Yellow Brick Road
Iron Triangle Walkable Neighborhood Plan
Transforming lives by transforming public space.

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This project is funded in part by a grant from the Environmental Justice grant program of the California Department of Transportation
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About the Yellow Brick Road Iron Triangle Walkable Neighborhood Plan

The Yellow Brick Road Walkable Neighborhoods Project addresses key community-identified barriers, issues, and opportunities in the community in order to design and implement complete streets improvements along roadways in the community-identified Yellow Brick Road (YBR) network. These complete streets improvements would be implemented in conjunction with rehabilitation of abandoned buildings and properties, code enforcement issues of aggressive dogs and fence lines, and personal security improvements to create safe, pleasant, artful, and walkable roadways in the Iron Triangle Neighborhood. The routes would connect the key assets in the neighborhood, including local elementary schools, parks, and transit.

The Yellow Brick Road concept was conceived by local youth living in the Iron Triangle neighborhood as a way to safely link key areas in the neighborhood through bright yellow brick patterns on the sidewalks and roadways, as described in the next chapter Envisioning the Yellow Brick Road. While the Yellow Brick Road idea originated in the Iron Triangle neighborhood, it is a model for neighborhood planning and creating safe routes to key destinations that can be replicated in neighborhoods throughout Richmond and the United States. As such, the Yellow Brick Road Walkable Neighborhood Plan is intended as a stand alone document and as an appendix to the Richmond Pedestrian Plan (2011). This Plan documents the first application of the Yellow Brick Road concept in Richmond.

This Walkable Neighborhood Plan is the outcome of an intensive community-driven process to improve the safety, security and desirability of walking for transportation and health in the Iron Triangle neighborhood. The City of Richmond, Local Government Commission and Pogo Park collaborated to prepare a Caltrans Environmental Justice Transportation Planning Grant proposal to fund the project. Caltrans awarded the grant to the City and its partners in 2012. The project partners selected Fehr and Peers, a firm with extensive multi-modal transportation planning, engineering and design expertise, to help inform the hands-on community-driven visioning process used to develop the plan, and to prepare the detailed design concepts presented in the pages that follow.
The study area of this Plan is generally defined as the Iron Triangle neighborhood of Richmond.

The neighborhood is bounded by the Richmond Greenway and Ohio Avenue to the south, the BART and Union Pacific Railroad tracks to the east, and Richmond Parkway to the west.
Overview

Envisioning the Yellow Brick Road

The Yellow Brick Road is envisioned as
a network of safe, green, and clean walking and biking routes
in Richmond, California’s Iron Triangle neighborhood

This section explains the concept, place, partners, strategies, and lessons learned in envisioning and creating the Yellow Brick Road in the Iron Triangle Neighborhood.

THE CONCEPT:

The Yellow Brick Road

In a 2008 summer youth program, a group of teen-agers from Richmond, California’s Iron Triangle neighborhood were given the task of thinking of a project that would improve their neighborhood. They came up with a brilliantly simple idea: the Yellow Brick Road.

They envisioned Iron Triangle residents identifying key community assets (e.g., schools, parks, churches, community centers, transportation hubs, etc.). Then they would connect those assets via the Yellow Brick Road – a network of “safe, green, and clean” (their words) walking and biking paths designated by brightly colored yellow bricks, stenciled on sidewalks and roads.

The City of Richmond and its partners, the Local Government Commission and Pogo Park, received an Environmental Justice Transportation Planning Grant for the Yellow Brick Road from the California Department of Transportation in 2012 to further develop this neighborhood vision into a plan. The project partners selected Fehr and Peers, a transportation planning and engineering firm and Dan Burden of Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, a non-profit that inspires, teaches, connects and supports communities in their efforts to improve health and well-being through better built environments, to help inform the intensive community-driven visioning process used to develop the plan and to prepare the detailed design concepts presented in the pages that follow.

THE PLACE:

Richmond, California’s Iron Triangle Neighborhood

The Iron Triangle is a historic neighborhood of roughly 15,000 people in the center of Richmond. Its one square mile was originally defined by three major railroad lines that formed a triangle around its border, hence its name. Today, its southern boundary is the Richmond Greenway, a multi-use path that was constructed in the former Atchison-Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad corridor.

The Neighborhood Has Good Bones: Historic and architecturally notable houses, a well-laid-out street grid with short, walkable blocks, and a major regional transit hub (Richmond is the only Bay Area city with a direct BART-to-Amtrak connection).

Demographics: According to the 2010 US Census, the Iron Triangle neighborhood was 60% Latino, 27% African-American, 5% Asian, 7% other. The Iron Triangle is a historic center for African Americans who came from the South to work in the Richmond shipyards and the recent population trend has been an increase in Latinos, including immigrants from Mexico and Central America.
**Economics:** Low-income and working poor; 50% of children live in poverty.

**Environment:** The Chevron Richmond Refinery, Port of Richmond, Richmond Parkway, railroad lines, and industrial uses contribute to poor air quality, few trees or natural areas.

**Challenges:** Unemployment, blight and decay, beleaguered and underfunded schools, little access to healthy foods, persistent health problems including asthma and obesity, high levels of violent crime, dangerous streets, and hopelessness.

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**THE PARTNERS:**

**CITY GOVERNMENT**
The City of Richmond: This effort involved several City departments including the City Manager’s Office, Planning and Building Services, Engineering Services, Public Works, Parks Division, Police Department, Code Enforcement, and the Fire Department, working together to implement the City’s Pedestrian Plan and Bicycle Master Plans, adopted in 2011, and the City’s “Health in All Policies” strategy to address health disparities and work towards health equity in Richmond (adopted by the Richmond City Council in 2014).

(www.ci.richmond.ca.us/index.aspx?NID=2575)

**NONPROFIT PARTNER**
Pogo Park: A community-based nonprofit working to transform city parks and streets in Richmond’s Iron Triangle neighborhood into safe and vibrant green spaces. Pogo Park organized and managed the unique resident-driven community engagement process described below. (www.pogopark.org)

**PROFESSIONAL DESIGN TEAM**
Local Government Commission: A nonprofit organization that assists local governments and community leaders in California and beyond with design tools and strategies and innovative public engagement initiatives to develop locally driven solutions. (www.lgc.org)

Fehr & Peers: Transportation engineers with extensive multi-modal transportation planning, engineering, and design expertise. Fehr & Peers helped to develop the community’s vision for the Yellow Brick Road into detailed designs that are presented in this document. (www.fehrandpeers.com)

Dan Burden, Blue Zones: A nationally recognized educator and leader on pedestrian and bicycle path design and creating more livable, walkable, equitable communities. (www.bluezones.com/speaking/dan-burden-speaking-2/)
Envisioning the Yellow Brick Road

THE STRATEGY:
How We Empowered the Community

A  Community Outreach Team formed. Made up of 30 local residents, diverse in race, ethnicity, and gender, mirroring the demographics of the neighborhood, and including children, youth, adults, and seniors—people who know their neighborhood best.

B  The Community Outreach Team maps the neighborhood. Walking every street in the Iron Triangle over 21 days, the team makes detailed notes on what they observe—both “positive” (a yard with flowers) and “negative” spaces (vacant houses, snarling guard dogs, speeding cars, menacing gang tags). They meticulously catalogue every physical barrier to mobility such as lack of crosswalks, wide streets, poor lighting, vacant houses, and men who sit in open-door garages, commenting and leering at women who pass by.

By beginning the planning process with local residents walking and documenting the streets with their own eyes, the typical sequence of city planning is turned around. Instead of outsiders (consultants) telling residents what they see is right and wrong with their neighborhood, the community becomes an active player in assessing their own neighborhood assets and constraints.

C  The Community Outreach Team reports its findings. Writing on a large wall map, the team pinpoints the Iron Triangle’s positive and negative spaces. Local residents write their observations and ideas on post-it notes and stick them to the map in the appropriate spots. At this meeting, the group decides on the routes for the Yellow Brick Road.
The Professional Design Team and Community Outreach Team walk the proposed routes together. Stopping at each barrier, the two teams and city staff discuss possible solutions onsite. Dan Burden explains why stop signs fail, how bulb-outs and mini-circles make it physically impossible for cars to speed, and how islands in the middle of wide streets help people to cross them. When the Community Outreach Team presents him with a barrier, Burden describes possible solutions used in other cities around the world, sketching them on butcher paper or on the ground in chalk. Everyone can see and comment on the proposed changes.

The process works like magic. Residents quickly develop a shared language and understanding of how to solve the barriers to walking and biking in subsequent locations. The residents, city staff, and professional design team are in synch.
The Professional Design Team and Community Outreach Team create a “Living Preview” of the Yellow Brick Road. As a way to communicate the proposed street improvements to the local community, the project partners create a three-dimensional full-scale model for a segment of the YBR. They use chopped wood pieces, potted plants, sawhorses, Astroturf, traffic cones, chalk, paint, scavenged road signs, two huge carved wooden totems to create mini-circles, straw waddles to create the illusions of wider sidewalks, narrower streets, crosswalks, and bike lanes.

The Living Preview of the Yellow Brick Road is publicized to the entire community. Notices go out
to neighborhood residents, city officials, police and fire departments, local schools, and the public bus system providers who has a stop in the Living Preview segment. Over two days, 354 people attend the event. Residents mingle with city officials, police officers, and professional transportation planners and engineers to examine and critique the design. A transit bus tests how the vehicle would maneuver around the new traffic circle.

The City sends a fire engine and fire truck to test the two traffic circle designs. But when it tries to get around the first mini-circle it gets stuck. Firemen and local residents work on a solution together, logs and potted plants are rearranged, and the fire truck tries again. Still no luck. It takes 13 tries to find exactly how the mini-circle must be built to allow passage by the fire truck.

The engineer from the Fire Department is jubilant. He explains that Richmond’s fire trucks are several feet longer than standard models, causing headaches with road design changes. Professional designers always assume the standard length, he said. “No one ever asked us for our opinion before.” Dan Burden says, “People in the world of livable streets will be talking about the Yellow Brick Road Living Preview in decades to come.”
We need to rethink our understanding of who is an expert. The premise of this project—recognizing that local residents are experts in their own environment—works.

Empowering a core group of committed local residents— in this case, the young people who first envisioned the Yellow Brick Road—acknowledges this local expertise and builds a foundation of trust in the community.

Organized and empowered community residents can work together with city staff, transportation planners and engineers, and other professionals to create a detailed conceptual design.

If they are thus empowered, community residents are capable of learning the language of street design, building neighborhood capacity and skills.

The Living Preview model is a powerful method to test ideas and engage community members in the transformation of their own streets.

Design professionals should see their roles as partners who can guide and collaborate and not simply deliver solutions.

The Yellow Brick Road concept is a dynamic model for neighborhood planning and creating safe routes to key destinations that can be replicated in other neighborhoods in Richmond and across the United States.
Envisioning the Yellow Brick Road