

An Assessment of the Viva CalleSJ Event in San Jose

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Introduction

Viva CalleSJ, an open-streets initiative, transforms city streets into car-free zones. The September 8, 2024, event celebrated its ninth anniversary with over 125,000 participants engaging along a six-mile route. Organized to foster active transportation, support local businesses, and build community, the event demonstrated its potential to enhance urban life in San Jose.

Study Methods

The assessment of Viva CalleSJ 2024 employed a mixed-method approach, collecting data through surveys of participants, interviews with businesses, and observational analysis during the event. An intercept survey was distributed along the six-mile route to capture participants' demographics, reasons for attending, travel modes, physical activity, spending patterns, and perceptions of the event. The survey, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, yielded insights into participant demographics and engagement. Semi-structured interviews with business owners and city officials explored perspectives on the event's planning, economic effects, and areas for improvement. Field observations assessed participant behaviors, engagement levels, and the use of space. Together, these methods offered a comprehensive evaluation of the community and economic impacts of Viva CalleSJ 2024.

Findings

Key insights from Viva CalleSJ on September 8, 2024 include:

- **Diverse Attendance and Demographics:** The intercept survey of 596 participants reflected diverse attendance, spanning different

age groups, genders, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. However, some demographic gaps were noted, indicating a potential need for more inclusive outreach efforts.

- **Modes of Event Access and On-Site Mobility:** Attendees embraced the event's bike-friendly setting, with 50.2% arriving by bicycle, while 11% walked and 30.2% drove. On-site, participants primarily used biking (72%) and walking/running (20.8%).
- **Repeat Participation and Event Awareness:** Viva CalleSJ's popularity was evident, with 34.1% of survey respondents attending five or more times. The event has successfully retained participants since the pandemic, with 72.7% attending for the first time during that period.
- **Duration of Attendance and Activity Participation:** Most attendees spent two to three hours at the event, engaging in popular activities like visiting community resources (68.8%), dining (66.4%), and enjoying live entertainment (64.4%). Feedback highlighted a desire for more services, such as bike repairs, and diverse dietary options.
- **Economic Impact:** The event had a positive economic effect, with 77.7% of participants planning to spend money during the event, averaging \$54.23 each.
- **Community Impact:** Viva CalleSJ contributed significantly to community building, helping attendees discover local businesses (80.4%), fostering a sense of community connection (76%), and encouraging exploration of new areas (68.5%). While minor negative impacts,

such as litter (10.6%) and traffic congestion (10.4%), were noted, these were outweighed by the overall positive experiences.

Policy/Practice Recommendations

The evaluation highlights opportunities for future open streets events in San Jose:

- **Broaden Outreach Efforts:** Addressing demographic gaps through targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, particularly older adults and Asian communities. Partnering with community organizations and leveraging cultural media outlets can increase participation.
- **Enhance Access and Mobility Options:** Reducing car dependency can be achieved by offering incentives for alternative transportation modes, such as public transit discounts, free event-day transit, and shared micromobility promotions.
- **Expand Event Offerings:** Introducing new services based on participant feedback, including more on-site bike repairs, bike safety education, and food options to accommodate diverse dietary needs could further enrich event experience.
- **Address Minor Negative Impacts:** Implementing measures to mitigate minor issues, such as increasing waste management resources to address litter and enhancing crowd control for safety. Improving parking and traffic management strategies could also help minimize disruptions for local residents.
- **Expand Outreach to Local Businesses:** Inform businesses about the event and encourage involvement. Businesses with outdoor stalls or displays experienced increased foot traffic and sales, making participation beneficial for both the event and local commerce.
- **Leverage Economic Opportunities and Community Engagement:** Encouraging participants to further increase their support of local businesses along the route by offering a “passport” program that can be stamped at

participating businesses. Completed passports could be entered into raffles or used for discounts, incentivizing engagement with local shops and restaurants.

About the Authors

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2464



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