01. PLAN & PROCESS

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Washington County’s bicycle culture is rich in history dating back to the 1860’s. This history is celebrated and promoted throughout the county. The biking community hosts numerous events on an annual basis that attracts hundreds of riders throughout the region and nation. Notable events include the Tour De Hugo (City of Hugo) and the Hero Gravel Classic (City of Stillwater). Many events are also hosted in the county parks that range from fat-tire bike demos to educational/safety programs.

INTRODUCTION
Washington County is fulfilling one of its strategies from the 2040 Comprehensive Plan by “adopting a bicycle and pedestrian plan to address county recreation and transportation needs.”

The purpose of this plan is to:
» Create a future county-wide bicycle and pedestrian network that builds upon the existing network;
» Identify barriers that limit safe and comfortable bicycle and pedestrian routes for all users;
» Incorporate community feedback and desires toward bicycle and pedestrian needs, while being balanced with other county goals and resources;
» Identify best practices and guide the county in future facility and network investments; and,
» Guide policy and programming improvements, such as wayfinding and educational/encouragement activities.
PLANNING FOR BIKING AND WALKING

Over time, the purposes for biking and walking have changed dramatically. Walking is the original form of transportation. It has always been the cheapest and most environmentally friendly way of getting around. The introduction of the bicycle in the early 1800s carried many of the same benefits and allowed people to travel more efficiently, faster, and longer distances. After the advent of the personal automobile and its increased popularity in the 1920s and 30s, biking and walking for transportation purposes began to decline and was seen mostly for sport, exercise, or recreational purposes.

Today, biking and walking have again become more popular for multiple purposes as many people are recognizing the importance of living an active and healthy lifestyle. The following are some key reasons for planning for the future bicyclists and pedestrians in Washington County.

SAFETY

Evidence suggests that high-bicycling-mode-share communities are not only safer for bicyclists but for all road users. Further, bicycle facilities themselves act as “calming” mechanisms on traffic, slowing cars and reducing fatalities 1.

LIVABILITY + MOBILITY

Fifty percent of U.S. residents say that walkability is a top priority or high priority when considering where to live 2. Bicycling has become the country’s fastest-growing form of transportation for commuters.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Washington County residents have indicated their “quality of life” as being excellent or good 3, which is attributed in part to the County’s park and trail system. Parks and trails provide public health benefits by connecting people to nature, while providing opportunities to recreate and live actively. See pages 1-4 and 1-5 for more information on recent surveys conducted by Washington County regarding public health, parks, trails, and active living.

HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY PROSPERITY

According to AAA, it costs an average of $8,849 to operate the average car for 2018, or about $737 per month 4. Not all households can afford to own a car and some lower income households who own a car may be sacrificing other basic needs in order to get by.
The Washington County Residential Survey is administered on an annual basis. The most recent survey was mailed to 2,500 randomly selected households in January 2019 and was distributed equally among the five county Commissioner Districts. Of the approximately 2,413 households that received a survey in the mail, 749 surveys were completed, providing a response rate of 31%.

Finding: Washington County residents feel exceptionally safe in the community, but are concerned about road safety.

Residents’ rating for overall feeling of safety in the county was much higher than that given in other counties across the nation.

Respondents felt the least safe from distracted drivers and being injured while biking or walking along roads in the county; both of these reported feelings of safety declined from 2016 to 2019.

Finding: Residents visit parks regularly and would like to see additional amenities offered.

As in 2016, ease of travel by car in Washington County received a rating of 71 on the 100-point scale, which was between “excellent” and “good” and was much higher than ratings given in other counties across the nation.

Residents were less pleased with the availability of public transportation options in the county: this item received a rating of 35 on the 100-point scale (just above “fair”) and was lower than the national county average.

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AIR QUALITY AND GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTIONS
The transportation sector generates the largest share (28.9%) of greenhouse gas emissions 7. Walking or cycling could substitute for 41% of short car trips (less than 3 miles), saving nearly 5% of CO2 emissions from car travel 8.

RECREATION & COMMUTING
Trails provide recreational opportunities and commutes for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Pedestrians and cyclists can use bicycle-specific infrastructure such as bicycle lanes, bicycle paths, and trails. Bicycle paths and trails are safer than roads for cyclists and motorists than roads alone. Roads are safer for pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, and motorists. Walking and cycling saves time, money, energy, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. From a sustainability perspective, bicycles can be produced for a fraction of the materials, energy, and shipping costs of a car. Biking and walking also saves taxpayers money by reducing road wear. A 20-pound bicycle causes less wear on the pavement than a two-ton vehicle.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS / TOURISM
As bicycling and walking networks have grown, so have active transportation-oriented developments and bike-friendly businesses. Numerous studies have shown that real estate values increase with proximity to bicycle paths and walking trails.

SUSTAINABILITY / RESILIENCE
Because biking and walking do not rely on burning fossil fuels, they are more resilient to swings in fuel prices. From a sustainability perspective, bicycles can be produced for a fraction of the materials, energy, and shipping costs of a car. Biking and walking also saves taxpayers money by reducing road wear. A 20-pound bicycle causes less wear on the pavement than a two-ton vehicle.

THE PLANNING PROCESS
The planning process occurred over 12 months, starting in June of 2019 and ending in July of 2020. The Washington County Board of Commissioners adopted the Plan on XX, Month, 2020.

PROJECT BRAND
A project brand was developed in an effort to create an “identity” for the plan. The project brand and style (as seen below) is based on three brand principles: Balance, Family, Connection, Nature, and Evolution. These principles represent an identity and path for building Washington County’s bicycle and pedestrian network. Materials and documents prepared for this plan were required to use the project logo and follow the county’s style guide.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM
The overall planning process was led by Washington County Public Works. The Project Management Team (PMT) was comprised of Public Works, Information Technology, and Public Health staff.

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
The planning process was guided by a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) (see Table 1.1). The TAC was comprised of local and regional agencies. Each committee member served as a “champion” of the process by promoting the public engagement activities, reviewing technical information, and providing guidance throughout the planning process.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Every effort was made to make the planning and public engagement processes accessible to all Washington County residents. This was achieved by targeting public engagement activities in specific parts of the county, while leveraging online tools. A summary of these activities are listed below.

POP-UP EVENTS

Community events were one of the most effective forums for engaging residents in the planning process. Washington County staff attended the following events to share project information and ask questions about walking and biking in the county:

- Spokes & Folks: The Evolution of Bicycles and Trails in Washington County Exhibit (Historic Court House in Stillwater) – June 1, 2019
- Washington County Ice Cream Social (Historic Court House in Stillwater) – July 18, 2019
- Washington County Fair (Lake Elmo) - July 29 - August 4, 2019
- Washington County Blue Grass Festival (Lake Elmo Park Reserve) – September 7, 2019
- Sustainable Stillwater (Stillwater) - September 6, 2019
- Tour de Hugo (Hugo City Hall) – September 21, 2019
- Park and Trail User Interviews: Field Visit (county-wide) - September 28 – 29, 2019
- Lake Links Association (White Bear Lake and the Town of White Bear) - December, 2019
- Woodbury Bicycle Advisory Committee (Woodbury) - January 14, 2020

Additional events were planned, but canceled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online engagement efforts were used to help supplement the public engagement process.

VIDEO

A short video was created to highlight the purpose of the study, while showcasing interviews from residents on what walking and biking means to them in the county.

ONLINE TOOLS

Interactive maps and surveys were used to engage people specifically for this planning effort. At any given time during the planning process (June 2019 – July 2020), people were able interact with these tools to provide comments or react to ideas. The county’s website was used as a clearinghouse to promote the project and interactive tools. These tools reached over 2,000 unique users.
Specific destinations for better pedestrian and bicycle routes identified by the public include:

» Woodbury Village/494 and CR16
» Stillwater Marketplace (Stillwater Blvd and 36)
» Transit stations/park and ride locations
» Gateway Trail
» Indian Head Trail
» Hardwood Creek Trail
» Lake Links Trail
» Browns Creek Trail
» Carpenter Nature Center
» Wargo Nature Center
» Oakdale Nature Center

Safety concerns are primarily linked to pedestrian and bicycle crossings at trails and intersections.

Transportation barriers, such as Highway 36, Highway 95, Interstate 94, and Interstate 494 are major obstacles for people traveling by foot or bike.

There is a strong desire to provide safer connections between neighborhoods, schools, and commercial/retail centers.

On-road shoulders could be wider to provide more opportunities for bicyclists.

Desired routes are focused on larger connections between popular destination points (state/regional parks to state/regional trails) or future commuter and school routes/connections.

In general, bike commuters are traveling between Woodbury and Saint Paul.

There is a growing need for more pedestrian and bicycle amenities (e.g., bike racks, restrooms, bike repair stations, kiosks, and drinking fountains) along regional trail corridors (e.g., Gateway and Browns Creek).

Some of the most popular pedestrian and bicycle loops are located in and around natural features (lakes and rivers).