

CHAPTER THREE – GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Study Area

The study area for this plan includes the five counties of the North Georgia Regional Development Center (Fannin, Gilmer, Murray, Pickens, and Whitfield Counties) and all the cities within this region. The focus of this plan is to develop a comprehensive network of bikeway corridors for intra-city and regional travel. Additionally, the plan will discuss local priorities for bikeway and walkway improvements, as many of these will be funded through regional and state funding sources.

This section establishes a policy framework to guide future transportation decisions and capital improvement programming for both the unincorporated and incorporated areas of the North Georgia Bike and Pedestrian Planning area. This undertaking is intended to promote regional planning and offer opportunities to coordinate infrastructure improvements.

The Plan is intended to help coordinate and guide the provision of all pedestrian and bicycle-related plans, programs, and projects in the region. It is intended to assist local jurisdictions to implement their priorities but does not mandate any particular action on their part.

The other studies or planning efforts detailed in the next chapter have been reviewed and where appropriate have been incorporated into North Georgia Bike and Pedestrian Plan.

Planning Advisory Committee (PAC)

Initially, a Joint Regional Bike and Pedestrian Plan Advisory Committee was set up in January between the five counties of the North Georgia Regional Development Center (Fannin, Gilmer, Murray, Pickens, and Whitfield Counties) and the 10 counties of the Coosa Valley Regional Development Center (Dade, Catoosa, Walker, Chattooga, Gordon, Floyd, Bartow, Polk, Haralson, and Paulding Counties). These areas combined are often referred to as Northwest Georgia. This Joint Committee was made up of elected officials, other city and county officials, citizens, bicycle dealers, bike and pedestrian advocates, school officials, and public health officials.



This Joint Committee met twice: once in March and once in April and helped formulate the goals, objectives, and strategies for expanding and enhancing biking and pedestrian activities in the Northwest Georgia region. This Joint Committee was later divided into two committees, split by the boundaries of the Regional Development Centers, to more effectively delve into the

bicycle and pedestrian needs each of these two regions. After the split, the North Georgia Regional Development Center's portion of the Bike and Pedestrian Planning Advisory Committee met in February to discuss the implementation strategies for this plan in that five county region.

Conducting a Visioning Session

At the first meeting of the Joint Committee on March 2004, the members were given background and an explanation of the plan's purpose and an outline of the schedule for the plan. They were also presented with a current inventory of existing bike and pedestrian plans for both of these regions. The main focus of the meeting was a visioning session. At this visioning session, Joint Committee members took the information provided to them and through use of a nominal group process determined their likes and dislikes of current bike and pedestrian facilities in northwest Georgia.

Likes and Dislikes of Current Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities and Policies

The following is a list of likes and dislikes of current bike and pedestrian plans and existing bike and pedestrian facilities in the region. The Committee, through the visioning session, generated the following Likes and Dislikes.

LIKES

- Silver Comet / Pinhoti Trails: Members indicated that these routes are excellent facilities and were good benchmarks for other facilities that could be developed in the region.
- Good Secondary Road System: The region has a good secondary road system that travels through scenic areas and could be utilized for bicycle routes.
- Existing Trails Attract Tourists: Members stated that trails like the Silver Comet and Pinhoti Trails attract tourists, which adds to the economic development of the region.
- Some Designated Bike Lanes: Although there are few designated bike lanes in the region, they are appreciated.
- Some Prior Planning: Members appreciated GDOT's development of the State Bicycle Plan and publication of the Georgia Bicycle Map. A few local communities have also recently prepared plans.
- Number of Abandoned Railroads: There are a number of abandoned railroads in the region, which would make good bike/pedestrian facilities like the Silver Comet Trail.
- Downtown Streetscape Projects: A number of communities in the region have undertaken downtown streetscape projects, which were funded mainly by Transportation Enhancement dollars and have improved pedestrian accessibility.
- Rural / Scenic Assets: Members think that northwest Georgia is a beautiful region, which make it an attraction for biking and pedestrian activity. The mountainous terrain in the region also made it an attraction for the Tour De Georgia, which will bring more attention to bicycling in the region.

DISLIKES

- Routes Are Disconnected: While the State's proposed routes travel through the region and provide continuity to other parts of the State, the few local bike and pedestrian routes that exist in the region are disconnected from each other.
- Not Enough Routes / Facilities: There are not enough designated routes and built bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the region.
- Not Enough Funding for Planning / Facilities: There is a need more funding for both local planning and construction of facilities.
- Scenic Byways Not Designated as Bike / Pedestrians Routes: All scenic byways designated in the region should also be designated and developed as bike and pedestrian routes.
- Existing Facilities Not Well Maintained: Generally, existing sidewalk facilities are not well maintained or kept in good condition. Many are overgrown with weeds and brush. Others have cracks or other impediments to walking safely. Many are not handicapped accessible.
- Lack of Planning/Coordination Among Local Governments: Very few governments have prepared bicycle/pedestrian facility plans. What little planning that has been completed by local governments in the region has not been well coordinated with other agencies and organizations.
- No Safe Routes to School: This program needs to have more attention in the region.
- No Connectivity Between Activity Centers: Major activity centers in the region like schools, shopping areas, employment areas, recreation areas, libraries, etc. are not adequately connected by bike and pedestrian facilities.
- Existing Routes not Well Marked: Existing designated routes do not have adequate signage.
- Lack of Obedience/Enforcement of Traffic Laws: Automobile drivers do not understand the rules of the road concerning bicyclists. Bicyclists do not always obey traffic signals and stop signs.
- Lack of Education: There needs to be more education about rules of the road, bike and pedestrian safety, designated routes, available facilities, encouragement of biking and walking as alternative transportation mode, etc.
- Not Enough Off-Road Trails: There needs to be more off road facilities like greenways and similar facilities.
- Lights Don't Change for Bikes: Automated traffic lights do not change for bikes.
- Rumble Strips: Excessively wide rumble strips along highways make it difficult and dangerous for bicyclists to safely utilize paved shoulders as a bicycle lane.

Needs Assessment through a Visioning Session

During the same visioning session in March, 2004, the Joint Committee was asked to develop a list of needs for the region. Again, through use of a nominal group process the Joint Committee were asked to determine what needs to be done to expand and enhance the bicycle and pedestrian facilities of the region. The Joint Committee divided into groups and using the results of what they liked and disliked about the current bike and pedestrian plans and facilities, brainstormed to develop a Needs list. The members then rated the newly generated list of Needs.

The following is a list of Needs listed in priority order as indicated by the votes received (in parenthesis).

NEEDS

1. There needs to be better connectivity between activity centers and bike and pedestrian facilities, better connectivity between existing bike and pedestrian routes to increase ease of traveling longer distances. (17)
2. Conduct an inventory of abandoned railroad right of ways; acquire access easements; and develop into multi-use trails. (13)
3. Increased funding to maintain and improve existing bike and pedestrian facilities, and develop new ones. (12)
4. Utilize secondary roads for bicycle routes instead of placing them along major roads as is currently often done. (10)
5. Provide safe bike and pedestrian routes to schools for children. (6)
6. Increase funding and other incentives to the local governments to encourage more local bike and pedestrian facility planning. (5)
7. More local government planning to increase bike and pedestrian facilities in local communities. (4)
8. Acknowledgment by State and local governments that bike and pedestrian facilities are used more for recreation purposes than for transportation. (4)
9. Increased education of the public as it relates to rules of road regarding bike and pedestrian issues, safe walking and biking practices, and where to find out about existing routes and facilities. All educational materials need to be multiple languages. (3)
10. Find ways to promote biking and walking to the public as a means to improve general health and wellness, reduce traffic congestion, and reduce fuel consumption. (3)
11. Better signage along roads to alert drivers that bicyclists are sharing the roads. (3)
12. Require developers to install sidewalks along new streets in urban areas. (2)
13. Finish construction of the Pinhoti Trail and other trails that are planned. (1)
14. Keep utilities like utility poles out of areas where bike and pedestrian facilities exist. (1)
15. Promote the development of organized biking and pedestrian events. (1)

16. Increase amenities that support pedestrian activities like trash cans, benches, public restrooms, and similar facilities. (1)
17. Improve the automatic traffic signals so they will change when bicyclists approach intersections. (0)
18. Develop a north to south biking route in State. (0)
19. Increase amenities that support bicycling activities such as bicycle storage and parking facilities. (0)
20. Require a license to be issued before people are allowed to bike on public streets; and require user fees for people to utilize public off-road trails. (0)

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goals, objectives, and some strategies were drafted from the previous Needs list. At a Joint Committee meeting in April, 2004 these goals, objectives, and strategies were refined. These goals, objectives, and strategies were reviewed and some additional changes were made from a public meeting held in June, 2004. In a later chapter, there are some specific recommendations for each county and city regarding how to improve and enhance bike and pedestrian travel in the region.

Goals provide the context for the specific objectives and strategies discussed in this North Georgia Bike and Pedestrian Plan. Goals are the generalized expressions that provide direction for the bicycle and pedestrian transportation system and help provide the long-term vision and serve as the foundation of the plan. Objectives are specific quantitative or qualitative targets, which can be used to measure the degree of attainment of a specific goal. Strategies provide a series of smaller steps to help achieve these objectives. In this section, strategies are more regional in nature and generally can be applied to any one of the counties or cities in the region. Later, recommendations will be introduced specific to each county and city government. This plan and the goals, objectives, strategies, and recommendations herein do not mandate any specific action by the local jurisdictions. The following are to be used as a guide to coordinate efforts throughout the region and to fill gaps in existing local initiatives.

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.

Objective 1.1: Establish a regional educational and marketing program that promotes the public health, economic development and environmental benefits of bicycling and walking.

Implementation:

- A. Work with regional health organizations, school systems, local bicycle clubs and other agencies to develop and distribute written, graphic and other materials citing the benefits of bicycling and walking.
- B. Work with local governments, local bicycle clubs, and other agencies to develop written, graphic and other materials highlighting the rules of road regarding bike and pedestrian issues, safe walking and biking practices, and where to find out about existing routes and facilities. All educational materials need to be in multiple languages
- C. Organize and promote regional and local events such as National Bike Month, Bike to Work Week, 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.

Objective 2.1: Develop a system of bicycle routes that will connect the region's major urban centers to the State bicycle routes.

Planning Strategies:

- A. Identify secondary roads that connect major urban centers and utilize these for bicycle routes instead of placing them along major roads as is currently often done.
- B. Conduct an inventory of abandoned railroad right of ways, utility right of ways, and other public right of ways in the region that could be developed into additional multi-use trails.

Implementation:

- C. Once routes have been approved by local governments, install signs and publish regional maps and pamphlets indicating route locations.

Objective 2.2: Develop a system of bicycle and pedestrian facilities within local jurisdictions that will link residential areas with commercial areas, employment areas, educational centers, and cultural and recreational resources.

Planning Strategies:

- A. Identify major activity centers and establish safe bike and pedestrian routes connecting residential areas to these areas.

Implementation:

- B.** Encourage local governments to require developers to install sidewalks along new streets that are developed in the region's urban areas.
- C.** Encourage local governments to provide support facilities such as bicycle parking and storage, lighting, signing, pavement marking, benches and other rest areas to increase the utility and safety of the bicycle and pedestrian system.
- D.** Encourage local governments establish maintenance standards and programs that ensure safe and usable bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Objective 2.3: Support education, training and enforcement of regulations to ensure safe and proper use of the bicycle and pedestrian system.

Implementation:

- A.** Assist local organizations and bicycle and pedestrian interest groups to conduct regular training and safety education programs.
- B.** Utilize League of American Bicyclists to conduct training sessions on bike safety to the public.
- C.** Educate local officials and enforcement officers on biking rules and safety issues.
- D.** Encourage local governments to install "Share the Road- It's the Law" signs on key routes in each county and communities.

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

Objective 3.1: Encourage and provide assistance to local governments to prepare local plans that assess local bicycle and pedestrian needs, and establish new bike and pedestrian facilities where needed or desired.

Implementation:

- A.** Identify federal and state grants and provide information to local governments.
- B.** Coordinate the development of local bicycle and pedestrian plans to make maximum use of opportunities for joint development of facilities.

Objective 3.2: Establish policies that require the incorporation of bicycle and pedestrian design elements in all transportation projects that are identified as part of a local or regional bicycle or pedestrian route.

Implementation:

- A. Encourage and provide technical assistance for zoning, land use plans, subdivision regulations, roadway design changes, public transportation (bus service), and other similar areas to promote bicycle and pedestrian friendly development.
- B. Encourage GDOT to add more staff or contract the RDC's to conduct local bike and pedestrian planning.

Objective 3.3: Provide adequate funding for project development and maintaining high quality regional and local bicycle and pedestrian systems.

Implementation:

- A. Identify federal and state grants and provide information to local governments.
- B. Provide technical assistance to local governments concerning alternative financing mechanisms for bicycle and pedestrian facilities including local option sales tax programs, user fees for operations and maintenance of off-road facilities, and programs to encourage tax free contribution of funds and property.
- C. Encourage local governments to set aside an equitable amount of transportation funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects incorporating design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction.
- D. Investigate the use of "user fees" to help pay for bike and pedestrian projects.
- E. Encourage special events that raise money for bike and pedestrian projects.

Public Involvement

Two public hearings were held. The first meeting was in June, 2004, which was for the purpose of reviewing and getting input on proposed goals and objectives. Potential strategies were also discussed at that time. The second public meeting was in March, 2005 for the purpose of review and getting input on proposed recommendations and strategies. Some suggested changes and additions were introduced at these meeting and incorporated in the plan.

