UC SANTA BARBARA

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New dashboard maps bike safety across Santa Barbara County

Santa Barbara County has many of the ingredients needed for walking, cycling and other forms of active transportation: great weather, relatively flat city centers, walkable streets and a robust and growing bike network.

So why do so many people still rely on cars?

“For many, the biggest barrier is safety — or the perception of safety,” said Trisalyn Nelson, the Jack and Laura Dangermond Chair of Geography at UC Santa Barbara. “People are unlikely to bike or walk if they feel at risk of being hit by a car, even if bike lanes or sidewalks exist.”

Understanding where people feel unsafe and where incidents are actually happening, is key to making active transportation more accessible.

For that reason, Nelson’s group has launched the Santa Barbara County Active Transportation Dashboard, starting with the safety page. Data about biking and walking is often incomplete or hard to find. This dashboard brings official and community-reported safety data together in one place, revealing patterns, trends and hotspots for collisions and near-misses across the county.

The idea was to create a one stop shop for residents, visitors and decision-makers that will improve our understanding of walking and bicycling access in our region. Anyone can use the safety page to explore which areas and intersections feel safer

and where improvements are needed. This information supports better street design, targeted safety improvements and smarter infrastructure investments, Nelson explained.

“We were interested in understanding patterns of bicycling safety and realized that first we needed to improve data,” Nelson said. Experts estimate that only 20% of bike crashes are officially reported, so she developed BikeMaps.org in 2014 to crowdsource international data on bike crashes and near misses. Since then, her group has helped cities make decisions about where to prioritize infrastructure to make biking better.

People can contribute directly to the Santa Barbara dashboard project through BikeMaps.org.

“Nervous about a specific intersection? Had a close call or collision? Add your experience to the map,” Nelson said. Together, these shared insights can turn everyday experiences into powerful data, helping make Santa Barbara County safer and more welcoming for everyone who walks, bikes or rolls.

Nelson’s group is hard at work on additional pages to display data on local bike and pedestrian volumes, infrastructure and equity. “My goal is to create more opportunities for people to walk and bike safely,” she said. “There are so many benefits to biking for transportation; it is good for our health, pocket books, communities and environment.”

This work was funded through California Assembly Bill 140 as a Regional Early Action Planning Grant and administered by the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) as a part of the state’s strategic investment toward a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive future.

“This dashboard highlights the innovation happening at UC Santa Barbara and shows how research can directly benefit local communities,” said SBCAG Executive Director Marjie Kirn. “Through the State’s Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) program, SBCAG partnered with the university to turn complex safety data into real progress. Programs like REAP help regions like ours connect housing, transportation, and climate goals while supporting smarter investments in safer, more connected places to walk and bike.”

Tags
Data Science

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