

# 19<sup>th</sup> Street Youth Walking Laboratory

*Crest View Elementary School, November 17, 2015*

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**T**he 19<sup>th</sup> Street Youth Walking Laboratory is a collaborative project of Walk2Connect, GO Boulder, Growing Up Boulder and the Boulder Valley School District, designed to help bring youth voices into the City of Boulder's 19<sup>th</sup> Street Multimodal Project planning process. This brief report presents findings from our initial youth-led audit of 19<sup>th</sup> Street between Oak Avenue and Yarmouth Avenue on November 17,



2015. Ten Crest View Elementary School students participated, along with two adult facilitators, five parents, a teacher, an assistant principal, and another adult representative of BVSD.

One group walked north from Sumac Avenue to Yarmouth Avenue, and a second group walked south from Sumac to Oak Avenue. The children made photographs of elements of the street and its environs using digital cameras and holding up red or green frames to show what they like and don't like about walking along 19<sup>th</sup> Street. The adult facilitators discussed ideas with the participants, recorded key comments and made additional photos. In this report, the children's photographs are paired with their observations and those of their parents. Some photographs in the Group 1 summary were taken by facilitator Darcy Kitching for context.

## ***Summary of observations:***

- Crosswalks are sometimes ignored by drivers or placed in such a way that confuses drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists at busy intersections. This contributes to students feeling unsafe and creates congestion along the route.
- Traffic speeds along 19<sup>th</sup> Street can be too fast for pedestrian comfort; speed limits are not always observed.
- The existing sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate both pedestrian and bicycle traffic; students may choose not to use on-street bike lanes because of traffic speeds.

## ***Key recommendations:***

- More effective crosswalks featuring flashing lights, distinctive street art (i.e., Paint the Pavement projects) or stop signs would help create a safer pedestrian environment.
- Better enforcement of speeds along the corridor would help calm traffic at busy times.
- Installation of a wider, multi-use path along the west side of 19<sup>th</sup> would accommodate both pedestrians and bicyclists and simplify students' route.

## Group 1: Sumac to Yarmouth

As Group 1 walked toward 19<sup>th</sup> along Sumac, parents pointed out the difficulty of navigating the intersection of Sumac and 19<sup>th</sup> during busy school drop-off and pick-up times. There are yield signs but no stop signs on 19<sup>th</sup>, and because there are crosswalks at both the north and south end of the intersection, bicyclists, pedestrians and drivers have to perform an intricate dance there to let everyone through. Students often feel particularly vulnerable when drivers have so many choices to make.



*Left, the intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Sumac looking north. Right, the same intersection looking southeast. Although the intersection can be congested, students reported liking the bright yellow and red signs alerting drivers to their presence.*

North of Sumac, the sidewalk on the west side of 19<sup>th</sup> dips down below street level alongside a drainage ditch. This area is prone to flooding, which occasionally makes it impossible for students to walk or bike on.



Along with their concern about the recessed sidewalk flooding, students also mentioned that better maintenance along the street would make it a more inviting environment for walking.

One student suggested, “No more leaves on the road, and push the water to the side.” Dead leaves and water make the sidewalk slippery.

The importance of property maintenance for students’ comfort and interest in walking became clear as they pointed out places along the route that make them uncomfortable. One student said, “The woods are a little scary” on the east side of 19<sup>th</sup> north of Sumac. They are wary of the long grasses and dense trees. While the 19<sup>th</sup> Street Multimodal Project may not be able to influence changes to private property directly, providing a wider, more functional multi-use path on the west side of the street (the same side as Crest View Elementary) would create a positive invitation to walk to school.



*Left and right: overgrown brush and dense trees on the east side of 19<sup>th</sup> can feel scary to students who are walking or bicycling along the street.*

Participants agreed that the intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Upland, the next intersection north of Sumac, is a particularly challenging crossing point on a daily basis:

- “In the morning, no one ever waits for us [to cross] except the buses. It’s really scary in the morning” (Student).
- “It’s really dangerous for [the children] to have to walk in between cars” that are pulling out onto 19<sup>th</sup> from Upland (Parent). “In order for [the cars] to turn, they have to pull out. They block the sidewalk, and they just keep coming.”
- About the area, another student said, “I feel that when the cars – since they go pretty fast – they wouldn’t notice if something happened, like if I fell down or something. And also, it’s really hard to just suddenly stop and go help, because that’s not usually what people do.”



*Cars from a student’s point of view at the intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Upland.*



*The intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Upland is challenging for students because drivers often don't obey the yield sign in the crosswalk and because drivers roll over and block the crosswalk to see if it is safe from them to turn, students and parents said.*

The Boulder Fire Department station along 19<sup>th</sup> near Violet elicited the first green-framed photos during the walk, indicating that students feel comfortable with the firefighters there (students indicated likes with green frames and dislikes with red frames).



As the group neared Violet, one parent discussed what she called “a good and a bad” aspect of 19<sup>th</sup> Street:

- It's good that the sidewalk is separated from the road by a buffer [detached sidewalk], but children who ride their bicycles to school often do not feel safe riding in the bike lane in the street. They then shift to the sidewalk, but the sidewalk is too narrow for both pedestrians and bicyclists.

A major issue with using the bike lane is that it ends at Violet, another busy intersection like Upland, where students have to compete for the crosswalk with cars entering 19<sup>th</sup>. The bike lane disappears between Violet and Yarmouth, in the Boulder Meadows development, replaced by on-street parallel parking.



*Left, a student red frames the “Bike Lane Ends” sign on the east side of 19<sup>th</sup> at Violet. Right, they highlight their dislike of the second wide, busy intersection they encounter on their walk north from school.*

Students said:

- “I don’t like that the bike lane ends.”
- “Violet is really bad. It’s tricky to cross.”
- “Cars just don’t stop for anyone, and there aren’t many lights or crosswalks at all.”
- “This road is hard when you’re biking so you have to go on the sidewalk.”
- “The sidewalk gets very crowded.”

The Boulder Meadows development between Violet and Yarmouth presents challenges in terms of the bike lane disappearing, but the students also mentioned that they like the intersection of Avocado and 19<sup>th</sup> because, “Not a lot of people come out. ... It’s not that busy on this road.” However, there are no crosswalks in Boulder Meadows, and students commented negatively on the level of property maintenance (in terms of leaves on the sidewalk).



For students walking or bicycling to Crest View Elementary from the Holiday neighborhood north of Yarmouth Avenue, the intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Yarmouth presents a particularly frightening challenge. One student said, “The whole 19<sup>th</sup> corner is bad [at Yarmouth].”



Major issues students and parents reported at this intersection were:

- The streets are very wide and cars move fast. One parent said, “You have cars going 30 miles per hour, and there’s not a lot of time to get across.”
- Cars approach 19<sup>th</sup> from the east around a blind curve off of the Diagonal Highway and may not slow down in time to stop at the crosswalk.
- Crosswalks are only provided across 19<sup>th</sup> and at the northeast side of the intersection, but students prefer to walk on the west side of 19<sup>th</sup> because it’s the same side as the school. It is difficult and stressful for them to cross two busy streets in the opposite direction they need to travel.
- Cars coming out of the parking lot at Boulder Journey School, at the north end of 19<sup>th</sup> on Yarmouth, also present a hazard to pedestrians and bicyclists. While standing at the intersection, we observed several close calls between cars coming around the curve east of 19<sup>th</sup> and cars pulling out of BJS.

One student suggested adding a crosswalk across Yarmouth at the west side of the intersection, where students are crossing anyway, and making the busy intersection a 4-way stop because “lots of bikes go through here and lots of kids.” At least adding flashing lights to the crosswalks here could help a great deal. Another student proposed installing a left-turn refuge for drivers traveling west on Yarmouth, turning onto 19<sup>th</sup>, to ease congestion at the intersection.

The sidewalk on the west side of 19<sup>th</sup> ends at Yarmouth. Students proposed a new sidewalk running along the north edge of Boulder Meadows parallel to Yarmouth with a crosswalk at a less busy intersection, such as Wintercress or Lemon. Students and parents pointed out that the 205 RTD bus also stops on Yarmouth, so bicyclists have to go around it. People end up cutting across Yarmouth on the opposite side from the crosswalk. Better signage and traffic management is essential here.



*Students and parents would like to see a sidewalk here, along the south side of Yarmouth. These photos are looking west from 19<sup>th</sup>.*



## Group 2: Sumac to Oak

Walking south on 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Group 2 discussed the problem of cars slowing down but not coming to a complete stop all the time at the intersection of Sumac and 19<sup>th</sup>, just outside of the school. “The greatest variable here is student drivers,” one parent said, as well as people on their phones not paying attention to the students waiting to cross the street.

This intersection is a critical travel hot spot for all modes going to and from Crest View, and the consensus of the group was that it needs work to make it more functional. Key observations included:

1. The south-facing signage for the crosswalk at Sumac, and the flashing “20 MPH” school zone beacons are not readily visible from the road and might be difficult for oncoming auto drivers to see.
2. The placement of signage and lights at the outer edge of the 19<sup>th</sup> Street right of way is a problem; that area (the east side of 19<sup>th</sup> just south of Sumac) is cluttered with signs, so drivers may not pay attention to them.
3. Pedestrians are not easily visible to drivers at all points in this intersection, and traffic speed is not effectively controlled. One participant suggested contrasting colored pavement for the crosswalks and creating “bulb-outs” to enhance pedestrian safety.



Another issue is how little room student pedestrians and bicyclists have to negotiate the intersections and travel down 19<sup>th</sup> Street. One parent said, “At peak travel times, you have multi-directional traffic and this little sidewalk right here [see right-hand image above]. You have the real bikers [adult bicyclists] in the bike lane and then you’ve got some kids biking this way [toward school] and other families coming this way [down Sumac].”

Bicyclists also use both sides of the road because the bike lanes are narrow. Wider sidewalks or a wider multi-use path would be preferable. Families often bike right down the middle of the street and develop patterns that feel safer to them than using the designated pathways. Some avoid 19<sup>th</sup> Street altogether.



Children notice dirty, unattractive elements in the environment such as broken sidewalks (above left), overgrown weeds or leaf waste (above right), places where water pools and becomes slippery ice (below left), and graffiti (below right).



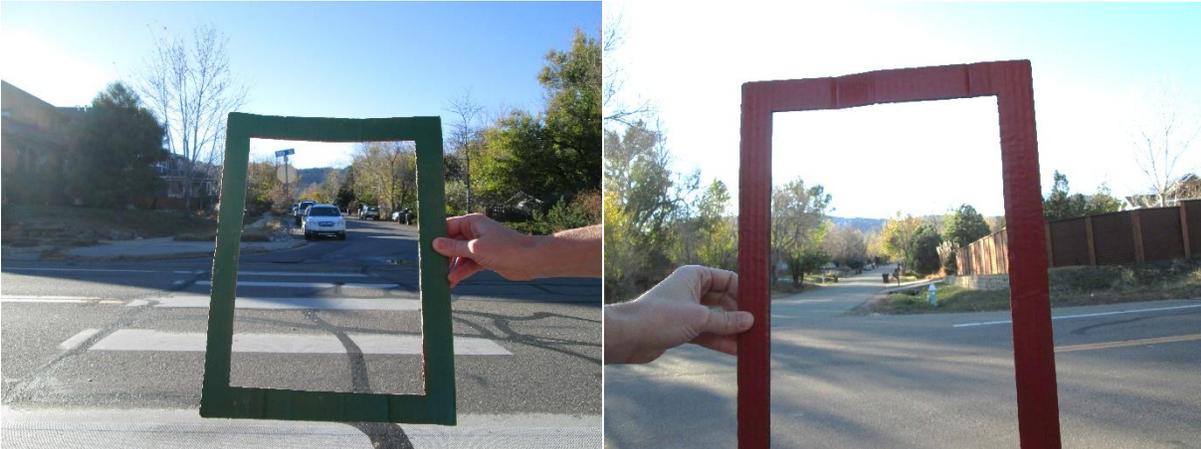
In contrast, they also notice where the street and sidewalk are in good repair, protecting pedestrians from traffic in the road (as in the photo, below, of a painted barrier between the street and sidewalk).



Parents and students also commented during the walk that people drive very fast down 19<sup>th</sup> and are often distracted. They do not seem to obey the 20 MPH signs. The yellow and red yield signs at Oak Avenue are appreciated; students and parents would like to see more clear, bright markers like this at intersections along 19<sup>th</sup>.



Similarly, wide, clearly marked crosswalks like the one at Redwood Avenue, below left, are appreciated by students and parents when they are placed where people naturally want to cross. However, participants also documented places where the crosswalk is not in the right place – such as at the intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Oak (below right). Here, students tend to cross at the north end of the intersection rather than the south, where a narrow crosswalk is available.



The intersection of 19<sup>th</sup> and Oak is problematic for students, our participants commented, because the crossing conditions there are precarious. More study of how pedestrians and bicyclists are using this area and treatments that would help them feel safer is warranted.

