

2546 Rolling Hills Ct.
Alamo, CA 94507

February 7, 2023

VIA HAND DELIVERY

City of Watsonville
Watsonville City Council
275 Main Street
Suite 400 (4th Floor)
Watsonville, CA 95076

**Re: Dangerous Condition at Highway 129 and Locust Street Relating to
Ceiba College Preparatory Academy Student Drop-Off and Pick-up**

Dear Members of the Council,

Last month, I shared how Ceiba College Preparatory Academy (Ceiba) was placed in an industrial zone along State Highway 129. Today, I want to show a photo of the result of this decision. Here you can see Ceiba students being dropped off along the highway shoulder, while heavy truck traffic passes by.



What is troubling is that everyone knows this is dangerous.

Here's a timeline:

1. In April 2019, Ecology Action and Ceiba presented a Safe Routes to School update citing heavy traffic and unsafe crossings on Walker Street and Highway 129. Seven months later, two Ceiba students were injured in a crosswalk on Walker Street.
2. In March 2020, the City of Watsonville Complete Streets to School Plan (pages 36 and 37) highlighted hazards on Highway 129.
3. In September 2021, Principal Josh Ripp informed his board that Ceiba requested an address change partially because the highway was dangerous.
4. In March 2022, Ripp wrote to Assistant Director/ City Engineer Public Works and Utilities Department Maria Esther Rodriguez, citing concerns about placing a crosswalk along a state highway "where cars travel 55+ mph".
5. In August 2022, even Ceiba's real estate broker, Elizabeth Sanborn Falcon, instructed Ripp to tell parents not to drop off children on Riverside Drive.
6. The National Safe Routes to School Organization in Washington D.C. does not recommend dropping off students on this section of the state highway, where speeds average 45 mph. The organization maintains that "what's safest for pedestrians is to not mix with motor vehicles at all and when there is mixing, 20 mph speed limits."
7. Ecology Action, which compiled the Complete Streets to School report, does not recommend dropping off students on this section of the state highway.

Yet, Ripp maintains parents have "the prerogative" to drop off and pick up students on a state highway shoulder. That highway shoulder was never intended to accommodate a neighboring school's traffic and parking overflows caused by inadequate site capacity.

The Watsonville Planning Department refuses to verify that Ceiba's use of the highway for student loading is safe and appropriate, but it does encourage such use.

Although the Pajaro Valley School District (PVUSD) is the jurisdictional authorizer of Ceiba, the District refuses to acknowledge the danger of the situation.

Although the Santa Cruz County Board of Education has oversight authority of both Ceiba and the PVUSD, that Board chooses to remain uninvolved and does nothing.

Ceiba currently has a marginal Safe Routes to School plan. That plan does not even mention Highway 129, let alone designate the highway as a safe route or a pick-up or drop-off area. Nonetheless, Principal Ripp illegitimately claims the Ceiba Safe Routes to School Plan as justification for use of Highway 129. In addition, the Ceiba Safe Routes to School Plan instructs parents not to park on Locust Street and to use a circulation loop, which its own traffic consultant acknowledged was used less than adjacent roadways.

Scattering student traffic across an industrial zone and highway for the purpose of creating the illusion of zoning compliance is illegitimate urban planning. Even worse, such action is reckless and negligent since it places students in significant danger.

The City of Watsonville ranks dead last amongst cities for injuries and fatalities among pedestrians under the age of 15, and 4th worst for pedestrians overall. The preceding information I just provided to you gives a clue as to why that is.

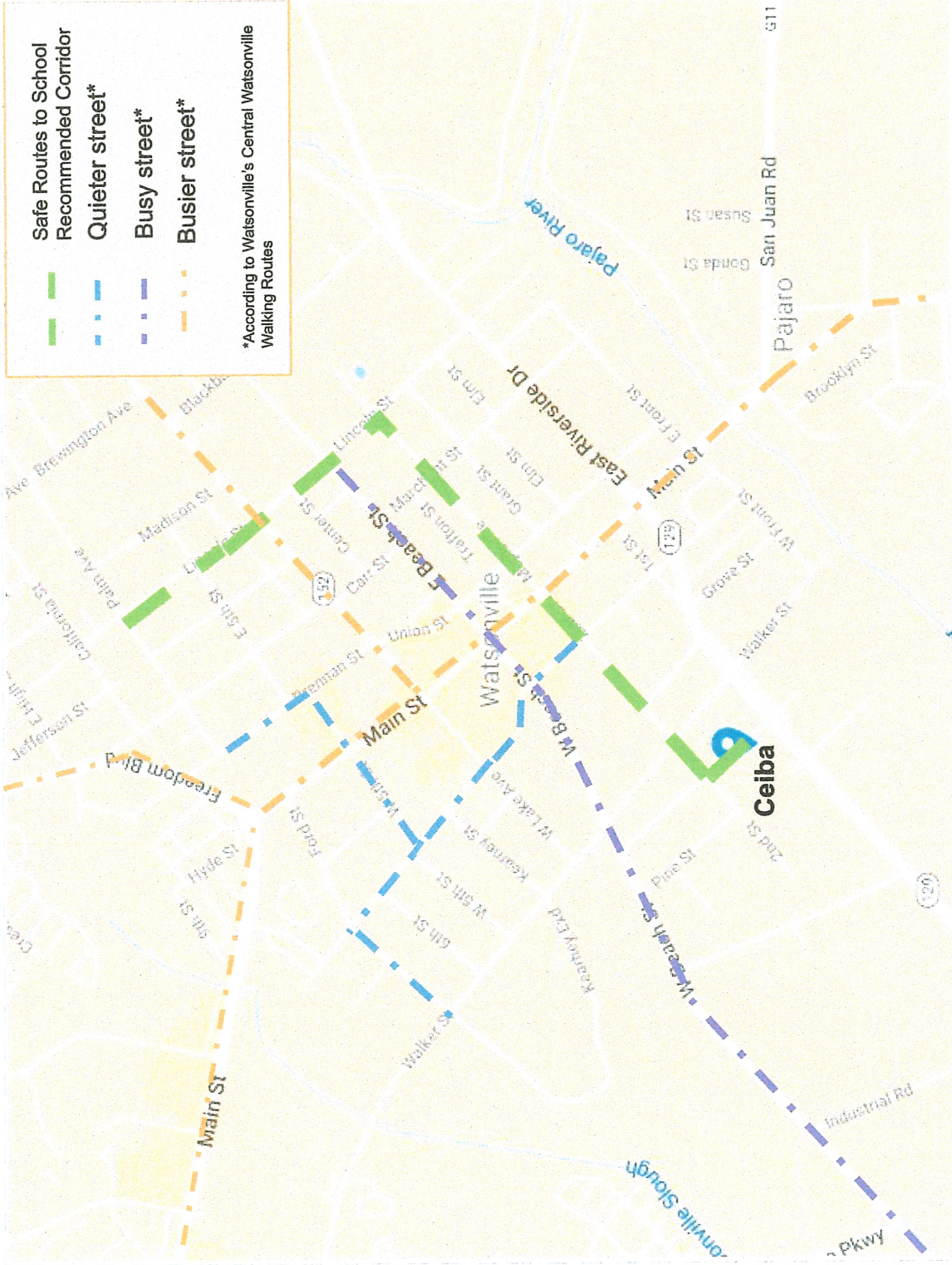
Sincerely,



Marta J Bulaich

Attachments

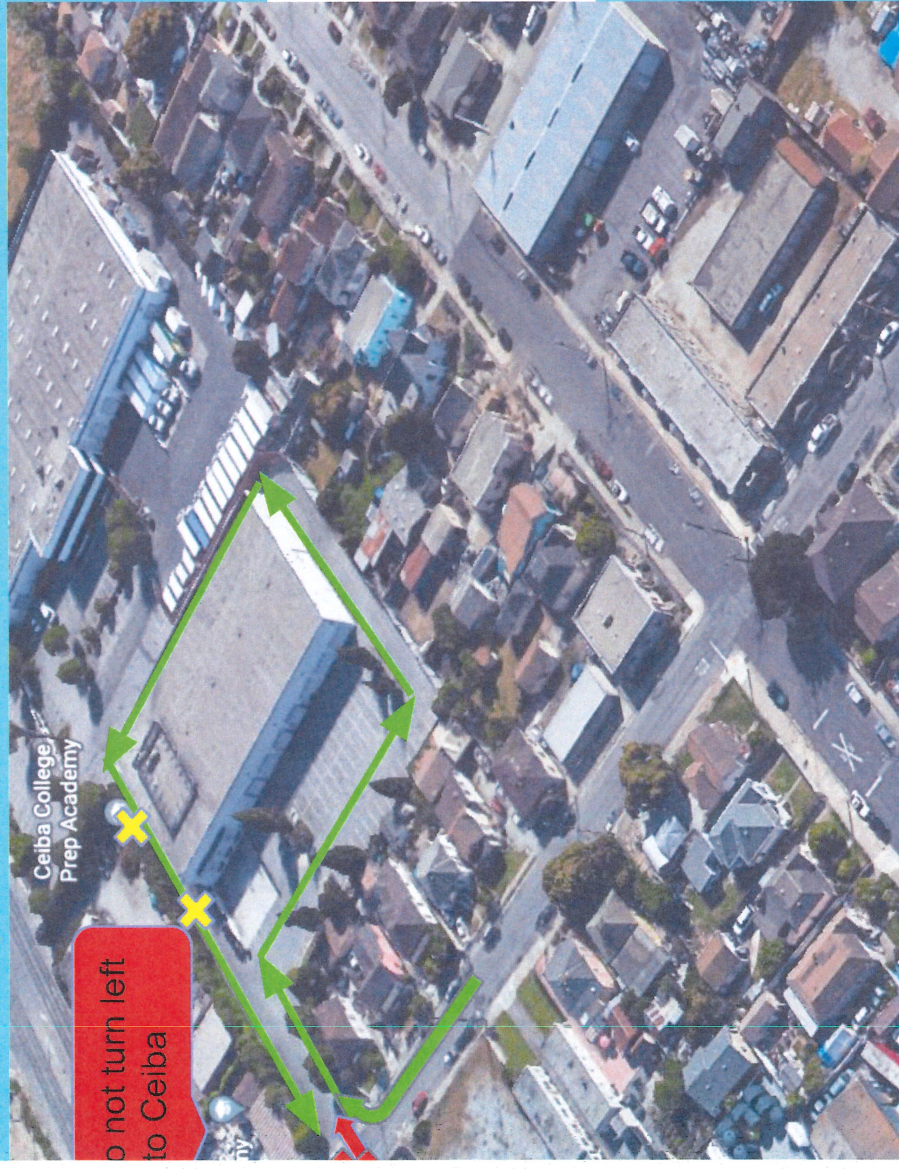
1. Ceiba Safe Routes to School Map
2. Ceiba Traffic Guidance/Drop-off and Pick-up Procedures
3. The Impact of Traffic Violence on the City of Watsonville



- Safe Routes to School Recommended Corridor
- Quieter street*
- Busy street*
- Busier street*

*According to Watsonville's Central Watsonville Walking Routes

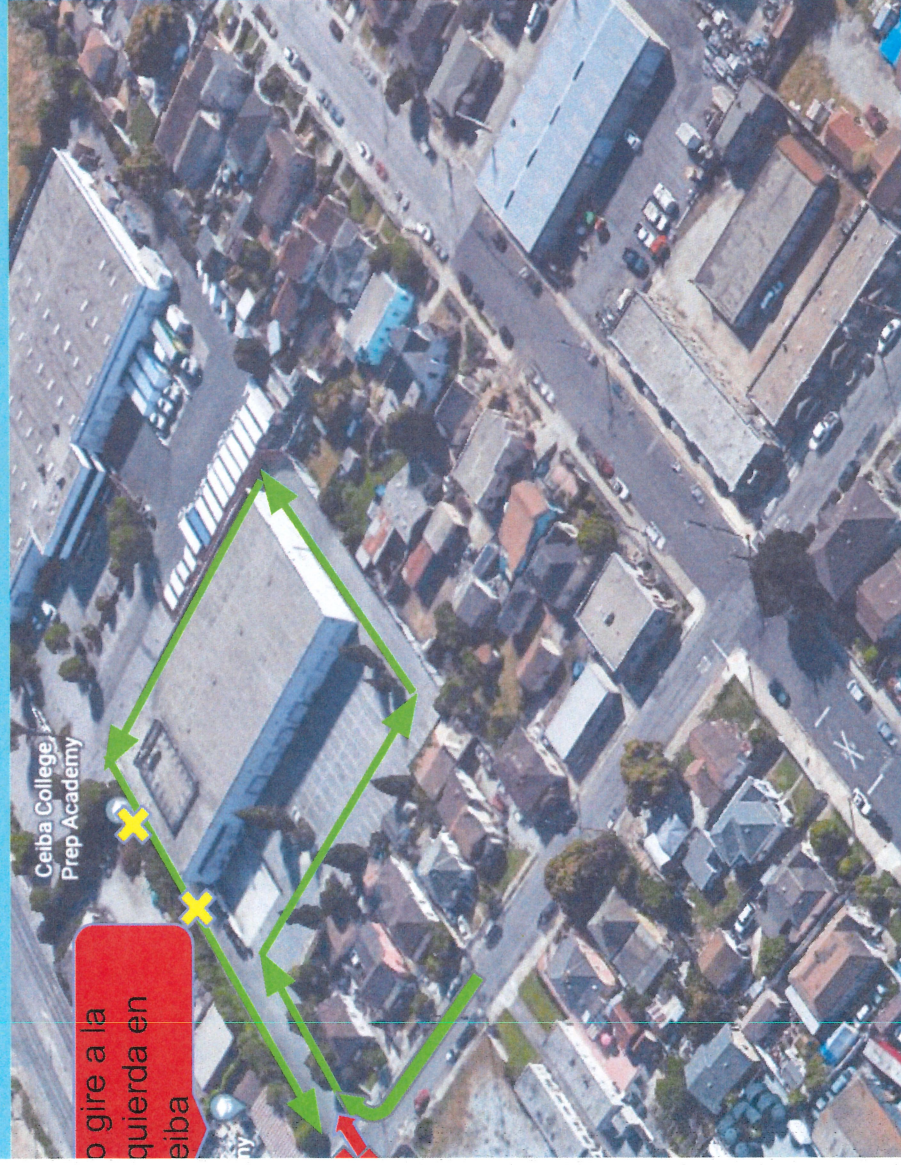
Ceiba Drop-off and Pick-up Procedures



Student Pick-Up and Drop-Off :

- **X** Please pick-up/drop off on the **SOUTH** side of the building
- Please **do not double park** (Do not park next to a parked car on Locust St or any other street)
- Please be respectful of our neighbors, let them exit their driveways and businesses as necessary
- Please do not drop your students off on Locust St
- **X** Do not turn left into Ceiba's driveway or on to Riverside

Procedimientos de entrega y recogida de alumnos de Ceiba



No gire a la izquierda en Ceiba

- Recogida y entrega de estudiantes:
- Por favor, recoja y deje a los estudiantes en el lado sur del edificio. **X**
 - Por favor, no aparcarse en doble fila (no aparcarse al lado de un coche aparcado en la calle Locust o cualquier otra calle)
 - Por favor, sea respetuoso con nuestros vecinos, déjelos salir de sus entradas y negocios cuando sea necesario
 - Por favor no deje a sus estudiantes en la calle Locust
 - No gire a la izquierda en la entrada de Ceiba o en Riverside **X**

The Impact of Traffic Violence on the City of Watsonville



Primary Collision Factors

Two factors are 3x more likely to cause crashes in the City of Watsonville than any other factor:

- **Unsafe speed** (26.4% of all crashes)
- **Right of way violations** (29.5% of all crashes)



What does it take to become a Vision Zero City?

The first step is for a city council or county board of supervisors to make a public commitment to preventing all roadway deaths and life altering injuries.

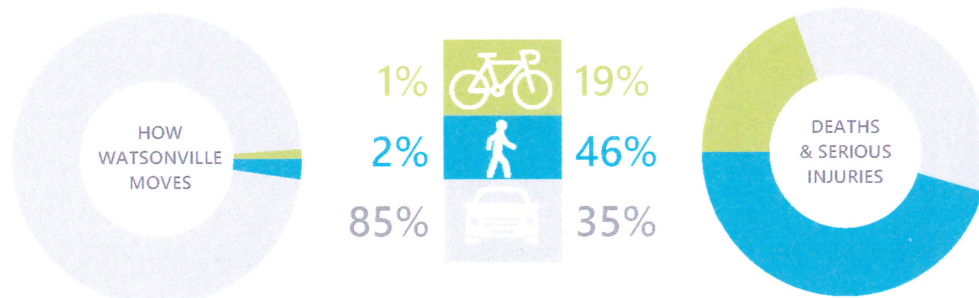
How Watsonville Compares

Watsonville ranks **1st WORST** for injuries and fatalities among pedestrians under the age of 15, and **4th worst** for pedestrians overall.*

*When compared to 105 California cities of similar size, 2014 OTS Rankings

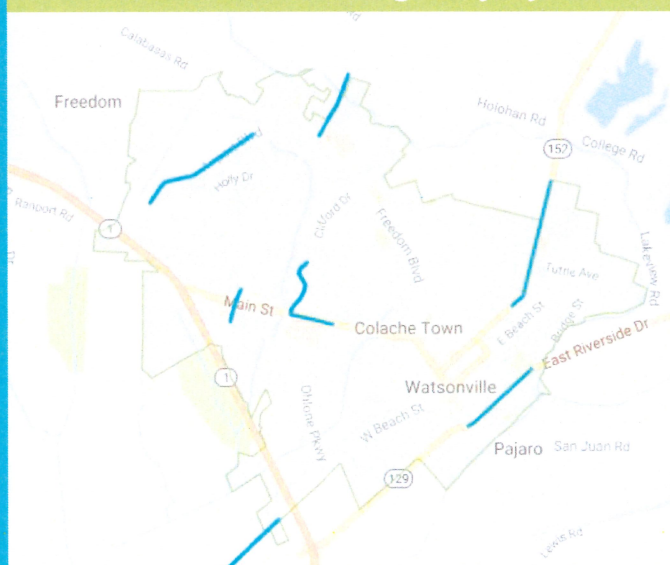


Watsonville Travel Mode vs. Traffic Deaths & Serious Injuries



Source: ACS 5-year estimates, Commute Mode age 16+; CHP SWITRS 2010-2014

High-Injury Corridors



All of these streets are in low-income neighborhoods.

30% of fatal & serious injury crashes occur on **2 miles** (2.2%) of city streets.

An additional **25%** of fatal & serious injury crashes occur on **1.9 miles** of the State highways within city limits.