



# WILLIAMS COUNTY ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

healthy people  
healthy environment  
healthy economy  
mobility for all

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cover Photo: Wabash Cannonball Trail near West Unity, OH  
Jennifer Hellard, The Bryan Times, Fall 2015

This plan was made possible with the support of the Williams County Parks  
Committee. Thank you!

Williams County Health Department  
Williams County Soil & Water Conservation District  
Williams County Engineer's Office  
Williams County Parks  
City of Bryan Parks  
City of Bryan  
Bryan Development Foundation  
New Leaf Consulting  
Village of Edon  
Village of Edgerton  
Village of Montpelier  
Village of West Unity  
Northwestern Ohio Rails to Trails Association (NORTA)  
First Insurance Group  
Ohio Department of Transportation



## [1] INTRODUCTION

Community leaders in Williams County came together in late 2017 to create the Williams County Parks Committee. Members of the County Health Department, County Engineering staff, municipal representatives, as well as regional trail supporters and other County agencies formed the Committee in order to better connect parks throughout the County, share resources, and ultimately enhance amenities in Williams County while improving the overall quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Through meeting and discussing ideas, the Committee recognized the need for Active Transportation while planning for bicycle and pedestrian connectivity.

### WHAT IS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?

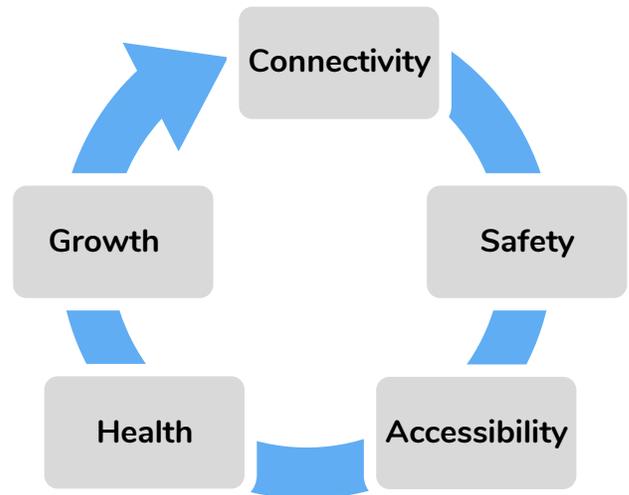
The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) defines Active Transportation as “human-powered transportation that engages people in healthy, physical activity while they travel from place to place.” The most common examples of Active Transportation include walking, bicycling, horseback riding, and skateboarding. Active Transportation is important for several reasons, as it promotes healthy people, a healthy environment, a healthy economy, and mobility for all.

### THE PLAN

The committee enlisted the Maumee Valley Planning Organization to lead the development of the Active Transportation Plan for the County. The plan outlines the vision, goals, and strategies needed to support increased modes of Active Transportation in Williams County.

## [2] VISION & GOALS

For the next 10 years, Williams County envisions coordination between local governments, non-profit organizations, residents, and businesses to work towards developing a County-wide non-motorized transportation system that will be safe, connected, and accessible for all, promote healthy lifestyles, and attract new residents and industry to the County.



### GOALS

Five goals were developed with corresponding objectives and strategies in order to reach the County's vision. The goals include the overarching themes of Connectivity, Safety, Accessibility, Health, and Growth.



(1) **Connectivity:** Increase connections between places for non-motorized means of travel

**Objective 1a:** Develop a comprehensive non-motorized transportation system that provides County-wide connectivity.



(2) **Safety:** Improve the safety and efficiency of the transportation system for non-motorized users

**Objective 2a:** Reduce distracted driving, walking, and bicycling.  
**Objective 2b:** Reduce the number and severity of crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians.



(3) **Accessibility:** Enhance mobility for all users

**Objective 3a:** Improve and expand infrastructure for pedestrians, bicyclists and people with disabilities.



(4) **Health:** Support healthy lifestyles for all residents

**Objective 4a:** Promote healthier communities by encouraging and improving access to Active Transportation.



(5) **Growth:** Enhance and promote quality of place assets to attract people and industry to the County

**Objective 5a:** Establish a marketing strategy to promote quality of place assets.



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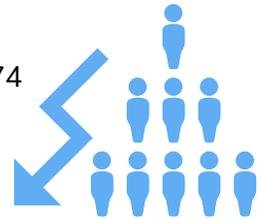
## [4] EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing conditions include demographic information, pedestrian and bicyclist crash statistics, current infrastructure, and relevant plans and policies.

Demographic data was collected and analyzed from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey five-year estimates (2011-2016).

### DEMOGRAPHICS

- Williams County has a total population of 36,784 in northwest Ohio
- The median household income is \$45,044, whereas Ohio's is \$50,674
- The County is characteristically rural as 41% of residents live in unincorporated areas
- Almost 75% of the population has a commute less than 25 minutes
- 1% of the population does not own a vehicle



The population has been steadily declining and is expected to continue this trend, while also aging considerably.

Future infrastructure must accommodate an aging population as well as entice younger generations to reside in the County in order to stabilize the population and reverse the decline.

### PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

Multiple studies have been conducted which show the positive effects of being outdoors, especially when combined with physical activity, on an individual's mental state. The following statistics are from the Williams County Health Assessment (2016) for physical health:

- 13% of Williams County's youth is obese based on body mass index (BMI)
- 76% of County youth reported exercising for 60 minutes on three or more days per week
- 71% of Williams County adults are overweight or obese based on BMI
- 41% of residents are characterized as obese compared to Ohio (33%) and the U.S. (30%)
- 50% of adults were engaged in some form of physical activity for at least 30 minutes for three or more days per week; and 19% exercised five or more days per week
- 28% were not participating in any physical activity during the week

Of those individuals who stated they were not exercising, 5% indicated it was due to no walking or biking trails and no parks. 1% stated it was due to poorly maintained or no sidewalks and another 1% said there was no access to parks.



Based on the physical and mental health benefits, there is a great need for additional Active Transportation facilities and better access to parks in Williams County.



The Wabash Cannonball Trail, which starts in the Village of Montpelier, is a valuable asset to the County. The multi-use recreational trail traverses 3 counties over 63 miles.

## CRASH STATISTICS

There were 20 bicyclist related crashes and 18 pedestrian related crashes in Williams County from 2013-2017. The majority of crashes occurred in the City of Bryan, accounting for 13 bicyclist crashes and 14 pedestrian crashes.

## EXISTING ASSETS

Knowing what infrastructure and assets are currently available provides a baseline of data upon which all analyses and planning procedures are formed. The existing conditions include physical infrastructure such as trails and parks, and policies and procedures. Williams County currently has a variety of Active Transportation infrastructure in place. However, much of this infrastructure is disconnected and mainly located within the municipalities. Nearly every entity in the County has sidewalks, totaling approximately 70 miles.

There are at least 30 parks, nature preserves, reservoir parks, and other recreational lands throughout Williams County.

## PLANS & POLICIES

Plans and policies that affect Active Transportation in Williams County were compiled. Sidewalk policies for bicycling, maintenance, and installation were also gathered for each entity, if available.

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## [5] NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Gaps and barriers in the active transportation network were determined through public feedback, fieldwork in priority areas, and mapping of current infrastructure.

### BARRIERS

Barriers to implementing Active Transportation networks were identified:



- Funding large projects may take several phases and local matches from entities
- Existing infrastructure, such as narrow bridges, wide roadways, and high-speed roads
- Weather and climate can discourage walking and biking and deteriorate infrastructure
- Public perception includes safety and awareness of existing parks and trails

### FOCUS AREAS

Four focus areas were chosen in order to better prioritize planning and investments for the Active Transportation system throughout Williams County.

#### 1. Infrastructure

Focus on areas where infrastructure is nonexistent or needs upgrades

- Build sidewalks where there are none & improve conditions for existing sidewalks
- Identify crash locations and determine safety countermeasures
- Build trails and other infrastructure to connect entities in the County
- Install bicycle lanes on roads with no current bicycle infrastructure



#### 2. Education & Awareness

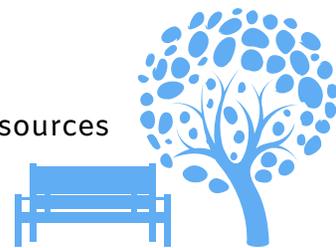
Focus on public safety, awareness of existing infrastructure, and its benefits

- Increase public awareness of existing parks and trails
- Educate residents on how to safely use all forms of Active Transportation
- Inform the public on the benefits of walking and biking

#### 3. Existing Parks & Trails

Focus on improving and connecting existing County resources

- Increase the use of existing assets



#### 4. Policies

Focus on incorporating policies to strengthen the non-motorized transportation network

- Incorporate policies such as Complete Streets and ADA Accessible Standards
- Consider bicyclists, pedestrians, and individuals with disabilities in roadway design, operation, and maintenance

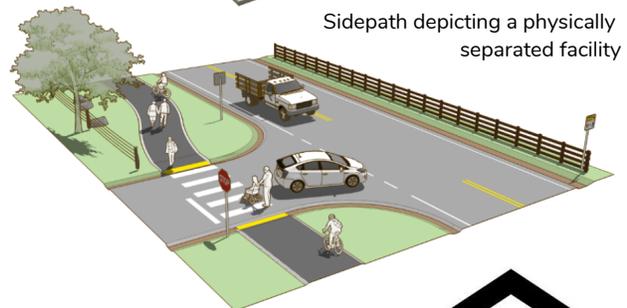
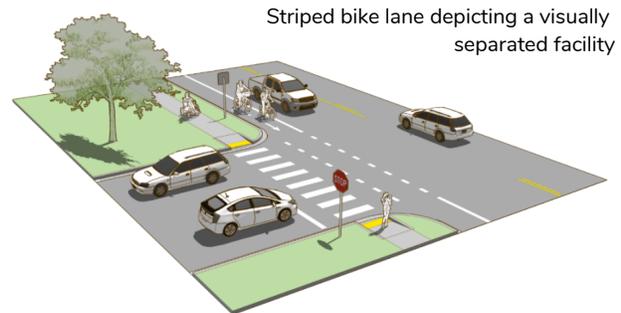
Plan implementation will focus on the areas of infrastructure, education & awareness, existing parks & trails, and policies.

## [6] RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several ways to better support Active Transportation in Williams County, which include, but are not limited to: increasing visibility of parks and trails, programming efforts for safety and education, policies to support Active Transportation, and infrastructure planning.

### 1: INFRASTRUCTURE

- Visually separated facilities use buffer striping and marking to increase the distance between motorized and non-motorized users; there are no physical barriers
- Examples include bike lanes and paved shoulders
- Separated facilities include bike lanes used only for bicycles, sidewalks for pedestrians, and sidepaths, which are located separate but adjacent to roadways
- Mixed traffic facilities include both unmarked shared lanes for bicycles and motor vehicles, and lanes with pavement markings such as "sharrows" (shown right)
- Other facility types that promoted safety of pedestrians and bicyclists include raised crosswalks, high-visibility crosswalks, roundabouts, and pedestrian hybrid beacons



### 2: EXISTING PARKS & TRAILS

- Improve signage for residents and visitors to clearly identify the locations of all existing parks and trail
- Utilize similar signage for each park and trail to be associated with Williams County
- Partner with the Health Department or other agencies to include diverse information on signage

The Williams County Health Department, with funding through the Four County ADAMhs Board, provided signs to parks throughout the County in order to promote mental wellness for residents.

### 3: EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Creating awareness and educating the public on Active Transportation initiatives can be accomplished through creating an online presence for the County parks and trails, partnering with the Safe Communities Coalition, and conducting social media campaigns.

#### Online Presence

- Make park and trail information readily available and within an entity owned webpage
- Add park locations to Google Maps
- Use social media as a platform to disseminate information

#### Safe Communities

- The Williams County Safe Communities Coalition regularly promotes traffic safety awareness and education
- Partner with Safe Communities to educate motorized and non-motorized users on how to safely share roadways

### 4: POLICIES

#### Complete Streets

Complete streets are “designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities” (Smart Growth America).



Example of a complete street

Complete streets may include:

- Sidewalks
- Bike lanes
- Wide shoulders
- Frequent and safe crossings
- Median islands
- Accessible pedestrian signals
- Curb extensions
- Narrower travel lanes
- Roundabouts

#### ADA Accessibility

- Incorporate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible elements in all future infrastructure projects
- Include infrastructure such as pedestrian access routes, curb ramps, detectable warnings, crosswalks, and accessible pedestrian signals



ADA accessible curb ramps

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## [7] IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUTION

Projects were solicited from the Parks Committee and local entities. Many of the projects focused on regional connectivity in the County. Local, State, and Federal funding sources were also compiled for projects relating to Active Transportation.

### PLAN ADOPTION

After a 30-day public comment period, the plan was adopted on February 25, 2019 through a resolution by the Williams County Commissioners.

### SHORT-TERM IMPLEMENTATION ITEMS

These items can be implemented with little upfront cost and focus primarily on education and awareness.

#### Phase 1: Update the County's Online Presence



- Update all park and trail addresses in Google Maps
- Create Wikipedia pages for County parks and trails
- Add information about existing parks and trails to entity web pages

#### Phase 2: Increase Education & Awareness



- Work with the Safe Communities Coalition to implement Active Transportation safety campaigns
- Work with the County Health Department to promote the benefits of Active Transportation for physical and mental health

#### Phase 3: Plan for Funding



- Match projects to funding sources
- Assess budgets and plan for local matches
- Solicit community input and create short and long range plans

### PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Progress will be tracked through measures such as the miles of bicycle and pedestrian facilities implemented, number and severity of pedestrian and bicycle crashes, number of Active Transportation projects started and/or completed, and the incorporation of complete streets and ADA accessible design in new projects.

The Plan will be reviewed annually to assess performance measures, track progress towards goals, and update the project list. The Plan will be fully updated every five years.