

8 Bicycle and Pedestrian System

INTRODUCTION

Walking and bicycling are integral parts of the transportation system. People walk and bike to commute to work and school, for trips such as visiting friends, shopping, or other personal errands, and to make connections to transit or other intermodal facilities. The infrastructure system should support and encourage these types of trips.

REGIONAL TRAIL PLAN

In December 2007, the Tyler Area MPO commissioned a study to develop a Regional Trail System. This study was completed in 2009. The plan represents a comprehensive system of trail corridors that spans the Tyler MPO boundary and much of Smith County. The Regional Trail System (see **Figure 8-1**) will be a major component of the multi-modal transportation system providing alternative transportation corridors for bicyclists and pedestrians while offering off-street connections to strategic locations. The multi-modal trail system includes pedestrian, all terrain vehicles, equestrian, and high speed hike and bike trails. The Plan is the first of its kind in Smith County. It is anticipated that the Plan will lead to the ultimate development of more than 175 miles of trails.

Development of the Regional Trail Plan is an important element of the Metropolitan Planning Organizations regional planning process. The planning process engages different cities to come together for a common goal. The goal is to provide a multi-jurisdictional, interconnected system of trails, open spaces, and recreation opportunities which are distributed equitably throughout the MPO boundary, as well as providing multi-modal transportation opportunities to move people, rather than just cars throughout the metropolitan area.

The Regional Trail Plan identifies the optimal location and cross section of the trails as well as locations for trail head facilities. While specific construction details are not included, the plan provides the MPO, County and each Municipality a tool to assist in the preservation of future trail corridors and trail head facilities. The plan is long term in nature and construction of the trail phases will rely heavily on regional participation and fiscal abilities. The concept of trail master planning is to first identify the locations and routes of these trails in order to ensure the preservation of the corridors while beginning implementation over a period of time.

The 20 year Regional Trail implementation plan recommended that the Plan be reviewed annually and updated every 2 years to continue to reflect the unique needs and opportunities of the region. The update should include adding constructed segments to the map, reviewing all trail segments to ensure development patterns are considered. The MPO should also encourage the member cities to work on developing urban trail plans within their boundaries to begin enhancing inner-city trails that allow for urban connections out to the regional trail system.

The proposed trail system identified in this plan will enhance the quality of life in the region and help ensure that the area is able to keep pace with the growing recreational and multi-modal needs of the citizens. The resulting benefits include increased quality of life, tourism potential, economic value, increasing property values, and pride in the residents of the area.

Design Standards

The Regional Trail System is proposed as a motorized/non-motorized, shared –use, multi-modal corridor used for transportation and recreation. The trail will feature primary hard-surface trail and secondary soft-surface trail where possible. Various corridors will be either hard or soft due to terrain or other constraints. A system of trail classifications was developed to include a variety of trail types for the region. Each classification type is designed to accommodate various trail conditions. The trail classifications include:

- ❑ Gateways
- ❑ Primary
- ❑ Secondary
- ❑ Neighborhood/Interpretive (e.g., Neighborhood/Transit/Connector Trail)
- ❑ Conservation/Interpretive
- ❑ Equestrian
- ❑ All terrain vehicle
- ❑ High speed hike and bike

The Regional Trail Plan Final document dated September 21, 2009 has the details of each trail classification, including trail cross sections and amenities.

Trail Segments and Implementation Priority

The miles of trails identified within the trail system are organized into identifiable segments and priorities. These priorities will serve as a guide for the MPO, County, and Cities to use when implementing the trail plan. Each segment is named, which will identify the location of the trail within the region. The Trail Segments section of the Plan identified the following ten trail segments. Details of each trail segment is described in the Regional Trail Plan Final document.

- ❑ Lake Tyler Loop from Lake Tyler West to Lake Tyler East (29 miles)
- ❑ Harris Creek ATV Route from Harris Creek to UT Health Center/Lake Tyler (12.5 miles)
- ❑ Tyler State Route Park from Tyler State Park to City of Tyler Glass Center/ Black Fork Creek (17 miles)
- ❑ Loop 49 Corridor from City of Tyler, Faulkner Park to West IH 20/ East IH 20 (39 miles)
- ❑ Old Railroad Route from City of Tyler, Faulkner Park to City of Bullard/City Park (11.5 miles)
- ❑ Lake Palestine from Loop 49 W to The Villages at Lake Palestine (5 miles)
- ❑ Texas Rose Equestrian Trail between Texas Rose Horse Park and a loop to Lake Palestine and back to Horse Park (36 miles)
- ❑ Bellwood Lake Trail from City of Tyler, Bellwood Lake Recreation Area to Loop 49 (6.5 miles)
- ❑ South Tyler Trail from City of Tyler, South Tyler Trail to Faulkner Park (11 miles)

- ❑ Black Fork Creek Trail from City of Tyler, Willie Glass Recreation Center to Loop 49 W (7.5 miles)

The Plan includes implementation strategies and general trail implementation guide to help identify the actions to be taken and the priority. Under the Implementation section, six trails are assigned priorities. The first three priorities will begin to build a major west/east series of trails throughout the region. In order to get the most benefit from the trail construction, the Tyler MPO should strive to implement sections that are connecting rather than leaving disconnected pieces of trail systems that would therefore be underutilized. A first step for these five priorities would be to commission specific route studies on each trail segment and then begin efforts to apply for grants or presentations to various private or public groups to support funding.

The six prioritized trail segments are listed below. Details are taken directly from the Regional Trail Plan Final.

PRIORITY 1: LAKE TYLER LOOP

This is a major Tyler 21 initiative as set forth in the massive planning effort the City of Tyler just finished. This loop would allow access to all member cities by creating unlimited recreational opportunities at the lake which include mountain biking, walking, swimming, camping, running, and wildlife viewing. There are existing trail head facilities that can be utilized as part of this project, so limited construction dollars would be needed. The cities of Tyler, Whitehouse and New Chapel Hill should work together to apply for recreational trail grants and begin planning the routes for this loop. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Recreational Trails Grant program matches cities at an 80/20 percent rate. The municipalities would only be responsible for 20 percent of the match. Additionally, groups such as the Boy Scouts, Audubon, and East Texas Trekkers could work to construct various legs of the route.

PRIORITY 2: SOUTH TYLER TRAIL

This is a major Tyler 21 initiative as set forth in the massive planning effort the City of Tyler just finished. This trail extension would allow full access from Southside Park to Faulkner Park allowing for a linear trail connection through the center and south portions of the City of Tyler. There are existing trail head facilities that can be utilized as part of this project. The City of Tyler should work together with developers within the area to apply for recreational trail grants and begin planning the route for this extension. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Recreational Trails Grant program matches cities at an 80/20 percent rate. The city would only be responsible for 20 percent of the match. Additionally, groups such as the Boy Scouts, Audubon, and East Texas Trekkers could work to be partners in this project.

PRIORITY 3: HARRIS CREEK

This route offers a unique experience to the use of trails. ATV trails are growing in popularity and a substantial amount of funding exists through grants. This ATV trail will allow for a new experience not offered to the public within the region. The trail could be constructed with grants funds and then operated and maintained by a private company. All member cities as well as Smith County should work together to leverage grant funds for this project to allow for a new and different recreation opportunity.

PRIORITY 4: TYLER STATE PARK/ BLACK FORK CREEK TRAIL SECTIONS

This priority offers a connection to Tyler State Park through alternative forms of transportation including walking, jogging, and biking. This connection greatly benefits the City of Tyler as its citizens are able to access the State Park via a trail system. The City of Tyler and Smith County should work together to apply for grants funds to construct this trail.

PRIORITY 5: TEXAS ROSE HORSE TRAIL

This trail offers an additional unique and different trail experience for the horse lover. This trail would be a loop to Lake Palestine utilized the Texas Rose Horse Park as the trail head facility. The Cities of Lindale, Hide-a-way and Tyler along with Smith County should work to raise private funds to assist with construction of the trail.

PRIORITY 6: LOOP 49

Loop 49 is an existing facility with a very wide right-of-way width. The cities could easily work with TxDOT to mark bike lanes and add additional paving for a high speed hike and bike path. The route of Loop 49 is in place and utilization of the existing right-of-way would make implementation of this priority easier. The MPO should work with TxDOT to facilitate the planning of these additional lanes or begin marking and signing these hike and bike routes. All member cities benefit from multi-modal access along Loop 49 and should work together to implement these hike and bike facilities.

PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Pedestrian facilities need to be treated as a part of the transportation system that provides connections between schools, residences, recreation, shopping and employment. The pedestrian system is also necessary for providing connectivity to the transit system and parking areas.

Pedestrian improvements, like all transportation decisions, need to be prioritized. Conceivably, the most important users of the pedestrian system are school age children. Therefore, the most critical sidewalk and pedestrian system improvements are those deficiencies around schools, parks and recreation areas and their neighborhood connections. Another priority would be providing pedestrian connections in high employment areas.

Smart land-use and growth patterns are crucial factors in determining the feasibility of walking as an alternative mode of transportation. By encouraging strategies such as mixed-use development, clustering housing near retail and employment activities, and using grid or modified grid patterned street systems that provide direct pedestrian connections, the practice of walking trips will begin to replace some vehicle trips. In addition, by keeping the built environment at a "human" scale, a more comfortable pedestrian environment is created.

Sidewalks

The Tyler MPO lacks a consistent pedestrian sidewalk system. A large portion of the area's sidewalks are discontinuous and do not meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Historically, cities grew with a strong network of sidewalks, especially in their downtown districts. This is apparent in the cities of Tyler, Whitehouse, and Lindale. Sidewalks are present along the older arterials and collectors. However, in the late twentieth century as communities began sprawling, the construction of sidewalks declined. That trend held true in the Tyler MPO area. In recent times, the demand for sidewalks in metropolitan areas has increased as a means of commuting and for recreational uses. Attention has been given to the trend and sidewalks have been incorporated into recent projects in the area.

In the City of Tyler, sidewalks are typically provided on both sides of a roadway. Their presence is dense near the downtown district and hospital area. However, the majority of these sidewalks do not meet current ADA requirements. At many locations the pedestrian ramps are not present or if available the slope exceeds current standards. Also in some cases, the sidewalks' overall widths are too narrow. Many of the sidewalks in Lindale and Whitehouse can be described similarly.



In the southern parts of Tyler, where developments have thrived the last decade, sidewalk is more discontinuous along arterials and collectors. Although the city now requires new development to install sidewalk along the front of streets, there are still some older establishments that existed before the ordinance. These businesses are not required to install sidewalk and therefore gaps in the sidewalk network is created.

An example of a well planned pedestrian facility in Tyler can be found along Grande Boulevard. This roadway features an ADA compliant sidewalk to its north with bike lanes along its right-of-way just south. The idea was to incorporate the sidewalk and bike lanes into the city's regional trail plan and provide better connectivity between its parks. The city has received positive feedback with this project and is currently looking at other projects where integration of transportation modes can occur.

Curb Ramps

The curb ramps along the majority of TxDOT roadways meet current ADA requirements. In 2007, TxDOT replaced the curb ramps along East Fifth Street from Beckham Avenue to ESE Loop 323 to meet current standards. TxDOT also installs curb ramps at the majority of its traffic signal replacements or new installations. When existing sidewalk facilities are not located near the intersections, the curb ramps are still installed for future use. The City of Tyler Traffic Department has begun to follow the same procedures as TxDOT when installing curb ramps.



Medians and Refuge Islands

There is a planned project along Gentry Parkway, in north Tyler, to install pedestrian refuge islands. Gentry Parkway has a roadway section that is 92 feet wide. There are many people crossing the arterial along its entire length. The proposed project, that is currently being developed, will install raised pedestrian refuge islands at all the signalized intersections. Initially

these islands will be constructed only as refuge points. However the hope is to modified the signal wiring and install pedestrian push buttons and signal heads on the islands themselves. When this is installed, pedestrians will be able to cross the large pavement area in two protected movements without adding excess delay to the vehicular movements.

In terms of medians, several projects constructing medians in Tyler have occurred since the last MTP update. In 2005, raised medians were installed along South Broadway Avenue from Loop 323 to Heritage Drive. These medians eliminated many conflicts points along the segment that the existing continuous, left turn lane created. Around the same time period, medians were installed along the southern portion of Loop 323. And more recently in 2009, medians were installed along the eastside of Loop 323 and Troup Highway from Golden Road to north of Aberdeen Drive.



SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a program that is aimed at getting more children to safely walk or bike to school regularly. SRTS is a national and international movement. In the United States, funding for Safe Routes to School activities has been made available by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy of Users (SAFETEA-LU). *Future funding opportunities for SRTS will depend on either a continuing resolution of SAFETEA-LU or passage of a new transportation bill.*

SRTS implementation in Tyler has so far been limited to the SRTS project for Douglas Elementary School. Douglas Elementary School (Hillsboro Street) is surrounded by a residential development that utilizes the school, but the area lacked a clear network of sidewalks for pedestrians. TxDOT awarded the City \$78,400 towards the construction of 600 linear feet of sidewalk along Hillsboro Street and a raised pedestrian refuge island at the intersection of Hillsboro Street and Gentry Parkway. Numerous students crossed the intersection daily with the help of a crossing guard; the pedestrian refuge island now allows students to cross the large roadway section in parts rather than all at once. The project also includes installation of new and improved signage and pavement markings on streets adjacent to the school.