East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
LA River Improvements

Background & Introduction:

The Los Angeles River is the largest local body of water for the I-710 Freeway corridor, and is also a mostly cemented 51-mile flood channel. Efforts to revitalize the LA River began in the mid 1980s, when the interest in the river as a valuable natural asset for the Los Angeles basin began to grow.[i] Since then, revisions to the City of Los Angeles and County of Los Angeles River Master Plans have aimed at the preservation of flood control in combination with an overall restoration of the natural elements of the river. The current proposed I-710 Freeway Expansion Project Environmental Impact Review (EIR) process provides a timely opportunity for much-needed river improvement implementation as part of the I-710 Freeway project. We define river improvements as the restoration of the natural urban river functions with a focus on the improvement and addition of recreational trails, pocket parks and open space, restoration of wetlands and continuous fish migration corridors, and purposeful native landscaping. A focus on the preservation, enhancement and growth of a river-wide greenway belt that promotes open and recreational space, wildlife habitat preservation and wetland restoration, improved access to river bicycle and pedestrian pathway, and improves economic activity in communities along the river will promote healthier more vibrant and well-connected communities along the corridor via the river.

The Los Angeles County River Master Plan Goals are the following: the necessity for flood control; public safety; appearance improvement; promotion of river as economic asset to surrounding communities; preservation, enhancement and restoration of environmental resources in and along the river, storm water management alternatives consideration, public involvement, enhancements of recreational opportunities along the river; and securing safe access to land compatibility between the river and other activity centers.[ii] The proposed Community Alternative 7 (CA 7) River Improvements element compliments the desired goals from the LA County River Master Plan and can potentially provide the necessary funding to implement improvements.

This document provides overall recommendations to be analyzed along with the CA 7 as an alternative in the I-710 EIR process, as well as specific design recommendations to be emulated along the length of the LA River in the study area. Finally, there are a few specific case-studies highlighted in the end that provide a guideline for the implementation of improvement and restoration efforts

Overall Los Angeles River Improvements

The following are overall goals that should be implemented as part of the River Improvements Element of the CA 7:

- Overall enhancement of existing river connections to the cities along I-710 Freeway

- Increase of connections to river along I-710 Freeway cities, with a special focus on existing river-front open space and pocket parks and existing public mass transit systems.
- Integration of the existing transit system to the LA River bike/pedestrian pathway
- Connectivity and expansion of LA River greenways and associated parks to adjoining neighborhoods within study area of I-710 Freeway
- Recreation of natural and urban habitats that promote healthy lifestyles and the preservation of native landscaping and storm water treatment
- Enhancement of outdoor recreational opportunities along the river (i.e. river front park in Maywood, CA)
- Restoration of wetlands, wildlife habitats and native plants
- Promotion of adaptive reuse of existing available sites and infrastructure
- Enhancement urban forest along river adjacent neighborhoods

LA River Improvements need to incorporate the River Centric design-concepts for the length of the LA River that is within the I-710 FWY Study Area. The following are taken from the City of Long Beach Design Concept on the LA River Improvements[iii]

Neighborhood (City) Patch

-Movement to the river greenway is segmented going form one city to another, taking advantage of local shopping establishments & parks

Transit Loop

-Focused on the existing mass-transit network along the corridor, to take advantage of existing network as mechanism for river access and greenway connectivity

River-Centric

-River emphasized as major spine of movement. Pedestrian and bicycle travel converging along the river at certain access points

Eco-Basin

-Focused on the natural river valley as the area of opportunity. Movement happens from watershed ridgelines and follows the flow of water toward the LA River

RiverLink System is made up of Pathways, Connections & Destinations. The LA River Improvements need to implement the three components throughout the length of the river, in a similar fashion as is planned for Long Beach on their River Link Plan.

Pathways: streets and routes that direct people and vehicles throughout surrounding cities to the river greenway (shared theme can distinguish certain key streets as pathways to greenway)

-Use existing bus stops to optimize transit connections
-Enhance walking and bicycling access through safe and comfortable travel lanes
-Optimize urban forest along pathways

-Include amenity zones along pathways for rest (ex. P55-56)
-Major Arteries, Minor Arterials, Collector Streets, Parkways

Connections: intersections where at minimum, two transit networks meet (pedestrian, bicycle, public transit, and/or vehicular)

-Connections should be identified with imprints (depending on design element) at corresponding areas within the RiverLink system.
-Imprints to be placed at foot of transit stops/entries, and on connection street corners. (Banner example on p. 63)

Destinations: places of interest (activity) along the pathways (to and from the river greenway), such as riverfront parks and open space that can serve as beginning or end point of travel

-Entrance and regulatory signs (rules and regulations, points of entrance to river greenway) should be placed at all destination points
-Signage should be sculptural and artistic, derived from design element
-Existing destinations (in LBC): The Golden Shore Wetlands, Drake Greenbelt, Magnolia Yards, Wrigley Greenbelt, Wrigley Heights Park, Dominguez Gap Wetlands, the Deforest Wetlands and Deforest Park.

Overall Guidelines for existing & new Destinations:

Passive Recreation:(walking trails, un-programmed open space, public forum spaces for informal gatherings
Eco-Revelatory Design: educational opportunities and interpretive signage to demonstrate ecological systems acting on the site over time. (Opportunity to coordinate with local schools or community organizations for environmental learning)
Habitat Protection: Known threatened species habitat should be protected and enhanced

Design Elements for River Improvements

Color Selection

Use natural colors found within the foliage and structure of the native vegetation
Avoid reflective colors & use slightly darker color paint (sunlight provoked fading)
Use colors as accent in decorative elements (tiles, mosaics, window frames, gates, etc.)

Materials

solar-and-wind exposure resistant (longevity) and require minimal maintenance
with natural colors that require no painting or staining
steel, brushed aluminum or other durable alloy materials (minimum maintenance)
repel and disperse heat
decomposed granite (to match surrounding earth tones for pathways)
if possible, use locally produced materials

Plants and Landform

Consider enhancement of wildlife habitat and forage potential

Landscape with native and adapted plants to reduce resource and maintenance inputs
Grade landforms (greenway) to direct water runoff to landscaping

River Improvement Chart

Location	Environmental Enhancements	Aesthetic Improvements	Recreation Enhancement
E. Artesia Blvd [South of Artesia Blvd / East of I-710 FWY]	Plant trees on open land adjacent to LAR	Themed Signage	Pedestrian / cycling bridge component in reconstruction of Artesia Blvd bridge & overpass. Bike pathway to Drake Park LARIO trail link to Coolidge Park Playground/exercise station component
Alondra Blvd. [East of I-710 FWY]	Plant trees	Themed Signage	Pedestrian / cycling bridge component in reconstruction of Alondra Blvd. bridge & overpass Bike pathway to Compton Par Three Golf Course Bike Pathway on Alondra Blvd- link to Dominguez High School
I-91 FWY [North of I-91 FWY, East of I-710FWY, South of Sportsman Dr.]	Wetland Restoration Plant trees	Themed Signage re: Wetlands River mapping and sign system	Camp Suanga- educational/ recreational opportunity Construct Bicycle Crossing at Greenleaf Blvd.
Somerset Blvd. Ralph C. Dills Park	Native Plants Plant trees	Themed Signage Improved rail River mapping	Install playground Outdoor exercise station

		and sign system	Refurbish Public Facilities (Restrooms & Water Fountains)
Rosecrans Blvd.	Plant trees: west side	Themed Signage Improved rail	Pedestrian / cycling bridge component in reconstruction of Rosecrans Blvd. bridge & overpass Access to LARIO Trail from Compton Golf Course Bike path to River Dills Park
Hollydale Park [North of I-105FWY, East of I-710 FWY, in South Gate, CA]	Native Plants Plant trees: east	Themed Signage Improved rail	Install playground & outdoor exercise station Provide access to LARIO trail at Century Blvd. Connect Ham Park and Vista High School to LARIO Trail
Imperial Highway [North of Imperial HWY, East of I-710 FWY]	Wetland restoration Plant trees		Pedestrian / cycling bridge component in reconstruction of Imperial Highway overpass Establish a “rest zone” with benches, native plants & drinking water fountain Provide Trail Connection from east side of LAR to Rio Hondo Bicycle Trail

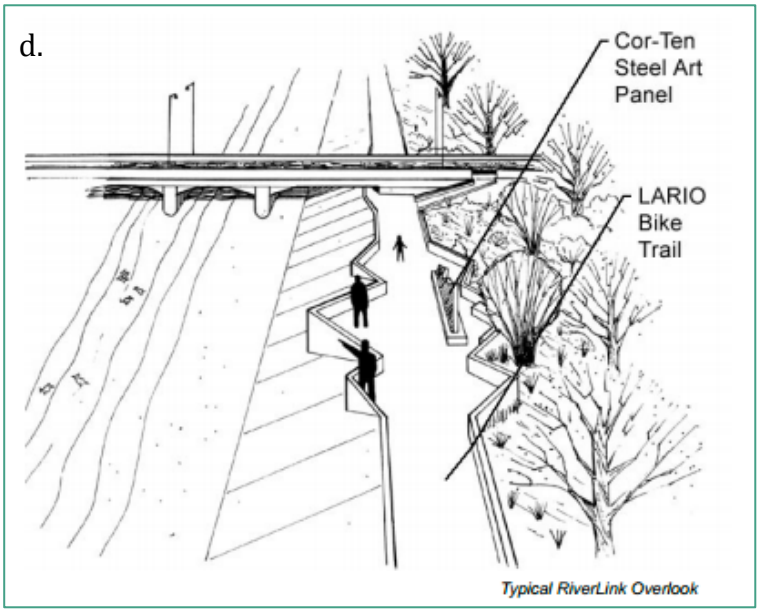
Firestone Blvd. [South of Fostoria Ave, East of Wilcox Ave, North of Railine, West of I-710 FWY] Wetland restoration	Plant trees	Refurbish existing bike pathway	Pedestrian / cycling bridge component in reconstruction of Firestone Blvd. overpass Establish a "rest zone" with benches, native plants, and drinking water fountain. Bike path to South Gate Park (via Firestone blvd) Connect to Rio Hondo Bike path
Clara St.	Plant trees	Improved railing Themed Signage Refurbish existing bike pathway	Pedestrian/ cycling bridge component in reconstruction of Clara St. overpass Connect Cudahy Park to LARIO trail Close River Road and replace with park space
Florence Blvd.	Plant trees	Improved railing Themed Signage Refurbish existing bike pathway	Pedestrian/ cycling bridge component in reconstruction of Florence Blvd. overpass Veterans Memorial Park, Marlow Park, Darwell Park, Clara Park, Lugo Park Community Center bikepath to LARIO

			trail Redesign currently empty Pritchard Field (on Florence Blvd) into park with bike path to LA River
Randolph St.	Plant trees	Refurbish existing bike pathway	Connect to Maywood Riverfront park and Maywood Park Connect to LARIO trail to Downtown via Randolph and Maywood Street
Atlantic Blvd.	Plant trees Tile Patterns on the Pedestrian Bridge Graffiti Abatement Program	Refurbish existing bike pathway	Establish a "rest zone" with benches, native plants, signage Empty lot available west of I-710 Establish a Sleepy Lagoon historical monument site, with bike path to exact location

NOTE: The previous recommendations were made for the area that lies within Atlantic Blvd and East Artesia Blvd. The recommendations set by the City of Long Beach for the area resting between the Long Beach port and East Artesia Blvd. on the City of Long Beach Riverlink Plan, 2013 are supported by our organization and have been included as part of our recommendations in the Public Comment period in September 2012.

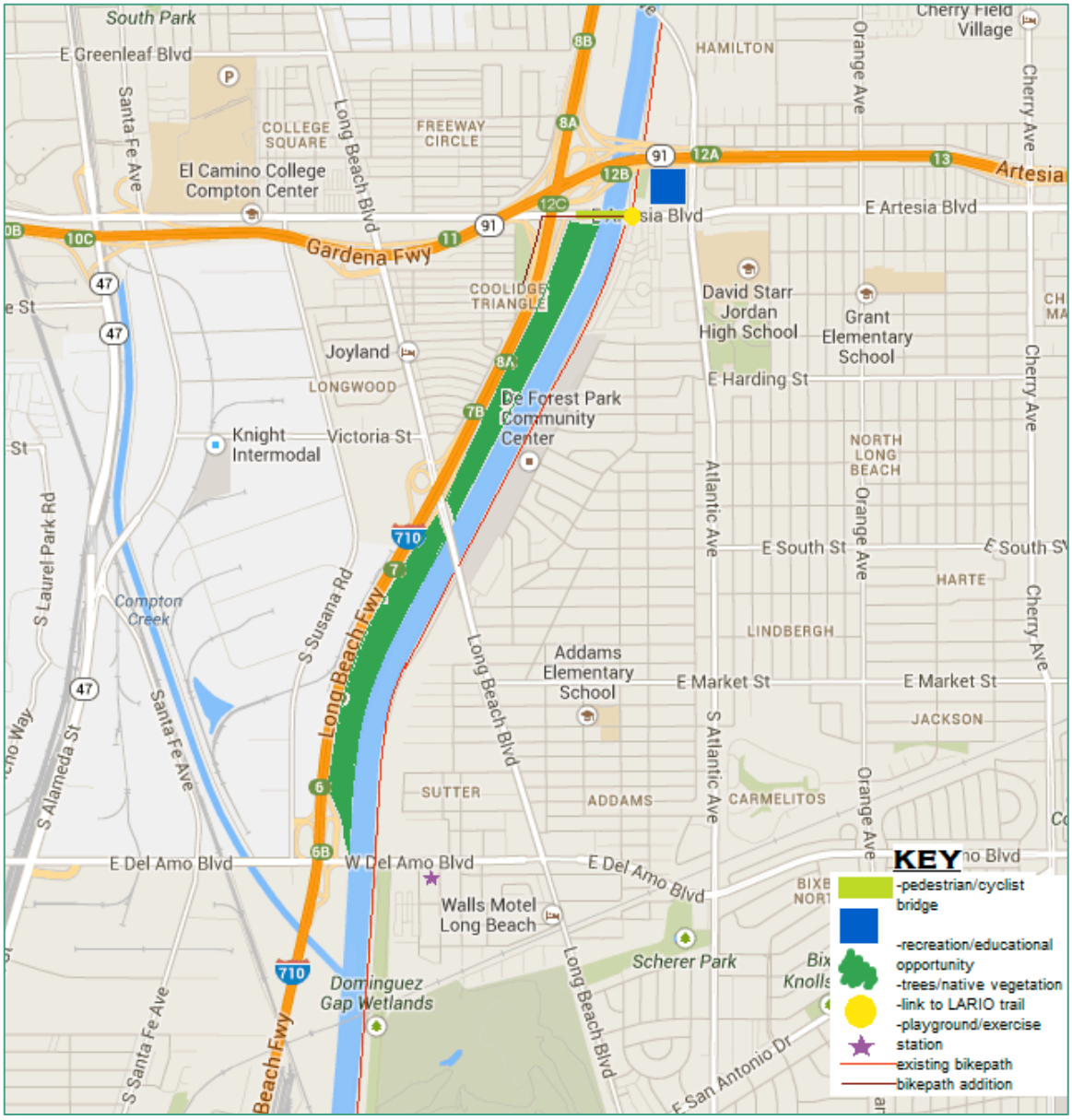
Design Examples:

Image a,b & c were taken from the Pacoima Wash Vision Plan, 2010.
Image c was taken from the City of Long Beach Riverlink Plan Vision

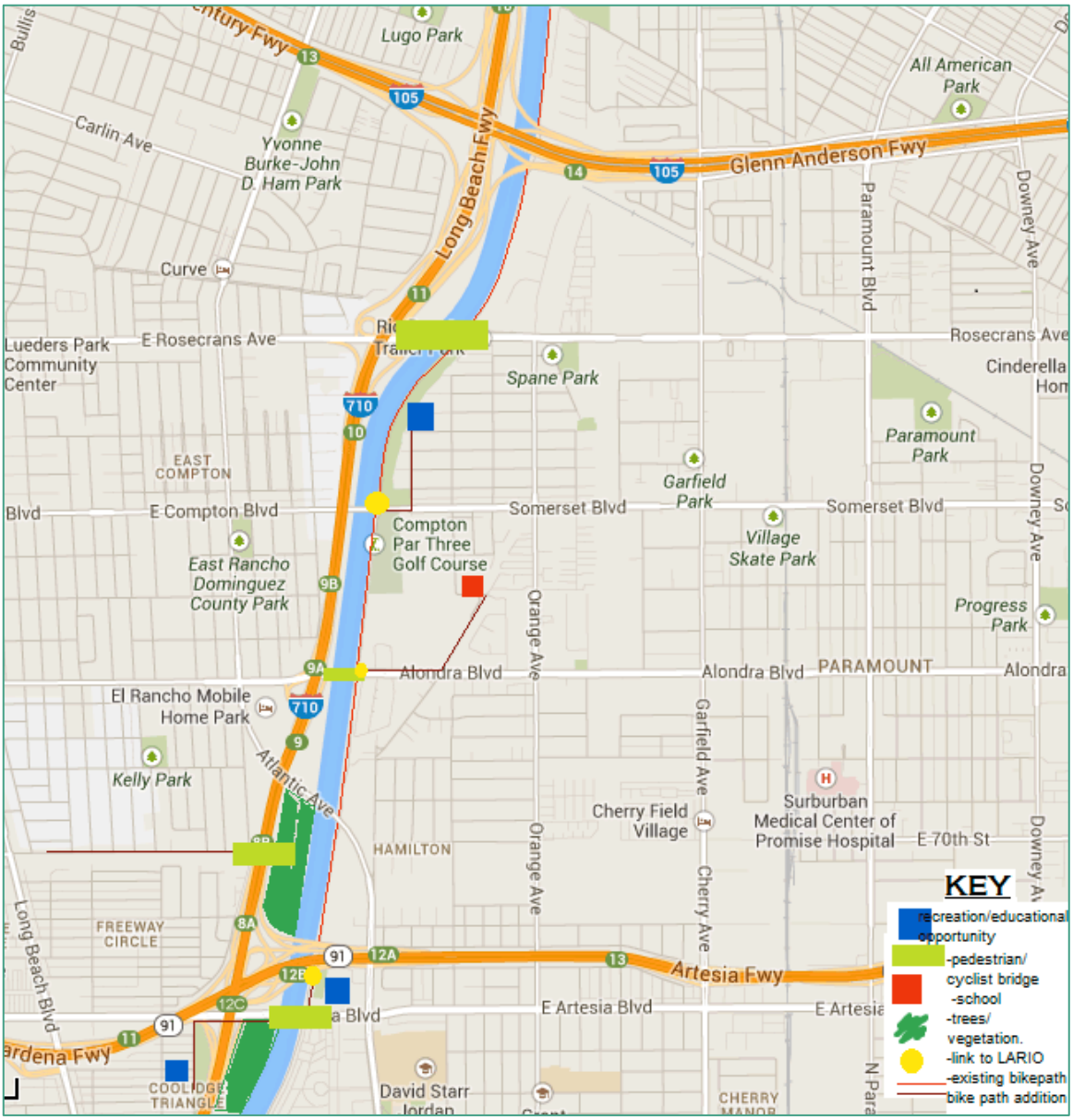


Clockwise: Example of themed pathways, connections and destinations to be implemented along the LA River. Example of how to update existing bush and plants, add benches, refurbish pathway and plant trees along the LA River pathway. Example of how to implement art panels and appropriate signage along the LA River pathway for an enhanced walkway experience.

Mapped Improvements

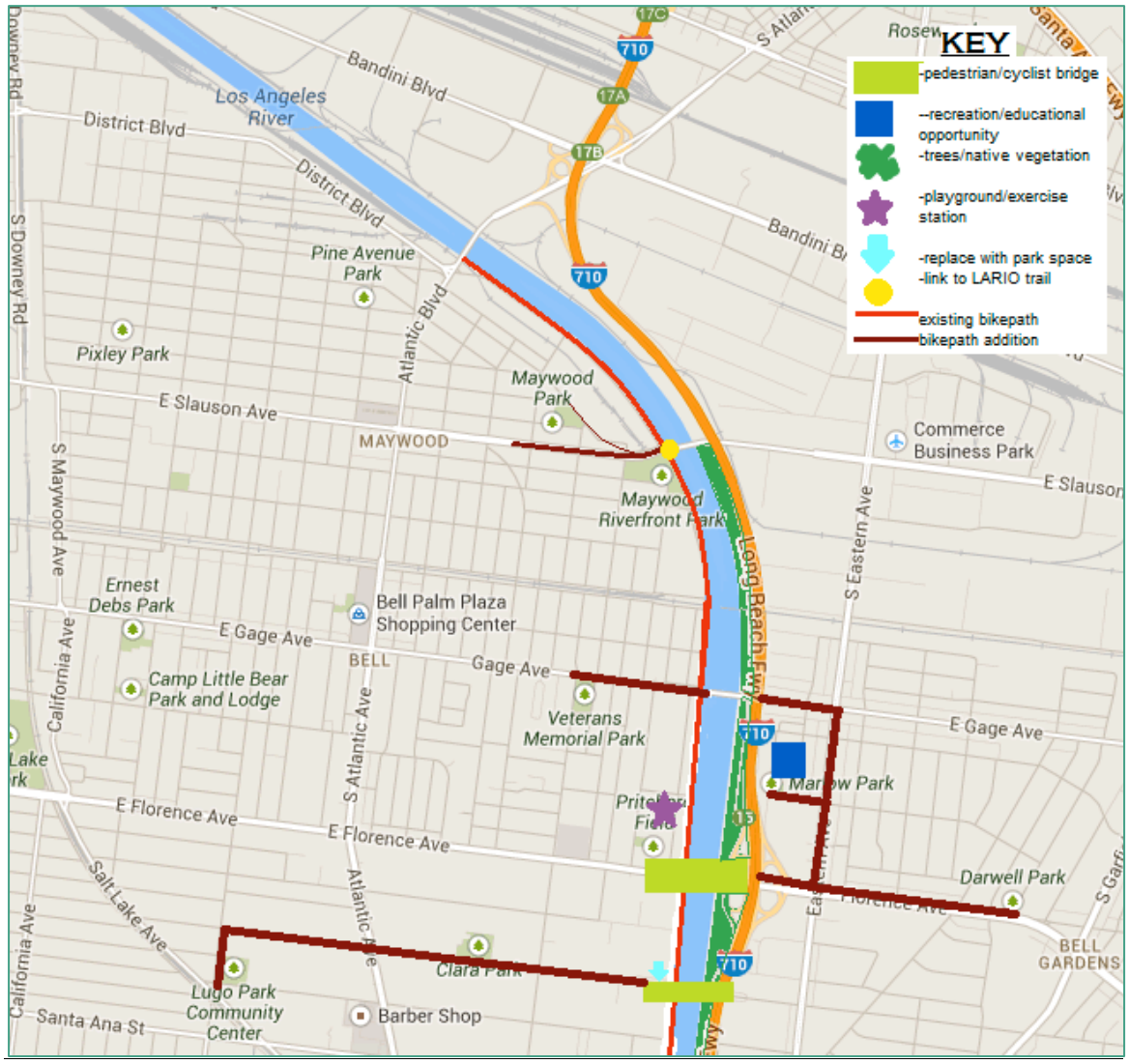


Map 1 demonstrates the recommendations from the areas north of Del Almo Blvd and south of Artesia Blvd.

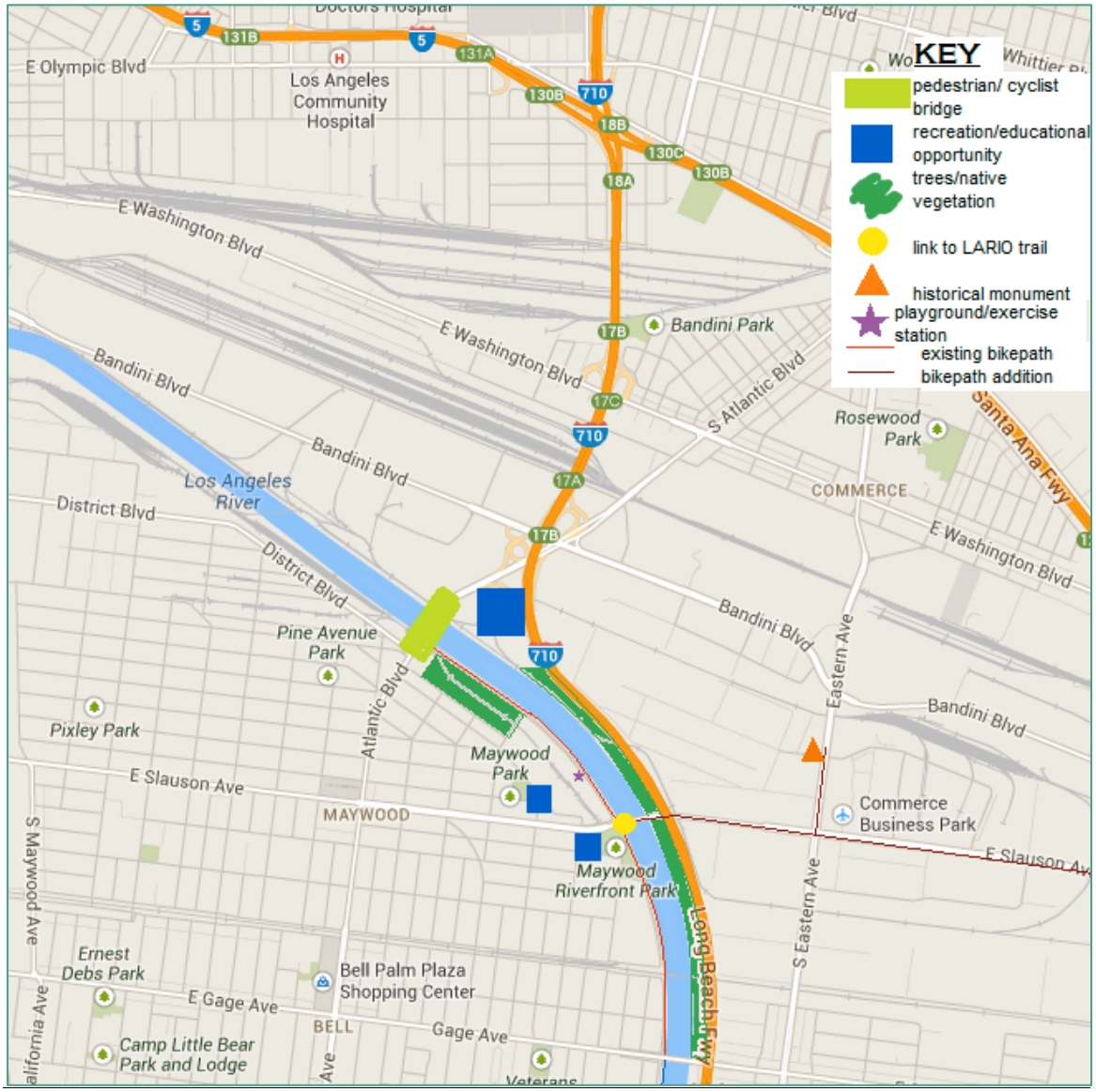


Map 2 demonstrates the improvements north of E. Artesia Blvd and south of Rosecrans Ave.

Map 3 demonstrates the improvements for areas north of the Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and South of Firestone Blvd.



Map 4 indicates improvements for the area north of Firestone Blvd and south of Slauson Ave.



Map 5 demonstrates the improvements for areas north of Slauson Ave. and south of Atlantic Blvd.

Conclusion

LA River greenway implementation will enhance physical activity and recreational access to I-710 corridor communities, where a large percentage of the population has heart disease, diabetes and other cardiovascular diseases.[iv] The current concentration of goods movement industry between the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and the intermodal rail yard facilities in Commerce, and the heavy-duty diesel truck traffic on the I-710 Freeway make the communities within the project's study area vulnerable to an expected truck and general vehicle traffic growth. The river improvements recommended here will allow for much-needed mitigation in the context of the expected negative health impacts resulting from the proposed I-710 Freeway project.

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[i] Executive Summary, A County Master River Plan, LA County Department of Public Works (June 1996)
Link: http://ladpw.org/wmd/watershed/LA/Larmp/LARMP-02%20I.%20Executive%20Summary.pdf

[ii] Mission Statement, A County Master River Plan, LA County Department of Public Works (June 1996)
Link: http://ladpw.org/wmd/watershed/LA/Larmp/LARMP-02%20I.%20Executive%20Summary.pdf

[iii] Design Concept, Long Beach River Link Plan
Link: http://www.longbeach.gov/park/about/development_projects/riverlink_plan.asp