



Connecting Active Transportation Networks in Foley, Alabama

Challenge

When the City of Foley, Alabama developed a [new comprehensive plan](#) in 2008, lack of walkability was identified as a major issue for the community. The city, with a population of 16,345,¹ is segmented into four quadrants; US-98 runs east-west through the city, and Alabama State Route 59 (AL-59) runs north-south. AL-59 is a major highway for the entire region. It serves as the main arterial to the Gulf of Mexico, carrying up to 60,000 vehicles per day. While schools and a hospital are located on the west side of AL-59, the city's historic museum, library, civic center, and other amenities are located on the east side. This separation limited residents' ability to enjoy the amenities of Foley's downtown, and as in many small towns throughout the country, Foley's downtown was not as vibrant as it had once been. Many people did not feel safe crossing the busy highway (even at designated crossings); police officers regularly directed traffic at the main intersection of US-98 and AL-59 so that groups of schoolchildren could safely cross. Because of the long crossing distance and heavy traffic volumes on AL-59, this situation did not work well for either pedestrians or motorists.

Solution

In 2008, City of Foley planners and engineers worked with a consultant to amend the city's comprehensive plan. This led to the development of the [Transportation Regional Infrastructure Pedestrian System](#), or TRIPS. In August 2011, as part of TRIPS, city planners surveyed approximately 300 citizens, as well as nearby schools and large employers, to identify desired transportation improvements. Community members expressed overwhelming support for projects that would help connect the network of walking and bicycling facilities, particularly those separated by AL-59. The study and public input process resulted in the [2011 Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan](#), developed by the same consultant that worked on the 2008 comprehensive plan.

The City of Foley received a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grant in 2013 to implement some of the projects included in the 2011 Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan. The grant funded the projects in three phases.

Phase	Components	Construction Began	Construction Completed
1	3.45 miles of complete streets and 0.8 miles of shared use sidewalks	November 2014	August 2015
2	13 miles of shared use paths	September 2015	September 2016
3	110-foot long, 12-foot wide pedestrian bridge over AL-59	July 2015	September 2016

The total construction costs of the three phases was \$6.3 million, including the TIGER grant award of \$4.7 million and the city's 25 percent match. City planners completed the preliminary engineering work. The projects filled gaps between previously existing pedestrian and bicycle paths to create a more cohesive network. For example, schoolchildren and hospital employees now use the bridge and shared use paths to get to school and work, and the paths connect to an outlet mall that employs approximately 1,200 people. The pedestrian bridge has a

¹ 2015 American Community Survey: https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml

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parking lot so that people can park on one side and walk to the other. The bridge is also accessible to bicyclists, with large elevators on each side. Foley community members were so excited to see the bridge go up that they watched from the street below in the middle of the night when it was constructed. The bridge has become an attraction in the downtown area; for example, during prom season, Foley high school students often go to the bridge to take photographs.

Like many communities across the nation, Foley had wanted to revitalize its historic downtown area, especially with AL-59 cutting through and presenting challenges for walkability and tourism. Following the construction of the new projects, attendance at historic landmarks such as the model train museum has increased, and new shops and restaurants have opened downtown, indicating a general increase in economic activity. An arts association located near the base of the pedestrian bridge reports a significant increase in sales since the bridge was completed in September 2016. The projects have also improved access to Centennial Park, which frequently hosts music festivals and outdoor movies.

The transportation improvements are part of a holistic effort to foster healthier lifestyles for Foley residents. Community members often walk, bike, and skateboard on the shared used paths for recreation, exercise, or to get around town. The pedestrian bridge connects to the [Antique Rose Trail](#), which was converted from a historic railroad and runs parallel to AL-59. The city has also invested in recreational sports leagues and youth sports tourism, as well as starting a farmers' market in October 2013 where local vendors can sell to the community.

The City of Foley used these active transportation projects to spark broader consideration of pedestrian and bicycle accommodation across transportation investments. For example, when Foley planned East Pride Drive, a new four-lane boulevard constructed in January 2015, the city decided to include sidewalks to accommodate pedestrian access and connectivity from the outset. Additional projects include a new one-mile shared use path that will connect existing networks for walking and bicycling, which the city will fund using a Federal funding set-aside of the Surface Transportation Block Grant program funding for transportation alternatives.

Conclusion

City of Foley Mayor John Koniar highlights how the projects have improved quality of life in the community. "We've seen a huge increase in people biking and walking to get where they need to go," he said. "The pedestrian bridge in particular has become a main focal point and attraction in the city. We're very proud of it!"

The City of Foley will update its comprehensive plan in the next few years. TRIPS and the 2011 Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan serve as guiding documents, which the city will also update in the years to come. Through strategic planning and grant implementation that clearly represented the interests of community members, the city strengthened its pedestrian and bicycle focus and set a precedent for prioritizing livability and connectivity in future transportation projects.

Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability



The pedestrian bridge over AL-59 is just one component of the City of Foley's recent bicycle and pedestrian transportation improvements. (Image courtesy of the City of Foley, AL)

