



BASIC INFORMATION

Name: MARJAN PHILHOUR

Candidate for: Board of Supervisors, District 1

PERSONAL WALKING EXPERIENCE

1. Please describe what role walking plays in your life.

As a working mom to three school-age children, it probably goes without saying that I spend most of my time on my feet. I walk my children to school every day, and am anticipating with some anxiety the day, coming soon, when my oldest will be walking to and from school on his own. We have seen some truly tragic stories come out of our Outer Richmond neighborhood in recent years, involving both pedestrian and bicycle fatalities as well as serious injuries to children. Because my work day involves a very demanding job with meetings in multiple locations throughout the city, tied together with medical and other appointments for my children across town at Mission Bay, I am a car owner and user. But I think that has more to do with my circumstances and position in life - when I was in my 20s and 30s I was an avid runner and made my way through both Washington D.C. and Sacramento on foot. I anticipate with pleasure returning to such a lifestyle in a few years as my children grow older.

BIG PICTURE

2. Describe your vision of a healthy, safe, equitable, and sustainable transportation system for the city and the role that walking plays in that vision.

Growing population, growing traffic congestion, and growing awareness about the environment and our own health means more people are walking, biking, and taking transit. We need to ensure that our public transportation options are among the best in the world, and that pedestrian and bicyclists feel safe on our residential streets. This means creating dedicated, protected bike lanes and pedestrian features along thoughtfully planned corridors as well as enhanced safety measures within the park.

I have already begun to notice improvement in the quality of walking life in the Richmond from changes made through MUNI Forward including bulbouts, widened sidewalks, and other pedestrian and bus features. Since speeding cars is an issue in our neighborhood of wide streets and comparatively little traffic, I find these traffic calming measures welcome and appropriate.

VISION ZERO

3. If elected, what steps would you take to ensure the implementation of Vision Zero projects? In your answer, please explain whether you pledge to prioritize safety improvements that narrow crossing distances and slow traffic (bulbouts, "road diets," etc.) over other competing demands for street space, including parking or automobile lanes.

We owe it to future generations to get these issues right, and this means doing a better job of listening to concerns early in the process and leading the work of consensus-building with all stakeholders. This takes leadership and a spirit of humility in the service of the public. Our infrastructure in San Francisco is car-oriented and needs to become less so - sudden and dramatic moves, however, can turn public opinion against this important work.

As Supervisor, I pledge a hands-on approach with regard to infrastructure issues in our District. I have spent more than twenty years learning how the engine of government, flawed as it is, works at the federal, state, and local level. In my experience, a single person with the drive and passion to serve constituents rather than any particular ideology, can make a huge difference. I have seen government do good things for ordinary people. I aim to bring that spirit of public service Richmond.

I believe in the goals of Vision Zero and the need for safety improvements; I am not convinced these always need to be presented as a zero-sum solution - for instance, bulbouts, road diets and other improvements can move people to make greater use of public transit, bicycles, and walking, in which case the impact on parking and congestion is also reduced.

4. What would you do to ensure there is enough funding for pedestrian safety improvements and Vision Zero projects?

I am running on a platform that publicly prioritizes transportation infrastructure and public safety and feel my election would represent the preferences of Richmond District residents to move forward with such improvements.

POLICY/LEGISLATION

5. The most dangerous transportation behavior in the city is speed, as it exponentially increases a victim's risk of injury or death. Two key strategies that have effectively reduced speeds in other states and countries are automated speed cameras and decreased speed limits. Unfortunately, the State of California doesn't permit automated speed enforcement and only allows speeds lower than 25 mph in school zones. Do you support these strategies? If so, how will you work with your community and State legislators to change these (and similar) laws so the City can use these strategies to save lives?

I am reviewing the arguments for and against automated speed enforcement. There is clearly strong interest among residents in the Richmond District for greater enforcement of speeding along Fulton St, but whether that comes from physical measures such as traffic calming, real-life traffic enforcement by a properly staffed police force, or citation measures is an ongoing discussion. In my experience walking door to door, residents are nearly unanimously unaware of the proposals around automated speed enforcement and have serious misconceptions about its use (for instance, that it would lead to 'points' on their records, cost as much as a speeding ticket, and/or wrongly misidentify drivers). So the very first thing I would do is engage with the community to inform and to listen. If we see sufficient community support, I would engage fully with the process involving generating a pilot exemption from state law.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

6. Approximately 41% of San Francisco elementary school students live within walking distance of school. Unfortunately, only 25% take the short journey by foot. Studies have shown that children who walk to school enjoy key health benefits and academic advantages, as well as getting more quality bonding time with parents. What would you do to increase the number and safety of children walking and biking to school?

We have to regain the confidence of families with children that their kids are safe when walking. All families, my own included, would prefer to walk. And I look forward with some trepidation to the day my kids walk on their own. Right now, there are two large “brody” spin-out markings on each of the street corners adjacent to their school. Traffic signs and speed limits are routinely disobeyed at each street corner between my house and their school. In six years of walking my children to school, I have never once seen any enforcement of traffic laws of any kind, nor any police cars. Our school runs their own pedestrian safety program using volunteer middle-school students, but this is only at the crossings immediately adjacent to the school. So, again, in a city where adults don’t feel safe crossing, where Vision Zero fails to meet its goal year after year, I don’t think we are going to see families sending out their children in droves.

WALKABILITY/WALKING MODE INCREASE

7. The City has established a goal to steadily increase the percentage of all walking trips and walking trips for commuting in the next 5 years. Do you support this goal? If yes, what would you do to help the City realize it?

I support that goal. I will work more closely with residents than any Supervisor in our history to educate and inform so we can build the political will to accomplish these goals. We need to make the connection between the much-maligned speeding we see in the Outer Richmond to public safety improvements that don’t inconvenience law-abiding drivers. We also need to create more reliable rapid and local bus service so that people feel that walking a short distance to their stop is worthwhile

8. Walk San Francisco believes that everyone deserves equal access to enjoyable places to walk, and that our street space can be better used by shifting excess street right-of-way from private automobiles to places for people to walk and gather. How do you feel about projects like these that improve our public realm, and how will you support them?

I am in favor of this but want to make sure we involve the community. We have strong data that suggests that lower speeds are dramatically safer for pedestrians, particularly the elderly. We know that not everyone in San Francisco has (or can have) a car and we need to be fair about how much of the public sphere we give up. We also have to think carefully about access for emergency vehicles as well as the potential shift to autonomous vehicles.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

9. Have you championed or strongly supported any other initiatives that are in line with Walk San Francisco's mission of making walking in San Francisco safe, so that our community is healthier and livable?

I am running on a platform that prioritizes improvements in transit infrastructure and bicycle safety measures as well. .

10. Is there anything else you'd like to share with the people of San Francisco, all of whom walk or travel with an assistive device at some point?

My mother-in-law, who lives with us, walks with a cane or walker and has difficulty navigating the streets of San Francisco. I have had the experiencing of pulling my children back from the corner in their stroller because of an inattentive driver. It is only human nature that each of us, when envisioning traffic changes, think first about the impact on our own life. We as a community need to build empathy with those who walk with