

CHAPTER ONE - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This plan has been developed through a contract with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). In order to relieve traffic congestion, conserve fuel, and meet the need of transportation disadvantaged populations, the Federal Highway Administration and GDOT are supportive of expanding and enhancing alternative forms of transportation like bicycle and pedestrian travel. Historically, through our dependence on the automobile, bicycle and pedestrian needs in the North Georgia region have generally been forgotten when transportation infrastructure has been created. As a result, bicycling and walking are not currently widely used forms of transportation in North Georgia. However, due to increasing traffic congestion, higher fuel prices, and interest in recreational bicycling and walking, these forms of transportation are growing in popularity. Through planning and implementation they could grow even further in North Georgia.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Process

This plan was developed with the input of a North Georgia Planning Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC was made up of elected officials, other city and county officials, citizens, bicycle dealers, bike and pedestrian advocates, school officials, and public health officials from the North Georgia region. The PAC met three times during the development of this plan. The first meeting was to review existing conditions and develop a needs list; the second was to develop goals and objectives; and the third, to review and discuss implementation strategies. Two public meetings were also held - one to review and comment on the goals and objectives, and the other to review and comment on implementation strategies.

Plan Goals and Objectives

Three goals with related objectives and implementation strategies were established as indicated below.

Goal 1: Promote and encourage bicycling and pedestrian travel as viable forms of transportation, as healthy forms of exercise, and as a positive benefit to the environment and community.

Objectives:

- Establish educational and marketing programs that promote bicycling and walking.

Implementation:

- Develop and distribute materials citing the benefits of bicycling and walking.
- Develop and distribute materials regarding bike and pedestrian rules and regulations and safety issues
- Publish maps of established routes and facilities.

- Organize and promote events such as National Bike Month and Walk to School Day.

Goal 2: Provide a regional system of bicycling and pedestrian facilities that is safe, convenient and accessible for all users.

Objectives:

- Develop a system of bicycle routes that will connect the region’s major urban centers to the State bicycle routes.
- Develop a system of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that will link residential areas with major activities centers in each county.
- Support education, training and enforcement of regulations to ensure safe and proper use of the bicycle and pedestrian system.

Planning Strategies:

- Identify secondary roads that connect major urban centers.
- Conduct an inventory of right of ways and other features in the region that could be developed into multi-use trails.
- Identify major activity centers and establish safe routes connecting residential areas to these areas.

Implementation:

- After routes are approved, install signs and publish regional maps and pamphlets indicating route locations.
- Require developers to install sidewalks along new streets in developments.
- Provide support facilities such as bicycle parking and storage, lighting, signing, pavement marking, benches and other rest areas.
- Establish maintenance standards and programs that ensure safe and usable bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Conduct regular training and safety education programs using such agencies as the League of American Bicyclists or local clubs.
- Educate local officials and enforcement officers on biking rules and safety issues.
- Encourage local governments to install “Share the Road- It’s the Law” signs on approved routes.

Goal 3: Promote coordinated and continuous bicycle and pedestrian planning and development at the regional and local levels.

Objectives:

- Local governments and State to implement local plans and establish new bike and pedestrian facilities.
- Establish policies that incorporate bicycle and pedestrian design elements in all transportation projects.
- Provide adequate funding for project development.

Implementation:

- Identify federal and state grants and provide information to local governments.
- Coordinate the development and implementation of local plans and look for joint development of facilities.
- Encourage and provide technical assistance for all land use and other plans to promote bicycle and pedestrian friendly development.
- Identify federal and state grants and provide information to local governments.
- Provide technical assistance to local governments concerning alternative financing mechanisms for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Encourage local governments to set aside an equitable amount of transportation funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- Investigate the use of “user fees” to help pay for bike and pedestrian projects.
- Encourage special events that raise money for bike and pedestrian projects.

Inventory and Analysis of Existing Conditions

The inventory and analysis of existing conditions involved the following activities:

- Information gathering and visioning sessions at three PAC meetings,
- Conducting field inventory of existing conditions,
- Reviewing census commuting statistics, crash statistics, and land use data,
- Reviewing and analyzing existing bike and pedestrian plans,
- Seeking input via two public hearings,
- Working with local officials, city and county departments, local clubs, and the public, and
- Reviewing bicycle and pedestrian plans from other locations.

Bike Route Recommendations

Proposed bike routes have been made for each county in the North Georgia region in order to fulfill the objectives stated above. Three different types of bike route recommendations were made (shared lanes that would be signed only, bike lanes or wide shoulders, or multi-use paths). Maps showing the proposed routes and type of planned facility for each county are contained in plan. Detailed route descriptions and explanation of the type of bike facilities recommended for each route segment are also located in the recommendations chapter of the plan.

Pedestrian Facility Recommendations

The proposed sidewalk additions recommended in this plan are suggested as improvements that will expand and enhance pedestrian travel in the region. Generally, an assessment was made to identify major traffic generators such as schools, parks, shopping facilities, and major employment centers, and analyze their proximity to concentrated residential areas. Generally, people will walk a distance of a quarter to one-half mile to major destinations such as a school,

park or shopping, if they can do so safely. An assessment was made in each of the major communities in the region to determine if there were sidewalk deficiencies within a half mile radius of these major activity centers. If there was a lack of sidewalks within these areas, the plan recommends that sidewalks be installed as shown on maps contained in the plan. Further study and engineering will need to be done before installation, however, to determine the feasibility of the proposed sidewalk additions. This is mainly due to topographic conditions, right-of-way limitations and other factors that may make installation impractical.

Implementation

The implementation of the recommended bicycle and pedestrian systems, and encouragement of their use, is a responsibility that will be shared by all government agencies and jurisdictions in the region, as well as many community organizations. The implementation will rely not only upon the development of good facility plans, but commitment at each level of government to support funding for good bicycle and pedestrian projects. This will include support to raise new revenues for projects and programs. Whereas each agency has a different level of responsibility for building capital facilities, the implementation of public education, and encouragement of developing programs is a responsibility that needs to be shared among all agencies including the North Georgia RDC. An implementation agenda listing the strategies for each goal and objectives, as well as a timeline, responsible parties, and possible funding sources for each strategy is also included.