

17th Street Trial Plaza User and Perception Analysis



Source: Jamison Wieser

Summary of data collected between
May 6th and June 13th, 2009

Executive Summary

The 17th Street Trial Pedestrian Plaza is the first of several trial street closures in San Francisco. The project converted a small street in the Castro Street Commercial Area, a tourist destination and a bustling community with strong history, into a sitting area. The area still provides a thoroughfare and a stop for the historic Muni F-line, but now also contains plants, tables, chairs and secondary seating. This study seeks to analyze the utilization of space and the user perception of the 17th and Castro Streets intersection before and after the implementation of this trial pedestrian plaza.

The study finds that once the trial plaza was implemented:

- The length of time spent in the area increased and users became more engaged in cultural and social activities.
- The area is now utilized as a place and destination rather than a route.
- A greater sense of community character was perceived by pedestrians.
- There was an increased desire for public space in the Castro Street Commercial Area.

Methodology

The Great Streets Project performed two rounds of on-site data collection: a baseline collection on Wednesday, May 6th and Saturday, May 9th, 2009 and another after the plaza was implemented on Wednesday, June 10th and Saturday, June 13th, 2009, from noon to 2 pm and 5 pm to 6 pm on all four days.

During these observation periods, the intersection of Castro Street and 17th Street was monitored through timed photographs, pedestrian counts and surveying users about their perceptions of the area.

The Castro Street Commercial District is defined for this study as the area between Market Street and 19th Street as well as the areas of 17th Street off of Castro with business activity.

11. How do you rate Castro Street commercial area as a good place to spend time?

- Very Good
- Good
- Okay

- Bad
- Very Bad

Area Utilization

In order to learn how this space was being used, photographs were taken every 15 minutes during the observation periods. These images revealed the transformation of the area from an intersection into a gathering place.

- The average number of intersection users in the area at one time rose from 16 to 31, with up to 64 people in the trial plaza at once.
- While the baseline data showed only one person sitting in the area during the entire first two-day observation period, there was an average of 10 seated users in the trial plaza, with up to 26 seated at one time, during the second observation period.
- Users remained in the area for less than 15 minutes prior to plaza, but were observed for up to 2 hours after implementation.
- The instances of cultural activities observed greatly increased, including a performance by the San Francisco Rainbow Symphony, as well as interaction and conversation between users.



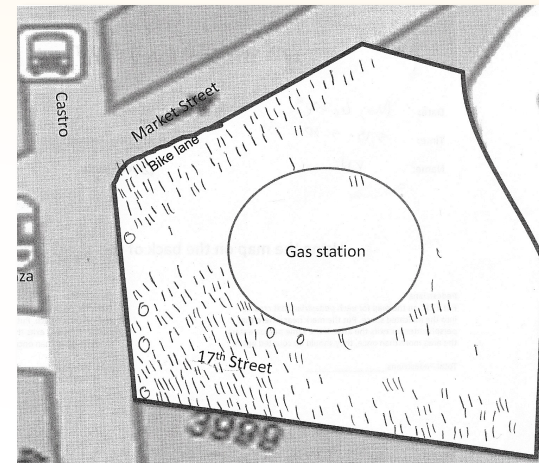
Pedestrian Counts

On average, the number of pedestrians passing through the intersection decreased slightly after the addition of the plaza, however closer examination of counts shows that during two of the six hours measured, pedestrian traffic increased.

The following changes over the course of the month between the “Before” and “After” studies may have affected the findings:

- Changes in the way people use the entire Castro Street Commercial Area
 - The introduction of the trial plaza as a place rather than a transportation route.
 - Pedestrians that had previously walked through area are now users that stay longer.
- Differences in weather
- Differences in economic activity

Trends seen in these numbers should be considered in conjunction with survey data and more qualitative and observational evidence in order to construct a fuller picture of the trial plaza’s effects on the Castro Street Commercial Area.



Perception of Place

The user perception surveys revealed an increasing demand for public sitting areas and improved perception of the pedestrian experience in the Castro Street Commercial Area.

- Those who agreed that they would spend more time in the area if there was more pedestrian space with public places to sit rose from 79% to 84%.
- The perception of the pedestrian experience as “Good” or “Very Good” rose from 68% to 73%.
- 5 out of 5 users who worked in the Castro rated the pedestrian experience as “Good” or “Very Good” after the trial plaza was installed, compared to only 1 out of 4 prior to the plaza.



“The new plaza is excellent & well used. Market Street crossings are dangerous for pedestrians. Needs more bike parking.”

“This plaza is a good first step, but more in this direction would be great.”

Sense of Community Character

Although many agreed that the neighborhood had a strong sense of community character before the trial plaza was installed, there was a notable increase in this number afterward, especially among residents.

- Those who agreed that the Castro Street Commercial Area has a strong sense of community character rose from 84% to 93% after implementation of the trial plaza.
- Castro neighborhood residents who felt a strong sense of community rose from 76% to 89%.
- 100% of all tourists and employees of the area agreed that the area has a strong sense of community character both before and after the plaza was implemented.



“Love it here, lived here 2 1/2 years.
Feels like home, feels like a
neighborhood.”

Conclusion

The Castro Street Commercial Area is one that has a strong sense of community and serves a large amount of pedestrians every day. Since the implementation of the 17th Street Trial Plaza, the area has enabled and encouraged users to linger and interact with one another while improving the overall perception of the neighborhood and pedestrian experience.

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