Trails, Cycling, and Older Adults

What we can learn about cycling and health, trails and older adult

American Trails Webinar, September 21, 2023

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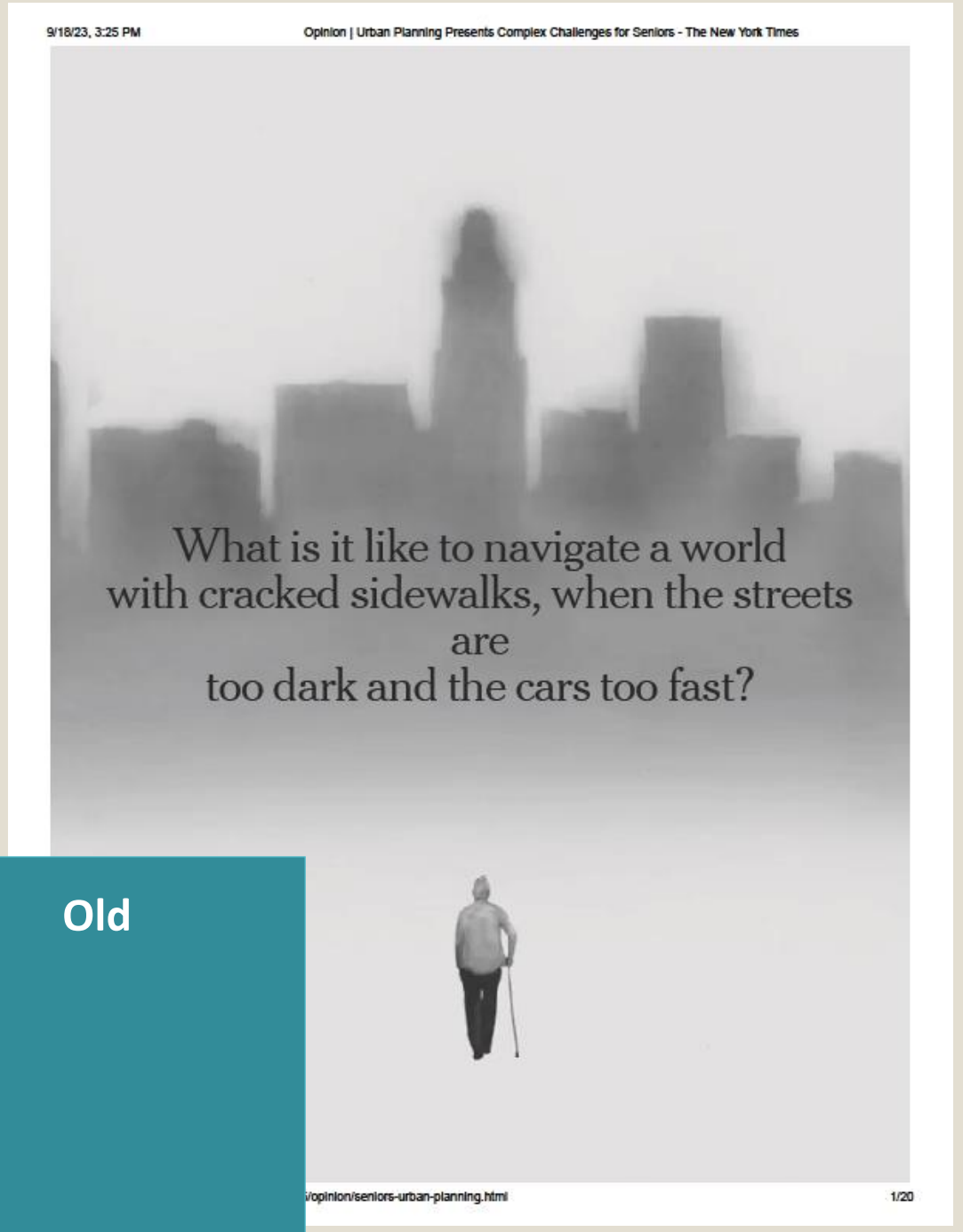
dblTilde CORE
Community Outreach, Research & Education

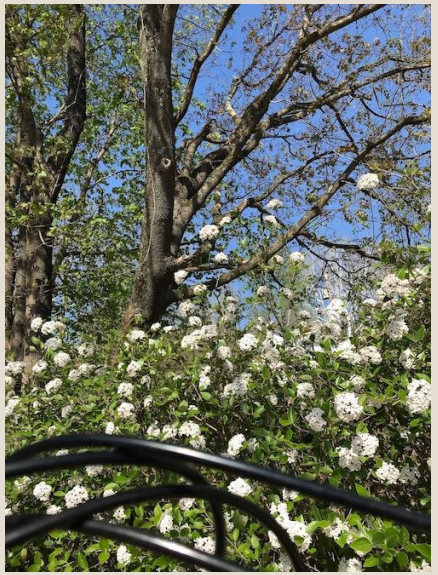


https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/09/06/opinion/seniors-urban-planning.html

Not old

Old

Instead…



Underlying assumptions

- People need to be and can be physically active as they age
- Cycling is an age-friendly form of physical activity that has physical, psychological, and social benefits
- Trails are a logical go-to place for older cyclists
- Cycling infrastructure, programs and policies need to reflect the needs of older adults
  - Older adults are often not included as a resource for these items
  - Social pressure to stop cycling

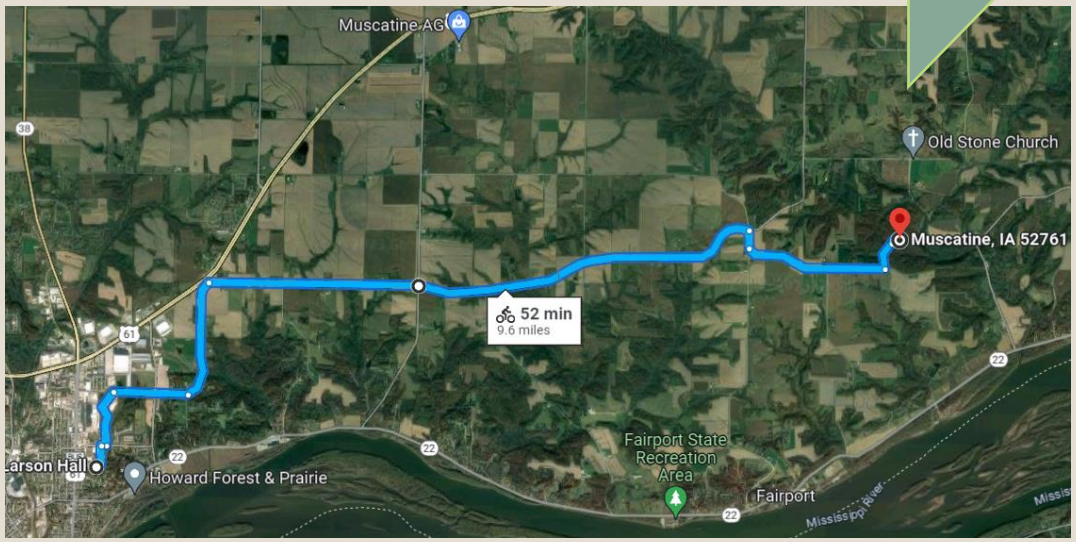
Agenda

What we've learned from

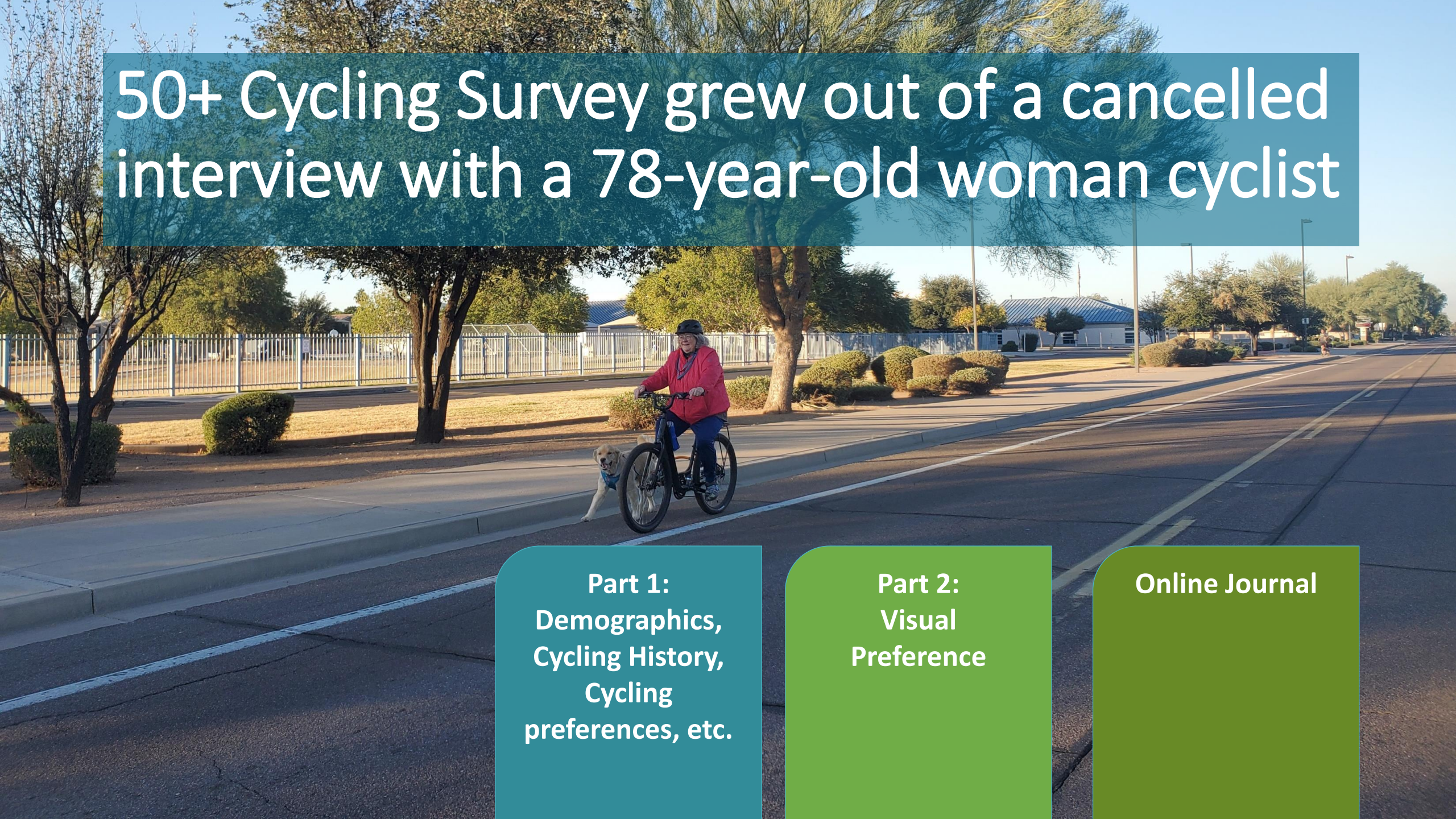
- 50+ Cycling Survey & Journals
- Older Adult Communities

Identify what's important

Begin to use it



50+ Cycling Survey grew out of a cancelled interview with a 78-year-old woman cyclist

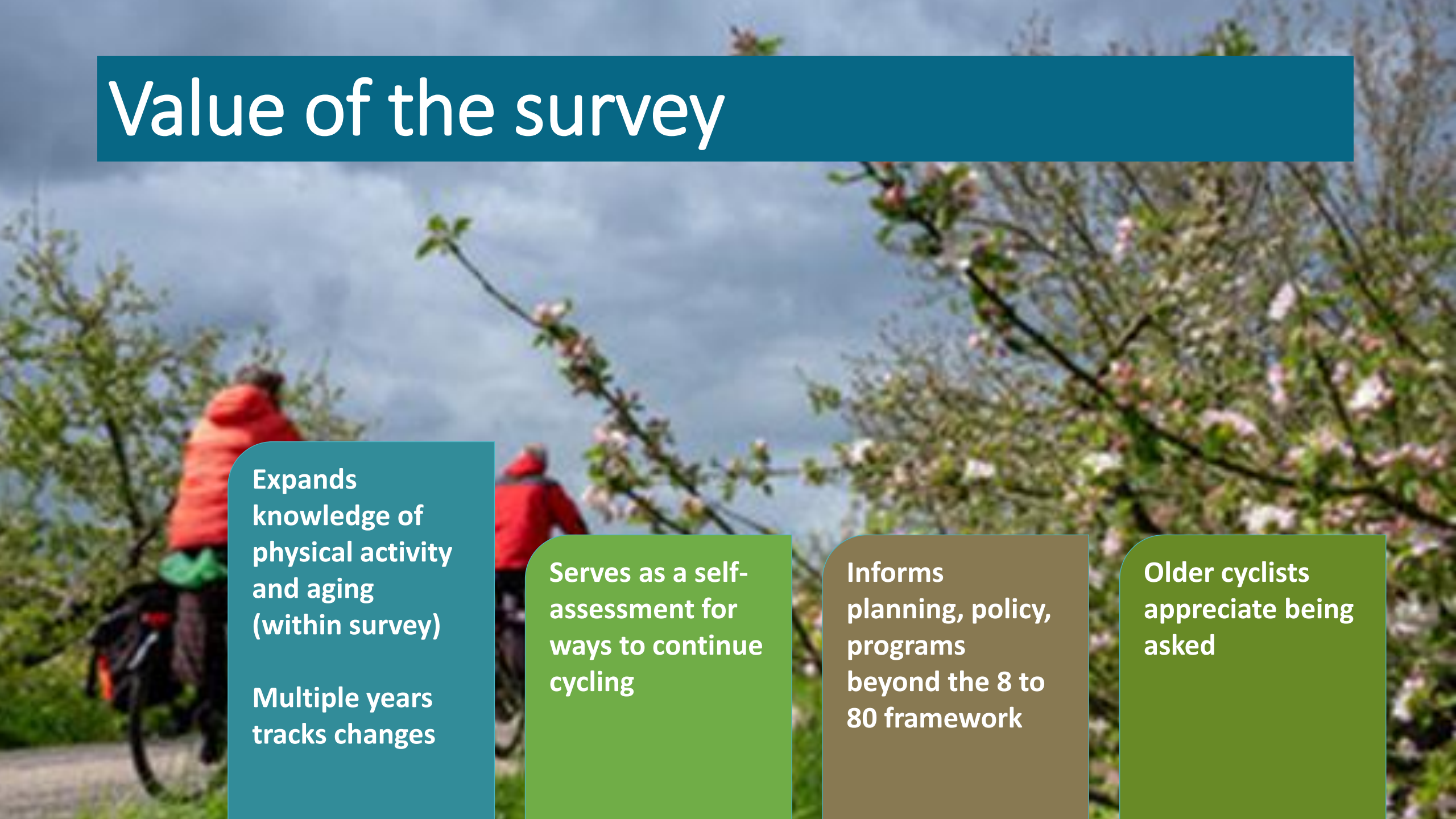


Part 1: Demographics, Cycling History, Cycling preferences, etc.

Part 2: Visual Preference

Online Journal

Value of the survey



Expands knowledge of physical activity and aging (within survey)

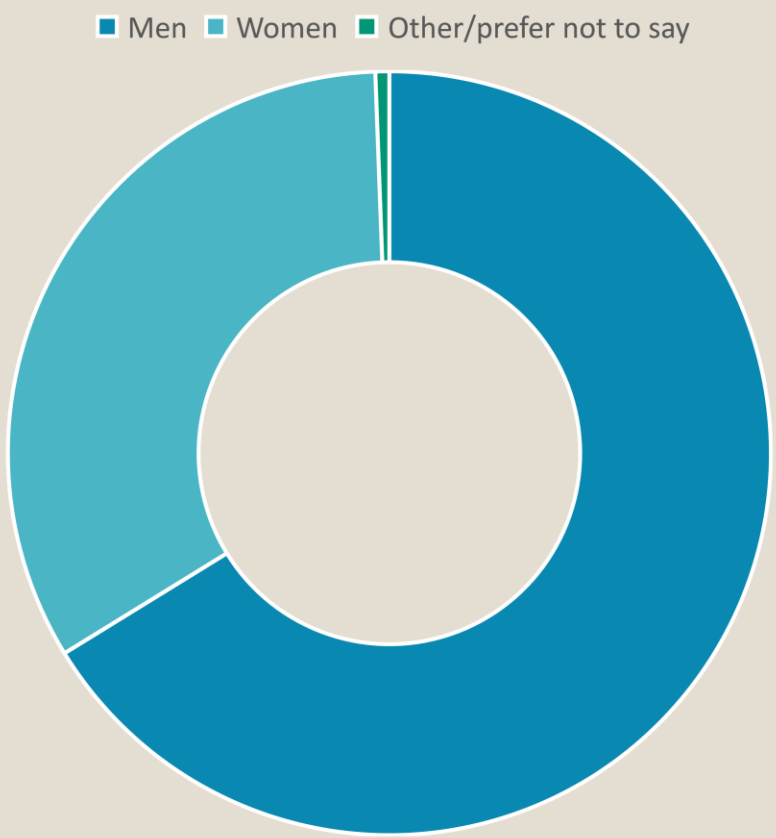
Multiple years tracks changes

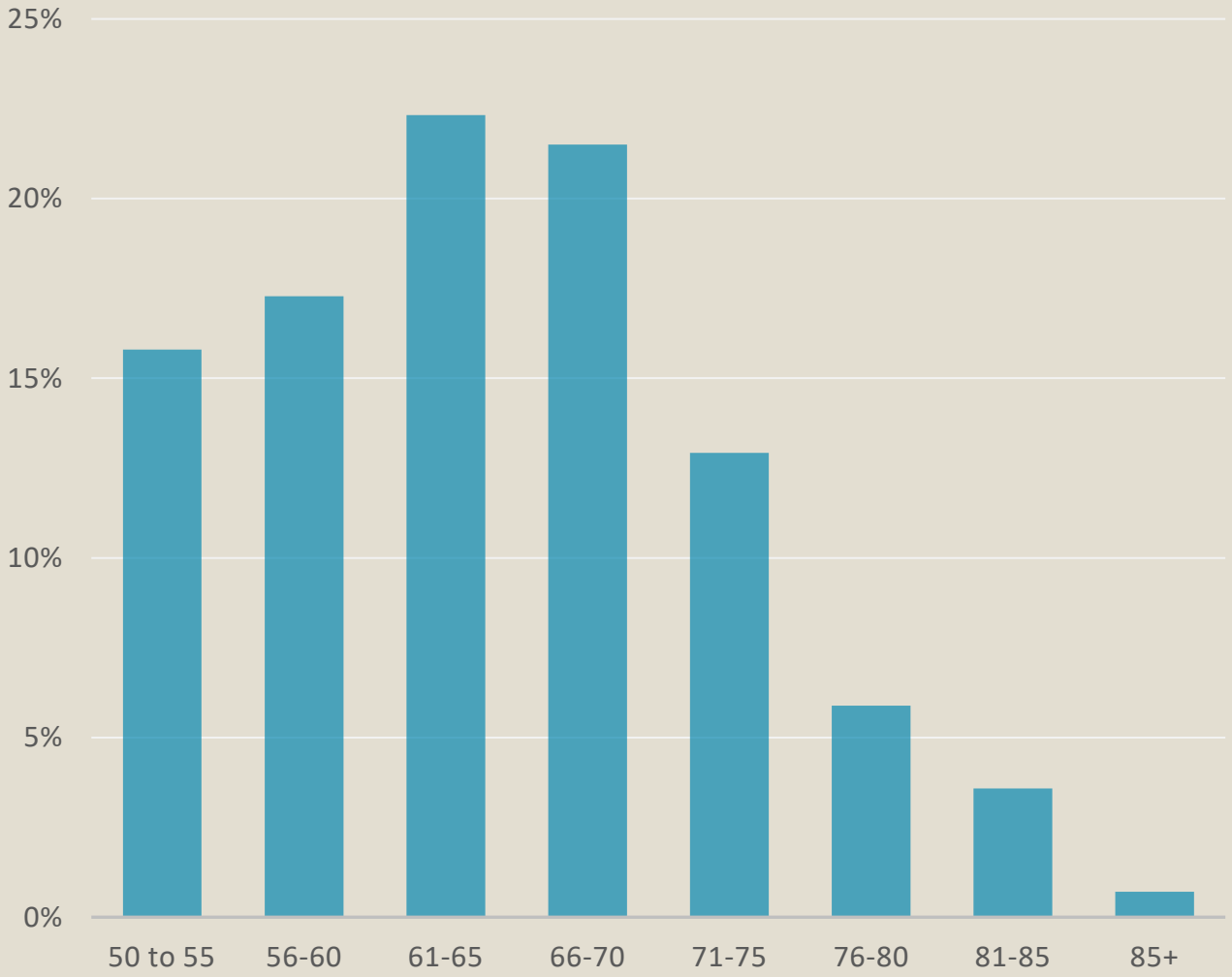
Serves as a self-assessment for ways to continue cycling

Informs planning, policy, programs beyond the 8 to 80 framework

Older cyclists appreciate being asked

50+ Cycling Survey, Year 4 (5,000+ responses)

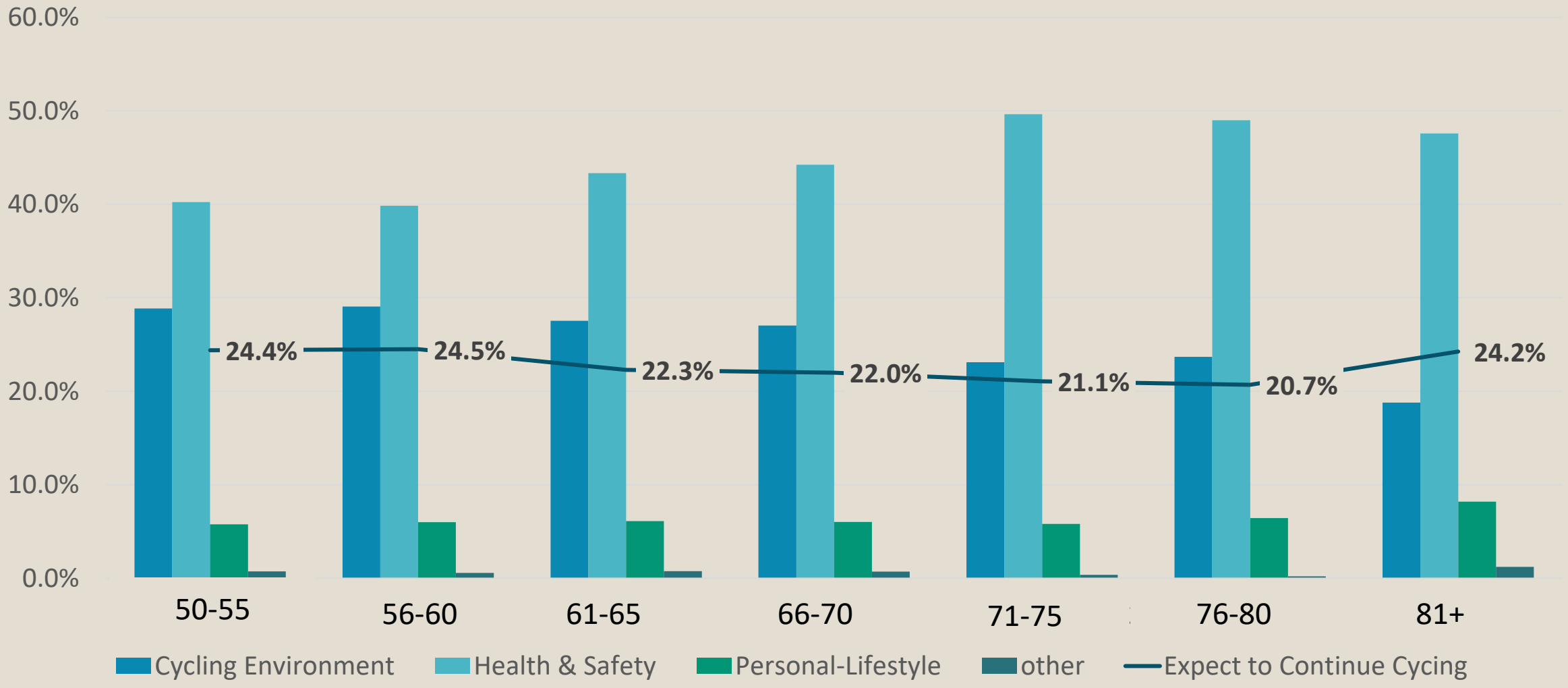




A Coat of Many Colors

- Ride 1 x month to daily
- Cycle alone
- Cycle at night
- Ride for transportation
- Ride for exercise and fitness
- Ride to enjoy nature
- Ride to be social
- Ride a couple of miles to 50 or more
- Cycle on trails, streets, sidewalks
- In urban, suburban, rural environments
- Year ‘round or weather-dependent
- On different types of bikes
- Are cycling into their 90s
- Crashes deter some; inspire others to recover

Start with the end in mind:
Can you envision a time when you would not cycle?



Factors affecting where older adults cycle

Cycling Environment

- Other cyclists present
- Easy & safe bike parking
- Pleasant vistas, parks
- Easy connections to destinations

Health & Safety

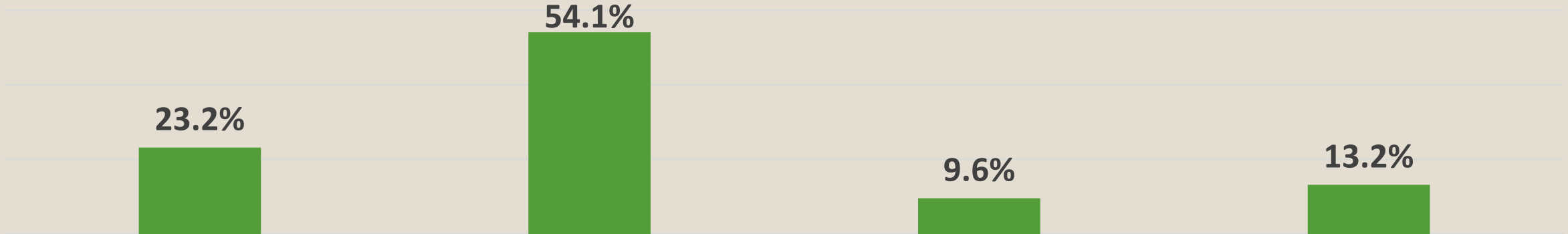
- Benches for breaks
- Shade to cool off
- Bathrooms, water fountains
- Few or no cars
- Roads in good condition, no debris
- Low volume, speed neighborhood streets
- Protected bike lanes
- Overall feeling of being safe

Social Relations

- Places to stop, eat, shop, visit
- Group Rides

Personal-Lifestyle

- Ride primarily during the day
- Avoiding rush hours
- Avoid night cycling



Why the amount of my cycling changed last year

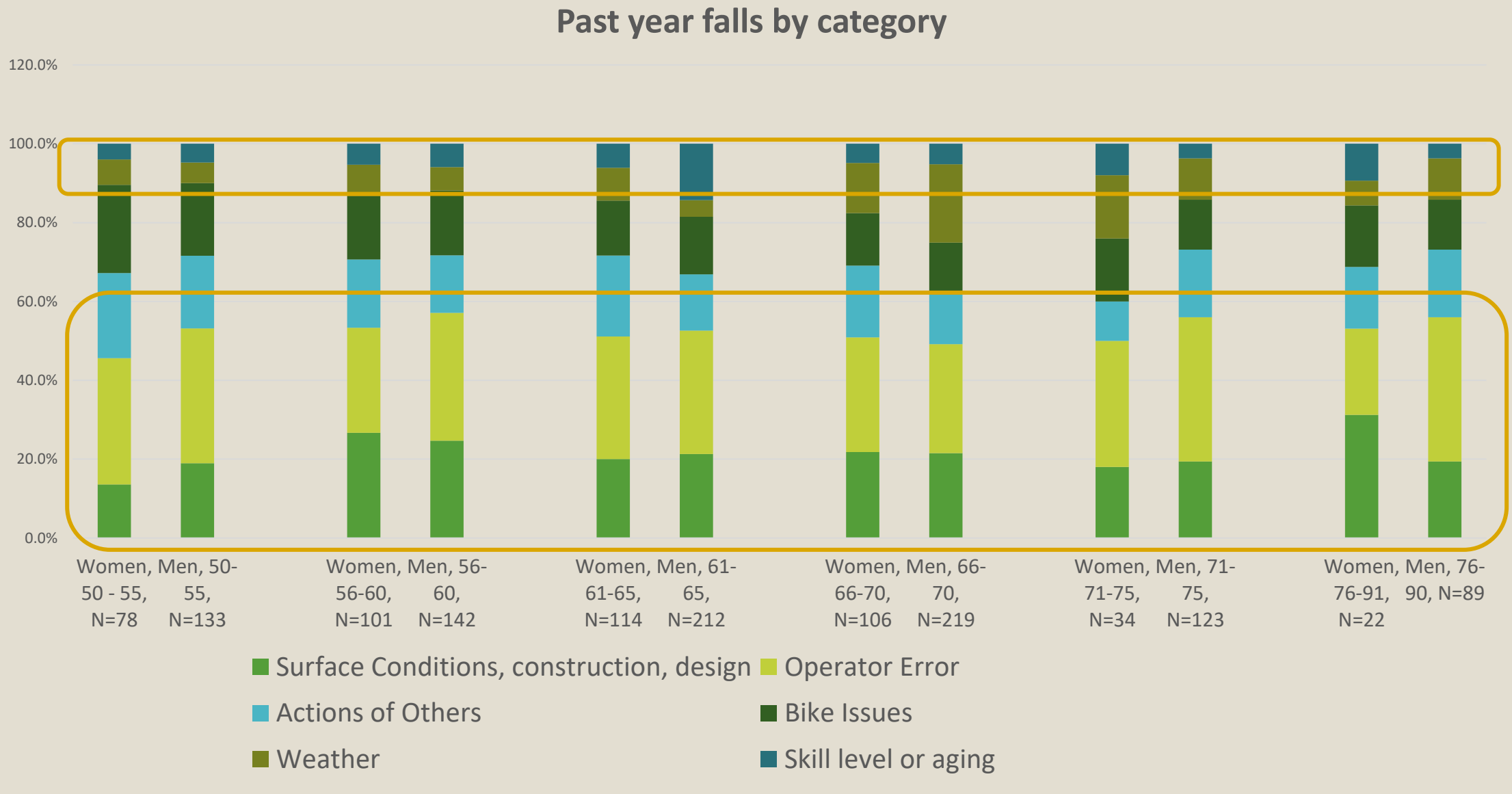
Health & Safety	Cycling Environment	Work related	Personal-Lifestyle	Social Relations
48.6%	15.4%	14.9%	14.2%	6.9%

Cycling less

Cycling more

Personal-Lifestyle	Health & Safety	Cycling Environment	Social Relations	Work related
32.9%	25.9%	22.7%	16.8%	1.8%

The elephant in the room: crashes



Past Year Falls

Surface Condition

- Gravel, sand, soft dirt on path
- Slippery bridge
- Potholes, depressions, ditches
- Narrow passageways
- Sharp turns by design; off-set pathways
- Steep trail access
- Limited facility features – capacity, lighting, sight lines

Operator Error

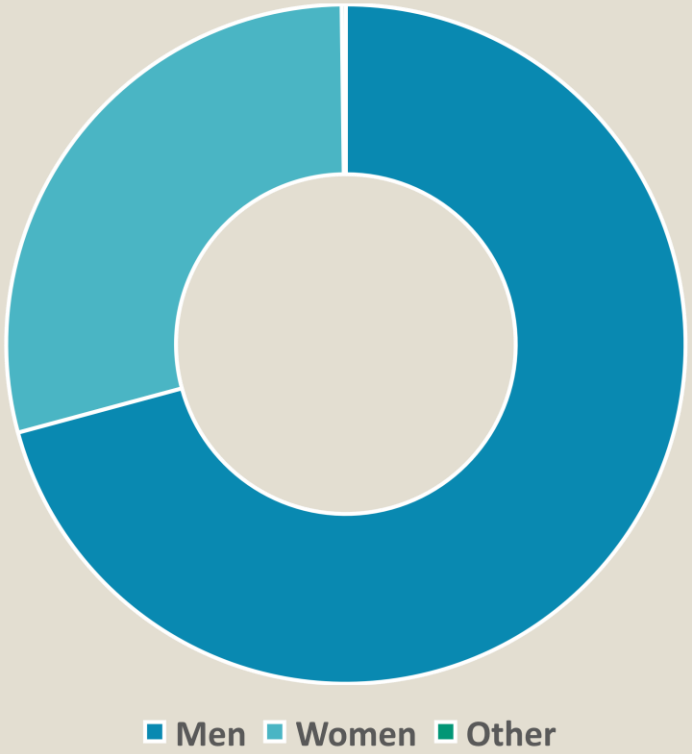
- Inattention or focus, poor bike handling or decision-making
- Going too fast for conditions or my skill level
- Trouble stopping and staring
- My fault, stupidity, clumsiness
- I don't know; I don't remember

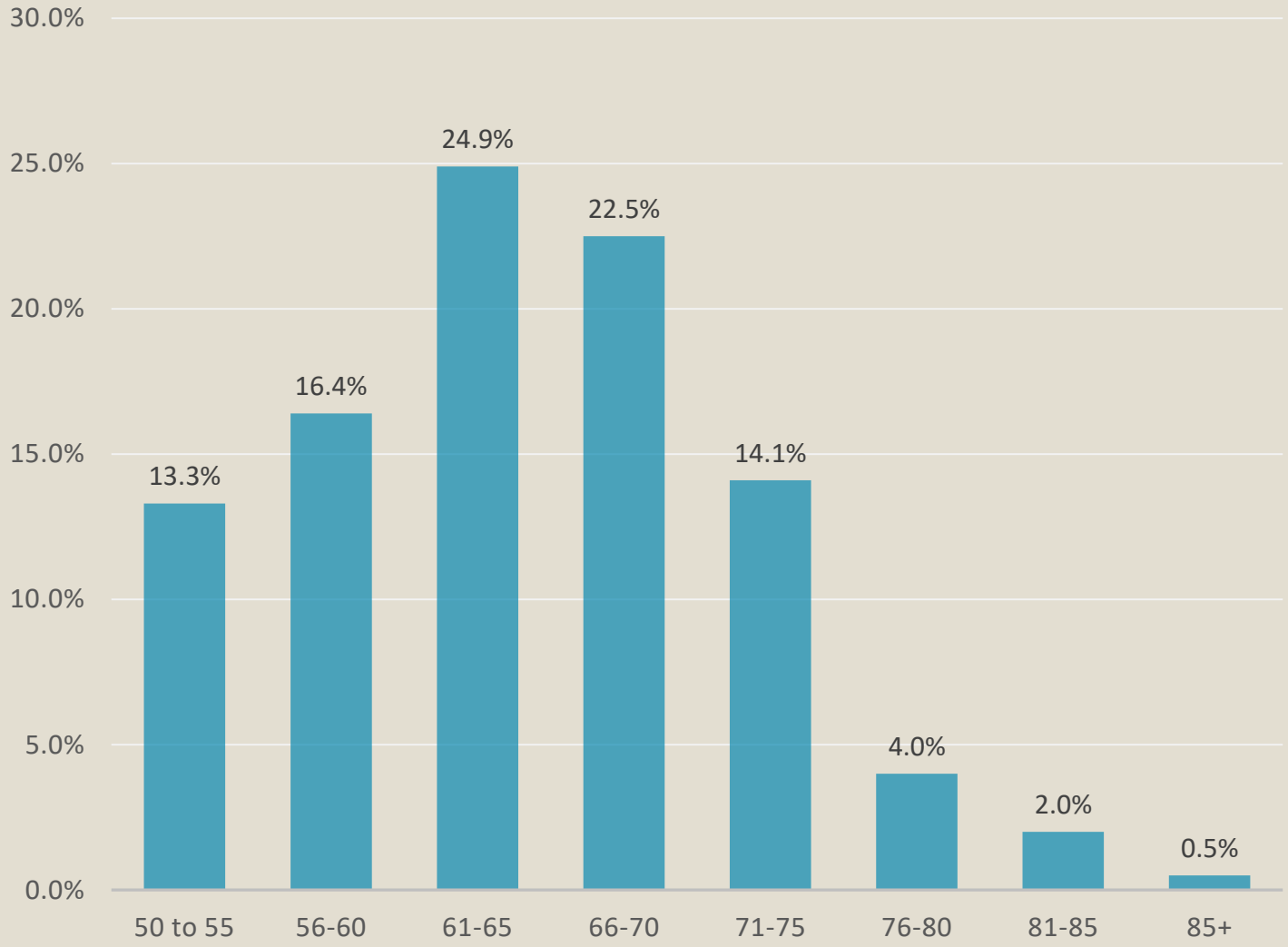
Age-related Limitations

- Balance issue, at slow speed, getting on/off bike
- Health issue; physical strength or agility, effects of heat or fatigue
- Inattention or focus, poor bike handling or decision-making
- Effects of aging

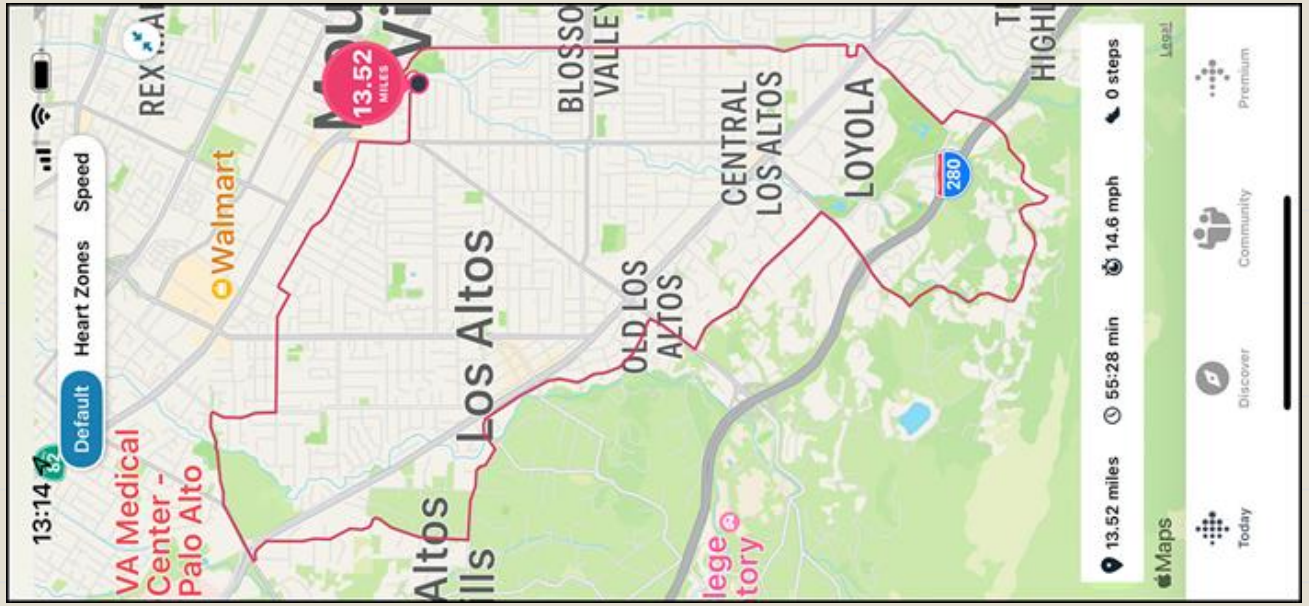
Experience during cycling trip
Year 4 Online Journal (845 responses)

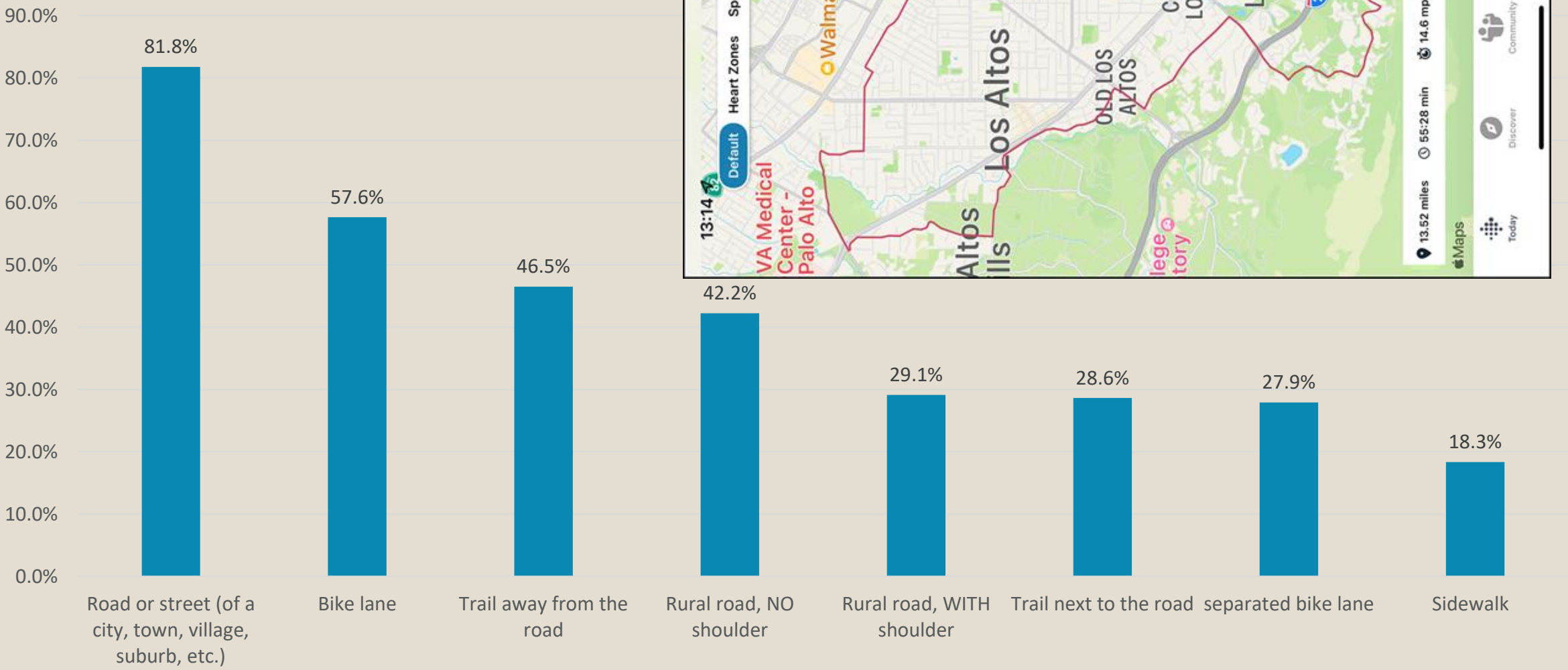
Who journaled?



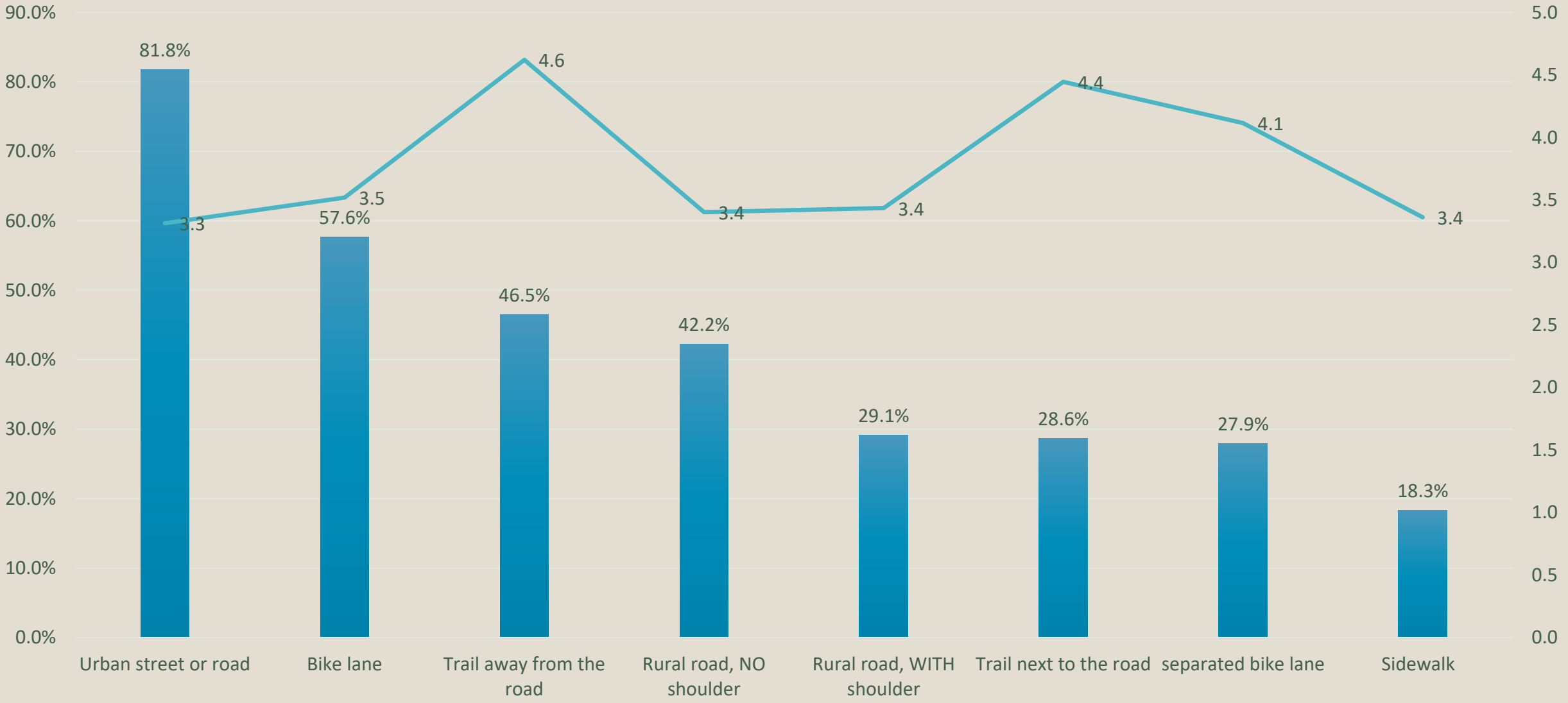


Where did you cycle?





How safe and comfortable was it?



What worked well?

Trail infrastructure & Context

- Being able t… …nificant portion of the trip on rails to tra…
- Great rid… …ty on paved off-street bike paths, an… …on well-marked bike lanes on not part… …city.
- Well planned route pic… …specifically because it contained many bike trails and bike lane.
- Having friends nearby while riding trail sections occupied by "campers" and loiterers. Traffic signals that were actually triggered by bicycle presence.
- Good covered bicycle rack at my destination.

Nature & Trails

- Trail built within a nature setting such as a forest, along a river
- Trails create opportunity to enjoy the day – sun, air, etc.

- A dedicated bike/pedestrian trail in a forest pres river, no traffic.
- Being ou singing, seeing other cy
- The enjoy e and a total of over 2,000 mi
- Beautiful winter day, w ed a coyote hunting.
- Beautiful day for a ride with husband.
- Scenery …animals...
- I dressed right for the cold.

What didn't work well? What did you use despite safety & comfort concerns?

Trail Access: Street & roads as connections

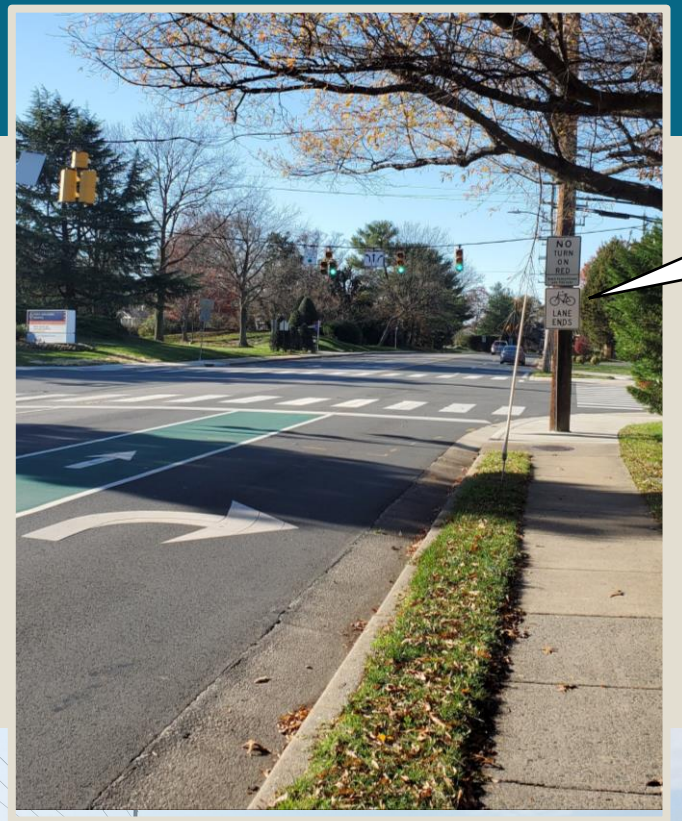
- Turning left to get to the bike path. The bike path begins at the top of a T intersection, but you need to jog left on a five-lane road to get to it.
- Down a steep city street with a stop light at the bottom on a wet evening. It's the best way to get to a greenway.
- Crossing a 2-lane 45 mph main road to reach the trail. We cross very, very carefully.
- My route is almost entirely a separated bikeway or a rural two-lane road, …BUT I have no choice but to cross Hwy 126 at some point in my ride. There are no good crossings.

- **Trail access from street and highway grid, especially at intersections**

Trail Gaps

- **Missing trail segment forcing cycling on-road**

- There was a 1/4-mile missing segment of paved bike trail between two segments of paved bike trail. I rode in the public (rural) street that had two 11'-foot traffic lanes and no shoulder or bike lane to connect these two segments of paved bike path. I did not ride on the "use" path that was on the property about 30' from the edge of the road. While I was on the road, there were no cars passing in either direction. Immediately when I had the opportunity, I rejoined the paved bicycle path.
- A strange part of the separated bike route where … the separated route…stops..and [cyclists] then … share the road with cars, [then needing]…to turn left at a traffic light to re-join the separated path. There are not directions about how to do this. It feels somewhat dangerous to turn left against oncoming cars in an unregulated intersection.



Trail conditions

- The bike path on the side of Viers Mill Road is not wide or separated from cars and there is a lot of traffic.
- Bike path is getting very bumpy in places due to tree roots.

- **Trail surface condition.**
- **Trail capacity and placement.**

Isolation Factor

- Biking alone on a country trail early in the morning far from a city. I kept thinking that no one would find me if I had an accident. No one else was on the trail but if I met someone, I am not sure that would have felt safe either. I always bike with someone, so it was an unusual experience.

- **Isolation factor – what safety features are available?**

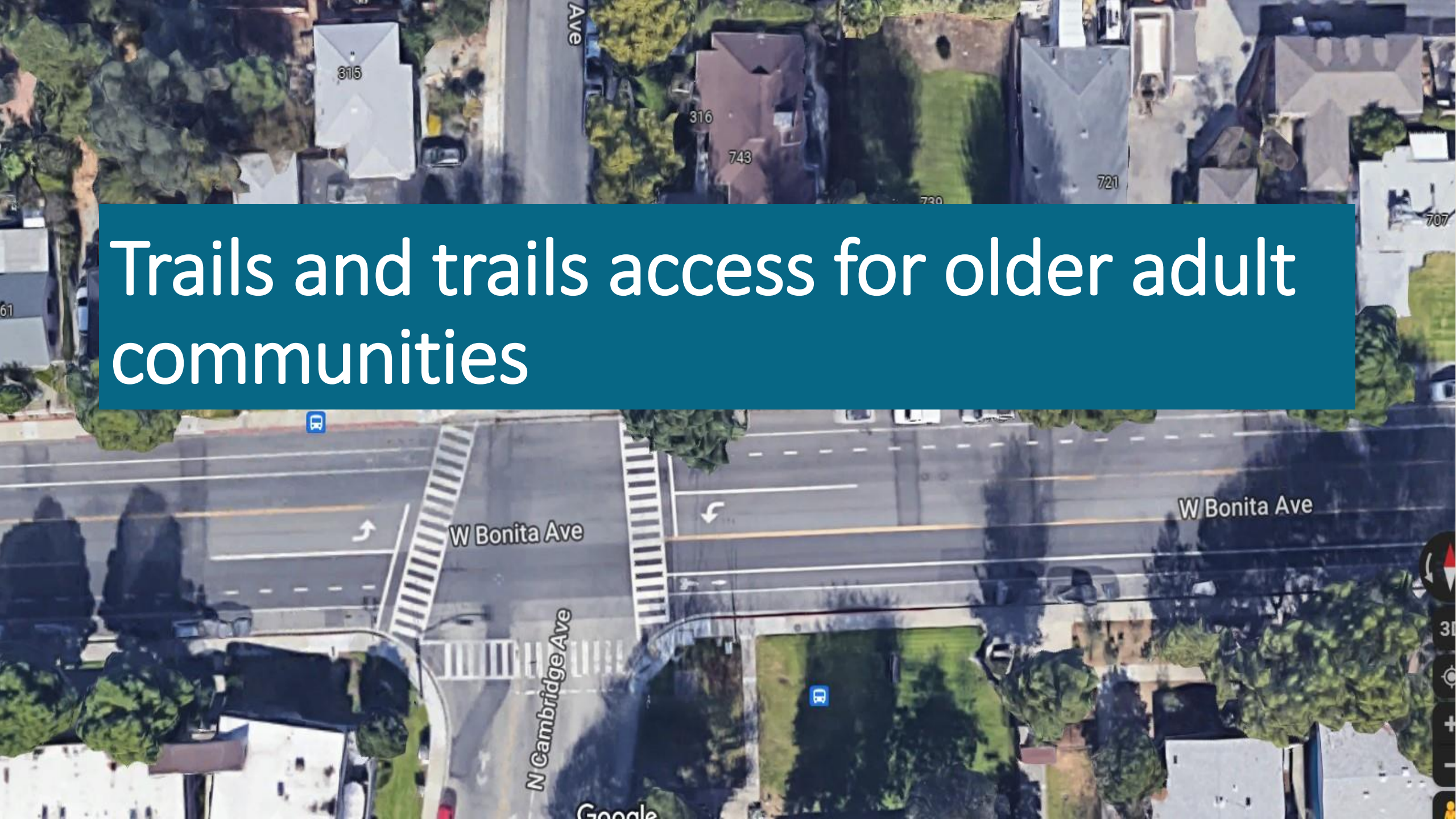
What did you avoid?

What did you avoid?

- I avoided areas where there were gaps in the trail and I wasn't sure how they were supposed to connect, i.e., which roads would be suitable.
- I avoided non-paved trails because of expected mud.
- I chose to trail ride because of a recent near miss on a road ride I definitely avoided going off the trail.
- I drive to the trail when I used to ride to it because the local roads are too dangerous to ride now.
- I ride only a short distance on the main north-south road in my area because the lane is narrow, changes width, has no buffer. Then, I jump off onto a gravel trail that runs along a small creek for a mile until it meets a larger paved trail along a larger creek. On the gravel (with thousands of fallen acorns) travel is slow--but there are absolutely NO motor vehicles.

- **Trail gaps.**
- **Uncomfortable trail conditions.**
- **Unsafe & uncomfortable trail options.**
- **Unsafe trail access resulting in ‘driving to ride.’**

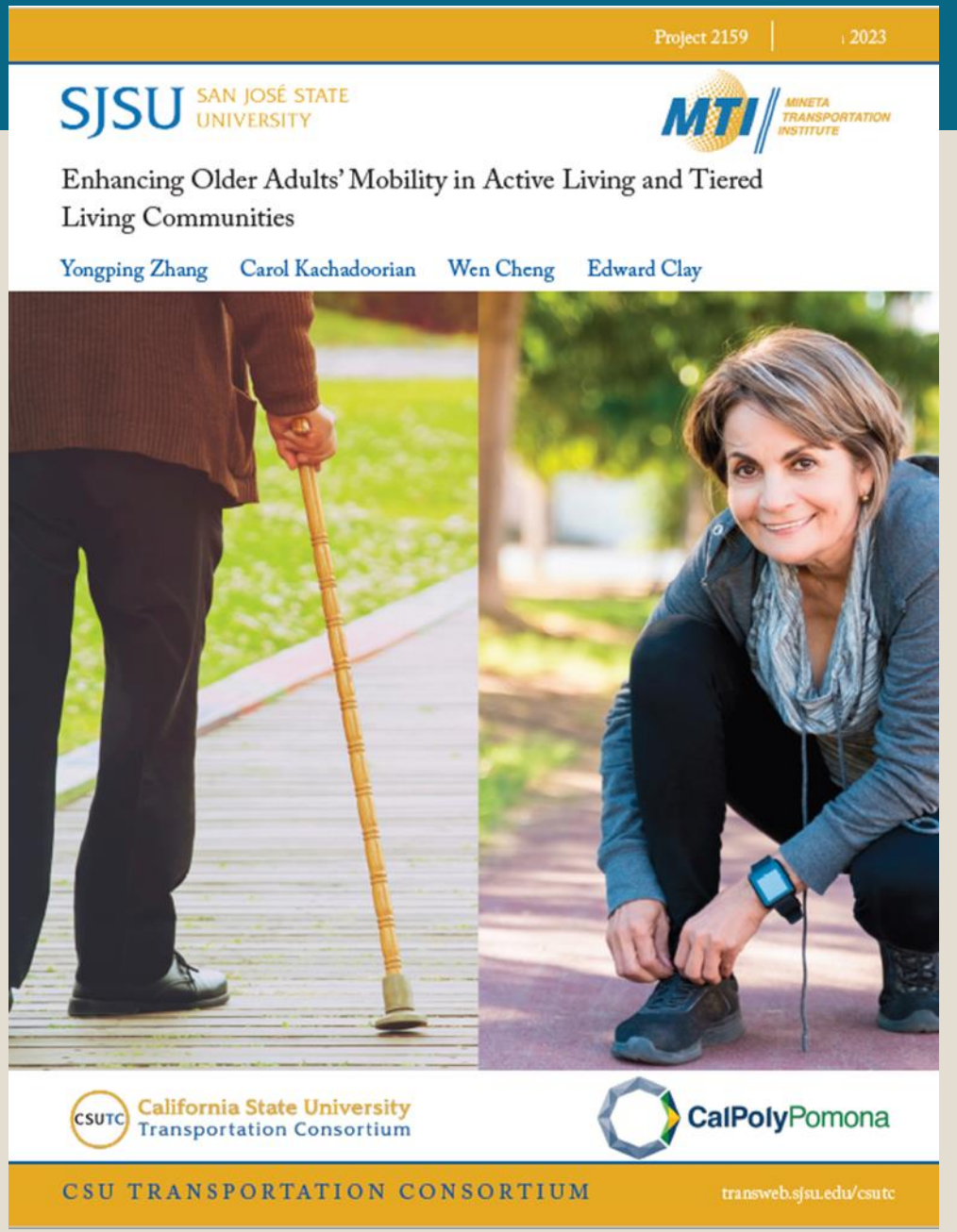
After so many years of cycling, I'm grateful to still be able to do this. It's still mucho fun!



Trails and trails access for older adult communities

Project overview

- Presence of Active Mobility Infrastructure for residents of 10 OAC in 8 California jurisdictions
  - Interviewed older adult community and city government staff
  - Surveyed residents; conversations
  - Reviewed of communities and surrounding areas
- Mix of
  - Active living to tiered living communities
  - Housing type included SFH, duplex, manufactured homes, apartments
  - Household income range of low income to ‘portfolio’ residents



What about trails and access to them?

Encina Royale (Goleta)

- Developed in the 1960's
- Attracts residents who want to walk or cycle to nearby destinations

Trails within a park are 2 miles away; trail head for Stevens Creek Trail is 3-4 miles away via a less-than-ideal route. Thanks to residents' advocacy, the 2018 BPMP recommends improved bikeways, but need for safe and comfortable crossings of large roads remains.

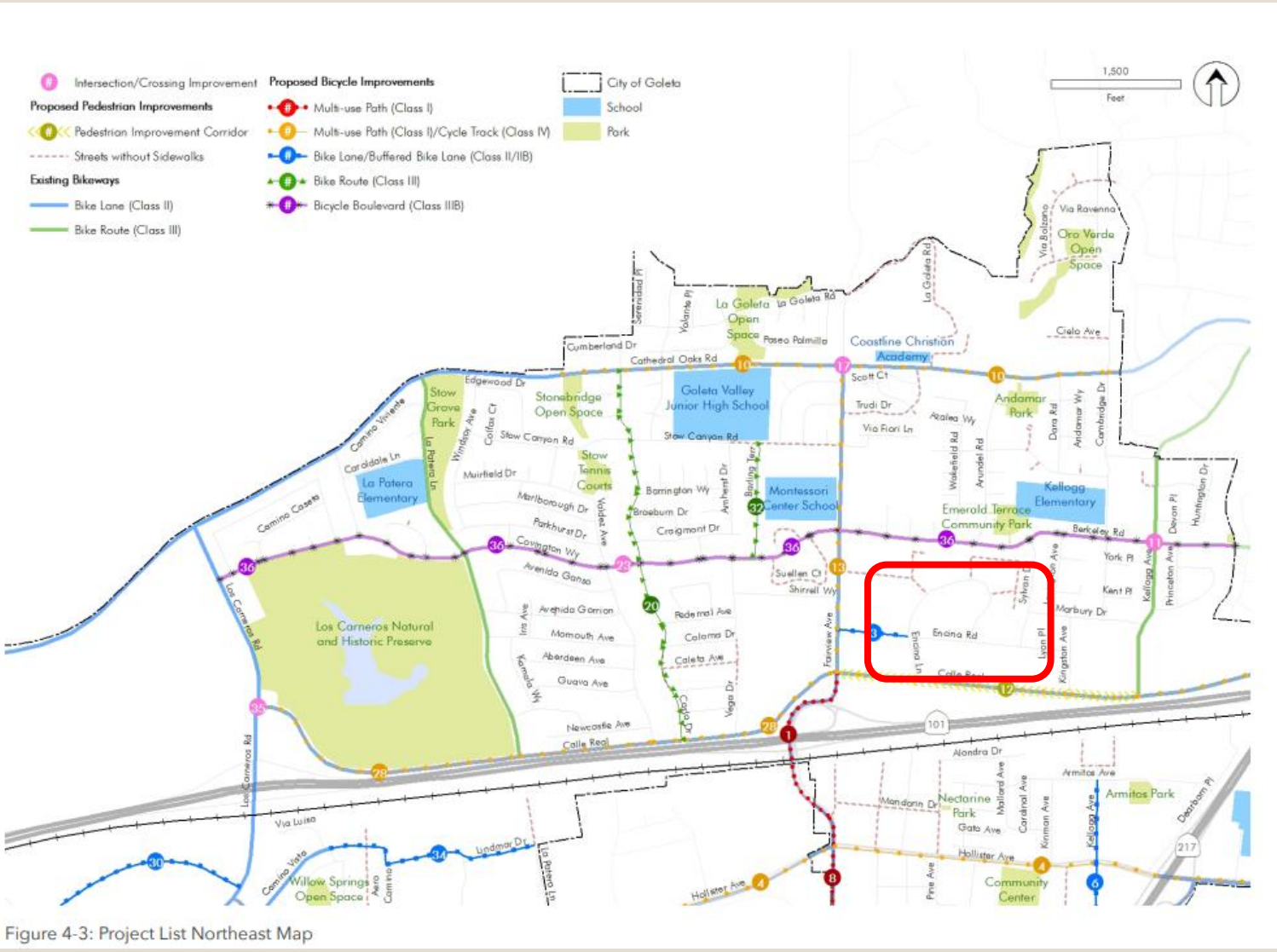


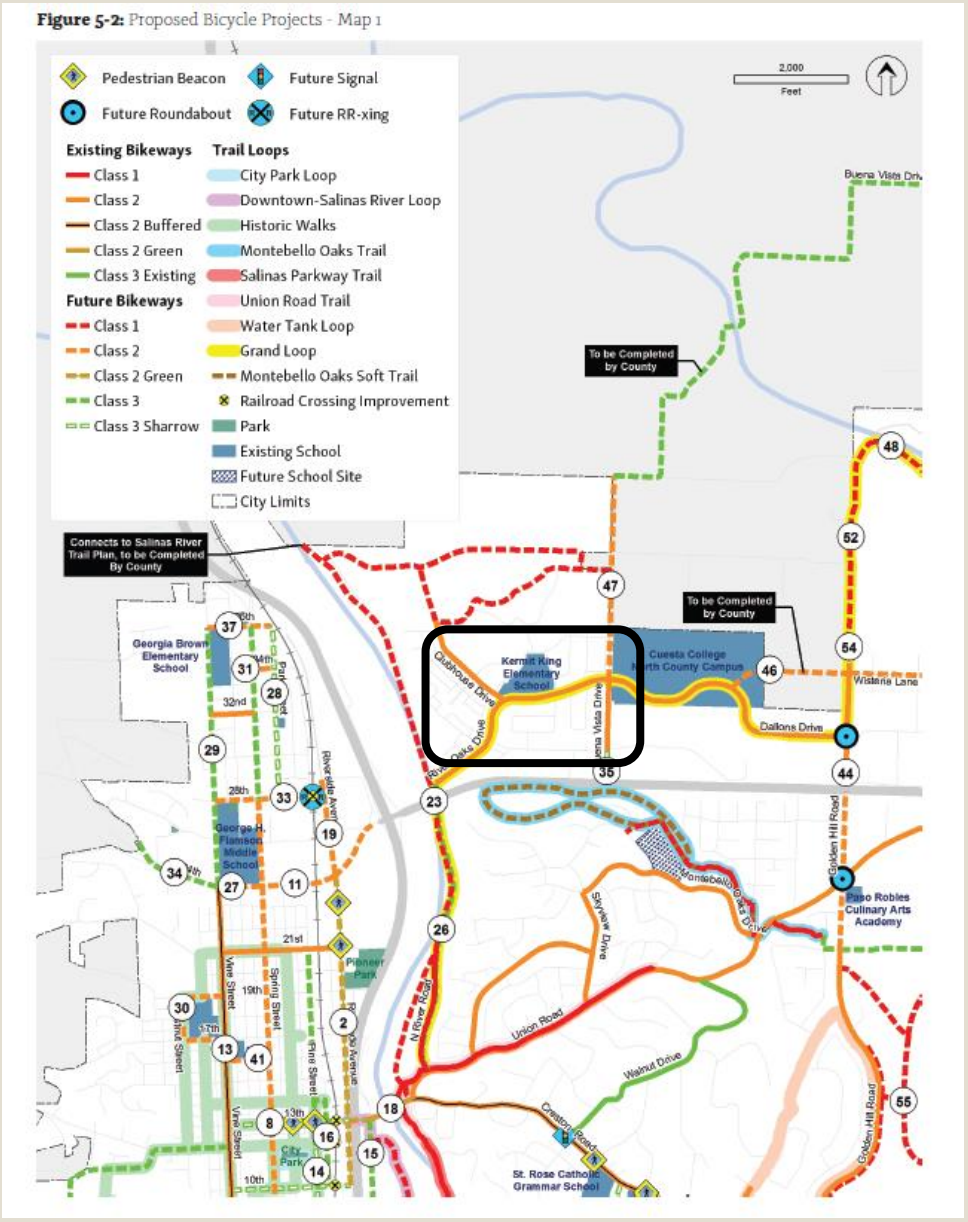
Figure 4-3: Project List Northeast Map

What about trails and access to them?

Traditions at River Oaks (Paso Robles)

- Develop in the early 2005 for high end buyers
- Extensive on-site AMI, but some want to cycle off-site
- City did not consider OACs in 2018 BMP

The trail is 3.5 miles away on a 2-lane road with no shoulders. Residents who use the trail want improved access. Also want a sidepath to downtown. Class 1 bikeway proposed in 2018 Bicycle Master Plan.

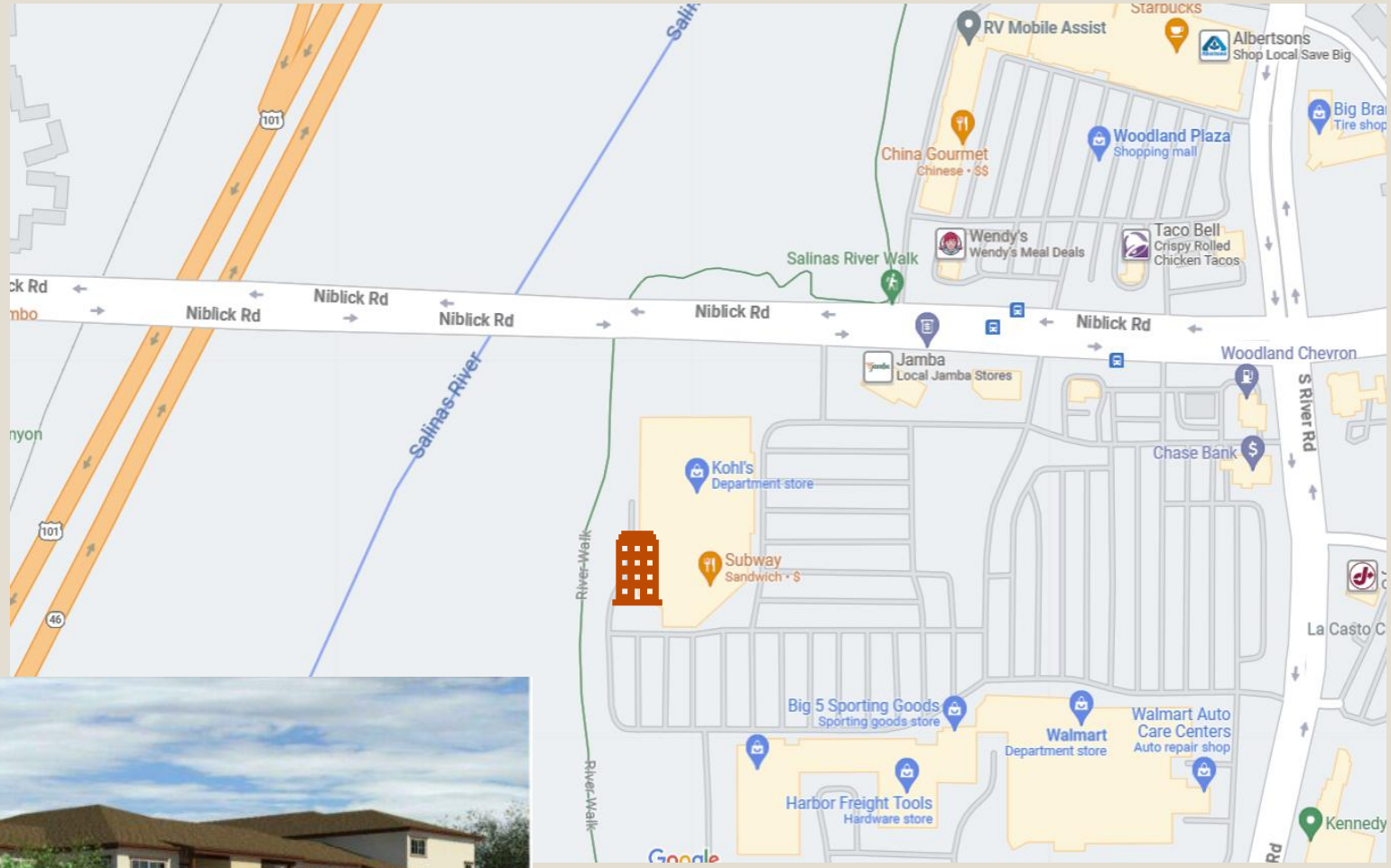


What about trails and access to them?

River Walk Terrace (Paso Robles)

- Planned older adult low-income apartment building.
- Target occupancy in mid-2020's.
- Satisfies County's need for low-income housing.
- Sited near shopping, transit, river trail.

New access pathway planned. Bike parking included on the site plan; not sure if it will be added.

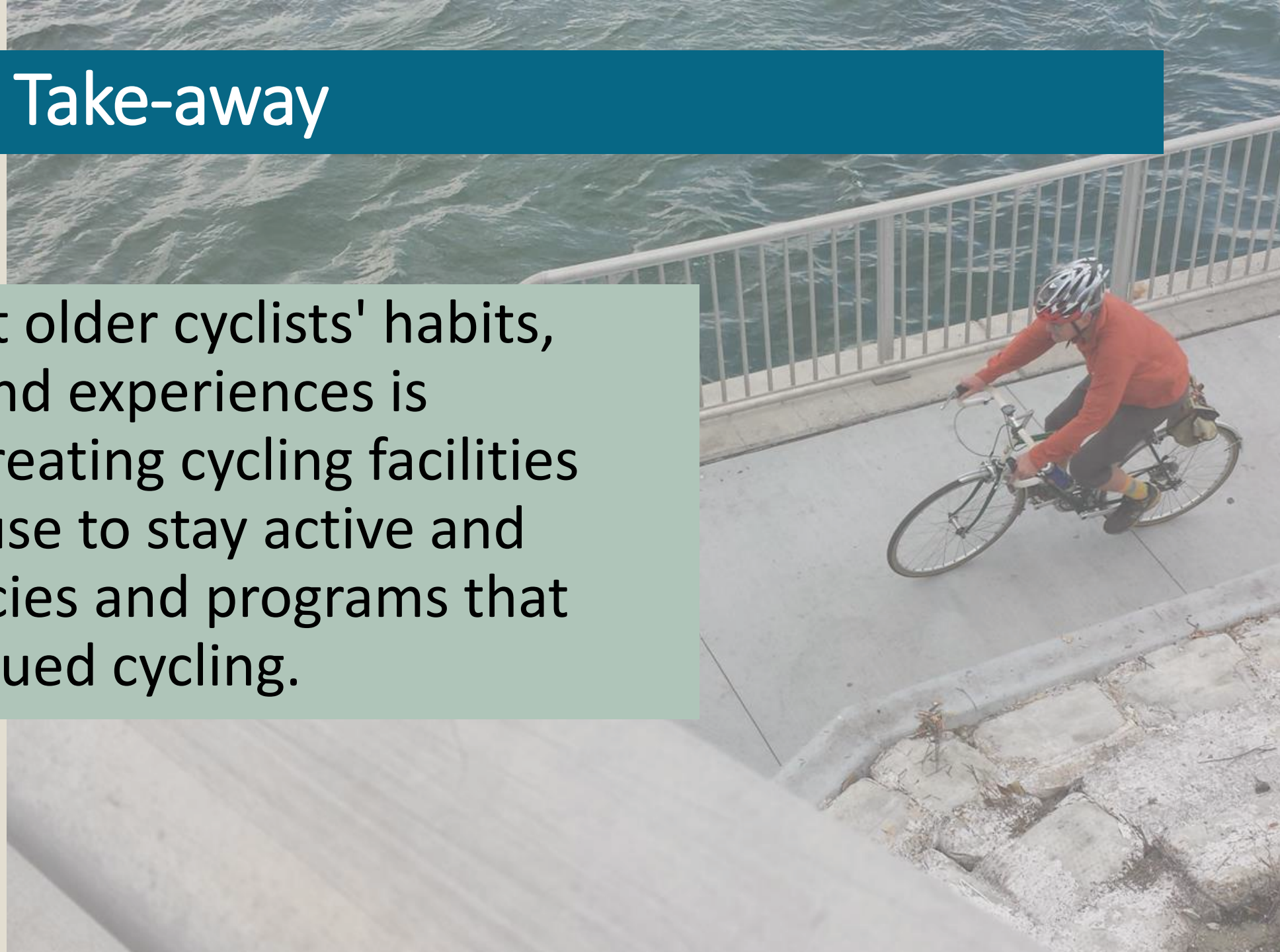


“The older I get, the more I need safer and more comfortable circumstances to cycle.”

--Joan, aged 87

Key Trails Take-away

Learning about older cyclists' habits, preferences, and experiences is important in creating cycling facilities that they will use to stay active and healthy & policies and programs that support continued cycling.



4 Important Considerations *(segue to James's presentation)*

- Focus on mobility and wellness outcomes *(where does your work fit in to this?)*
- Use an interdisciplinary approach
- Use an inclusive approach
- Be open to facility design and operation adaptation *(Stop building infrastructure for other ages, then expect older adults to learn how to use it. Build infrastructure that fits the needs of older adults.)*

Thank you

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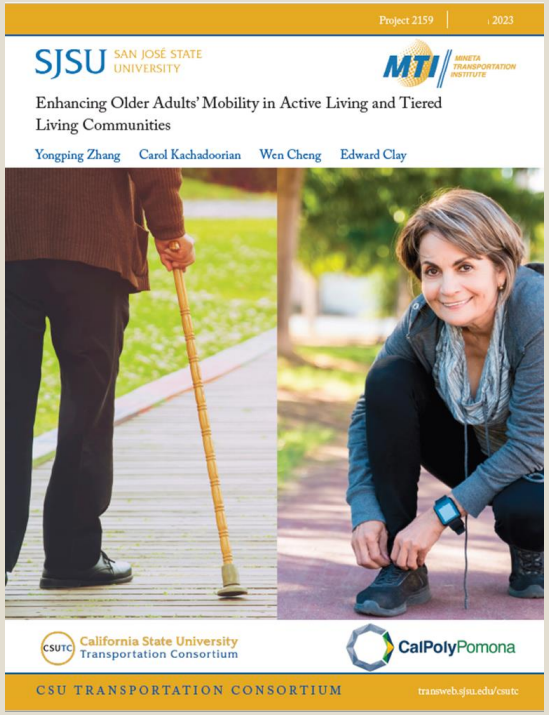
Community Outreach, Research & Education

References



- Link to Year 4 survey
- Slides of MTI webinar reviewing the 50+ Cycling Survey, Year 4
- Video of Ageism is Cycling Infrastructure Planning
- Video of Pedestrian Signal Timing

Report on 50+ Cycling Survey, Year 4 to be available in the fall 2023 from MTI