



# 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.

# PLAN GOALS

The purpose of this Plan is to also advance Washington County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan's goals, policies, and strategies that pertain to pedestrians and bicyclists. Excerpts from Washington County's 2040 Comprehensive Plan are listed below.

## TRANSPORTATION GOAL 1: PLAN, BUILD, AND MAINTAIN AN INTERCONNECTED AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM THAT CONSIDERS ALL USERS AND MODES OF TRAVEL.

- » Policy: Coordinate transportation mobility and choice to meet a diversity of needs, while considering appropriate system levels of service.
  - *Strategy: Integrate non-motorized accommodations into the design of roadway and transit facilities to increase access to destinations*
  - *Strategy: Adopt a bicycle and pedestrian plan to address county recreation and transportation needs.*
- » Policy: Work with partners to identify and coordinate transportation system improvements to accommodate growth and development
  - *Strategy: Identify gaps in the trail network and prioritize investments to improve non-motorized access to destinations.*
- » Policy: Support regional planning activities to enhance interagency collaboration and coordination.
  - *Strategy: Coordinate with partners, including the Metropolitan Council and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, to preserve, maintain, and expand the regional and state trail networks.*

## TRANSPORTATION GOAL 3: IMPROVE SAFETY AND EFFICIENCIES FOR ALL USERS.

- » Policy: Support ongoing safety review processes that promotes both proactive and reactive treatments to reduce crashes.
  - *Strategy: Coordinate with partners to improve safety and usability of county roadways when developing safe, effective, and implementable strategies in key locations (e.g., schools and at non-motorized crossings).*
  - *Strategy: Develop roadway crossings at trail facilities within county roadway corridors to promote safety for all users.*

## TRANSPORTATION GOAL 4: PROMOTE POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH OUTCOMES.

- » Policy: Explore opportunities to improve the environment and encourage physical activity.
  - *Strategy: Work with local partners to promote land use patterns that enable alternative modes of travel and reduce reliance on the private automobile*
  - *Strategy: Identify trail connections to provide links to key destinations.*

# 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 1800's 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, bike facilities themselves act as “calming” mechanisms on traffic, slowing cars and reducing fatalities <sup>1</sup>.



## LIVABILITY + MOBILITY

Fifty percent of U.S. residents say that walkability is a top priority or high priority when considering where to live <sup>2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>, 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 <sup>4</sup>. 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.

## WHY PLAN FOR BIKING AND WALKING TODAY?

The following are some key reasons for planning for the future bicyclists and pedestrians in Washington County.

- » Safety
- » Livability + Mobility
- » Health
- » Household and Community Prosperity
- » Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Reduction
- » Recreation
- » Parking and Transportation Networks



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 are pleased with the ease of travel in the county, but public transportation continues to be an area of opportunity.**

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.



**“Residents visit parks regularly and would like to see additional amenities offered.”**



When asked how often they had frequented a regional park or trail in the past year, a majority of respondents (**6 in 10**) had visited at least three times during that time period; **87%** of the respondents visited a regional park in the past 12 months.



Residents were asked to select from a list of options why they had not visited a regional park or trail, or had not visited more often, and instructed to choose as many as applied. Residents were most likely to indicate lack of time as a factor for not visiting (**52%** of respondents selected this option).



Residents would like to see the following facilities added or expanded to the county’s park system: hiking trails (**48%**), biking trails (**36%**), dog parks (**28%**), a swimming splash pad (**27%**) and picnic/group shelters (**25%**).

The **Adult Health and Wellbeing Survey** is conducted every 4-6 years and was administered by Washington County's Department of Public Health and Environment with SHIP support in the fall of 2019. In 2019, a total of 1,281 residents participated in either a random mail based survey, or a targeted in person survey of low income and minority populations in the county.

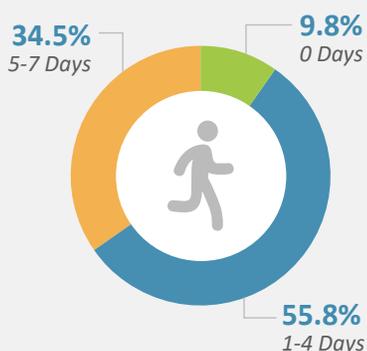


### TRANSPORTATION

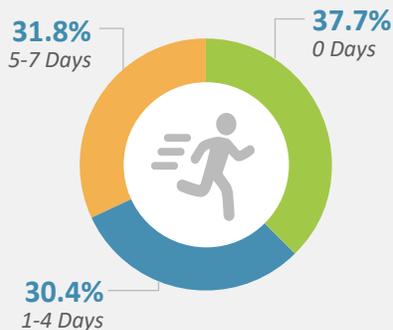
In the year prior to the survey, the lack of personal transportation kept 20% of the respondents in the targeted sample from getting to places where they needed to go, such as jobs, medical appointments, or shopping.

**Finding: Most Washington County residents from the targeted sample are getting some form of exercise at least once a week, but is not meeting CDC's recommended physical activity guidelines.**

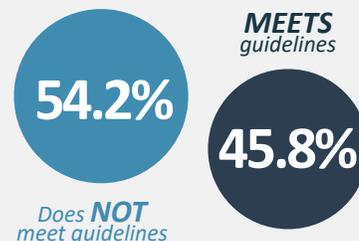
#### Moderate exercise 5+ days per week



#### Vigorous exercise 3+ days per week



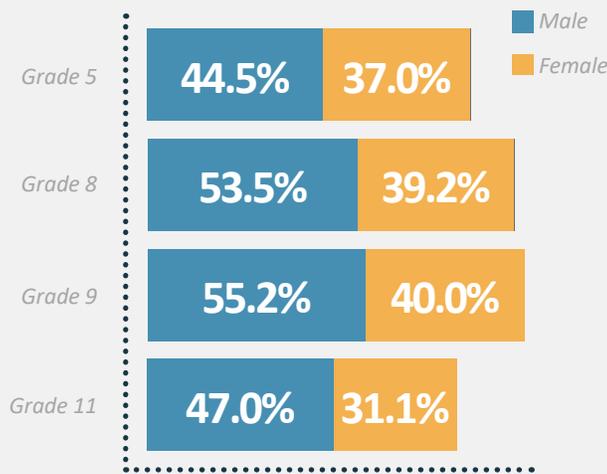
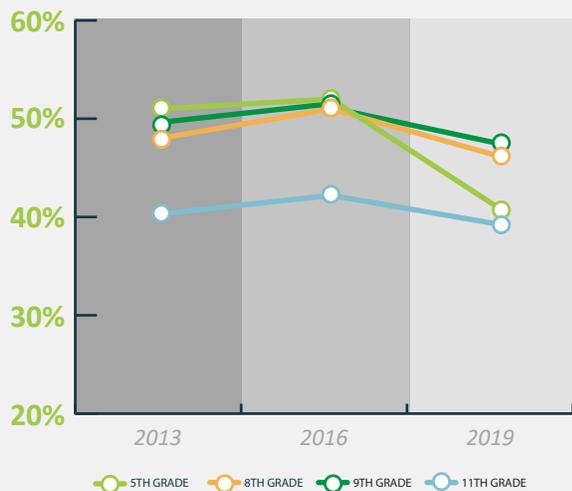
CDC Recommended physical activity guidelines: Moderate activity for 30 minutes / 5+ days or vigorous activity for 20 minutes/3+ days or both



The **Minnesota Student Survey** is conducted every three years and is a collaborative effort of local schools and state agencies (Education, Health, Human Services, and Public Safety). This survey was completed in the spring of 2019. In 2019, there were 9,541 survey responses by 5th, 8th, 9th, and 11th graders in the county.

**Finding: There has been a steady decline in the amount of time students partake in physical activity during the week.**

#### PHYSICALLY ACTIVE AT LEAST 60 MINUTES FOR 5 OR MORE DAYS IN THE PAST WEEK?



## REFERENCES

1. University of Colorado Denver. (2019, May 29). Cycling lanes reduce fatalities for all road users, study shows: Roads are safer for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists in cities with robust bike facilities. Science Daily. Retrieved May 31, 2019 from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/190529113036.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/190529113036.htm)
2. Urban Land Institute: America in 2015: A ULI Survey of Views on Housing, Transportation, and Community. Washington, D.C.: the Urban Land Institute, 2015.
3. 2019 Washington County Resident Survey
4. Your Driving Costs: How Much Are You Really Paying to Drive? [Brochure]. (2018 Edition) Heathrow, FL: AAA Association Communication
5. U.S. EPA's Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2017. <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/inventory-us-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-sinks>
6. Neves, A., & Brand, C. (2018, August 31). Assessing the potential for carbon emissions savings from replacing short car trips with walking and cycling using a mixed GPS-travel diary approach. Retrieved May 31, 2019, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0965856417316117>
7. Wen, Liang; Kenworthy, Jeff; Guo, Xiumei; Marinova, Dora. 2019. "Solving Traffic Congestion through Street Renaissance: A Perspective from Dense Asian Cities." Urban Sci. 3, no. 1: 18.



## AIR QUALITY AND GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTIONS

The transportation sector generates the largest share (28.9%) of greenhouse gas emissions <sup>5</sup>. Walking or cycling could substitute for 41% of short car trips (less than 3 miles), saving nearly 5% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from car travel <sup>6</sup>.



## RECREATION & COMMUTING

Trails provide recreational opportunities and commuters options. Trails also serve diverse communities, including those that may otherwise have limited opportunities to access natural areas and jobs due to financial or transportation constraints. Furthermore, bicycling is the fastest growing form of transportation for commuters.



## MULTIMODAL NETWORKS

As more people bike and walk to destinations such as retail, restaurants, entertainment, and work, the demand for vehicle parking decreases, allowing buildings to be closer to each other and become even more walkable. Encouraging transit use, biking and walking brings travel origins and destinations closer together and can help alleviate traffic congestion <sup>7</sup>, while supporting public health initiatives.



## 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 started in June of 2019 and ended in July of 2020. The draft Plan was available for public review during the fall of 2020 (August 2020 - October 2020). A longer review period was provided to better accommodate people during the pandemic. The Washington County Board of Commissioners adopted the Plan in February 2021.

## 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 five 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.

## PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM

- » Emily Jorgensen, Planner II, Public Works (Project Lead)
- » Connor Schaefer, Planner II, Public Works
- » Kevin Peterson, Engineer II, Public Works
- » Joe Gustafson, Traffic Engineer, Public Works
- » Charlie Parent, Engineering Technician II, Public Works
- » Stephanie Souter, Public Health Program Supervisor, Public Health & Environment
- » Kim Ball, Public Health Program Coordinator, Public Health & Environment
- » Alena DeGrado, Planner I, Public Health & Environment
- » David Brandt, IT Spatial Analyst Developer, IT
- » HKGi, Bolton & Menk, and CivicBrand project team representatives

**Table 1.1 Technical Advisory Committee Members**

NAME	CITY/TOWNSHIP	ROLE/POSITION	COUNTY DISTRICT
Ben Prchal	City of Lake Elmo	Planner	3
Ryan Goodman	Forest Lake, Marine on the St. Croix, Scandia	Consultant Engineer, Bolton & Menk	1
Eric Johnson	City of Oak Park Heights	City Administrator	3
Bill Turnblad/Abbi Wittman	City of Stillwater	Economic Development Director/Planner	3
Bob Streeatar	City of Oakdale	Community Development Director	2
John Burbank	City of Cottage Grove	Planner	4
Kathy Laur	Lake St. Croix Beach	City Administrator	3
Merritt Clapp Smith	Stillwater Township, Scandia, Baytown	Consultant Planner, TKDA	1, 3
Kate Eiyneck	City of Newport	Consultant Planner, MSA Services	4
Tony Kutzke	City of Woodbury	Engineer	2,5
Shayla Denaway	City of Hugo	Parks Planner	1
Steve Elmer	Met Council	Bike/Ped Planning	NA
Brandon Helm	DNR	Acquisition and Development Specialist	NA



## 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.

The public was able to review and comment on the draft Plan in late 2020 (August 2020 - October 2020). The draft document was posted on the project website and paired with a series of videos summarizing each chapter - narrated by county staff.

### NOTE TO THE READER

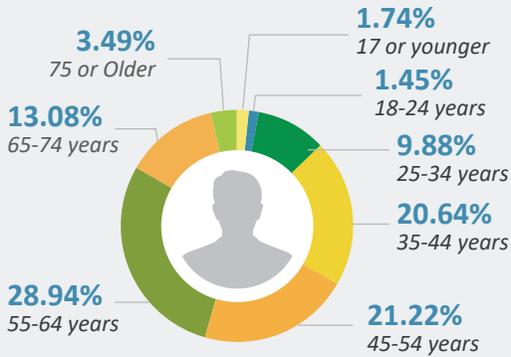
COVID-19 was at the forefront of all of our lives during the last several months of developing this Plan. During this time, Washington County’s park and trail system experienced a large increase in the number of users.

The response to COVID is continually evolving and we will continue to experience impacts in our communities and parks/trail systems as this plan is implemented.



Key themes and findings that emerged from the online questionnaire include:

Survey respondents (350 people) fell within the following age groups:



Many respondents indicated they use the existing network on a regular basis for exercise, leisure, or recreational purposes.

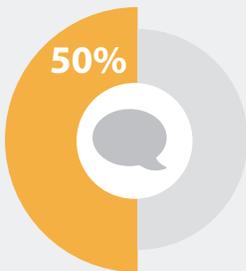
Only a small percent of the respondents use the existing bicycle and pedestrian network to travel to work:



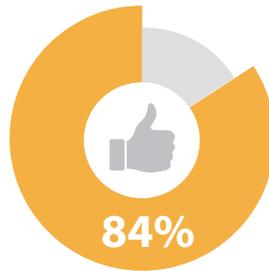
Only a small percent of respondents (1.5%) walk or bike to transit options on a regular basis.



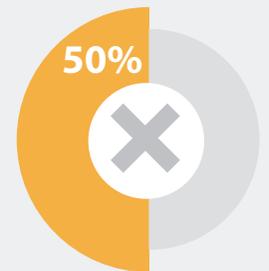
94% of the respondents never walk or bike to school or work.



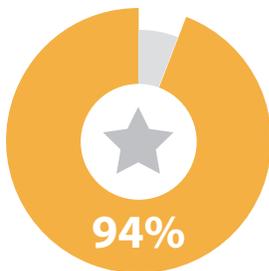
50% of the respondents indicated they are "comfortable" and "confident" in using the existing network, while 28% are "interested" or "concerned" in using the existing network.



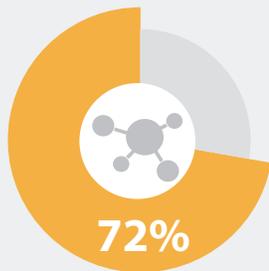
84% of the respondents felt non-motorized access to parks are "important" or "very important."



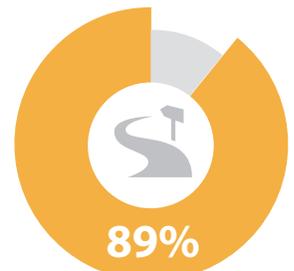
50% of the respondents do not have access to trails or sidewalks for where they want to go.



94% of the respondents felt safety was "important" or "very important" for all users of the roadway.



72% of the respondents felt it was "important" or "somewhat important" to reach their destination by foot or bike as fast as possible.



Creating off-road trails with scenic views and connections to parks and natural features are "very important" or "important" to 89% the respondents.

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



*Key themes and findings that emerged from the Social Pinpoint (an interactive online map) and discussions with people at pop-events include the following:*

- ➔ 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).

KEY THEMES

