

Destination Downtown

Streetscape

Investments for a Walkable City



The Downtown Streetscape Plan Adopted July 13, 1995

An implementation plan and guidelines for
Objective 22 of the Downtown Area Plan and
Section 138.1 of the Planning Code.

The Planning Department
City and County of San Francisco

Funding Provided by
The San Francisco County
Transportation Authority

Destination Downtown

The Downtown Streetscape Plan

The Planning Department
City and County of San Francisco

The Downtown Streetscape Plan is the guiding document for the development of the Downtown Pedestrian Network called for in the Downtown Area Plan (Objective 22). As such, the Plan is the basis for Master Plan consistency determinations for all pedestrian streetscape improvements in the downtown, whether implemented by the public or private sectors.

The Downtown Streetscape Plan is also the implementation framework for downtown streetscape improvements as outlined by Section 13B.1 of the Planning Code which regulates streetscape improvements in the downtown, C-3 districts. As per the provisions of Sections 309 and 137 of the Planning Code, the Downtown Streetscape Plan is used as the basis for, and to determine the adequacy of, all streetscape improvements required by Sections 13B and 13B.1 of the Planning Code, mandated by the City Planning Commission, or voluntarily installed as a component of any project subject to Section 309 review.

The Department of Public Works is the permitting agency for all improvements in the public right-of-way. All streetscape improvements mandated by the Planning Commission as per the provisions of the Planning Code and the recommendations of the Downtown Streetscape Plan are subject to approval by the Director of Public Works. As set forth in DPW Order Number 16B,244, DPW agrees to consider the recommendations referenced in the Downtown Streetscape Plan when reviewing encroachment and street-use permit applications in the downtown area.

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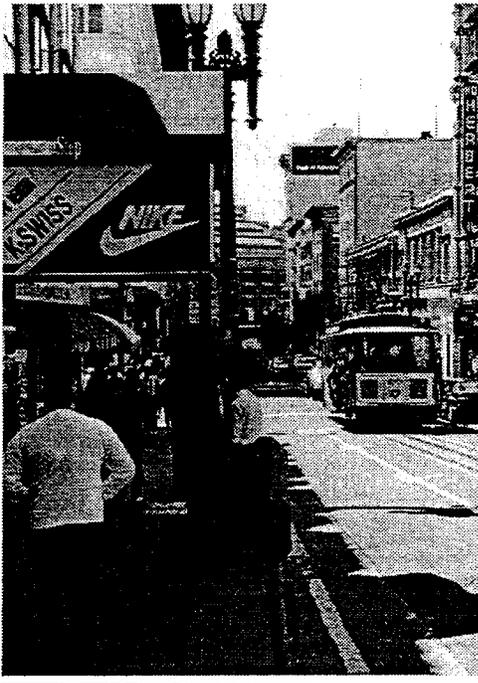
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... The street
"means accident
and incident,
drama, move-
ment. It means
above all dream .
.. In the street
you learn what
human beings re-
ally are; other-
wise or after-
wards, you invent
them. ...

Throughout history, the pedestrian space of the street has been one of the most important places in the city. The street is a truly "public" space. No one and everyone owns it. Sidewalks are the paths that everyone travels, the spaces in which everyone comes together; where people see each other, bump into each other, and talk to each other. Whether they arrive by bus, train, or car, at some point almost everyone will be a pedestrian during their journey through the city.

Close to half a million people walk in downtown San Francisco every day. They are walking to and from transit, work, shopping, or maybe to a lunchtime sojourn at an open space. And, while walking, they see the city at a slower pace and a smaller scale than people in cars and buses. Walking affords intimate observations of the city; as the influential urbanist Kevin Lynch once noted, pedestrian paths provide a strong sense of the overall image of the city. And, for better or worse, the physical character of the city's streets has a strong influence on the quality of San Francisco's image for residents and visitors alike.

Downtown San Francisco has a remarkable number of urban resources to offer visitors, shoppers, and workers. Foremost among these is the richness and diversity of the city—its energy and its beauty. It is this richness that has made San Francisco both a desirable place to live and work as well as one of the world's most popular destinations. Yet, it is often difficult to appreciate a beautiful view or a wonderful street scene if the sidewalk is hazardous, dirty, in disrepair, and filled with a variety of neglected and poorly placed pieces of street furniture. Indeed, there are an average of 100 pedestrian-vehicle accidents in the downtown each year, and some sidewalks are so cluttered that pedestrians have to walk in the street.



Walking in Downtown San Francisco

The overall character of the urban environment is dependent on the richness of the views, the social scene, *and* the conditions of the street on which the entire urban experience is viewed. The condition of the sidewalks is especially important in San Francisco, a city noted for the quality of its architecture, its human scale, its unique views, and its innate walkability. An inferior sidewalk environment detracts from the perception of this special urban fabric.

According to surveys conducted by the Planning Department, almost 70% of the 300,000 people who work downtown arrive by transit, carpool, or by walking. Similarly, 60% of the 200,000 other people in the downtown area each day arrive by transit or by walking. Of these, over 30% of the shoppers downtown use walking as their primary mode of transportation. It is also estimated that 90% of the 12 million tourists that visit San Francisco each year walk through the Union Square area during their stay in the city. It is probable that the majority of the people who arrive downtown by auto will spend some time walking too.

Overview

... walking is essential in the downtown core, and all streets are, or should be, pedestrian-oriented....

Indeed, the compactness of downtown and the City's temperate climate combine to make walking an ideal mode of transportation. As a result, the underlying assumption of this design plan is that walking is essential in the downtown core, and all streets are, or should be, pedestrian-oriented.

In general, sidewalks are taken for granted. While beautification efforts are often directed at open spaces, the connections to these open spaces, the sidewalks, are most often ignored. Despite the fact that city sidewalks are a far larger open space resource than all city parks combined, sidewalks are sacrificed for other purposes, most notably automobile traffic and a jumbled assortment of randomly placed obstacles. Sidewalk conditions are of low priority, and pedestrian needs rarely considered unless there is an imminent liability. Often, efforts to improve the streetscape are seen as unnecessary beautification.

The quality of sidewalk conditions, though, is not just a question of aesthetics. The deterioration of the pedestrian environment is also an important safety issue. Inadequate sidewalk space is an increasing hazard in an ever-growing downtown, and proliferating sidewalk obstructions create ever-worsening accessibility problems.

Moreover, a negative image of the city influenced by a poor streetscape environment can have significant and adverse impacts on the economic vitality of the city as a whole. Visitors might choose not to visit again or pass along negative perceptions of San Francisco to their hometown friends and colleagues, regional shoppers might choose to go to a mall instead of Union Square, and businesses, both large and small, might choose to locate in a clean, attractive, and well-maintained environment elsewhere. Ultimately, efforts to retain and improve upon the innate attractiveness and livability of the City of San Francisco must include attention to all of the components of the urban experience, including the conditions of the streetscape.

The Downtown Streetscape Plan

The publication of this streetscape plan for the downtown pedestrian environment represents a first step in a long-term effort to improve sidewalk conditions in downtown San Francisco. The intent of the plan is to assist in the development of pedestrian projects in both the public and private sector by providing design ideas for large scale improvements as well as guidelines for individual sidewalk elements. The goals of this plan are threefold:

■ **To provide a coordinated, comprehensive design vision for the Downtown Pedestrian Network.** A design vision that:

- Reinforces the sidewalk as an essential element of the public realm.
- Provides for the comfort and safety needs of pedestrians.
- Contributes to the unique physical character of the City.
- Complements the open space network.
- Promotes walking as the primary transportation mode in the downtown core.
- Unifies the downtown streetscape.

■ **To provide standards and guidelines for the placement of streetscape elements by both the public and private sectors.** These standards and guidelines will ensure that the many sidewalk elements are appropriately sited and meet the overall goals of the Downtown Pedestrian Network.

■ **To provide a framework for anticipated capital projects funded by the Proposition B sales tax as administered by the San Francisco County Transportation Authority, for privately financed projects implemented to meet downtown open space requirements, and for projects funded by public-private partnerships.**

The Downtown Pedestrian Program

The Downtown Pedestrian Program was developed from the fieldwork and analysis of the 1980 Center City Pedestrian Circulation and Goods Movement Survey produced by Wilbur Smith Consultants. This survey examined the problems in the downtown pedestrian environment and recommended a number of system-wide improvements as well as specific capital projects. The Wilbur Smith plan was expanded upon and incorporated into the 1985 Downtown Plan which also identified a series of capital improvements ranging from sidewalk widenings to South of Market mid-block pathways.

Due to funding limitations, few projects from the Wilbur Smith report or the Downtown Plan were implemented. These projects have been limited to private sector developments constructed in order to meet downtown open space requirements. These include a corner bulb at Front and California, sidewalk widening on Commercial Street, decorative paving on Leidesdorff, and brick paving on Ecker Street.

Overview

In 1989, the voters of San Francisco approved Proposition B, authorizing the expenditure of sales tax money for transportation projects and the establishment of the Transportation Authority of the City and County of San Francisco. The Downtown Pedestrian Projects were included in the Proposition B plan, and this dedication of funds revitalized the pedestrian program.

When the Pedestrian Program was restarted in 1991, staff began an extensive review of the recommendations in both the Wilbur Smith report and the 1985 Downtown Plan. Combined with this review, staff began a thorough reassessment of the existing downtown environment with particular attention to the many changes that have transpired during the past decade. Staff then initiated the development of this streetscape design plan.

The Downtown Pedestrian Program funded by Proposition B sales tax monies aims to complete a wide-range of pedestrian projects outlined in this design plan. Due to the limited amount of funding available to the program, the impact of these projects is somewhat limited. However, the long-term impact of the Downtown Pedestrian Program will not be restricted to Proposition B funded capital projects. Rather, the Streetscape Plan, especially the streetscape element standards and guidelines, will have, in the long-term, a more "bang for the buck" positive impact on the downtown pedestrian environment since they will guide all downtown streetscape improvements in both the public and private sectors.

The policy basis for the Downtown Pedestrian Street Improvement Program can be found in the goals and objectives of both the Transportation Element and the Downtown Area Plan of the Master Plan of the City and County of San Francisco. Contained within the Master Plan are a number of policies outlining the importance of pedestrian circulation, the importance of the public right-of-way as an open space asset, and the need for a safe, efficient, accessible, and pleasant pedestrian environment.

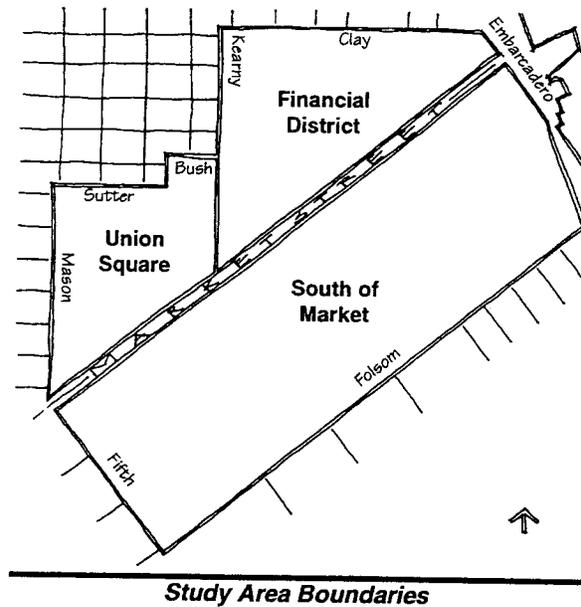
The original Downtown Pedestrian Network proposed in 1985 was based on a classification of four types of pedestrian streets: pedestrian oriented/vehicular streets (most streets in the area); part-time pedestrian streets (alleys such as Belden and Maiden Lane); pedestrian/service street (service alleys such as Jessie and Natoma); and, exclusive pedestrian walkways with or without transit (The Powell Street Transit Mall and the mid-block walkways south of Market). The street typology in this Downtown Streetscape Plan is a refinement of the Downtown Plan classification system and is based on an initial assumption that all downtown streets should be pedestrian-oriented, whether a pedestrian-oriented vehicular street or an alley.

Overview

Plan Study Area

The study area for the Downtown Streetscape Plan encompasses the C-3 district outlined in the Downtown Plan, exclusive of mid-Market and the Civic Center both of which are covered in another study. The boundaries as indicated on the map are Mason and Fifth Streets to the west, the Embarcadero to the east, Clay Street to the north (except Chinatown), and Folsom Street to the South.

The district is further sub-divided into three sub-areas that correspond to land use and zoning patterns: Union Square (Mason to Kearny, Market to Bush), the Financial District (Kearny to the Embarcadero, Market to Clay), and South of Market (Fifth to the Embarcadero, Market to Folsom).



Developing the Plan

The work program for this project included five primary phases:

■ **Research, Fieldwork, and Data Gathering (9/91-9/93):** The first stage of the process involved reviewing the 12 year history of the pedestrian program, including all projects proposed and the few that were actually implemented. Each of the existing project proposals was individually evaluated based on pedestrian usage and funding feasibility. The pre-existing project ideas formed the basis for the initial capital program outline presented to the City Planning Commission in February of 1993, as well as for the federal grant application cycle. This process highlighted the need for a coordinated plan which would facilitate long-term project development and phasing.

Drawing on the ideas and analysis techniques of noted urban designers such as Kevin Lynch and William Whyte, program staff spent hours in the field observing pedestrian behavior and recording street conditions. The goal was to gain as complete a picture as possible of the social and physical environment of the downtown streetscape. Information gathered included pedestrian counts, questionnaires, and behavior notes, sidewalk element inventories, land use information, microclimate notations, and extensive photos. During the fieldwork process, program staff also developed a series of data maps illustrating transit usage, traffic volumes, pedestrian-vehicle accidents, sidewalk element placements, pedestrian volumes, pedestrian level of service, open space, street trees, land use, sun/shadow, trip generators, tourist destinations, walking tours, and historic districts. A final component of the design preparation process involved reviewing similar street improvement projects in San

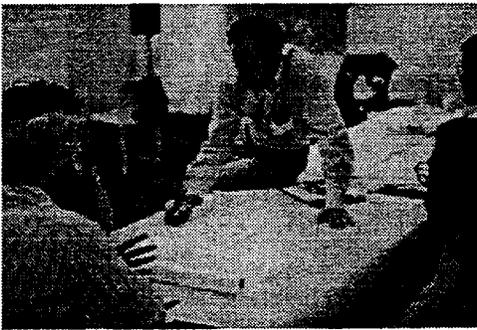
Overview

Francisco such as Market Street, as well as projects in Portland, Honolulu, and Seattle. A review of relevant literature also outlined useful project development, design, and implementation techniques.

■ **Urban Design Analysis (9/92-9/93):** The research, fieldwork, and data gathering process yielded a great quantity of information for the extended analysis phase. The objective during this phase was to explore the character of the sidewalk environment and assess pedestrian needs and safety issues, as well as to develop goals for the design phase.

■ **Design Charrette (9/93 & 2/94):** The culmination of the research and analysis phases was a design charrette co-sponsored by the San Francisco chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Participants included city staff, the general public, and members of professional design organizations including the AIA, the American Society of Landscape Architects, and the American Planning Association. Prior to the charrette, a planning team composed of Department staff and AIA members outlined the program for the charrette and developed the analysis framework and street typology system.

The charrette was an all day event held on a Saturday at the AIA offices in downtown San Francisco. The morning session was devoted to analysis of the downtown environment during which time the group explored the idea of street typologies and the ideas of street image and function. The afternoon session utilized a small team approach to explore design solutions for the four sub-areas (Union Square, the Financial District, South of Market, and Alleys).



Downtown Pedestrian Design Charrette

The charrette was very successful. The group of thirty design professionals and members of the general public produced a very detailed overall analysis of the downtown pedestrian street system, an overall framework for design development including a basic outline of the pedestrian street typology hierarchy, and a series of very detailed streetscape design recommendations for each of the sub-areas. These design ideas provided the basis for the ensuing development of the streetscape plan.

A follow-up meeting to discuss the design ideas and first draft of the plan document was held with the AIA in February of 1994. Participants offered feedback on the plan and discussed its development since the charrette. The group devoted much of the session to the streetscape design standards and guidelines, a level of detail that was not possible at the first charrette.

■ **Design Development (9/93-8/94):** After the charrette, program staff revisited the conclusions and developed more detailed designs. For each design goal, implementing design standards and guidelines were developed, and code and policy amendments drafted.

■ **Comment and Design Revision (1/94-3/95):** The draft plan was presented to the public and interested city departments for comment and revisions.

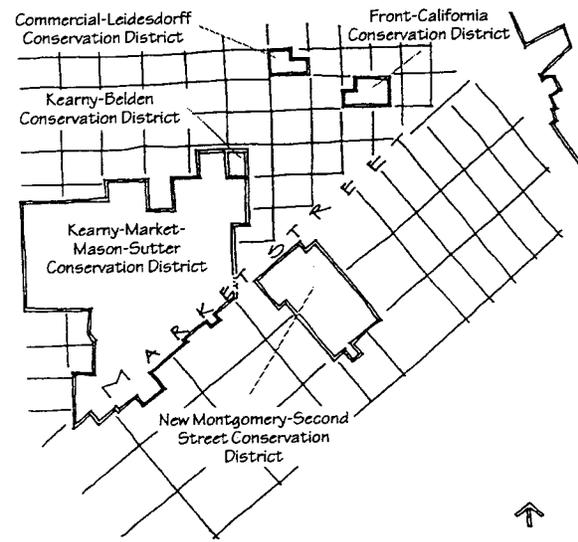
Urban Design Features

The analysis of the existing pedestrian environment involves identifying urban design features, quantifying the physical characteristics, and exploring the distinct qualities of individual streets. Drawing on the ideas and methods of William Whyte, Donald Appleyard, Allan Jacobs, and Kevin Lynch, among others, the analysis was conducted over the course of two years by a team that included Planning Department staff and a number of student interns.

Downtown San Francisco is composed of three sub-districts. While they all have a predominately commercial and office character and high building densities, they are each distinct. The Financial District has a number of high rise office towers which shade many sidewalks and create significant winds. The Union Square district has moderate scale, historic buildings with ground floor retail, hotels, and the landmark Union Square. South of Market has at least three different personalities: an office area with large-block office buildings, a smaller scale historic district, and the large scale Yerba Buena Center redevelopment area.

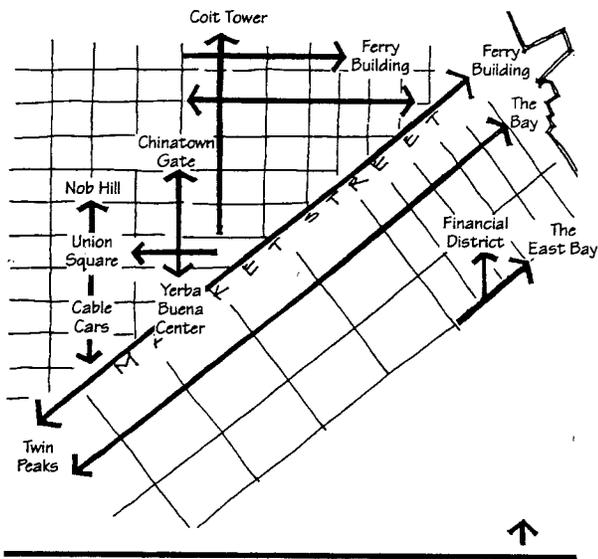
The edges between the districts are clearly demarcated by streets and a variation of both geographic and man-made topography with many visual clues. Market Street, the edge between north and south, is the widest, most ceremonial street in the city, Nob Hill topographically marks the northern edge of Union Square, while on Kearny Street, the edge between the Union Square and Financial districts, the east side is composed of high rise offices while the west side is smaller scale historic buildings.

The character of the edge on Kearny Street is defined by the Kearny-Mason-Sutter Conservation District which encompasses the Union Square area and preserves its unique character. This historic district is one of five in the downtown area as indicated on the Downtown Conservation Districts map. Each of the historic districts is noteworthy for the high quality of their buildings and their predominantly pedestrian characters. As such they tend to include popular pedestrian destinations whether as an entire district or at distinct locations within the district.



Downtown Conservation Districts

Analysis

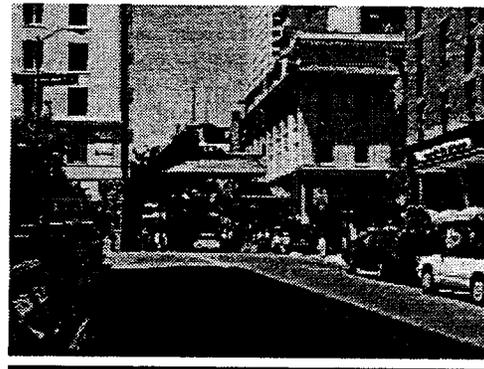


Significant Views Diagram

Views of significant landmarks (such as the Dewey Memorial in Union Square or the Sheraton Palace), to the Bay, and to the hills, are also important visual clues for orientation and movement as well as defines the quality of the City's image. These clues are especially useful for visitors as the most important landmarks are visible destinations in the street landscape.

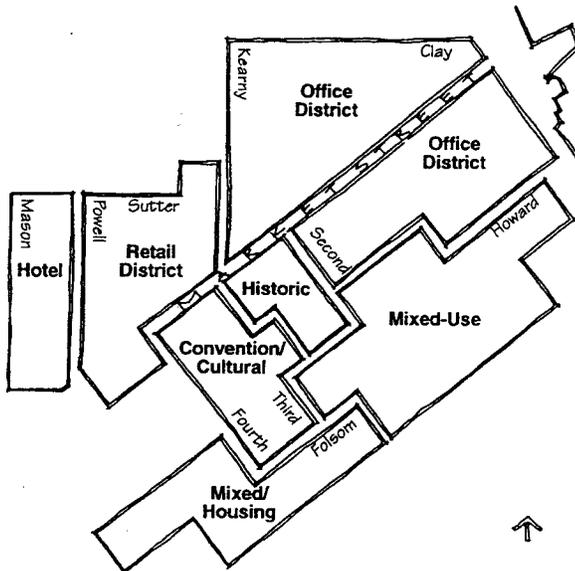
On Grant Avenue, the ornate Chinatown gate is visible for blocks and is a beacon marking the entrance to Chinatown. Heading south, the looming Marriott south of Market indicates the emerging Yerba Buena Center. The landmark Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street demarcates the waterfront and is visible from the downtown, the Civic Center, and beyond. While the distant view of Coit Tower at the peak of Telegraph Hill demarcates Kearny Street as an important path towards it.

Significant destinations downtown range from transit hubs and office buildings to shopping streets and tourist destinations. Within the Financial District, the transit hubs are focal points that generate significant usage at the morning and evening peaks, while lunchtime destinations such as Kearny Street, open spaces, and the alleys are concentrated at midday.



Chinatown Gate on Grant Avenue

In the retail district, Union Square is a focal point and landmark for the downtown and the city. The core shopping street is Stockton, a street with substantial transit connections as well. Tourists are found in large volume throughout the district, but Powell is the primary tourist hub centered on the landmark Cable Car Turntable and the Tourist Information Center at Market Street.



Downtown Land Use Diagram

The size of the south of Market area affords a number of significant destinations within its sub-areas. In the office area, the Rincon Center and the Embarcadero generate lunchtime usage, and for the former an increasing amount of evening activity. The Transbay Terminal is a primary transit hub for the entire downtown area,

Analysis

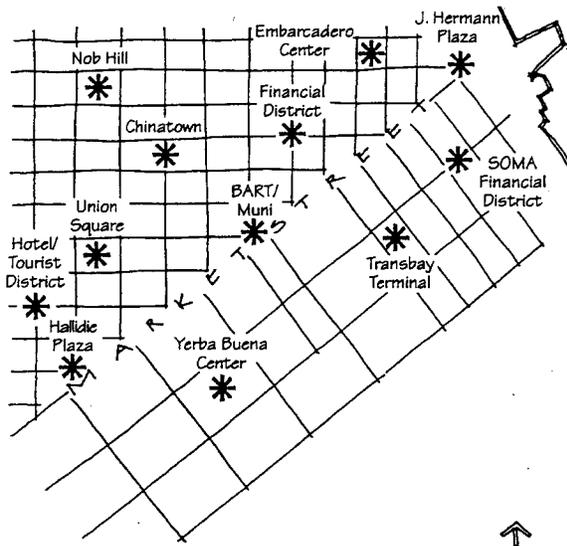
generating high volumes on the surrounding streets during both the morning and evening peaks. The Yerba Buena Center, though, has the potential to generate the most consistently high pedestrian volume given its new cultural institutions, convention center, and residential population.

Much of the south of Market area is in transition, both from a land use and pedestrian perspective. In addition to the changes at the Yerba Buena Center, the Transbay Terminal area is slated for new development and possibly a new Terminal one block to the east and a

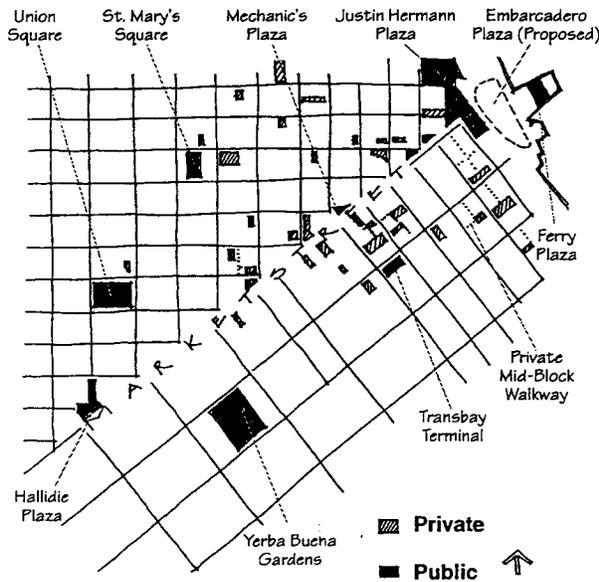
Caltrain station at Beale and Market. Between the existing Terminal and YBC there are at least three major development projects being planned including a high-rise housing development. A proposed arena and the rebuilding of the Embarcadero and the Terminal Separator Structure will affect Steuart, Main, Beale, First, Mission, and Howard. Finally, the continued development of the "multi-media gulch" area around First and Folsom and towards South Park and the eventual development of Mission Bay will increase pedestrian and vehicular traffic throughout the immediate vicinity.

Most of the primary destinations in the downtown core are within a short walk from each other. It is very convenient for Montgomery Street businesspeople to walk to the Union Square retail area or to the Embarcadero during lunch. Similarly, the proximity of the Convention Center to the Union Square hotels and shopping and the Financial District suggests that walking could be the primary mode for most visitors between these sites. Indeed, much of the downtown core is within a 15 minute walk from the Convention Center. While many do walk now, there are also a large number of shuttle buses ferrying conventioners between the YBC and nearby hotels--the walk between north and south of Market destinations can be confusing to visitors and many find the general deterioration of the downtown streetscape environment uncomfortable.

Open spaces are among the most popular destinations in the downtown area. These open spaces range from public parks such as Union Square and Justin Hermann Plaza to privately-operated pocket parks and roof gardens. The usage of the parks is quite varied too. The Financial District parks serve the lunch crowd and are sparsely populated at other times. While Union Square and Hallidie Plaza serve a more constant stream of shoppers and Tenderloin/Nob Hill/Chinatown residents.



Significant Downtown Pedestrian Destinations



Downtown Open Space Diagram

Analysis

Existing Streetscape Conditions

The open spaces are an integral element of the Downtown Pedestrian Network. The network is both a connection to the parks as well as an important aspect of the open space system in and of itself. In a dense city such as San Francisco, the space of the public right-of-way is a refuge in the urban fabric, a space for sun and for air and a respite from the building environment. The role of the pedestrian network is especially important in those areas that the Downtown Plan identified as deficient in usable open space, such as south of Market.

The distribution of the significant destinations and landmarks throughout downtown, combined with a number of important destinations in adjacent areas have provided a framework for the development of a series of walking tours published by the Visitors and Convention Bureau and AAA. These walking tours are oriented both within the district and to citywide destinations and are used primarily by tourists. However, despite their obvious usefulness, knowledge of these tours is fairly limited. Although millions of visitors and residents alike walk between destinations in the area, many tourists can be observed looking quite lost throughout downtown.

While each street in the Downtown area raises specific issues and concerns, there are a number of universal problems that occur throughout the area. Identified problems include:

■ **Congestion:** Large pedestrian volumes are not necessarily a problem in a vibrant urban environment. Indeed, a high level of foot traffic makes the downtown more bustling and interesting. Problems occur, though, when the number of people exceeds the carrying capacity of the sidewalk area. In other words, if the sidewalk is too narrow for the number of people and activities on it. Congested sidewalks are hazardous and create significant accessibility problems.

■ **Queuing Space:** When the sidewalks are too congested, significant problems can result at the corners due to insufficient queuing space. At congested corners pedestrians often wait off the curb, a particularly dangerous practice on streets with peak-hour curb lane traffic.

■ **Unsafe Crosswalks/Vehicle Conflicts:** Conditions such as lengthy crosswalks, insufficient signalized pedestrian crossing times, extensive vehicle turns through the crosswalk, red-light running, and inadequate pedestrian crossing islands present problems for pedestrians and are evident throughout downtown.

■ **Sidewalk Clutter/Obstacles:** There are many elements on the sidewalk ranging from street signs and parking meters to street trees and flowerstands. While many of the elements are indeed desirable and/or necessary, their placement often makes them obstacles to through pedestrian movement. This problem is especially acute on sidewalks with congestion problems.

