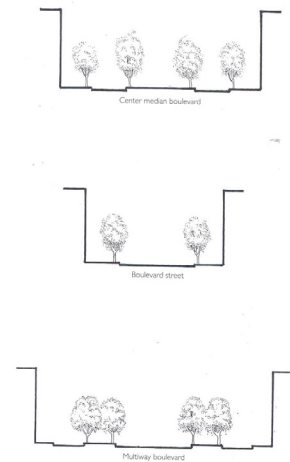


# Boulevards and Parkways

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**Boulevards + Parkway**

Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn in 1890 - Jacobs, Macdonald, Rofe, *The Boulevard Book*, 2002



Jacobs, Macdonald, Rofe,  
*The Boulevard Book*, 2002

A multiway boulevard is a “mixed-use public way that is by its very nature complex”

Alan Jacobs, 2002

**A** boulevard or parkway is a wide urban street with tree-lined sidewalks and often multiple lanes of both fast and slow moving traffic. Boulevards are usually pleasant and grand promenades, flanked by rich, monumental architecture and supporting a variety of street uses. They are often “monumental links between important destinations.”<sup>1</sup> More importantly, boulevards can be open space systems that serve multiple functions at once: movement of traffic, provision of green space in the city, relief of congestion in overcrowded areas, accommodation of pedestrians and bicycles, and the nurturing of vital street life and activity in the city.

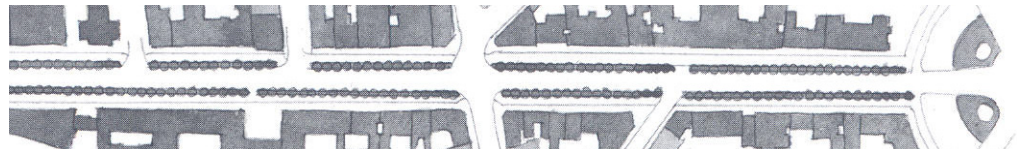
Boulevards date back to the 16th century, when medieval towns abandoned their fortified walls and converted them to tree-lined walkways for public recreation. Cities like Amsterdam and Strasbourg were among the first to develop obsolete ramparts into pleasure promenades. In 1670, Louis XIV abandoned the walls of Paris and replaced these with promenades that served as the parade grounds of aristocrats and the well-to-do. These were also known as cours or allees, such as the Cour de la Reine, which extended alongside the palatial gardens of the Tuileries.<sup>1</sup>

In the mid-19th to early-20th century, boulevards came to be associated with large-scale planning efforts, such as those of Napoleon III and Baron Haussmann in Paris or City Beautiful movements in the United States. At this time, the multiway boulevard became a distinct boulevard type and was widely used and praised for its capacity to hold multiple transit modes and speeds. In the early 1900's, Olmsted and Vaux proposed a system of boulevards for Brooklyn, which they called parkways. Parkway were more suburban and “park-like” in character than traditional boulevards, but maintain many of the same characteristics of boulevards.



## 6 contexts for boulevards in the U.S.

1. Major and existing inner city streets.
2. Existing strip development streets or suburban commercial arterials
3. Existing expressways and freeways, especially those that cut thru the city
4. Existing suburban residential arterials that are already wide and planted with medians.
5. Major traffic streets in new urban or suburban developments.
6. Existing Boulevards of the late 19th and early 20th century that have fallen into disrepair



### Contexts

**B**oulevards are a versatile street form, making them appropriate in many contexts. They can be major city streets, new streets in new towns or developments, existing boulevards that have been renovated or rehabilitated after a period of decline or neglect, or simply existing wide streets in the inner city. Boulevards also work at a range of scales, from large arterial streets to small commercial strips, or as residential and suburban arterials. In general, they work well when they are 125 to 300 feet wide.

Boulevards are balanced, multi-purpose streets. They have a social component as well as a transit function, affording a diversity of activity. They are a central spine of the larger street network, and therefore should be located in areas that enhance the existing street system and give it clarity and coherence. In designing boulevards, care must be taken to ensure that all components of the boulevard are working together in a coherent whole.

Boulevards are especially appropriate where there is a need to carry both slow, local traffic and fast, through-moving traffic. They are a good alternative for areas that have the potential to become significant and great spaces in the city. Additionally, boulevards are well-suited for areas with high pedestrian and public transit uses, and where many buildings face the street and have direct access from the street.

### Case: Avenue Kleber, Paris



Avenue Kleber is a busy little boulevard. There are four lanes of north-south traffic with two lanes designated for buses and taxis (one of which is separated by a rolled curb). Avenue Kleber is an example of how to make a small street do a lot: two bus/taxi lanes, two through, bi-directional lanes, two service lanes, a planting strip with bus stops and benches, comfortably wide sidewalks, evenly-spaced trees, parallel parking in the service lanes, and a metro stop off the service lane. There are a bit of scattered commercial uses with moderate activity. Overall, Avenue Kleber is a pleasant, small-scale refuge from the busy Avenue de la Grand Armee nearby.

Avenue Kleber  
source: [www.parisliving.com](http://www.parisliving.com)



## Elements

### General Dimensions:

- 100 ft minimum, 4 lanes at 10.5 feet wide, access ways at 16ft (one passing one parking lane) 2 medians 5ft, sidewalks 8ft. absolute minimum
- 125ft to 140 ft more workable – overall 230 ft max. – gets to be difficult to pedestrian crossing, access roads never wider than 25ft – erode the slowness

### Trees:

- Tree-planted median necessary
- At least one continuous row at each median along pedestrian realm
- Closely spaced, uninterrupted, reach to intersections
- Provide further definition to different realms – visual dividers
- Spacing to allow continuous canopy – max 35 feet apart
- Alternating pattern of 2-3 species okay
- Deciduous trees preferred
- Dense foliage below eye level discouraged – inhibits sight
- Tree placement depends on median width – 5ft wide center, 20 ft or wider can have two rows, or alternating

### Medians:

- Medians should not be too wide, breaks down perception of street as whole and becomes two streets or three parallel – Las Ramblas
- Very flexible, design depends on context and needs – some areas can be wider to allow for transit stops or benches
- Primary function to protect pedestrians from fast-moving traffic and break down crossing widths – safe haven for pedestrians
- 5-50 feet range
- Amenities and attractions to pedestrians – regular-spaced benches
- Stops for transit
- Paved or varying materials

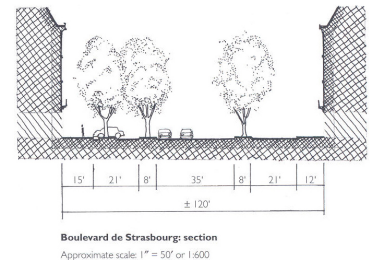
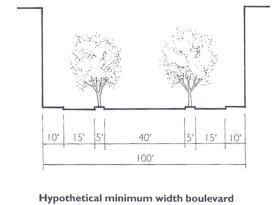
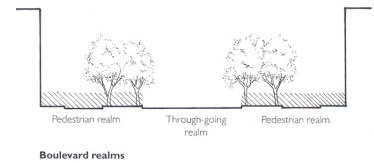
### Lane Design and Configurations:

- Very wide center lanes break up the street into two separate realms – street activity is bifurcated
- No less than two lanes but no more than 6 lanes
- 2 lanes okay for one-way traffic
- Three lanes in each direction allow for public transit lanes
- Overall width of central lane – depends on availability of right-of-way dedications, traffic capacity desired, need for safe crossing
- 50 feet – two lanes each way w/ alternating left turn lane (tightly)
- 70 feet – three lanes and left turn
- Public transit best in center roadways, not access lanes

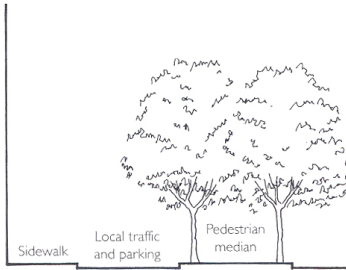
### Parking:

- parking in central lane should be discouraged – undermines fast traffic of central lane and slow traffic purpose of access lanes, can overwhelm the medians with too many cars
- parking in access lanes helps to slow down traffic there and give access to shops
- do not provide too much traffic – intent is to have it for shop customers only, and too much parking, when unoccupied, can leave vast open lanes that can be taken by fast moving traffic
- okay to have angled parking into median, as long not in way of pedestrians
- bulb at intersections to ensure pedestrian safety

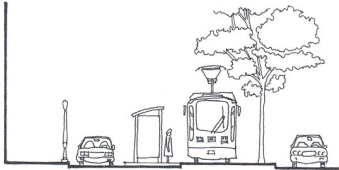
## Boulevards + Parkways



Jacobs, Macdonald, Rofe,  
*The Boulevard Book*, 2002



Elements of the pedestrian realm

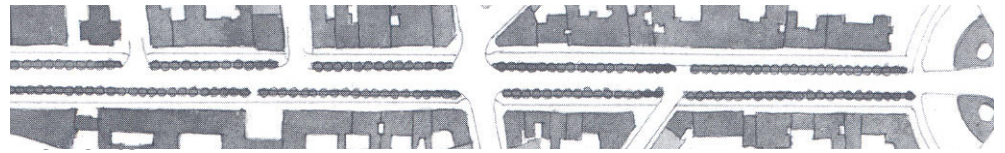


Possible configurations for light rail on a median



Median along Passeig de Gracia

Jacobs, Macdonald, Rofe,  
*The Boulevard Book*, 2002



### Overall Pedestrian Realm:

- pedestrian realm in 'good' blvd is never less than 50% of total street width (included in pedestrian realm is access local traffic lanes)
- Best to provide refuge in center of blvd – bollard or island at intersections, makes crossing easier in wider boulevards
- psychological, noise, pollution, mobility buffer
- need for well-defined boundaries and edges, and controlled speeds
- only one travel lane max – two lanes can encourage fast-moving cars to bypass traffic on central lanes
- breaks in pedestrian realm should occur only at major street intersections to avoid conflict, confusion and make it safer for pedestrians
- amenities – transit stops, subway entrances, kiosks, benches, fountains, flower stands – encourage crossings between median and sidewalk – pedestrians take over entire realm
- lighting – closely spaced and low, warm colors
- narrow sidewalks okay because entire realm can be taken by pedestrians
- can use access lanes too
- slight changes in paving or elevation help differentiate realms
- transit exits should be on pedestrian realm to encourage use (subway exits onto medians)



Jacobs, Macdonald, Rofe,  
*The Boulevard Book*, 2002

### Case: Passeig de Gracia, Barcelona

Passeig de Gracia is an important boulevard in Barcelona. It connects two major parts of the city, the Placa de Catalunya with the historic Gothic Quarter. It is also one of the city's most elegant shopping streets, with multiple stores, restaurants, offices, hotels, theaters and residential buildings.<sup>1</sup> It is over 200 feet wide, with a 60 foot center roadway for fast traffic, sidewalks that are wide enough to hold restaurant seating and public events (like book fairs or farmer's markets), and medians that do many things at once. Several amenities are provided on the medians. In addition to stylishly designed benches, kiosks and street lamps, the medians also provide entrances to underground parking structures, subway stations and regional train stations. Careful attention is given to all details of the space, with benches and planters designed by the world-renown Antonio Gaudi.



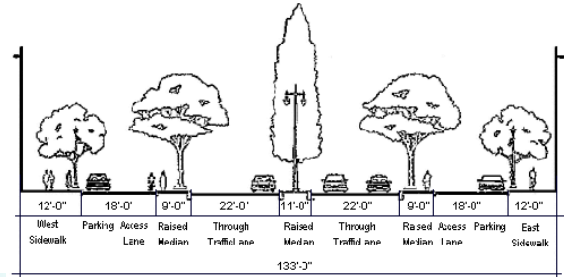
### Case: Octavia Blvd, San Francisco

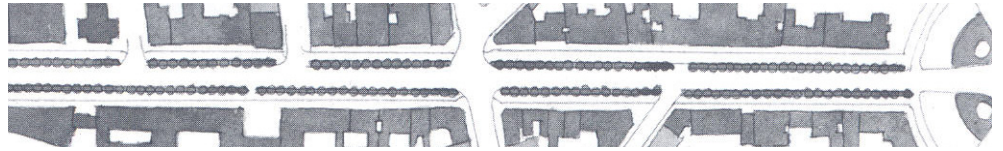
In the mid-1970's, San Francisco's voters instituted a policy to tear down the Embarcadero Freeway and replace it with a boulevard. Similarly, the Central Freeway project over Octavia Street was stopped. This 'freeway revolt' was the first such resistance to freeway construction in the country.<sup>2</sup> It was not until 1989, with the Loma Prieta earthquake, that the project to build the Embarcadero boulevard began. Plans for a similar boulevard on Octavia Street were also proposed, but the project was only recently completed in September of 2005. Octavia Boulevard was designed to carry large amounts of traffic through the Hayes Valley neighborhood, while also catering to local needs with slow-moving access lanes. The right-of-way width is 133 feet, with twelve-foot sidewalks lined with evenly-spaced trees and adjacent to eighteen-foot access lanes on each side. Parallel parking is provided in the access lanes, and a nine-foot wide median is fully landscaped and has trees every twenty feet. New lighting, benches and flowering planters are also provided. The central lanes allow for two lanes of traffic in each direction, and are separated by a central median. The new boulevard terminates at a memorial park and playground that is used by the residents in the area. Overall, Octavia Boulevard is a much-needed improvement in the Hayes Valley neighborhood, and a better alternative to the divisive and single-purpose freeway proposed before.<sup>3</sup>



Octavia Boulevard, San Francisco

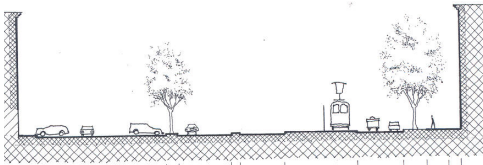
<http://www.sfcityscape.com/projects/octavia.html>





## Implementation

- citizen groups now less likely to allow future freeway construction through their neighborhoods because aware of negative environmental and social effects. Must capitalize on the power of neighborhood and community groups
- must advocate for multi-use systems, streets and expressways as serving more than traffic needs, but also social and community needs
- must demonstrate that boulevards are not unsafe or less effective than expressways, arterials or alternative street types – can point to studies done and to examples of boulevards that work – “seeing is believing”<sup>1</sup>
- preference toward existing wide streets to avoid land acquisition difficulties – costly and politically unfeasible
- consideration should be given to types of land uses surrounding the blvd. – incentives to encourage more socially active uses and pedestrian/ transit activity
- neighborhood matching funds, tree planting funds could be employed – same process to get roundabouts (traffic circles) could be used by neighborhoods to turn sections of street into blvd
- Portland’s *Cheap and Skinny Streets* program; *Creating Livable Streets*– example
- *Making Choices* – street design guidelines in Ontario
- green streets designation
- right-of-way manual



## References

<sup>1</sup>Jacobs, MacDonald and Rofe, *The Boulevard Book: History, Evolution, Design of Multiway Boulevards*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002.

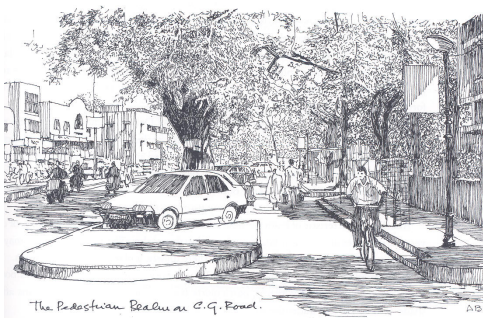
Jacobs, MacDonald and Rofe, *Boulevards: A Study of Safety, Behavior, and Usefulness*. Berkeley: Institute of Urban and Regional Development, University of California, 1994.

Kostof, Spiro, *The City Shaped*. Boston: Little Brown, 1991.

<sup>2</sup>“Octavia Boulevard: The last freeway north of Market and the last remnant of the Freeway Revolt will be replaced by a landscaped boulevard.” *San Francisco Cityscape*, <<http://www.sfcityscape.com/projects/octavia.html>> accessed 29 January 2006.

<sup>3</sup>City of San Francisco webpage: <<http://www.sfgov.org>> accessed 29 January 2006

City of Seattle Right-of-Way Manual



Jacobs, Macdonald, Rofe,  
*The Boulevard Book*, 2002