



# FHWA’s Fostering Multimodal Connectivity Newsletter

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### Introduction

The Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA’s) *Fostering Multimodal Connectivity Newsletter* provides transportation professionals with real-world examples of how multimodal investments make our transportation system safer for all people, promote an inclusive and sustainable economy, reduce inequities across our transportation systems and the communities they affect, address the climate crisis by building more resilient transportation systems, and support complete trips and mobility innovation. This newsletter also showcases how FHWA and its partners are improving connectivity, accessibility, equity, safety, and convenience for all transportation users, including equitable transportation options for traditionally underserved communities.

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## Ohio Develops Its First Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Cait Harley, Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation Manager, Ohio Department of Transportation

In June of 2021, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) published [Walk.Bike.Ohio](#), its first Statewide pedestrian and bicycle plan. This plan envisions a future where walking and biking are safe, convenient, and accessible transportation options for all Ohioans.

Walk.Bike.Ohio was funded with FHWA State Planning and Research dollars. A Statewide Steering Committee, which included representatives from FHWA and over twenty State, local, and non-profit organizations, also helped inform the plan.

ODOT developed Walk.Bike.Ohio over the course of two years. ODOT began the planning process with an existing conditions report to understand [the current state of walking and biking in Ohio](#). This report enabled ODOT to establish goals for the future and outline the short-term actions that ODOT would seek to advance in coordination with its partners.



Figure 1: Bicyclist riding on a shared use path. (Image courtesy of the Ohio Department of Transportation)

Walk.Bike.Ohio is a strategic action plan that defines a set of top-priority actions, performance measures, and targets that could be advanced within five years to support the needs of people walking and biking. Walk.Bike.Ohio is organized around five overarching themes:

1. Planning & Guidance – Ensuring that active transportation is part of Statewide planning frameworks, design recommendations, implementation procedures, and operations.
2. Implementation – Providing resources to strategically implement bicycle and pedestrian projects and assist local partners in project development and implementation.
3. Education & Promotion – Educating and informing roadway users, decision makers, and practitioners on bicycling and walking matters.
4. Data – Collecting and maintaining quantitative and qualitative multimodal data to ensure decision making reflects all modes of transportation.
5. Collaboration – Developing and sustaining relationships with partners at the State, regional, and local level to coordinate on active transportation goals.



Figure 2: Bike lane in Columbus, Ohio. (Image courtesy of the Ohio Department of Transportation)



One of the action items in this plan is to convene an ODOT task force to develop and adopt Statewide [Complete Streets](#) guidelines. This was a top priority recommended by stakeholders. Complete Streets guidelines can support agencies in planning, developing, and operating equitable streets and networks that prioritize safety, comfort, and connectivity to destinations for all people who use the street network.

At the State level, developing a strategic plan to address the needs of people walking and biking is a sizable effort which requires assessing the current conditions of people across diverse communities and geographies. In Ohio, a large majority of the existing bicycle and pedestrian networks are under local authority; however, ODOT still has an important role to play. Not only are there roadways under State authority that are used by pedestrian and bicyclists, but the State DOT plays a critical role in ensuring that partners have readily available data, access to funding programs, and technical assistance that will help to advance transportation goals within the State for all modes.

The publication of Walk.Bike.Ohio also culminated with the release of Statewide active transportation data and analyses available through [ODOT's Transportation Information Mapping System](#) (TIMS). These data and analyses include walking and biking demand and need assessments at the census tract and block group levels. These are important inputs into the planning process and have also been used to support successful applications for U.S. DOT discretionary grants. For example, Metroparks Toledo, in coordination with the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments and other local stakeholders, utilized the initial data collected by Walk.Bike.Ohio to support a 2020 Department of Transportation [grant application for the future Glass City Riverwalk](#). In addition to local data and case studies to support the importance of active transportation, the Walk.Bike.Ohio information was crucial for highlighting why critical safety improvements were



Figure 3: The Scioto Mile in downtown Columbus provides space for pedestrians and bicyclists to enjoy the riverfront. (Image courtesy of the Ohio Department of Transportation)

necessary. The project was awarded \$23.6 million. The need for more bicycle and pedestrian data across Ohio is critical, as documented in Walk.Bike.Ohio, so developing, housing, and maintaining more tools for ODOT and partners to utilize is an important goal Walk.Bike.Ohio aims to accomplish.

Today, the Statewide Steering committee has transformed into an ODOT Active Transportation Advisory Committee, which will continue to oversee plan implementation. More information about Walk.Bike.Ohio can be found on the [website](#).

In November 2021, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) was signed, authorizing new transportation formula funding and discretionary grant programs. Walk.Bike.Ohio aligns with BIL priorities by emphasizing equity, the environment, and safety of vulnerable roadway users. The findings documented in Walk.Bike.Ohio will directly support local governments and the State to seek out and justify prioritizing these investments in Ohio communities.



## Advancing Transportation Equity in Minnesota

Abdullahi Abdulle, Transportation Equity Planning Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Transportation

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) [Advancing Transportation Equity Initiative](#) consists of several activities that aim to better incorporate equity considerations in transportation decision making and support community quality of life by improving transportation access and opportunities, specifically for underserved communities. This initiative is rooted in community feedback from the [2017 Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan](#), which identified reducing transportation disparities and incorporating equity into decision-making processes as high priority needs. MnDOT launched this initiative in coordination with internally focused, agency-wide diversity and inclusion efforts including contracting and workforce collaborations.

The Advancing Transportation Equity Initiative includes the following activities:

- The [Community Conversations](#) Engagement Project is a Statewide effort to better understand the relationship between transportation and equity and identify strategies that reduce transportation burdens for underserved communities. MnDOT conducts interviews with community-based organizations in each of MnDOT's eight districts to better understand the transportation needs of underserved communities. For each district, the project team hosts three implementation meetings to discuss themes and findings from the interviews and create district-specific equity recommendations and action plans, which are shared on the Community Conversations website. To date, the project team has facilitated 30 interviews in six MnDOT districts.
- [Transportation Equity Labs](#) is a capacity-building effort to help MnDOT staff understand their role in advancing transportation equity through facilitated conversations with stakeholders on equity considerations specific to their work. In 2020, MnDOT hosted a Transportation Equity Lab for the [Minnesota Safe Routes to School \(SRTS\) Program](#). This lab convened MnDOT and external partners to review the ongoing strategic planning process for the program, which distributes State and Federal grants to communities. Following these conversations, MnDOT developed the [Student Transportation Equity for Priority Populations \(STEPP\)](#) tool. The STEPP tool integrates equity considerations into review and scoring of SRTS grant applications. The tool identifies priority populations through a series of metrics at the census block group level and for specific schools such as: the percent of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, the number of non-motorists killed or seriously injured in crashes, percent of students who are Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), and percent of English-learner students. Users can look up the information using an online map or by downloading the data.
- MnDOT also funds local agencies, universities, and other partners through [transportation equity research projects](#) to understand transportation disparities and mobility challenges across the State. One of these research projects focuses on developing performance measures by synthesizing previous research on equity assessments by MnDOT and other partners. The study aims to establish a detailed understanding of current challenges and needs related to equity assessment, identify assessment methods and equity-focused strategic actions, and facilitate the adoption of identified equity assessment methods and complementary strategic actions. [Another research project](#) explores systemic transportation-related barriers that marginalized individuals confront, especially those constructed by Minnesota government agencies, while studying the survival strategies individuals use to navigate these barriers. A final project examines whether socially constructed gender roles lead to disparate travel patterns for Minnesotans. Researchers at the University of Minnesota are conducting a literature review to understand how gender can influence travel-related behaviors. The project will use the [2019 Travel Behavior Inventory household surveys](#) from Metropolitan Council and collect additional data in Greater Minnesota using smartphone survey app.



## Initial Findings

While many of MnDOT's transportation equity initiatives are ongoing, there are several initial lessons that inform the agency's decision making to improve transportation outcomes for underserved communities.

Through Community Conversations, MnDOT learned transportation challenges limit people's access to opportunities, and community-based organizations that work with and represent underserved communities are essential partners to fill transportation gaps. Some organizations provide bus passes, collect and redistribute donated cars, and operate volunteer driver programs. This effort underscores the importance of working with local experts to develop community-specific transportation solutions. Transportation Equity Labs are effective collaborative processes to build internal staff capacity to incorporate equity into State plans, programs, and policies. Finally, research projects help MnDOT stay current with the latest transportation equity metrics and gain a deeper understanding of community needs to help develop equitable policies, programs, and processes. MnDOT is currently updating its Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP) which includes these lessons as well as additional strategies and actions to continue advancing transportation equity throughout the State. Some of the equity centered strategies in the current draft SMTP include involving people in the decision-making process, supporting a diverse and inclusive transportation workforce, protecting people from a changing climate, and providing equitable access to destinations.



Figure 4: Group of students walking to school with adult crossing guards. (Image courtesy of the Minnesota Department of Transportation)



### Learning with Peers

To support MnDOT's efforts, promote information exchange, and share experiences, MnDOT held a peer exchange on March 22-23, 2022, sponsored by the [FHWA/Federal Transit Administration \(FTA\) Transportation Planning Capacity Building \(TPCB\) Program](#) to explore comparative approaches to transportation equity. The event brought together peer State departments of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations from across the country to discuss transportation equity and methods to adopt equitable practices in transportation planning, programming, and project delivery. MnDOT organized the peer exchange to help the agency and its stakeholders better understand how to collectively embed equity in the planning, programming, and design of projects. The event also explored how to proactively address transportation deficiencies and disparate impacts generated as a result of past inequitable transportation decisions. Finally, the peer exchange sought to model collaboration with partner agencies to identify holistic, equitable, and people-centric solutions going forward. A report of the peer exchange will be posted on the TPCB website by late summer 2022.



## Updating Alaska’s Statewide Active Transportation Plan

Julius Adolfsson, Statewide Bike and Pedestrian Coordinator, Rural Transit Planner, Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

In 2016, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) partnered to update the 1994 Alaska Statewide Active Transportation Plan (ASATP), setting out a policy and action framework to support active transportation across Alaska. The [update of the ASATP](#), which was funded through the annual work program and in the [State Transportation Improvement Program](#) with 80 percent Federal participation and a 20 percent State match, was completed in 2019. Alaska DOT&PF worked to develop a plan that accommodated a diversity of communities and needs.

Ryan Anderson, the Alaska DOT&PF Commissioner, noted that *“the importance of planning for and supporting active transportation has really evolved over the years in Alaska. And our thinking has changed too—now we recognize the importance of supporting active travelers—the cost and energy savings, the equity issues, and the health benefits for Alaskans. Now, planners, designers, and construction staff consider active transportation as part of any other mode of travel. Active travelers make up an important part of our transportation network and setting up this plan will help us continue to support active transportation users for years to come.”*

The State’s transportation system has significantly changed since the ASATP was first published in 1994. Notably, there is a greater focus on active transportation modes, particularly walking and bicycling. The purpose of updating the ASATP is to improve safety, increase accessibility, and promote healthy lifestyles in Alaskan communities through the development of a safer and more efficient active transportation network and infrastructure to encourage more people to walk and bike. One of the recommendations in the plan that supports this goal is for DOT&PF to adopt a Complete Streets policy and implementation strategy. This policy considers the needs of all users in planning, design, and operation of State-owned transportation facilities. Several communities in Alaska including Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks, and Bethel have already adopted a Complete Streets policy.

Alaska has few urban communities, some connected-rural communities, and hundreds of remote rural communities that are off the road system. DOT&PF formed a steering committee of 20 individuals representing various communities and backgrounds to help guide the development of the plan and ensure that voices from across Alaska were heard. This committee included representatives from the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Alaska Mobility Coalition, Live Work Play Trails Initiative, Providence Hospital (BikeSafe, a bicycle injury prevention program), Anchorage and Fairbanks metropolitan planning organizations, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, and Alaska Department of Natural Resources. Engagement also included interested citizens, youth advocates, and representatives from local bike clubs and bike shops.



Figure 5: Scenic bicycling in Alaska in June 2020. (Image courtesy of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities)



Creating a plan that encompassed performance measures and recommendations was critical to the project's success. Performance measures are connected to the overall themes of the ASATP: safety, health, maintenance/system preservation, connectivity, and economic development. Previously, the primary obstacle to developing effective performance measures was lack of data; several recommended measures could not be implemented without established data, resulting in a less robust set of measures. To help address this issue, recommendations were included in the plan to encourage future data collection efforts including active transportation data, such as asset management and traffic counts. DOT&PF anticipates updating the plan in 2023 as the recommendations are implemented.



Figure 6: Bicycle parking at a playground. (Image courtesy of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities)

The plan is intended to be used in a variety of ways by different stakeholders and was developed in coordination with local and regional non-motorized and active transportation planning activities. The aim is to connect active transportation needs at the Statewide, local, and Tribal levels. Thus, the plan provides clear direction on how DOT&PF and other transportation planning agencies can improve active transportation options throughout the State of Alaska. The plan has been referenced in most, if not all, recent updates of local active transportation plans. DOT&PF plans to implement certain ASATP recommendations this fall, such as a safe passing distance and distracted driving legislation.

Planners involved in the development of the ASATP noted several challenges. In particular, it can be difficult to identify and implement performance measures. The ASATP highlights this challenge and notes that the measures will be revisited in a future update of the Plan. Further, rural communities may lack capacity to track transportation data such as crashes which can make planning more difficult. It can also be challenging to find locations in rural communities to hold public meetings.

The ASATP references several Federal resources, including the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines, the Proposed Guidelines for Pedestrian Facilities in the Public Right-of-Way, the U.S. Department of Transportation and FHWA Small Town and Rural Multimodal Design Guide, Incorporating On-Road Bicycle Networks Into Resurfacing Projects Guide, Achieving Multimodal Networks: Applying Design Flexibility and Reducing Conflicts, the Separated Bike Lane Planning and Design Guide, the Bikeway Selection Guide, and more. Further, the plan directs practitioners to Federal [funding opportunities](#) available through the National Highway Performance Program, Surface Transportation Block Grants, and the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

The ASATP references several Federal resources, including the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines, the Proposed Guidelines for





## U.S. 70 James City, North Carolina Improvement Project Engagement

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U.S. 70 is a primary east-west corridor in North Carolina which runs from the Atlantic coast through James City to Raleigh. James City is an unincorporated area and census-designated place (CDP). Within James City CDP is the James City neighborhood, a historically Black community. James City neighborhood has an older population, on average, as compared to James City CDP and North Carolina.<sup>1</sup> Two separate U.S. 70 highway construction projects in 1999 and 2010 negatively impacted the James City neighborhood. In 1999, U.S. 70 bifurcated the CDP and the neighborhood at grade, acting as a barrier to local through traffic, pedestrians, and other road users. After the 1999 construction which removed many through streets and displaced residents, the NCDOT responded to community concerns about pedestrian safety by constructing a pedestrian overpass. However, the bridge did not provide a meaningful pedestrian connection for residents and was not Americans with Disabilities Act accessible.

In 2014, NCDOT began planning projects along U.S. 70 to bring it up to interstate standards, with the intent to improve regional mobility. This time, NCDOT recognized an opportunity to rebuild trust with the James City neighborhood by meaningfully involving the community in the planning process.



Figure 7: Community members examining study area maps with design alternatives at a public meeting. (Image courtesy of North Carolina Department of Transportation)

A degraded neighborhood environment and lingering resentment among community members, especially Black residents of the James City neighborhood, led NCDOT to engage an external public involvement consulting team (project team) that specialized in outreach to environmental justice (EJ) communities. The project team's charge was to implement an innovative public involvement campaign. The project team conducted a site visit to collect and review demographic data; identify neighborhoods, businesses, organizations, and community leaders and representatives for further engagement; and begin to understand local stakeholder sentiments. Based on the site visit, the project team adopted a three-phase process for community engagement that involved conducting 1) individual stakeholder interviews, 2) focus groups, and 3) corridor-wide meetings.

First, they held one-on-one meetings with community stakeholders, which identified safety, congestion, and lack of access due to construction as primary concerns. The stakeholders also offered recommendations about the most convenient and accessible times and locations for larger meetings in the next steps of engagement. The project team provided informational fliers regarding the next phases of involvement to the stakeholders and requested stakeholders share the information with their neighbors.

<sup>1</sup> According to 2017 ACS data, about 50% of the population in the James City neighborhood are 55 years and over. In James City CDP, about 17% of the population are 65 years and over.



The project team then held focus groups with local residents and business owners. These community meetings encouraged participation and discussions on access, congestion, construction impacts, traffic, and safety. In the final phase, the project team facilitated larger, corridor-wide meetings. The meetings initially focused on collecting broad comments about the community's vision and possible design alternatives to address the safety, congestion, and access issues. [Information presented during these meetings can be found here](#). The final meeting summarized the public involvement efforts of the past four years and introduced [videos and two-dimensional renderings](#) of the corridor during and after construction to give the community a visual of the proposed project. The project team published a newsletter following each meeting to more widely distribute the comments collected and project planning progress.

In June 2017, NCDOT selected its preferred alternative which raises U.S. 70 so interchanges in James City are above grade, addressing community concerns about access for local traffic and safety of pedestrian and bicyclists. These preliminary designs were approved in March 2018. Since then, NCDOT has continued to engage with the community. In February 2019, NCDOT outlined [steps in a meeting handout for property owners impacted by the construction to acquire assistance](#). To address noise concerns, the agency conducted a noise study to determine where noise walls may be built and developed a [Noise Walls Policy](#) for the project. The policy provides information to the public regarding the locations where noise abatement measures, such as noise walls, will be considered and evaluated. NCDOT also released fact sheets with information for [travelers](#) and [businesses](#) on what to expect during construction activities. As a result of the meaningful engagement, NCDOT was able to understand and address the concerns of James City, and work to re-establish trust with a community historically subject to recurring impacts from transportation projects. In order for NCDOT to begin rebuilding relationships with residents, the project team needed to show residents that they had heard and understood why residents were upset about the way previous projects had been planned and implemented. [The project is currently under construction, which began in spring 2022, and is expected to be completed by late 2024.](#)



*Figure 8: Maps of the preferred alternative design for the U.S. 70 James City Improvements Project which were presented in the final community meeting. (Image courtesy of North Carolina Department of Transportation)*



## Announcements/New Resources

The Federal Highway Administration released the following:

- The [Fiscal Year 2022 Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) for the [Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program](#) is open now through Thursday, October 13, 2022.
- The [Thriving Communities Program](#) is a new initiative to provide technical assistance and capacity building resources to improve and foster thriving communities through transportation improvements. This includes the [DOT Navigator](#), a new resource to help communities understand the best ways to apply for grants, and to plan for and deliver transformative infrastructure projects and services.
- The [Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside Guidance](#) clarifies eligibility, transfer, and other requirements for the [Transportation Alternatives \(TA\) Set-Aside](#) from the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program (23 U.S.C. 133(h)) under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. [Slides](#) and a [recording](#) (Passcode: 3MPNf1=5) from a June 1, 2022 webinar provide more information.
- The [National Highway Institute “Integrating Transportation and Land Use” web-based training course](#) is designed to help transportation and land use practitioners plan multimodal transportation systems that support community development goals, shape land use patterns, and further transportation system performance goals.
- The [Shared Micromobility & Equity Primer](#) provides an overview on shared micromobility and transportation equity, a discussion around strategies that jurisdictions may use to incorporate equity into shared micromobility programs, several case studies, and featured resources.
- The [Example Practices for Performance-Driven Programming](#) report highlights how State departments of transportation (State DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are implementing performance-driven programming processes and aligning transportation investment decisions with the Federal performance areas for safety, infrastructure condition, and system performance.
- The [Active Transportation Funding and Finance Toolkit](#) serves as a starting point for anyone interested in expanding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. It includes funding and financing strategies, advantages of public private partnerships, emerging and supporting strategies to deliver active transportation projects, highlights from successful examples, and considerations for implementation.
- The [Virtual Public Involvement \(VPI\) Conversations Release Case Study Video Series](#) showcases the VPI practices State and local agencies use for transportation planning and project development. The new videos showcase [Alaska DOT & Public Facilities](#), [Michigan DOT with Kari Martin](#), [Michigan DOT with Brad Sharlow](#), and [Indianapolis MPO](#). The first four videos in this series are available on YouTube on the [VPI Conversations playlist](#).
- [The Environmental Justice \(EJ\) and Equity Screening Tools Peer Network](#) completed a [four-part series of events](#) in the fall of 2021. These events provided a forum for State DOTs and MPOs to share experiences using Geographic Information System (GIS)-based data tools to identify underserved populations within their respective State or region with the goal of facilitating equitable outcomes through transportation planning and project development.
- The [2022 FHWA Environmental Excellence Awards](#) recognized fourteen winners across the United States who make outstanding contributions to environmental stewardship and partnerships above and beyond traditional transportation project outcomes. The winning projects and programs exemplify FHWA’s priorities of climate change and sustainability, equity and environmental justice, complete streets, economic strength, and safety for all road users.

