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## **Retrofitting Historic City Centers and the Potential Effects on Their Walkability: A Comparison of San Luis Obispo, CA and Bath, England**

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Aging city centers are often retrofitted to accommodate more up-to-date requirements for associated land uses, including restaurants, shops, and housing. While these “facelifts” may be necessary for supporting current building codes and needs, they can impact other desirable noted qualities of these areas such as walkability. This research focuses on two questions: 1) Does retrofitting historic city centers appear to decrease or increase walkability? 2) What walkability qualities appear to be the most and least impacted by the changes associated with retrofitting?

Two cities noted for their walkable city centers with retrofitted structures were compared using a scoring instrument that measures urban design qualities related to walkability (Ewing and Handy 2009). San Luis Obispo, CA, founded in 1772, is a city of approximately 45,000 located in the central coast region of California (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The city of Bath, England, which really became more established as a noted town in the 1800’s, is located on the River Avon and has a population of approximately 80,000 (Bath and North East Somerset Council, 2001). Both cities are considered tourist destinations because of the effort they have made in preserving characteristics from their historic origins. Three street segments from each city were assessed and scored for design qualities that contribute to walkability. Comparisons were made between the extent of retrofit for each street and their walkability rankings. Each segment represented a typical street typology (main street, a secondary street and a tertiary street) for each location.

Overall, results indicated Bath city center street segments scored higher than San Luis Obispo streets, suggesting that a lower level of intervention and retrofitting within these historic districts may provide a more walkable environment. Specifically, Bath, when compared to San Luis Obispo, shows a greater retention of historic buildings, and changes to these buildings occur primarily at the ground floor level to accommodate current uses including shops, restaurants and other commercial ventures. San Luis Obispo has maintained some of its historic buildings with similar ground floor retrofits, however, there has been a higher degree of wholesale building replacement of historic buildings with those that represent post World War II construction and style. Discussion of specific variable results between the two sites, and the possible application to other city center assessments will be presented.

--Associate Professor Beverly J. Bass and Margaret Livingston