

# THE LOOP

The Community Vision for the Potrero Gateway  
& the open spaces around Highway-101.



PREPARED FOR:

**MUNA**  
Neighborhood Association

**San Francisco Parks Alliance**  
OUR CITY, OUR PARKS.

PREPARED BY:

**bionic**  
landscape architecture  
planning  
urban design

JANUARY 2014



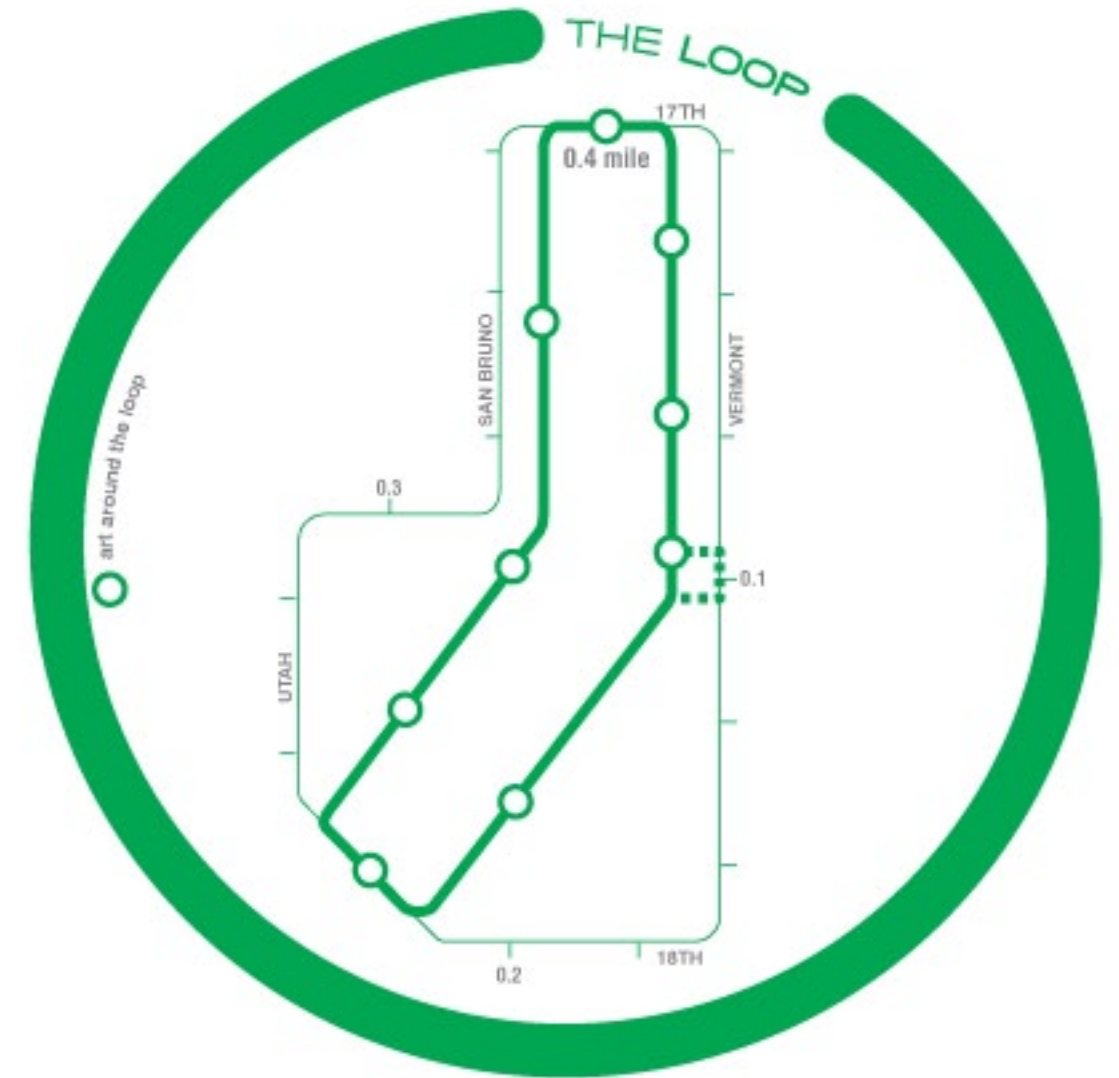
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The Need for a New Gateway on Potrero Hill

The 101-Freeway was constructed in the 1950's to support **50,000** cars per day. Today, capacity has surpassed **425,000** cars per day. Once envisioned as a well-maintained grand thoroughfare, the freeway has become a broken promise to the City of San Francisco. Today there is a diminishing lack of maintenance, overgrowth, and neglect for the spaces surrounding the freeway. This has resulted in illegal activity, encampments, fire, and dangerous and unsightly conditions at the entryway to downtown San Francisco. The resulting streetscape is unpleasant and dangerous for pedestrians and 200+ bicyclists using 17th Street daily, a designated SF Bicycle Coalition Bike Route and an SF Planning Department Green Connector. The Potrero Hill neighborhood is dissatisfied with the current appearance and conditions, and feels that it presents a **serious health and safety threat to the general public** in a rapidly growing area.

**As a reflection on the neighborhood and the city, the area is in need of significant investment to make a change.**

The Loop is an urban design proposal for the loop of continuous open spaces surrounding the 101-freeway on Potrero Hill between 17th and 18th Streets. The Loop will address neighborhood concerns of public health and safety by transforming the neglected right-of-way into accessible public spaces that offer a range of programs and experiences not offered elsewhere in the area. The Loop will also transform this major entryway into San Francisco as a defined and iconic gateway. The proposal was developed by the **Potrero Gateway Park Steering Committee** with **Bionic**, a San Francisco based landscape architecture and planning firm, through a 6-month long community process. The committee involved critical agencies including **DPW, Caltrans, SFMTA**, and the **San Francisco Parks Alliance** throughout the process. The project is supported by **Supervisor Malia Cohen**, the **Potrero Boosters**, local businesses, and neighbors.



Left: 101 Freeway, 1957 & 2012.  
Right: The Loop guide and branding strategy.



## Developing the Vision

### Project Goals

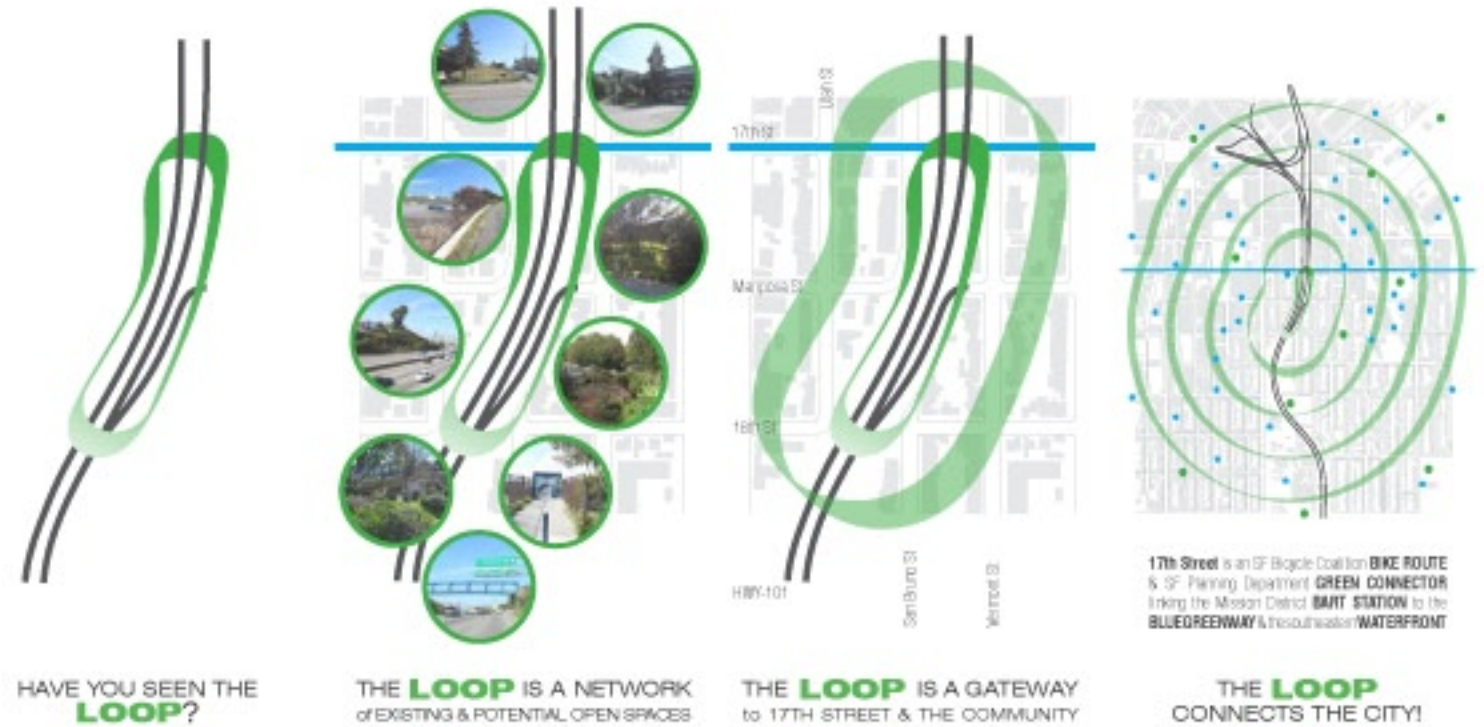
In 2011, the neighborhood formed the Steering Committee to address the existing conditions. Through community meetings, an ideas competition, and 6 years of previous efforts, the Committee identified **3 main objectives**:

- 1/ Promote public health, safety, and welfare by creating open spaces, improving accessibility, and providing maintenance around the freeway.
- 2/ Provide a range of program, park amenities, and recreation spaces for the neighborhood and the city.
- 3/ Improve pedestrian and bicycle circulation above, below, and around the freeway.

### Process

In 2012, the committee identified the landscape architecture and planning firm, **Bionic**, as a critical partner to developing a complete vision for the area that could achieve the 3 main goals. Assisted by the design services and consulting of Bionic, the Steering Committee quickly and strategically identified partners and raised \$15,000 for an analysis and design phase to develop a complete vision for The Loop. The budget for the project was asymmetrical to the scale of issues and complexity that the project presented. A significant portion of the landscape architect's services were provided on a pro bono basis in support of the project objectives and the client's ambition, with a commitment to **establish a prominent gateway into San Francisco**.

Bionic conducted an extensive **6-month long community design process** including research and analysis, concept design, focus group sessions, and 4 well attended community workshops to develop the complete vision. Analysis topics included existing conditions, planning context, current initiatives, environmental aspects, precedents, traffic, circulation, safety, sound wall conditions, the freeway perimeter, and community impact. At the final workshop, the community, critical agencies, and Supervisor Malia Cohen were present and in support of the complete vision to transform the area into a **vibrant public park**.



Top: Original concept and marketing for The Loop.  
Bottom: Community Workshop 1.



## Program

The analysis phase and input from the community and critical agencies informed a complete vision for The Loop that proposes a new set of programs and amenities for the open spaces that will transform the freeway right-of-way into a loop of accessible and well-maintained public spaces.

Combined, the range of programs and spaces would create an iconic public park offering various experiences, programs, amenities, and ecologies not currently offered in the area. The vision includes:

- A continuous trail system
- Streetscape improvements
- Small gathering spaces
- Ecologies of grassland, wild flowers, and serpentine meadow
- Ornamental planting
- Seating
- Lighting
- Iconic fences and paint
- A vertical garden
- Sculptural stairways
- Views
- A dog run
- A secret garden

In addition to these proposed elements, selected program was identified for The Loop:

### 17th Street Micro-businesses

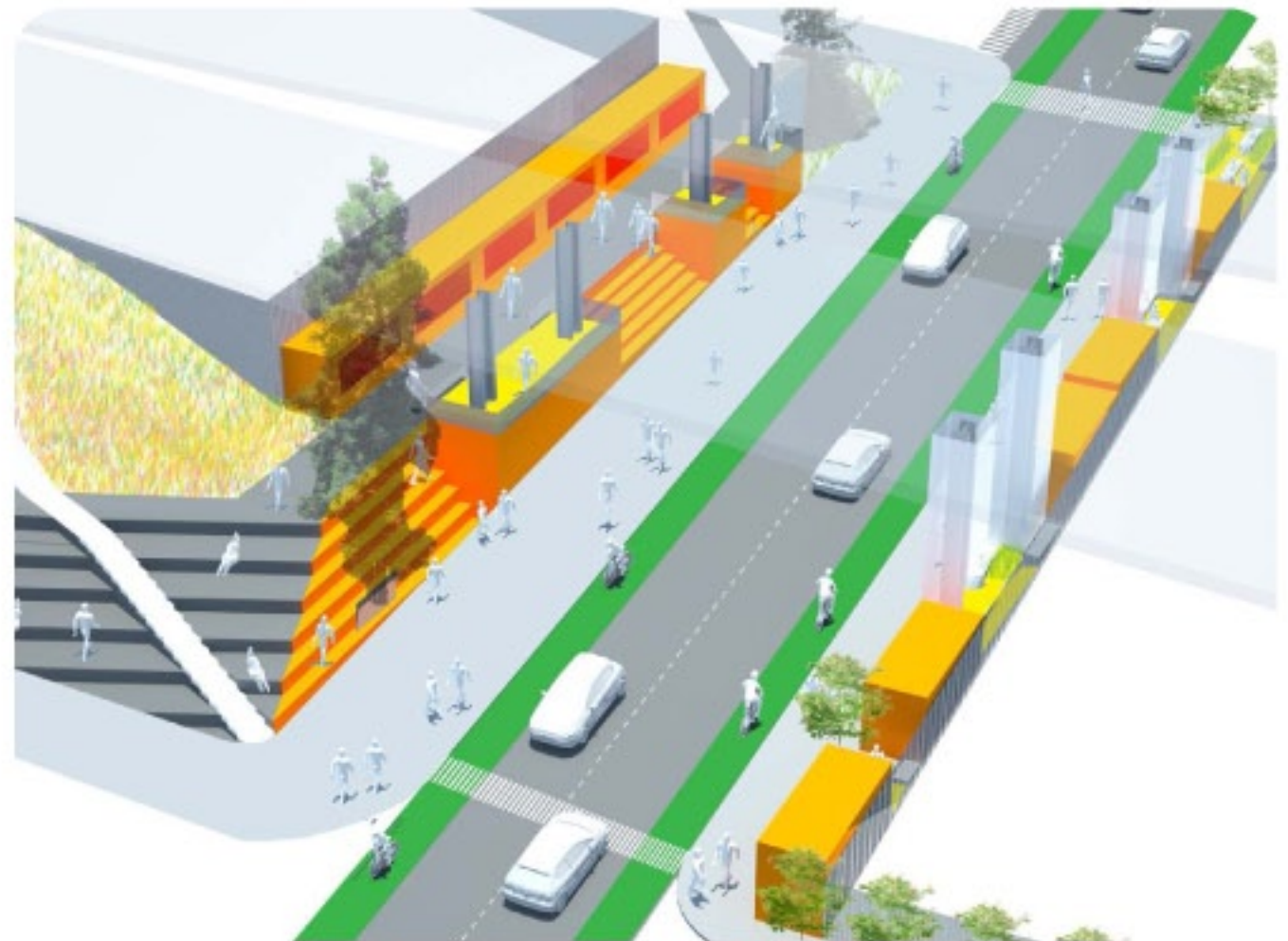
A new set of program of micro-businesses in shipping containers is planned for the area beneath the freeway on 17th Street to introduce a new user group and activities. The Steering Committee is pursuing micro-businesses that would offer commercial, retail, art, and culture through partnerships with local entrepreneurs.

### An Art Program throughout The Loop

Based on unique existing conditions at the interface between freeway and park, a range of art installations would provide opportunities for a set of experiences and both educational and informative installations that engage the freeway in a dialog with the park. This type of sensory and data-driven program derive from the ubiquitous presence of the freeway and would promote a distinct park identity that attracts a range of visitors beyond neighborhood residents.

### Streetscape Improvements, Safety, and Circulation

Bionic was commissioned to design a park. To promote the best possible open space, a range of improvements are suggested that would improve the streetscape, safety, and circulation of The Loop. The vision proposes various improvements that encapsulate the community's wish list to create a park that is accessible, enjoyable, and safe.



## Next Steps

Located along primary connectors in the eastern neighborhoods, and centrally located within the newly-forming Green Benefits District, the project aligns with current planning and funding initiatives. The mission of the Green Benefits District is to establish new funding sources that will support capital improvements and build the capacity to create and maintain open spaces within Potrero Hill. The Steering Committee is pursuing alliances with the Green Benefits District for future funding and maintenance strategies for The Loop.

Next steps include raising awareness, garnering political and inter-agency support from the City and Caltrans, identifying critical partnerships, and fund raising to advance The Loop.

Top: Rendering of 17th Street with continuous trail system, sculptural stair, and micro-businesses.



# ENDORSEMENTS

This project is supported by Supervisor Malia Cohen, the Potrero Boosters, local businesses, and neighbors.

Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 10



City and County of San Francisco

**MALIA COHEN**  
**馬莉亞郭嫻**

December 16, 2013

Mariposa Utah Street Neighborhood Association  
550 Utah Street  
San Francisco, CA 94110

Dear Neighbors,

I am pleased to share with you my support for the Gateway Park project started by the Mariposa Utah Street Neighborhood Association ("MUNA"). As a community you have worked with various city and state departments including Caltrans, Department of Public Works ("DPW"), San Francisco Parks Alliance and other local stakeholders to redesign and landscape the freeway right of way open space along the "U" shape formed by San Bruno Avenue, 17th Street and Vermont Street, north of Mariposa Street. With San Francisco Parks Alliance as your fiscal sponsor and your inclusion in the DPW Street Parks program, I understand you envision opening the area to the community by beautifying it with landscaping, walking paths, benches at scenic points, and a dog park. I was fortunate to attend one of the last community planning meetings and was very pleased at how the design is progressing and the direction this project is taking in its effort to beautify the neighborhood.

MUNA has a successful track record for this type of project, and has already successfully improved the freeway right of way at 18th and Utah Streets, referred to as Fallen Bridge Mini-Park.

I look forward to continuing to support your efforts to create new and improved open spaces in the neighborhood for all of our residents to enjoy. It is with the dedication from neighbors like you and a strong partnership with local government that we will continue to build and support thriving neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Malia".

Malia Cohen  
Member, San Francisco Board of Supervisors

City Hall • 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place • Room 244 • San Francisco, California 94102-4689 • (415) 554-7670  
Fax (415) 554-7674 • TDD/TTY (415) 554-5227 • E-mail: [malia.cohen@sfgov.org](mailto:malia.cohen@sfgov.org)



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POTRERO BOOSTERS  
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION  
SERVING THE HILL SINCE 1926

January 1, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

The Potrero Boosters Neighborhood Association has long supported the efforts of Potrero residents in reclaiming underutilized public lands to create new, neighborhood-serving green spaces. In this tradition, we support the efforts of the Mariposa-Utah Neighborhood Association and its affiliates in the creation of a Potrero Gateway Park in the area surrounding the 101 Freeway between Seventeenth Street and Eighteenth Street.

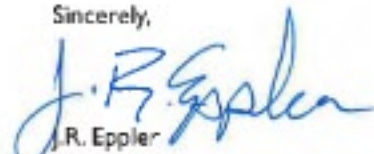
Seventeenth Street serves as the principle bicycle and pedestrian thoroughfare between Potrero Hill and the Mission District. The 101 underpass acts a barrier between the neighborhoods, with narrow, poorly lit, litter-strewn sidewalks. Illegal encampments on Caltrans property create an unsafe environment for nearby residents and passers-by. The Potrero Gateway Park plan will address these issues and provide an appealing atmosphere for bikers and pedestrians.

As the Eastern Neighborhoods Plan increases the population density on both sides of the underpass, the demand for outdoor space will also grow. Landscaping and making accessible and safe the spaces flanking the underpass will offer additional outdoor resources for new and existing residents.

The Steering Committee for the Potrero Gateway Park, of which, for full disclosure, I am a member, has undertaken a multi-year process of reaching out to and engaging community members with regards to what may be done with the land around the freeway, both by attending and presenting at Boosters meetings and by hosting their own community workshops. The Steering Committee has successfully raised funds to create a general landscaping plan, and has coordinated with the myriad local and state agencies with jurisdiction over the area.

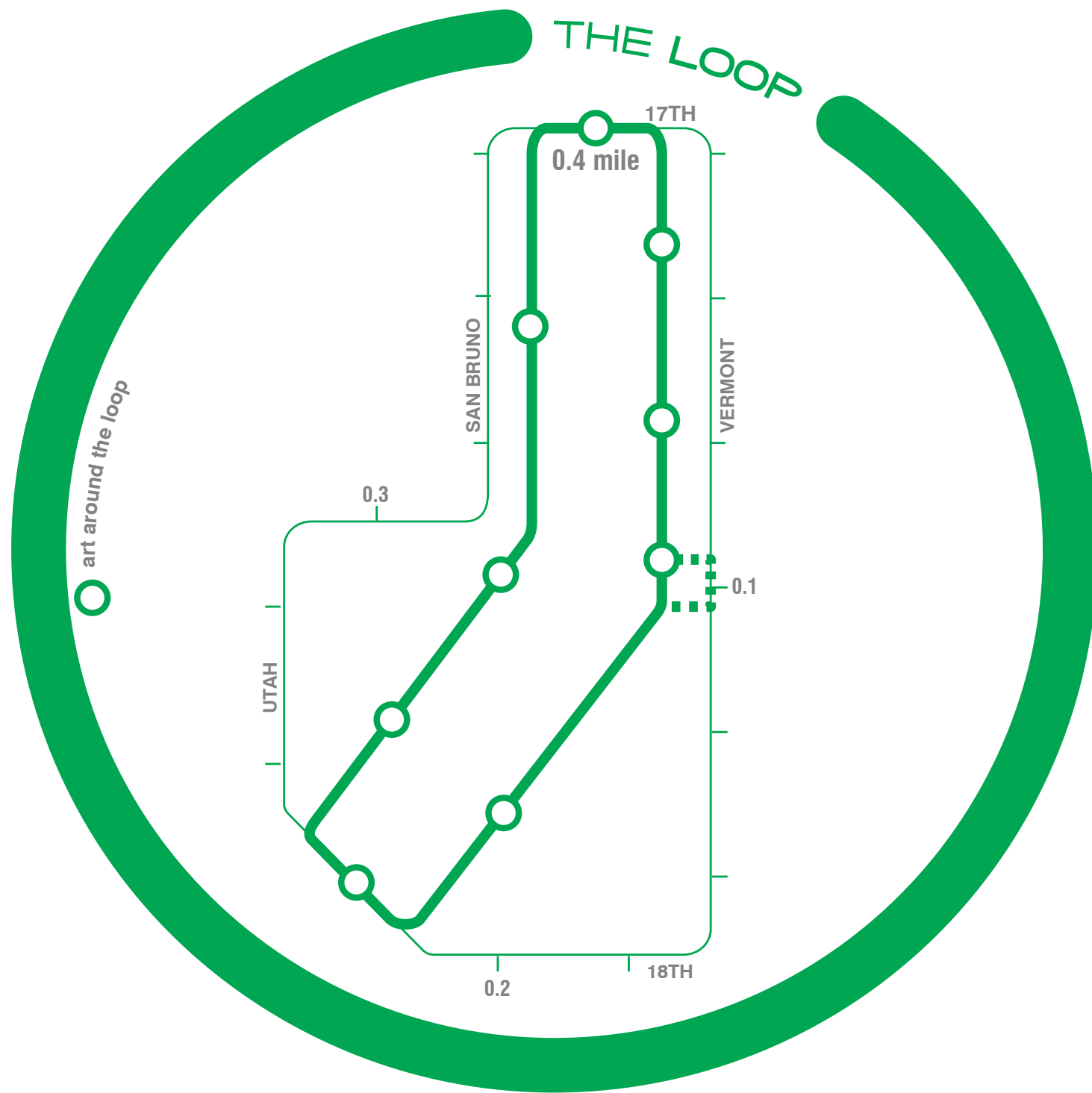
In closing, the Potrero Boosters Neighborhood Association supports the creation of a Potrero Gateway Park. I am available to discuss this support with any parties that may request it, at 415-704-7775.

Sincerely,

  
J.R. Eppler  
President

1459 EIGHTEENTH ST PMB 133 • SAN FRANCISCO, CA • 94107





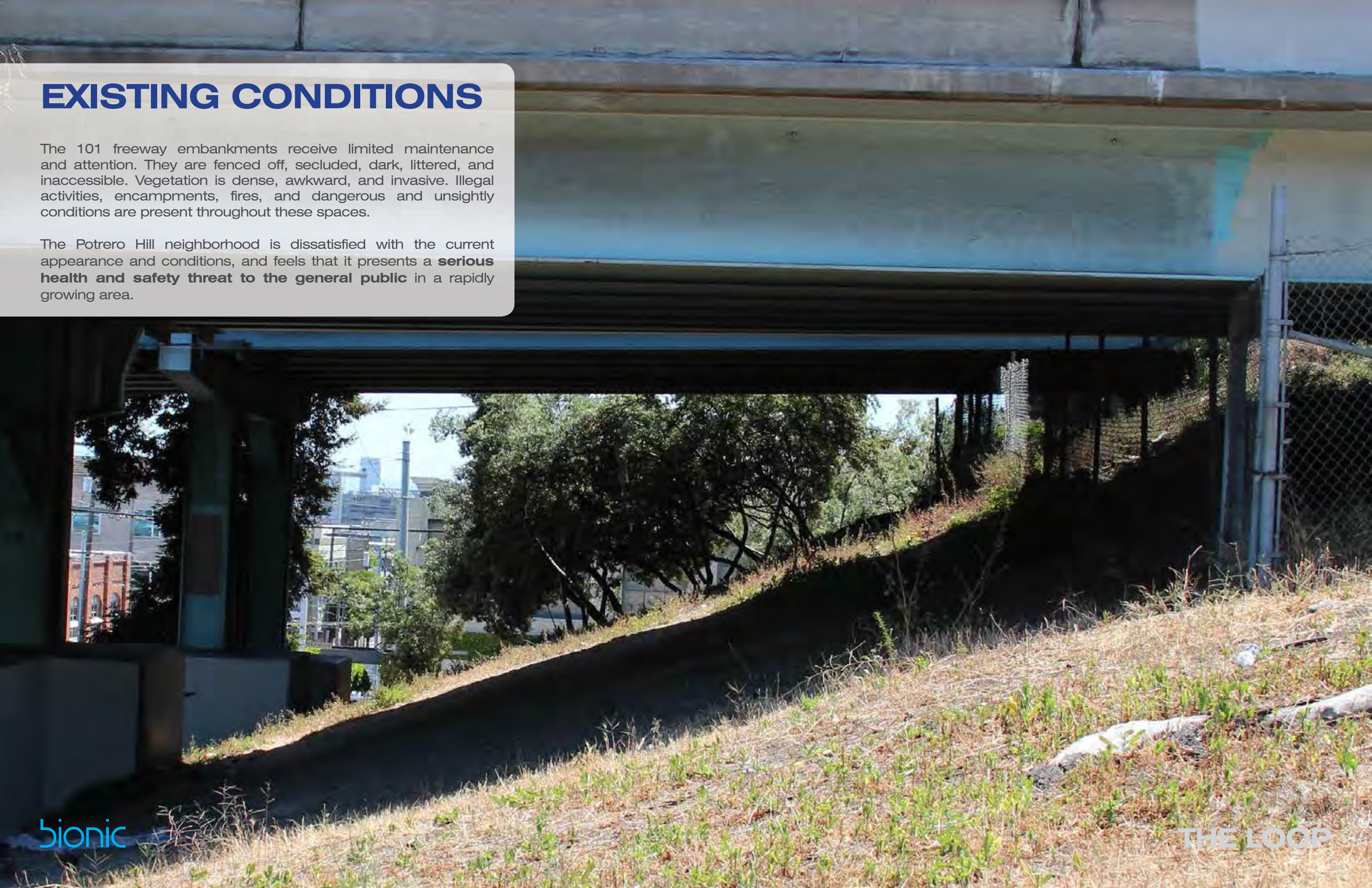
## Existing Conditions



# EXISTING CONDITIONS

The 101 freeway embankments receive limited maintenance and attention. They are fenced off, secluded, dark, littered, and inaccessible. Vegetation is dense, awkward, and invasive. Illegal activities, encampments, fires, and dangerous and unsightly conditions are present throughout these spaces.

The Potrero Hill neighborhood is dissatisfied with the current appearance and conditions, and feels that it presents a **serious health and safety threat to the general public** in a rapidly growing area.





## January 2013

Today overgrown areas are prone to brush fires and dangerous for surrounding properties.

2 fires were documented in 2013 by July.





2003



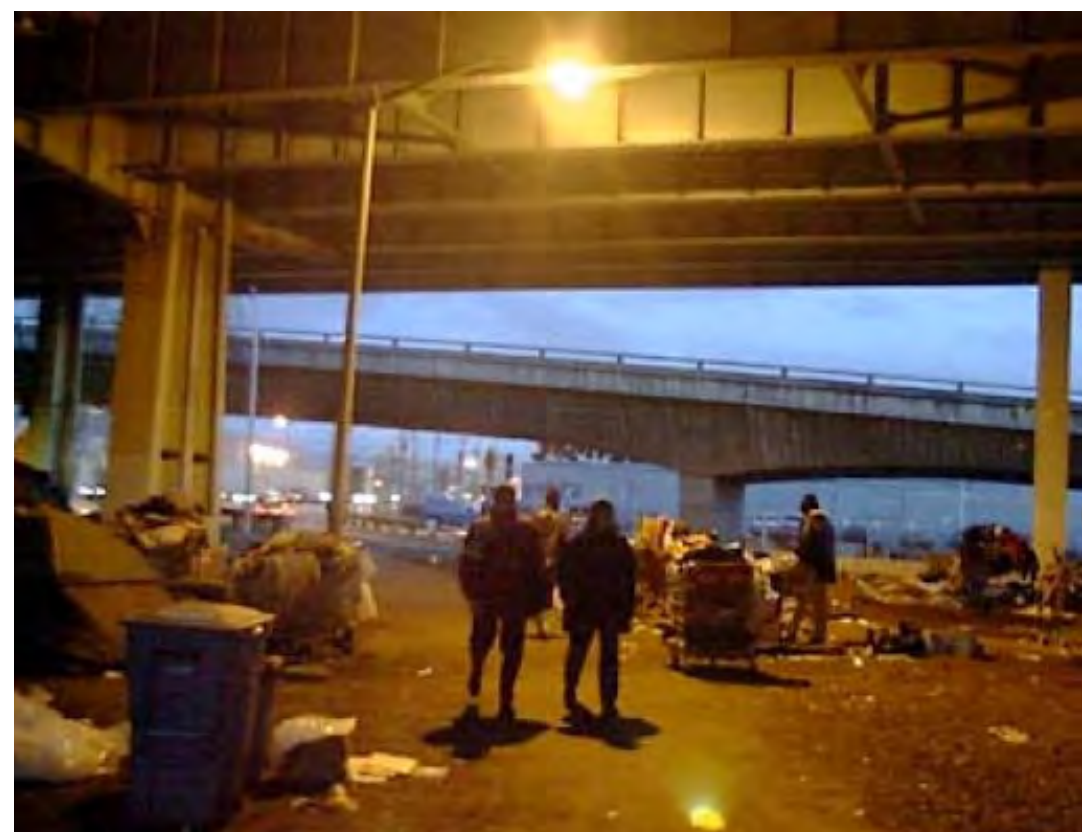
July 2013





Existing Conditions





Existing Conditions

bionic

THE LOOP



LANDSCAPE TODAY

STEEP SLOPES /  
LIMITED SOIL

bionic

ROCK  
OUTCROPS

THE LOOP



LANDSCAPE TODAY

AWKWARD

INVASIVES

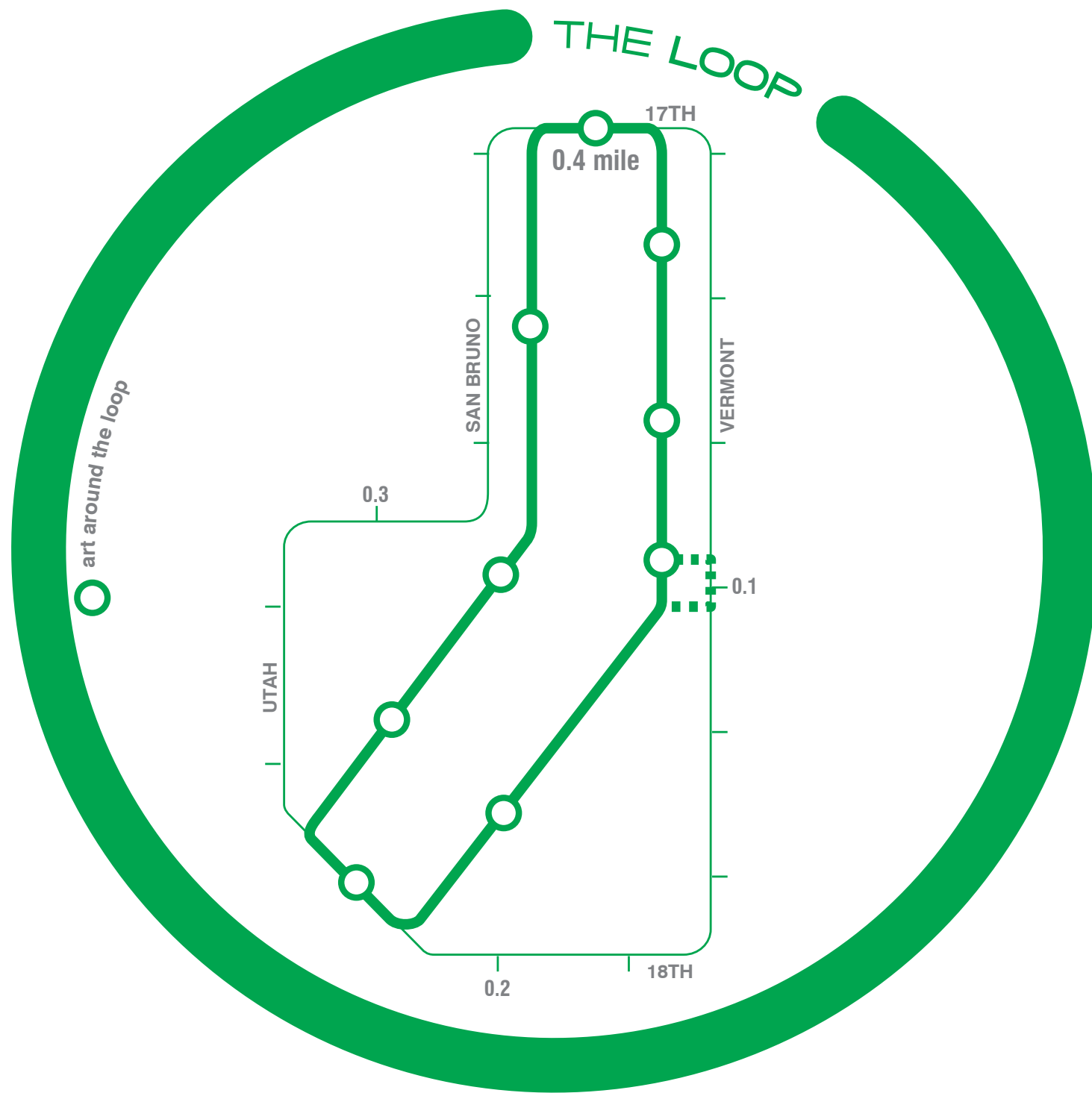
UGLY

DANGEROUS

bionic

THE LOOP





## Planning Context



An aerial photograph of San Francisco, showing the city's dense urban grid, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the surrounding water. Overlaid on the image are several blue lines and text labels indicating key transportation features. A blue line runs horizontally across the middle of the image, labeled '16th Street Bike Lane'. A blue line runs vertically through the center, labeled '17th Street'. A blue line runs diagonally from the bottom left towards the center, labeled 'Green Connector'. A yellow rectangular box highlights a specific area in the lower-left quadrant of the image. The background image is a high-resolution aerial view showing buildings, streets, and the Golden Gate Bridge.

## PLANNING CONTEXT

Located along a primary connector in the eastern portion of San Francisco, the Loop has the potential to not only be a gateway to the community, but also to serve the greater San Francisco population.

17th Street is an SF Bicycle Coalition **Bike Route** and an SF Planning Department **Green Connector** linking the Mission District **BART** station to the **Blue Greenway** and to the **southeastern Waterfront**.

As the first view to downtown for vehicles traveling north on HWY-101, The Loop will also play a critical role in defining the **entry into San Francisco**.

16th Street Bike Lane

17th Street

Green Connector

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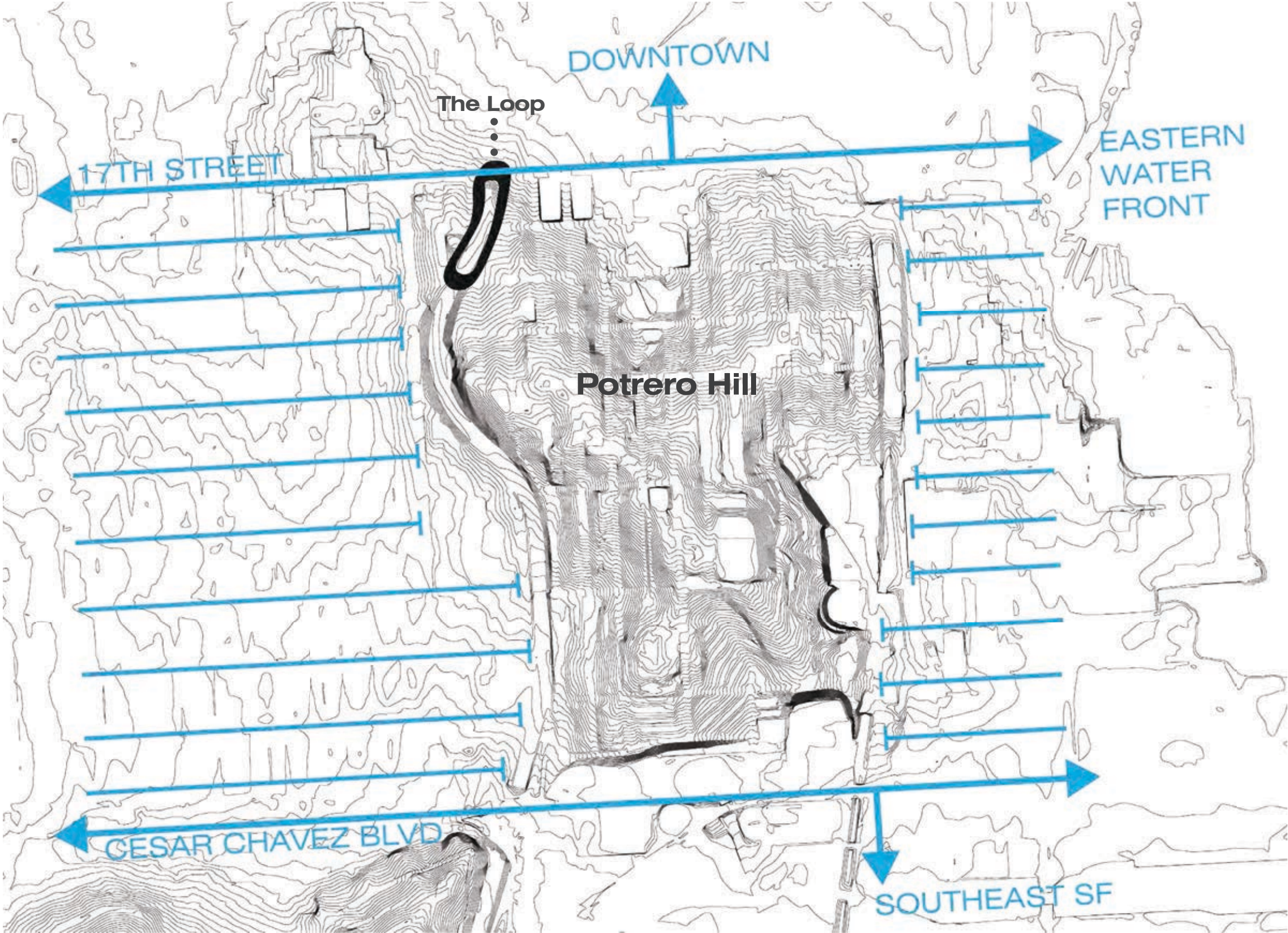
17th Street

Green Connector



# Topography & Primary Routes

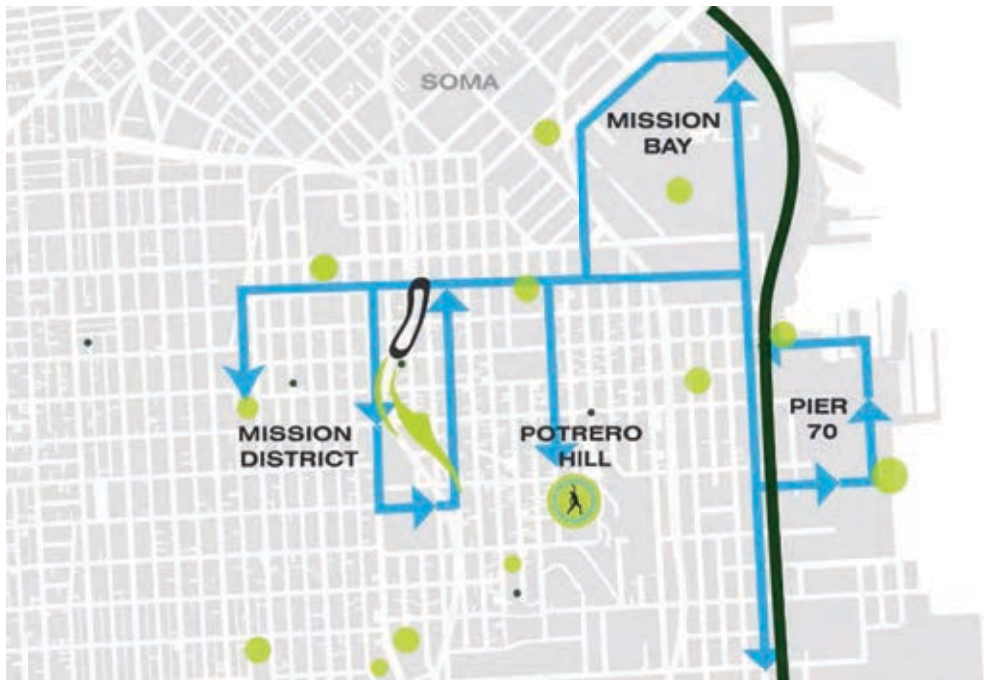
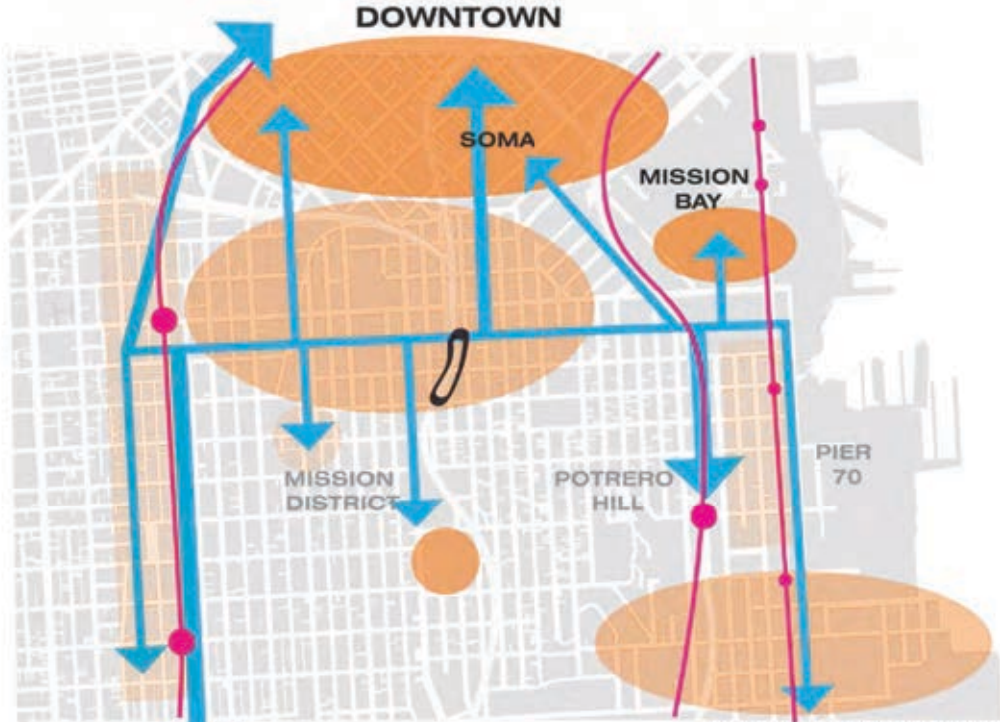
The topography of Potrero Hill defines two primary routes for access through these neighborhoods: 17th Street and Cesar Chavez. 17th Street serves as a critical connector through the eastern portion of San Francisco for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians.





# Daily Patterns

Daily activities in Potrero, Mission, Dogpatch, and SOMA define typical patterns throughout and around the Loop. These include daily trips to goods & services, employment centers, and open spaces. The Loop is a primary passage node at the center of these patterns where thousands of people pass through daily.



## GOODS & SERVICES

- Grocery
- School
- Restaurant

## Employment Centers

- T Third Street Light Rail
- BART/Caltrains Station
- Office, Commercial, Institution
- PDR District
- Neighborhood Commercial

## Open space

- Parks, Playgrounds, Recreation
- Community Gardens
- Blue Greenway



# Passage Node

Analysis of daily patterns in the Potrero, SOMA, and Mission neighborhoods suggest that 17th Street at The Loop is a critical passage node.

Research of SFTMA vehicle and bicycle counts found that in 2003, **16,625 cars** passed through the 17th / Vermont Street intersection daily.

Bicycle counts estimate roughly 200+ bicycles utilizing the 17th Street bike lane daily.

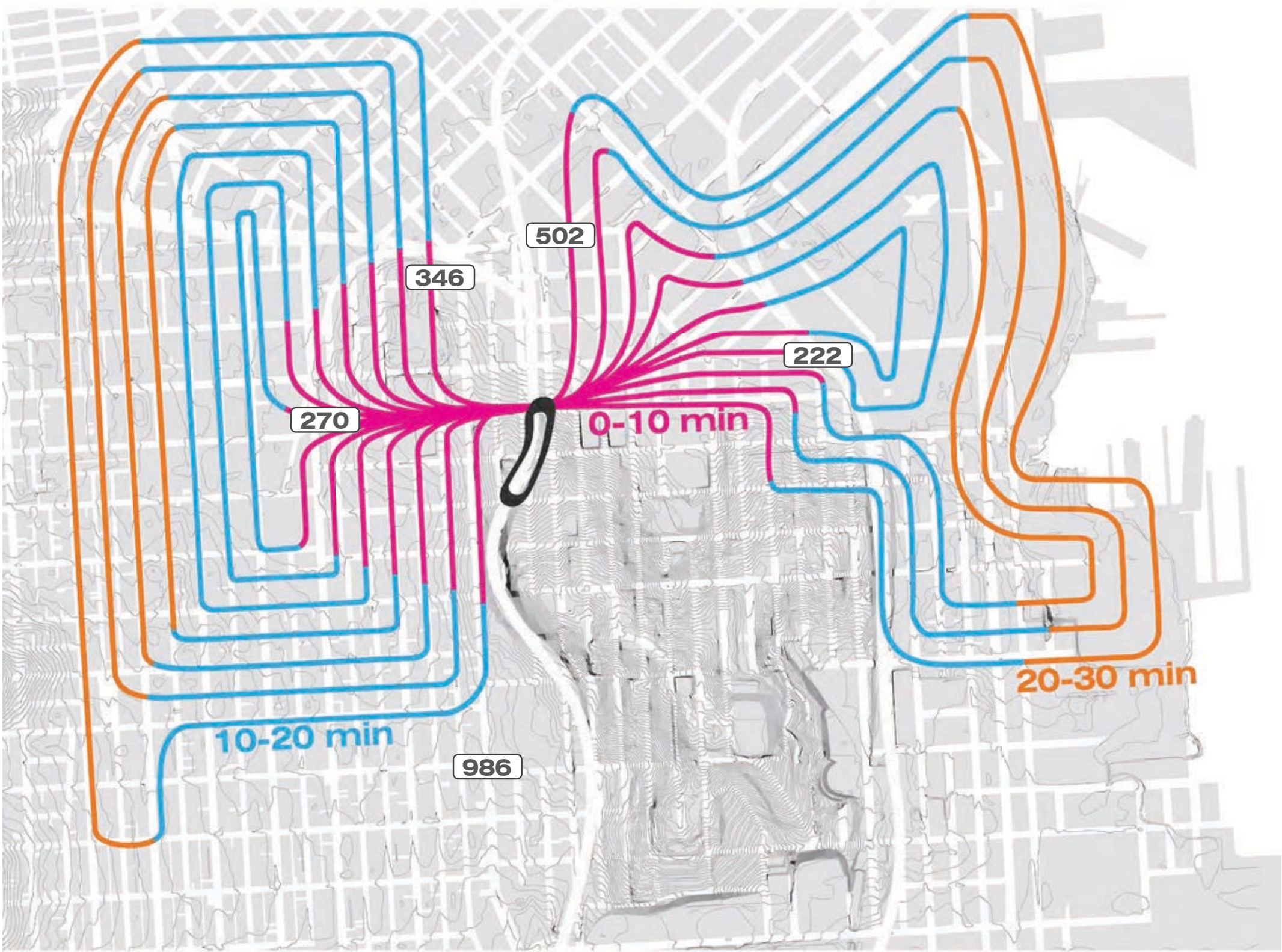
X

bike counts

x min

Bike & Walk Times

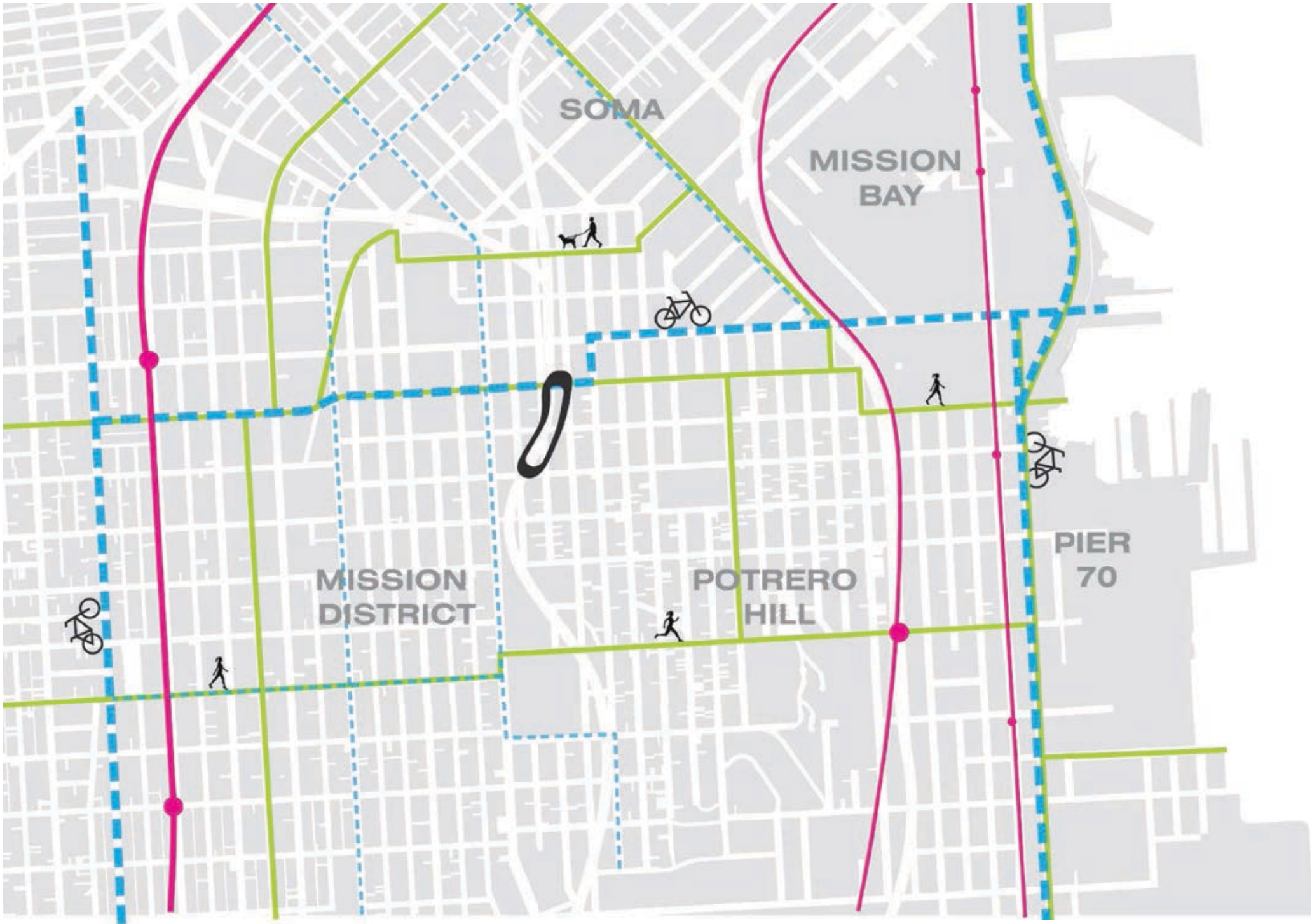
Source: SFMTA vehicle counts 1999-2003 and the 2011 Bicycle Count Report, SFMTA





# City-Proposed Connections

The Loop aligns with existing goals of connecting the City and would provide an extension to already proposed and existing connections through the Mission, Potrero, SOMA, and Mission Bay neighborhoods. 17th Street is an SF Bicycle Coalition Bike Route and an SF Planning Department Green Connector.



- T Third Street Light Rail
- BART/Caltrains Station
- Major bike route
- Minor bike route
- Green Connectors



# Green Benefits District

The Loop is located within the newly forming Potrero Hill/Dogpatch Green Benefits District. The three main goals of the GBD align with the concept vision to install and maintain the Loop as a signature open space for the Potrero and Mission neighborhoods. We see an opportunity for the Loop and the GBD to grow together.

## 1 - Create New Funding Source

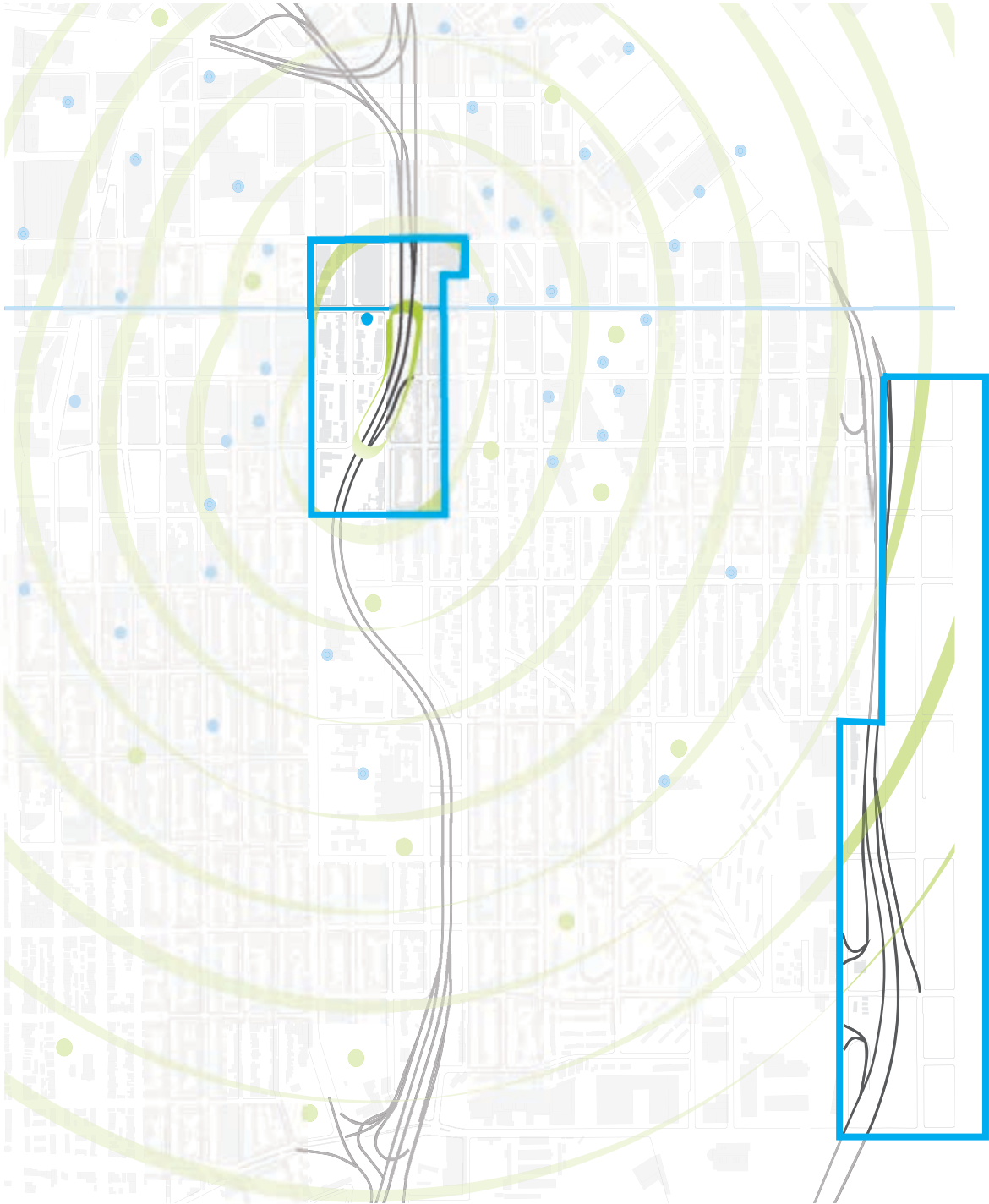
For improved maintenance of neighborhood parks, gardens and green spaces.

## 2 - Envision and Support Small Capital Improvements

To enhance existing green spaces and add new ones.

## 3 - Build Neighborhood Capacity to Create New Open Spaces

Hold the city accountable for their maintenance commitments, and advocate for better neighborhood parks and services.



— GBD boundary

Potrero Hill / Dopatch

**GBD**

STREET CLEANING . MAINTENANCE . PUBLIC SAFETY  
BEAUTIFICATION PROJECTS . DISTRICT ADVOCACY



# Serpentine Soils & Species



The Loop can contribute to the urban ecology of San Francisco. Located along the Serpentine soil swath through the city, The Loop has potential to provide unique and rare habitat for a range of species.

## Trees

- California Buckeye (*Aesculus californica*)
- California Foothill Pine (*Pinus sabiniana*)
- California Laurel (*Umbellularia californica*)
- California Redbud (*Cercis orbiculata*)
- Canyon Live Oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*)
- Coulter Pine (*Pinus coulteri*)
- Flannelbush (*Fremontodendron californicum*)
- Grey Pine (*Pinus sabiniana*)
- Leather Oak (*Quercus durata*)
- MacNab Cypress (*Cupressus macnabiana*)
- Oracle Oak (*Quercus x moreha Kellogg*)
- Sargent’s Cypress (*Cupressus sargentii*)

## Shrubs & Grasses

- California Buckthorn (*Rhamnus californica*)
- California Fuchsia (*Zauschneria epilobium*)
- Coyotemint (*Monardella villosa*)
- Deergrass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*)
- Eastern Mojave Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*)
- Hollyleaf Cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*)
- Hummingbird Trumpet (*Epilomium canum*)
- Leather Oak (*Quercus durata*)
- Naked Buckwheat (*Eriogonum nudum*)
- Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*)
- Serpentine Columbine (*Aquilegia eximia*)
- Styrax (*Styrax benzoin*)
- Toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*)
- Van Houtte’s Columbine (*Aquilegia eximia*)
- Woodbalm (*Lepechinia calycina*)

## Endangered & Threatened

- Bay Checkerspot (*Euphydryas Editha*)
- Coast Rock Cress (*Arabis blepharophylla*)
- Franciscan Thistle (*Cirsium andrewsii*)
- Marin Dwarf Flax (*Hesperolinon congestum*)
- Opler’s Longhorn Moth (*Adela operella*)
- Presidio Clarkia (*Clarkia franciscana*)
- Raven’s Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos hookeri ssp. ravenii*)
- San Francisco Owl’s Clover (*Triphysaria floribunda*)
- San francisco Gum Plant (*Grindelia hirsutula var. maritima*)

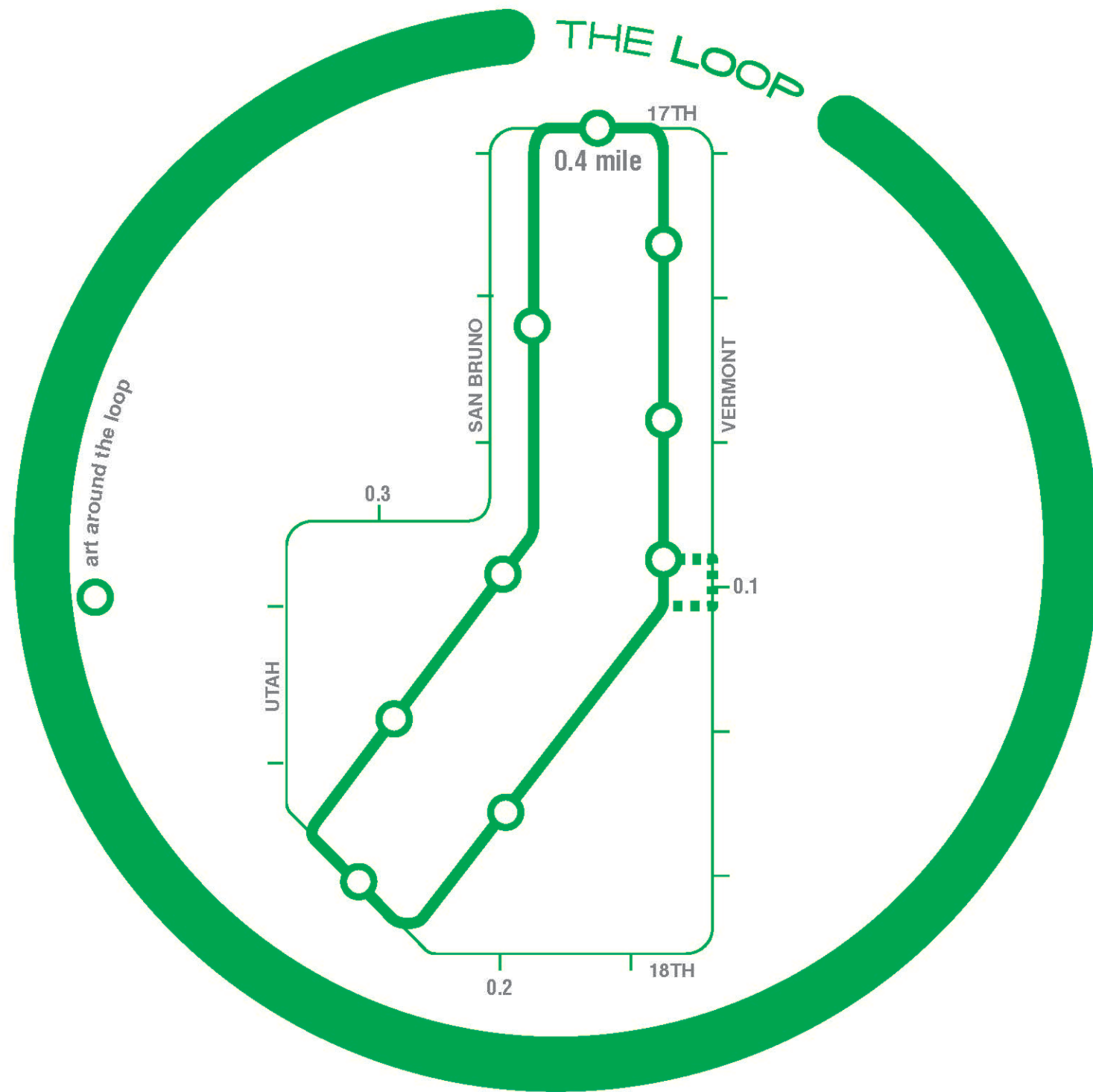
- special concern
- threatened
- endangered











## Site Context & Project Zones



# SITE CONTEXT & PROJECT ZONES

The 2 acre site is located at the base of Potrero Hill along the freeway embankment of HWY-101. The property is owned and maintained by Caltrans. Defined by the freeway structure and surrounding topography, the project area consists of varied slopes, safety concerns, and challenging site conditions.

Analysis of existing conditions and stakeholders suggested 6 individual project zones. Program for each zone was developed to align with community recommendations and site conditions. Alternatives were considered for each zone. (Included in the appendix.) Combined with existing community-led projects - The Benches and Fallen Bridge Park - the 6 zones create a continuous Loop of open space above, around, and below the freeway.





Ownership

- Caltrans
- DPW
- Commercial/Retail/Institutional
- Mixed-Use
- Residential/Private

- A - RPD & Caltrans: Fallen Bridge Park
- B - Joe Treinen & Caltrans: encroachment permit/private garden
- C - Caltrans & San Bruno Neighborhood Group: Benches Community Garden

Source:  
Caltrans Right-of-Way Record Maps  
and the Sanborn Maps





Project Zones

SAN BRUNO



MARIPOSA  
HILLSIDE



GREEN  
STREETS



17TH



BENEATH  
FREEWAY



VERMONT



VERMONT  
EXIT





# 17th Street / Beneath Freeway

## SOUTH SIDE

### Area Conditions & Concerns:

- Steep
- Dark
- Loud
- Smelly
- Bad paint job
- Encampments and unwanted activity
- Narrow sidewalk
- Freeway pillars & footings
- Litter

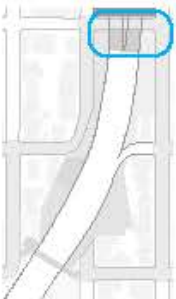
## NORTH SIDE

### Area Conditions & Concerns:

- Narrow
- Dark
- Loud
- Smelly
- Chain link fence
- Bad paint job
- Encampments and unwanted activity
- Narrow sidewalk
- Litter

### Combined Program:

- art
- light
- through access
- box out freeway at top of slope
- new retaining wall
- wider sidewalk
- street trees





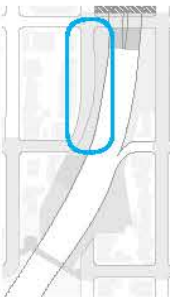
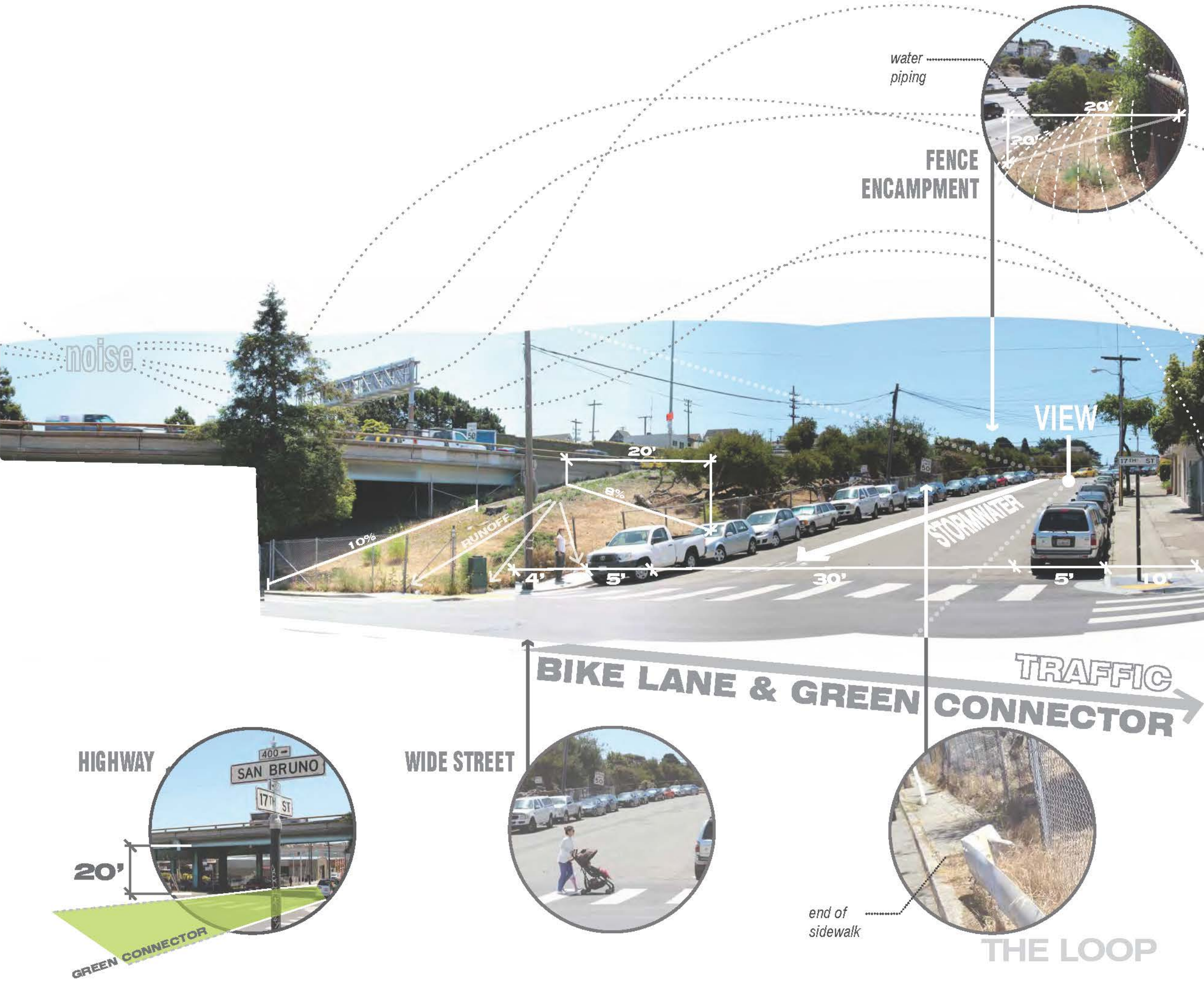
# San Bruno

## Area Conditions & Concerns:

- Steep
- Narrow
- Loud
- Adjacent to / level with freeway
- Entangled and dense vegetation
- Encampments and unwanted activity
- Narrow and incomplete sidewalk

## Program:

- wall between park / freeway
- paths
- extend sidewalk
- planting
- angled parking
- benches
- stop signs
- view
- narrow street
- street trees
- wider park

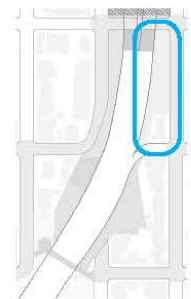




**Area Conditions & Concerns:**

- Program:**

- 

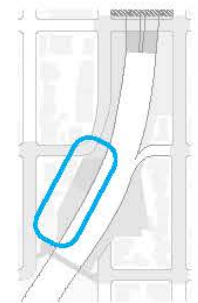




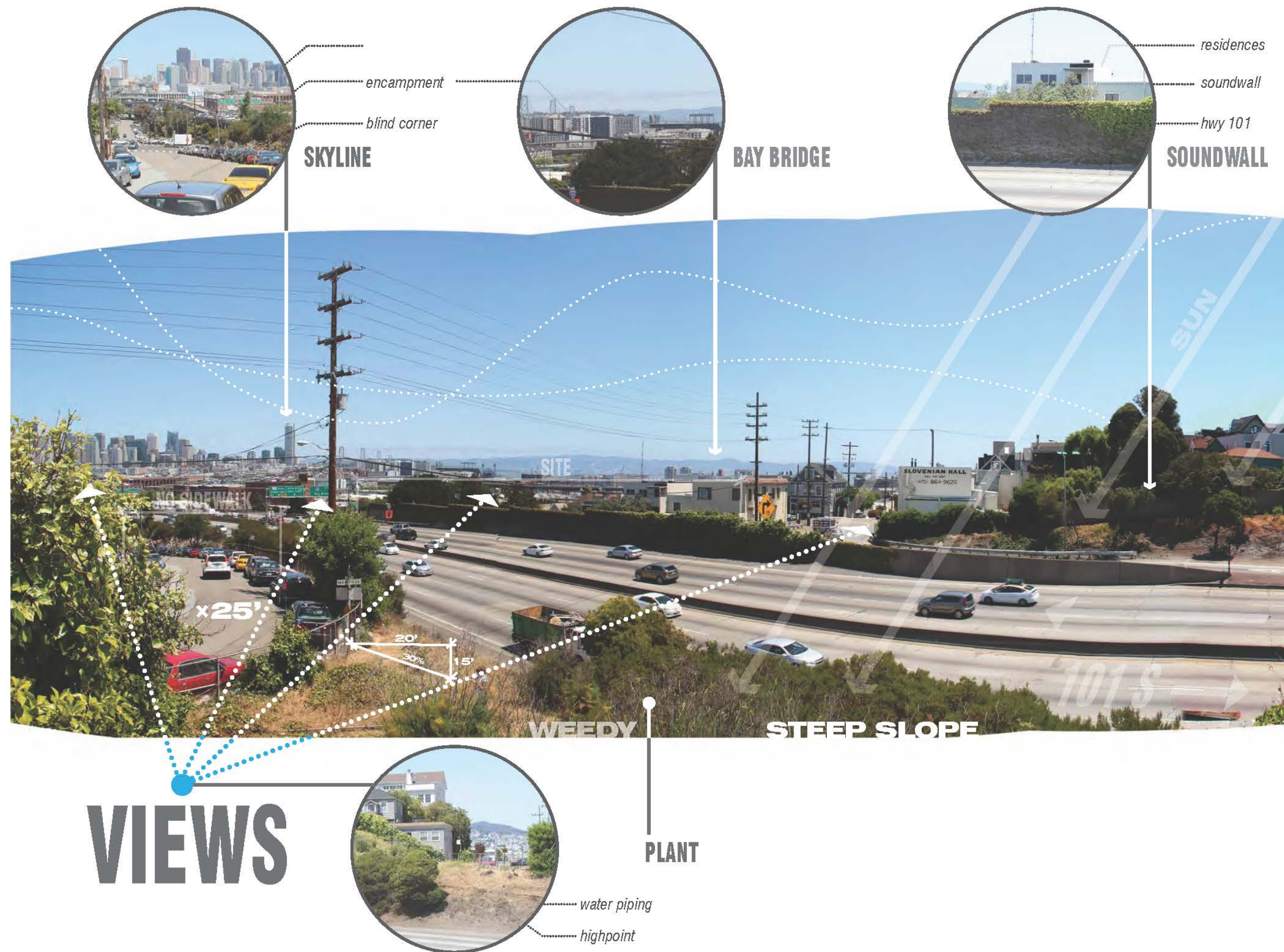
**Area Conditions & Concerns:**

- Program:**

- view
- screen freeway
- art
- safety
- through access



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## THE LOOP



# Vermont Exit

## OUTSIDE SOUNDWALL

**Area Conditions & Concerns:**

- Dirt pathway
- Exposed
- Narrow
- Steep
- Limited soil
- Fire hazard
- Neglected vegetation
- Limited soil
- New sprinklers
- Views

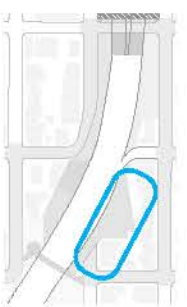
**Program:**

- through access
- low vegetation

## INSIDE SOUNDWALL

**Area Conditions & Concerns:**

- Hidden
- Quiet
- Existing garden
- Dense vegetation
- Inaccessible
- Existing door in sound wall
- Secret
- Existing mature foliage



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existing door in soundwall



secluded garden



VIEWS



overgrown

existing maintenance path & irrigation

steep

ugly

SECRET GARDEN



blocked entry



existing bench

THE LOOP



## Green Streets

### Area Conditions & Concerns:

- Wide right-of-way
- Limited street trees
- Narrow sidewalks
- Paved
- Limited planting
- Unattractive
- Traffic

### Program:

- Sidewalk Vegetation
- Street Trees
- Swale
- Porous Pavement
- Crosswalks

