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Getting Banning back on its feet

By Mike Cruz, Staff Writer

BANNING - Civic leaders would like to see more residents leave their cars at home and don a pair of walking shoes to get around town.

Some say walking is more healthful, safer, cheaper and more energy efficient.

But before people can be expected to ditch their four-wheeled security blankets, civic leaders acknowledge that Banning must do more to become pedestrian friendly.

On some Banning streets, sidewalks are cracked and raised by tree roots while on others, mailboxes and sign posts make awkward hazards. Some areas have no sidewalks, and residents walk makeshift, well-worn dirt trails.

"Walking should not be a nerve-racking experience," said Ryan Snyder, a Los Angeles-based transportation planning consultant, during a workshop for Banning civic leaders Monday.

The Riverside County Department of Public Health and Banning Councilwoman Barbara Hanna spearheaded the effort to bring Snyder's workshop to the city to collect ideas for making the area more walkable now, before growth increases and makes it difficult to revitalize areas.

"(Walkability) brings the community together," Hanna said, adding that walkable areas could be profitable if the city can increase visitor traffic from Interstate 10. But she said, people will not abandon their cars "unless it's very safe and very pleasant." Snyder pointed to cities with downtown areas that are walkable, enjoyable and profitable, such as Pasadena, Claremont, San Diego and Riverside, and noted that Banning also could make strides in its downtown area. For smaller cities, he pointed to the "Main Street" concept where people shop and gather to socialize along a main thoroughfare.

But Snyder also challenged civic leaders to determine the larger reasons, not just geographical hurdles, that keep people from walking more. For example, while most older adults will say they walked to school every day as children, less than 10 percent of children today walk to school, Snyder said.

But not everyone agrees that reducing plans for vehicles from some projects and



(Eric Reed/Staff photographer)

A pedestrian crosses a sidewalk along Murray Street in Banning. A workshop this week focused on making the city's streets more pedestrian friendly.

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narrowing roadways for more pedestrian-friendly strategies is the best plan.

"We have to accommodate the automobile. It's a staple in America," said Community Development Director Oscar Orci. He questioned Snyder about how cities should go about balancing cars and parking areas in creating projects to encourage pedestrians.

Police Chief John Horton and school officials sought alternatives for street design near Central Elementary School, on San Gorgonio Avenue, where children freely cross into traffic to be dropped off or picked up by parents.

Banning Unified School District board member Amy Herr said that having decision-makers together to solve pedestrian problems shows the importance of the issue to the city's leaders.

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