Transportation Choices: Bicycle and Pedestrian Paths

Cars often consume most, if not all, of the right-of-way on public streets. Dedicating more space to sidewalks and bike lanes provides people with inexpensive and environmentally-friendly transportation alternatives. An active lifestyle that includes walking and biking can also lead to better health. To promote transportation alternatives, better health, and recreational opportunities associated with walking and biking networks, communities can take the following steps.

- Connect and Complete Streets
- Build a Bicycle Network
- Implement Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design in Public Projects

Connect and Complete Streets

Street networks can accomplish more than just getting people from place to place. They can be designed to yield a safer, healthier and more attractive place to live. The old hierarchy of streets that begins with high speed arterial road and terminates in the subdivision cul-de-sac can present safety hazards for people travelling by foot or on two wheels. A connected grid of streets, by contrast, reduces traffic tie ups at intersections, disperses travel over a larger area and provides more routes to reach major destinations. Traffic engineers have developed guidelines and design standards to help communities improve the walkability of new and existing streets. One technique is using unused area in the right of way for sidewalks, bike lanes and even transit lanes. This strategy of building Complete Streets makes it more appealing for people to walk or ride for short trips. This reduces traffic and moves the greatest number of people efficiently in the same network.

Bicycle Networks

One of the most effective ways to find land for bicycle trails is to utilize flood zones near creeks, rivers and coastlines. Communities can bring this land back into productive use by creating a scenic public amenity close to the water, much like Waller Creek in Austin, Texas. By removing bikers from auto traffic, but connecting them back into the on-road network, the number of users a communities serves can be expanded.

Bicycle networks can be incorporated within the right of way or in an off road system. The bridges over Biloxi Bay and the Bay of St. Louis on the Mississippi Gulf Coast attract hundreds of locals and tourists daily because the bridge lanes (pictured below) are separated from traffic to accommodate pedestrians and bikers. However, roadway markings on the pavement can clearly delineate a six-foot or larger lane for bikes (left).

Intersections are the most dangerous place for bikers and the site of frequent collisions when it is not clear who has the right of way. Curb bump-outs, right-turn islands, and signage can all make intersections safer for bicyclists.

Photo from neighborhoods.org, FLICKR.

Bridge in Ocean Springs, MS. Photo by Courtney VanderSchaaf.

The Waller Creek Master Plan promotes recreation and flood control. Graphic by McCann Adams Studio, Austin, TX.
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Accessible Design
Seniors who are unable to drive often find themselves confined to their homes. People with disabilities also face mobility obstacles. By designing a network of sidewalks and bike paths for the needs of people of all ages and abilities, communities can promote increased independence. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) outlines the design standards for accessibility. When implemented, these standards often benefit other users like parents with strollers and shoppers with multiple parcels. Features of accessible design include sidewalk widths appropriate for wheelchair users, gentle slopes and curb ramps that allow people in wheelchairs or using other assistive devices to cross streets safely. All new subdivisions should meet ADA standards, but communities can also modify existing streets to ease movement through neighborhoods and commercial districts. Building ADA compliant pedestrian networks also saves money in the long run by avoiding expensive retrofits as residents age.

Right: Complete streets provide for pedestrians of all ages and abilities. Photo by Elizabeth Table For Five, FLICKR.

Tools

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| Create Walkable Neighborhoods | Make walking safer in your community  
Promote walking to improve public health  
Implement ADA Standards for Accessible Design to create walkable communities for seniors and accessible communities for People with Disabilities  
Design New Urbanist Streets |

| Provide a Variety of Transportation Options | Adopt a Model Complete Streets Ordinance to incorporate Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure with new construction and reconstruction  
Use flood plain for bicycle/pedestrian pathways  
Use the Federal Highway Administration’s Shared-Use Path Design to accommodate walkers, bikers and people with disabilities  
Adopt Bicycle Facility Guidelines into Local Ordinances |

*For a complete list of tools and resources, please see the “Tools & Resources Index” section of the Smart Growth and Sustainability Toolbox.

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