

CITY HALL

## Mayor Barbara Lee announces major investment in Oakland sidewalks and curb ramps

The city will make a “historic investment” over the next 25 years to ensure streets and sidewalks are more accessible to disabled people as part of a legal settlement.



by **Eli Wolfe**

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A pedestrian uses a curb cut as they cross a street in Oakland's Fruitvale district on May 31, 2023. Credit: Florence Middleton/The Oaklandside

Mayor Barbara Lee announced on Thursday that the city of Oakland will take significant steps to make streets and sidewalks more accessible to people with mobility issues, thanks to a recently inked settlement agreement.

She said the city has agreed to significantly improve its infrastructure over the next 25 years. The deal must still be approved by a judge, and a hearing is scheduled for early December.

The settlement stems from a [lawsuit](#) filed against the city in May 2023 by Michael Curran and Nicole Brown-Booker, both Oakland residents who use wheelchairs to get around. The plaintiffs accused Oakland of failing to maintain accessible pedestrian rights of way, including sidewalks and curb ramps, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The city has participated in mediation over the past two years to reach a potential settlement that would lead to long-term improvements in the city's accessibility.

As part of the agreement, Oakland will build or retrofit roughly 11,000 curb ramps within 15 years. Within 25 years, the city will improve all the remaining curb ramps and repair damaged sidewalks in 78,000 locations where damage has been identified. City officials will also continue to prioritize requests for curb ramp and sidewalk repairs that come from people with disabilities and ensure that the construction work making Oakland more accessible benefits people living in underserved populations.

“Oakland is strengthening our efforts to ensure people with disabilities, seniors, and parents with strollers have equal access to our transportation network,” Lee said in a statement. “This work will take time, but we’re committed to making our sidewalks accessible to everyone in our community.”

These improvements won't happen overnight, but the city has already taken steps to implement the agreement. The City Council recently approved expanding the existing Sidewalk Assistance Program, which helps low-income property owners make repairs to the stretch of sidewalk bordering their home. The budget approved last month by the council also invests more money in programs to build and maintain curb ramps and sidewalks, and it adds funding for staff to make sure the city is on track to hit construction milestones.

In addition, the mayor's office said, the city is implementing “major improvements” to its Buy-Sell-Repair program, which requires any needed sidewalk repairs to be taken care of whenever a property changes hands or undergoes a major renovation. As part of this investment, the city will improve its enforcement database and potentially introduce fines for people who don't comply with notices to repair their pedestrian walkways.

To ensure transparency, the city will publish annual reports so residents can track construction progress.

City spokesperson Sean Maher told The Oaklandside that the city doesn't have 25 years of funding in place, but will likely allocate money to support some of these initiatives through the Capital Improvement Plan budgeting process.

The City Council recently adopted a [resolution](#) that authorizes the city administrator to award sidewalk and curb ramps to bid out construction contracts of up to \$7.5 million without council approval. Staff who prepared this report said that this will help reduce delays in awarding contracts.

Josh Rowan, director of Oakland's department of transportation, said in a press release that it's essential for pedestrian walkways to be “well-maintained and accessible for everyone” and that his department “looks forward to delivering on our commitments to people with mobility issues and everyone who uses our sidewalks.”