

multistudio

[RE]CONNECT
San Francisco Central Freeway:
Report from Localized Neighborhood Events
August 2024



WHY [RE]CONNECT?

Historic Impacts

The San Francisco Central Freeway, like many other freeways built in the 1950s, displaced existing residents and divided neighborhoods, causing significant cultural, economic, and health impacts on community members.

Advocating for a Future Vision

Since 2019, Multistudio has been collaborating with Badiner Urban Planning, BASE Landscape Architecture, and ARUP to spark conversations in various forums around the many potential opportunities for the future of the Central Freeway. Recent events, including the SF Design Week “Can We Re-Envision SF’s Unintended Division?”, the SPUR event “Freeway Rethink: Burying Hospital Curve and Removing the Central Freeway” and episode five of the KPBS podcast “Freeway Exit” offer important explorations toward next steps.

Recommendations

This report includes feedback from attendees of two localized neighborhood events in San Francisco in June 2024. **This report is in no way reflective of a comprehensive community engagement effort. That is what we are hoping to see as a vital next step in discussions around the future of the Central Freeway.**



Elgin Park Block Party



Annual Parade and Festival



Neighborhood Bar, SoMA



Local Community Bulletin Board

We gathered input from attendees of two local events we hosted in June. While this was not a large scale engagement, we enjoyed the inspired dialogue. This level of interaction indicates a great interest in the topic and a need for more robust, inclusive, and organized community engagement efforts.

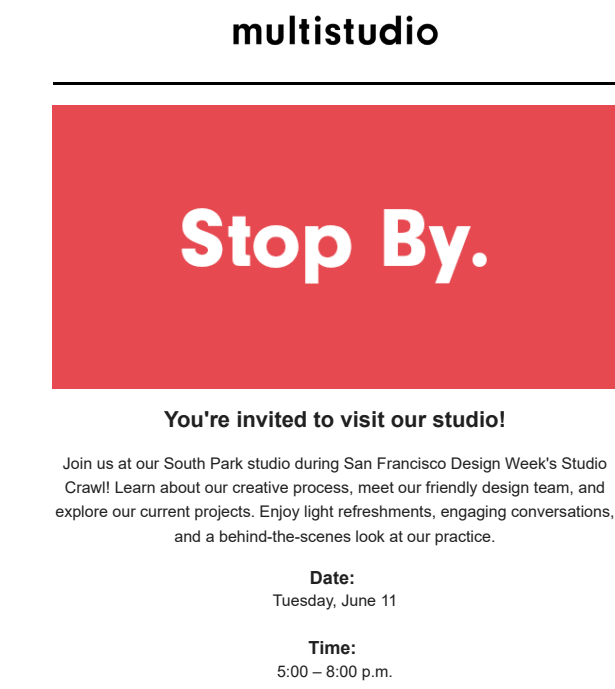


Photo by Britt Tennell

SF Design Week Studio Crawl

Localized Input

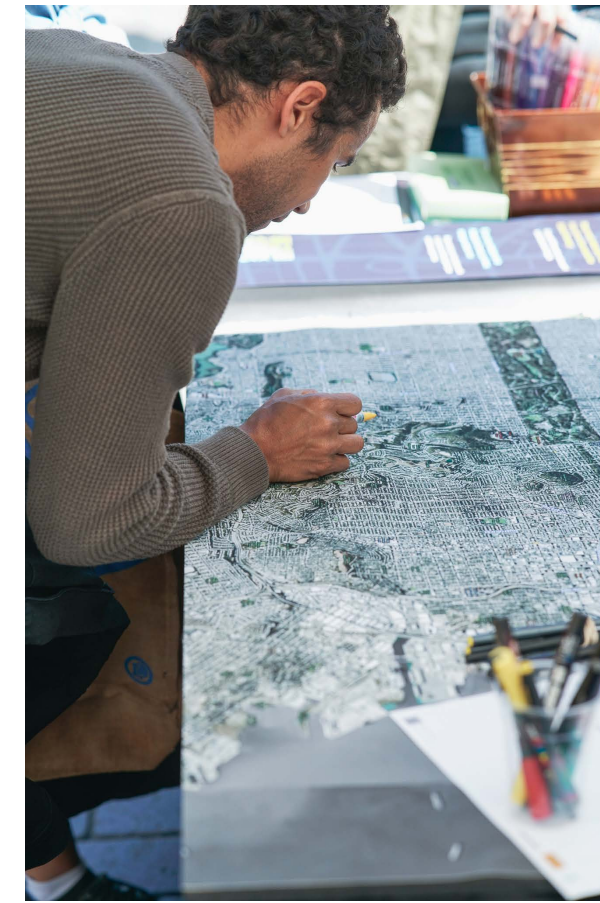
Various interactive activities invited attendees to share their experiences with the Central Freeway and ideate on other potential opportunities for the corridor.

Elgin Park Block Party

June 1, 2024

RSVPs: 100 Individuals

Ages: Children to Seniors



Mapping Exercise

SF Design Week Studio Crawl

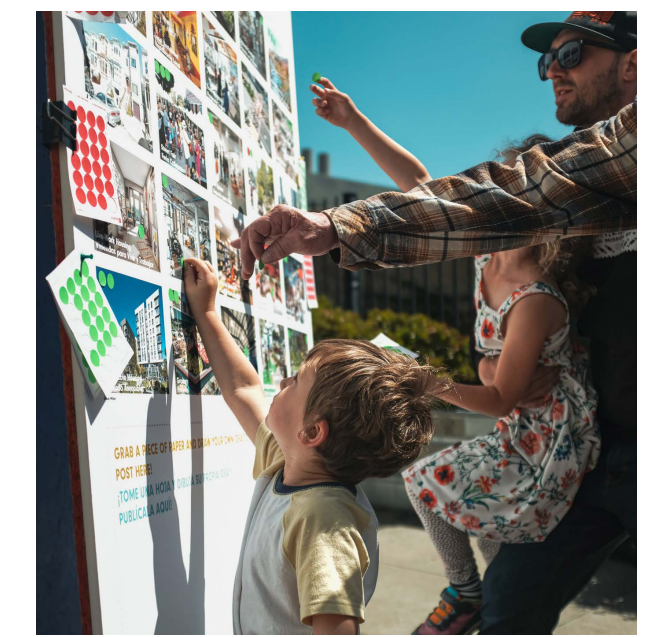
June 11, 2024

Sign-Ins: 40+ Individuals

Ages: Children to Seniors

Neighborhoods Represented (Both Events)

- 25 Mission District residential locations were self-identified.
- 6 SoMA District residential and workplace locations were self-identified.
- 55+ residential locations outside of the Central Freeway area were self-identified.
- 30+ attendees were west of Octavia Boulevard.



Attendee Input



Information Sharing

Kids Activities & Treats

Photograph by Michael Cochran

What We Heard:

Challenges

Participants who chose to engage during the Elgin Park Block Party shared many interconnected challenges posed by the Central Freeway, not only its physical presence but the air and noise pollution it brings, as well as the impediment to providing open space and greenery.

Participants noted flooding as a persistent issue around the Central Freeway. There are also concerns about insufficient affordable housing, food access, and thriving local small businesses.

Priorities

In activity responses, participants prioritized a habitable streetscape oriented toward pedestrians, cyclists, and transit; creating walkability, general safety, and connectivity to other parts of the city. An overwhelming number of participants indicated a desire for more open urban greenery where residents could gather in various scales and usages, such as parks, sidewalks, and elements we would characterize as urban green infrastructure (terms including wetlands, ponds, songbirds, trees, and urban forest were noted).

Participants additionally expressed a desire for affordable and inclusive housing with mixed-use and shared amenities. Other desires included access to diverse and fresh food, resources for the unhoused and support for local businesses. There was also an interest in spaces for sports, art, and culture. Those who attended also shared a strong desire to reconnect the SoMA District to the Mission District, and the Octavia-Market to the Design District.

Recommendations

The feedback we've gathered through these informal sessions indicates a need for further engagement, visioning, and feasibility studies.

The “Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program” grant program is an opportunity to apply for federal funding to support these needed studies. Information and workshop sessions regarding precedents and case studies of other freeway removal projects, creek daylighting, community land trusts, green benefit districts, and more would be instrumental in providing local communities with the tools to create a more vibrant neighborhood of their own.

For our San Francisco neighbors, we encourage you to share the report with your family, friends, neighbors, and leaders representing your district. We also invite you to sign the petition to urge the city agencies and Caltrans to apply, or support community organizations to apply, for the “Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program grants” due September 30th.

Mapping Exercise: Environmental Constraints and Community Assets Around Central Freeway

Where do you live and work in this neighborhood?

○ Circle with Yellow marker and use post-it to write down your thoughts.

What are the important things to keep?

○ Circle with Red marker and use post-it to write down your thoughts.

Have you noticed any flooding in this area? Please identify their locations on map.

○ Circle with Blue marker and use post-it to write down your thoughts.

¿Dónde vives y trabajas en este vecindario?

○ Haz un círculo con el marcador amarillo y, use una nota adhesiva (post-it) para escribir sus sugerencias.

¿Qué desea conservar? ¿Qué es lo más importante en su vecindario?

○ Haz un círculo con el marcador rojo y, use las notas adhesivas (post-its) para escribir sus sugerencias.

¿Ha notado alguna inundación en esta zona? Por favor, identifique dónde en el mapa.

○ Haz un círculo con el marcador azul y, use las notas adhesivas (post-its) para escribir sus sugerencias.



Virtual Sign-In Here!
Iniciar sesión virtual aquí!



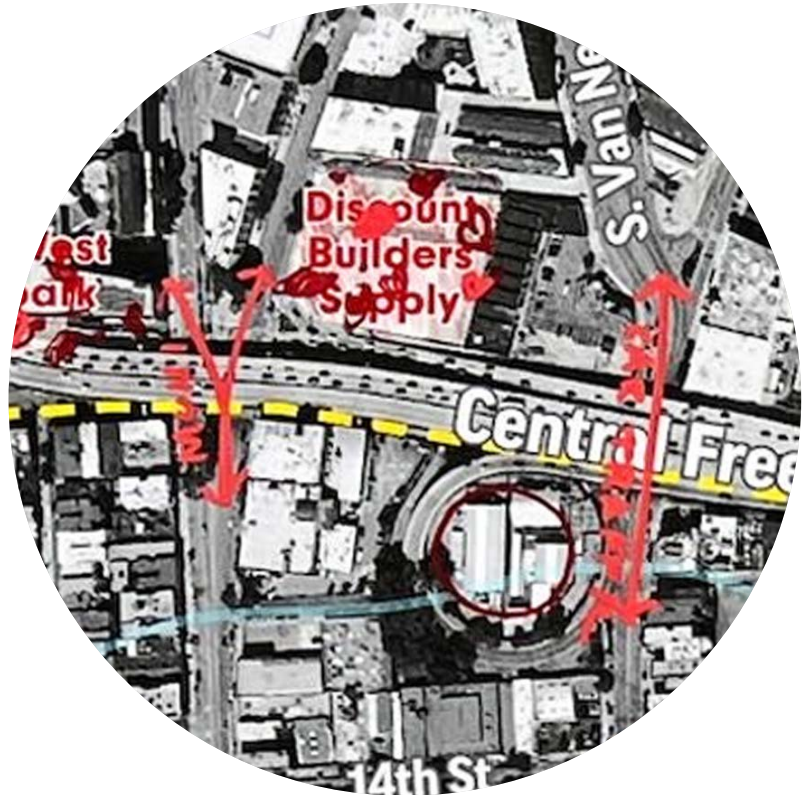
Legend

- Frequent Flood Zones
- Community Resources
- Flow of Historic Mission Creek
- Historic Riparian Area
- American Indian Cultural Hub

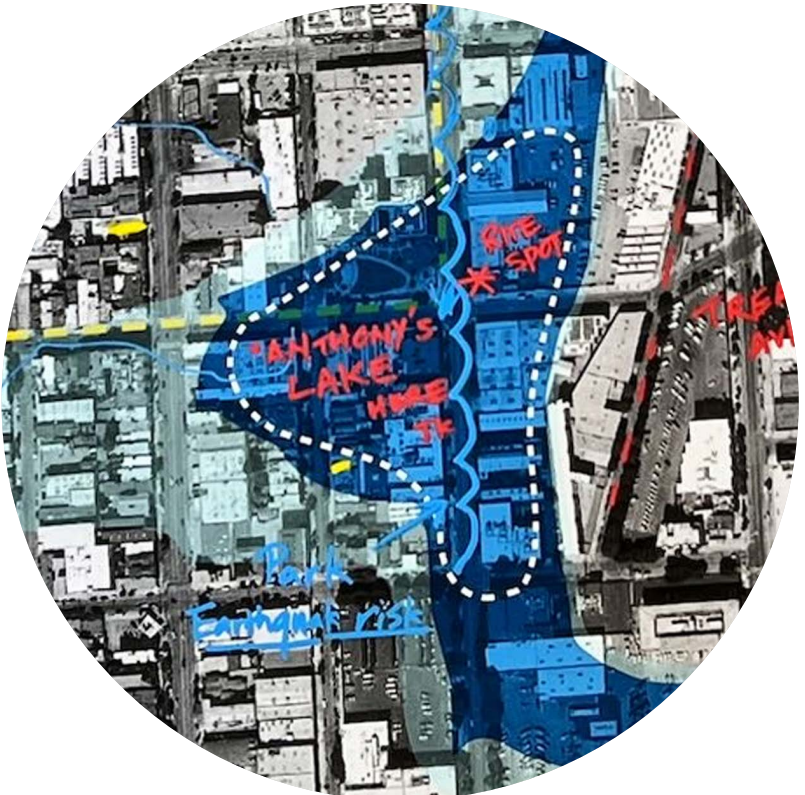
Legenda

- Zonas de inundación frecuentes
- Recursos de la comunidad
- Circulación histórica de Mission Creek
- Área Ribereña Histórica
- Centro Cultural de los Indios Americanos

Mapping Exercise: Takeaways



Participants seek improved and safer walkability connections between the South of Market District and the Mission District, which address the city roadway beneath the Central Freeway, creating barriers for pedestrian and cyclist crossings, including the east-west connections from Market Street to 9th Street/San Bruno Avenue.



During heavy rainfall, frequent flooding occurs along Folsom Street, Division Street, 14th Street, and 15th Street between Bryant Street and South Van Ness Avenue, coinciding with the Mission Creek and its tributaries. Flooding is also reported along Elgin Park, Pearl Street, and the intersection of Duboce Avenue and Valencia Street.



Respondents want to preserve local food resources such as Rainbow Grocery Cooperative, Costco, and Petco, as well as neighborhood bars, restaurants, and event venues, with some asking for more.

Mapping of San Francisco Residences Outside of Central Freeway Area



Input includes commentary from motorists and residents who live in other parts of San Francisco and the greater Bay Area region.

Central Freeway Challenges

Participant Responses

We asked participants to leave a word or two that describes the challenges communities in your neighborhood around the Central Freeway are facing right now.

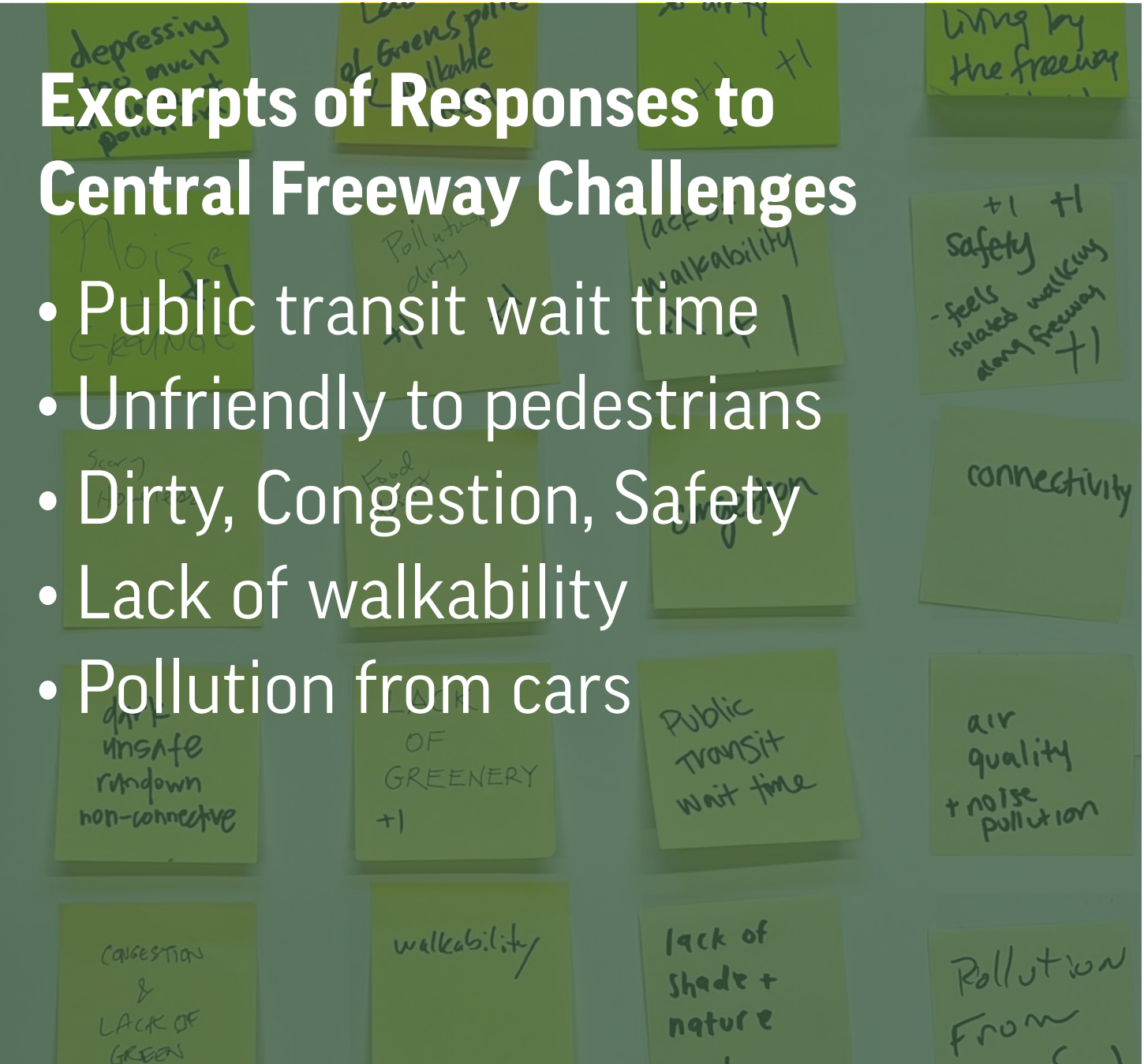
46% of respondents saw traffic and public safety as key challenges.

Neighbors' complaints include health impacts due to high levels of air and noise pollution, significant safety concerns affecting pedestrians and cyclists, and a need to improve unsanitary sidewalks. Lack of street vibrancy contributes to general theft and break-ins. Inadequate public transit and lack of pedestrian-friendly streets results in the perception of isolation.



Excerpts of Responses to Central Freeway Challenges

- Public transit wait time
- Unfriendly to pedestrians
- Dirty, Congestion, Safety
- Lack of walkability
- Pollution from cars



Central Freeway Opportunities

Participant Responses

We asked participants to leave a word that describes something you would like the communities around the Central Freeway to have.

28% of respondents saw greenspace and greenery as key opportunities.

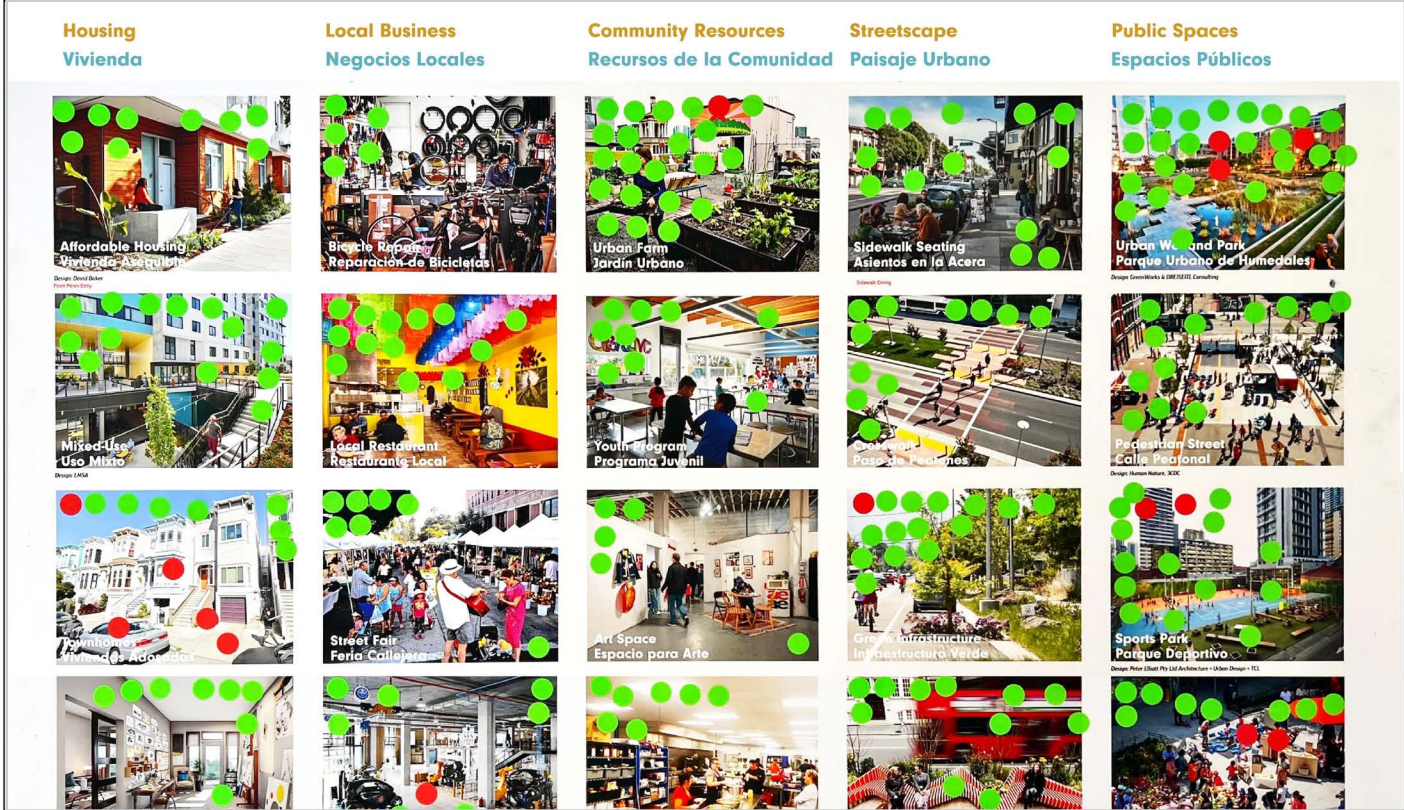
While the urgency of creating a more pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly and safe streetscape is high, there was also a strong desire for more green spaces, trees, plants, seating, and open spaces. In addition to demanding more affordable and attainable housing and shelters for the unhoused, the respondents expressed a desire for more access to diverse, affordable food options including corner stores, farmers' markets, restaurants, urban agriculture, and more.



Central Freeway Visioning

Participant Responses

We asked participants to adhere green dots on imagery that aligns with their vision for potential opportunities for the land beneath the Central Freeway. Imagery was divided into five categories: Housing, Local Business, Community Resources, Streetscape, and Public Spaces.



Dot Polling Board

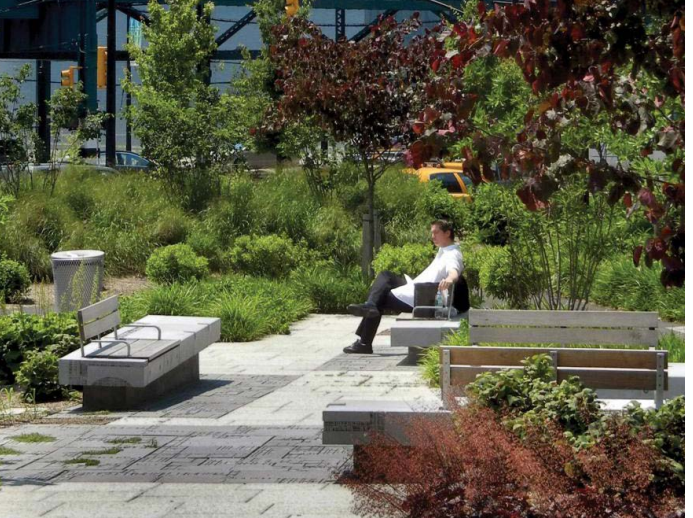
Most Popular Dot Poll Subcategories and Sticker Counts

41 3



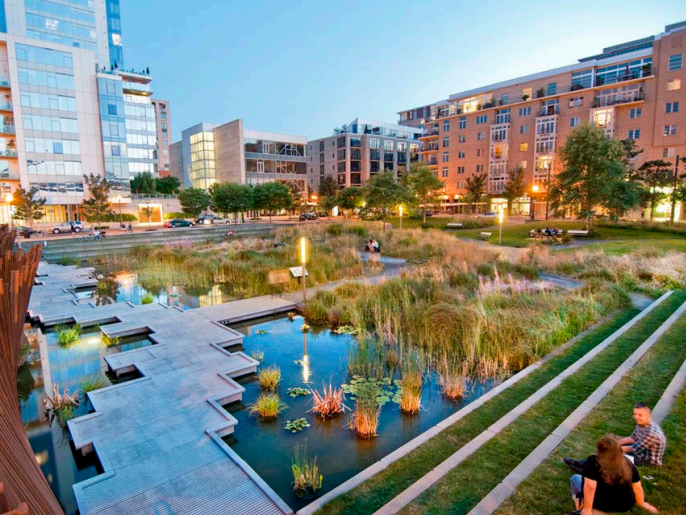
Shared Street

40 0



Urban Park

36 8



Wetland Park

36 1



Urban Farm

33 3



Affordable Housing

33 0



Grocery Stores

30 0



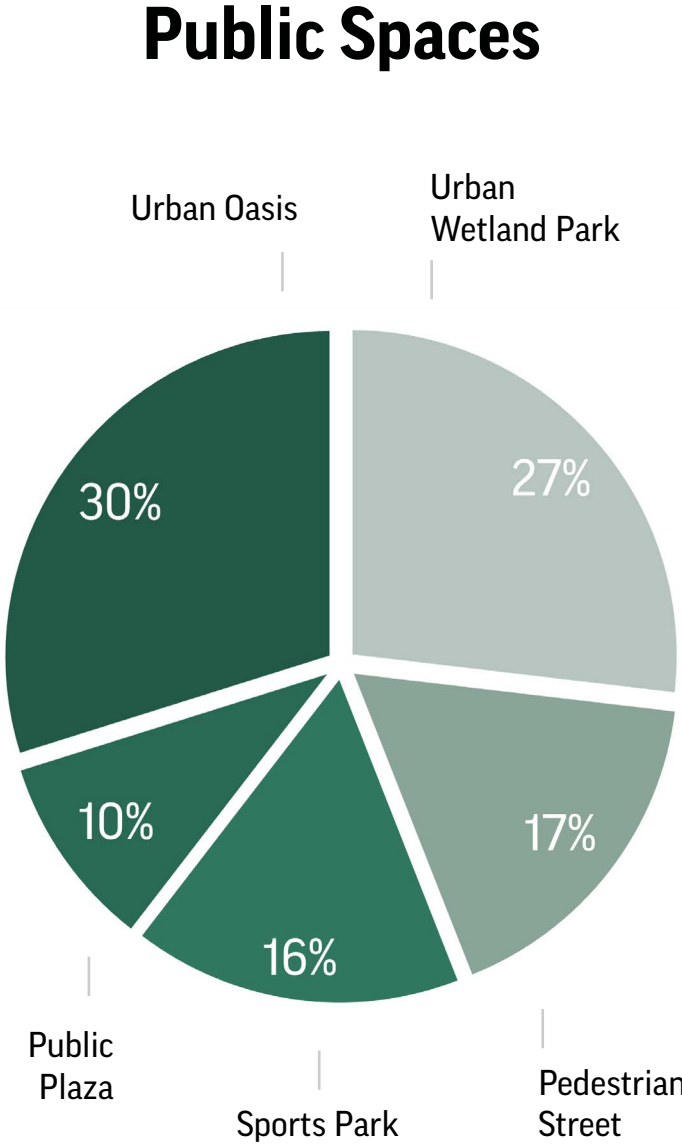
Local Restaurants

Red dots represent dislike

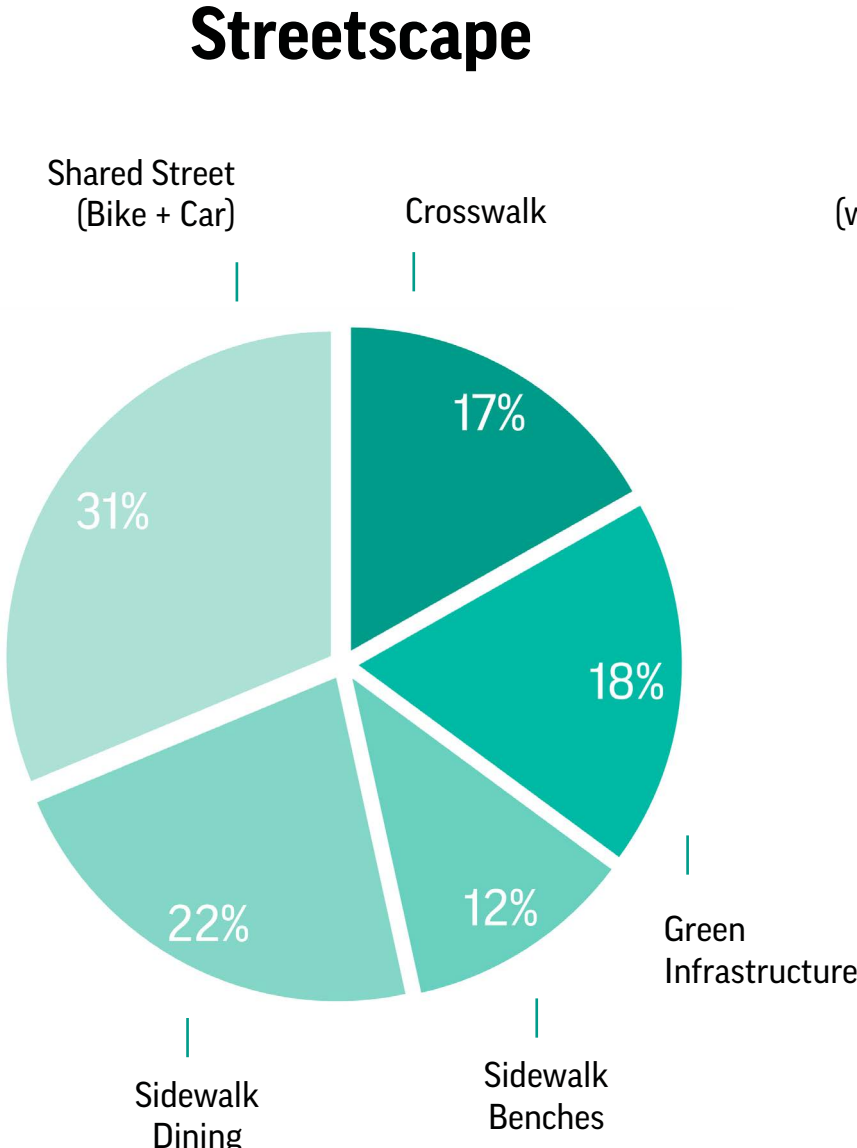
Central Freeway Visioning

Participant Responses

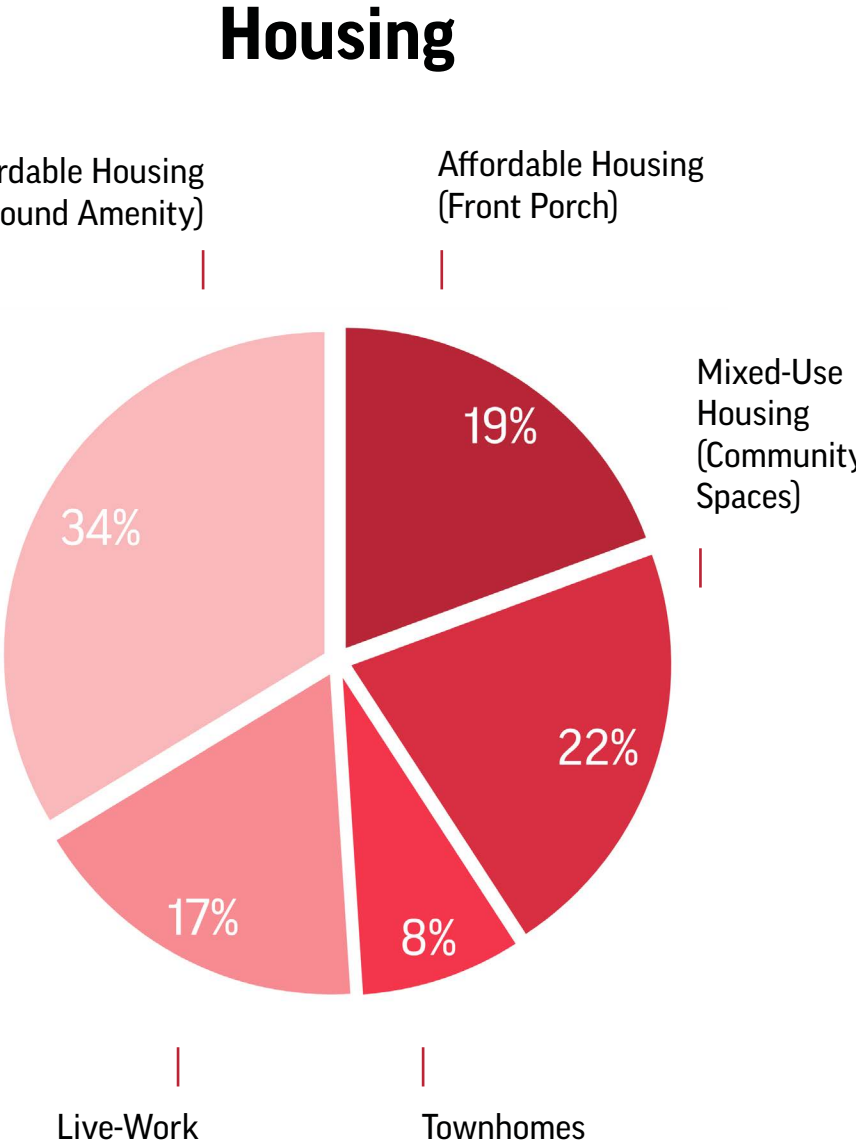
Dot poll responses were further organized into subcategories by Multistudio.



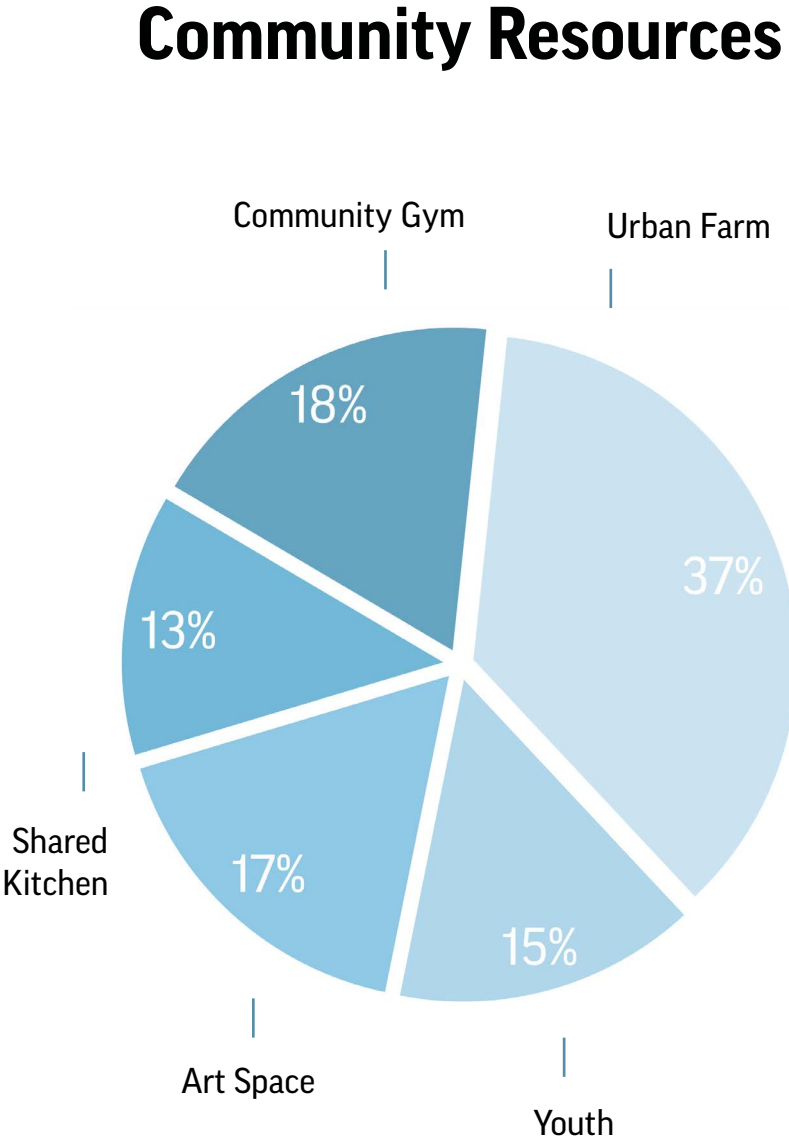
The idea of an urban oasis received the most positive responses (30%) followed by the idea of an urban wetland park (27%).



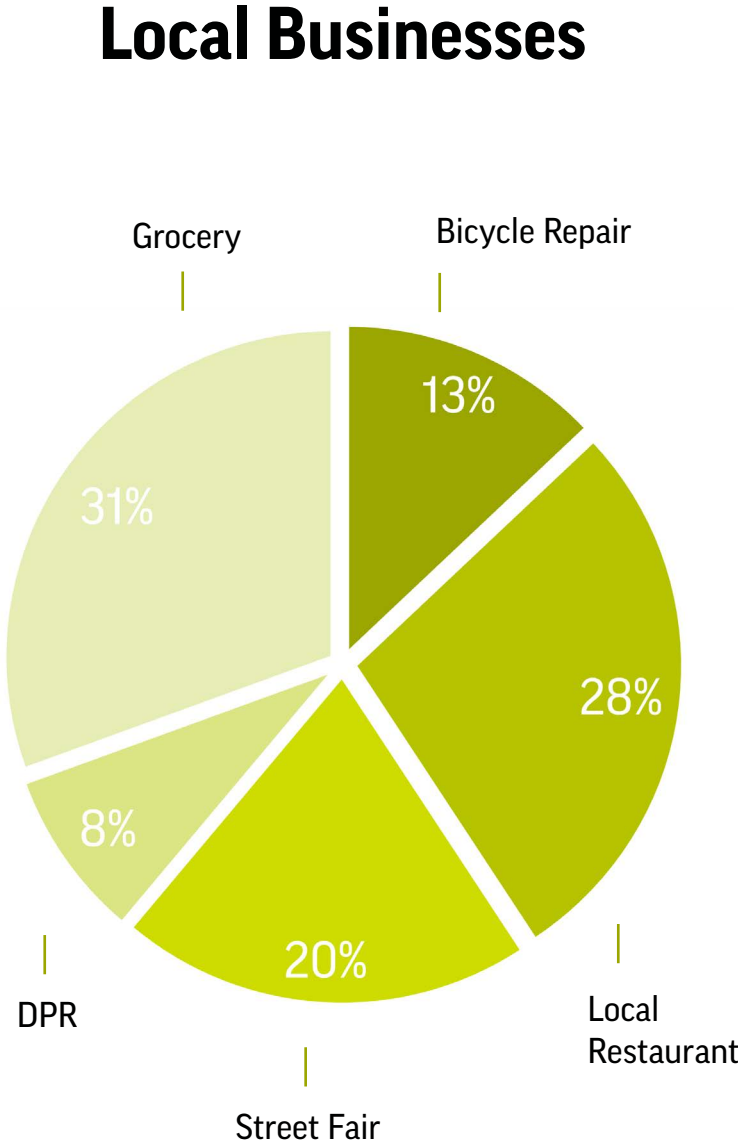
Shared streets (bicycles and sidewalks) received the most positive responses (31%), followed by sidewalk dining (22%) and what we categorized as green infrastructure (18%).



Affordable housing with playground amenities (34%) and mixed-use housing received the most positive responses.



A majority of respondents prioritized food access in the “local business” and “community resources” categories. Urban farming (37%) and grocery options (31%) were the most popular options, followed by local restaurants (28%) and street fairs (20%).

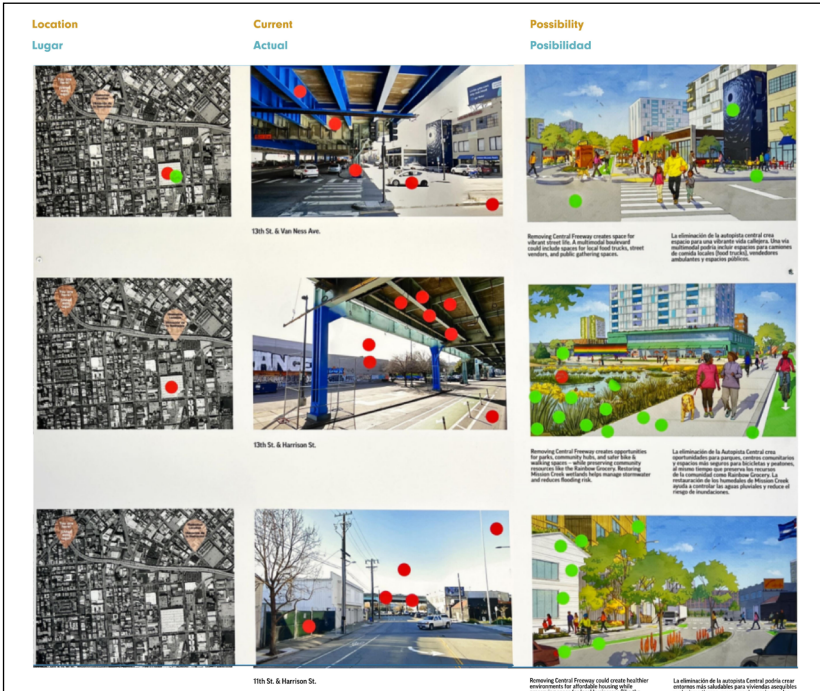


Central Freeway Vignettes

Participant Responses

Each vignette, paired with photos of the existing site, is intended for illustration purposes only and serves as a conversation starter, encouraging the community to explore ideas for creating a safer, healthier, and more environmentally resilient neighborhood for everyone.

Participants were invited to sketch/color vignettes of what could replace the Central Freeway, but most participants used green and red dots to express their opinions.



Vignette Board

Location



13th St. & Van Ness Ave.



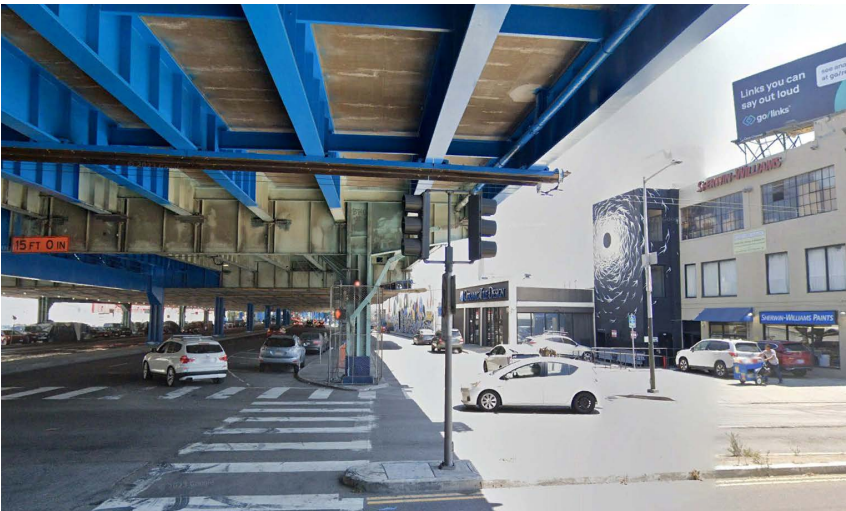
13th St. & Harrison St.



11th St. & Harrison St.

Current

0 4



0 8



0 5



Possibility

3 0



12 1



7 0



Artist vignettes by Yu Jia



**We welcome feedback, ideas, dialogue, and support.
Please contact us at Reconnect@multi.studio**