

# 6 - Regional Pedestrian System

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## Introduction

Why are pedestrian trips important? Because every trip – whether by automobile, public transit, or bicycle – begins and ends with a pedestrian movement. In addition, we can no longer afford, either monetarily or environmentally, to continue our recent practice of building our way to mobility solely via highway construction. A pedestrian-friendly environment, on the other hand, can be cost effective, reduce our reliance on the automobile, and support the use of other transportation modes.

Creating a pedestrian-friendly environment, however, poses some problems. The air quality, traffic congestion, and financing problems that we now face have evolved, to a large degree, from decades of public policies and investments that have heavily favored the automobile, often at the expense of other modes of transportation. To accommodate our increased use of the automobile, streets and building setbacks to allow convenient parking have increased, travel lanes are wider, and vehicle speeds are faster. All of these "automobility" improvements serve to discourage the pedestrian.

It has been traditionally assumed that if a basic "walking infrastructure," such as sidewalks, were provided, pedestrian activity would be encouraged. What we have seen is that while simply building sidewalks may facilitate pedestrian *movement*, truly encouraging pedestrian *activity* requires a broader effort. In addition to making appropriate improvements to the physical infrastructure, an environment must be created that is both convenient and comfortable for the walker to effectively promote pedestrian activity. Making pedestrians comfortable means creating development at a human scale, enabling individuals to better relate to, and feel a part of, that environment. Urban landscapes that embody this concept tend to make a pedestrian feel secure and more involved with his or her surroundings and provide a more interesting and accessible environment.

Until relatively recently, the main concern of most transportation planning related to the pedestrian was to attempt to avoid conflicts with the dominant mode, the automobile. Specific policies in this Plan designed to encourage walking, bicycling, and transit as an alternative to driving mark a distinct departure from past practices. This Plan recognizes that a significant relationship exists between land use patterns and densities and transportation systems that contributes to particular travel behavior choices. As a result, this Plan recognizes the important role of adequate pedestrian facilities in our overall mobility system.

## Walking in the Salem-Keizer Area

Walking has become a popular activity for recreation, exercise, or simply for relaxation and enjoyment of the outdoors. However, its potential as a viable mode of "transportation" is just

beginning to be realized. According to the 1990 Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey (NPTS), 7.2 percent of all travel trips are currently made by walking. Approximately one-third of all walking trips were for social or recreational purposes.

The 2000 Census "Journey to Work" data indicates that 3.3 percent of workers in the SKATS area walked to work. The census data was collected during a one-week period in March, making it likely that walking trips were somewhat underreported for many parts of the country (like Salem) due to cold weather. Moreover, walking trips made to access transit or other modes were not recorded.

Some cities in Oregon, such as Portland and Ashland, demonstrate even greater levels of walking (15 percent of work trips, 1990 census). Furthermore, census data only measures work trips; more information needs to be collected to determine what share of our total trips are made by walking.

As expected, a greater number of walk trips occur in the central business district areas, like downtown Salem, where there are adequate sidewalks and awnings, higher densities, and mixed land uses. Convenient pedestrian facilities, along with closely linked destination points, make walking a highly efficient way to cover short distances. As a consequence, most walking trips are relatively short: the NPTS indicates that the average length of a walk trip is 0.6 miles. With an appropriate infrastructure, pedestrian-friendly design, and a supportive land use pattern, walking can be a realistic and enjoyable alternative for short trips and can be coupled with public transit for longer trips.

## **Benefits of Increasing Walking Trips**

Increasing the share of overall trips made by walking can provide us significant benefits in terms of health and physical fitness, the environment, and transportation-related effects.

### **Promotes Health**

Increased levels of walking can result in significant benefits in health and physical fitness. Research has shown that even low to moderate levels of exercise, such as regular walking or bicycling, can: (1) reduce the risk of coronary heart diseases, stroke, and other chronic diseases; (2) help reduce our personal and societal health care costs; and (3) contribute to greater functional independence in the later years of our lives.

### **Improves Public Transit and Reduces Traffic Congestion**

Investments in pedestrian improvements can not only increase the number of walking trips, but can also increase the cost effectiveness of existing public investments in the transit system. By improving pedestrian accessibility, pedestrian-friendly street design and land use patterns can contribute to higher rates of transit ridership. Conversely, an effective transit system extends the mobility of the pedestrian, allowing more people to commute and meet other transportation needs without the use of the automobile.

## **Improves Air Quality**

Although air quality in the SKATS area is expected to improve with the implementation of this Plan, significant increases in the use of the automobile will degrade our air. Promoting pedestrian travel can be one of the most cost-effective pollution reduction strategies because walking displaces shorter auto trips that are the most polluting on a per-mile basis.

## **Public Cost Savings**

Many public costs associated with automobiles are not borne by actual vehicle user fees, such as fuel taxes and license fees. As a result, the general public indirectly subsidizes vehicle travel by paying some of the costs for road construction and maintenance, police and ambulance services, and uninsured medical costs, among others. Increasing the overall share of trips made by pedestrians can serve to contain these costs, reduce wear and tear on our roads, and enable more efficient investment of public monies.

## **Energy Efficiency**

Walking is an extremely efficient means of transportation relative to motor vehicles. Increasing pedestrian travel reduces the need to import and consume petroleum fuels. Heavy reliance on petroleum fuels has a variety of environmental consequences including greenhouse gas emissions, urban air pollution, oil spills, and impacts of drilling operations. In addition, such imports contribute to a trade imbalance and have negative effects on the overall economy.

## **SKATS' Role in Pedestrian Planning**

The primary role of SKATS (the local MPO) in pedestrian planning is to establish a series of regional policies that embody goals and objectives related to the pedestrian systems of regional significance to ensure that walking is a viable transportation option for meeting mobility needs in the Salem-Keizer area. As a consequence, the regional Plan deals specifically with only those issues related to accessibility to and within regional activity centers and major transit transfer stations. The actual network of pedestrian facilities in the SKATS area is planned, funded, constructed, and maintained by the area's jurisdictions (ODOT, Marion and Polk counties, and the cities of Salem, Keizer, and Turner). SKATS cooperates with these local jurisdictions to identify and implement priority pedestrian projects that improve the pedestrian environment in the areas and corridors of regional interest. Through policies identified in this Plan, pedestrian issues will also be considered in the planning and programming of multimodal projects for the regional transportation system.

## **The Regional Pedestrian System**

The regional pedestrian system comprises those pedestrian facilities that serve a regional function, meaning that they serve the region's major activity centers and the major transit

transfer center. Major activity centers are focused concentrations of activities of regional significance. In the Salem-Keizer area the current major regional activity centers are:

- The Salem Central Business District (CBD)
- The Capitol Mall
- Willamette University
- Lancaster Mall
- Chemeketa Community College
- West Salem transfer station

Future activity centers were considered in the Salem-Keizer Transit's *Short-term Strategic Business Plan* (2004). Several centers and mixed use transit oriented centers are defined in the plan in addition to the ones listed above. These include:

- Keizer transfer station
- South Salem Mixed Use Transit Oriented Center

The regional transportation policies contained in this plan element are focused on access within and to these activity centers. At the present time, direct pedestrian connections from the adjacent portions of the regional highway system to these major activity centers and the downtown Salem transit transfer center already exist and require no major additional improvements at the regionally significant level. Pedestrian networks and connections that serve other parts of the region are considered to be of local rather than regional significance and are addressed in the local transportation plans being prepared by the respective local jurisdictions within the region.

## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

**Goal 1:**      **A continuous network of safe, convenient, and accessible pedestrian facilities to and within regional activity centers and major transit facilities.**

**Objective:**    *To ensure a viable system of pedestrian facilities of regional significance.*

**Policy:**        Pedestrian issues shall be included in the prioritization of projects for allocation of all regional funds.

**Policy:**        Support continuation of current (or equivalent) federal, state, and local funding sources to construct or improve pedestrian facilities in the region.

**Policy:**        Encourage the timely repair and maintenance of existing pedestrian facilities in regionally significant settings.

**Policy:**        Ensure that all pedestrian facilities are accessible and constructed in accordance with ADA standards, including reasonable grades and adequate clearances.

**Goal 2:** A substantial increase in the percentage of trips made by walking for all trip purposes in the region.

*Objective:* Encourage local land use patterns, densities, and designs that decrease trip lengths and that support walking as a practical and attractive transportation mode.

**Policy:** Support an urban design that adequately considers pedestrian needs.

**Policy:** Encourage the delineation of safe pedestrian ways, emphasizing separation from vehicular areas using planting strips, crosswalks, and increased lighting where appropriate.

*Objective:* Encourage appropriate linkages with other alternative modes of transportation, including public transit and bicycling.

**Policy:** Support the incorporation of multimodal connections and modal balance into regional transportation facilities.

## Recommended Improvements

Given supportive facilities and land use patterns, pedestrian travel can replace a significant number of auto trips. The following actions are necessary to facilitate walking as a viable mode of transportation. Local jurisdictions in the region are encouraged to incorporate these actions into their respective local transportation system plans and their land use, zoning, and building regulations, and implement them when feasible, appropriate, and practicable:

- Construction of new sidewalks and pedestrian facilities
- Creation of pedestrian-friendly environments
- Promotional campaigns to encourage walking

### Construction of New Sidewalks and Pedestrian Facilities

There is a direct correlation between the provision of good walkway networks and their use. All things being equal, the construction of missing links in pedestrian facilities serving regional activity centers or major transit facilities should be prioritized over new facilities that have no immediate linkage in the overall circulation system. Regional pedestrian facilities comprise only a small fraction of all pedestrian facilities in the urban area, the majority of which serve a local function. For the facilities at the local level, providing a safe and convenient connection to schools, parks, shopping and transit stops are the priorities as defined by the local jurisdictions.

The projects listed in **chapter 15** either provide the linkages between regional centers that are necessary to support pedestrian movement, or address issues that are detrimental to the safe and convenient movement of pedestrians. Many of these projects are part of converting a road

to “urban standards,” where the inclusion of sidewalks and bike lanes, as appropriate, are the norm. Several of the proposed projects utilize railway right-of-ways that have either been abandoned or are likely to be abandoned in the near future. These off-street paths will provide pedestrians and bicyclists a safe and attractive route to travel between regional activity centers.

One project that characterizes this is the 12th Street Promenade (see **Map 7-1**). The 12th Street Promenade project was developed to address the safety issue surrounding the Union Pacific rail line. The majority of collisions between trains and pedestrians have occurred on this stretch of track. In addition to improving the aesthetics of the environment for walkers, it will provide a connection between the Capitol Mall area and the Amtrak Station, facilitating the intermodal nature of the station.

## Outstanding Issues

Providing safe and convenient pedestrian links along and across the regional road system is one of the policies of this Plan. Currently, there are several areas in the Salem-Keizer area where this is not being met. One such area is along Highway 22 between Lancaster and Cordon Road.

On the south side of the highway is located a housing development with few to no stores or other amenities. On the north side is located a new elementary school and numerous retail and food stores. Due to the poor pedestrian linkages, and the circuitous route that walkers face, many people walk to the stores by crossing Highway 22, cutting through the fences that were erected along the right-of-way. Due to the high traffic volume and lack of any pedestrian accommodations along the highway, this current situation has the potential for pedestrian fatalities and injuries. Currently, ODOT has recommended the construction of a pedestrian bridge linking the two areas terminating around Connecticut Street on the north side.

Ensuring connectivity between Keizer and Salem for all modes is a continuing aim for the Regional Transportation Systems Plan. One option to address this situation would be the development of a multi-use path along the Willamette River, providing access for the residents of Keizer west of North River Road to downtown Salem. This path would be part of the larger Willamette Partnership (WP) plan to link cities along the Willamette River together via a multi-use path. Currently, this proposal is still in the conceptual stages, with no specific routes through Salem-Keizer identified. The completion of a path as envisioned by the WP is compatible with the goals of the RTSP to provide residents of Salem-Keizer with multiple mode and route options when traveling between origin and destination.

Combining the two issues above, there needs to be reexamination of the current regional bicycle and pedestrian networks to determine their suitability in facilitating the safe and easy movement of people using these modes.

These issues will require additional study and public deliberation and input before a preferred alternative can be identified and included in the Plan.