

Official TwinCATS Non-Motorized Plan

*Approved by TwinCATS Policy Committee and
amended into 2035 Long Range Plan 11/21/2011*

Section 1: Introduction

Providing the ability for users to walk and bike safely and comfortably is an extremely important aspect of the performance of transportation systems. The benefits of easy non-motorized travel are many:

- Walking and biking leads to better health, reducing obesity rates and lowering the risks for such ailments as diabetes and heart disease;
- Providing walkable destinations improves the mobility of older adults, lessening isolation and increasing independence;
- Amenable walking and biking conditions help attract and retain young professionals, as younger adults are increasingly choosing to rely less on cars for transport;
- Providing walkable and bikable shopping, service, and job access is crucial to the well being of households who live without cars, whether out of choice or economic necessity;
- Attractive walking and biking routes provide valued recreational amenities for residents and bolster an area’s attractiveness to tourists.

The above list is only a partial statement of the value gained from good walking and biking facilities.

In light of this value, the Twin Cities Area Transportation Study (TwinCATS) has seen the need for an area-wide non-motorized plan. The main component of this plan – detailed in Section 2, below – is an inventory of area roads that are

particularly important to the area’s bicyclists and pedestrians, compiled through discussions with area officials, public input collection, and the observations of planning and road agency staff. Context sensitivity is central to the task of designing transportation facilities, and this plan makes no mandates for specific design elements needed on any particular road segment. What the list is intended to do, however, is to ensure that each named stretch of road is given proper consideration for the best feasible walking and biking facilities. Any major (re)construction on these segments that does not include improved walking and biking facilities ought to have a strong rationale for such an exclusion.

In addition to providing a list of important non-motorized routes, the following plan contains additional background information on the state of non-motorized travel in the Benton Harbor/St. Joseph area. The plan contains an overview of public input gathered on non-motorized travel, examples of different types of non-motorized shortcomings seen throughout the area, a summary of area walking and biking safety statistics, and a brief discussion of local socio-economic conditions that affect the importance of walking and biking mobility. Finally, the plan document discusses a number of design resources, which can be turned to to help determine the best walking and biking facilities available in different contexts.

Section 2: Designated Walking and Biking Routes

The following maps and lists contain an inventory of TwinCATS area on-road and off-road segments that have been deemed especially important to the area's non-motorized transportation network. This inventory is not meant to be a definitive list of all possible routes that could potentially benefit from improved walking or biking facilities (though it was meant to err on the side of inclusivity), nor is the inventory meant to prescribe any certain set of design measures for given sets of road segments. Rather, it is meant to designate locations of special importance to area bicyclists and pedestrians, and to ensure that these segments are given due consideration for design improvements that will foster better walking and biking environments.

The list was compiled through a number of overlapping measures. Many road segments were deemed a priority based on their inclusion in previous planning efforts, notably a regional 9-county plan. Several rounds of public surveys were also distributed, both in paper and electronic

form, in the summer of 2010 and the spring of 2011. Observational input was provided by the staff of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission and several area road agencies. Finally, the list of designated roads and paths was brought before community officials representing the component cities, towns, and villages of SWMPC to get a feel for the relative priority of different identified locations and to fill in any remaining gaps.

The maps on pages 5 through 10 show the location of the prioritized road and path segments. The map on page 5 gives a wide view of the entire TwinCATS area, with the subsequent maps on pages 6 through 10 provide a more detailed view, giving road names and showing an aerial view of local features. Finally, the table on pages 11 through 13 gives a listing of all designated road segments, including segment boundaries, the communities within which the segments fall, and their status as federal aid eligible or not.

Figure 2.1: Full Area Non-Motorized Route Priorities

