

GENESEE TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

RESOLUTION

Resolution 16-3 Accepting the *Regional Walkability Improvement Program* as evidence of completion of UPWP Task 8710

WHEREAS,

1. The *FY 2015-2016 Unified Planning Work Program* includes Task 8710, Regional Walkability Improvement Program, for the purpose of developing action plans to improve pedestrian safety, accessibility, convenience, and comfort in downtowns, on main streets, and to and from activity centers in up to ten cities, villages, or hamlets in the Genesee-Finger Lakes Region;
2. Said Task included developing a Walkability Audit Checklist based on existing models that can be adapted to respond to community priorities; conducting the Walkability Audits with members of the selected communities in fall 2014 and spring 2015; identifying alternatives, design guidance and maintenance recommendations for the selected communities; and preparing draft and final action plans for the selected communities as well as an executive summary for the program;
3. Said Task has been completed and has resulted in the *Regional Walkability Improvement Program*; and
4. Said Report has been reviewed by GTC staff and member agencies through the GTC committee process and has been found to be consistent with the goals, objectives, and recommendations of the Long Range Transportation Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

1. That the Genesee Transportation Council hereby accepts the *Regional Walkability Improvement Program* as evidence of completion of UPWP Task 8710; and
2. That this resolution takes effect immediately.

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned duly qualified Secretary of the Genesee Transportation Council certifies that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a resolution adopted at a legally convened meeting of the Genesee Transportation Council held on March 10, 2016.

Date _____

KEVIN C. BUSH, Secretary
Genesee Transportation Council



Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Walkability Improvement Program

Executive Summary

January 2016



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Walking is the most basic, common and accessible mode of transportation. There has been growing attention to the benefits of “active transportation” (walking, biking and using transit). Increasingly, it is recognized that walkable communities are important not only for the health of our citizens, but also for the health of our communities. A growing percentage of people want livable communities where they can shop, socialize, recreate and even commute to work by foot and bicycle. The 2012 National Survey of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Attitudes and Behaviors Highlights Report indicates that 11 percent of all trips, and 25 percent of social and recreational trips are by foot. There is ample opportunity to increase the rate of active transportation: national data suggest that half of all trips are under 3 miles in length, and 25 percent are less than a mile, a distance that is easily walked or biked.

Creating a walkable community, however, involves much more than installing sidewalks. Many factors can encourage or discourage pedestrian activity. Physical elements that must be considered include the presence and connectivity of sidewalks, the quality of the pavement, the steepness of grades, and aesthetics. Social factors, such as perceptions of safety and security, comfort, convenience and the presence of other people, have an influence. Safety issues include traffic speeds, safe crossing areas, the number of curb cuts and separation from traffic. Other important details include tree canopy and other landscaping, wayfinding and signage, the location of parking lots, the mix of uses and the proximity of destinations, and the presence of pedestrian infrastructure, such as pedestrian crossing signals and crosswalks. Policies, education, enforcement and encouragement also have a strong influence on the amount of pedestrian activity.

The most important factor is community context. Each community has its own character and its own configuration of destinations. For this study, the Project Team evaluated the character of ten municipalities in the Finger Lakes region. These cities, villages and neighborhoods have a built environment that was developed in an era when walking was the primary mode of transportation, and they have strong potential for enhanced walkability. The existing building stock and combination of multiple land uses in close proximity to each other – which makes walking a viable travel option – is a competitive advantage to these areas. Increasing the walkability of these places will help the vibrancy of their downtown “main streets,” improve access to other activity centers, and benefit local residents. Currently, the physical infrastructure in support of walking and biking in many communities has been degraded by modern accommodations to the automobile. Retrofitting these areas requires context-sensitive interventions to promote better walkability. The municipalities in this series of audits ranges from small villages to an urban neighborhood to a major residential suburb, and the specific solutions vary depending on the nature of the community and local circumstances. However, there are also common themes and approaches that apply in different situations. One common theme is that there are demonstrable benefits to improving access for all residents.

The Walkability Audit can be a powerful tool for visioning change and redesigning these ten communities. Leveraging improvements to the built environment can make these communities more vibrant and appealing, while local policies and programs can help alter behaviors. Often these changes build confidence in a community and spur private investment. In all cases, local action is key to improving the walkability and quality of life for the citizens of these communities.

Walkability Audits: Setting

The Genesee-Finger Lakes Regional Walkability Improvement Program was initiated by the Genesee Transportation Council (GTC) as part of its on-going bicycle and pedestrian planning. GTC has invested significant resources in the planning for developing travel alternatives through the Circulation, Accessibility, and Parking (CAP) Program; public transportation service enhancements; municipal active transportation plans; and multi-use trail feasibility studies. The Regional Walkability Improvement Program is intended to support and enhance - not replace- these other initiatives.

The purpose of the project has been to develop action plans to improve pedestrian safety, accessibility, convenience and comfort in ten communities throughout the nine-county Genesee-Finger Lakes region. The communities are distributed throughout the region and represent a mix of municipalities, ranging in size from just over 1,000 residents to a densely populated urban neighborhood in the City of Rochester. The following table summarizes the characteristics of the ten communities that were audited.

GTC Walkability Study: Participating Communities			
Municipality	County	2010 Population	Density (Population/Sq.Mile)
Village of Albion	Orleans	6,056	2,074.0
Village of Avon	Livingston	3,394	1,096.2
City of Batavia	Genesee	15,447	2,976.3
Village of Bergen	Genesee	1,176	1,589.2
City of Canandaigua	Ontario	10,471	2,295.4
Village of Geneseo	Livingston	8,045	2,828.8
City of Geneva	Ontario	13,261	3,149.9
Village of Medina	Orleans	6,065	1,838.4
Town of Penfield	Monroe	36,242	974.0
City of Rochester *	Monroe	210,512*	5,884.8*
(Merchants- Culver)		42,571* (zip code)	5,870.2*

* Data shown are for City of Rochester. Neighborhood level data are not available. The 14609 zip code was used as a proxy for the neighborhood.

Methodology

A Walkability Audit was conducted in each of the ten target communities. Four of the audits were held in the Fall of 2014, while the remaining six were completed in the Spring of 2015. The Project Team hosted an introductory webinar for each group of audits (one in the Fall and one in the Spring). This webinar provided an overview of the audit process, an explanation of the logistics of the audits, and recommendations for how to hold a successful walk audit. The webinar also explained how to plan a local route for the audit, and ideas for who to invite. Beyond the webinar, the Project Team also worked directly with a local contact person to schedule audits, locate a meeting location, and invite local stakeholders to participate. For each community, two routes were developed: a ‘windshield’ tour route to provide an overview of the entire community, and a focused walking route for the audit itself. The mix of stakeholders attending the audits varied for each community, but generally included community leaders, local officials, representatives from relevant agencies and organizations, as well as members of the general public. The intent was to get a wide range of perspectives on the problems and opportunities faced by pedestrians in the local community. Representation variously included representatives from planning boards, zoning boards, schools, the business community, neighborhood associations, County employees (Health, Planning and Tourism Departments), local advocacy groups (running/walking/biking) and residents. Local municipal employees were also important stakeholders, including staff from Departments of Public Works, Parks, Planning, Clerks Offices, and/or engineering. In many communities, there was representation from the local elected governing board (Town Board, City or Village Council). In a few communities, the local press also participated in the audits. The audit routes were approximately 1 to 2 miles in length, and designed to cover a range of land uses, destinations, issues and concerns relevant to the community.

The audit process is described in the individual action plans. Generally, the audits consisted of a windshield tour, an introductory presentation, the walk audit, and a hands-on session with maps where participants identified opportunities and potential action items. The introductory presentation educated participants on what contributes to a walkable environment and the benefits of a more walkable community. The walk audits were highly interactive, with frequent stops to discuss conditions along the way. The workshop portions were designed to get participants to identify specific projects, programs and policies that could help make their communities more walkable. Focusing on these “three p’s” (projects, programs and policies) enables a more comprehensive approach to fostering walkability. Projects include elements of the built environment, such as crosswalks, streetscape improvements, and trails. Programs involve encouragement and education that build awareness, change behavior or strengthen abilities. Examples of programs include a walking school bus, a running club with a facebook page, or downtown events, such as a farmer’s market, to create a destination for walking or biking. Policies are the rules and standards that over time change the local environment. For example, communities should evaluate their comprehensive plan and their zoning ordinance to make sure both encourage pedestrian-friendly design. Adopting a local complete streets policy will ensure that the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians will be considered for each new transportation improvement. The most effective strategies involve all three: encouraging safe routes to school may require sidewalk improvements, but it works best when the district also considers school busing policies and implements education and encouragement programs to make students and their parents comfortable with walking or biking to school.

Why Walkability is Important

Walkable communities have many benefits. The health benefits of walking are well-documented by public health and medical professionals. Walking for transportation results in lower obesity rates and a reduction in related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease. Environmental benefits include better air quality and reduced congestion on the roadways. Walkable areas also increase equity. They are more accessible to all ages, including youth and seniors who may not be able to drive, or lower income residents who may not be able to afford a vehicle. Walking creates community, and areas with high walk scores (a measure of mixed, walkable, land use) tend to have lower crime rates. As a result, urban planners, engineers, and public health professionals are increasingly working together to create pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environments that promote these activities for both leisure and transportation purposes.

National statistics show that in 1969, 90% of students living within one mile of their school walked. By 1999, that figure had dropped to 31%. The distance is not the barrier; design, policies and attitudes are. School officials offer – or require – busing despite the distance to school. Parents are afraid to let their children walk, particularly when they must cross busy streets, or there are no sidewalks. Yet the greater threat to children is poor health associated with a lack of activity. There are an estimated 365,000 premature deaths each year due to physical inactivity and poor nutrition. Communities where biking and walking is easy and accessible have much lower obesity rates.

In addition to the health benefits, walkable communities see a range of other benefits:

- Fewer deaths from motor vehicle-vs-pedestrian crashes, as lower speeds are implemented
- Reduced congestion on the roadways, as people choose alternative means of transportation
- Lowered air pollution and greenhouse gases from car exhaust
- Reduced energy consumption
- Reduced need for parking
- Lowered health care costs
- More options and opportunities for persons with limited choices, particularly the young and the elderly who don't or can't drive, and those individuals and families without access to a private automobile
- Increased quality of life

There are also strong economic reasons to invest in walkable communities. Studies have shown that people who walk or bike to a commercial area spend more money per month than those who travel by automobile. Walkable areas sustain higher rents, revenues and resale values. Business districts that are pedestrian-friendly are more likely to be vital and economically sustainable. Younger generations increasingly are choosing to locate in walkable communities, where they do not always need to drive. Attracting young adults increases the vitality and economic development potential of an area. Residents in walkable areas often have more disposable income, due to lower overall transportation costs, as walking or biking becomes a viable option over taking the car. Home values tend to be higher in walkable areas: a CEOs for Cities report estimated a more pedestrian-friendly area can see an increase in home values from \$4,000 to \$34,000 per home. Walkable areas also tend to attract investment. As a case study, the Village of Hamburg, New York saw a doubling of property values following the reconstruction of Main Street to better accommodate biking and walking. Vehicle crashes fell by 66 percent, and injuries declined by 60 percent. The Village experienced approximately \$7 million in private investment in its downtown, and there is little to no vacancy in the business district. Creating places that are appealing to pedestrians also creates places that attract business activity and private investment.

What Makes a Walkable Community

Four features are integral to creating a walkable community:

1. A mix of destinations: People are more likely to walk or bike when there are nearby destinations that attract people to them. The most walkable locations have a mix of housing, shopping, restaurants, parks and institutions such as schools, libraries and post offices in close proximity. Zoning codes that segregate uses tend to discourage walking or biking. Traditional development styles, with housing above retail in downtown or neighborhood business districts, and schools and parks located near the community core, encourages walkability. The web site www.walkscore.com uses a community's land use mix as the principal determinant of its "walkability" in recognition of its key importance to making walking a feasible, enjoyable travel mode.
2. Site design: If the first thing people see is a large parking lot, they are more likely to choose to drive to a destination. Site design should promote buildings up to the street, with easily accessible, inviting front entrances. Features, such as clear pedestrian pathways through the site, landscaping and human-scale lighting also promote pedestrian activity. Details, such as public art, seating, awnings, visible bike parking, and other amenities further make a site more appealing. Beyond individual site design, community-wide design is important. Walkable communities tend to have shorter blocks and a tight grid of connections, rather than isolated cul-de-sacs. New development should integrate connections to adjoining development to promote connectivity and walkability.
3. Safety and access: People will not walk if they do not feel safe. High speed traffic, dangerous crossings and overly wide roadways inhibit pedestrian and bicyclist usage. Features such as highly visible crosswalks, curb extensions to shorten crossing distances, median islands for pedestrian refuge and traffic calming can improve safety for all users. In fact, research has shown that slowing speeds reduces overall accident rates and severity, promoting safety for drivers as well as pedestrians and bicyclists. Education about appropriate behaviors (crossing, yielding, etc.) also supports safety, as do programs, such as walking school buses (organized walk-to-school groups, with adult supervision). Facilities should be designed to support safety while also taking into consideration the needs of individuals of all ages, incomes and abilities. This will help to maximize their usefulness to the community and their cost effectiveness as an investment of scarce resources.
4. A connected network for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users: In most communities, the pedestrian and bicyclist networks are incomplete. In newer developments, there may be no sidewalks. In older areas, the sidewalks may have deteriorated or heaved, making access difficult and creating potentially unsafe conditions. Most communities have some gaps or disconnects in the network. Bike lanes are even more likely to be inconsistently implemented than sidewalks. Often, there are no designated bike lanes, even on streets where sufficient right-of-way is available. In other cases, bike lanes may be inadequate, poorly marked or characterized by poor conditions (e.g. cracking pavement, gravel, poorly oriented storm drains). At a minimum, communities should strive to provide safe pedestrian and bicycle facilities to key destinations, such as parks and schools. Providing safe and convenient access to transit is also a key strategy, and expands the choices available beyond the privately-owned automobile. The mutually supportive connection between quality walkability and transit usage is increasingly recognized. Transit advocates now focus on the "first and last mile," recognizing that walking or biking is a crucial part of the journey to and from public transit.

How to Evaluate Your Community

The participating municipalities benefited from facilitated walk audits led by experts in the field. However, it was emphasized that one audit is not sufficient to create a walkable community. Participants were encouraged to continue to monitor and evaluate the walkability of their communities. In each case, there was great potential to encourage more active transportation. The following checklist provides guidance on what to look for when assessing your community's walkability.

- Sidewalks
 - Is there a continuous network, or are there gaps?
 - Are sidewalks wide enough? (5' minimum; 6' preferred; wider in heavily traveled areas, such as near schools or in downtown business districts)
 - Are they in good condition? (no cracks, heaving, etc.)
 - Are there "goat trails" (dirt paths) that show where paths or sidewalks are needed?
 - Is the sidewalk clear of obstacles, such as overgrown shrubbery or drainage grates?
 - Is there a sufficient buffer between the sidewalk and the traffic, taking into consideration traffic speeds? (a wider buffer needed along higher speed / higher volume roadways) Note: parking lanes, bike lanes or street furnishings can also serve as a buffer.
 - Are the sidewalks maintained, and kept clear of snow in the winter?
- Crosswalks
 - Are crosswalks clearly marked and visible?
 - Are there crosswalks at locations where people want to cross (access to key destinations)?
 - Is it comfortable to cross or is the width of the street intimidating?
 - Do crosswalks have appropriate signaling, with sufficient timing to cross? Are there count-down timers to indicate time available for crossing?
 - What is the condition of the curb ramps? Are they oriented properly?
 - Curb extensions or 'bulb-outs' both shorten the distance pedestrians must cross through the traffic lanes, and increase visibility of pedestrians to drivers, due to the increased height.
 - Crossing islands or medians can facilitate crossing wide roadways, by providing a pedestrian refuge. As a best practice, the crosswalk cut through the island should be angled so that pedestrians, by design, are required to face towards on-coming traffic before crossing the road.
- Environmental
 - Is the walk pleasant: are there shade trees, awnings, landscaping, lighting, etc.?
 - Is the walk safe, with appropriate lighting, traffic speeds, community policing?
 - Is the walk interesting: does the route have a mix of land uses, activities, or is it monotonous?
 - Is the walk purposeful, providing access to important destinations, such as parks, schools, shops, libraries, etc.?
- Bicycle Network
 - Are bike lanes, marked shoulders or 'sharrows' provided as appropriate to the roadway?
 - Are the bike lanes wide enough for traffic conditions (minimum 5 feet)?
 - Are the bike lanes clearly marked?
 - Are the bike lanes in good condition and free from obstructions such as improperly oriented storm drains? (Drains should be oriented so that the 'slots' in the grate are perpendicular to the bicyclist's tires.)

- Are there bike facilities, such as bike parking or lockers, at important destinations?
- Multi-use paths can be a good solution, accommodating both bicyclists and pedestrians in a separated pathway. Such paths need to be wide enough to accommodate both modes: a minimum of 8 feet is needed, and 10 to 14 feet is preferred.
- Transit Network
 - Are the bus stops located appropriately (i.e. providing convenient access to destinations, such as downtowns, parks, etc.)?
 - Are there safe crossings nearby?
 - Are bus stops linked to the sidewalk network, or do passengers disembark on the side of the road or onto an unpaved surface such as a tree lawn?
 - At high usage bus stops, are there benches, a covered bus stop or other supporting infrastructure?
 - Are bus stops accessible in winter months, or are they obstructed by snow piles and ice? (This can be determined visually in season, but should also be verified through a review of the community's snow removal policies).
- ADA / Universal Design
 - Are sidewalks wide enough to accommodate two wheelchairs passing each other (minimum 5 feet width)?
 - Where feasible, are grade changes relatively consistent and not too steep?
 - Are cross slopes at intersection ramps and driveway crossings designed such that they will maximize stability for wheelchair users? (Excessive cross- or side slopes tend to direct wheelchair users off their intended path, 'downhill' into the street in many cases.)
 - Are surfaces smooth and free from obstacles?
 - When decorative paving is used, is a clear 'through-lane' provided through the center of the paved walkway?
 - Are there detectible warnings to alert pedestrians with visual impairments to intersections?
 - Are there flat 'landing areas' as transitions between crosswalk ramps and the sidewalk?
 - Do curb ramps provide access directly to crosswalks or direct the user into the street?
- Traffic Calming
 - Are traffic lane widths appropriate to the context? Narrower lanes reduce speeds naturally; conversely, motorists are more likely to speed when lanes are wide.
 - Are curb radii (turning distances at corners) appropriate? Tighter curb radii slow traffic. Excessively wide curb radii can function as unofficial right turn lanes and encourage drivers to travel through the intersection without stopping.
 - Adding visible pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure tends to slow traffic.
 - Street trees, streetscaping, public art, gateway treatments and buildings facing the street create a sense of 'arrival', 'enclosure, and 'place'. Drivers naturally reduce their speed in these environments.
 - Roundabouts, mini-traffic circles and chicanes are other options for slowing traffic.
 - Traffic calming features greatly reduce the risk of fatalities.

A Toolbox of Options

There is a wide range of options communities have in improving their walkability. Community specific solutions are provided in the individual action plans. A list of resources that provide additional guidance on various strategies is included at the end of this report, following the Action Plans. Some generic options for creating a more walkable community are listed here:

- Consider creating cross-lot or between-lot connections and trail linkages, particularly between residential concentrations and attractive destinations, such as parks. Over the long-term, work toward obtaining easements or direct ownership of the connecting property.
- Evaluate your community's Comprehensive Plan, zoning, subdivision and other regulations to determine if they support or hinder walkability. For example, required parking ratios often result in overly large, underutilized parking lots. Large setback requirements and single-use zoning districts that do not accommodate mixed development patterns also hinder walkability.
- As a more proactive step, consider updating the community's zoning and subdivision regulations to require connectivity and walkable design where it is appropriate.
- Establish a social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) page to communicate walkability initiatives, events and programs, and encourage coordination with a range of advocates.
- Consider experimental, temporary solutions to test an idea. For example, curb extensions can be created with paint and removable bollards. Mini-circles can be tested out with hay bales.
- Consider pursuing official status as a Walk Friendly, Bike Friendly, and Age Friendly community to build momentum and support for proposed improvements – and bragging rights.
- Take creative approaches, such as a sponsor a bike rack programs.
- Involve the entire community, including youth and seniors, and welcome and celebrate volunteer initiatives.
- Programming, such as community events, walking clubs and farmer's markets, can encourage more walking.

Don't forget to make it fun and enjoyable – and recognize the benefits outside of walkability: entertainment, enhanced business activity, and a stronger community.

Moving Forward

There are a number of responses a community can take to make their area more walkable and bikable. These range from very low cost, such as paint for new striping, to extensive interventions, such as the complete reconfiguration of a roadway. It is recommended that an incremental approach be taken. A community should focus on easy to implement, low cost options first, while always keeping the preferred long-term changes in mind. For example, high visibility crosswalks can be installed at a relatively low cost (mostly paint) while the community investigates the need for and secures funding to implement more elaborately designed option, such as curb bump-outs or speed tables.

Step One: Determine local priorities.

The concepts in each community's Action Plan provide a starting point for projects each community can implement to improve local walkability. Communities are encouraged to learn from each other and share these ideas. Other sources of ideas include the local Comprehensive Plan, community surveys and input from partners, such as the GTC, the County or the local school district. Ultimately, it is a local decision on what strategies to prioritize and implement first.

Step Two: Establish an Organizational Structure

It is important to have some institutional basis. There should be a working group tasked with concentrating on the issue of active transportation in order to maintain momentum. The core team should be a small, focused group, made of people who have a natural tie to the issue, ideally as part of their job responsibilities. As an example, the local Parks Director, the head of Public Works, the Mayor and a representative from the County Health Department could form the core group. These people could leverage their professional and personal networks to bring in the wider group of advocates, for example to encourage letters of support for a grant application. In addition to the core group, each community should develop a wider support group that can advocate for action. The participants at the walk audits are excellent candidates for this support group. Partners could include representatives from local elected officials, planning and zoning, public works, schools, public health, historic preservation, chamber of commerce or other business groups, neighborhood organizations, church groups, conservation groups, etc. The objective is bringing in a range of capacities, interests, perspectives and skill sets in support of the issue.

Step Three: Create an Ambitious, Feasible Wish List

Pick a manageable list of actions to accomplish. Include programs and policies in addition to projects. In each case, include some easy to accomplish items, along with some more ambitious, long-term goals. This can be considered the community's list of alternatives from the 'tool box' of options available. Based on the cost and difficulty of implementation and the community's desires and resources, categorize each of the action items into a near-term, mid-term or long-term time frame for implementation.

Step Four: Develop a Work Plan

Consider creative ways to accomplish the projects. Some actions, such as adopting a new policy, can be accomplished at little to no cost, depending on the staff and resources available to the community. Others, such as curb bulb-outs and new sidewalks, may require outside funding, inclusion in the work programs of other agencies, or long term inclusion in the community's capital improvement budget. Potential funding sources include local, school or county capital budgets; state and federal transportation funding; state, federal, and private grants; and volunteer (in-kind) support.

Step Five: Work with Partners

Develop strong partnerships with organizations interested in the same goals. GTC is a key partner. County, state, and federal agencies can also be important partners. Partners can provide technical assistance, support and encouragement. They also can also facilitate new funding options and strengthen the competitiveness of grant applications.

Step Six: Celebrate Successes

Celebrating successes is important for maintaining momentum and keeping participants engaged. It is also a great way to communicate about what you are trying to accomplish and building broader support for your efforts.

Step Seven: Continually Re-evaluate

As successes occur, it is important to re-evaluate what you have accomplished and what remains to be done. Changing circumstances, such as new development, may necessitate identifying new priorities and action steps. Periodically revisiting Step One and taking a fresh look helps sustain existing projects, programs and policies, and can help identify new areas for improvement. There are always new opportunities and new enhancements that can improve the walkability of your community.