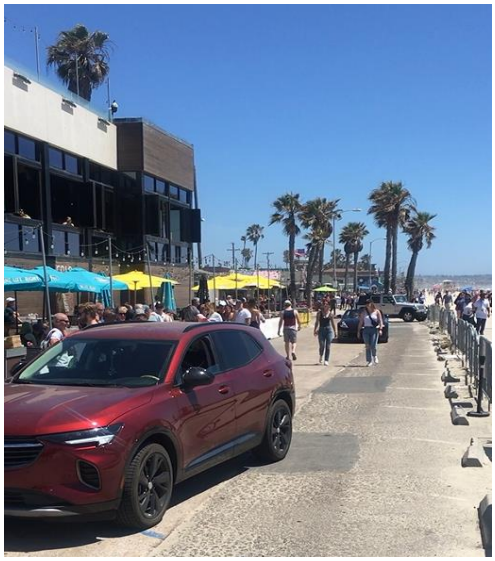
The Case for Pedestrianizing Ocean Boulevard

Grand Avenue to Thomas Avenue
Pacific Beach, San Diego



Evidence-Based Analysis from PB Counts Report 2025

Prepared by beautifulPB Board of Directors

February 2026

Executive Summary

The 2025 PB Counts project provides an in-depth look at traffic patterns, behavior, and safety in Pacific Beach through manual traffic counts, speed surveys, and new automated traffic sensors.

Travel Patterns

Manual traffic counts were conducted at nine locations in August 2025 by community volunteers. Five of these locations have been counted consistently for 11 years, which allows us to monitor travel trends in Pacific Beach over time. Travel patterns have remained consistent with the past decade, with vehicles comprising about two-thirds (64%) of all traffic, walking accounting for one-third (30%), and cycling representing 5% of total travel. Travel behavior varies by location, with fewer cars and more active travel (walking and biking) closer to the beach. Despite the presence of bike lanes, sidewalk riding remains common, suggesting that traffic stress and perceived safety have a strong influence on route choice.

Automated Traffic Sensors

In 2025, beautifulPB received funding from the County of San Diego to install three VivaCity automated traffic sensors at Pacific Beach Drive, Ocean Boulevard, and Ingraham Avenue. These provide real-time, continuous data collection, speed data, and near miss data for pedestrians and cyclists. Travel patterns are distinct for each location and this case specifically:

- **Ocean Boulevard**: This location includes both the Ocean Boulevard roadway between Grand and Thomas, and adjacent boardwalk. Both the boardwalk and roadway have very high pedestrian and cycling activity, markedly higher than other locations counted in Pacific Beach. The data shows that particularly when the boardwalk becomes crowded on weekends or holidays, people spill over onto the roadway.

Near-Miss Events

Traffic sensors provide information about “near misses” for the roadway at Ocean Boulevard between Grand and Thomas. A near miss is any vehicle that comes within one meter of a vulnerable road user (pedestrian or cyclist). The data for Ocean Boulevard shows that near misses are more common on weekends and are concentrated in the middle of the block. Most near misses occur during the afternoon and early evening, likely because these are times with higher vehicle and bicycle traffic.

Ocean Boulevard between Grand Avenue and Thomas Avenue is one of the most heavily trafficked pedestrian corridors in Pacific Beach. Data collected through the 2025 PB Counts project reveals a compelling case ***for Closing Ocean Boulevard to Vehicle traffic during peak hours on Weekends and Holidays.***

73.7% of All Traffic on the Ocean Boulevard roadway consists of Pedestrians and Cyclists—Not Cars.

This report presents quantitative evidence demonstrating that Ocean Boulevard already functions primarily as a pedestrian plaza space, that vehicle traffic is minimal, and that ***Community Safety Concerns Warrant Immediate Action.***

Key Findings

1. Modal Distribution: People Over Cars

Traffic sensor data from September 2025 reveals the true nature of Ocean Boulevard: *It is a pedestrian corridor with potential, incidental vehicle access, not a road with pedestrian activity.*

Mode	Roadway	Boardwalk
Pedestrians	50.8%	87.8%
Cyclists	22.9%	11.9%
Active Travel Total	73.7%	99.7%
Motorized Vehicles	26.3%	0.3%

Source: VivaCity traffic sensor data, September 5-9 and September 25 - October 2, 2025

2. Overwhelming Pedestrian Volume

The adjacent boardwalk and Ocean Boulevard roadway combined handle extraordinary pedestrian volumes, particularly on weekends:

Metric	Value
Peak daily pedestrians (boardwalk)	11,102 (Sept 6, 2025)
Peak daily pedestrians (roadway)	5,747 (Sept 6, 2025)
Combined weekend peak	16,000+ pedestrians/day
Total active travel counts (28 days, roadway)	31,530
Total active travel counts (28 days, boardwalk)	95,435

3. Weekend and Holiday Spillover Effect

Critical analysis of summer 2025 data reveals a dangerous pattern: when the boardwalk reaches capacity, pedestrians and cyclists spill over onto the Ocean Boulevard roadway because they have no alternative route. This creates hazardous conditions as drivers must navigate around vulnerable road users.

On July 4th weekend, pedestrian traffic on the roadway spiked dramatically while vehicle traffic remained unchanged—*Clear Evidence that overflow crowds are forced into the street.*

The boardwalk consistently handles **10,000-12,000** pedestrians and cyclists on weekend days during summer. ***When this capacity is exceeded, the roadway becomes a de facto pedestrian space—but without the safety measures that designation would require*.**

4. Near-Miss Data Reveals Safety Concerns

The VivaCity traffic sensors track 'near misses'—any instance where a vehicle comes within one meter of a pedestrian or cyclist. Near-miss data from Ocean Boulevard (July 28 - September 8, 2025) shows:

- Near misses are more common on weekends when pedestrian volumes are highest

- Near misses are concentrated in the middle of the block
- Most near misses occur during afternoon and early evening hours (peak pedestrian times)
- Video footage confirms vehicles passing dangerously close to vulnerable road users

Near-miss data allows us to identify dangerous conditions before someone is injured or killed—a significant improvement over the traditional approach of waiting for crashes to occur.

Traffic Patterns Analysis

Peak Activity Times

Understanding when Ocean Boulevard is busiest helps identify optimal hours for pedestrianization:

Day Type	Peak Hours	Pattern
Weekdays	5:00 AM - 8:00 PM	Steady increase, peak around 8 PM
Fridays	Highest weekday traffic	Leads into weekend crowds
Weekends	10:00 AM - 1:30 AM	High all day, elevated late for nightlife
Saturdays	Busiest overall	Up to **11,000+** on boardwalk alone

Vehicle Traffic Is Minimal

Despite concerns about vehicle access, the data shows that motorized traffic represents only a small fraction of Ocean Boulevard usage:

> Only 11,227 motorized vehicles were counted on the roadway over the 28-day sample period, compared to **31,530** active travelers (**Pedestrians and Cyclists**).

This **3:1 ratio of people to cars** demonstrates that Ocean Boulevard already serves primarily as a pedestrian space*. **Formalizing this through weekend closures would simply align policy with reality.***

Recommendation

Based on the comprehensive data collected through PB Counts 2025, beautifulPB recommends:

Close Ocean Boulevard to vehicle traffic between Grand Avenue and Thomas Avenue during Peak Hours of Pedestrian and Bicycle traffic on Weekends and Holidays.

Implementation Considerations

- Timing: Weekend and holiday closures during peak hours (approximately 10 AM - 10 PM)
- Infrastructure: ***Minimal costs***; City already has equipment required, including portable barriers and bike racks
- Access: Maintain emergency vehicle access; consider permit system for essential deliveries
- Activation: Partner with local businesses for outdoor seating, street performers, and events
- Evaluation: Continue sensor monitoring to assess impact and refine closure hours

Expected Benefits

- Eliminate vehicle-pedestrian conflicts during highest-risk periods
- Create safe overflow capacity when boardwalk reaches saturation
- Enhance the beach experience for residents and visitors
- Support local businesses with increased foot traffic and outdoor dining opportunities
- Aligns with **City's Vision Zero** goals of ***eliminating traffic fatalities, civic liabilities***

Call to Action

The data is clear: Ocean Boulevard between Grand and Thomas Avenues serves far more pedestrians than vehicles. ***The current mixed-traffic configuration creates unnecessary risk during the busiest hours when crowds overflow from the boardwalk onto the street.***

We urge the City of San Diego to implement weekend and holiday pedestrianization of this block as a pilot program. This evidence-based approach would:

- Improve safety for the thousands of people who already use this space daily
- Acknowledge the reality that this is already a pedestrian-priority area
- Create a model for other high-pedestrian corridors in San Diego
- Demonstrate San Diego's commitment to Vision Zero and complete streets

For more information or to support this initiative, please contact **beautifulPB**, **info@beautifulpb.com**

Data Collection Methodology

The findings in this report are based on data collected through the PB Counts 2025 project, a comprehensive traffic data collection initiative organized by beautifulPB and funded in part by a grant from the County of San Diego.

VivaCity Traffic Sensors

A VivaCity automated traffic sensor was installed at Ocean Boulevard between Grand and Thomas Avenues in June 2025. The sensor is positioned to record traffic on both the Ocean Boulevard roadway and the adjacent boardwalk. The sensors collect:

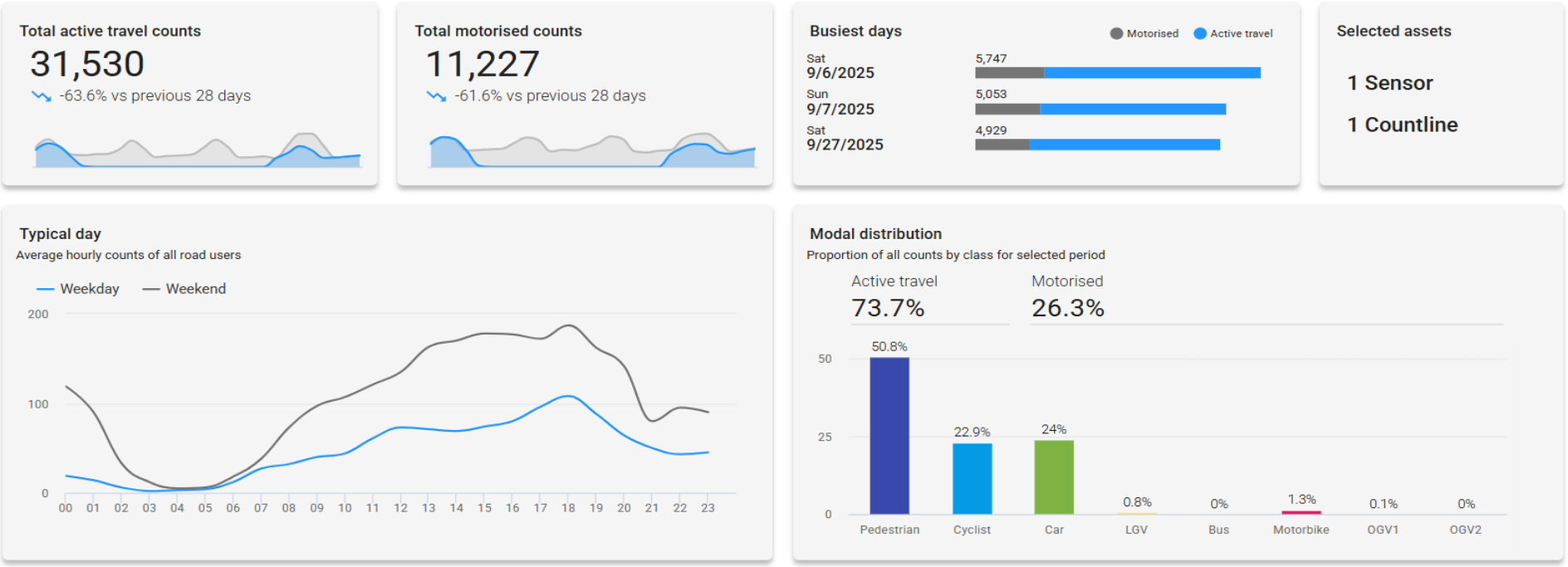
- Real-time, continuous traffic counts by mode (pedestrians, cyclists, vehicles)
- Travel paths showing how users move through the space
- Speed data for all road users
- Near-miss data capturing dangerous vehicle-pedestrian interactions
- Video footage for verification and incident review

Data Periods Analyzed

Period	Coverage
Primary analysis	September 5-9 and September 25 - October 2, 2025
Summer trend analysis	July 1 - August 31, 2025
Near-miss analysis	July 28 - September 8, 2025

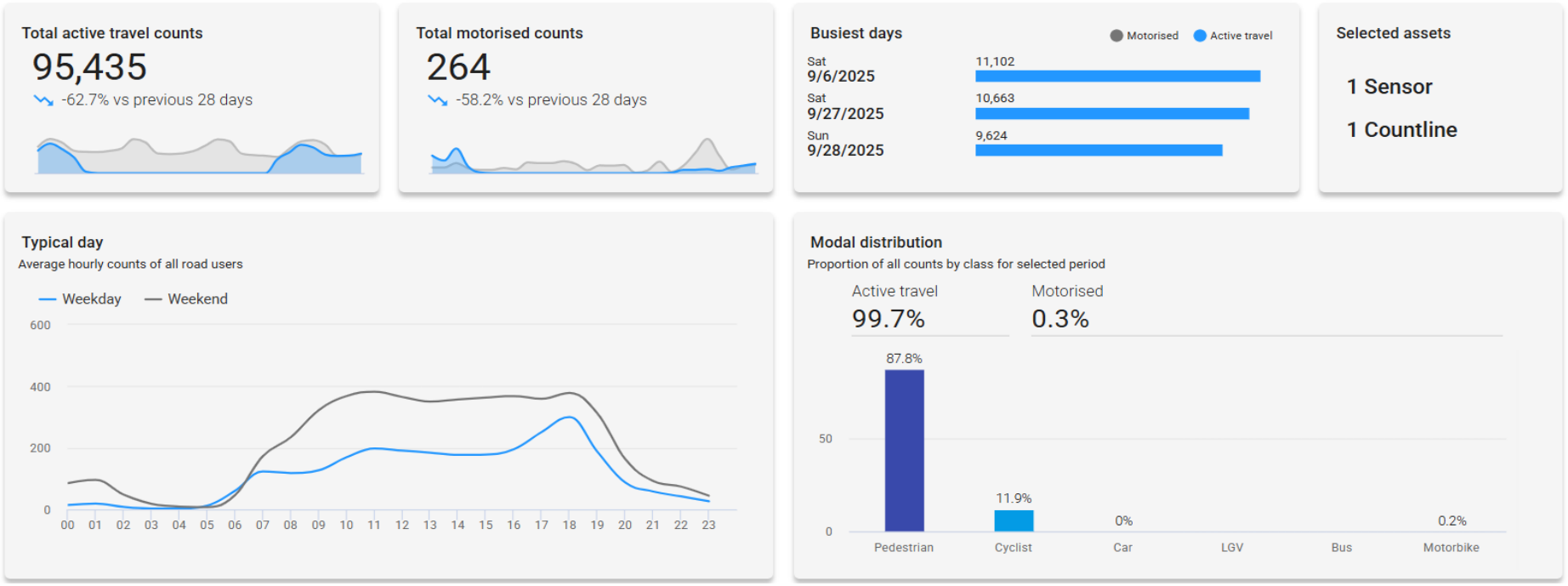
Supporting Data

OCEAN BOULEVARD (ROADWAY ONLY) – September 5 to 9, 2025 and September 25 to October 2, 2025



The sensor at this location was inactive for a portion of September, but enough data was available during that timeframe to provide a sense of trends at this location. This graphic shows counts on Ocean Boulevard between Grand and Thomas, a portion of the roadway that parallels the boardwalk and is often used as an alternative route to the boardwalk for this block. The counts show that pedestrians make up about half of the traffic on the roadway portion of Ocean Boulevard, while motorized traffic makes up only about one-quarter of traffic. Cyclist traffic is also unusually high at this location, likely due to its proximity to the boardwalk. Weekends are the busiest at this location, with traffic highest in the early evening and staying relatively high until around 1:30 am, likely due to the popularity and later hours of the bars and restaurants in the immediate vicinity. Data for June 1 through September 8 shows that average weekday pedestrian and cyclist traffic is highest on Fridays. On weekdays average pedestrian and cyclist traffic increases steadily beginning around 5:00 am, with a peak around 8 pm. Average pedestrian and cyclist traffic is higher, but follows a similar pattern.

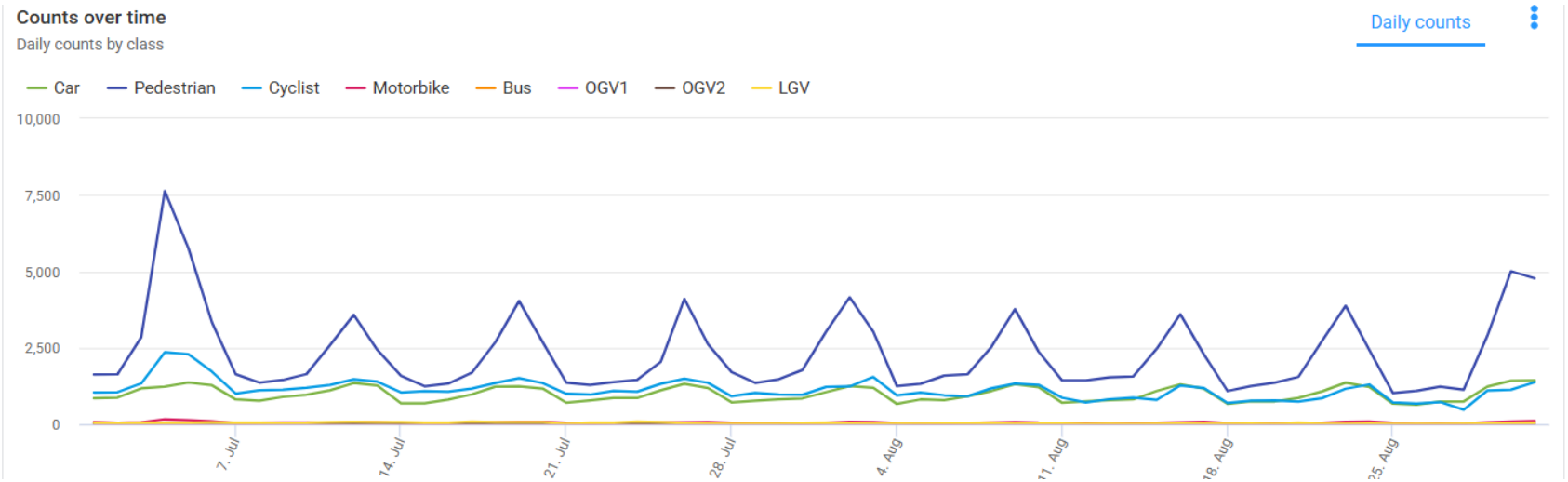
OCEAN BOULEVARD (BOARDWALK ONLY) – September 5 to 9, 2025 and September 25 to October 2, 2025



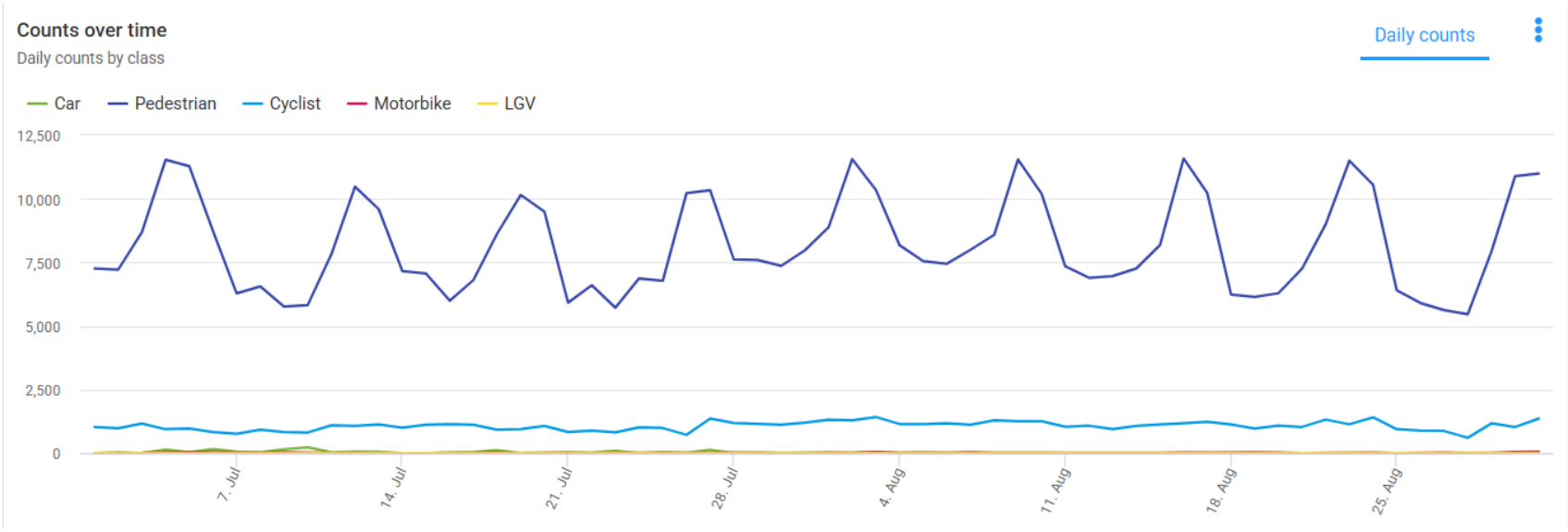
The sensor at this location was inactive for a portion of September, but enough data was available during that timeframe to provide a sense of trends at this location. This graphic shows counts on the boardwalk only adjacent to Ocean Boulevard between Grand and Thomas. Pedestrians make up most of the traffic at this location (nearly 90 percent of all traffic), with the cyclists making up the remainder, along with a few motorized vehicles (presumably service vehicles). Overall the boardwalk is busy throughout the day, primarily during daylight and early evening hours. Weekends are busier than weekdays, with over 10,000 individual pedestrians and cyclists counted on some weekend days.

Because the sensor at Ocean Boulevard has been in place since July, we were able to review trends in summer traffic at this location. The graphics below show that traffic levels on the Ocean Boulevard roadway remain fairly consistent, with regular peaks in all traffic on the weekends. The exception is on July 4 weekend, where there is a significant increase in both pedestrian and cyclist traffic, while vehicle traffic does not change. In contrast, count data for the same period on the adjacent boardwalk shows weekend peaks of between 11,000 and 12,000 daily pedestrians and cyclists, but no significant change on July 4. This suggests that when the boardwalk is full to capacity, pedestrians and cyclists spill over onto the Ocean Boulevard roadway because they have no other place to go. This may lead to an increase in dangerous near miss interactions, as drivers must navigate a much busier roadway filled with pedestrians and cyclists who do not have an alternative route to use due to boardwalk crowding.

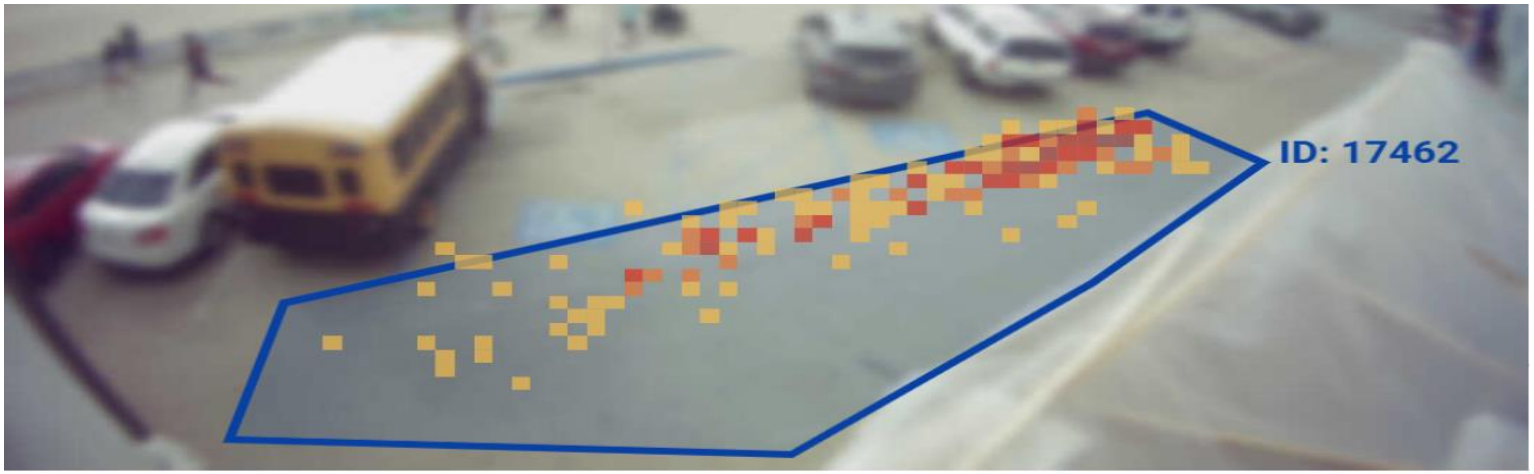
OCEAN BOULEVARD (ROADWAY ONLY) – July 1, 2025 to August 31, 2025



OCEAN BOULEVARD (BOARDWALK ONLY) – July 1, 2025 to August 31, 2025



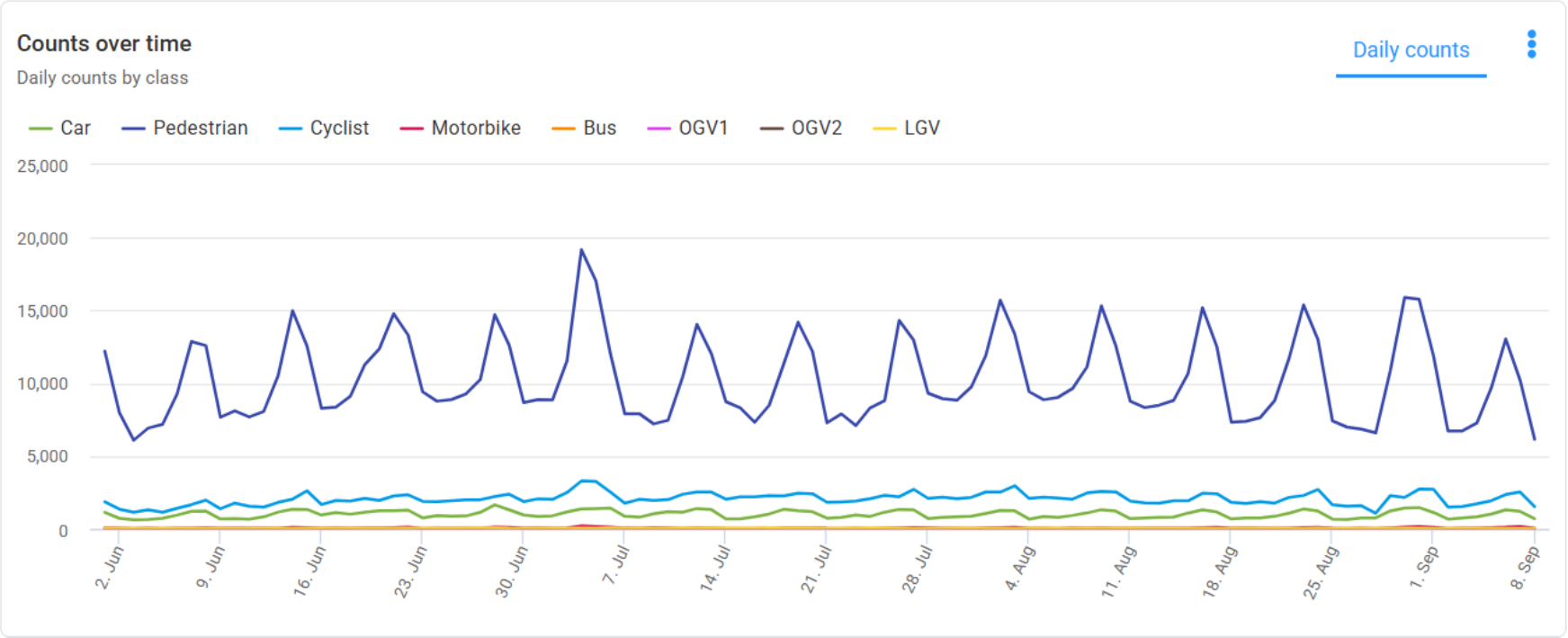
OCEAN BOULEVARD (ROADWAY) – Location of Near Misses July 28 to September 8, 2025



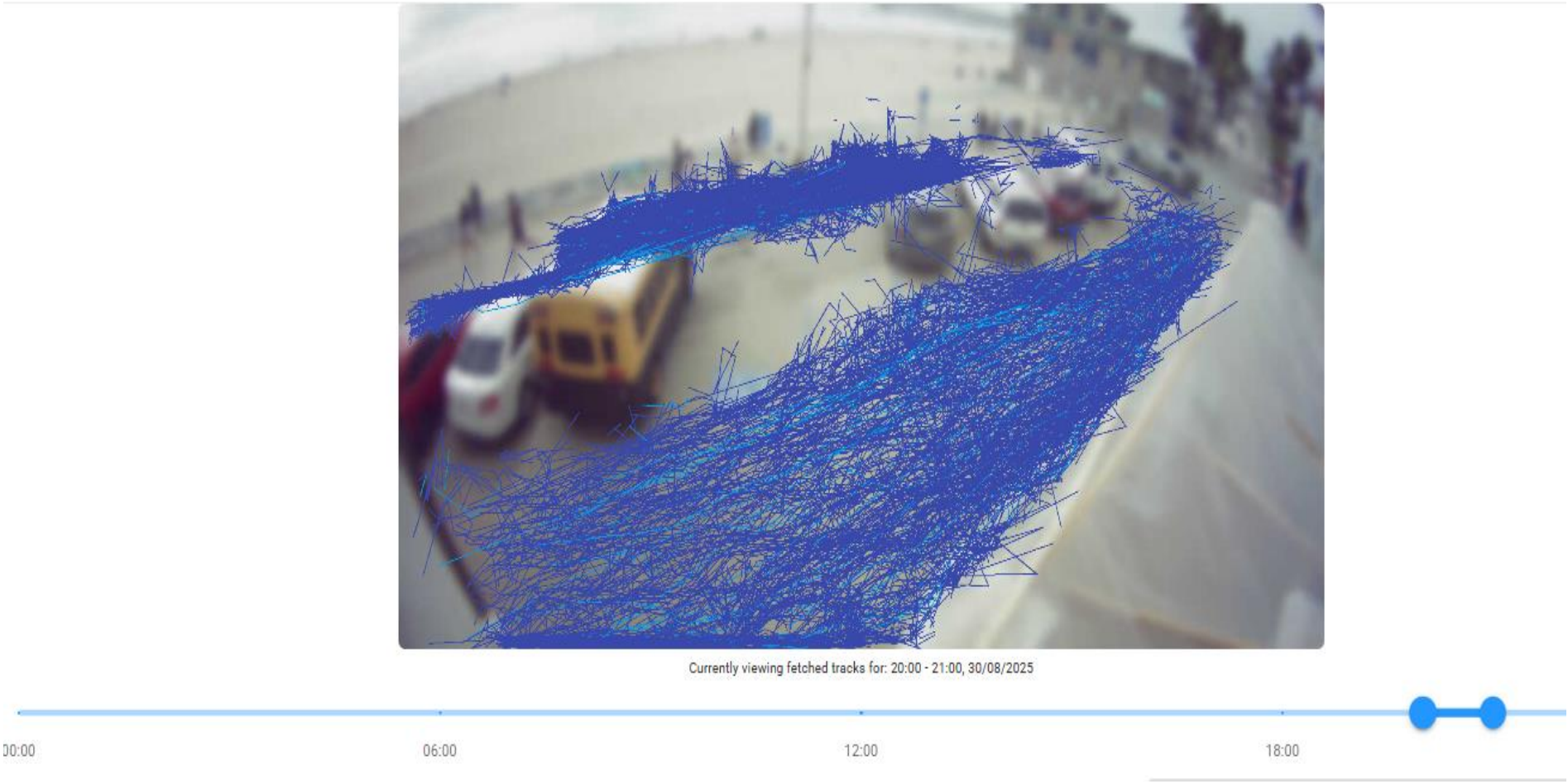
This example from a video of one near miss on Ocean Boulevard shows how these types of interactions are classified. The video highlights the distance between the cyclists and the vehicle, as well as each one's speed. In this case the cyclist passes within a few feet of the vehicle while both are traveling at 6 mph.

OCEAN BOULEVARD (ROADWAY) – Example of near miss video

OCEAN BOULEVARD (ROADWAY AND BOARDWALK) – June 1, 2025 to September 8, 2025 – All traffic



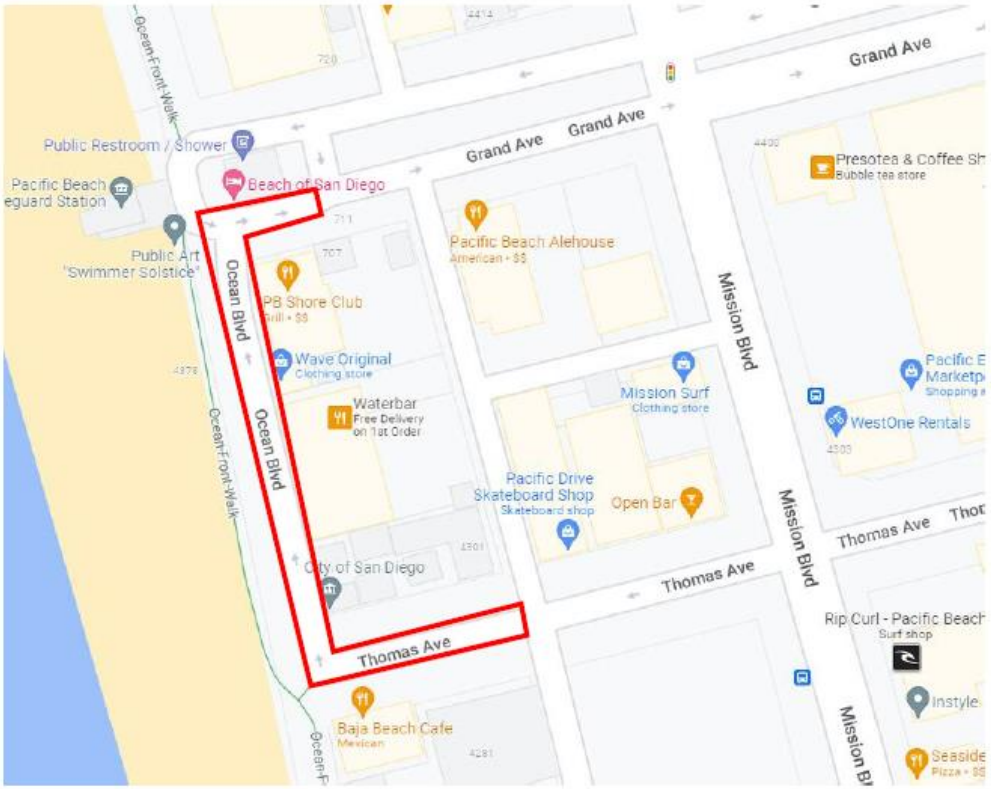
OCEAN BOULEVARD (ROADWAY) –August 30, 2025 – Pedestrian and Cyclist travel paths (Evening Weekend)



The light blue (cyclist) and dark blue (pedestrian) lines show paths of travel during *Only One Hour* in the evening on a Saturday.

Thomas Ave. & Ocean Blvd. Car-Closure

- This project has been in Overall Area City Planning since 2012 !
- Increases Net-New, *Safe* Pedestrian & Bicycle Beach Access (as is currently North of Lifeguard Station)
- Increases Net-New, *Sustainable* Pedestrian & Bicycle Beach Access
- Decreases Motorized Noise and Pollution
- Increases Potential Clientele for Businesses



Closure of Ocean Blvd & Thomas Ave

Project Impacts and Logistics:

- West of Alley on Thomas Ave, will close 12 current parking spaces.
- Residential Housing (4301-4311 Ocean Blvd, 10 Units) has 4 “Tuck-Under” building parking spaces; Net need of 6 spaces.
- There are 11 other overnight parking spaces, East of Alley on Thomas Ave by Open Bar.
- Previous vehicular traffic can continue, by turning left or right on alley, for flow relief and commercial deliveries.
- District 1 City Council Office has recommended City Planning consideration.

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