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Understanding Suburban Equestrian Transportation Safety

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Issue

The Northeastern San Fernando Valley is a historic, passionate, and diverse suburban community in Los Angeles. It is also home to around three-quarters of the city's equestrian population. Equestrians in this area travel along a mixed network of transportation infrastructure, including official and unofficial trails, private and public land, and roadways in the public right-of-way. New land use developments, post-pandemic increases in traffic violence across the United States, and recent fatal equestrian collisions within the community have placed a larger focus on urban and suburban equestrian transportation safety. In 2019, a vehicle struck two horses on Foothill Boulevard in Lake View Terrace, killing the horses and seriously injuring their riders. This tragic event led to a surge of political and community support for equestrian safety, especially along high-traffic arterials. In response, Los Angeles and the Office of Councilwoman Monica Rodriguez, whose district encompasses many of these neighborhoods, are working to improve equestrian mobility throughout the region and other key recreational areas. However, while there have been recent advancements in transportation research for vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists, equestrian transportation safety, especially in suburban contexts, is relatively underresearched.

Study Approach

For this study, a GIS analysis was first conducted to map equestrian communities and their demographics within Council District 7, using brown bin service locations and designated horsekeeping zones as proxies for horse populations (Figure 1). To support this analysis, community members participated in mapping exercises to identify their travel routes and mark unsafe trails, crossings, or recreational areas. Finally, planners from other equestrian communities in the region were interviewed to analyze their equestrian planning efforts and compare relevant guidelines for equestrian trail planning.

Key Findings

From this research, three primary equestrian transportation safety challenges in the Northeastern San Fernando Valley emerged:

1. **Land Use and Trail Management:** Equestrians fear that new development will impede the existing equestrian transportation network. The network's informal status creates safety hazards, often due to a lack of maintenance.

2. **Conflicts with Other Recreational Modes:** The increasing popularity of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), dirt bikes, and e-bikes in equestrian areas spook horses and endanger riders. The Angeles Forest Foothills and Hansen Dam Recreational Area are the two primary recreational areas frequented by equestrians. Both spaces have a limited number of safe access points by horse and are becoming more popular for use by other recreational modes, hampering equestrian safety.

3. **Vehicular Conflicts:** Located in a suburban area, the community faces more conflict points with speeding cars in comparison to rural equestrian communities. The two

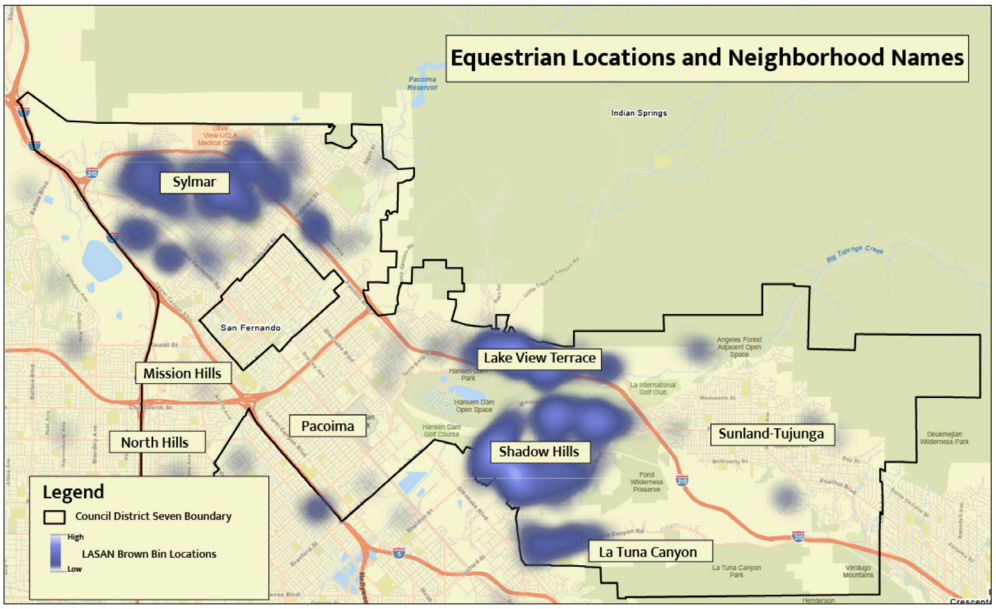

Figure 1. Map of Los Angeles Sanitation Brown Bin Services in Council District 7 (Map by Milena Johnson)

recreational areas are separated by Foothill Boulevard, a high-traffic arterial parallel to the 210 Freeway that separates equestrian destinations and lacks safe sidewalk trails and crossings. Vehicular speeding and blind curves also pose a major threat to safe crossings.

Conclusions

Study a Complete Equestrian Facility for Foothill Boulevard. Foothill Boulevard is both a popular facility for and a barrier to equestrian travel. While recent improvements, such as enhanced equestrian crossings, are appreciated by the equestrian community, the arterial lacks a complete equestrian facility — a dirt pathway physically separated from vehicular traffic and other modes of travel — and instead has fragmentary bridle paths with varying degrees of protection from vehicular traffic. There are also several constraints to installing a complete equestrian facility, including inconsistent right-of-way, illegal property encroachment, and bicycle facilities required by the city's Mobility Plan 2035. Given competing demands on Foothill Boulevard's right-of-way, the city should undertake a comprehensive corridor study to identify opportunities for continuous equestrian facilities, safety and improved connections between key recreational destinations.

Map Equestrian Facilities. There is currently no complete map of all equestrian facilities for the Northeastern San Fernando Valley. The city has published a plan for proposed equestrian trails, but it does not identify which segments are completed. The Foothill Trails District Neighborhood Council recently undertook an effort to map the equestrian network in their neighborhoods. While this map is valuable to Council District 7's future equestrian transportation planning efforts, it is limited only to a handful of neighborhoods. CD7 should develop a comprehensive inventory of existing equestrian infrastructure, including formal and informal trails, crossings and access points. A complete map would help planners identify safety gaps and prioritize future equestrian investments.

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