

Active Transportation Policy Review for Five Cities in Central Minnesota

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This report is a review of policies in place that support, encourage, promote, and implement active transportation in the five Central Minnesota cities of Brainerd, Little Falls, Long Prairie, Wadena and Walker. Populations for the five studied cities range from a low of 928 for Walker to a high of 13,517 for Brainerd. Wadena has 4,090, Long Prairie has 3,409, and Little Falls has 8,288. Each of these cities is a county seat, which makes them influential communities in their counties and in the region as a whole. Good active transportation practices in these five cities will have positive impacts on active transportation advances in neighboring towns.

In addition to reviewing policy, which comes largely from comprehensive plans, strategic plans, and ordinances, this report also contains recommendations so that the five cities, and any other community for that matter, can improve their active transportation policies.

Reviewing policy documents online gives just one high-altitude perspective of what a community embraces and supports. To get a more detailed picture of a community's vision for the future, it is necessary to talk with community officials and local citizens to find out what kinds of transportation initiatives are being implemented thanks to good policy in place, or as is often the case, despite a lack of good policy in place. This report, which includes that human perspective, could not have been possible without the generous contributions of some people who carved out time in their busy schedules to talk honestly about active transportation in their respective communities. They are:

Mark Ostgarden, Brainerd City Planner

Greg Kimman, Little Falls City Engineer

Bradley Swenson, Wadena City Administrator

Brenda Thomes, Long Prairie City Clerk/Administrator

Cassie Carey, State Health Improvement Program (SHIP) Coordinator for Crow Wing County

Katherine Mackedanz, SHIP coordinator for Cass, Wadena, Todd and Morrison Counties

Sheila Funk, Community Health Educator with Morrison County Public Health

Terri Bjorklund, Walker City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer/Planning and Zoning Administrator

What exactly is active transportation?

The Partnership for Active Transportation defines it as: "Any method of travel that is human-powered, but most commonly refers to walking and bicycling." It is sometimes called "non-motorized transportation," but the Partnership prefers the term "active

transportation” since it is a more positive statement that expresses the key connection between healthy active living and our transportation choices. Rails-To-Trails defines active transportation more simply as “to freely travel to destinations by walking and biking.” By any definition, active transportation offers the promise of improving the health of our people and the places in which they live.

What are the benefits of active transportation policies?

There are five basic benefits that any community can support. They are:

1. **Healthy People:** America, the State of Minnesota, and every community in the State are facing an obesity crisis. In a 2011 study by Minnesota Compass, about 28% of the adult population of Central Minnesota was considered obese. For the State as a whole, the figure is slightly less at 26%. For the U.S., 27.4% of the adult population is considered obese. Broken down by counties in which our five cities fall, Crow Wing is at 27%, Morrison is at 28.7%, Todd is at 28.4%, Wadena is at 28.2%, and Cass is at 27.7%. The major causes of obesity fall into the categories of behavior and environment. Behaviorally, the consumption of more calories than a person uses leads to becoming overweight. This can be corrected through an increase in physical activity and a decrease in calorie consumption. Environmentally, the layouts of our homes, our neighborhoods, and our workplaces promote or inhibit physical activity, which affects obesity. By making walking and biking safe and convenient, we can make it much easier for people to build routine physical activity into their daily lives.
2. **Healthy Environment:** More walking and biking allows our communities to more efficiently address numerous environmental challenges including air pollution and climate change, both of which are occurring because of the burning of fossil fuels.
3. **Healthy Economy:** Active transportation creates dynamic connected communities with a high quality of life that catalyzes small business development, increases property values, sparks tourism, and encourages corporate investment that attracts a talented highly educated workforce. Active transportation also offers economic benefits to families by providing transportation options that don't require consuming gasoline at almost \$4 per gallon. According to AAA, the average cost of owning, insuring, maintaining, and gassing up a car is more than \$9,000 per year. In Central Minnesota, that is a significant amount of money, and it could go a long way towards paying off a mortgage or shy-rocketing health care costs, purchasing higher quality foods, building up a savings cushion in case of a future emergency, and contributing to a child's higher education fund.
4. **Mobility for All:** Near-universal reliance on the automobile for transportation leaves many people out of the equation, stuck with no way to get around. Children, the elderly, the visually impaired or otherwise physically challenged, those with lower incomes, or those who simply choose to not have access to a car, are among the groups that benefit most when opportunities to safely walk or bicycle are improved.

5. **Attracts Millennials to Your Community:** Millennials (age 18-36) are 77 million strong or 24% of the U.S. population – the same as Baby Boomers (49-69 years old). They are coveted by all communities, which are competing with one another to either keep their kids close to home or bring them and their friends back after being away to get educated, or gain work experience, or spread one's wings and explore what else is out there. Numerous studies show that Millennials are relatively averse to driving, and are especially concerned about the costs of doing so. Nearly half of Millennials who own cars say that they would consider giving it up if they could count on public transportation or walkable/bikeable options. Millennials don't necessarily want the highest paying jobs, but in exchange for a lower paying job, they want to be able to stretch their income by living a sustainable life in walkable, bikeable, transit-friendly, mixed-use communities where they can be close to shops, restaurants, offices and cultural attractions. To target the desires of Millennials, cities and towns must change their policies to create more appealing urban-style downtowns, which include pedestrian-, bike- and transit-friendly ways of getting around, a mix of residential and commercial development with a mix of housing types for any income and choice, and attractive, appealing public gathering areas. In surveys by the Rockefeller Foundation and Transportation for America, 86% of Millennials said it was important for their city to offer opportunities to live and work without relying on a car. In another survey by the American Planning Association, only 7% of Millennials said they want to live where they have to drive to most places.

Are there policies in our five targeted cities that support active transportation?

For each city, we will examine what policies they currently have that support healthier alternatives to a car to get from Point A to Point B. All of our cities have comprehensive plans and ordinances (or city codes), which were reviewed to find language that supported walking and bicycling options in their community. One city – Brainerd – also has a strategic plan, and that was reviewed as well.

In general, all comprehensive plans want the same thing: a successful vision for the future, and that vision usually includes things like clean water, healthy lakes, open spaces for recreation, efficient transportation systems, livable wage jobs, affordable taxes, top-of-the-line government services, a unique sense of place, and in general, to be a vibrant, resilient community where anyone would want to live, work or play. Unfortunately, there is often a disconnect between the vision described in the comprehensive plan and the ordinances or rules of development that guide developers on what they are allowed to do in a community. The goals of clean water and healthy lakes, for example, don't necessarily agree with high-density development of shorelands and the filling of wetlands, but that's what we see happening on the ground because it's allowed in ordinances.

This disconnect between a comprehensive plan and ordinances can also be seen when looking specifically at active transportation. The comprehensive plans for all five cities contain good concepts that seemingly embrace walkability and/or bikeability.

Unfortunately, those well-meaning concepts are often forgotten when ordinances are written. This happens in most, if not all, communities. At the end of this report, recommendations will be made to help any community get beyond their broad vision and get closer to implementing active transportation through better policies and ordinances. One recommendation worth mentioning early in this report, however, is that communities must begin to use stronger language when describing their vision for what they want to be in the future.

In the comprehensive plans for our five cities that are reviewed below, the reader should take notice that the language used is often too soft to create ordinances or actions with any bite. For example, in a comprehensive plan, a community might state that they want to “promote” or “encourage” bike trails. A nice concept, but it’s tough to write a defensible, get-the-job-done ordinance based on a sentence or two with non-action-inspiring verbs like promote and encourage. If a community truly wants to be more bike-friendly or pedestrian-friendly, they need to use more action-oriented verbs in their policies like “require” and “must.” A community has no problems saying that residential or commercial development in certain areas is required to hook up to sewer and water, no questions asked, but that same community will typically not make sidewalks and bike trails a requirement when building near schools, even though their comprehensive plan states that as a community, they want to **promote** active transportation options, especially near schools and parks.

Along with a review of comprehensive plan language and ordinance language, this report will site examples of active transportation projects that are happening in each city. Even if strong policies are lacking, active transportation projects are still happening, and there are a variety of reasons why. First, there are walking and biking advocates in every community, and their increasing numbers and influence are helping to push projects forward into implementation. Second, city staff is being proactive because they are hearing from their citizens that biking and walking options are desirable additions to a community’s sense of place. And third, a city council may have at least one biking and walking advocate who wants to make that a priority during their time as an elected official. The greatest success happens when all three of those reasons come together in support of an existing, strongly worded, action-requiring policy statement and/or ordinance. For those communities choosing to ignore this growing desire by its residents and visitors to be more bike- and pedestrian-friendly, they should be reminded of what Henry Ford III once said: “If you don’t like change, you’ll like obsolescence even less.”

The City of Brainerd

Brainerd Comprehensive Plan: The Brainerd Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2004. It contains a number of statements that support active transportation. They are as follows:

- A community-wide vision includes 10 statements describing what Brainerd should be. One says “A place where an effective transportation system is

available: The City will strive for the most effective roads, railroads, airport facilities, potential regional commuter rail, public transit, **sidewalks and expanded trail systems** that offer alternative modes of moving people and goods around and through the city. The City recognizes its place as a regional economic center and that the transportation network must support the economic activity of the region.”

- The City creates goals and strategies. Goals are general statements of community aspirations that indicate a broad social, economic, or physical state of conditions that the community officially agrees to strive to achieve in a variety of ways. Strategies are officially adopted courses or methods of action intended to be followed to implementation. For example, a goal for downtown is “to support the economic viability and diversification of the Downtown Commercial District.” Strategies include: “#3) Refocus development efforts to take advantage of the Mississippi River and the regional trails to improve the character and access to the downtown area; and #4) Evaluate and recommend improvements to downtown pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow.”
- A goal is given for “orderly, efficient, and fiscally responsible growth of residential development in Brainerd.” A strategy for that goal is “to **encourage** [rather than the stronger word, require] the development of a trail system and open spaces in new residential developments with points-of-interest destinations.” It should be mentioned that another strategy for this same goal is to “**require** all residential developments to be connected to public water and sewer where feasible,” so the word require has a place in comprehensive plans; it just isn’t used enough when it comes to active transportation options.
- A goal for parks and open space is to “provide and maintain adequate community parks and open space to meet the future needs of the community.” Strategy #2 states: “Strongly support [again, not require] the expansion of parks, trails and open space along the Mississippi River and Gilbert Lake.” Strategy #4 states: “Improve the greenway and trail connections between the existing and future community parks, and provide trail connections to the Spur Line and the Paul Bunyan Trail.”
- Concerning transportation, goal #4 is to “**promote** alternative transportation such as bicycling, walking, transit and trail.” Six of the nine strategies support biking and walking options. They are: “1) Incorporate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure when planning changes, additions, or maintenance to roads, sidewalks, bridges, paths or other public facilities; 2) Incorporate bike safety standards into planned transportation improvements; 3) Continue to maintain and seek ways to expand the existing network of bicycle and pedestrian trails throughout the City; 4) **Encourage** sidewalks and separated pathways along all arterial and collector streets in developing residential and commercial areas through the City’s subdivision regulations; 5) **Promote** the connectivity of alternative transportation systems and have such transportation systems connect efficiently to community and recreational facilities; and 6) Design

local streets to discourage driving at unsafe speeds, and **promote** pedestrian and bicycle use.”

- In the Land Use and Development Plan section, there is a statement that reads as follows: “Plan for bikeways and walkways connecting commercial areas, parks and other points of interest including the Mississippi River.”
- In the Transportation Plan, which is part of the Land Use and Development Plan, it states that SRF Consulting Group was hired by Brainerd to analyze the transportation system within the community. Nothing is mentioned about active transportation needs being addressed in the analysis.

Brainerd Strategic Plan: This strategic plan was adopted by the Brainerd City Council on July 1, 2013. This document was created 9 years after the comprehensive plan was last updated in 2004. In those 9 years, the City of Brainerd has a different city planner, a significantly different city council, a different city administrator, and different attitudes about city priorities. This short document contains some good specific focuses and action steps that support new active transportation initiatives in the city.

- The mission statement is “to provide high quality, cost effective public services and leadership in creating a sustainable city.” Sustainable city is defined as “a place where people will want to live and work, now and in the future, in enjoyable, well-functioned, high quality environments.”
- The vision statement says that the City of Brainerd “will invest in its neighborhoods, and place an emphasis on recreational and cultural opportunities.”
- Strategic Focus #1 is “to invest in the City neighborhoods.” One objective of this focus is to “develop walkable and bikeable neighborhoods.” Action steps needed to meet the objective include the following: “Develop comprehensive City-wide sidewalk, trail and bike lane plans for inclusion in the City’s comprehensive plan and also be used as the basis of a Complete Streets program; and all plans will be based upon consideration of citizen involvement and input.” The timeline for this is to “develop a plan by 2014, have citizen input meetings in 2015, and adoption of the plan by the city council in 2016.”
- Strategic Focus #4 is “to design and build a Mississippi Riverwalk.” The objective is “to connect downtown to the rest of the trails winding through town, which will assist in Brainerd’s ‘brand’ by ultimately connecting the City to the river.” Action steps to meet this objective include the following: “Collect applicable visioning tools i.e. maps, photos, illustrations and already formulated plans; prepare information describing the need, vision, and benefits of the project; collect information on rough cost estimates to determine the scale of the project and final funding needs; begin communications with prospective partners; and complete trail connections throughout the City.” Timeline to accomplish this is 12/31/2016.

Brainerd Subdivision Ordinance: This document was last updated in 2010 and contains the rules for subdivision development within the city limits. There isn't a lot in here that promotes walking and biking, but there are some passages worth noting.

- Under Section 7, “Design Standards,” there is a passage that reads: “A proposed subdivision shall conform to the Comprehensive Plan, to related policies adopted by the City, and to the Brainerd Zoning Ordinance, as may be amended.” Here is example showing that new development in the city is required to respect the comprehensive plan and other related policies. Therefore, if the comprehensive plan and other city policies used stronger language and got away from words like “promote” and “encourage,” proposed subdivisions would be required, according to the Subdivision Ordinance, to incorporate things like sidewalks, trails, etc. in their design.
- Under the same section, there is a passage relating to city blocks. It reads: “Blocks over 900 feet long **may require** pedestrian ways at least 10 feet wide at their approximate center. The use of additional pedestrian ways to schools, parks, and other destinations **may be required.**” The insertion of that little word “may” changes whether a pedestrian way gets built or not. It isn't **required. It may be required.**
- Under the heading titled “Sidewalks and Trails,” the language is stronger. It reads: “Concrete sidewalks in new developments not less than 6 feet in width, 10 feet in commercial zoning districts, and/or bituminous trails not less than 10 feet in width **shall be provided.**” There follows a listing of street types and the sidewalk/trail requirements for each street type. For example, for arterial and major collector streets, the sidewalk/trail **requirements** are as follows: “Sidewalk on both sides of the street or sidewalk on one side of the street and trail on the other side of the street if part of a larger trail network.” For minor collector and local streets, excepting cul-de-sacs, the sidewalk/trail requirements are as follows: “Sidewalks on both sides of street and if a trail is part of a minor collector that alternate sidewalk and trail would apply.” For cul-de-sacs, the requirement is “sidewalk around cul-de-sac.” On an industrial street type, the requirement is “either/or sidewalk/trail.”
- Under Section 8, “Public Land Dedication,” there is a passage that reads: “As a prerequisite to any subdivision approval and at the sole determination by the City, applicants and/or developers **shall dedicate** land for parks, playgrounds, public open spaces and/or trails and/or shall make a cash contribution to the City's Park Dedication Fund roughly related to the anticipated effect of the subdivision on the park system.” This is a good example of a park dedication ordinance. These are commonly used by cities and counties to create new parks and trails needed to accommodate the additional recreational impacts of those who will live in a new subdivision. A good example of a park dedication ordinance – one that is based partially on the City of Brainerd ordinance – is referenced in the recommendations section of this report.

Brainerd Zoning Code: While there isn't much in the code that relates directly to active transportation opportunities, there is a passage on mixed-use development, which many cities are using to promote more vibrant downtowns with a mix of residential and commercial development, a mix of housing types, and greater opportunities for walking and biking.

- Under Section 72, "Mixed-Use District," it reads: "This district will allow latitude in permitting and encouraging diversity in land uses and permitting variation and imagination in the relationship of uses in the district." Again, this is an excellent concept that could use stronger language. For a well-worded ordinance to create vibrant mixed-use districts in a city, see the example in the recommendations section of this report.

What's happening on the ground in Brainerd because of good active transportation policy or despite a lack of good policy?

Mark Ostgarden, the Brainerd City Planner, says, "Being a more walkable and bikable community is now a priority focus in Brainerd." He adds, "Brainerd has some good active transportation policy statements in its comprehensive plan and in its recent strategic plan, but even so, getting to implementation can still be tough." He credits City staff for leading the initiative to convert Willow Street into a Complete Street, which went from a wide auto-specific neighborhood road to a multi-purpose road with painted bike lanes to safely accommodate bicyclists and walkers in an area with no sidewalks.

Mark says, "As evidence of our commitment to active transportation in Brainerd, we have invested \$2-3 million on non-motorized transportation options including the Buffalo Hills Trail, the College Drive Trail, connecting trails, and participation in Safe Routes to Schools programs." Other active transportation projects on the agenda for Brainerd include working with MnDOT to design South 6th Street from Hwy 210 to Joseph Street. In 2016, that stretch of road will go from 4 car lanes to 3 car lanes with bike lanes and sidewalks. In 2017, thanks to a secured \$400 K grant, the work will continue south from Joseph Street to Buffalo Hills Lane. The city has also been working with MnDOT to improve traffic light timing for safe pedestrian crossings and clearing snow for pedestrians and bicyclists who use the bridges on Hwy 210. In addition, successful bonding for the Cuyuna Trail will allow connections to be made with the Brainerd trails and the Paul Bunyan Trail, which now stretches from Crow Wing State Park north through Brainerd/Baxter and continues north to Bemidji.

An exciting project happening right now came about because of the City's Strategic Plan and a call for action to create a Mississippi Riverwalk. The City contributed funding dollars and formed a steering committee of citizens to work with the City and the University of Minnesota's Center for Rural Design to create a design plan that includes a riverwalk and bike trail connections along the Mississippi River as it flows through Brainerd.

The City of Brainerd is also working closely with citizen advocates for active transportation, and together, they have formed the Walkable and Bikeable City Committee. They began meeting in November of 2013 to implement more active transportation options in the city. They are not only looking at connecting bike trails, but are looking into opportunities to increase safe walking and biking options for workers to get from their home to their work place, and for shoppers to get from their homes to stores without the use of a car. The group, which helped promote the Willow Street Complete Street Project, is now working with City staff to create a city-wide Complete Streets Policy.

Crow Wing Energized is a program coordinated by the State Health Improvement Program (SHIP), which receives funding through the Minnesota Department of Health. SHIP Coordinator, Cassie Carey, says, “Four committees have been formed to address pressing health issues in the county and in the City of Brainerd. One of those committees is trying to develop strategies that encourage the population to make healthier choices, and one of the desired outcomes is to increase active living opportunities and more active lifestyles. More active transportation options will contribute to citizens being able to make healthier choices.”

The City of Wadena

Wadena Comprehensive Plan: The Wadena Comprehensive Plan is just one year old. It was revised in 2013. The previous plan was done back in 1986 and was an update of the original 1970 plan. Applicable active transportation passages are listed below.

- In Section 2.25, there is a listing of bike trails in the city. They include the Leaf River Trail, which is 10.6 miles of paved, shared-use trail that “provides a recreational opportunity for the residents of Wadena, and provides for other modes of transportation between the City’s core and the northern subdivisions.”
- Section 2.9 states: “Wadena recently constructed a new high school along its western edge adjacent to MN Hwy. 29. School officials and city leaders have expressed concerns based on their observations that truck traffic along this route will conflict with the need to provide a safe route to school for children who can easily walk a few blocks to school from adjacent neighborhoods.”
- In Section 3.3, “Issue Identification,” comments received from residents that apply to active transportation included the following: “1) Sidewalk and bike improvements need to be made; 2) Participants indicated a high level of agreement in regards to the interaction between bicycles and pedestrians with vehicular traffic around the new school; 3) Respondents displayed a generally neutral feeling towards increasing the priority of construction and maintenance of sidewalks and bike trails within the City of Wadena; and 4)

Most people agreed that there is a need to improve bicycle and pedestrian access to Black's Grove Park.”

- Under Section 6.3, “Transportation and Land Use Relationship,” it states: “Acknowledging the relationship between land use and transportation is important. For this reason, ensuring on-going consistency between the comprehensive plan and transportation plan is also important. Neither document should be prepared independently from the other.”
- Under Section 6.5, “The Public Realm,” it states: “The public right of way includes streets, sidewalks, and boulevards which provide access to private properties throughout the city. Sidewalks are an important element of the right of way as they allow the movement of pedestrians and bicyclists. To ensure the safe movement of all forms of transportation, the city **should require** the construction of sidewalks along all city streets as part of their subdivision regulations. Additionally, review of the location and width of the proposed sidewalks **should be** included during the approval of a building permit.”
- Under Section 6.7, “Environment,” it states: “Reduce vehicle miles traveled. Reducing the vehicle miles traveled helps to create a more physically active and healthier community.” Suggested examples listed include the implementation of Safe Routes to School and traffic calming features such as the planting of boulevard trees and by making local streets and neighborhood collector streets no wider than necessary. It is stated that “these conditions encourage walking and biking.” Another example includes the use of Compact Urban Form to avoid sprawling forms of development. “Compact urban developments encourage walking and biking and result in fewer vehicle miles traveled by residents of the community.” The last example is mixed land use, which “creates vibrant walkable downtowns.”
- In the Action Plan, Section 7.5, an action is to “provide sidewalks to ensure safe pedestrian mobility and increase active living.” The short-range action is to “amend subdivision regulations to include **a requirement** for sidewalks along all city streets.” The mid-range action is to “**Require** sidewalk construction as a development standard to be included on all site plans for building permit applications.” The long-range action is to “follow through with subdivision regulations.”
- In the Action Plan, Section 7.6, an action is to “reduce vehicle dependency and carbon emissions.” The short range actions are to “mix land uses to make walking and biking more feasible and attractive, and develop a Compact Urban Form, where applicable, to reduce the overall street mileage throughout a development.” The mid-range and long-range actions are the same as the short-range action.

Wadena City Code: As with many city codes, there is little in the Wadena City Code that requires active transportation implementation. The Wadena Comprehensive Plan calls for actions to implement active transportation, but this is just one more example of a disconnect between comprehensive plans and

ordinances/codes. Passages in the code that are applicable to active transportation are listed below.

- In Section 8.32 titled “Skateboards, Roller Skates and Bicycles,” restrictions are put on their usage rather than promoting their use throughout the city. This is a good example of what we generally see in city codes – not what should be done, but what isn’t allowed. The code states “it **is unlawful** for any person to operate, propel or ride a skateboard, roller skate, or a bicycle upon any public sidewalk, street or parking lot in the Downtown Area of the City.” Keeping bicyclists off downtown sidewalks is one thing, but also restricting them from using the streets in downtown is a bold statement that is only acceptable if there are already ample bike trails through the downtown area. Doesn’t this position against bicycles in downtown conflict with the earlier passage under Section 6.5, the Public Realm, which states: “Sidewalks are an important element of the right of way as they allow the movement of pedestrians and bicyclists?” The code doesn’t just limit bikes on downtown sidewalks and streets. It goes further by stating: “It **is unlawful** for any person to operate, propel or ride a skateboard, roller skate, or ride a bicycle on or within that portion of any State trunk highway, County State-aid highway or County highway designed for vehicular use.” Again, this law might be less objectionable if there were existing safe biking trails/lanes along all of those highways mentioned. Unfortunately there aren’t, so if a person wants to get to work, or shop, or visit a friend via their bicycle, and there are no bicycle-specific trails to do so, they have to break a law. That is not the kind of language or message that is conducive to promoting active transportation options. It’s time for all communities to look for new and innovative ways (like Complete Streets) to better accommodate bicyclists rather than outlawing them.
- In Chapter 12, “Land Use Regulation (Platting), Subd. 2,” there is another statement that conflicts with a previously stated desire. The statement in question reads: “Streets for residential development shall not be less than eighty (80) feet in width.” In the same document in Section 6.7 titled “Environment,” there is an attempt to implement traffic calming features, one of which is that “neighborhood collector streets should be no wider than necessary.” This call for limiting the size of streets should apply to all streets if providing active transportation opportunities is a real desire in a community. Narrower streets are less expensive for cities to maintain and they can reduce speed limits, increase safety, and still provide for emergency vehicle access. For these reasons, many communities across the U.S. are recommending narrower road widths, which typically range from 29 feet to 36 feet. The National Fire Protection Association recommends 22 feet. The City of Portland, Oregon recommends 18 feet with one lane of parking or 26 feet with parking on both sides. Baltimore County, Maryland recommends 24 feet with on-street parking and just 16 feet with no on-street parking.

What’s happening on the ground in Wadena because of good active transportation policy or despite a lack of good policy?

City Administrator Bradley Swenson says, “The tornado that came through Wadena four years ago did a lot of damage, but it also energized our community to make a lot of positive changes. For example, we have a new school, a new community center, a new hockey arena, new fairgrounds, and a new park. The high school site was moved, so now the high school, the college and an elementary school are all close to one another, which should make it easier to coordinate transportation of students. FEMA relief dollars helped the community to add sidewalks that tie into our plan to create safer walking and biking routes for children getting to and from their schools.”

Bradley adds, “The City has an aggressive sidewalk policy for the downtown core. In addition, on the north side of town, where redevelopment is happening, sidewalks are required on at least one side of the street. On the southeast side of town, a proposed planning process will begin in 2015 to replace bad sidewalks and build new ones. Also, bike trails to connect city parks has been supported by the City Council. The City has also applied for a Safe Routes to School grant to add sidewalks, lighting and crosswalks.”

Bradley says, “Most of the ideas supporting walking and biking options are coming from City staff and the City Council. They are generally not coming from community members. At present, there doesn’t seem to be a lot of support for Complete Streets.” Bradley added that one problem might be that the City doesn’t have a lot of good communication materials (i.e. brochures and informational packets) to promote active transportation options available to its citizens.

The City of Long Prairie

Long Prairie Comprehensive Plan: This plan was completed in 1999. In the minutes from a Long Prairie City Council meeting on February 12, 2012, there was discussion of a request for the City to do a strategic plan as a less expensive alternative to a comprehensive plan update (\$5,000 as opposed to \$20,000). At present, a strategic plan for Wadena has not been done. Applicable passages in the 1999 Comprehensive Plan are listed below.

- Under a section titled, “Issues with Greatest Consensus,” the following concerns appear: “1) Provide adequate facilities, services, and amenities. The City is currently unable to meet the needs of the population in a number of areas including housing, infrastructure, recreation, community facilities and employment; 2) Improve planning efforts; and 3) Address the changing needs and issues of the community.”

- Under a section titled, “Weaknesses/Threats,” two of those cited as significant weaknesses are a “lack of recreational and exercise facilities, and deterioration of downtown.”
- Under the section for transportation, there is no mention of promoting or encouraging more active transportation (biking and walking) opportunities in the community.

Goals and Policies: This document was done in 2004. It defines goals as “general statements of community aspirations and objectives.” Policies are defined as “officially adopted courses or methods of action intended to be followed to implement the community goals.”

- Goal #1 is to “maximize the potential of the community as a thriving center for business and recreation while maintaining and enhancing its livability.” Policies to support this goal are as follows: “1) Promote the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan; and 2) Review the Comprehensive Plan bi-annually and amend as necessary to ensure its usefulness as a practical guide for current and future development.”
- Under “Land Use Goals and Policies,” there is nothing of note with regards to active transportation.
- Under “Recreation Goals and Policies,” goal #1 is “provide and maintain an appropriate number of recreational facilities that meet the needs of all community residents, regardless of age or socio-economic status.” A policy recommendation for this goal is to “work with state and Todd County officials to develop, maintain and **promote** a regional trail.”
- Goal #2 for recreation is “maintain adequate active and passive open space to meet the needs of the community.” A policy recommendation is “develop a hiking/biking and/or a nature path system throughout the community which is integrated with park facilities.” Connecting parks via bike trails is a common tactic communities will use to address the desires of local bicycle advocates. Those trails are certainly appreciated, but what communities often forget is that bicycling isn’t just a recreational activity, so communities need to begin to look at bikes the same way they look at cars and find ways to get bikers from the neighborhoods where they live to the places where they work and shop.
- Under “Transportation Goals and Policies,” goal #1 is “provide and maintain a safe, convenient, and efficient local transportation system for the movement of people and goods.” Policies for this goal include the following: “3) Design neighborhood streets to **encourage** pedestrian use along with safe speeds; and 6) Draft and implement a comprehensive sidewalk system plan **requiring** installation and maintenance along major arterial and collector streets in the City.”
- Under “Environmental Goals and Policies,” a goal is “promote environmental stewardship for the community’s long-term environmental benefit.” A policy in support of that goal is “convert floodplain areas to passive open space areas

suitable for walking and biking trails, preserving natural features, and providing exposure to Long Prairie's sensitive environmental areas.”

- In the Land Use Plan under “Urban Design and Community Character,” there is an expressed “need for pedestrian-style street lights in downtown and around neighborhood and community parks, and around institutional areas such as schools and churches.” The City action step is to “develop a lighting plan and determine whether it is feasible and desirable to add pedestrian-style lighting in high profile areas of the City.” The time frame for this action step is as follows: “The 5-year lighting plan will be developed by the end of 2011. Implementation of the plan will begin the following year.” According to City Clerk, Brenda Thomes, the city completed its lighting plan.
- In the Transportation Plan, it states: “A 20-year street and roadway improvement plan will be developed that prioritizes city streets, sidewalks and alleys for improvement and reconstruction.” The City action step is to “develop a long-term street, alley and sidewalk improvement plan.” The timeline for this action step is to implement the plan over the next 20 years.
- In the Transportation Plan, there is a statement that reads: “Allow for sidewalks and alleys in residential areas. Sidewalks and alleys can be important components of a walkable, well-designed city. Through the use of sidewalks, teenagers, parents with young children, elderly persons, etc. can easily walk or bike throughout the city with minimal contact to automobile traffic. Sidewalks along one side of a collector or arterial street **should be** considered as the minimum [why not say, “are required?”] to encourage increased walking and biking through the City. Sidewalks in high traffic areas such as schools, parks, churches, the downtown area and other community facilities **should also be encouraged.**” City action steps are to “review its Subdivision Ordinance to ensure that sidewalks are required on all arterial and collector streets. In developed areas along existing arterials, such as Hwy 27 east of downtown, the City will work with the public Works Dept. to determine whether a sidewalk is possible. The City will also work with MnDOT and Todd County to ensure sidewalks are built when major roadway improvements occur. The timeline for this action step is as follows: “Review and modification of the subdivision ordinance will occur by the end of 2006.”
- Table 24, an Implementation Matrix, lists actions and prioritizations from 1-3. The action, “Allow for sidewalks and alleys in residential areas” received a 3, the lowest on the priority scale. The action step, “Improve and increase public lighting,” received a top priority of 1. The action step, “Plan for new park and open space areas,” received a low priority 3. The action step, “Maintain and improve existing street system,” received a rating of “on-going priority.”
- In 2005, a sidewalk plan was developed and several new sidewalks were installed.

Long Prairie Ordinances: Again, there is very little referenced in the ordinances that directly or indirectly ties to the encouragement or promotion of active transportation. One reference found was restrictive of bicycle use rather than

supportive of it. In the “Vehicles and Traffic Section,” 8.203 under “Rules for Operation,” it states: “No person shall ride a bicycle upon a sidewalk within a business district.”

What’s happening on the ground in Long Prairie because of good active transportation policy or despite a lack of good policy?

According to Brenda Thomes, City Clerk/Administrator, Long Prairie understands that walking and biking options are amenities desired by people of all ages.

Brenda says, “Long Prairie has a pretty good network of sidewalks through our downtown, and the City is working with the neighboring cities of Sauk Center, Browerville, Swanville, Little Falls, Hewitt, and Wadena to create a connected bike trail system that would go through our respective communities and add value to each one. The City of Hewitt received a small grant to do a feasibility study.” Brenda said there may also be some Centra Care funding available since bicycling and a healthier lifestyle are so closely connected to preventative health care. The City has also applied for Safe Routes to School funding. One comment heard from some visitors of Long Prairie was that the downtown has a good network of sidewalks to get around. Unfortunately, many of the City trees hang so low over the sidewalks, it’s difficult to walk without ducking below the branches. The visitors said, “If the City would trim some trees, more people might use the sidewalks.”

The City of Little Falls

Little Falls Comprehensive Plan: The Little Falls Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2006. The City understands that its future success rests largely on the vibrancy of its planning for downtown and along the Mississippi River, which flows through downtown. Accommodating pedestrians and bicyclists in these areas are priorities. Applicable active transportation passages are presented below.

- Goal #9, “Transportation,” states: “Promote a harmonious system which allows safe, freely flowing traffic movement for all modes of transportation, **servicing pedestrians, cyclists**, automobiles, trucks, rail, air, and navigation on the Mississippi River.”
- #5 of the “Thirteen Key Features of the Comprehensive Plan” is “Downtown, the River and Mixed Use.” This passage reads: “The heart of the City is the downtown and the river. Adding new mixed uses downtown, especially along the river on underutilized sites, will make the City more viable, more efficient, and should **increase the walkability.**”
- #7 of the “Thirteen Key Features of the Comprehensive Plan” is “Transportation Projects.” This passage reads: “A transportation plan with a balanced interrelated set of projects is proposed which **includes walks, trails,**

collector roads, arterials, freeways, interchanges, and a second river bridge with a grade separation at the railroad, reduction of the railroad nuisance.”

- #8 of the “Key Features of the Comprehensive Plan” is “Neighborhood Context.” This passage reads: “Future residential growth is based on establishing a neighborhood context for the dwellings, which **includes an internal system of trails**, parks and open space.”
- Under the heading, “Zoning Changes to Consider to Evaluate,” a passage reads: “Amend zoning ordinances to establish a mixed use district.”
- Under Section 4, “Parks, Trails and Open Space,” the following are considered reasonable standards or guidelines: “Trails – a network to provide access to, through and in some cases between schools, community facilities, commercial areas, and park and open space areas. Trails can be used for active and passive recreation, e.g., walking, biking, running, scenic observation, etc.” Policy recommendations to support the above standard are: “1) Promote linking public school sites with the public park and open space system; and 2) Construct and maintain trails and open space links throughout the community to provide alternative access routes between uses and areas, to **provide space for walking, biking and jogging**, and to serve as development breaks.”
- “Trail Recommendations” are as follows: “1) County Road 76 – by 2007, extend a trail system from Edmund St. to South of 13th Ave. NE; 2) Paul Bunyan Trail – **Encourage and support** a regional need to extend the Paul Bunyan Trail through the City; and 3) Other – Construct an annual element of the system.”
- Under Section 5, which deals with commerce, there is a heading entitled, “Make a Connection between Commerce and Active Transportation Opportunities.” The issues and needs in downtown include the following: “More mixed use, more river oriented uses and activities, continue to make downtown Little Falls more attractive to tourists, continual enhancement of the downtown image, **enhancing pedestrian friendliness/walkability**, and making downtown a more people oriented area, especially by the river.” Policies recommended for mixed use in downtown and other commerce areas of the City include the following: “By 2010, **achieve** [a more active verb than promote or encourage] at least one high-quality new mixed use development downtown, which includes housing on the upper floors; and amend the zoning for downtown regarding mixed use allowing apartments or condos above the first floor and prohibition of new detached single family dwellings and ground level residential units downtown.”
- Under Section 6, “Transportation,” the current conditions are described as follows: “The city has many blocks of sidewalks located on the outside edge of the right-of-way with a conventional boulevard between the sidewalk and the paved road. Many of the newer residential areas have only a marginal network of sidewalks or none at all. Few trails exist in the City. Most trails are located in parks such as Maple Island and Lindbergh State park.”
- Some of the expressed transportation needs include the following: “#4 – **Require** Improvements – In new subdivisions, **require**

subdividers/developers to be responsible for the installation of roads, walks and trails with the approval of new subdivisions.” #6 reads: “Trails and Pedestrianways – the sidewalk system is fairly complete in large parts of the City, but almost lacking in other parts. Few trails exist.”

- Transportation policy recommendations include the following: “1) Balanced and Complete System – **Establish** a balanced and complete transportation system by adding the needs of pedestrians, automobiles, bicycles, trucks, air transportation, railroads, river navigation, and in the future, perhaps transit; 2) Street Improvements – Improve the streets functionality and aesthetically to carry traffic, provide access to property, and to **provide for pedestrians**; and 3) Developing Areas – **Require** subdividers to establish and construct local streets, walks and trails in the neighborhoods.”
- Under Section 7, “Community Facilities,” policy recommendation #6 reads as follows: “Pedestrian-Bikeway Links to Schools – **Promote** establishment of links between neighborhoods, schools and parks.”

Little Falls City Ordinances:

- Under Chapter 7, “Streets and Sidewalks,” Section 7.18, there is a heading entitled: “Skateboards, scooters, bicycles, in-line skates (rollerblades) and roller skates.” It reads: “Right-of-way: Sidewalks: Whenever a person is riding or using skateboards, scooters, bicycles, in-line skates (rollerblades) or roller skates upon a sidewalk, such person shall give audible signals before overtaking and passing another person.” This passage recognizes that sidewalks will be used by multiple users and not just pedestrians. That said, there is an additional passage for “Unlawful Use,” which reads: “It is unlawful for any person to ride, use or operate skateboards, scooters, bicycles, in-line skates (rollerblades) or roller skates on a sidewalk within an area zoned general business district B-2 under this code.” This rule, which is commonplace nowadays for downtown districts, prioritizes pedestrian safety on downtown sidewalks, but it often ignores previous statements in comprehensive plans and policies that call for creating more bicycling opportunities in downtown districts. That isn’t the case in Little Falls, which created a Complete Street with bike lanes along 1st St. through the downtown area, so bicyclists don’t have to ride illegally on the sidewalks to feel safer than riding on a busy street. If communities truly want more bicyclists commuting through their downtown areas, they need to relax their rules about riding on sidewalks or they need to provide alternative spaces (like designated bike lanes) for them to move about the downtown district safely and legally.
- Under Chapter 12, “Subdivision Regulations,” there are rules about sidewalks. It states that “sidewalks **shall be constructed** along both sides of all major public ways as designated on a comprehensive plan upon which buildable lots front, and **may be required** by the city council upon recommendation of the planning commission along one or both sides of other rights of way.” Another passage reads: “In single family zones, the minimum width for sidewalks is 5

feet, but there is a 6-foot minimum in multiple family zones, public building sites, commercial zones and industrial zones.”

- For pedestrianways, a passage reads: “In blocks over 900 feet long, pedestrian crosswalks through the blocks and at least 10 feet wide, **may be required** by the City Council in locations deemed necessary to public health, convenience and necessity.”
- In Section 12.08, entitled, “Public Sites and Open Spaces,” there is a passage on park dedication that reads: “All plats, including plats associated with planned unit developments, shall be subject to the park dedication requirements of this section. In all new subdivisions, there shall be land dedicated for public recreation and/or open space, or other public recreation purpose, with such land being in addition to property dedicated for streets, alleys, easements or other public ways. The City Council will reasonably determine whether the development or subdivision will increase the demand for public recreational uses, such as parks, playgrounds, trails and open space. At least 7% of the area to be developed or sub-divided shall be set aside and dedicated by fee title or easement to the city for public recreation and/or open space purposes. Land used to extend an existing or proposed trail system is eligible for consideration. The City Council, in its discretion upon recommendation by the planning commission, may accept a cash fee in lieu of land dedication, or accept a combination of cash and land contributions.”
- Under Section 12.09, entitled, “Required Improvements on Site,” there is a passage that reads: “Sidewalks and Pedestrianways – Permanent sidewalks and pedestrianways **shall be installed** when residential density becomes 3 dwelling units per acre or more, unless a variance is authorized.” Those five words added on to the end of the sentence allow a variance to be a possible and plausible way out for developers to get away with not building sidewalks in higher-density residential areas.

What’s happening on the ground in Little Falls because of good active transportation policy or despite a lack of good policy?

Little Falls is being held up as the example for other communities interested in implementing a Complete Streets program. The City turned a four-lane, car-centric road (1st Street), which runs right through the heart of its downtown district, into a Complete Street with two car lanes, a center turning lane, two bike lanes, and still kept the parallel parking on both sides of the street. Most of these changes simply involved the relatively inexpensive task of repainting lines on the road. According to City Engineer, Greg Kimman, “This happened not because we had a great Complete Streets policy. Rather, it happened because groups of bicycle enthusiasts started looking for ways to connect the Camp Ripley/Veterans State Trail (to the north of Little Falls) with the Soo Line Trail (to the south of Little Falls), and the City wanted to be proactive about bringing bicycle traffic right through the downtown district where local businesses could benefit.” When the Camp Ripley/Veterans State Trail is completed, it will connect Crow Wing State Park with the Soo Line Trail and link to the Lake Wobegon Trail, the Paul

Bunyan Trail, the Heartland Trail, and the Mi-Gi-Zi Trail. It will put Little Falls at the hub of an interconnected trail system of an estimated 400 miles. In addition, this trail will be part of the Mississippi River Trail, a designated route from the Mississippi River Headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. In that vein, the City will soon begin posting signage letting pedestrians and bicyclists know that they are on the Mississippi River Trail, a trail with significant national importance and pride.

The City of Walker

Walker Area Comprehensive Plan: This plan was last updated in 2010. It contains many well-written passages that refer to the need to rethink the public realm and how to better accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians. Applicable passages to active transportation are referenced below.

- There is a passage in the Walker Comprehensive Plan that could be written in almost every plan in almost every city in the country. It reads: “While the automobile is a fantastic device that we should not be without, the change to an auto-oriented development pattern has damaged the character of the community. It has detracted from the public realm envisioned by those that set out the town’s original pattern. By orienting new development exclusively towards the automobile, Walker is losing its competitive advantage and is slowly transforming into a town that is indistinguishable from most small towns in the United States.”
- Under the heading, “Physical Elements of Character – Building Complex Streets,” a passage reads: “When streets are designed solely to move automobiles, they become harsh human environments that shun pedestrian life. When complexity is built into streets in the form of sidewalks, landscaping, on-street parking, narrower lanes and slower traffic, the public realm is enhanced and can be shared by many modes of transportation.”
- Under the heading, “Provide Safe Pedestrian/Auto Interfaces,” a passage reads: “A city needs cars and people, but the two do not mix well in a small-town environment. Designing the areas where pedestrians and automobiles interface in a way that limits the amount of interaction and creates a reasonably safe pedestrian environment will enhance the experience for the pedestrian and the automobile.”
- Under the heading of “Goals, Policies and Strategies,” a passage reads: “The City of Walker adopts the following goals related to community character: 1) Provide a high quality of life for the residents of Walker by improving the public realm and enhancing the character of community; 2) Improve property values throughout the City by ensuring that all development enhances the public realm and builds on the character of the community; and 3) Develop pedestrian-scale connections throughout and between neighborhoods to make Walker a more livable and vibrant community for people of all ages and incomes.”

- There is a passage that reads: “To accomplish the stated goals, the City of Walker adopts the following policies: 1) The pattern of new growth and development must be complementary to the community’s traditional development pattern; and 2) Streets within the public realm **must be complex, designed to balance pedestrian, bike and other universal methods of travel with automobile traffic.**”
- There is a passage that reads: “To implement the goals and policies of this section, the City of Walker **will seek to enact** [Why not be more forceful and say, “will enact?”] the following strategies: 1) Revise the City’s approach to maintaining sidewalks and curbs to put more emphasis on the appearance of those areas; 2) Adopt new street standards that narrow lane widths to appropriate neighborhood scale and provide safe pedestrian mobility throughout the City; and 3) Create a plan for establishing wayfinding (signs and other devices) throughout the City that are modestly scaled, pedestrian-oriented, and provide directions to key locations throughout the community.”
- Under the heading, “Challenges and Opportunities,” a passage reads: “Businesses that are auto-oriented – designed primarily to service people arriving by automobile – may independently be successful but, due to their lack of interconnectivity, fail to add proportionate value to neighboring businesses. The auto-oriented pattern of development is also damaging to existing businesses. The greatest unrealized assets that the Walker economy has are the residents themselves. Currently, those residents are forced, due to the auto-centric configuration of their neighborhoods, to drive to every routine destination. Once forced into an auto-trip, the competitive advantage of close proximity the downtown has is negated by large parking lots available in businesses outside of town. Reconfiguring the neighborhoods of Walker to provide residents with more choices for how they get around is necessary to the continued health of the community.”
- There is a passage that reads: “To be successful, the City of Walker must not limit itself to what currently exists or ‘how things have always been done’ but must instead boldly embrace innovation and new visions for the development of the local economy.”
- Under the section for “Parks and Recreation,” there is a passage that reads: “Make enhanced pedestrian connections to the lakeside park area a priority of the City.” There is also a passage that reads: “Work with the Forest Service to establish a walking trail connection from downtown Walker to neighboring public lands.”
- Under the section for “Transportation,” there is a passage that reads: “Urban areas are complex environments. Not only are there moving cars, there are parked cars, pedestrians, bicyclists and other things within the right-of-way such as trees, commercial signs and benches. Designers respond to this complexity by narrowing streets and adding design elements, such as sidewalks and parallel parking. In such a complex environment, it is imperative that cars are operated at neighborhood speeds. Where complex streets are transformed into simple roads, not only does it damage the value of the neighborhoods, but it makes the places dramatically unsafe.” A bit later

on, there is a passage that reads: “The irony of the approach Walker took in its 1997 plan is that it costs more money to build wider, less complex streets. It costs more money, is less safe, and it stagnates property values. As one participant in the planning process remarked, ‘Who wants to live on a highway?’”

- A transportation policy is described as follows: “Streets within the public realm must be complex, designed to balance pedestrian, bike and other universal methods of travel with automobile traffic.” To implement this policy, the City will enact the following strategy: “Adopt new street sections that reduce long-term costs by narrowing lane widths to appropriate neighborhood scale and providing safe pedestrian mobility throughout the City.”

Walker City Ordinance: Again, as is the case with other cities, there is a disconnect in Walker between the vision described in a very good comprehensive plan and the ordinances or rules of development that guide developers on what they are allowed to do in a community. Even though the Walker Comprehensive Plan contains many passages of support for pedestrians and bicyclists operating in the “public realm,” I could find nothing in the Walker ordinances that directly or indirectly ties to the encouragement or promotion of active transportation.

What’s happening on the ground in Walker because of good active transportation policy or despite a lack of good policy?

According to City Administrator, Terri Bjorklund, their new comprehensive plan “encourages more walking and biking opportunities in our downtown, but due to a loss of personnel at our City offices and small operating budgets, we haven’t yet been able to create the ordinances to implement a lot of our ideas about making Walker more bike- and pedestrian-friendly.” Terri adds: “Even so, the City has many amazing trail systems in place. The Shingobee Connector Trail, which was a huge collaboration between citizen advocates, the City and the County, goes right through our downtown, and it helps connect the Paul Bunyan Trail with the Heartland Trail. The North Country Scenic Hiking Trail, which runs through multiple states, comes right through Walker, and we’re working to create a downtown kiosk to educate people about it.” Terri says, “Walker now has a true community center in which no public funds were used. It was built entirely by donations and is owned and operated by the citizens of the community. It’s located up off 2nd Street, near a school, and is easily and safely accessible by both pedestrians and bicyclists.”

Recommendations for our five cities, and any other city for that matter, wishing to heartily embrace active transportation:

These recommendations include model policy and model ordinance language, best practices, resources, websites, and other ideas to get communities beyond the stage of just talking about improving walkability and bikability.

1. Adopt and Implement the Recommendations of the Resilient Region Project:

This was a two-year planning initiative to get the five counties of Central Minnesota – Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena – to become more sustainable, more livable, and more economically, environmentally and socially resilient to change, which is inevitable. Two of the core principles of the initiative were to help communities in Central Minnesota to provide more transportation choices to their residents and visitors, and to connect more people to active living opportunities. Implementing alternatives to the automobile and getting our fellow citizens healthier are what active transportation is all about.

Within the recommendations that came out of the Resilient Region Project (www.resilientregion.org) five are directly related to active transportation. For example, in the health care theme, there is an “active living” recommendation which reads: “Encourage a more active lifestyle by developing and promoting safe walking and biking options in the region, like Safe Routes to School. Develop and promote more trails/path connections between/within communities using white lines, sidewalks and signage.”

In the natural resources theme, there is a recommendation to “shift development patterns away from sprawl and automobile-centric designs, the region should embrace and implement fiscally, socially, and environmentally sound land-use decisions. This type of development will provide residents with environmental, economic, social, cultural, and civic benefits that are in agreement with the desires and visions that communities express in their comprehensive plans.” Action Step A for this recommendation is to “provide incentives for transit-oriented development, pedestrian-friendly development, mixed-use development, the inclusion of public green space in all developments, and projects that promote multi-generational and multi-family housing opportunities in all residential zones, especially where we have medical and social services, cultural amenities, retail, and community gathering places.”

In the transportation theme, there are three recommendations directly related to active transportation. The first is “to establish a connected region-wide public transportation network.” Two action steps for this recommendation are to “provide vibrant corridors that include adequate and affordable housing, multiple transportation options, and easily accessible green spaces; and link mobility in transit planning by incorporating bike options, expanded bus routes, and regional needs.”

A second recommendation of the transportation theme is to “plan multi-modal options (biking, walking and automobiles) on projects where it makes sense.” Two action steps for this recommendation are to “incorporate Complete Streets design where biking and walking populations support that cause;” and “leverage current efforts to promote bike trails/lanes. Additionally, provide more

transportation amenities including bike racks in towns and on buses, bike rental services, bike lanes, and signage.”

A third recommendation of the transportation theme reads: “When streets are reconstructed, connect areas with walking/biking trails for safe travel.”

2. Use Examples from the Document Entitled, *Model Comprehensive Plan Policies and Model Ordinances to Implement the Livability Principles*, by Chris Evans and Margaret Stinchcomb, Student Attorneys at the University of Minnesota Law School, June 2012

This document can be viewed on the Resilient Region website (www.resilientregion.org). It provides model policies and ordinances that any community can incorporate into their own comprehensive plans and city codes to provide safe and reliable options for pedestrians and bicyclists, and encourage development that minimizes the number and length of car trips.

For example, a model policy for a large or small city would be to “use design standards in designated districts to increase accessibility for pedestrian and bicycle use.” A model ordinance to support this policy (so there is no disconnect between a comprehensive plan’s vision and the city codes) is a **Pedestrian Overlay District**. This model ordinance is based on a Pedestrian Overlay District ordinance created by CR Planning, as well as a Downtown Overlay District ordinance developed by the City of Hopkins, MN. This model ordinance helps a city establish an overlay district for areas with densities and transportation infrastructure conducive to pedestrian and bicycle use, such as downtown districts. Within the overlay district, buildings are designed to be more accessible and appealing on a human scale, rather than being built primarily for “stop-and-go” traffic. These design standards not only encourage increased walking and biking, but also minimize car trips.

Another small city model policy is to “develop human scale connections to the town’s parks and green spaces for greater accessibility.” The model ordinance is a **Park Dedication Ordinance**, something which many communities already have and implement, but is their ordinance getting the job done as well as it could?. This model ordinance is based on the City of Princeton’s Park Dedication Requirements with revisions based on park dedication ordinances from the cities of Brainerd and Forest Lake. Park dedication ordinances typically require that new developments or subdivisions dedicate a specified percentage of land area for park or recreation use, or pay a fee in lieu of land dedication. Park dedication requirements encourage developers to incorporate park space into new subdivisions, thereby providing recreation space within walking distance for residents or commercial employees and customers. If the development is not appropriate for a park area, the fee will provide an income source to the city or county for creating parks and trails elsewhere. This model ordinance maintains the 7% land dedication requirement used by Princeton, Brainerd and Forest Lake. Other Minnesota communities require percentages ranging from 3% to 12%. In

this ordinance, appropriate park dedication areas include hiking and biking trails. This ordinance also gives the local government discretion to decide whether a proposed dedicated park area meets the needs of the community or if the fee option is more appropriate for that development. This flexibility allows officials to ensure that the dedicated spaces are contributing to the community's comprehensive plan and capital improvement plan.

3. **Use Examples from the Document Entitled, *Model Ordinances for the HUD/Region Five Resilient Region Sustainability Project*, by William Mitchell College of Law Community Development Clinic, March 2013**

This document can also be viewed on the Resilient Region website (www.resilientregion.org). It provides model ordinances for communities interested in making their downtowns more walkable and bikable. Two such ordinances are listed below.

The first ordinance is a **Downtown Mixed-Use Ordinance**. Mixed-use development is allowing a mix of commercial and residential zoning in the same area, which reduces commuter travel time, creates a greater sense of community, and provides pedestrian and bicycle access from residents' homes to employment and retail opportunities located nearby. The goal of this ordinance is to create housing within walking or biking distance of jobs and retail in downtown areas.

Another ordinance cities should consider is an **Urban Residential District** ordinance. This ordinance works well if used in concert with the Downtown Mixed Use Ordinance described above. This ordinance helps to create an area that serves as a buffer zone between the downtown mixed use district and outlying areas containing lower density development.

4. **Use Examples from the Document Entitled, *Supporting a Resilient Region: A Best Practices Toolkit for the Central Minnesota Sustainable Development Plan*, a Capstone Project for Students Seeking a Master's of Urban and Regional Planning at the Hubert Humphrey School of Public Affairs, July 2012**

This document can also be viewed on the Resilient Region website (www.resilientregion.org). It provides some proven best practices for making a community more pedestrian- and bike-friendly. Four best practices are described below.

Cities should create policies supporting **Complete Streets**, which are also known as livable streets. Streets and roads shouldn't just be for cars. They should also accommodate bikers, walkers, those in wheelchairs, and any age group. Complete Streets are roadways designed and operated to enable comfortable, safe, and attractive access and travel for all users regardless of their abilities, ages, and choices of mode. There are a lot of examples of communities around the nation that have embraced this concept. For more information on Complete Streets, check out the following websites: for the Minnesota Complete Streets Coalition at

www.mncompletestreets.org and for the National Complete Streets Coalition at www.completestreets.org.

Cities of all sizes should institute a **Safe Routes to School** program. Children who may live close to a school are commonly driven there (either by car or bus) due to a lack of safe alternatives. Safe Routes to School programs cost less than running a school bus service, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and incorporate exercise and social time into the routines of children. For more information on Safe Routes to School, check out the following websites: MnDOT's Safe Routes to School Program at www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes and the National Center for Safe Routes to School at www.saferoutesinfo.org.

Not everyone can afford to purchase a personal bike or knows how to maintain one. Many cities across the nation are beginning to implement a **Bike Rental/Sharing Program**. Sharing/renting a bike costs less than continual maintenance of a personal car or bike. Bikes are emissions free and provide cyclists with a healthy fast alternative. For more information on bike sharing, check out the website for Nice Ride Minnesota at www.niceridemn.org.

Most, if not all, communities want to **be more walkable**. Walking is the oldest, lowest impact, and cheapest form of transportation. Today, 41% of trips taken in a car are less than a 20-minute walk. Any community can improve its walkability by checking out the following websites: Twelve Steps Toward Walkable Communities at www.gdrc.org/uem/sustran/12steps.pdf, Walk Score at www.walkscore.com, and Walk Your City at www.walkyourcity.org.

5. Reform Land Use and Zoning Regulations to Promote Active Transportation

This information can be found on the Active Transportation Policy website at www.atpolicy.org.

Zoning and land-use codes should boost continuity between travel in the public right-of-way and the quasi-public realm. To advance public health, municipal governments can ensure the features of the built environment provide accessibility for multiple modes in and around new commercial, industrial and residential developments – just as they already do on public roadways. Ensuring that local zoning standards reflect the state of the practice for mobility is the strongest way to communicate expectations and yield consistent results from developers.

Here are some examples of how communities can change their zoning and development regulations to promote more active transportation: 1) Allow for greater land-use types (form-based codes), which brings residential and commercial areas closer together, thereby decreasing distance barriers for biking and walking. A good form-based code is the SmartCode, which can be viewed at the Green Step Cities website at www.greenstep.pca.state.mn.us; 2) Prioritize construction of continuous sidewalks adjacent to large developments and require connectivity to building entrances so that pedestrians can safely access buildings;

3) Require a maximum setback distance for building entrances, ensuring shorter trips through parking lots for cyclists and pedestrians; 4) Set a maximum block length, ensuring a high intersection density and greater connectivity for active transportation; 5) Require bicycle and pedestrian connectivity through cul-de-sacs in housing developments in order to improve the directness of routes, thereby decreasing distance barriers for biking and walking; 6) Increase flexibility on the required number of car parking spaces in order to limit parking lot size and improve pedestrian environment; 7) Create minimum standards for bicycle parking accommodations at commercial and workplace destinations.

In residential areas, communities should ask the following questions? 1) Is continuous sidewalk on both sides of each roadway required? 2) Is a minimum lot size requirement leading to unnecessary sprawl and increased walking distances? 3) Is the required number of subdivision access points sufficient for residents to reach surrounding roadways, schools, and other developments on foot or by bike? 4) Is there a requirement for pedestrian and bike access through cul-de-sacs?

In commercial areas and office parks, communities should ask: 1) Is there a requirement for sidewalks or paths that connect building entrances to the public right-of-way and to transit stops? 2) Do building setback requirements support shorter distances between buildings and public right-of-way? 3) Are businesses required to provide bicycle parking for customers and employees? 4) Do rigid parking space requirements result in large parking lots for pedestrians to navigate?

6. Communities Should have a Complete Streets Policy

A Complete Streets policy is a commitment by a municipality to accommodate all users of the roadways, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and motorists in all new transportation projects wherever appropriate, including the design of new facilities and the improvement and maintenance of existing facilities.

Implementing a policy requires the development of new goals, oversight systems, training, and the acceptance of new concepts and key ideas. To help ensure the best results, communities should involve affected parties in the policy development process. This should include representatives from public works, public health and community development agencies, municipal planners and engineers, elected officials, and local advocacy groups. With everyone at the table, there will likely be varied levels of experience and insight about active transportation. For example, maintenance crews with public works departments are often vocal naysayers to anything that they perceive as being more work for them (i.e. more trails means more snow to clear in the winter). This is an opinion that can be part of the overall conversation, but a community should place more emphasis on its broader vision to improve active transportation and community-wide health.

Here are some key concepts to discuss: 1) Walking and bicycling are modes of transportation – and not just recreational activities – and merit routine accommodation within the overall transportation system; 2) The need for walking, biking, and transit facilities should be assumed, unless a lack of a need can be evidenced and documented; 3) There are many ways to improve the environment for walking and biking, even when the installation of new sidewalks, bike lanes, and/or side paths is not possible. For this reason, the goals of a Complete Streets policy should focus on improving the overall travel environment within its appropriate land-use context and its network context, as opposed to focusing on specific types of facilities; 4) Selecting and designing the appropriate treatments may require an agency to re-assess its current design standards against national best practices, and to encourage the same by other jurisdictions whose roadways intersect their local transportation network; 5) State, county, and municipal Complete Streets policies might have very different principles, goals, and applications. It's important to let decision makers know this, so that one agency's policy doesn't speak for the whole initiative, and also to communicate the need for inter-jurisdictional coordination; 6) Many people are wary of installing new facilities because it encourages a travel mode that they perceive as unsafe (bicycling, for example) and they fear that they are liable for any potential injuries by creating dedicated facilities. To this notion there are two responses. The first is that adherence to nationally accepted guidelines is protection against liability, and bicycle and pedestrian transportation facilities are now firmly rooted within national best practices and supported by agencies such as the Federal Highway Administration, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and the Institute of Traffic Engineers. The second response to the fear of liability is the fact that people use their bicycles on all kinds of roadways and at all times of the year for a number of reasons. Their safety would be better promoted by improving their travel environment than by discouraging their use on the public right-of-way.

Should a Complete Streets policy be an ordinance, a resolution, or an internal policy? A policy's approach should be the one that best enables its implementation. If the municipal planning and engineering staff is educated and enthusiastic about developing new practices and seeking out innovative solutions, then a non-binding resolution or an internal memo may be successful tools. However, if the effort is spearheaded by people who do not plan and design roadways (e.g. executive administration, public health, and economic development agencies, and community advocacy groups) and/or the implementers are not interested in Complete Streets, a legal mandate may be necessary and appropriate. The best way to determine staff interest is to involve them in the policy development process, learn about the challenges they face, and empower them to find innovative solutions.

Written resolutions are a popular strategy, but they are non-binding and only serve as a first step in full adoption of a Complete Streets policy. The most

effective way for municipalities to ensure equity in the development of their local transportation network is to pass an ordinance requiring accommodation of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit traffic as well as automobiles in all new construction and retrofit programs. Ordinances should set design standards, establish performance measures, specify limited exceptions, and require the creation of an active transportation plan to guide long-term implementation of Complete Streets. Over time, this policy will allow the built environment to become healthier and more hospitable to active transportation as each project is completed.

Complete Streets policy should include the following considerations: 1) countdown timers on traffic lights to indicate amount of time pedestrians have to cross the street; 2) improved lighting, which increases personal safety and makes pedestrians more visible to drivers; 3) raised median islands, which provide safe resting places for pedestrians when crossing wide or busy streets; 4) bike lanes, which establish space on the road exclusively for bicycle travel; 5) marked crosswalks, which provide a visual cue to alert drivers of potential pedestrians crossing a street; 6) transit shelters, which protect transit users and passing pedestrians from the elements; and 7) curb bump-outs, which make road crossings by pedestrians shorter and safer.

7. Communities Should have a School Transportation Policy

Walking and biking to school are built-in ways for children to get physical activity they need to stay healthy, but studies show that this practice has significantly declined. For example, in 1969, almost 50% of children in the U.S. walked or rode bikes to school. In 2009 – 40 years later – that number has dropped from 50% to just 12%. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, during that same 40-year period, childhood obesity has more than tripled.

The ability of students to get safely to and from school is impacted by a number of factors. These include the presence and conditions of surrounding sidewalks and crossings, traffic speeds and perceived safety, travel distances since new schools are often built outside of town, and the transportation choices of parents.

The discussion of safety and funding for schools can become highly charged. People are often unwilling to compromise on what they feel is best for their children, and people have many different ideas on what that looks like. In addition, many school administrators are reluctant to promote biking and walking out of concern that they'll be liable if a child were to become hurt on the way to or from school. Advocates can address these (often unfounded) concerns by reading the document entitled, *Safe Routes to School: Minimizing your Liability Risk*, which is available at www.activetransportationpolicy.org.

Municipalities wishing to create a school transportation policy should: 1) adopt policies to preserve existing community-centered schools by prioritizing

renovation over new construction. It's important to remember that the phrase "Bigger is better" doesn't apply to everything. Studies show that bigger schools aren't necessarily better for students. When advocating for community-centered schools, it's important to focus on all their benefits, not just walkability; 2) create a county-wide initiative to help school districts work with municipalities to use comprehensive planning to select appropriate sites for schools; 3) update municipal land/cash ordinances based on current standards from the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) to reduce development, maintenance, and transportation costs; 4) require the analysis of a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to determine the effect on community health when making school site decisions; 5) require new schools to be sited in locations with existing infrastructure, such as sidewalks and trails to support biking and walking options for students; and 6) design school sites with separate entryways for pedestrians, cyclists, school buses and private vehicles.

The creation of a school transportation policy requires coordination between a municipality, school districts, and parents. There is a helpful document entitled, *Safe Routes to School: Local Policy Guide*, which is available at www.saferoutespartnership.org. This document provides a primer for what policies can be targeted to influence local transportation and land use plans in ways that benefit children's mobility. It also explains how to go about initiating policy change, and provides examples from communities that have successfully enacted policies in support of safe, active transportation options that benefit children.