

Chapter 1. Introduction, Goals and Objectives, Vision Statement

1.1 Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the trend towards walking has returned to the forefront. Whether for recreation, to improve our health, for exercise or to just meet neighbors, we have taken to the sidewalks, the gym, the track, greenway trails and sometimes to the street itself to get in our daily walk.



Figure 1: Sidewalk with Planting Strip

Most of the existing sidewalks are in the urban core of our oldest city and town centers: Winston-Salem, Kernersville and Rural Hall. The Town of Lewisville and the Village of Clemmons began installing sidewalks in the mid to late 1990's and Walkertown has just recently started installing sidewalks. For the past several decades Forsyth County has experienced a great dispersal of development, and a division of land uses that offered little or no pedestrian connectivity. Roads were designed and built to accommodate this sprawling type of development, again, for the most part without sidewalks. Citizens have moved farther and farther away from the urban core, away from the existing infrastructure, jobs, services and shopping areas; this has made it much more difficult to provide sidewalks at the same level as in the urban core. We have allowed living and working areas to become separated from each other making walking to work or to the drug store a difficult choice. Over time we have increased our dependence on the automobile and reduced our dependence on other modes of transportation.

Because of our need for more and better accessible modes of transportation, planning for pedestrian facilities is on the rise. In 1994 the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) realized the need to add pedestrian planning to its multi-modal planning program. They created a Bicycle Program in 1974, and subsequently added pedestrian planning to its bicycle program. In November of 1996, the NCDOT

adopted *the Bicycle and Walking in North Carolina, Long-Range Transportation Plan*, the first for the NCDOT. Most municipalities in the State had been doing sidewalk planning since their incorporation.

With the adoption in 1999 of the *Winston-Salem/Forsyth County 2025 Multi-Modal Long-Range Transportation Plan*, the goal has been to enhance and improve the pedestrian infrastructure throughout the county. Now that all nine Forsyth County municipalities have adopted the county's comprehensive plan the *Legacy Development Guide*, there is more wide spread support for pedestrian accommodations. *Legacy* provides numerous reasons why we need to plan for better pedestrian accommodations. A well-planned pedestrian transportation system provides for a more balanced overall transportation system. *Legacy* provides a framework for detailed land use plans within the county, area planning and the development guide process. This Pedestrian Plan also recommends using the area plan process as the framework to build the pedestrian system along non-Thoroughfare Plan streets. Since the area plan process is citizen driven, it offers the most appropriate avenue for the evaluation of existing and proposed pedestrian facilities.

1.2 Goals and Objectives

The first task in the development of the Pedestrian Facilities Plan was to form a steering committee that consisted of individuals who would best represent the users of the pedestrian system. Members of the committee consisted of various City Staff, Town Managers, NCDOT staff, Forsyth County Health Department staff, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools staff, and a representative of The Adaptables. The Adaptables, Inc. is a not-for-profit group headquartered in Winston-Salem, NC. In addition to providing information and referral, advocacy, and community resources to persons with disabilities, The Adaptables, Inc. are also the Center for Independent Living for Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin Counties. The steering committee developed a vision statement and goals/objectives for the Plan. The vision



Figure 2: Sidewalk along First Street

statement puts forward a future vision of the importance of the pedestrian system to the Winston-Salem Urban Area and its citizens.

Vision Statement

“The Winston-Salem Urban Area is a pedestrian friendly community where sidewalks offer a mode of transportation that provides access for all, promotes healthy lifestyles, and improves air quality.”

Goal 1: Facility Quantity

To increase the number of pedestrian facilities: Sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian safety improvements at intersections, and other related amenities.

Objective 1: New sidewalk construction should be a top priority, especially to produce connectivity. In addition, pedestrian crossings, signals, crosswalk treatments, signage, furniture and streetscaping elements should also be a top priority in areas with high pedestrian usage because they significantly increase the use of the pedestrian system.

Objective 2: Funding new pedestrian facilities is a capital intensive task and needs to be a coordinated effort between both the private and public sectors, with the local government taking a strong lead role in aggressively funding, providing matching funding and undertaking policy initiatives to ensure completion of a seamless pedestrian system.

Objective 3: Provide good connectivity between other modes of transportation

Objective 4: Connect neighborhoods to resources, such as, schools, parks, libraries, greenways, bikeways and recreational facilities.

Objective 5: Provide connections to commercial areas and retail centers.

Recommendation

- The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for the City of Winston-Salem and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funded projects for the entire MPO will include those recommendations from this plan.
- Reduce sidewalk gaps in the MPO by 25% in ten years.

Goal 2: Facility Quality

To improve the quality of both future and existing pedestrian facilities, especially in those areas that are suffering from poor conditions.

Objective 1: Pedestrian facilities should be kept in a safe and accessible condition in the entire MPO.

Objective 2: Connect current sidewalk network.

Objective 3: Promote walkable communities.

Recommendations

- The MPO should reduce the level of sidewalks meeting fair or poor rating in the pedestrian facility inventory by 25% in the next ten years.
- The City of Winston-Salem should conduct a survey every five years to determine the satisfaction level of its citizens on pedestrian facilities; this should include personal safety including vehicular traffic conflicts and lighting.
- Creation of a citizen request form.
- Creation of a citizen advisory committee.

Goal 3: Safety and Security

To enhance real and perceived pedestrian safety while increasing pedestrian activity.

Objective 1: Eliminate all pedestrian barriers.

Objective 2: Provide disabled accommodations at all intersections.



Figure 3: Crosswalk at City Hall, Winston Salem



Figure 4: Distribution Boxes at Crosswalk Landing

Objective 3: Provide grade separations where possible.

Objective 4: Provide safe crosswalks and signaling.

Recommendation

- As pedestrian activity continues to increase, the MPO should work to reduce pedestrian/motor vehicle related accidents.
- City Code and/or Ordinance changes to allow for an unobstructed path on sidewalks.

Goal 4: Coordination

To assure that those people and agencies responsible for providing transportation and land use options assume pedestrian considerations in their everyday policies and practices.

Objective 1: Capital Improvement Programs and Transportation Funded projects should include coordinated pedestrian projects which optimize limited resources to maximize connectivity and safety benefits.

Objective 2: Land development and policy should include pedestrian considerations as a core concern in every instance, including during preliminary project scoping. New development should be required to provide sidewalk connections to the nearest continuous sidewalk segment, just as would be required for water, sewer, or street connectivity.

Recommendation

- The MPO should develop guidelines that address aesthetics including building massing, eliminating blank walls, pedestrian furniture, and streetscapes to encourage pedestrian activity.

Goal 5: Quality of Life

To encourage healthier lifestyles.

Objective 1: Provide a means of physical activity and exercise.

Objective 2: Use sidewalks to reduce vehicle trips and improve air quality.

Recommendation

- Evaluate user surveys for transportation and recreation and parks.
- Evaluate national census data for vehicle ownership, modes of transportation utilized, etc.

Goals, objectives and recommendations are grounded in realistic expectations of funding levels and other variables that may influence implementation, but also aggressive enough to inspire confidence that the Vision and Mission of the Pedestrian Plan will be achieved.

1.3 Benefits of Walkable Communities

For many years, small and large communities across America have been implementing strategies for better serving the needs of their community. They do this because of their obligations to promote safe travel for their residents. The benefits of safe modes of transportation include increased health and fitness, additional transportation options, lower levels of traffic congestions on area roadways, improved air quality from lower rates of vehicle emissions and an increased sense of community among residents.

Obesity from poor eating habits and lack of exercise has become a critical issue in America today. Our unhealthy lifestyles lead to increased rates of many diseases. The increased rates of disease reduce over-all quality of life for individuals and lead to increased medical costs for families, companies and local governments. Increasing our activity levels is a crucial part of any strategy directed at improving overall community health, and walking is an excellent way to increase regular activity levels.



Figure 5: Walking to School

Many factors go into determining quality of life for citizens of a community: the local education system, prevalence of quality employment opportunities and affordability of housing are all items that are commonly cited. Increasingly though, citizens claim that access to alternative means of transportation and access to quality recreational opportunities such as parks, trails, greenways and bicycle routes are important factors for them in determining their overall pleasure within their community. Sidewalks provide connectivity to these desired resources, limiting the need for automobile traffic. Communities that are attractive for residents can also attract new businesses and industries, and in turn, additional residents.

When people decide to get out of their cars and onto sidewalks, they make a positive environmental impact. They reduce their use of gasoline which then reduces the volume of pollutants in the air. Other impacts can be a reduction in overall neighborhood noise levels and improvements in local water quality as fewer automobile-related discharges end up in the local rivers, streams and lakes.

In 2001, The National Household Travel Survey found that roughly 40% of all trips taken by car are less than two miles. By walking rather than driving, citizens can have a substantial impact on local traffic and congestion. Additionally, many people do not have access to a vehicle or are not able to drive. An improved sidewalk pattern provides greater and safer mobility for these residents.

During 2006, the Winston-Salem Department of Transportation sent surveys out to random community members as well as handed them out at a variety of locations throughout the City. While this survey asked questions regarding all modes of transportation, specific questions were asked regarding sidewalks. See Appendix A for these results.

Many private and public organizations have completed studies and surveys that show the many benefits of walking. The ideas presented above are only a small sample of the information that is available.