



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan for the Napier Avenue Corridor



NAPIER AVENUE
PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE PLAN

A plan is currently underway to make Napier Avenue in Benton Harbor, Benton Charter Township and St. Joseph Township into a more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly street. The corridor currently lacks adequate sidewalks, crosswalks, or any type of bicycle infrastructure to allow for safe travel for non-motorized users along the roadway.

The Napier Avenue corridor is an important east-west transportation route, providing connectivity from the I-94 expressway into the core cities, access to major shopping and medical destinations, and serving a number of

neighborhoods. While it may function well for vehicular travel, it is not a "complete street" that comfortably and safely accommodates all users.

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) is working with Benton Charter Township, St. Joseph Township, Berrien County Road Department, and others, along with consultants AECOM and Williams & Works to help produce the Napier Avenue Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan.

The Napier Avenue Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan was initiated in late 2017 and is a community-driven effort to study how pedestrian and bicycle facilities can be implemented along Napier Avenue. This study will consider the stretch of Napier Avenue from the St. Joseph River on the west end to the I-94 interchange on the east end. The physical roadway, public rights-of-way, and adjacent properties will be also considered in the plan.

The goal of the plan is to address the gaps in the pedestrian and bike network, promote safety for all users (pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists), and create a Napier Avenue that better fulfills its role as a regional connector for all users.

Speaking to the purpose and goals of the project, Denise Cook, St. Joseph Charter Township Manager and Napier Steering Committee member, stated; *"Napier Avenue is a major connector between St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, as well as being an important route for people to get to school, work, shopping, and health services. Napier is very heavily traveled by cars at relatively high speeds, and with very few segments of sidewalks, safe crossings, or bike lanes, it is an unsafe situation for those traveling along Napier who do not drive. If we are able to create continuous and safe walkways and bikeways it will benefit everyone from both a safety and an economic development perspective. Public transit options become more feasible too, if you have a safe place to walk once the bus drops you off."*



Napier Ave. Walking Audit

Continued on next page.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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Debbie Boothby, Benton Charter Township Treasurer and Napier Steering Committee member, stated; *“The Napier Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan is a feasibility study and conceptual engineering plan to consider walking and biking improvements along Napier Avenue, assessing options, and associated costs. Having a plan with feasible options for non-motorized transportation and knowledge of the costs of these options is a pre-requisite before we can invest in future pedestrian and bicycling improvements.”*

Interested members of the public are highly encouraged to get involved and may do so in a number of ways. Community members attended the first public open house that took place on Monday, March 26 from 4 pm – 7 pm held at Overflow Community Church located at 300 E. Napier Ave. The public open house included various interactive stations for the public to learn more about the Napier Avenue Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan. It also covered the existing conditions surrounding the corridor as well as provided input on how the corridor is utilized, identified opportunities for improving pedestrian and bicycle access along the corridor, and allowed participants to select their top priorities for the future of the corridor.



Photo from Napier Open House in March



Photo from Napier Open House in March

Jonathan Fisk, St. Joseph Charter Township Planning Commission Chair and Napier Steering Committee member, spoke about the Public Open House Meeting stating; *“This is your opportunity to contribute your ideas on how to improve Napier Avenue for pedestrians, cyclists, public transportation, and drivers. Very important.”*

A second **Public Open House Meeting** will be held on **Monday, May 21** from 4 pm – 7 pm at Napier Parkview Baptist Church located at 245 West Napier Ave. Benton Harbor, MI 49022. Feedback gathered from the public during the public open house meeting will be used to develop a set of design alternatives which will be presented during the second public open house meeting.

Future open house events will be announced once determined. Anticipated completion of the plan and final recommendations are expected in July of 2018.

More information on the project may be found at www.napieravenue.org.

TRANSPORTATION

LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING IS UNDERWAY

The Southwest Planning Commission is the agency designated by the Governor of Michigan to conduct a continuing, comprehensive, cooperative transportation planning process in the Census designated areas under the direction of elected officials from the various communities within the Benton Harbor/St. Joseph urbanized area and the Niles Buchanan Cass urbanized area. In order for these urbanized areas to be eligible for federal transportation money to assist in local transportation maintenance and improvements, the federal transportation bill mandates that a *Long-Range Transportation Plan* be updated every four years.

Over the past year SWMPC staff has been working on the 2045 Long Range Transportation Plans for both urbanized areas which will identify existing and future multi-modal deficiencies and needs and recommend strategies and investments to address the needs.

As part of this process, several surveys have been created to gather information to better understand how people currently use transportation resources and issues they may experience. The results will help guide future transportation improvements and investments.

The purpose of the Long Range Transportation Plan is to:

- Identify existing and future multi-modal transportation deficiencies, problems, and needs of the planning area;
- Prioritize projects and programs that best address the deficiencies, problems, and needs taking into account available and potential funding resources;
- Develop multi-modal transportation policies, principles, and strategies to protect, preserve, and maintain the transportation network;
- Develop goals and related performance measures to track the success of policies, principles, and strategies;
- Identify positive and negative impacts and remedial strategies that will maintain the environmental integrity of the planning area.

Please take our **Pedestrian, Driver, & Bike Surveys** to give us a better understanding on how you travel in the Benton Harbor and St. Joseph area. Your input will help guide future transportation improvements and investments in the 2045 TwinCATS Long Range Transportation Plan. Every attempt has been made to provide files in accessible formats. If you need to request an alternative version of this survey please contact us at 269-925-1137 x 1521. To take the surveys visit: www.swmpc.org/survey.asp

GEARING UP FOR TRAFFIC COUNTING SEASON

Spring is here and that means the staff is gearing up for our traffic counting season. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission offers a traffic counting service at **NO CHARGE** to local jurisdictions in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. Counts are usually taken between mid-April and November.



What are the counts used for? Thousands of traffic counts are collected on Michigan roadways each year by various agencies. Locally, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission collects counts on various locally controlled Federal Aid eligible roads. This information is used to produce traffic volume, vehicle classification, and speed as well as traffic forecasts, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) figures, reports, maps, and analysis. Traffic data products are used in safety evaluation, pavement design, funding decisions, forecasting, modeling, and much more.

How do I request a traffic count? Local jurisdictions can submit their request using our online form that can be found at this link: www.swmpc.org/trafficcountform.asp. Up to three count requests can be submitted at a time using the online form. If you have any questions or would like to speak to someone regarding the SWMPC Traffic Counting program, please contact Brandon Kovnat at kovanatb@swmpc.org or (269) 925-1137 x 1524

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS)

MAPS OF ALL TYPES NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

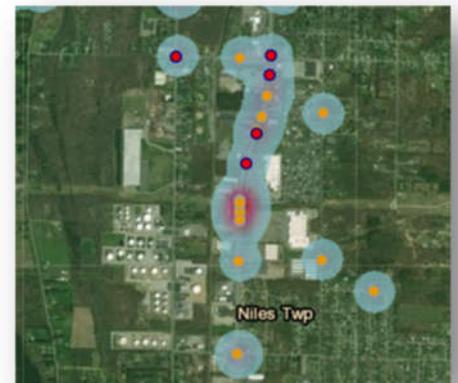
SWMPC GIS webpages are in the process of being updated. Check out the three main directions to access [mapping products](#) to find maps for your community.

Selected Maps	Frequently requested maps in PDF format which include boundaries of planning areas, municipalities, watersheds, and more.
Search for Maps	Search for stand-alone maps in PDF format. Many of these maps were created for reports, such as Master Plans, Recreation Plans, and Transportation Plans. <i>(Under Construction)</i>
Map Gallery	SWMPC GIS ONLINE is an online gallery of interactive maps. Featured are a collection of transportation elements, unique natural resources in southwest Michigan and more.

FATAL AND SERIOUS CRASHES

View locations for fatal and serious vehicle crashes in [SWMPC ONLINE](#)
[www.swmpc.org/mapping.asp](http://swmpc.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html) &
<http://swmpc.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html>

The interactive site, allows zooming in and out, changing the underlying base map, identifying layers and more. Other maps in the gallery focus on population characteristics and natural resources in the region.



INFORMATION SPOTLIGHT

[Social Vulnerability Index \(SVI\)](#) developed by the Center for Disease Control and others

The Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) uses U.S. Census data to determine the social vulnerability of every census tract in the United States. The SVI ranks each census tract on 15 social factors, including poverty, lack of vehicle access, and crowded housing, and groups them into four related themes:

- ◆ Socioeconomic
- ◆ Housing Composition and Disability
- ◆ Minority Status and Language
- ◆ Housing and Transportation

The data can be downloaded or viewed directly at <https://svi.cdc.gov/>. Primarily developed for emergency management, SWMPC recently included the information in the Long Range Transportation Plan because it directly addressed factors that can inhibit people's access to transportation and transit systems. For more information about this product and other maps, Contact: Jill Plescher; plescherj@swmpc.org

Economic Development

Southwest Michigan Economic Development District

Serving Berrien, Cass, & Van Buren Counties

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2018-2022



In 2016, SWMPC renewed its three-year economic development planning grant from the Partnership Planning Assistance Program administered by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). SWMPC is the EDA designated Economic Development District for southwestern Michigan (Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties). This designation enables communities within the district to remain eligible for EDA assistance. The primary purpose of the grant is to manage and implement the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Additional activities include technical assistance to local governments and integrating economic development with other regional economic development partners, as well as our internal projects for community, environmental, and transportation planning.



CEDS steering committee meeting

The CEDS was created by SWMPC bringing together regional and local economic development partners as a steering committee. Together, we used a SWOT analysis to consider the region's strengths and weaknesses (internal factors), with opportunities and threats (outward factors).

In the goals section the CEDS committee focused on better coordination among economic development groups and resiliency (the ability to adapt, avoid, withstand, and/or quickly recover from major disruptions

to an economic base). Both activities are supported by the grant, and both represent what SWMPC continues to work on for our region. The completely redesigned 2018-2022 CEDS is available online: www.swmpc.org/ceds.asp; it features a compact layout and is more visually impactful than previous editions.

REGIONAL VISION

"To cultivate a resilient and competitive economy that supports an excellent quality of life and builds pathways to prosperity for all residents."

Environmental

Water Quality Information

Everyone needs to do their part to protect our streams, rivers, inland lakes, and Lake Michigan! We depend on these water resources for our drinking water and for recreation: swimming, boating, and fishing.

How do pollutants enter the water?

- In urban areas storm drains are a main source of pollutants, draining virtually everything from lawns, streets, and parking lots directly into local streams, rivers, and lakes. Most storm drains do not treat or filter pollutants.
- Common pollutants include; fertilizers, pesticides, grass clippings, leaves, oil, grease, toxic chemicals, sediment, and pet waste.



Simple Steps to Protect our Water

- ◆ **Properly Dispose of Household Hazardous Waste.** Never dump items such as motor oil, fuel products, cleaners, paints, pharmaceuticals, and pesticides on the ground or down the drain. They can contaminate groundwater and surface water. Check with your county for collection dates.
- ◆ **Limit Fertilizer Use.** During watering or rainstorms, unnecessary phosphorus applied to lawns is washed into storm drains, which empty directly into local waterways. Get a soil test at an MSU Extension Office to see what amenities your lawn needs. It's the law to use no-phosphorus fertilizer!
- ◆ **Maintain Your Septic System.** If you have a septic system, have it checked and pumped every 2-3 years to insure it is working properly.
- ◆ **Close Abandoned Wells.** Close any abandoned wells on your property. They can act as direct conduits for contamination of groundwater.
- ◆ **Only Rain in the Storm Drain.** Rainwater and snowmelt is the only thing that should wash down our storm drains. Anything else grass clippings, leaves, motor oil, even fertilizer is considered an ILLICIT DISCHARGE and will pollute our water.
- ◆ **Pollution Emergency Alerting System (PEAS).** If you see any pollution affecting air, land, water, wetlands or public drinking water supplies call: 1-800-292-4706 to report it.

For more information on what you can do for water quality visit:

www.swmpc.org/water.asp

Environmental

Clean Commute Day is May 4th



JOIN A FUN CLEAN COMMUTE DAY EVENT. WIN GREAT PRIZES!

Southwest Michigan is competing for the title of “Michigan’s Cleanest-Commuting Community” in this year’s 5th-annual Clean Commute Day. Clean Commute Day is a regional competition between Greater Lansing, Grand Rapids, southeast Michigan, and southwest Michigan, that encourages area commuters to make a difference by choosing clean transportation like a carpool, the bus, walking, or riding a bike.

Commuters can register to help their region win at www.cleancommuteday.org. Southwest Michigan-bound commuters who take the clean commuting pledge and utilize alternative transportation on May 4th will be entered to win from a list of prizes that include gift certificates for local recreation like bowling, movies, golf, and more. Winners will be drawn at random on Monday, May 7, 2018.

This is the first year southwest Michigan is competing in Clean Commute Day, which is in its fifth year. Originally called “Casual Commute Day” the event was created to improve air quality in the state of Michigan by reducing CO2 and ozone emissions from transportation, educate the public about how their transportation choices affect air quality, and help commuters find cleaner transportation options.

Sign Up Now!



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SWMPC Board Meeting Schedule 2018

June 19	9:30 am	Van Buren ISD Conference Center Lawrence
August 21	9:30 am	Kinexus Service Center Benton Harbor
October 16	9:30 am	Kinexus Service Center Benton Harbor
December 18	9:30 am	Van Buren ISD Conference Center Lawrence

For more information visit: www.swmpc.org/calendar.asp

**Save Paper by Receiving our Newsletter Electronically:
email rosep@swmpc.org**