

CHAPTER 4: PLANNING SUPPORT

What is the basis for this plan? Why focus on pedestrians and walkable communities if a common perception is that “not many people actually walk”?

While only a small percentage of people walk and bike to work in the Duluth-Superior area today, there are many people in the community who would choose to walk more often, as part of their activities of daily life, if the pedestrian network offered more safe, convenient, and comfortable choices.

In addition, according to 2016 ACS Census data, nearly 9% of households in the Duluth-Superior area do not have vehicles, which means a significant number of people depend on walking as their primary means of transportation.

The recommendations in the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Pedestrian Plan are based on and well-supported by numerous recent plans and policies at the local, state and national level, as well as the needs and desires of the community.

Local, State and National Plans

Multiple planning initiatives at the local, state and national levels support pedestrian infrastructure improvements and policy development, and this plan presents ways to implement those planning and policy recommendations.

Local Plans

Duluth Comprehensive Plan — *Imagine Duluth 2035*

The City’s comprehensive plan asserts that walking is a primary mode of transportation. It articulates a vision to connect all users in a way that promotes safety, health, and quality of life.

Recognize that all citizens are pedestrians at some point in their daily travels, even if walking is used in conjunction with other modes, and
prioritize pedestrian safety and comfort in transportation improvements.

- Duluth Comprehensive Plan “Imagine Duluth 2035”

The recommendations for improved pedestrian facilities as put forward in this plan will contribute, to some extent, to meeting all of the policy goals identified in the Transportation section of Duluth’s Comprehensive Plan:

Imagine Duluth 2035

The recommendations for improved pedestrian facilities as are explicitly supported by multiple policy goals and strategies as defined in the City of Duluth’s most recent Comprehensive Plan:

Strategies to Implement Policy #1 – Improve Street Conditions to Function Better for Everyone

S1. Continue the City’s asset management plan to extend the life of pavement and sidewalks.

S3. Prioritize implementation of the ADA Transition Plan, with a focus on Core Investment Areas. S4. Develop a funding source dedicated to installation and maintenance of sidewalk networks.

S5. Install modern pedestrian and bike facilities whenever conducting resurfacing activities on city streets, including on-road bike lanes for all locations identified in the City’s adopted bikeway system plan.

S6. Ensure that sidewalks and crosswalks are rapidly cleared of snow (and continuously cleared, in Core Investment Areas), to ensure ease of system use by all residents.

S7. Continue to develop, improve, and implement Safe Routes to Schools plans to enhance safety for children around schools and throughout the community.

S9. Adopt measures to reduce vehicular travel speed and improve intersection safety, especially in busy areas, to improve safety conditions and reduce or eliminate injuries and deaths.

Policy #1 – Improve street conditions to function better for everyone

Policy #2 – Reduce infrastructure costs through innovation and wholesale design change

Policy #3 – Add to the transportation network by systematically enhancing multi-modal options

Policy #4 – Improve system condition and connections in and between downtown and Canal Park

Policy #5 – Base decisions about transportation infrastructure primarily in the context of improving city and neighborhood vitality, and not on automobile through traffic.

City of Superior’s Active Transportation Plan

This 2020 plan provides a framework of programs, policies, and infrastructure improvements to encourage more residents to use active transportation (i.e., any human-powered form of transportation, including walking, running, bicycling, skating, and using a wheelchair or other mobility device).

Vision Statement

Superior is a healthy city where walking and bicycling are encouraged as attractive, safe, comfortable, and convenient options for residents and visitors at every age and life stage.

City of Superior Active Transportation Plan (2020)

MIC Long Range Transportation Plan: Sustainable Choices 2045

The key theme of MIC’s long range transportation plan is “many needs, limited resources.” The projected revenue shortfall to cover this area’s infrastructure costs means that we need to set priorities for how those scarce funds are spent.

This plan identifies Priority Pedestrian Areas in which to focus improvements for people walking (see Chapter 2, Implementation).

1999 Metro Pedestrian Plan (MIC)

This plan, aimed at improving the pedestrian environment throughout the Duluth-Superior area, began with the MIC in 1999. That was where we began; this updated plan is where we’re trying to go.

Superior Active Transportation Plan Recommendations

- Improve safety for people who walk and bike in Superior.
- Reduce or eliminate pedestrian and bicycle-related crashes, serious injuries and fatalities.
- Build pedestrian and bicycle friendly streets that manage vehicular speed and reduce conflicts with motorists.
- Accommodate all users, especially more vulnerable populations such as children, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- Enhance street crossings along key walking and biking routes.
- Create a complete, comfortable and attractive pedestrian network that is usable year-round.
- Fill in gaps in the sidewalk and trail network.
- Retrofit or expand the existing sidewalk network to include accessible pathways for people with mobility devices.
- Ensure that the pedestrian network is maintained for year-round access.
- Enhance pedestrian accessibility to transit services.
- Improve connections between areas of the city currently separated by barriers such as rail corridors.
- Increase bicycle and pedestrian access to key destinations.
- Enhance multimodal connections that allow people to make trips using multiple modes of travel.
- Embrace bicycling and walking as ways of transportation, recreation, and healthy living in Superior.

Subsequent Work by the MIC

Following the 1999 Pedestrian Plan, the MIC undertook a number of pedestrian-related planning and data counting initiatives.

These included Safe Routes to School plans, the formation of a Bike-Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), baseline condition analysis, sidewalk inventory and condition analysis, priority pedestrian modeling and launched a pedestrian count program.

Trail Plans

Numerous planning efforts have taken place across the Duluth-Superior area that focus on improving the walking environments and creating connections to existing pedestrian networks and key destinations.

Trail plans developed by or with MIC staff for area jurisdictions include the [Canosia Township Trails Plan](#) (2018), [Duluth Township Trails Plan](#) (2016), the [Proctor-Hermantown-Munger Trail Spur Feasibility Plan](#) (2015), the [Proctor Master Trails Plan](#) (2007) and the [Munger Trail to Lakewalk Connector Plan](#) (2007).

State-Level Plans

Minnesota Walks

This 2017 initiative was a collaborative effort between MnDOT and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and is the first statewide pedestrian planning framework in the country that includes health as a priority by recognizing the role community transportation designs play in creating health.

*A key goal of Minnesota Walks is that pedestrians are considered as the **first priority** in design of roadway infrastructure.*

MnDOT Statewide Pedestrian Plan

MnDOT's Statewide Pedestrian Plan sets a framework to create, safe, convenient and desirable walking for all. The Plan has identified that walking is essential to achieving MnDOT's vision: a multimodal transportation system that maximizes the health of people, the environment, and our economy. MnDOT is planning to invest more in walking with a focus on safety, equity, and climate change.

Superior Active Transportation Plan Recommendations (cont'd)

- Increase the number of people who walk or bike for all trip purposes.
- Create a culture of safe walking and bicycling through education and enforcement programs.
- Ensure that City policies, ordinances, and plans support and promote active transportation.
- Increase sidewalk widths to at least 6 feet.
- Require sidewalk buffers that are at least 6 feet wide between the street and the sidewalk.
- Develop pedestrian crossing guidelines.

The Plan calls for MnDOT to leverage its resources and role as statewide leader to support agencies at the regional and local levels in their efforts to advance walking.

Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020

WisDOT developed the [Wisconsin Pedestrian Policy Plan 2020](#) to provide a long-range vision addressing Wisconsin pedestrian needs. It describes existing and emerging pedestrian needs through 2020, with a set of recommendations to meet those needs.

National-Level Reports and Preference Surveys

Step It Up! - Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities

US Department of Health and Human Services — *Step It Up!* Report notes that although walking is a popular form of physical activity and can be done easily by most people, barriers to walking exist.

Health Implications of Community Design – Moving to Combat Obesity

Calls for increasing understanding of the importance of community design (and redesign) and recognizing the potential it has to increase physical activity levels and create positive health outcomes for everyone.

Discusses social trends, leading strategies to encourage higher levels of daily physical activity, key factors of what communities can and are doing and specific actions that state and local officials can undertake immediately to make communities more walkable.

National Association of Realtors – Community and Transportation Preference Surveys

For the better part of the last decade, [surveys conducted by the National Association of Realtors](#) have noted a market demand for walkability. According to the 2013 Community Preference Survey, 60 percent of respondents favor a neighborhood with a mix of houses, stores, and other businesses that are within walking distance, rather than neighborhoods requiring driving between home, work, and recreation. Respondents in the 2020 survey continued to indicate a preference for a walkable neighborhood and less commuting.

Step It Up!

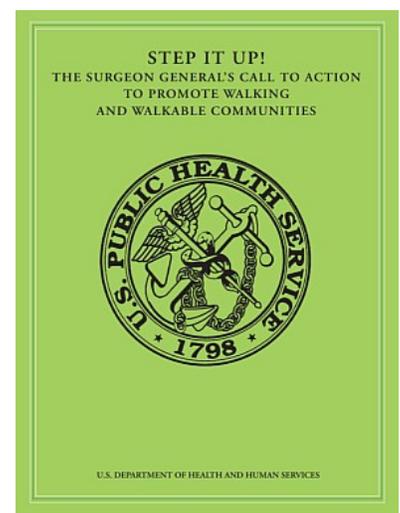
[The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities](#)

This influential 2015 publication recognizes the importance of physical activity for people of all ages and abilities.

It calls on Americans to be more physically active through walking and asks the nation to better support walking and walkability.

The Call to Action includes five strategic goals to promote walking and walkable communities in the United States:

- **Make walking a national priority;**
- Design communities to make it safe and easy for people of all ages and abilities to walk and roll;
- Promote programs and policies to support walking where people live, learn, work and play;
- Provide information to encourage walking and improve walkability;
- Fill surveillance, research, and evaluation gaps related to walking and walkability.



“Millennials and Silent Generation Drive Desire for Walkable Communities, Say Realtors”

It is no longer just millennials propelling interest in walkable communities. According to a new report from the National Association of Realtors®, members of the silent or greatest generation, those born before 1944, also prefer smaller homes in neighborhoods with easy walks to shops and restaurants.

- December 19, 2017 NAR Press Release

Multiple Societal Benefits

More and more communities are making investments in pedestrian infrastructure and amenities. Investing in pedestrian infrastructure is increasingly understood as a useful strategy with multiple social benefits: to attract residents, build the tax base, encourage economic development, ensure transportation equity, promote public health and address climate change.

Creating a pedestrian-centered transportation system has multiple benefits that include:

Health Benefits

Walking is an easy way to start and maintain a physically active lifestyle, and walkable communities make it easier for people of all ages and abilities to be active. The ways in which communities are designed and built can either present barriers to walking or encourage it as a safe and attractive way to get around.

The 2015 publication, *Step It Up! The U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities* notes that physical activity is one of the most important things Americans can do to improve their health.

The [Health Implications of Community Design: Moving to Combat Obesity](#) toolkit emphasizes community design (and redesign) and the potential it has to increase physical activity levels and create positive health outcomes for everyone.

Environmental Benefits

Providing infrastructure that supports walking (as well as other active transportation options such as bicycling and transit) can decrease motor vehicle usage and dependency on nonrenewable resources, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution.

Business Benefits

A walkable environment encourages people to walk more often for day-to-day activities such as trips to the local store and to complete errands.

Walkable business districts allow people to become familiar with their surroundings, discover new businesses and engage as customers in that community.

A [recent study](#) of business performance in walkable shopping areas by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation finds that businesses appear to do better in walkable commercial areas than in areas attracting mainly drive-to patronage. It states “evidence suggests that rents in walkable shopping areas can be 27-54% higher than in non-walkable areas. Many of the most successful recent shopping developments have been located and designed to attract a substantial walk-in population.”

Why Invest in Active Transportation?

An improved walking environment can boost the health, safety, quality of life, economic vitality, and accessibility of [a city] and its residents.

- City of Superior Active Transportation Plan (2020)

Equity Benefits

Although transportation infrastructure predominantly supports travel by motorized vehicles, a significant percentage of people in the Duluth-Superior area can't drive. This includes elderly people, children, those with mobility impairments, and people with low incomes.

Improving the pedestrian environment is among the most effective tools available to help level the playing field for these members of our community.

Duluth-Superior Area Population Demographics

Households without Vehicles: ~8.9%

People Over Age 65: ~16.6%

People Under Age 18: ~21.5%

People with Ambulatory Difficulties: ~6.5%

Population in Poverty: ~17.5 %

- Source: 2016 ACS Block Group Data

Safety Benefits

Roadway design practices and policies that improve mobility for motor vehicles have also created unsafe conditions for walking due to high speeds, limited crossings and dense traffic.

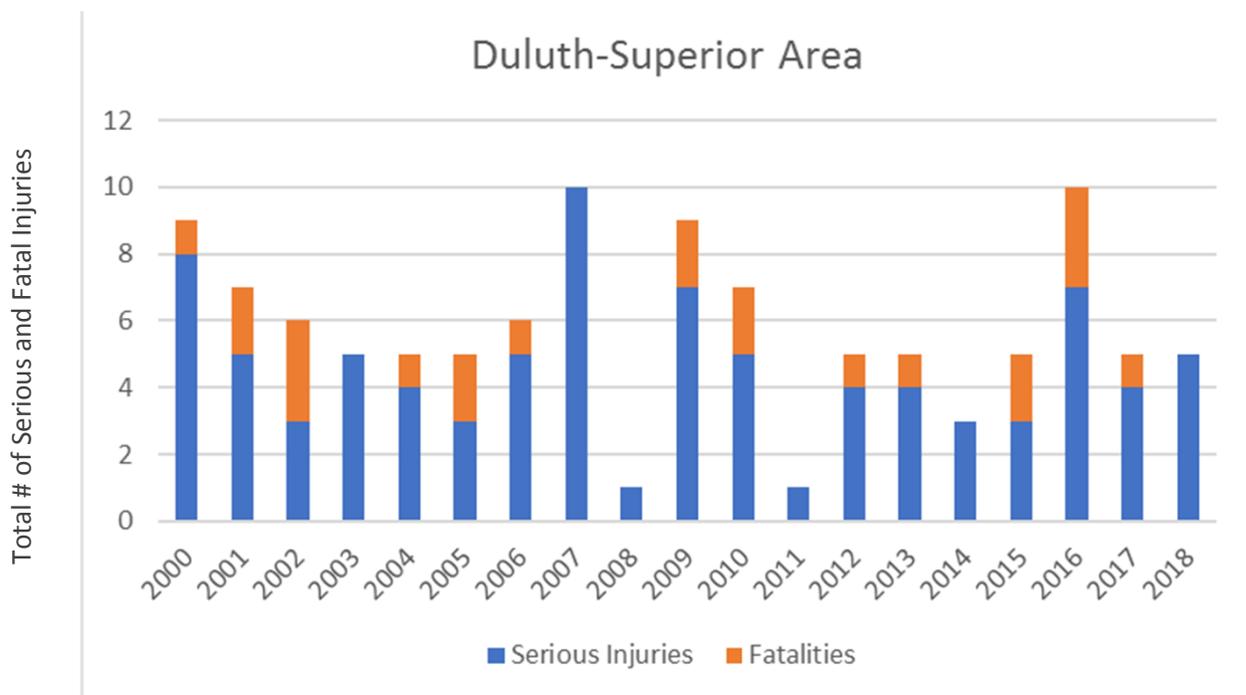
The 2018 [Benchmarking Report on Bicycling and Walking](#) reports that bicyclist and pedestrian injuries and fatalities "may be reduced through proactive infrastructure, policy, education and other community investments."

As shown below, In the 20 years since the MIC's first pedestrian plan, the number of people in the Duluth-Superior area who were injured or killed in pedestrian-related crashes has not significantly decreased.

In the majority of crashes between pedestrians and motor vehicles, the pedestrian is trying to navigate in an environment designed primarily for automobile use.

- https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ped_focus/docs/

Pedestrian- Related Serious Injuries and Fatalities in the MIC Area 2000-2018



Source: MnDOT and WisDOT crash data

In the 20 years since the MIC's first pedestrian plan, the number of people in the Duluth-Superior area who were injured or killed in pedestrian-related crashes has not significantly decreased.

Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Public participation is a critical part of any successful planning effort in order to ensure that the plan meets the needs and concerns of the community. Public participation and feedback for this plan was solicited through a variety of forums: an Advisory Committee, two public open houses, “pop-up” engagement at local community events, and four online “open houses” focused on Pedestrian Safety, Pedestrian Accessibility and Winter Safety and Accessibility.

Public Input Survey

From July 17 thru August 10, 2020 a public input survey was open. 627 responses were received and were proportionate to all geographies across the Duluth-Superior area.

Responses identified public perceptions of (1) issues and barriers that exist for people who walk and (2) policies to improve the pedestrian environment.

1. Issues and Barriers (Priority Improvements)

A. Walking along roadways:

- Clear obstructions
- Fill gaps
- Easier access
- Sidewalks on both sides
- Streetscaping

B. Walking across roadways:

- Improve visibility
- Increase yielding
- Easier access
- Longer WALK signal
- More frequent crossings

2. Priority Policies

- Snow clearing
- Maintain sidewalks
- Prioritize pedestrian needs
- Clear obstacles
- Add vegetation along sidewalk