

BEST PRACTICE AREA 5: MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION

Vision

Joint Planning District residents can choose among many modes of transportation to perform daily activities, and bicycling, walking and transit constitute a larger share of trips. It is possible to live in the Joint Planning District without a car. Regional trails connect the cities to outlying areas, and commuter rail connects the region to the Twin Cities. Neighborhoods are walkable, streets are designed for multiple uses, and safety is improved for all transportation modes.

Background

Conventional transportation planning focuses on addressing auto congestion and safety through roadway expansion and improvements. It supports automobile dependence, which in turn, increases congestion and air pollution. Multi-modal transportation planning, by contrast, includes more emphasis on non-automobile modes such as transit, bicycles and pedestrians, and more consideration of factors such as environmental impacts and mobility for non-drivers.

The St. Cloud region experiences a high level of congestion on many arterial roads and other major thoroughfares due to high levels of commercial development, limited number of river, highway, and railroad crossings, and a scarcity of viable alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle. Workshop participants identified a lack of safe bike routes and paths paralleling major roads. The regional transit system, while improving, provides only limited coverage. However, there is increasing interest in alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle for commuting and personal use. Transportation planning efforts by the Area Planning Organization, cities and counties are increasingly oriented towards multiple modes of travel to serve more compact and sustainable land use patterns.

Goals

- A. Work to ensure that existing transportation infrastructure including roads, sidewalks, and trails are adequately maintained prior to investing in new road infrastructure; emphasize funding of alternative transportation infrastructure (transit, sidewalks and trails).
- B. Improve the integration of transportation modes by designing and retrofitting streets for multiple modes where appropriate (the “complete streets” concept) and improve the connectivity (reduce gaps) of the transportation system for all modes, including bike, pedestrian, motor vehicle, transit and freight.





- C. Reduce per capita fatalities and injuries from all modes of travel.
- D. Better coordinate transportation with land use planning throughout the region with the goal of reducing VMT per capita and increasing mode share for public transit, bicycling, and walking.
- E. Increase the availability and use of public transportation between the Twin Cities and the greater St. Cloud region and between communities within the planning region.
- F. Increase the use of renewable/alternative fuels for municipal fleets and transit vehicles.
- G. Reduce impacts on air, water, and neighborhoods from the transportation system.
- H. “Right-size” vehicle parking requirements within communities in order to use land more efficiently, improve the tax base and community appeal, and reduce run-off to lakes and rivers.
- I. Address congestion primarily through improved land use planning, complete streets, and increased mode share for transit, bicycling, walking, and carpooling (also trip chaining) rather than roadway widening.
- J. Target roadway capacity increases to locations where they will accommodate higher density, mixed use development.

Initiatives and Action Steps

The following three initiatives for initial action were identified through public input and reflect local stakeholders’ views of which goals would have the most profound effect on moving the Joint Planning District toward sustainability.

1. Complete, Connected Streets: Improve the integration of transportation modes by designing and retrofitting streets for multiple modes where appropriate (the “complete streets” concept) and improve the connectivity (reduce gaps) of the transportation system for all modes, including bike, pedestrian, motor vehicle, transit and freight. Require bike parking as well as automobile parking; also explore separate standards for mopeds and scooters (a particular issue for the SCSU campus). Consider “right-sizing” off-street parking requirements.

The street standards currently in use in many communities date from an earlier era of transportation engineering; one in which unimpeded movement of motor vehicles was the primary goal. The new paradigm for street design is known as “complete streets,” defined by federal legislation³ as:

³ [HR 1443/S 584](#) The Federal Complete Streets Act of 2009.





“A roadway that accommodates all travelers, particularly public transit users, bicyclists, pedestrians (including individuals of all ages and individuals with mobility, sensory, neurological, or hidden disabilities), and motorists, to enable all travelers to use the roadway safely and efficiently.”

According to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT),

“Complete Streets does not mean “all modes on all roads”; rather, the goal of Complete Streets should be to 1) develop a balanced transportation system that integrates all modes via planning inclusive of each mode of transportation (i.e., transit, freight, automobile, bicycle and pedestrian) and 2) include transportation users of all types, ages and abilities.”⁴

Adoption of complete streets policies by the communities in the Joint Planning District would provide an integrated set of strategies for accomplishing many of the goals of the Committee, including integration of transportation modes, funding of alternative transportation infrastructure, and increased safety. As noted above, it would not require all roads to be designed for all modes of travel. Rather, a complete streets policy includes a range of improvements for various types of streets and highways.

Complete streets policies are supported by the Joint Planning District Planning Organization (APO). The APO’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (including staff representing state, regional, and local jurisdictions, business owners, cyclists, walkers and other interested citizens) has worked with APO staff to establish a vision statement to guide pedestrian and bicycle planning:

“The St. Cloud Metropolitan Area is a place where people will choose to bicycle and walk for everyday transportation and recreational purposes. Residents and visitors will be able to walk and bike safely, conveniently, and pleasurably on a well-designed, maintained, and connected system of sidewalks and bikeways.”

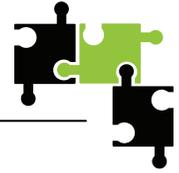
One of the goals established in the APO’s 2035 Transportation Plan is “Design and maintain Complete Streets that accommodate all modes of transportation through a functional network.”

- a. City governments consider revisions to street design standards to incorporate complete streets policies. New standards would apply to new streets and, where feasible, to reconstruction of existing streets. This strategy could include traffic calming techniques

⁴ Minnesota Department of Transportation, *Complete Streets Report*, a report to the Minnesota legislature, December, 2009.

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/completestreets/legislation.html#report>





such as encouraging street trees and on-street parking in order to narrow the perceived width of the street.

- b. APO and local governments seek funding for creation of separated bicycle/pedestrian paths along urban collector and arterial road corridors, and for trail connections to the regional trail system.
- c. Counties adopt policies providing for installation of paved shoulders on rural county roads where appropriate.
- d. Cities and the APO develop plans for bike routes on local streets parallel to main arterials, to enable bicyclists to “get across town” while avoiding congested streets.
- e. Require bike parking as well as automobile parking; also explore separate standards for mopeds and scooters (a particular issue for the SCSU campus). Consider “right-sizing” off-street parking requirements.

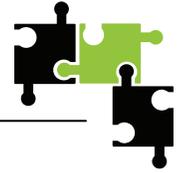
2. Viable Transit Options: Increase the availability and use of public transportation between the Twin Cities and the greater St. Cloud region and between communities within the planning region.

The St. Cloud region is now well-positioned to build on the momentum and interest generated by the Northstar Commuter Rail. Bus ridership is increasing between St. Cloud and the current Northstar terminus in Big Lake, and reverse commuting to the SCSU campus is also increasing. Metro Bus, the region’s primary urban transit provider, has undertaken a “Transit System Performance Analysis, System Redesign, Market Study and Long Range Plan Update” that will examine ways to increase the reach and effectiveness of the transit system.

While funding for transit is always an issue, available funding could be focused on initiatives that would make transit use more comfortable and predictable. These initiatives could include:

- a. Providing better infrastructure for high-frequency transit routes, such as improved shelters, lighting, and real-time information signage, to increase transit user safety and comfort.
- b. Exploring the potential for using smaller buses on routes with lighter ridership.
- c. Using transit to fill “gaps” in the trail system, emphasizing transit connections to trailheads and in between disconnected trails.
- d. Improve the clarity of transit maps and schedules so that information is more readily accessible to new or occasional transit users.





- e. Investigate the potential for a bike-share program like the new “Nice Ride” program in Minneapolis. A program of this type provides sturdy easy-to-use bikes for short rides within and around a downtown area, and can be very attractive to tourists and downtown employees.

3. Don’t Build Your Way Out of Congestion: Address congestion primarily through improved land use planning, complete streets, and increased mode share for transit, bicycling, walking, and carpooling rather than roadway widening.

This initiative is essentially a “global” or philosophical approach to transportation and land use planning. Therefore, the action steps associated with this strategy are essentially those listed above under Strategies 1 and 2, in combination with the general actions listed below.

General Actions

The following general actions have been identified as key steps to move the Joint Planning District toward the goals for this Best Practice Area not selected as “initiatives” above.

- I. Adopt policies that encourage or require street connectivity. In both suburban and rural areas, street design standards have tended to encourage cul-de-sacs and disconnected internal street networks. While cul-de-sac streets are popular among many homeowners and in some instances can support conservation designs in sensitive areas, they tend to push a disproportionate amount of traffic onto the collector and arterial streets from their single access points, as well as discouraging bicycle and pedestrian circulation.

According to a recent publication by the Congress for the New Urbanism,⁵

“Streets in connected networks: Can improve emergency response times by providing several routes to any given address; and are safer for pedestrians, drivers, and emergency responders since they calm traffic below speeds that are more likely to result in fatal or serious injury collisions.

Narrower streets in well-connected networks also help reduce stormwater runoff, require less energy to construct, and facilitate non-greenhouse gas emitting transportation alternatives like walking and bicycling.”

The LEED for Neighborhood Development rating system awards points for a high degree of street connectivity, beginning at a minimum of 200 intersections per sq. mi..⁶

⁵ Congress for the New Urbanism, *CNU Report: Emergency Response and Street Design*, 2009.
http://www.cnu.org/sites/www.cnu.org/files/CNUEmergency%20Response_FINAL.pdf

⁶ LEED-ND Requirements are posted and updated at the U.S. Green Building Council website,
<https://www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=148>





Where street connections are impractical, pedestrian connections should still be pursued. Sidewalks or paths can link otherwise disconnected streets and improve pedestrian safety on busy collector or arterial streets.

II. Continue to encourage walking by participating in the Safe Routes to School Program.

Minnesota's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is administered by MnDOT with federal transportation funds. Safe Routes grants may be applied for by schools, school districts, local governments, non-profits and many other organizations. Funds awarded under this program are also available for educational programs aimed at encouraging and facilitating safe walking to and from school. (The City of St. Cloud partnered with School District 742, the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization and other organizations to apply for a grant under the program in 2008 to install sidewalks in the Westwood School neighborhood.)

Comments at the May 27th meeting indicated some difficulties in gaining parent and school acceptance of the SRTS concept. An educational and outreach effort may help overcome these problems. Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) offers various educational tools, including a marketing toolkit (<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/marketingtoolkit/index.html>).

Blue Cross and Blue Shield's Center for Prevention has produced two new videos. The Safe Routes to School video shows how Red Pine Elementary School in Eagan supports more kids walking or biking to school. "Building a Walkable, Bikeable Community" tells the story of how community leaders have made strategic decisions to create an activity-friendly city in Hopkins (see www.preventionminnesota.com).

- III. Start a car share program like HourCar or ZipCar.
- IV. Encourage employers to participate in employer-sponsored transportation benefits programs, such as participating in the IRS Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits Program and offering up to \$230 per month in transit passes or \$20 per month in transportation expenses for bicyclists.
- V. Invest in bicycle wayfinding devices, such as signs, maps, and suggested routes to promote bicycling for commuters and recreationists of various abilities.
- VI. Encourage employers to offer workplace shower access to promote bicycling.
- VII. Install safe places to lock bikes, indoor bike parking, modern bike racks at work and recreation destinations.
- VIII. Add bike lanes and establish bike routes on existing streets.

