

# COLUMBUS AVE. NORTH BEACH, SF



A Public Space and Public Life Study

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# INTRODUCTION

## Public Space Public Life Research

Why pedestrians? Walking is a universal mode of transportation; we must walk to get to our cars, the bus, or the bike rack. It is an important part of our everyday lives and a critical function of city life. Walking enables thousands of pedestrians to get to and from their destinations and sidewalks full of people contribute to a vibrant public realm on San Francisco's streets. Walking down the sidewalk, you may stop to window-shop, talk to a friend, eat lunch on a bench, or take photos of a favorite site. All of these activities contribute to city life. Unfortunately, over a number of generations, planning policies and designs have turned greater attention towards design city streets for the automobile than the pedestrian. The result is a built environment that can be less friendly to people.

The Public Space, Public Life research studies key commercial streets in San Francisco to evaluate how well the streets support pedestrian activity and what, if anything, can be improved to make it a better, safer, and more enjoyable space for people.

Previous Public Space, Public Life studies have been conducted on Valencia St., Leland St., Irving St., Castro St., and Market St. This study concentrates on two blocks of Columbus Ave. in the heart of the North Beach Neighborhood.





JOEY & EDDIES

16600 WASHINGTON SQUARE

STOP

STOP

## The Study Area - North Beach

North Beach is a neighborhood located in the Northeast quadrant of the city of San Francisco. Also known as Little Italy, North Beach has been home to a large Italian American population since the early 20th Century. The neighborhood has retained its Italian heritage and boasts a number of popular Italian restaurants and eateries. The neighborhood is also home to young professionals and residents from nearby Chinatown.

North Beach was at the center of the 1950s “beatnik” generation. Local cafes were regular destinations for some of the period’s most famous writers, such as Jack Kerouac and Allan Ginsberg. A local “beatnik” museum holds tribute to the neighborhood’s former role as the epicenter of the beatnik generation.

North Beach has a pedestrian-scaled built environment. The neighborhood has low-rise buildings of historic character and a fine-grained street pattern. The North Beach Neighborhood Commercial District zoning code encourages small-scale development to ensure the continued “livability and attractiveness” of the neighborhood, with first floor neighbor-serving retail establishments and home/office space on the second and third floors (San Francisco, California Planning Code). A local ordinance, along with the support of many residents, prevents chain stores from occupying any first-floor storefronts. The neighborhood tries to retain a local commercial atmosphere.

At the heart of the North Beach neighborhood is Columbus Ave., which runs from Fisherman’s

Wharf to the downtown Financial District. As one of two diagonal streets in San Francisco, Columbus Ave serves as a busy thoroughfare for cars, public transit, tour buses, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

At the turn of the 20th Century, Columbus Ave.’s sidewalks were narrowed to make room for the growing use of the private automobile. Photos reveal the street’s former wide sidewalks, which have been significantly narrowed. A recent report by the San Francisco County Transportation Authority determined the current 10-foot sidewalks on Columbus Ave. are insufficient for its uses. The report put forth a number of proposed design alternatives to widen the sidewalk to improve overall walking conditions.

Additional research for this report was conducted on the adjacent streets of Grant Ave., Green Street, and Vallejo Street, and Washington Square, the local park.



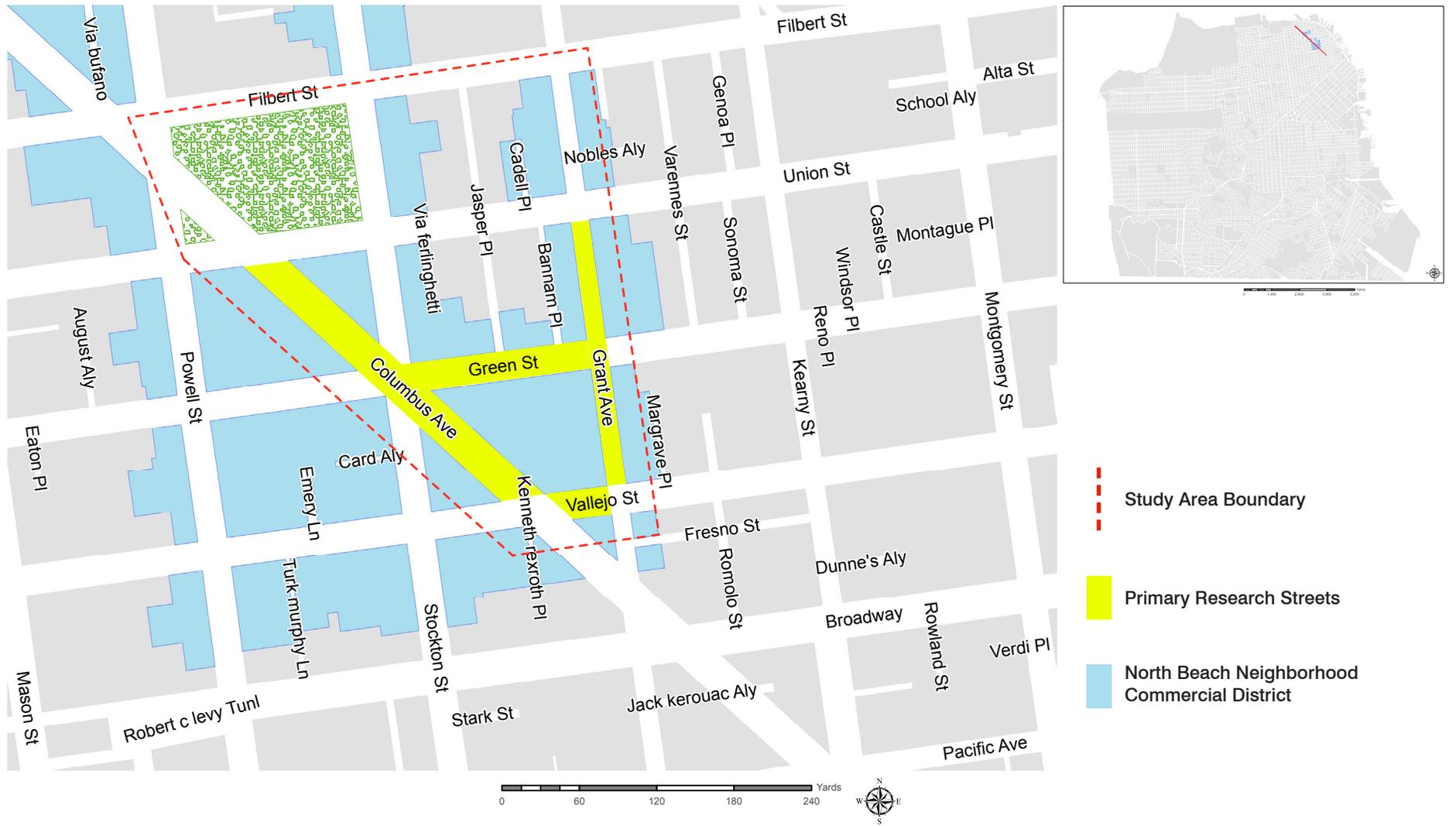
Columbus Ave.’s diagonal orientation makes it a popular travel corridor for all types of transportation modes.

Washington Square, a public space in North Beach

Columbus Ave. (1890) had wide sidewalks. They were narrowed at the turn of the 20th century. San Francisco History Center SF Public Library



## Map of Study Area



## METHODOLOGY

How do you study public space and public life? The Columbus Ave. Pedestrian Study used four methods to achieve a holistic perspective of the pedestrian experience on Columbus Ave. The study was conducted June – August 2010.

### Quality of the Physical Environment

The built environment plays a significant role in the pedestrian experience. This study used a façade quality instrument to rate the attractiveness of ground floor facades within the study area.

The study also counted the number of seating opportunities in the study area, including public, private, and adapted seating. A built environment should support a lively public realm, and that means providing places for pedestrians to stop, sit, and socialize.

### Pedestrians and their Activities

#### Pedestrian Volumes

This study counted the number of pedestrians walking down the street for 10 minutes every hour from 8:00 AM – 10:00 PM on weekdays and Saturdays. The 10-minute counts were multiplied by six to calculate hourly pedestrian volumes. Pedestrians were counted on seven blocks of the study area on a typical weekday and a typical Saturday during which there was no festival or event that would skew otherwise typical street activity.

#### Age & Gender Proportions

The study also estimated the age and gender of pedestrians to generate a basic user profile of the pedestrian population. These counts were made by estimating the age and gender of pedestrians walking down the street for five minutes every hour from 8:00 AM – 8:00 PM. The age and gender counts were conducted on Grant Ave and Columbus Ave on a weekday and a Saturday.

#### Stationary Activity Counts

Stationary Activity counts were conducted in three zones of the study area: Washington Square, Columbus Ave., and Vallejo Street. The stationary counts tallied all pedestrian activity occurring in these zones, such as sitting, standing, exercising, or playing music. Stationary activity includes any pedestrian activity with the exception of walking, which has already been counted in the pedestrian volume counts.



Columbus Ave.



Washington Square



Columbus Ave.

## Pedestrian Perspectives

One hundred pedestrians were interviewed on Columbus Ave. between Union St. and Vallejo St. during the hours of 8 AM – 10 PM over a period of three weeks. A random sample was achieved by asking every person who walked by to take the survey. There was a 10% response rate.

The anonymous survey asked pedestrians two types of questions: user profile information (such as age, gender, place of residence); and level of satisfaction questions, in which pedestrians were asked to rate elements of their walking experience.

A few changes were made to the survey after the first 15 pedestrian interviews to help clarify some initial confusion.

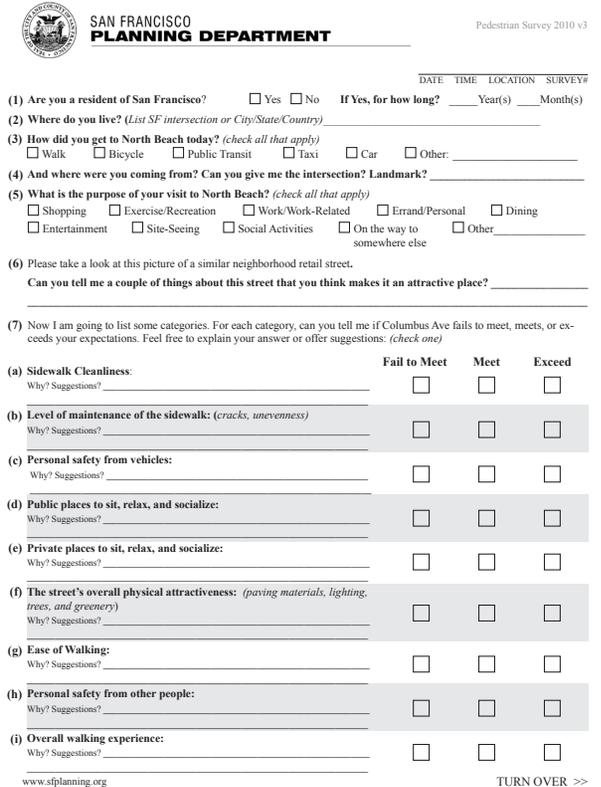
1. The first survey asked people to rate Places to sit, relax, and socialize. This category was divided into two separate questions for the remaining surveys to distinguish Public places to sit, relax, and socialize, and Private places to sit, relax and socialize.

2. The first survey asked people to rate sidewalk crowdedness and sidewalk clutteredness in a separate question. The second version of the survey condensed these two questions into one: Ease of Walking down the Sidewalk.

## Personal observation and experience

The final method of conducting this research was personal observation and experience. The nature of this research meant that extensive hours of field work afforded plenty of time to observe and interact with the environment and its users. These qualitative and experiential data complement the wealth of quantitative data collected from counts and interviews.

The Columbus Ave. Pedestrian Study was conducted over a period of three months: June – August 2010.



**SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT** Pedestrian Survey 2010 v3

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TIME \_\_\_\_\_ LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_ SURVEY# \_\_\_\_\_

(1) Are you a resident of San Francisco?  Yes  No If Yes, for how long? \_\_\_\_ Year(s) \_\_\_\_ Month(s)

(2) Where do you live? (List SF intersection or City/State/Country) \_\_\_\_\_

(3) How did you get to North Beach today? (check all that apply)  
 Walk  Bicycle  Public Transit  Taxi  Car  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

(4) And where were you coming from? Can you give me the intersection? Landmark? \_\_\_\_\_

(5) What is the purpose of your visit to North Beach? (check all that apply)  
 Shopping  Exercise/Recreation  Work/Work-Related  Errand/Personal  Dining  
 Entertainment  Site-Seeing  Social Activities  On the way to \_\_\_\_\_  
 somewhere else

(6) Please take a look at this picture of a similar neighborhood retail street.  
 Can you tell me a couple of things about this street that you think makes it an attractive place? \_\_\_\_\_

(7) Now I am going to list some categories. For each category, can you tell me if Columbus Ave fails to meet, meets, or exceeds your expectations. Feel free to explain your answer or offer suggestions: (check one)

	Fail to Meet	Meet	Exceed
(a) Sidewalk Cleanliness: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Level of maintenance of the sidewalk: (cracks, unevenness) Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Personal safety from vehicles: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Public places to sit, relax, and socialize: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Private places to sit, relax, and socialize: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) The street's overall physical attractiveness: (paving materials, lighting, trees, and greenery) Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g) Ease of Walking: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(h) Personal safety from other people: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(i) Overall walking experience: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

www.sfplanning.org TURN OVER >>

The pedestrian survey is a unique part of this research. We can draw conclusions from the people who know Columbus Ave. best: the pedestrians themselves.

## Methods

### Built environment survey

All facades in the study area

### Pedestrian counts

Every block of Columbus Ave., Grant Ave., Green Street, Vallejo Street (highlighted)

### Age & Gender counts

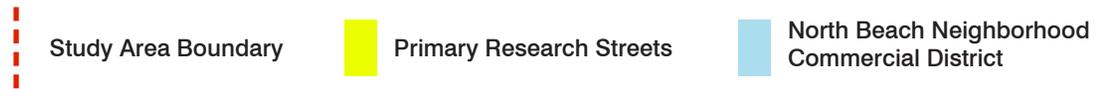
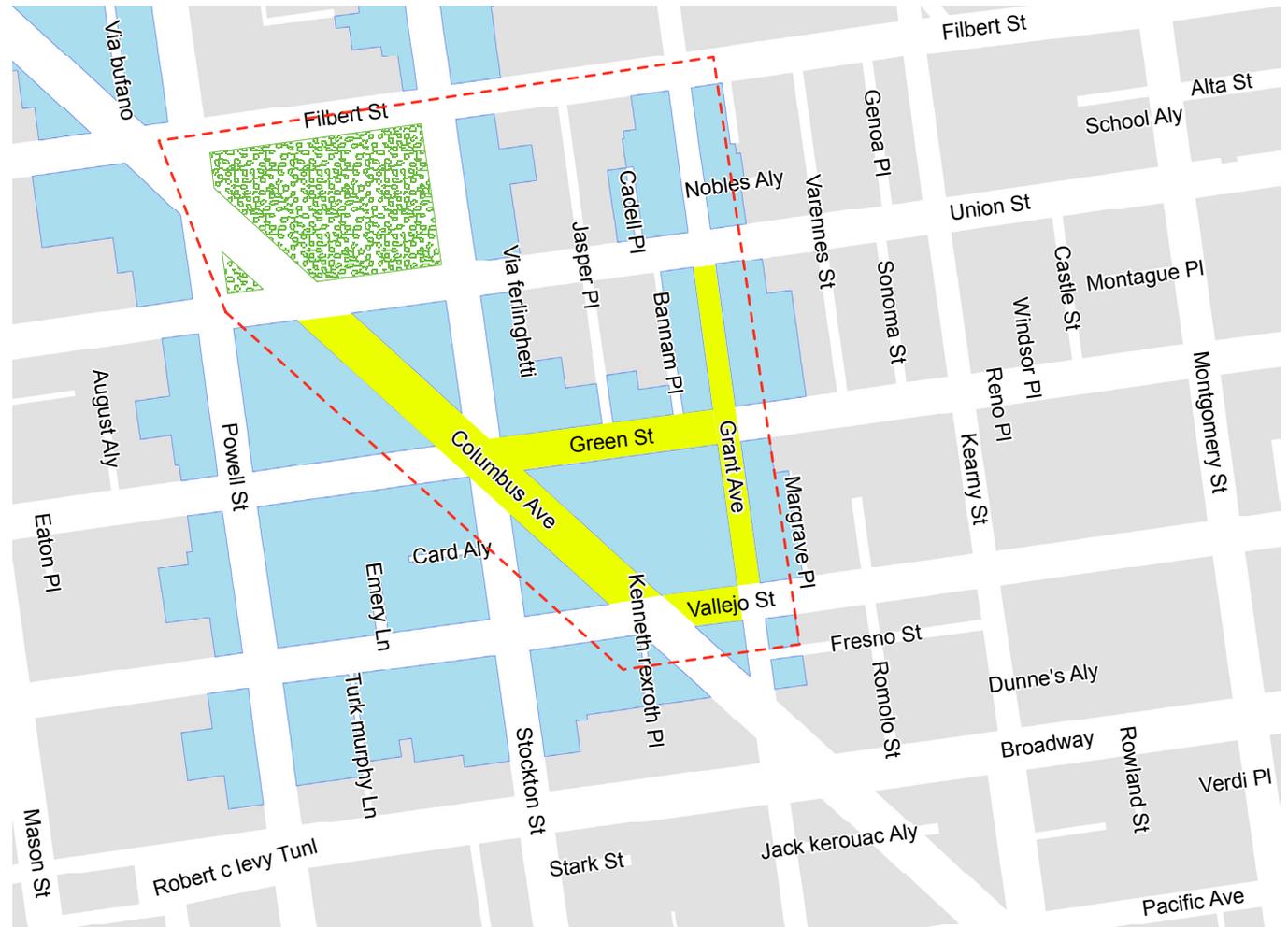
Mid-block at Columbus Ave., mid-block on Grant Ave.

### Stationary Activity counts

Washington Square, Columbus Ave., Vallejo St.

### Pedestrian Interviews

Columbus Ave.





# FINDINGS

## Quality of the built environment

Identifying the quality of the built environment is an important element of the public space and public life research. Pedestrian-scaled, attractive, and interactive buildings and streets can contribute to a dynamic and enjoyable street life. The ground floors of buildings in particular are significant to the pedestrian experience. Attractive ground floor frontages can draw people in and increase the amount of pedestrian activity on the street (*Public Space & Public Life in Fisherman's Wharf*).

This study used a façade quality instrument from the Centre for Public Space Research (Copenhagen) to rate the ground floor frontages on and around Columbus Ave. An A grade frontage is one that is attractive, interesting, and interactive. Lower grades represent frontages that are dull or unattractive. A parking lot would earn the grade of an F.

*“Closed frontages pacify the public realm while open and active frontages activate it.” Jan Gehl*

Examples of Façade Grades (from left to right): A, B, C, D



## Facade survey

The majority of the ground floor frontages in the study area are attractive and rated either an A or a B on the façade survey. This implies that the built environment is in a positive position to draw in pedestrians.

Unattractive or dull frontages that rated a C or below are found scattered throughout the study area. Most of these dull, inactive frontages can be found on the side streets connecting Columbus Ave and Grant Ave. The only dull frontages on Columbus Ave are the two bank buildings on the South East corner of Columbus Ave and Green St.

### A - Attractive

Small units, many doors (15-20 units per 100 m). Diversity of functions. No closed or passive units. Interesting relief in facades. Quality of materials and refined details.

### B - Pleasant

Relatively small units. Some diversity of functions. Only a few closed or passive units. Some relief in the facades. Relatively good detailing.

### C - Somewhere in Between

Mixture of small and larger units. Some diversity of functions. Uninteresting facade design. Somewhere poor detailing.

### D- Dull

Larger units with few doors. Little diversity of functions. Many closed units. Predominantly unattractive facades. Few or no details.

### E - Unattractive

Large units with few or no doors. No visible variation of function. Closed and passive facades. Monotonous facades. No details, nothing interesting to look at.

# Facade Rating Map



Union Street



Columbus Ave.



Grant Ave.



Green Street



Vallejo Street

## Seating Opportunities

North Beach draws a number of visitors who look for places to sit, rest, socialize, and people watch. Providing those places to sit will contribute to a social atmosphere. The study counted the number of private, public, and adaptable seating opportunities in the study area. Adaptable seating opportunities are objects that can be used for sitting but that serve an alternative primary function. An example of an adaptable seating opportunity would be a set of stairs or a low-rise landscaping wall.

There is a large disparity between private and public seating opportunities in the study area.

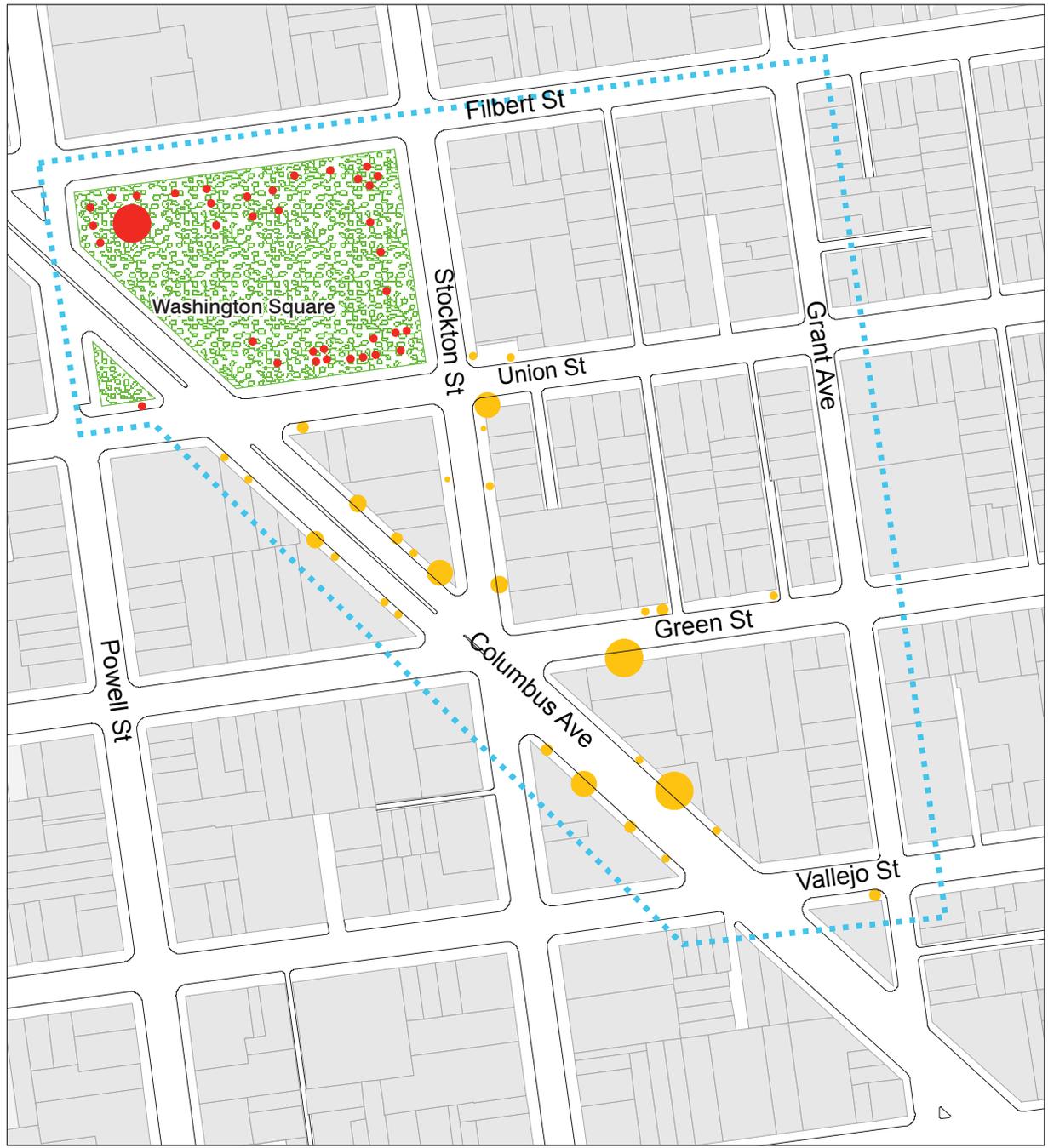
All of the public seating opportunities are concentrated in Washington Square. Each small dot represents a bench that seats between 4-8 individuals. The large dot represents a retaining wall that encircles a playground, a popular place for parents to sit and watch their children on the swings. In addition to the park's 36 benches, a short concrete wall surrounds the corner playground and serves as a popular adaptable seating opportunity for parents and families.

The private seating opportunities are concentrated on Columbus Ave and trickle onto Stockton St., Green St., and Vallejo St. North Beach is known for its Italian Cafes and restaurants; outdoor café eating is a popular activity along Columbus Ave and its side streets. There are no public seating opportunities in the study area outside of Washington Square, which can be a problem for pedestrians who need to make a quick stop to reference a map or make a phone call.

There are no public or private seating opportunities on Grant Ave despite its number of eating establishments. The sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate additional sidewalk furniture.

People sit on benches in Washington Square to rest and people watch.





Seating Key

	Private	Public
1-4	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	<span style="color: red;">●</span>
5-10	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	<span style="color: red;">●</span>
11-15	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	<span style="color: red;">●</span>
16-20	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	<span style="color: red;">●</span>
20-25	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	<span style="color: red;">●</span>
25+	<span style="color: yellow;">●</span>	<span style="color: red;">●</span>



Columbus Ave. is lined with outdoor dining.

# PEDESTRIAN COUNTS

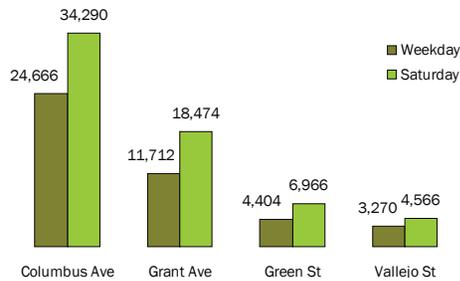
## Daily & Hourly Volumes

Columbus Ave. is a busy street.

As a diagonal street in a grid-iron street pattern Columbus Ave. is a convenient short-cut across the northeast quadrant of the city and is well used by commuters and cross-town travelers. Additionally, Columbus Ave. in North Beach is a popular destination for locals, Bay Area Residents, and out-of-state tourists who come to eat, shop, and socialize. As such, there is a high level of pedestrian traffic on Columbus Ave., especially on Saturdays.

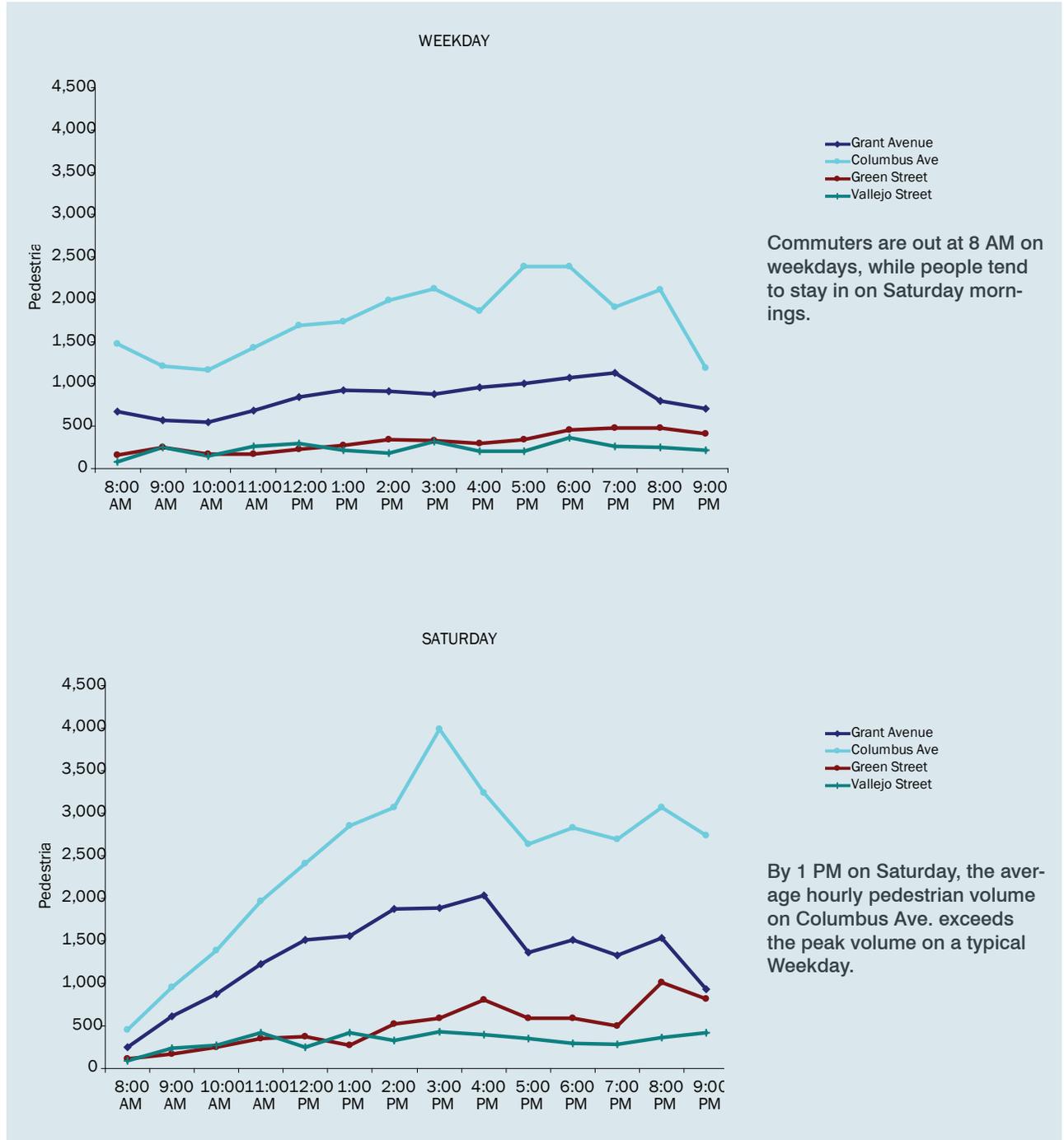
Every block in the study area incurred higher pedestrian volumes on Saturday compared to a typical weekday.

## PEDESTRIAN COUNTS



More people visit the study area on a Saturday compared to a typical weekday.

## COLUMBUS AVE. PEDESTRIAN COUNTS



## Columbus Ave.

Columbus Ave. incurred a volume of 24,666 pedestrians on a typical weekday and 34,290 pedestrians on a typical Saturday. By 1 PM on a Saturday, the number of pedestrians on Columbus Ave. exceeded the peak hourly volume on a weekday.

People tended to stay out later on Saturday evenings than weekday evenings. Conversely, weekdays see a higher number of pedestrians in the morning because of the commuter crowd walking to work.

Compared to other San Francisco streets, these two blocks of Columbus Ave. have relatively high pedestrian traffic. A typical weekday volume on Columbus Ave. exceeds the pedestrian volume of Castro Street on a Saturday.

## Grant Ave.

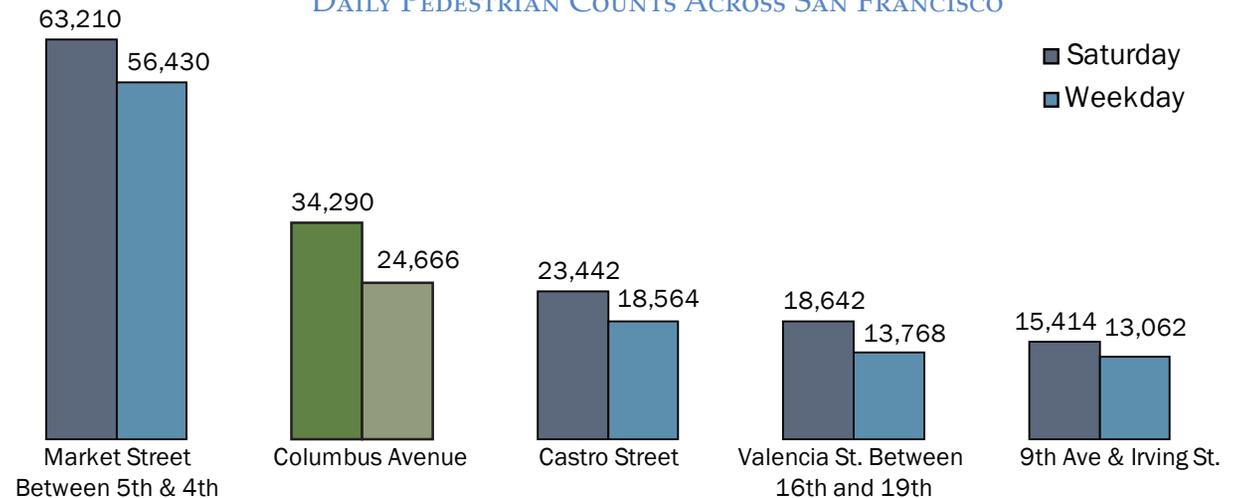
Similar to Columbus, Grant Ave. incurred an increase in pedestrian traffic (58%) on a Saturday. 11,712 pedestrians walked up and down Grant Ave. on a weekday and 18,474 on a Saturday. The southern most block of Grant Ave. had the highest daily volume and the number gradually decreased with each block north.

### COLUMBUS AVE. MORNING, AFTERNOON, EVENING PEDESTRIAN COUNTS



Columbus Ave. see a higher proportion of people in the morning on weekdays and a higher proportion of people in the evening on weekends.

### DAILY PEDESTRIAN COUNTS ACROSS SAN FRANCISCO



Compared to similar neighborhood streets in San Francisco, Columbus Ave. has relatively high pedestrian traffic volumes.

## Age & Gender

Age and gender counts can provide some insight into the daily demographic users of the study area. Age and gender counts were conducted at midblock on Grant Ave and Columbus Ave.

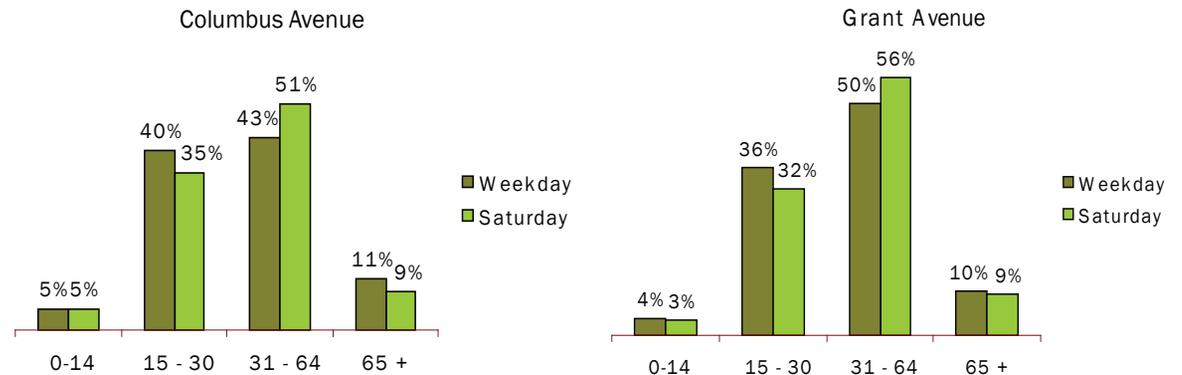
The age and gender counts indicate that the majority of pedestrians visiting both Columbus Ave. and Grant Ave. are adults. The highest proportions of pedestrians are between the ages of 31-64 years old. There are very few children and seniors visiting the area.

Both Columbus Ave. and Grant Ave. incurred a slight increase in the proportion of young people on weekdays, which probably consists of the young adult commuting crowd. Compared to 2000 Census Data of nearby tracts, current Columbus Ave. users tend to represent a younger age bracket than the age of the nearby residential population.



Both Columbus Ave. and Grant Ave. have a high proportion of adults between 31 - 64 years old.

## AGE COUNTS



## Hourly Trends

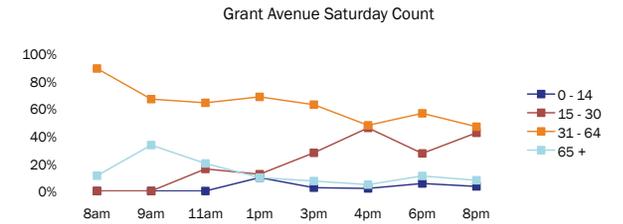
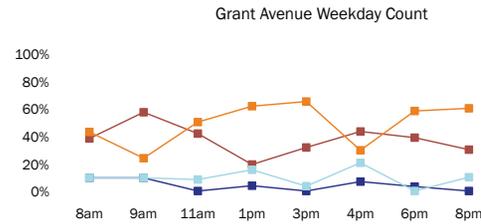
The age survey reflects the hourly activities of the different age groups. During the weekend on Columbus Ave, the proportion of seniors 65 years and older peaked at 8 AM and decreased throughout the day. Many seniors from nearby Chinatown use Washington Square in the morning for Tai Chi classes.

Conversely, the weekday proportion of young adults 15 – 30 yrs began as 33% of the pedestrian population and grew to 53% at 9 PM. North Beach is a popular evening destination for young adults.

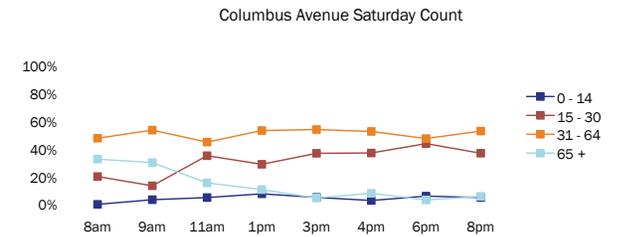
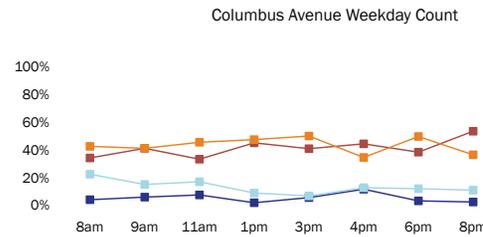
The hourly Saturday counts tell a similar story. The proportion of seniors 65 + years old peaked at 33% at 8 AM and dropped to 6% at 9 PM while the proportion of young adults gradually increased from 8 AM – 9 PM.

The age and gender survey shows that on both weekdays and weekends 51% of Columbus Ave visitors are male and 49% are female.

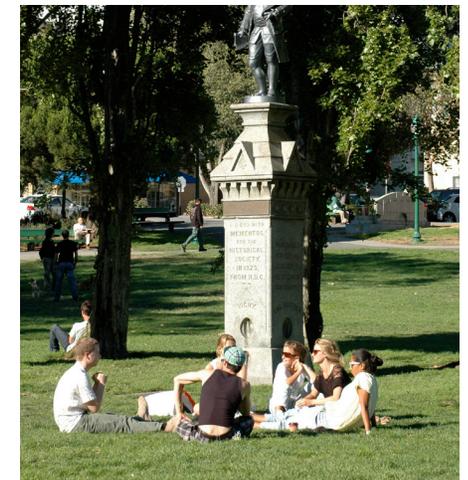
### GRANT AVE.



### COLUMBUS AVE.



Older residents visit Washington Square in the morning for Tai Chi. Younger people sit in the park in the afternoon.



## Stationary Activity

An active public realm is one in which people do more than just walk; they sit, stand, watch, and participate in their environment. These types of activities create sidewalks that are full of life and character. The stationary activity survey reflects the daily patterns of the pedestrian movement in key locations throughout North Beach: Washington Square, Columbus Ave., and Vallejo St.

### Washington Square

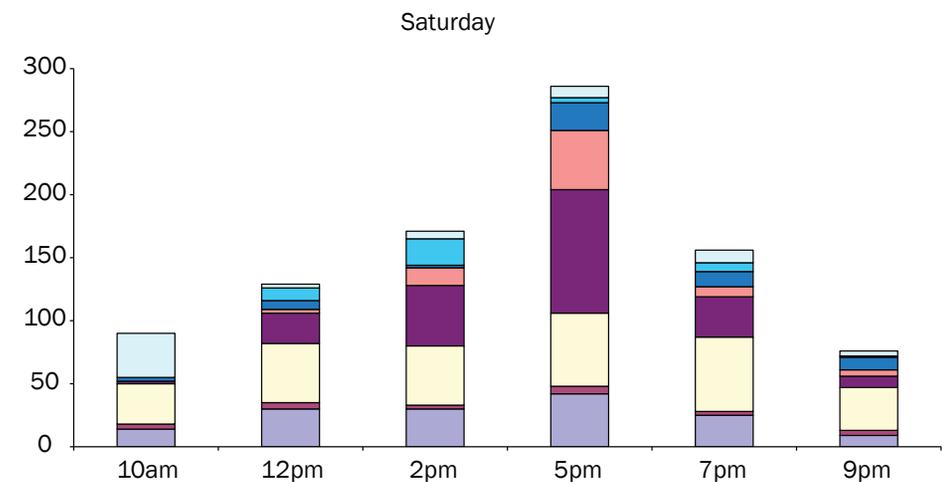
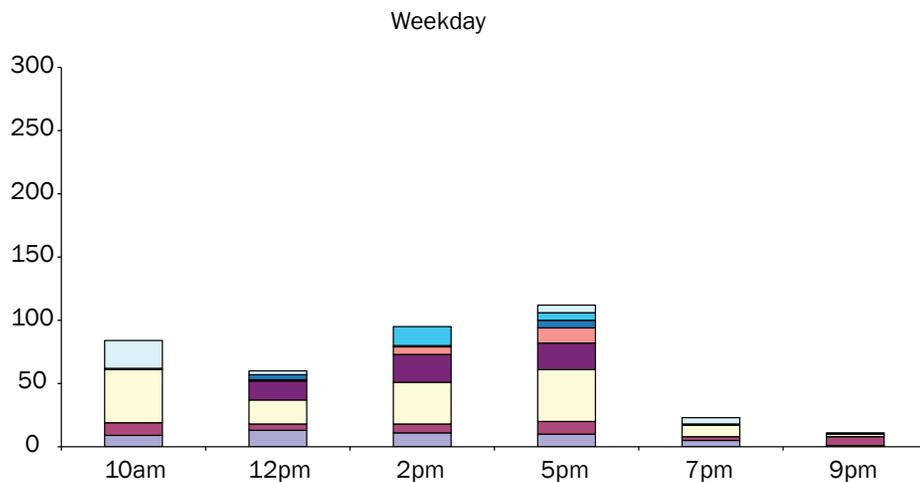
Washington Square is a well-used and well-loved park and serves as a Town Square for the North Beach Neighborhood.

The park supports a range of outdoor activities, from Tai Chi classes in the morning to Frisbee and dog walking in the afternoon. Saturdays see a much higher number of people than a typical week-day, yet both incur similar proportions of activity throughout the day with peak activity levels at 5 PM. Sitting is the most popular stationary activity in Washington Square, whether it's on a bench or on the grass.

Following Page (clockwise from right): Children play in the park in the afternoon; young men sit at one of the park's benches; An early morning commuter cuts through the park; Children play near the corner playground.

- Physical Activities (frisbee, catch, exercise)
- Cultural Activities (guided tours, music)
- Commercial Activities (buying/selling goods)
- Children Playing
- Lying Down
- Sitting on Adapted Seating
- Sitting on Cafe Chairs
- Sitting on Benches
- Waiting for Transport

## STATIONARY ACTIVITY COUNTS IN WASHINGTON SQUARE





### Columbus Ave.

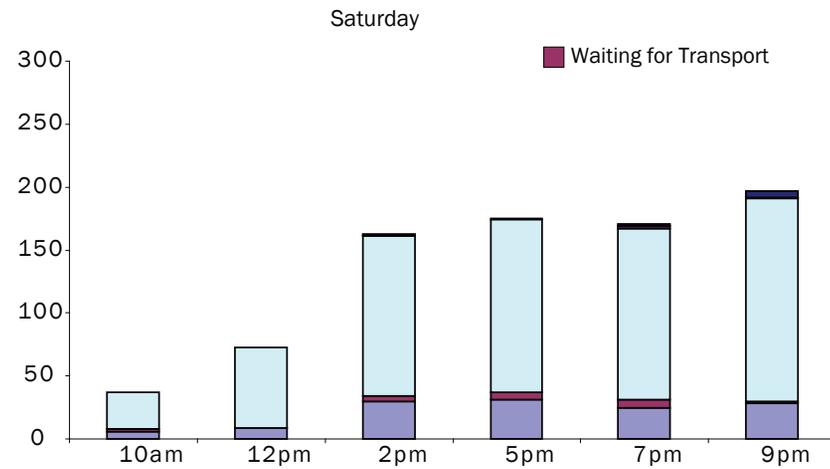
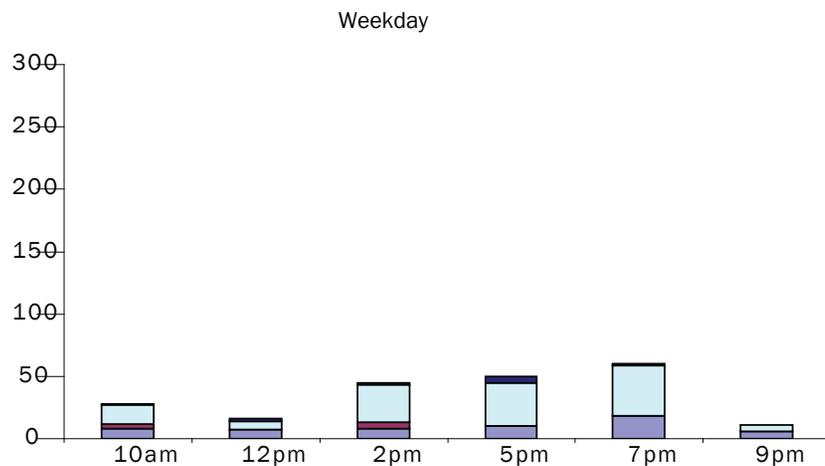
The sidewalks of Columbus Ave. are filled with walking pedestrians and street furniture. The limited spaces allows for few other activities.

The most popular observed stationary activity on Columbus Ave. café sitting. The street is lined with outdoor tables and chairs and locals and residents enjoy sitting outside for their morning coffees or evening dinners. The number of people sitting at the cafes increases dramatically on weekends: Columbus Ave. incurred a 289% increase in stationary activity on Saturdays. Patrons braved the chilly weather for the outdoor dining on Saturday nights. Restaurants often have heat lamps attached to the awnings to make it more comfortable for their diners.

Most of the people standing on Columbus were valets, waiters, or restaurant hostesses who could take refuge next to a tree trunk or behind a sidewalk planter and avoid getting swept away in the pedestrian crowds. Even when there were few pedestrians on the sidewalk, the valets and hostesses were there to greet me as I made my way up and down the block.

Following Page (clockwise from right) The Cafe Pistola Valet, Gio, stands next to the planters and keeps an eye on the street; A woman wait for the bus; Patrons sit at Cafe Roma.

### STATIONARY COUNTS ON COLUMBUS AVE.



- Physical Activities (frisbee, catch, exercise)
- Cultural Activities (guided tours, music)
- Commercial Activities (buying/selling goods)
- Children Playing
- Lying Down
- Sitting on Adapted Seating
- Sitting on Cafe Chairs
- Sitting on Benches
- Waiting for Transport



## Vallejo Street

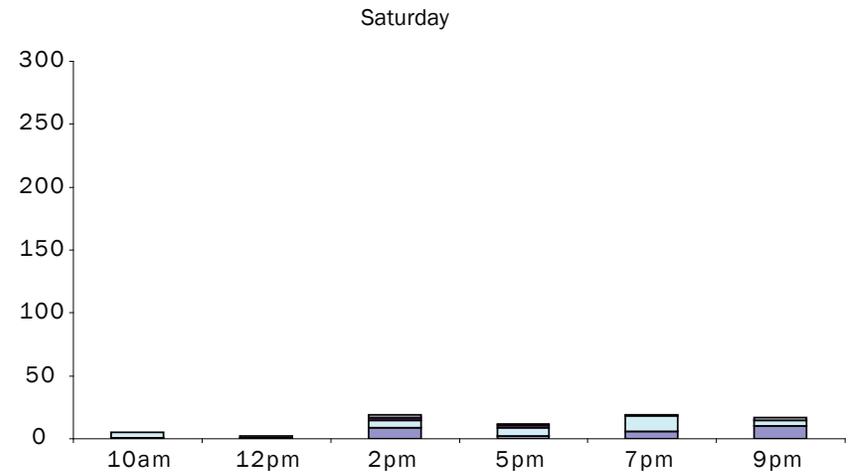
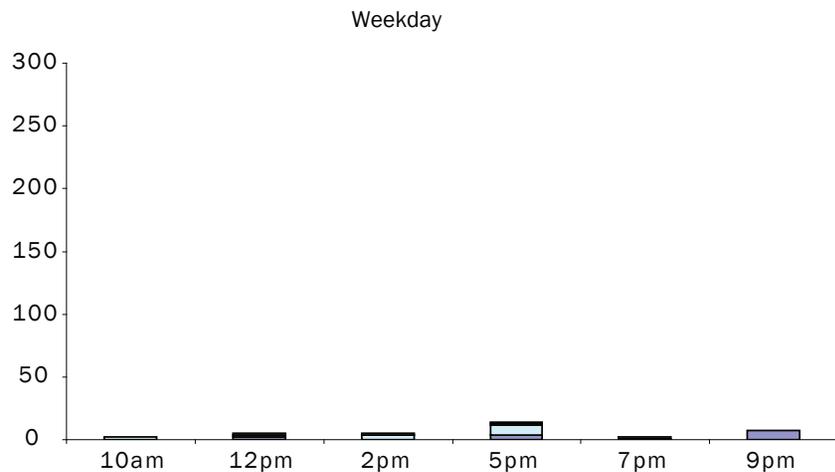
Vallejo Street is a short block off of Columbus Ave. The majority of the stationary activity on this block occurred outside of Café Trieste, the only commercial establishment on the block. Visitors and locals regularly sit or, when out of chairs, stand outside of the café, giving an otherwise empty block some company and street life.

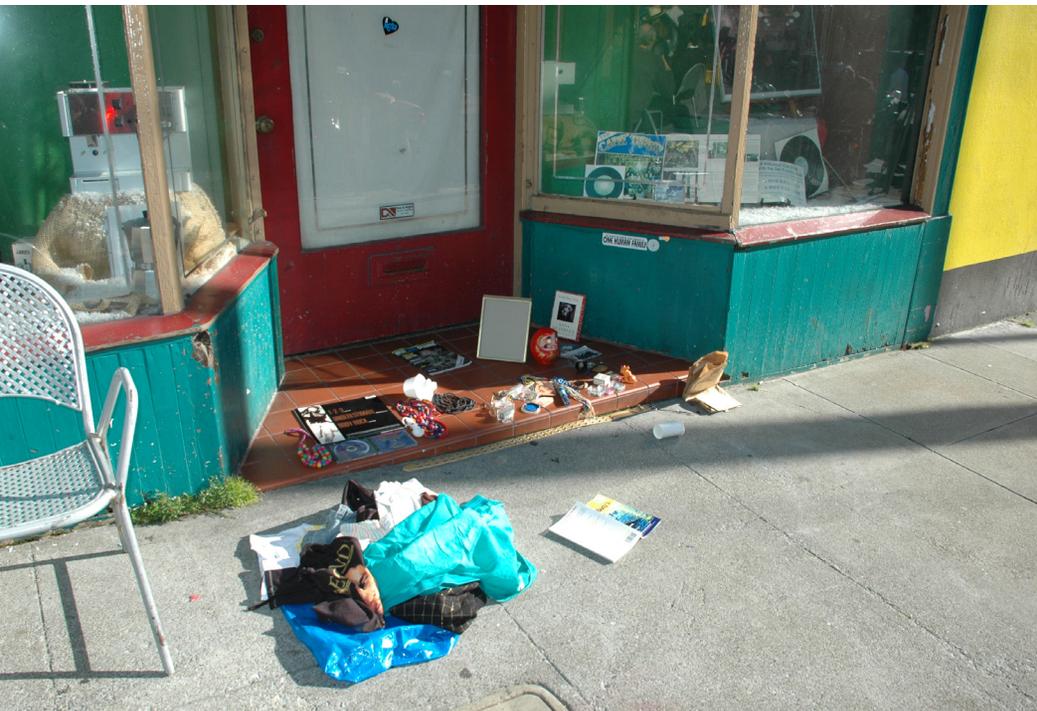
Occasionally there is someone sitting adjacent to the café selling goods and wears on the sidewalk.

Following Page (clockwise from right): Patrons sit outside of Cafe Trieste; Next door, a billboard and motorcycle parking; A street vendor occasionally sells goods on the sidewalk; St. Francis is across the street from Cafe Trieste, the entrance was under construction throughout this study.

- Physical Activities (frisbee, catch, exercise)
- Cultural Activities (guided tours, music)
- Commercial Activities (buying/selling goods)
- Children Playing
- Lying Down
- Sitting on Adapted Seating
- Sitting on Cafe Chairs
- Sitting on Benches
- Waiting for Transport

## STATIONARY COUNTS ON VALLEJO STREET





## PEDESTRIAN SURVEY

At this point in the research we can make a few conclusions about the study area and its main street from the facade surveys, the pedestrian counts, and first-hand observation. Columbus Ave. has an attractive built environment. It is busy with people walking and people sitting in the outdoor café seating, but can often feel overcrowded from all the activity on its sidewalks. The next question is: How do the pedestrians feel?

A unique part of this study is the pedestrian interview, which will add a final layer of data in this research. The interviews can tell us more about who is visiting Columbus Ave., why they're walking down Columbus Ave., and their level of satisfaction with their walking experience.

This study interviewed 100 pedestrians on Columbus Ave. To achieve a random sample, every pedestrian who walked by was asked to take the survey. 10% complied.

The pedestrian survey achieved two sets of data. First, the survey generated a basic user profile of the pedestrians who visit Columbus Ave., such as their age, gender, residence, and mode of travel.

Second, the pedestrian survey collected qualitative information about the pedestrian's walking experience on Columbus Ave. Survey respondents rated different elements of their walking experience. This information was used to quantify the overall walking experience down Columbus Ave. Do pedestrians also think the sidewalks feel overcrowded? The final conclusions of this study can be drawn from user opinion rather than just personal inference alone.

*"Would you like to participate in a pedestrian survey?"*

*"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, ok fine."*

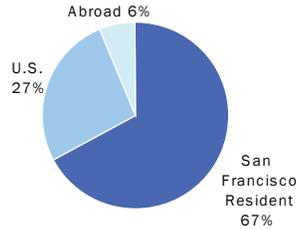


The author conducted 100 pedestrian interviews. Every pedestrian who walked by was asked to take a survey. 10% agreed.

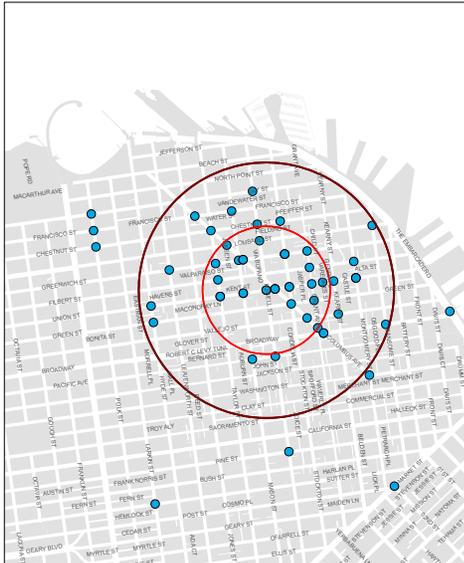
## User Profile: Who is visiting Columbus Avenue?

Columbus Ave. attracts a range of North Beach locals, Bay Area residents, and out-of-town tourists.

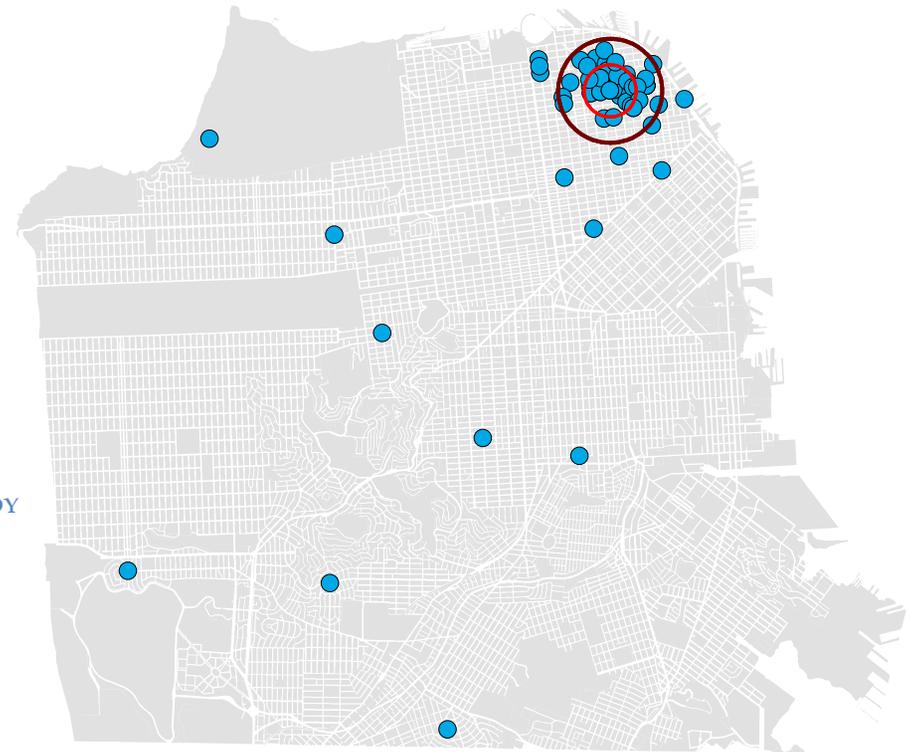
Sixty-seven percent of the survey respondents were San Francisco residents, the majority of who lived within walking distance to the study area. Thirty-three percent of the respondents were non-residents, visiting from 14 different states and 5 different countries. Based on observation, there were a number of pedestrians excluded from this survey because of language or cultural barriers.



*The length of residency for San Francisco residents ranged from 6 months to 79 years. The average length of residency was 23 years.*



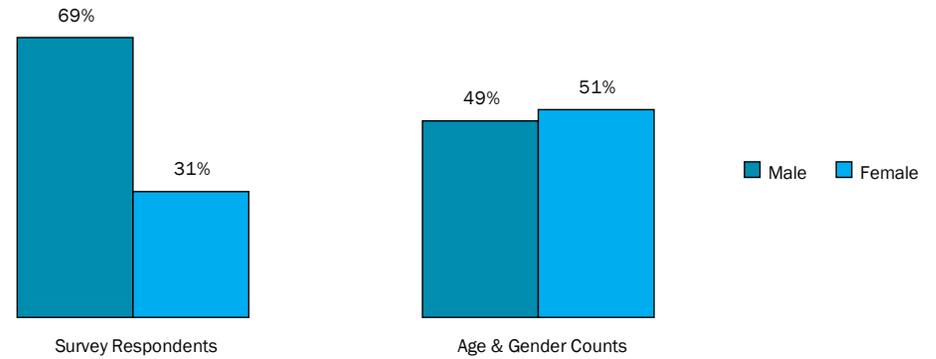
### WALKING DISTANCE TO STUDY AREA



The survey respondents ranged in age from 19 years old to 80 years old. The age of the survey respondents tended to be higher than the observed ages of the daily pedestrian population.

More men stopped to take the survey than women. The gender proportion is skewed towards men compared to the observed gender proportion discussed in the Age & Gender counts. Further analysis reveals that gender had little bearing on survey responses with the exception of a question about private seating opportunities. This analysis will be discussed further in the Places to Sit section of this report.

### GENDER COUNT COMPARISONS

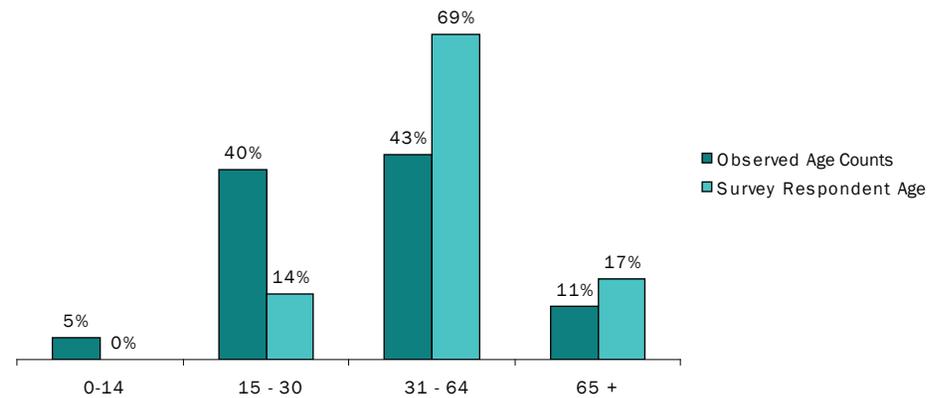


There were more male survey respondents than female. This is disproportionate to the observed gender counts.



The majority of survey respondents were male adults between 31-64 years old.

### AGE COUNT COMPARISONS



The majority of survey respondents were between 31-64 years old. Nobody under 19 stopped to take the survey.

## Modes of Travel

The most popular way to get to Columbus Ave. is to walk. Seventy-one percent of respondents said they walked as one of their modes of travel. 15% of respondents used a form of public transportation in their trip, 13% used a car, and 3% used a motorcycle or scooter. The three remaining respondents took a tour bus, a taxi, and a bicycle. When asked why the survey respondents chose to walk down Columbus Ave. instead of another street, nearly one fourth said because Columbus Ave. was the most convenient route.

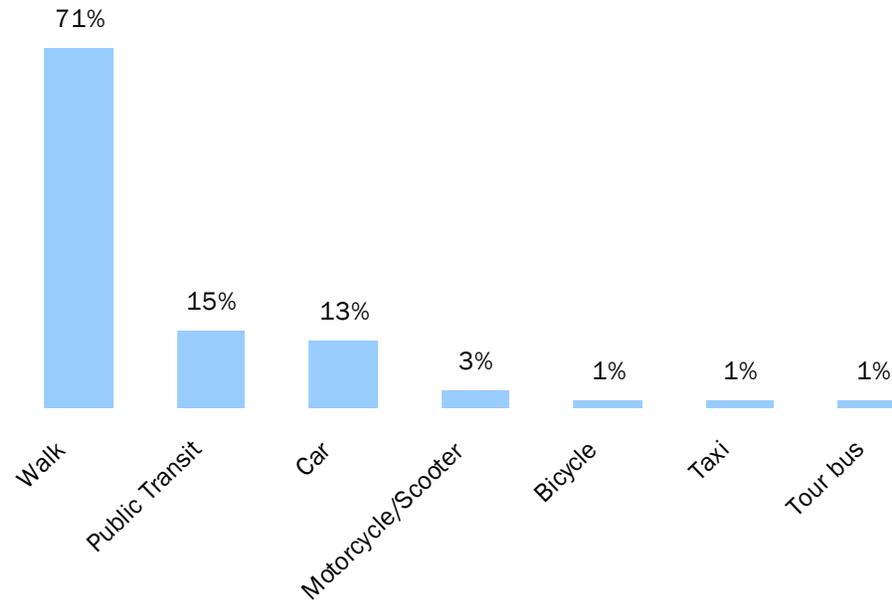
These findings support initial observations about the influence of North Beach's fine-grained street pattern, which provides a pedestrian-friendly environment, and Columbus Ave.'s diagonal orientation, which acts as a convenient short cut for pedestrians to cut across the North East quadrant of the city.

In addition to serving as a convenient travel corridor, Columbus Ave. is also a popular destination spot for eating and working.

*The majority of survey recipients got to North Beach by walking.*



## HOW DID YOU GET TO NORTH BEACH?



### Why do people come to Columbus Avenue?

Survey respondents were asked to state the purpose of their trip to North Beach, and the most popular reported reason was to eat. One third of respondents mentioned dining as a reason for their visit to North Beach. North Beach is also referred to as Little Italy, and attracts visitors near and far to dine at its Italian cafes and restaurants.

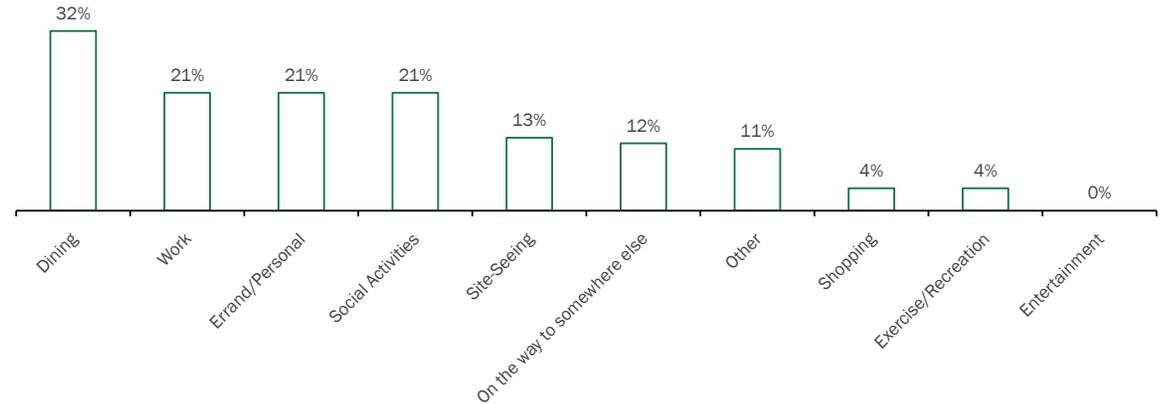
Other common purposes included work, an errand or personal appointment, or social activities. Many respondents mentioned that they were in North Beach to meet friends.

When asked, “What is the purpose of your visit to North Beach?” 11% of the respondents replied, “because I live here.”

When we compare the purpose of someone’s trip to their mode of transportation, the data reveals that walking is the most common travel mode for every trip purpose. For those who were in North Beach for work or a work-related event, 1/3 used a car as part of their trip, more so than any other trip purpose.

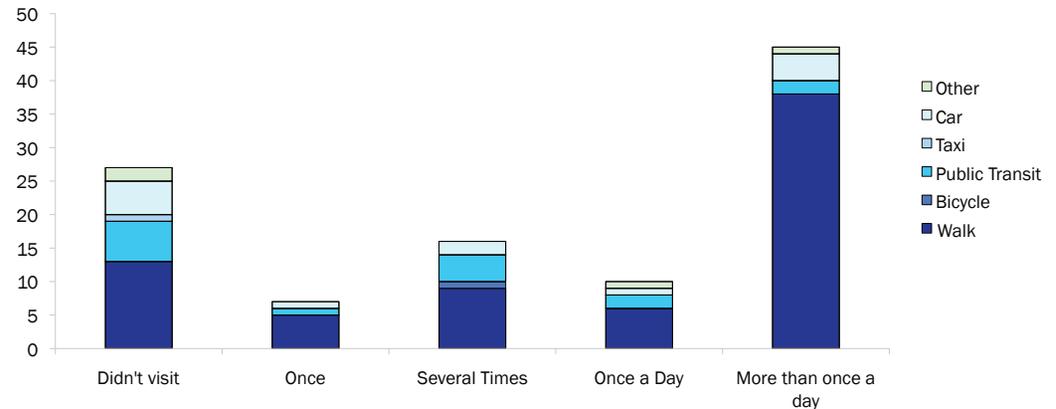
When we compare trip frequency by trip mode we see that the most frequent visitors to North Beach are walkers.

### PURPOSE OF TRIP TO NORTH BEACH



Over a third of survey respondents said they came to North Beach to eat.

### TRIP FREQUENCY AND MODE OF TRAVEL



The most frequent visitors to North Beach walk to their destination.



## Photo Survey: Identifying Attractive Characteristics

After collecting the basic user profile information, the survey asked respondents to look at a photo of a generically attractive street and identify a few attractive things about the street.

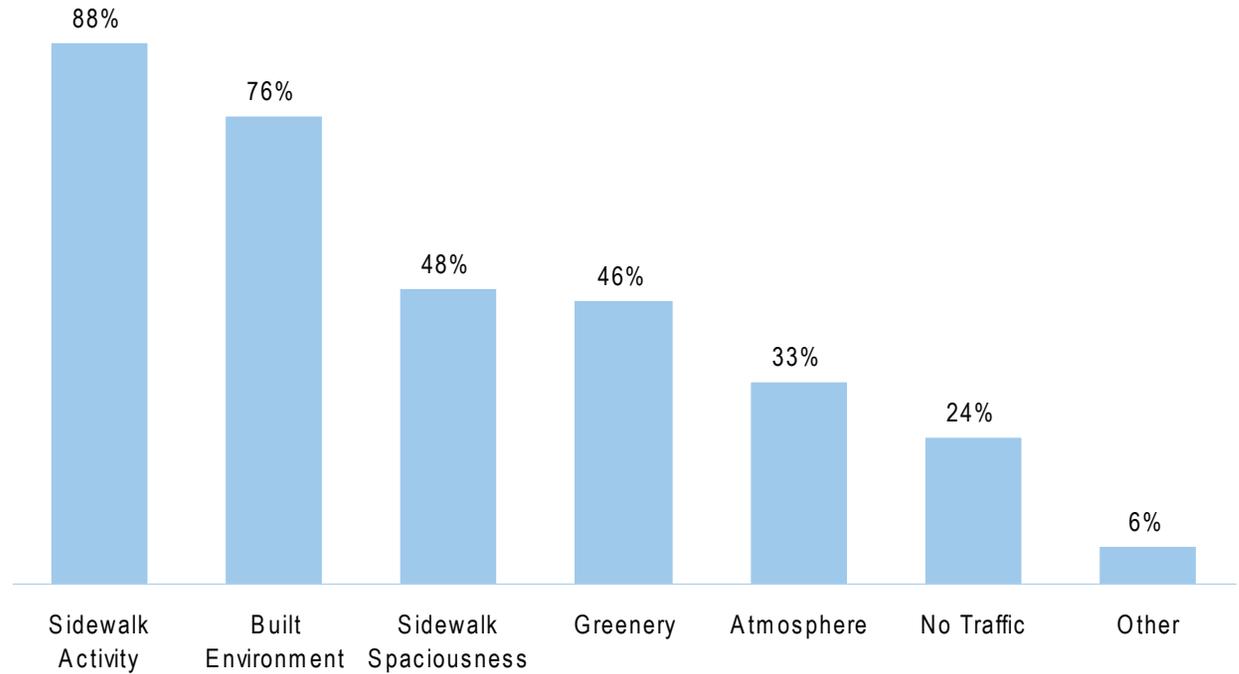
The photo survey served two purposes. First, it encouraged people to start thinking about street characteristics and their own opinions. How often does one consider the width of a sidewalk except when it becomes disruptive? Furthermore, the photo served as a point of reference when the respondents were later asked to judge Columbus Ave.



What is it about this street that makes it an attractive place?

Respondents found the most attractive things in the photo to be the sidewalk activity and the built environment. They frequently pointed to the outdoor tables and chairs and said they liked the architecture and colors of the buildings. Nearly half the respondents commented on the spaciousness of the sidewalk and the trees. Many noted that the street looked safe, friendly, and inviting. In total, all but one of the pedestrians found the photo attractive, and also assumed it was in a foreign country.

#### WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS STREET THAT MAKES IT AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE?



## Levels of Satisfaction with Columbus Ave.

There are a number of variables that contribute to a pedestrian's experience on a street. In addition to collecting a general user profile, the pedestrian survey also aims to collect opinions on some of these variables that contribute to a walk down Columbus Ave.

After the photo survey, respondents were asked to turn their attention to Columbus Ave. Their satisfaction was measured by asking whether each of the variables (listed below) failed, met, or exceeded their expectations. Behavior is more strongly influenced by perception and expectations than by absolute level. Whether a street is clean or ugly is less relevant than a user's perceptions of cleanliness when behavior and satisfaction are concerned.

- Sidewalk Cleanliness
- Level of maintenance of the sidewalk
- Personal safety from vehicles
- Public places to sit, relax, and socialize
- Private places to sit, relax, and socialize
- The street's overall physical attractiveness
- The ease of walking down the sidewalk
- Personal safety from other people
- Overall walking experience

Once we can identify the elements that are failing to meet expectations, planners and urban designers can direct their attention and resources towards improving the elements that are most critical to an enjoyable pedestrian experience.

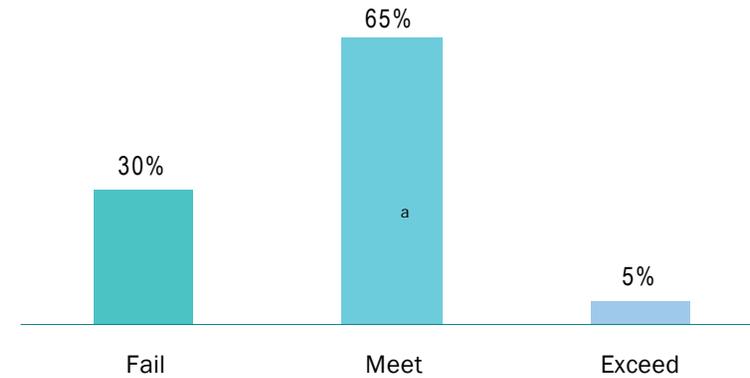


## Sidewalk Cleanliness

The majority of survey respondents replied that the cleanliness met or exceeded their expectations and one third of survey respondents said the sidewalk cleanliness failed to meet their expectations.

At first this data may be misleading. Although the majority said the cleanliness met or exceeded their expectations, indicating a high level of satisfaction, this answer did not imply that the respondents thought Columbus Ave. was clean. Typically, a respondent would point to the cigarette butts, chewing gum stains, and litter, then shrug and respond, "But it's a city. What can you expect?" They pointed blame to a number of sources, including the business owners, the night scene, and the lack of trashcans. Pedestrians demonstrated low expectations for the cleanliness of the sidewalk but were overall satisfied with it on Columbus Ave.

DOES THE SIDEWALK CLEANLINESS ON COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



Columbus Ave. sidewalks are gum-stained, yet free of clutter.

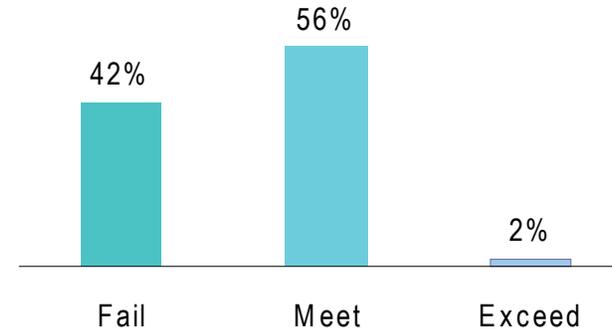
## Level of Sidewalk Maintenance

Survey respondents were less forgiving regarding the sidewalk's level of maintenance. 42% of respondents said the level of maintenance of the sidewalk failed to meet their expectations. Only 2% said the maintenance exceeded their expectations, the lowest proportion out of the entire survey.

The sidewalk's level of maintenance varies on Columbus Ave. In several places tree roots bring up the sidewalk panels and create uneven surfaces and cracks. People pointed out a few places where they have tripped, and called the sidewalk "precarious," "bumpy," or the "worse I've ever seen in my life."

Similar to the sidewalk cleanliness, the majority of respondents said the sidewalk met their expectations but not their standards: "It works, but it could be better."

### DOES THE SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE ON COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

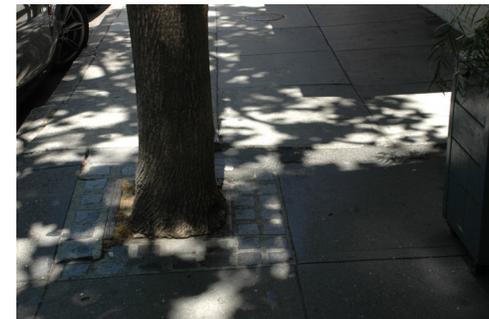


*"It's kind of old, shabby, and even. But it's not a high priority." Female, 32*

*"Could be better, but walkable." Male, 58*



There are a few maintenance problems on Columbus Ave.'s sidewalks, including unevenness and disrepair.



## Safety from Other People

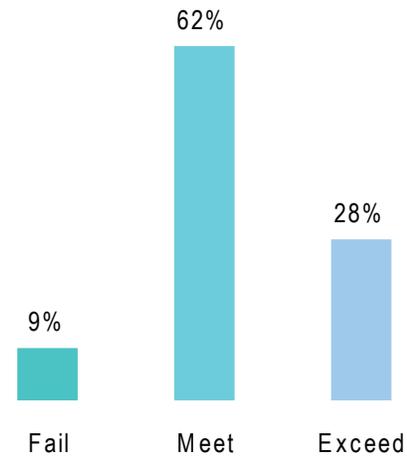
The majority of respondents reported that their feeling of safety from other people on Columbus Ave. met their expectations. 28% said it exceeded their expectations, and only 9% said it failed to meet their expectations.

Two respondents mentioned the crowded sidewalks as things that made them feel unsafe. Several respondents mentioned the Friday and Saturday night activity from the local bars or the nearby strip clubs. Many respondents mentioned the homeless but said they never felt threatened by them. The majority said they felt very safe.

Part of what contributes to this sense of safety is the number of people out on the street. There is always someone watching the street: the early morning commuters, the mid-afternoon café patrons, or the late night valet attendants. Everyone likes to watch the street, and, as such, there is an enhanced feeling of security. As one woman pointed out:

*“I used to have to walk to work at 5am and would choose to walk down Columbus Ave because it was well lit, there was always someone out, and it felt safer than other streets. There are eyes on the street.” Female, 30*

### DOES YOUR FEELING OF SAFETY FROM OTHER PEOPLE ON COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



## Safety from Vehicles

Because of its diagonal orientation, Columbus Ave. is a busy corridor for all types of travel modes, including cars, public transit, and tour buses. In general, respondents felt safe on the sidewalks from cars and vehicles. 75% of respondents said their feeling of safety at least met or exceeded their expectations.

Comments from survey respondents indicate there are three elements that make someone feel less safe from vehicles or, at the least, act as a nuisance. Of the 25% of respondents who said their sense of personal safety from vehicles failed to meet their expectations: Nine people said the “speeding” traffic and “reckless drivers” contributed to the lack of safety; eight people complained that the intersections were too ambiguous, confusing, or scary; and five people complained that the narrow width of the sidewalk forced them to walk in traffic. When it comes to safety from vehicles, it isn’t just the cars that are the threat; it is also the narrowness and crowdedness of the sidewalk that someone can feel pushed into traffic.

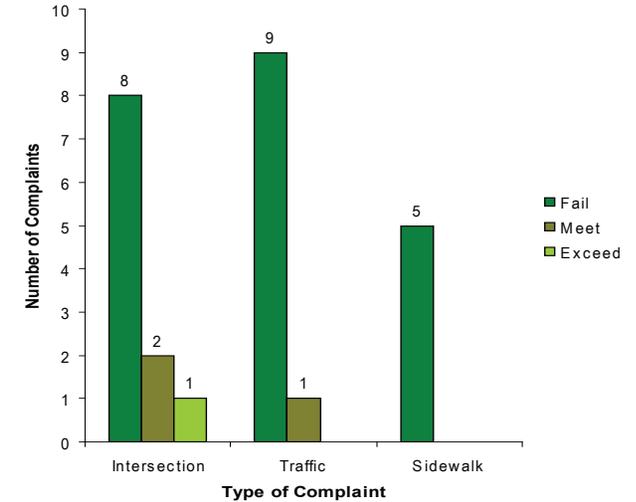
63% of respondents said their feeling of safety from vehicles met their expectations. Only three of these respondents mentioned the hazards of traffic or the intersections, but accredited themselves as savvy and safe pedestrians and therefore able to “handle” the danger and confusion of the traffic and crosswalks.

Twelve percent said their feeling of personal safety from vehicles exceeded their expectations and were frequently confounded by the question. “What, do I think a car is going to jump the curb and hit me? Of course not!” This type of response may have been generated by the location of the survey, which was held at mid-block. If the survey had been conducted next to one of the intersections, responses may have been different.

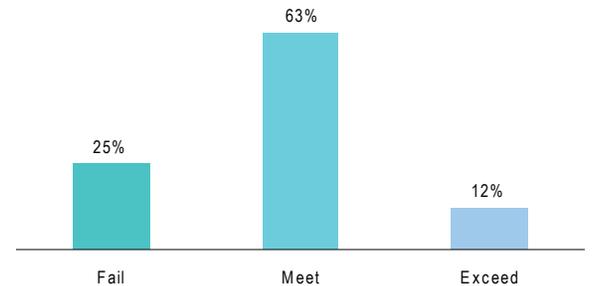


The large intersections can be confusing. The streets are crowded with buses, trucks, and cars.

### COMPLAINTS ABOUT CAR SAFETY



### DOES YOUR FEELING OF SAFETY FROM VEHICLES ON COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



## Ease of Walking

When asked to rate the ease of walking down the sidewalk, 45% said the ease of walking down the sidewalk failed, 45% said it met, and 10% said it exceeded their expectations. There is very little room on Columbus Ave. and survey respondents said they often had a hard time walking down the sidewalk.

All three responses shared similar complaints: the sidewalks are too narrow; the tables and chairs get in the way; the sidewalks are too crowded. The difference in their expectations was based on how they interpreted these difficulties. Respondents who said the ease of walking failed considered the narrowness and crowds bothersome, those who said MET considered these difficulties to be expected, and those who said EXCEED thought the narrowness and crowdedness was exciting.

*"You have to stand in line to walk down Columbus Ave." Female, 52*

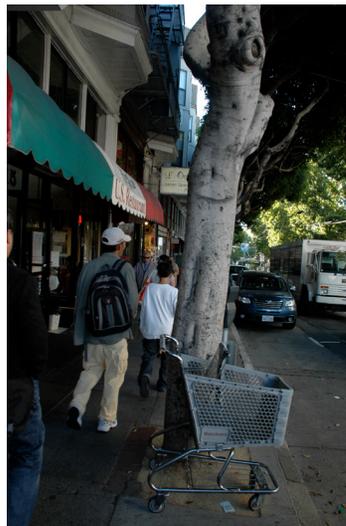
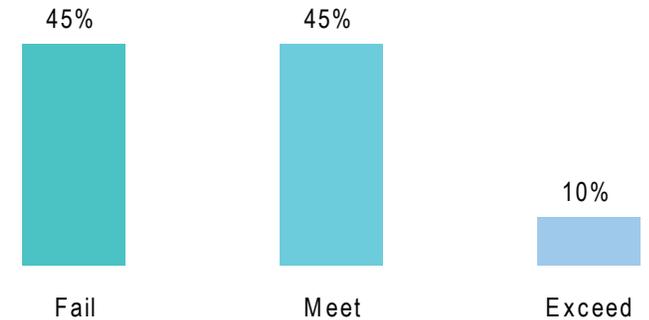
*"It's narrow, but it's better than Chinatown." Female, 23*

*"It's fun to be with lots of people." Female, 57*

These responses represent a frequently shared attitude towards Columbus Ave. Many agreed that, yes, it can be difficult to walk down the sidewalk, but they liked having people on the street and they enjoyed the cafes.



DOES THE EASE OF WALKING DOWN THE SIDEWALK ON COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



There is very little space for pedestrians to walk down Columbus Ave. (Top Graphic courtesy of SFCTA)

## Places to Sit, Relax, and Socialize

Sitting is an integral part of a thriving public realm. Chairs, benches, and low-rise walls provide places for people to gather, congregate, and socialize. Without them, sidewalks would be transit corridors alone that lack the vibrancy of stationary activity.

As noted in the seating opportunities map, the public and private seating is segregated. All of the public seating is in Washington Square. There are no public seating opportunities on Columbus Ave. There are also no seating options, public or private, on Grant Ave., a popular tourist destination lined with shops and eating establishments.

Survey respondents were asked to rate both the public and the private places to sit, relax, and socialize on Columbus Ave. The difference in level of satisfaction between the two is substantial, but not surprising.

### Public Seating

Do the public places to sit, relax, and socialize on Columbus Ave. fail, meet, or exceed your expectations?

An overwhelming 70% of pedestrian respondents reported that the public places to sit, relax, and socialize on Columbus Ave. failed to meet their expectations. 23% said the public seating opportunities met their expectations, and 6% said they exceeded expectations. Despite a range of opinions, respondents from all three levels of satisfaction shared a similar reaction:

“Public places? What public places? There’s just Washington Square.”

The 3% of respondents who said the public seating exceeded their expectations included Washington Square in their assessment of Columbus Ave.

### Private Seating

North Beach pedestrians love the outdoor café seating on Columbus Ave. 52% of respondents said that the private seating opportunities on Columbus Ave. exceeded their expectations. The 11% who said the seating opportunities failed their expectations were less critical of the seating itself than the lack of space afforded to it. The sidewalks are narrow and while many survey respondents said they liked the outdoor cafes, they complained that the tables and chairs often protruded too far into the sidewalk and made it difficult to get by.

Both male and female survey respondents had a high level of satisfaction with the private seating options, but a closer look at the data reveals that females were more likely than males to say the private seating exceeded their expectations (67%), whereas males had an equal chance of saying the private seating either exceeded or met their expectations (45%). Both genders had a low proportion of respondents who said the private seating failed.



The absence of public seating may not be immediately apparent: private cafe tables and chairs line the sidewalks offering a number of private places to sit.

But private seating is a separate amenity entirely. Sitting at one of the local outdoor cafes customarily involves engaging in commercial activity, typically buying something to eat or drink. Public seating does not require a purchase, and thus it invites varying types of use.

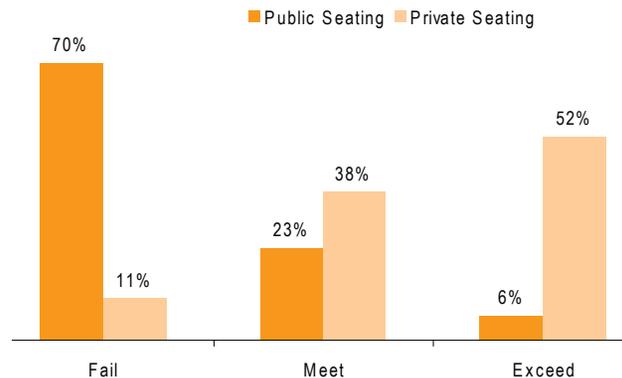
One doesn't need to look far to study public seating activity. Washington Square, as discussed in the Stationary Activities section, has well-used benches where resting, reading, and people watching are favorite activities. Finding these opportunities on Columbus Ave. without buying something is nearly impossible. The lack of public seating options is unfortunate for such a popular tourist destination. For practical purposes, a visitor who needs to reference a map or tie a shoe will be hard pressed to find a place to sit without walking to Washington Square.

But, seating is more than just a convenience, just as café tables and chairs are more than just places to eat. People like to see and be seen, and the outdoor dining provides the sidewalk with an audience. Residents can stop and talk to their neighbors, or tourists can sit and watch the crowds of pedestrians walk by. The public benches in Washington Square employ a similar role for park dwellers.

It's no surprise that survey respondents want to

see more places to sit on Columbus Ave., whether they're public or private. Sidewalk seating opportunities put people on the street and further add to the social attractiveness of the street.

### DO THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SEATING OPTIONS ON COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



Private cafe seating on Columbus Ave. is a popular activity. The lack of public seating can be a problem for pedestrians who need to stop to take a quick break.

## Overall Attractiveness

Survey respondents were asked to rate the overall attractiveness of Columbus Ave., including the paving materials, street fixtures, and greenery.

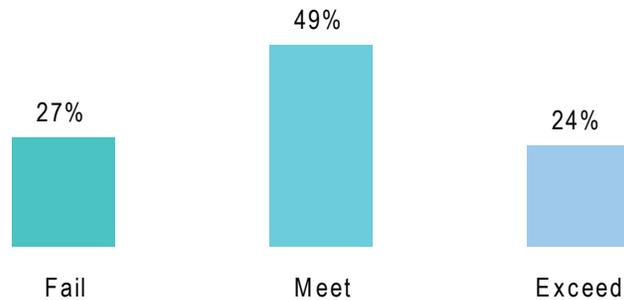
Nearly half said the overall attractiveness met their expectations, 27% said it failed and 24% said the overall attractiveness exceeded their expectations.

Respondents who were least satisfied with the street's attractiveness said it was too cluttered, too crowded, and that it needed more trees.

Those who said the attractiveness met their expectations said the street looked tired but had personality and potential.

Respondents who said the street's attractiveness exceeded their expectations offered little explanation, though many mentioned the trees as something they liked best.

### DOES THE OVERALL ATTRACTIVENESS OF COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



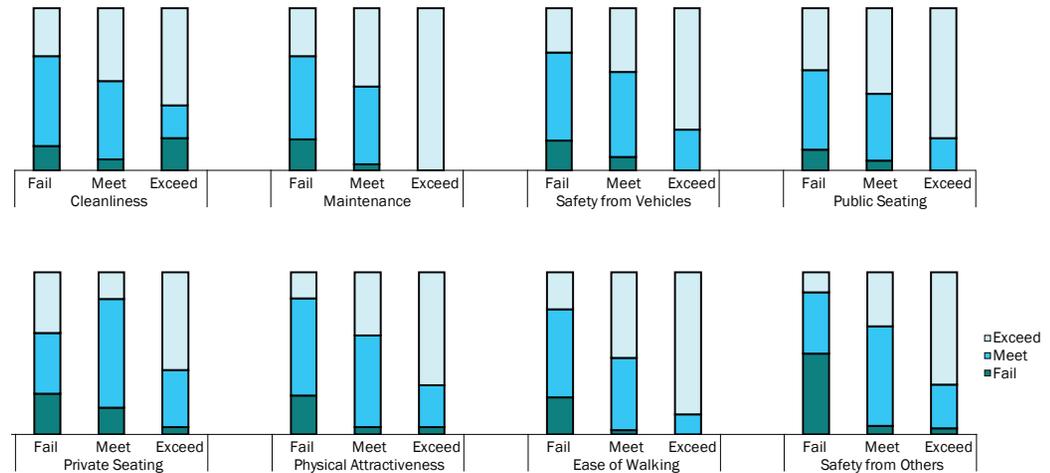
People liked the trees that line Columbus Ave. and wanted to see more greenery.

## Overall Walking Experience

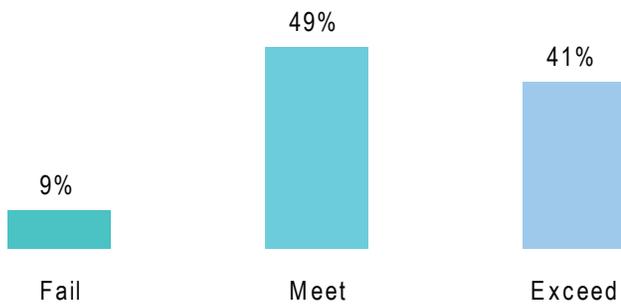
When survey respondents considered their overall walking experience down Columbus Ave., 41% said it exceeded their expectations, 49% said it met their expectations, and only 9% said it failed to meet their expectations. In other words, 91% of the survey respondents said the overall walking experience down Columbus Ave either met or exceeded their expectations.

The study finds a relationship between level of satisfaction with each walking variable and survey respondent's overall walking experience. In other words, respondents who said the level of maintenance failed to meet their expectations were more likely to say their overall walking experience also failed. This implies that sidewalk cleanliness, maintenance, safety, places to sit, attractiveness, and ease of walking all have an influence on someone's enjoyment of their walking experience.

### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEVELS OF SATISFACTION AND OVERALL WALKING EXPERIENCE



### DOES THE OVERALL WALKING EXPERIENCE ON COLUMBUS AVE. FAIL, MEET, OR EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



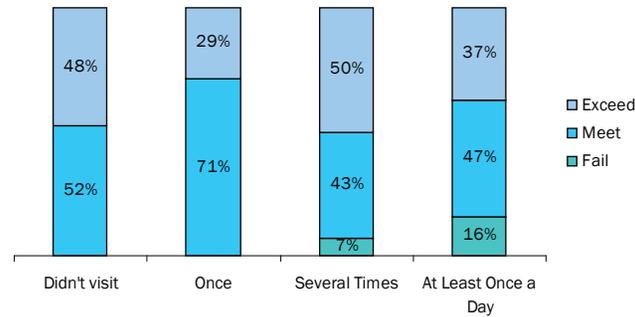
## Overall Walking Experience: who had the most enjoyable walking experience?

A closer look at a visitor's trip frequency indicates some interesting findings. Over half the people who hadn't visited North Beach the previous week had a high level of satisfaction with their overall walking experience. This finding corresponds to the other survey questions: non-residents tended to have higher levels of satisfaction than residents. Visitors tend to see their experiences through rose-colored glasses.

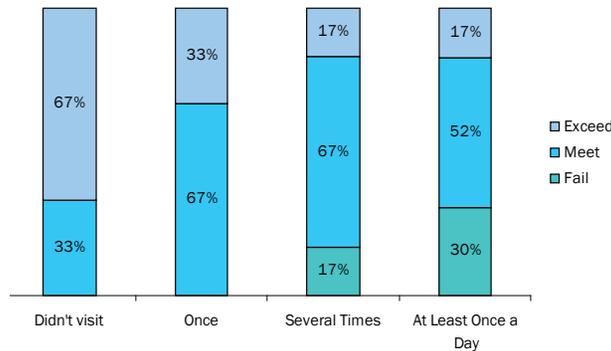
Concurrently, the more frequently a person visited North Beach, the more likely they were to be least satisfied with their walking experience. 7% of respondents who visited Columbus Ave. several times per week said their overall walking experience failed and 16% of respondents who visited Columbus Ave. at least once a day said their overall walking experience failed. When we look at people who said the Ease of Walking down the street failed and compared their trip frequency to their overall walking experience, we see this relationship strengthened. Someone who frequents Columbus Ave. at least once a day and has trouble walking down the sidewalk will be least satisfied with their overall walking experience.



### SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL WALKING EXPERIENCE BY TRIP FREQUENCY



### SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL WALKING EXPERIENCE BY TRIP FREQUENCY: SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO STATED THE EASE OF WALKING FAILED TO MEET EXPECTATIONS.



Taking a look at the people with a high trip frequency and low satisfaction with overall walking experience, we can see that half of these respondents were taking Columbus Ave. because it was a direct route to their destination; the other half said they were in the area for work or a personal errand. In other words, these respondents were on Columbus Ave. because they had to be, whether it was for work, a personal appointment, or because the street served as the quickest route to their destination. When asked if they had additional comments about the neighborhood, 5 out of the 6 respondents said they would like to see Columbus Ave. made into a more pedestrian-friendly street because they wanted more room to walk.

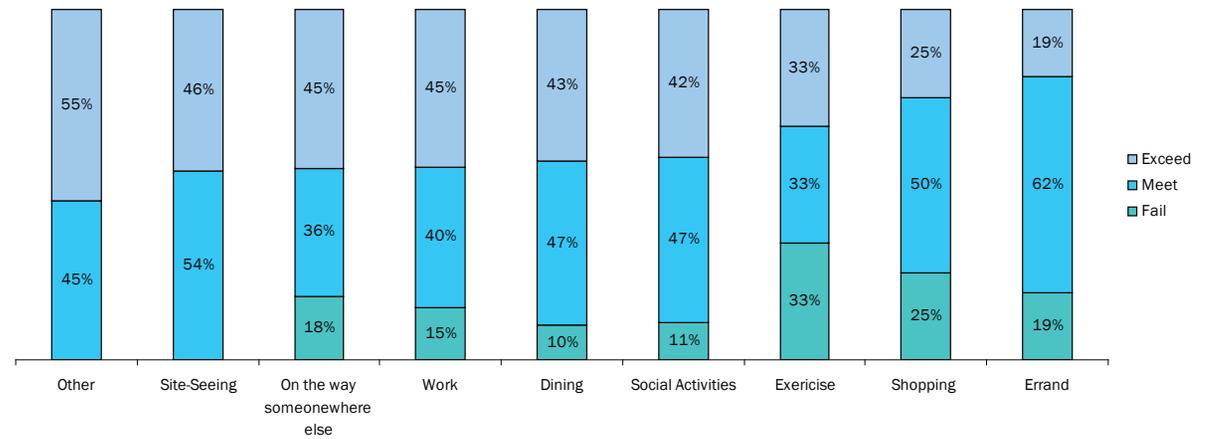
Does the purpose of a trip influence satisfaction with overall walking experience? The survey question asked respondents to identify the purpose of their trip to North Beach: Shopping, Exercise/Recreation, Work/Work-Related, Errand/Personal, Dining, entertainment, Site-Seeing, Social Activities, On the Way to Somewhere Else, or Other. The people who were most satisfied with their overall walking experience were those who answered "Other." When asked to explain why they were on Columbus Ave., all six of the respondents replied, "Because I live here." Previous data indicated that the more frequently someone visited Columbus Ave., the higher chance they had of having a low overall walking experience. However this group of respondents who had a high level of experience and also lived in the area reveals an alternative reason why pedestrians

enjoy Columbus Ave., and that is their sense of emotional attachment and identity to the street and the neighborhood. In fact, their answer, “because I live here,” suggests that they don’t need a reason to walk down Columbus Ave., it is part of their home.

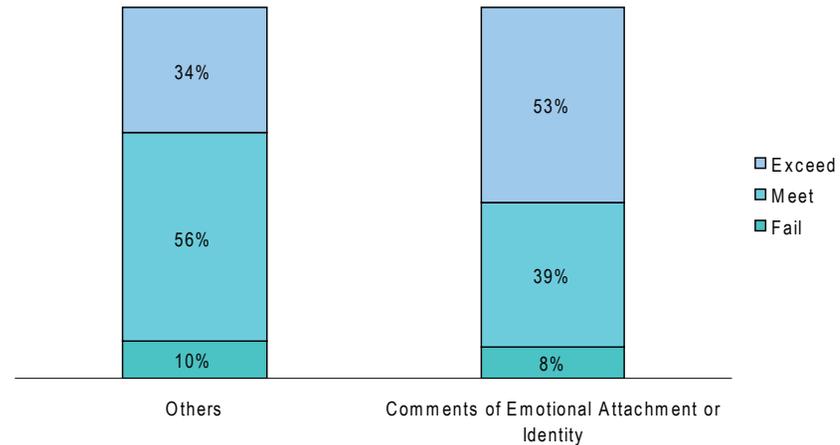
An analysis of additional comments indicates that many respondents shared this sense of emotional attachment and identity to Columbus Ave. There is a tremendous amount of social capital in North Beach reflected in the relationships between shop owners, patrons, and the everyday people on the street. This sense of community is powerful, and can supersede many frustrations with the narrowness of the sidewalk.

*“I know my postman, I know my barber... There is a huge sense of community in this neighborhood. I never thought I’d move here. I thought it’d be too congested. But I came here 9 years ago and never left.”*

SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL WALKING EXPERIENCE BY TRIP PURPOSE



SATISFACTION WITH OVERALL WALKING EXPERIENCE BY COMMENTS OF EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT OR IDENTITY TO COLUMBUS AVE.



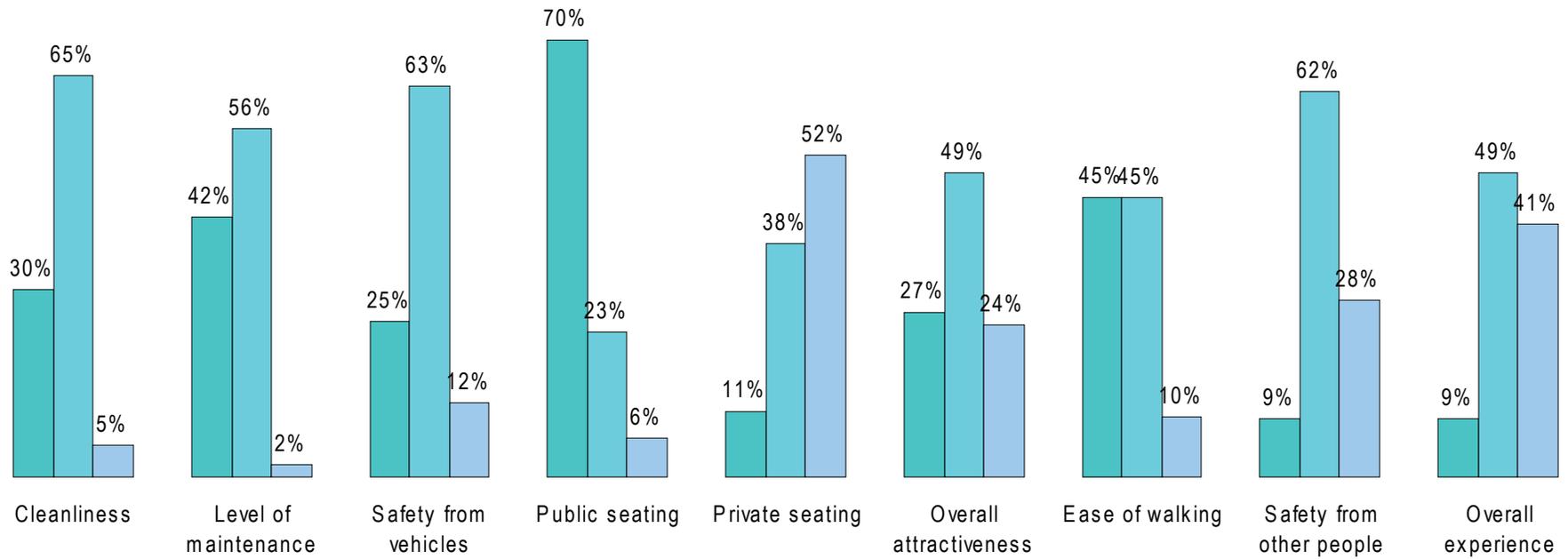
## Summary of Findings

The results of the pedestrian interview indicate that pedestrians have varying degrees of satisfaction with Columbus Ave. At times, their expectations for the street are low. What people like the best and want to see more of are the elements of the street that contribute to a lively sidewalk: places to sit.

People often felt that the street could be improved, but they still tended to enjoy the overall experience. Columbus Ave. has the potential to exceed expectations.

### LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH COLUMBUS AVE.

■ Fail ■ Meet ■ Exceed





## THE COLUMBUS AVENUE BALLET

In her study of Greenwich Village in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs likens the intricacies of street activity to that of a well-orchestrated ballet. The shop keepers, the pedestrians, the delivery trucks, and the cars – each character performs a unique part of street life as they manage to ebb and flow together on a shared stage.

Columbus Ave. has its own ballet, one that attracts tourists, locals, and workers to visit, eat, walk, live, and watch. Yet Columbus Ave.'s dance is performed on a cramped and crowded stage. The sidewalks are bursting with activity, and by mid-afternoon the dance spills into the streets.

Columbus Ave. has the potential to become one of the best streets in San Francisco and some may argue that it already is. Columbus Ave. is popular, it is active, it is safe, and it has an established community and a tremendous sense of place. However, it has limits to its design that ultimately hinders its potential. The sidewalks are far too narrow to accommodate the pedestrian traffic and activity, yet people want more places to sit and socialize. There is a pent-up demand by pedestrians to use the space in ways that the current design does not allow.

Providing more room for pedestrians does not mean clearing the sidewalk of its elements. The street furniture, the trees, and of course the café seating are not only necessary for a sidewalk, but they are also the very elements that contribute to a lively public realm and that continue to attract people day after day.

The future vision of Columbus Ave., as voiced by so many survey respondents, is to have a more pedestrian-oriented street, one with wider sidewalks, fewer cars, more trees, and more places to sit, relax, socialize, and enjoy each other's company. Ultimately, a future Columbus Ave. is one that finally turns its attention to the street's most popular traveler: the pedestrian.



## FUTURE RESEARCH

The Columbus Ave. Pedestrian Study accumulated a wealth of data and information. This report covers only a fraction of it. This data can be further analyzed for future North Beach studies.

Grant Ave. is of particular importance. It is home to a variety of boutiques, grocery stores, restaurants, and bars, but its public realm is sparse and barren. There are no trees or places to sit, yet, similar to Columbus Ave., has the physical and social foundation to become a great street. Grant Ave. could benefit from a more in-depth public space and public life analysis.



Grant Ave. has several vacant storefronts and a barren public realm.

## WORKS CITED

San Francisco Bicycle Plan. San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority. (June 2009)

San Francisco, California, Planning Code: Article 7: Neighborhood Commercial Districts, Sec. 722.1 – North Beach Neighborhood Commercial District

Public Space & Public Life in Fisherman’s Wharf, Gehl Architects

Close Encounters with Buildings, Jan Gehl and Centre for Public Space Research, Copenhagen





**SAN FRANCISCO  
PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

Pedestrian Survey 2010 v3

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TIME \_\_\_\_\_ LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_ SURVEY# \_\_\_\_\_

- (1) Are you a resident of San Francisco?     Yes     No    **If Yes, for how long?**    Year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Month(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- (2) Where do you live? (*List SF intersection or City/State/Country*) \_\_\_\_\_
- (3) How did you get to North Beach today? (*check all that apply*)  
 Walk     Bicycle     Public Transit     Taxi     Car     Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- (4) And where were you coming from? Can you give me the intersection? Landmark? \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) What is the purpose of your visit to North Beach? (*check all that apply*)  
 Shopping     Exercise/Recreation     Work/Work-Related     Errand/Personal     Dining  
 Entertainment     Site-Seeing     Social Activities     On the way to \_\_\_\_\_  
somewhere else
- (6) Please take a look at this picture of a similar neighborhood retail street.  
 Can you tell me a couple of things about this street that you think makes it an attractive place? \_\_\_\_\_

(7) Now I am going to list some categories. For each category, can you tell me if Columbus Ave fails to meet, meets, or exceeds your expectations. Feel free to explain your answer or offer suggestions: (*check one*)

	Fail to Meet	Meet	Exceed
(a) Sidewalk Cleanliness: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Level of maintenance of the sidewalk: ( <i>cracks, unevenness</i> ) Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Personal safety from vehicles: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Public places to sit, relax, and socialize: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Private places to sit, relax, and socialize: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) The street's overall physical attractiveness: ( <i>paving materials, lighting, trees, and greenery</i> ) Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g) Ease of Walking: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(h) Personal safety from other people: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(i) Overall walking experience: Why? Suggestions? _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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TURN OVER >>





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