

Hennepin County Pedestrian Plan Public Comment Report

On May 31, 2013, the draft Hennepin County Pedestrian Plan was released for a 45-day public comment period ending July 15, 2013. The county received comments on the draft plan from the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the City of Minneapolis, and 33 residents. Staff revised the plan based on public feedback and presented the final Hennepin County Pedestrian Plan for County Board approval on September 24, 2013. This report summarizes and responds to comments received during the public comment period.

General Comments:

- Two general comments in support of the plan.
- Two comments that the plan is a step in the right direction, but does not go far enough to reduce auto dependence.

1. Introduction

Comment: *Section 1.2: Provide Transportation Choices*—Importance of walking for transit use should be noted here.

Response: *Section 1.2: Provide Transportation Choices* was edited to highlight that walking is the primary means of access to public transit. (Page 5)

2. Goals of This Plan

Comment: Edit Goal 1, second sentence: “This plan includes strategies to promote safe behavior by pedestrians and motorists through improvements to pedestrian infrastructure along **and across** Hennepin County roads.”

Response: Text edited as suggested (Page 8)

Comment: Add a fourth goal for HC to advocate pro-pedestrian policies when interacting with other jurisdictions

Response: Added strategy under *6.2.1: Pedestrian-Related Policy and Process Improvements*

Encourage Infrastructure and Policies that Support the Goals of the Hennepin County Pedestrian Plan When Interacting with Other Jurisdictions and Agencies.

Hennepin County reviews, advises, and provides funding support for many projects and plans led by other jurisdictions and agencies. These project and plans often have an influence on the pedestrian environment. The county should continue to work with other agencies and jurisdictions to leverage opportunities for infrastructure and policies that promote the goals of this plan. (Page 35)

3. Context: Geographic and Demographic Characteristics of Hennepin County

Comment: Consider mental health as well as physical health benefits of walking.

Response: Included a sentence under 3.3: “Regular physical activity also has mental health benefits such as reduced risk of depression.” (Page 11)

4. Existing Conditions

Comment: Pages 12-13: Use GIS to calculate how many county residents live within a 10 min walk of retail, office, or industrial land uses to estimate how many residents could potentially walk to destinations. This would get a sense of the feasibility of the performance measures of the plan.

Response: The county does not currently have the data to reliably estimate this measure.

Comment: “The county does not have the data to determine whether there has been a disproportionate number of pedestrian vehicle crashes along county roads in Minneapolis.” Recommendation that the county collect the aforementioned data through pedestrian counts and other applicable measures along county roads in Minneapolis while also coordinating with Minneapolis Traffic and Parking to retrieve pedestrian-vehicle crash report data. Understanding if this is or is not the case could help direct county efforts that would directly impact Goals 1, 2, and 3 for county residents in the most populous city within the county.

Response: A sentence was added to *Strategy 4.1C: Develop and Implement a Program to Conduct Annual Pedestrian Counts*: “Counts should also be used to understand whether a disproportionate number of pedestrian-vehicle crashes occur in Minneapolis.” (Page 42).

6. Recommendations

Goal 1: Improve the Safety of Walking

6.1.1. Curb extensions, refuge medians, and crosswalks

Comment: Desire for zebra crosswalks in Minneapolis (two comments)

Response: Edited Practice to Continue: Stripe Zebra-style Crosswalks to read: “The City of Minneapolis is responsible for installing and maintaining crosswalks along county roads in Minneapolis. The City of Minneapolis uses its own standards to determine whether to install zebra or longitudinal crosswalks. The county should continue to encourage the City of Minneapolis to stripe zebra-style crosswalks on county roads.” (Page 23)

Comment: Properly mark and maintain crosswalks in all communities in the county.

Response: This concern is addressed by the Practice to Continue: Work with Municipalities to Install Durable Crosswalk Markings (Page 23).

6.1.2. Signals

Comment: Add signals or beacons at crosswalks with pedestrian safety and access problems.

Response: This comment is addressed by Strategy 1.2B: Install Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPI), Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFB), and High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk Beacons (HAWK) where appropriate and feasible (Page 26).

Comment: Re-time signals to allow seniors and people with disabilities enough time to cross with the walk signal.

Response: This comment is addressed by the Practice to Continue: Adjust Signal Timing for a Walk Speed of no More Than 3.5 Feet per Second. Additional clarification was added to this practice: “As signals are retimed in the future, the county should evaluate the need for additional pedestrian crossing time near land uses such as schools and senior housing.” (Page 28)

Comment: Safety benefits of countdown timers are mixed and are not as great as other strategies such as basic provision of sidewalks and crosswalks. Countdown timers should be installed as part of other processes but not necessarily as part of their own initiative.

Response: The county considers countdown timers as a best practice in pedestrian signal design. The county will continue to install countdown timers as part of *Practice to Continue: Install Countdown Timers on all County-Owned Signals* (Page 28).

Comment: Do not allow pedestrian push buttons in urban areas (six similar comments received).

Response: *Strategy 2.1B: Create Complete Streets Design Guidelines for County Roadway Projects* has been updated to recommend that the county's Complete Streets Design Guidelines include criteria for the installation and removal of pedestrian push buttons (Page 34).

Comment: Include strategy to implement: Implement lagging left turns as signal timing standard. This will increase pedestrian safety and convenience by allowing pedestrians to walk first and reduce conflicts when pedestrians enter the intersection despite a leading left turn signal.

Response: *Strategy 2.1B: Create Complete Streets Design Guidelines for County Roadway Projects* has been updated to recommend that the county's Complete Streets Design Guidelines include evaluation of signal phasing practices and opportunities for implementing lagging left turns. (Page 34)

6.1.3 Crashes and Community Concerns

Comment: 6.1.3: There should be public transparency in the evaluation process. Residents should be able to monitor the evaluation process and provide input into the evaluation outcome.

Response: *Strategy 1.3A: Formalize an Internal Procedure for Evaluating Pedestrian Safety Needs at Specific Locations in Response to Pedestrian-Vehicle Crashes and Community Concerns* was revised to include the following: "As part of this strategy, county staff should evaluate and implement ways to use technology to allow residents to report pedestrian connectivity and safety concerns. The reporting process should allow residents to track the status of their concern and provide additional feedback following a response from the county." (Page 29)

6.1.4. Sidewalks and Trails

Comment: Should consider improvements to existing pedestrian facilities, not just the addition of new facilities. Include the rating of the conditions of facilities as part of the measure for Goal 2.

Response: Strategy 1.4A was edited to read "Work with Cities to Encourage Applications for CIP Sidewalk Participation Funds to Construct *and Improve* High Priority Sidewalks". The description of this strategy was edited to clarify that CIP funds should be focused towards the construction and improvement of high priority sidewalks (Page 31)

Comment: Strategy 1.4B: Priority pedestrian facilities for schools are limited to within ½ mile of schools. Include school walk boundaries within the priority definition to acknowledge that some school walk boundaries extend beyond ½ mile.

Response: Edited paragraph under Strategy 1.4B to read: "Staff should encourage applications for sidewalk and bikeway funds to construct sidewalks and trails near schools and parks, including those within school walk zone boundaries." (Page 31)

Goal 2: Increase Walking for Transportation

6.2.1 Pedestrian Related Policy and Process Improvements

Comment: Implement pedestrian improvements along with every street reconstruction project and coordinate pedestrian improvements with bicycle access improvements.

Response: These are current county practices and are supported by the county's Complete Streets Policy.

Comment: Several comments were received regarding specific street design elements such as lane widths, free right turns, auto turning radii, and continuity of pedestrian and bicycle shoulders.

Response: *Strategy 2.1B: Create Complete Streets Design Guidelines for County Roadway Projects* has been updated to recommend that the county's Complete Streets Design Guidelines include the following:

- Evaluation of signal warrant practices and policies
 - Evaluation of signal phasing practices and opportunities for implementing lagging left turns
 - Criteria for the installation and removal of pedestrian push buttons
 - Guidelines for turn radii and the use of free right turn lanes
 - Shoulder continuity at intersection approaches on county roads without sidewalk or trail.
- (Page 34)

7. Performance Measures

Comment: Percent of County residents who walk to a destination at least once per week: Target of 60% by 2030 should be increased.

Response: This target has been increased to 78%, assuming a 2.5% annual increase in walking to destinations (Page 46).

8. Priorities for Implementation

Comment: Give more priority to outer ring suburbs such as Rogers

Response: Priorities for implementation were developed based on indicators of pedestrian traffic and pedestrian demand, including population density, retail, schools, parks, and employment centers. The northeastern part of Rogers is identified as high priority.

Comments on other topics:

Accessibility

Comment: Strengthen the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) priorities such that ADA-compliant design is the default in high-priority locations, unless there is a major contextual reason to not implement ADA compliance. Detail the ADA priorities in the pedestrian plan.

Response: The county is required to construct all new sidewalks, curb ramps, and other pedestrian facilities in compliance with ADA. County staff have clarified the links between ADA and the pedestrian plan through several revisions, including to the Introduction as follows:

1.5 Improve ADA Accessibility

Accessibility for all pedestrians is a priority of the county. Hennepin County is currently developing an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan to bring county roadways, sidewalks, buildings, programs, and policies in compliance with ADA. The Hennepin County Pedestrian Plan complements the county's work to improve accessibility by supporting the

expansion of the sidewalk and trail network, as well as improvements to pedestrian crossings. All new pedestrian infrastructure is required to be ADA-compliant. (Page 6)

Throughout the plan, additional text was added to specify the county's role in reconstructing pedestrian curb ramps and constructing Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS). In *Chapter 10: Implementation of the Plan*, the following strategy was added to the list of immediate priorities for implementation:

4.1B. In coordination with the ADA Transition Plan, complete a comprehensive assessment of the condition of sidewalks along the county road system and prepare a plan for improving conditions. (Page 56)

The description of Strategy 4.1B was clarified to state that cross slope, running slope, and trip hazards will be included in the comprehensive assessment of sidewalk conditions. (Page 41)

Land Use

Comment: Plan is focused too much on infrastructure – does not focus enough on land use to encourage pedestrian activity. The county should advocate for better land use solutions and use the county's granting programs (TOD, NSP, Brownfields) to improve pedestrian environment.

Response: Under 6.1.4. Practices to Continue: Work with Cities and Property Owners to Fill Sidewalk Gaps and/or Improve Sidewalk Conditions in Coordination with New Development and Redevelopment Projects added sentence: "The county should continue to evaluate ways to leverage existing funding sources (TOD, NSP, Brownfields) to promote pedestrian-friendly land use and urban design." (Page 32)

Comment: County should influence urban design along county corridors: smaller parcels, narrower streets, smaller setbacks, abolished parking minimums, removal of free or municipally subsidized parking garages, form based codes, removal of skyways.

Response: The county's role in urban design is limited to grant programs and station area planning. Under Strategy 2.2A, added sentence: Station area planning should also be used as an opportunity to promote pedestrian-friendly land use and urban design. (Page 36)

Next Steps and Implementation

County staff has finalized the Hennepin County Pedestrian Plan based on feedback from the public comment period. The Hennepin County Pedestrian Plan was approved by the County Board on September 24, 2013. The final plan is available on the county's website: www.hennepin.us/pedestrianplan. Implementation of the plan will begin in Fall 2013.