

## Section 11 Stakeholder and Public Involvement

Public input is a necessary component for the development of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan. This section discusses the public and stakeholder involvement process. It focuses upon the comments gathered from surveys, stakeholder interviews, and a bicycle ride and public workshop conducted in September 2006.

### 11.1 County, Township, Municipal, and Community Leader Surveys

Local and regional decision makers decide how to prioritize spending of transportation funds on roadways, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and public transit. Their support for initiatives to create a successful pedestrian and bicycle network are pertinent to the implementation of this plan. Therefore, the Rockford Area Transportation Study (RATS) conducted a survey of county, township, and municipal staff and community leaders throughout the Rockford Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) in order to assist in the evaluation of existing conditions and to gather comment on pedestrian and bicycle policies and initiatives. Questions were derived in part from information and comment gathered in the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) public involvement process.

#### County and Municipal Staff

The municipal staff survey consisted of questions regarding existing sidewalks and bicycle facilities, as well as pertinent ordinances. Other questions included requests for information regarding maintenance and facility funding (See **Attachment D, Municipal Staff Survey**).

The following communities completed surveys: the City of Belvidere, Boone County, the Village of Cherry Valley, the Village of Machesney Park, the Village of Timberlane, the Village of Roscoe, the City of Rockford, Winnebago County, and the Village of Winnebago. The results from these surveys primarily were used for verification of county and municipal ordinances, identifying locations of sidewalks and bicycle facilities, and providing preliminary comments on maps of existing conditions.

#### Township Highway Commissioners

The township highway commissioners' survey sought to determine the importance of pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Township highway officials were asked to evaluate selection criteria, and whether or not they approved of the construction of new facilities for pedestrians and for on/off road bicycle use (See **Attachment E, Township Highway Commissioner Survey**).

Thirteen township highway officials were contacted both within Winnebago and Boone Counties. Six responses were received.

The township officials were split between agreement for the inclusion of sidewalks on both sides of the streets in all new developments with 2 or more units per acre, as three agreed that they should be required, while three did not. Only one township among those responding had funding for the inclusion of sidewalks as part of the general budget. The amount was listed in the survey as \$2500.

On the other hand, few responded to the question asking whether or not they approved of the inclusion of on-street and off-street bicycle facilities. Of the four that answered, only one official agreed with the inclusion of these types of facilities.

Additional comments suggested that township highway officials were willing to work with county agencies and other townships to ensure that pedestrian and bicycle network connections were made to existing facilities. However, little indication was made as to the existence of extensive programming targeted toward the inclusion of these types of facilities. Typically, the township highway officials were not involved directly in the direct construction or implementation of pedestrian and bicycle facilities planning.

### Community Leaders

The community leader survey focused on questions related to policy initiatives. This survey was designed to allow officials to provide feedback on existing conditions, as well as demonstrate what criteria are important in building new pedestrian and bicycle facilities within their communities. Workshop comments from the 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan Update provided specific guidance for determining some of the criterion to include within the survey. Community leaders also were asked what types of programs they would be willing to support (See **Attachment F, Community Leader Survey**).

Responses from the community leader survey were gathered from elected and appointed officials, and other community members. The surveys were used to gather perceptions about existing and proposed pedestrian and bicycle improvements.

- **Pedestrian Facilities-** Most felt that sidewalks should be placed on both sides of the streets in all new developments. They also recognized that many schools were lacking adequate sidewalk facilities and that their communities had many locations where people were unable to walk due to the lack of facilities. Respondents also were asked to rate and rank a series of location criteria for providing sidewalks as shown in **Table 11-1, Community Leader Survey Results**.

Table 11-1 Community Leader Survey Results Average Score for Location Criteria of Sidewalks				
<b>Question:</b> Sidewalks can encourage walking within a community by providing a connective network of routes between local destinations and other modes of transportation. Please rate and rank the importance of the following criteria by which your community should consider the construction of sidewalks.				
Criterion	Average Rating*	Standard Deviation	Rank **(Average Ranking)	Standard Deviation
Proximity to Schools	4.6	.78	6 (5.3)	1.20
High Neighborhood Population Density	4.3	1.07	5 (3.8)	1.50
Proximity to Commercial Centers	4.3	.79	4 (3.6)	1.23
Proximity to Parks, Forest Preserves, and Conservation Districts	4.3	1.10	3 (3.6)	1.82
Proximity to Transit Routes	4.0	.99	2 (2.8)	1.42
Proximity to Major Employers	3.6	1.14	1 (2.0)	1.18

\*Rating is based on a scale of 1=Not Important and 5=Very Important

\*\*Ranking is based on a scale of 1=Lowest Priority and 6=Highest Priority

- **Bicycle Facilities-** A majority of the respondents felt that bicycle facilities should be provided both on and off-street and that inadequate bicycle facilities were present in the respondents’ jurisdictions. They were willing to support initiatives that would assist young, old, low-income, and disadvantaged residents seeking to use bicycles for recreation and as a means of transportation.
- **Funding-** Funding was not available for pedestrian and bicycle facilities in a majority of the respondents’ communities. Many believed that funding should be set aside by local governments to provide these facilities. However, in additional comments, several respondents suggested that although they want to accommodate these needs, the financial resources are not available at the present time.
- **Policies-** Most of the leaders felt that bicycling and walking amenities should be provided by local governments and that local governments should promote bicycling and walking as alternative transportation choices in order to improve public health and the overall quality of life. A small group of the respondents (23%) objected to retrofitting existing roadways to add bike lanes on streets. None provided further comment to explain their objections.

Most respondents (80%) were supportive of complete streets measures, as well.

- **Other policies supported by respondents** were the development of guides and standards for pedestrians and bicyclists, the preparation of land use plans that would encourage pedestrian and bicycle oriented development, and supporting

education programs to encourage the use of pedestrian and bicycle facilities throughout the communities.

### Observations

Input from the surveys provided guidance for developing priorities for pedestrian and bicycle corridors.

The response from municipal officials, township highway commissioners, and community leaders was relatively uniform.

Additional comments within these surveys suggested that money was a significant factor in determining whether or not to build new and/or to improve existing facilities. Several community leaders wrote that they would like to build these types of improvements, but other projects were deemed more important and received priority for the available funds.

## **11.2 Stakeholder Interviews**

Representatives from the T.Y. Lin International (TYLI) team conducted eighteen key person interviews throughout the months of August and September 2006 with various community leaders. The interviews were conducted so as to gather comment prior to the start of the bicycle ride and public workshop.

Interview questions were based on the Community Leader Survey, while providing ample allowance for discussion and diversion from the original questions. A summary of the interview responses is presented in the following discussion.

### Pedestrian Facilities

Six criteria for the prioritization of sidewalks were discussed with all interviewees. These included the following:

- Proximity to schools
- Proximity to major employers
- Proximity to commercial centers
- Proximity to transit routes
- High neighborhood population density
- Proximity to parks, forest preserves, and conservation districts

The interviewees deemed all of the six criteria to be important factors to consider when evaluating the need for sidewalks.

However, the main priority is to assist children in getting to school safely and to areas where they frequently travel, such as parks, while at the same time providing sidewalks for residential and commercial connections.

On the other hand, some interviewees felt that sidewalks were not necessary and that they only were needed if safe crossings were not present. Some also suggested that sidewalks should be provided only on one side of a street rather than both sides.

Specific problem areas within the MPA identified within the interviews include the following:

- State Street east and west of Alpine Road
- West State Street
- North Second Street
- Charles Street Connection
- Cherryvale Mall

These problem areas coincided with those receiving high priority rankings from the 2035 LRTP workshop held in January 2005. For instance, the Charles Street Connection was ranked as the top rated priority for the RATS planning area at this workshop.

### Bicycle Facilities

Interviewees also were asked to respond to a variety of questions regarding the inclusion of on-street and off-street bicycle facilities. Nearly half of the local officials were hesitant to suggest the retro-fitting/new construction of on street bicycle facilities. In part, negative feelings exist due to the legal case surrounding the Boub case. The case involved intended versus permitted use of the roadway (see **Section 7.3, Boub v. Township of Wayne**). For this reason, some of municipalities within the MPA are hesitant to place signage on roadways or indications marking permitted usage of the roadway.

On the other hand, a number of officials and community leaders recognized the need for bike lanes, as well as associated facilities, such as bicycle racks. Many respondents associated off-road paths with recreational needs and on-street facilities as travel routes for everyday needs. Some respondents felt that on-street facilities were very important, as they would provide a more extensive system of movement than off-street paths, especially for those riders using bicycles as their primary means of transportation. Interviewees felt that improvements should not focus entirely upon the City, but also should extend to the surrounding countryside to allow connections and access between the two areas.

Interviewees suggested the following bicycle facility improvements:

- Rock Cut State Park to Long Prairie Trail
- Spring Creek/N. 2<sup>nd</sup> St. intersection
- From the Machesney Mall to Harlem High School

### RATS Pedestrian/Bicycle Planner

Interviewees were asked for their input regarding the establishment of a RATS position to coordinate non-motorized transportation planning. The interviewees had mixed feelings for supporting this new position within RATS. Some community leaders and officials were willing to dedicate funds to this position, while others opposed the commitment of new funding for this type of position.

### Policy

Interviewed community leaders and officials clearly supported the use of land use plans and regulations to encourage pedestrian and bicycle oriented development.

A federal program designed to address land use and transportation for children is the Safe Routes to School program. Programs, such as this, have been utilized throughout the United States in order to provide safe paths for children to travel to school. Few interviewees were aware of these programs, yet all interviewees except one expressed a desire to learn more about them and to work on a regional implementation of the program.

### **11.3 Bicycle Ride and Public Workshop**

A bicycle ride and public workshop was held in September 2006 at the Loves Park City Hall in order to update community members regarding the Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, to allow them an opportunity to give comment on existing facilities, and to provide an open forum for suggestions on future improvements (See **Attachment G, Public Invitation**).

The informational bicycle ride took place along the route depicted in **Figure 11-1, Public Bicycle Ride**. Representatives from TYLI, the Illinois League of Bicyclists, municipal staff, community leaders, residents, and local business owners participated on the ride (See **Figure 11-2, Bicycle Ride Participants**).

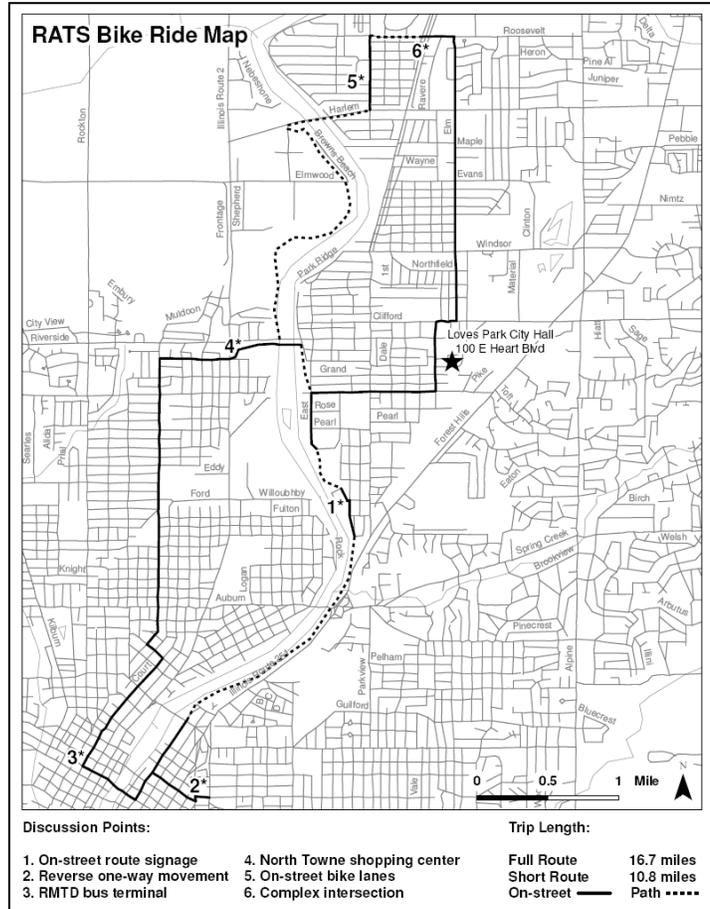
The afternoon public workshop was attended by community residents, municipal and government employees, and elected/appointed leaders, including the Mayor of Rockford and the Village President of Machesney Park. The afternoon workshop session included a brief presentation of the need for pedestrian and bicycle facilities within the MPA, as well as an introduction to the RATS Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan.

A majority of the workshop session was devoted to allowing participants opportunities to evaluate pedestrian and bicycle facility maps created by TYLI. Comments from this process were recorded and were checked against priorities to ensure that the concerns were considered in the evaluation.

Community members who were unable to attend the bicycle ride and public workshop, yet contacted the TYLI team, were provided with the Community Leader Survey. Four respondents participated in this request.

**11.4 Environmental and Social Justice**

Federal guidance for the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) requires that all members of society are allowed full participation in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Non-discrimination in regard to transportation improvements is necessary in order to ensure that all programs, policies, and activities do not have an adverse impact on minority and low-income populations. The Rockford Area Transportation Study (RATS) continues to be committed to applying the principles of environmental justice to the transportation planning process.



**Figure 11-1  
Public Bicycle Ride**



**Figure 11-2  
Bicycle Ride Participants**

An important part of the environmental/social justice process involves promoting services and facilities that serve all populations and distribute benefits and costs equally. As the focus of this analysis was placed on non-motorized transportation, opportunities open to users of all ages, races, and socio-economic backgrounds accounted for the primary criteria for prioritizing transportation facilities. Transit routes, along with major arterials and collectors, were analyzed specifically for sidewalks and bicycle facilities. As per comments obtained through public involvement and collected data,

destinations rather than residential areas also served as the main indicators of where facilities should be developed, thus promoting investments and benefits for all people within the MPA.

### **11.5 Website**

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan has been posted on the RATS website for public review. The final Plan will remain on the website.

### **11.6 Final Public Workshops**

An open invitation to the public was made to attend a presentation of the final Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan.