1. Introduction and Background

When used to the best of their abilities, bicycles are not only a great source of exercise and recreation, but also an efficient mode of transportation. According to the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association, bicycles are the second most preferred mode of transportation. However, unsuitable conditions are restricting the use of bikes for recreation and as a form of transportation. Moreover, bicycle enthusiasts are in agreement that the amount of bicycle facilities in the Stearns County area is limited in parts.

This plan will discuss Stearns County’s approach to bikeways through guiding principles, an analysis of current bikeway conditions, the benefits and impacts of bicycles, public involvement, an inventory of rural and urban/suburban areas, bicycle safety, and the process of the implementation of bicycle facilities. The elements listed previously will guide the 2007 Stearns County Bikeway Plan in successfully improving the local transportation network for bicycling.

History

It was in 1894 that Minnesota experienced its first movement by lobbyists toward paved roads for bicycles at the Minnesota Good Roads Convention. Just two years later Minnesota’s first bike path was constructed around Lake Harriet in Minneapolis.1

In the first half of the twentieth century bicycles largely competed with trolleys and automobiles causing bicycles to be looked upon as a recreational vehicle and primarily for children. The oil restriction in 1973 caused resurgence in the use of bikes nation-wide. It was after this epidemic that the Minnesota Legislature gave the responsibility of the development of bicycle facilities to two State agencies: the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT). In 1984 a third State bicycle agency was created by the legislature entitled the State Bicycle Advisory Committee.

The fore mentioned State bicycle agencies yielded some of the most important bicycle plans and programs for Minnesota including the nations first Comprehensive State Bicycle Plan and a federal investment program called the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA).1

Previous Stearns County Bikeway Plans

Since the States involvement with bicycle facilities in the late nineteenth century, cities and counties throughout Minnesota have gone on to create their own planning documents as a way of guiding them towards effective bikeways.

Stearns County’s first written Bikeway Plan was in 1977, which briefly describes areas where bikeways should be placed based on the location of parks, historical sites and scenic areas. The 1977 Bikeway Plan was created due to the substantial increase in the number of Stearns County residents using bicycles for transportation and recreation.

1 Mn/DOT. The Mn/DOT Bicycle Modal Plan (2005).
The first update of the 1977 Plan was in 1985. The 1985 Bikeway Plan outlines the Counties goals for creating more proficient bikeways in Stearns County using knowledge, resources and trends of that time. In 1989 the Park and Recreation section of the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan was updated to identify abandoned rail corridors as potential bike trails. The next update was in 1996, which is the latest plan until now. The 1996 Plan begins to discuss the construction of trails on abandoned and active rail corridors and included a survey of local governments within Stearns County about bikeway facilities in their area.

Summary
The purpose the 2007 Stearns County Bikeway Plan is to inform all individuals and groups affected of the importance of bicycle facilities and how issues regarding bicycle facilities are to be addressed. This document will lead Stearns County towards an increasingly further bicycle friendly community.

2. Guiding Principles

By establishing principles, Stearns County hopes to pilot its efforts toward key bicycle facility improvements. Through extensive research and public input, Stearns County has established principles regarding education, support, implementation, and funding for the 2007 Stearns County Bikeway Plan. The following are the principles by which Stearns County plans to advance area bicycle facilities:

1. *Educate the motorist and bicyclist on proper shared roadway safety and etiquette.*

   Both the cyclist and motorist need to be aware of their surroundings. Many cyclists feel intimidated while biking next to motorist even though they are a legal mode of transportation. The majority of motorist, on the other hand, feel that only cars should be allowed on the road. This issue is causing a great deal of frustration between the cyclist and the motorist. It is in the best interest of everyone to better educate the public on the rights of motorist and bicyclists whether it is through drivers training and safety classes or a required bike safety program at school.

2. *Increase the public’s knowledge on the many benefits of bicycling.*

   There is an increasing obesity trend in the United States. By increasing the public’s knowledge on the benefits of bicycling, we can hopefully begin a decline in these statistics. Along with health benefits, bicycling is an environmentally friendly form of transportation and is much cheaper than owning a vehicle.

   Stearns County expects to provide access to information on the countless benefits of biking to the public.
3. Assure safe and convenient bicycle access to schools, employment areas, shopping centers and recreation areas.

By increasing the amount of safe bikeways in the County, the number of bicyclists will raise. This can be accomplished by developing standards for shoulder widening and supporting programs such as Safe Routes to School.

4. Enforce state and federal guidelines concerning bicycle facilities.

By following Minnesota Statues and Federal Law, Stearns County can increase the effectiveness of its bikeway plan. Stearns County bikeways must meet Minnesota Transportation Goals, State Environmental Policies, Federal Environmental Justice and Federal Accessible Design guidelines.

5. Increase the amount of bikeways.

Through funding and support, Stearns County will construct more bikeways in the county. It is important to provide safe and convenient access for all County residents to areas of interest.

6. Develop standards for shoulder widening.

It is illegal to ride a bicycle on some sidewalks; therefore standards must be created to allow bicycles enough room to safely bike next to moving vehicles. MnDOT has developed such standards for road shoulders on urban and rural roads (Table 1).

7. Tap into tourism potential

Creating more bikeways can improve the areas economy. By expanding the amount of bikeways and trails in the County, businesses will find an increase in the need for fuel, accommodations, food, souvenirs, and maps. This will also increase the amount of trail related jobs.

8. Draw on all available funding sources.

Finding the appropriate funding to complete bikeways is the largest issue at hand. Some of the largest contributors include grants from the Federal Government (Table 2), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (Table 3) and local supporters (Table 4). By seeking all available funding, Stearns County could increase the number of trails and bikeways over the next few years.

Through the eight principles listed above, Stearns County will improve and expand bikeways throughout the County taking into consideration input from the public, local schools and businesses, and local and state governments.
3. Bicycling in Stearns County

Since the 1996 Stearns County Bikeway Plan, many changes have occurred allowing bikeways to reach their present condition. Studies have been updated, projects have been completed and new trends have risen over the past eleven years. However, based on Minnesota statistics and community surveys, there is still a need for improved bikeways. After reviewing national, state and local bicycle trends, the County can now act on the implementation of more efficient and appropriate bicycle facilities for Stearns County.

The Need

The 2004 Outdoor Recreation Facility Survey of Minnesota Cities, Counties and Schools, reported that all three sources ranked their highest recreational facility need in the Trails category; conveying an obvious need for amenities such as bikeways. The simple fact that 63 percent of adults in Minnesota bicycle, is reason enough for Stearns County to be concerned about bikeway conditions in the area.

Recently a survey was sent out by the Stearns County Parks Department to all cities and townships in Stearns County concerning bikeways in their area (Table 5). Based on the responses received, most jurisdictions did not have a bikeway or only had a short distance of safe and convenient bikeways in their community and were in favor of extending what exists or constructing a new facility (Table 6).

As a way to better serve the public’s need for bikeways, the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) has created the St. Cloud APO Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee. One of their most important goals is to create better connectivity throughout the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area. This group consists of individuals from different backgrounds and with various bicycling abilities, which allows the APO to get a better understanding of the need for increased bike facilities. The information obtained helps identify ways in which to upgrade existing facilities and piece together new ones.

Based on past findings through similar activities as the fore mentioned; Stearns County has completed several widely recognized bikeways. One such facility is the Lake Wobegon Trail which was constructed just after the 1996 Bikeway Plan was completed. This 54-mile bituminous trail runs from St. Joseph to Osakis in Todd County on the former Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line and branches out in Albany along the former Canadian Pacific Soo Line through Holdingford to the Morrison County line. A similar project is the Beaver Island Trail. Currently this trail extends 2.5 miles from St. Cloud State University to the intersection of 33rd Street South. Due to the trails popularity, Stearns County and St. Cloud began working together to extend this trail even further giving safe bikeway access to Clearwater and Warner Lake County Park. The extension of several of the trails previously mentioned and the shouldering of select county roads will greatly improve the areas bikeway system.

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2 Mn/DOT. The Mn/DOT Bicycle Modal Plan (2005).
Trends
Concepts, objects, places, people, or to sum it up – “everything” changes. This is also true of bikeway facility design, implementation and use. The need for more sufficient bikeways is based on the changing world around us.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has released studies indicating an obesity epidemic in the United States. In 2006 the CDC reported that 22 states had obesity rates above 25 percent and only four states have obesity rates below 20 percent. There is a direct correlation between this obesity epidemic and the amount of time people are spending in their vehicles. On average it takes most individuals less than ten minutes to bike to their place of employment if they so chose to bike. Congressman Jim Oberstar is quoted as saying “We are fighting an epidemic of childhood obesity and Type 2 diabetes by making it possible for kids to walk and bike to school,” he goes on to say “We are teaching an entire generation of kids to live healthy and lead active lives.” Pushing Stearns County to create more available modes of transportation for county residents, is the need for a healthier community.

One community that has implemented bicycling to its fullest is the city of Davis, California, also known as “Americas Most Bicycle Friendly Community”. Davis residents voted to get rid of public school buses, put a lockdown on cars during class changes and implemented traffic lights directed toward bicyclist. Through these extreme ways, Davis grew from a population of 6,000 to 60,000 with bicycling at its core. The vision of this community is that, “Bicycles are a legally recognized mode of transportation, and not just recreational in nature. This implies that bicycle facilities should be as direct, convenient and safe as the facilities designed for motor vehicles.”

This has ultimately placed Davis, California at the top of the list for most bike-able community. By following some of California’s bicycling habits, as not all trends work in the same way for communities, Stearns County can begin to create more user-friendly bicycle facilities.

The development that has gained the most publicity is the Rails-to-Trails and Rails-with-Trails movement throughout the United States, which Stearns County has acted on with great enthusiasm. The movement toward rail trails was spurred around 1986 but took some time to gain interest. As railroad traffic declined people started looking for other uses for railroad corridors, which brought about the idea of transforming them into trails. The fact that the rail lines had all the attributes of a great trail facility was perfect; the corridor was

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4 Census Transportation Planning Package (CTPP 2000)
6 City of Davis Comprehensive Bicycle Plan, October, 2006.
7 City of Davis Comprehensive Bicycle Plan, pg 23, October, 2006.
already in place and there would be no need to clear areas for construction, ultimately saving time and money.

Rails-to-Trails refers to replacing the abandoned tracks with a trail, while Rails-with-Trails refers to placing a trail within the right-of-way of the train tracks of an active railway. As is expected, railroads and trail users were concerned about the safety of being so close to an active rail line, but studies show a decrease in the amount of trespassing on rail corridors when a trail is placed near train tracks. Also, a barrier is required between the tacks and the trail when the trail is located near an active line.

The largest Rails-to-Trails project that Stearns County has constructed is the Lake Wobegon Regional Trail, which is constructed on the abandoned BNSF and Canadian Pacific Soo Line rail corridors. This trail, as mentioned previously, runs from St. Joseph to Osakis in Todd County where it connects with the Central Lakes Trail. It also runs from Albany to the northeast through Holdingford to the Morrison County line where it connects to the Soo Line Trail. Stearns County would like to continue to develop trails on abandoned rail corridors and along active rail lines as a way to provide an alternative mode of transportation and opportunities for outdoor recreation and exercise.

Roadways in Stearns County
In 2006 the Minnesota Department of Transportation completed a video recording of the surfaces of all county roads. This has been compiled to provide a description of the width of road shoulders on county roads (Table 7).

4. Benefits and Impacts of Bicycling

The benefits of bicycling are many. Not only does bicycling help keep a body healthy it also helps keep the environment, the economy, history and communities healthy. Many people are oblivious to the positive impact bicycles make on everyday life.

Health and Wellness
As mentioned previously, obesity is reaching epidemic proportions. It is said that overweight and obesity may soon cause as much preventable disease as cigarette smoking. Obesity can be controlled through diet and exercise, and one way to get your heart rate up is through bicycling; one of the top three exercises for cardiovascular fitness. Bicycling is also a cost-effective form of exercise. Beautiful trails have the ability of drawing individuals outdoors, causing them to actually want to be outside. Even small increases in physical activity can bring measurable health benefits. The health benefits of bicycling have also been proven to benefit employers. Studies have shown that bicycle commuters work more efficiently, arriving to work eager and alert, and due to a cyclists improved health, have fewer job-related injuries.

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8 Federal Highway Administration. Rails-with-Trails: Lessons Learned.
10 City of Davis Comprehensive Bicycle Plan, October, 2006.
Environment
Bicycling affects the environment in a number of different ways. First of all, bicycling is powered by a renewable energy source: the cyclist. Second, bicycling does not pollute the air around it the way a vehicle does. By creating bikeways we are preserving the natural environment which includes plants that naturally filter out pollutants and create oxygen. Once bikeways are constructed in scenic areas, the areas are typically protected from further development. This in turn helps preserve natural landscapes, provides needed links between fragmented habitats and offers tremendous opportunities for protecting plant and animal species\(^{11}\). Third, trails promote eco-tourism. Many communities thrive on the revenue received from natural recreation much like Damascus, Virginia accommodates to the users of the Appalachian Trail and in return profits from them.

Economy
Revenue generated by trails can greatly contribute to the local economy. As bikeways are constructed they create jobs for the area. Trail users often spend money at local businesses, on equipment, clothes, food, souvenirs and gas. Tourism along trails can also produce a need for lodging within a reasonable distance of the trail.

The sale of products or services to trail users is not the community’s only financial advancement from bikeways; trails can create cost mitigation as well. When trails are placed near waterways as a way to preserve the existing green space the green space acts as a buffer to help prevent run-off from entering the water. Trees are also often planted along trails for more than their beauty. Trees help remove pollutants from run-off and from the air. By removing pollution naturally, communities are saving themselves money.

Communities with trails have experienced increased property values due to the convenience of having such an amenity so close. In addition, bike paths have been proven to increase a community’s perceived quality of life. While trails are great for the public, they are also handy for expanding cities as well. Trails preserve linear space for future infrastructure development\(^{12}\).

Historic Preservation
Significant events, whether they occurred two days ago or two centuries ago, draw spectators. To place trails near these sites allows for easy access to the site and gives riders reason to use the trail. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy on *Historic Preservation and Community Identity* states,

“The desire to walk in the footsteps of our predecessors or stand in the exact place where a significant event occurred is a characteristically American need, indicative of a culture that values authenticity.”

\(^{11}\) Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. *Enhancing the Environment with Trails and Greenways.*

\(^{12}\) Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. *Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways.*
By placing trails on or near abandoned rail corridors preserves a piece of our past and takes us on a journey through history. Railroads show America’s advancement throughout history, the ability to get outside and enjoy this part of the past is culturally stimulating.

**Livable Communities**  
One of the major goals in today’s society is to create more livable communities. Through the construction of trails and bike lanes residents can more readily use bicycles as a form of transportation. The more connected the bikeways are to places the more efficient they are. Bikeways should connect the public to areas of employment, shopping, education and entertainment. By providing for this alternative means of transportation, we are also serving the portion of the population that does not own a vehicle or cannot drive. This portion of the population can include the underprivileged, youth and aging adults. Some older adults find that trails allow them the independence to walk or bike to areas of interest.

**Summary**  
As one can easily see, bicycling affects our everyday life whether we think it does or not. The greatest benefit bicycling provides is a healthy life. Due to the decline in the health of many American citizens, an entertaining and productive form of exercise is needed. Bicycling is not only a form of exercise, it is also an environmentally friendly mode of transportation, a great economic stimulant, a way of preserving history, and an easy approach to creating livable communities. Therefore, constructing more bikeways will promote a better quality of life for everyone.

The 110th United State Congress recognized the importance and benefits of bicycling facilities by passing the following resolution on May 21, 2008. “Whereas surveys show that a majority of people want to ride and walk more but are dissuaded by concern over traffic danger and other barriers, and case studies have shown that when those barriers to bicycling are removed, people start riding;”

**5. Public Involvement and Input**

Stearns County residents are what drive changes in the county, officials are there just to carry out the action. It is these individuals that will change the way in which bikeways are implemented in the community. Community members are the key to the success of many projects. With public input the county can more accurately provide for its residents. Throughout the production of this document we, the county, have asked for and used the community’s ideas and opinions.

**Stearns County Public Input Session**

Two Public Input Sessions were held to seek public input. At each of the Public Input Sessions Intern Roxanne Achman presented an overview of the Bikeway Plan. John Peck the Chair of the Stearns County Park Commission chaired the Public Input Sessions. A court reporter recorded a transcript of each session.
The first session was December 10, 2007 at Kennedy School in St. Joseph. Nineteen citizens attended this session. They were from the following cities – Richmond, Avon, Eden Valley, St. Joseph, Waite Park, St. Cloud, Cold Spring and Sartell.

The two main issues that the citizens spoke about were safety for bicyclists and the importance of building the Lake Wobegon Trail from St. Joseph to the Mississippi River in downtown St. Cloud.

The second session was December 11, 2007 at City Hall in Sauk Centre. Three citizens attended this session. They were from Sauk Centre, Greenwald and St. Cloud.

The primary concerns at this session were the need for better maintenance on the existing Lake Wobegon Trail, the need to make safe connecting routes for bicycles, what is the liability of a landowner next to the trail and building the Lake Wobegon Trail from St. Joseph to the Mississippi River in St. Cloud.

Input was also received via email (Table 8). The eight emails received included concerns about safety for children, building the Lake Wobegon Trail from St. Joseph to the Mississippi River in St. Cloud, getting Benton and Sherburne Counties involved, improving the bikeways in the St. Martin area and connecting the St. Martin to the Glacial Lakes and Lake Wobegon Trails.

**St. Cloud Area Planning Organization Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee**

The St. Cloud Area Planning Organization has created a Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. This committee was formed as a way to improve St. Cloud Area bikeways and pedestrian ways. The committee is composed of individuals from every aspect of life which includes avid cyclists, children, parents, transportation planners, government workers, college students and many others. Non-members are encouraged to attend the meetings and provide insight. The goal is to discuss and improve the way bicyclists and pedestrians move throughout the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area.

It is apparent throughout these meetings that St. Cloud Area residents are concerned with the way bikeways and walk-ways are functioning in the area. One of the greatest concerns was that there is no complete north/south or east/west bike routes for cyclists to use when traveling across St. Cloud. The cyclists are subjected to zig-zagging through neighborhood streets in order to stay safe. Bikeways need better connectivity in order to keep cyclists safe. Another fear for bicyclist is the motorist. Area cyclists have reported that motorists have harassed them as they were biking in bike lanes, which are located on the roadway next to vehicle lanes. Some motorists feel that bicyclist should be on the sidewalk instead of on the road. This misunderstanding is causing distress between the motorist and the cyclist.

Another concern of cyclists is that bikeways sometimes disappear. The curb areas of streets, where bicyclists are often restricted to, are often used for parking. Cyclist must jut out into traffic to avoid the parked cars, creating a safety concern for everyone. The curb area is also
often full of debris and not maintained enough for cyclists to safely ride on. These poor biking conditions need to be corrected to encourage more people to use a bicycle for transportation.

**Lake Wobegon Trails Inc**

This is a committee formed of citizens from towns along the Lake Wobegon Trail. The committee supports the expansion of the trail into St. Cloud and supports events in communities along the trail. Items discussed include promotion ideas, merchandise, trail expansion and future events. The public is welcome to participate in the meetings and are encouraged to express their opinions on trail issues.

**Area Events**

As the amount of bikeways in Stearns County increase so does the number of trail related events. Some of the tours are one time events and other are on-going traditions. Nonetheless, these events tend to bring individuals together from all over the United States for good causes.

**Habitat for Humanity 500**

This year, 2007, was the 16th annual Habitat 500 bike ride. The ride raises money for Habitat for Humanity affiliates. The ride is limited to 130 riders who must raise a minimum of $850 to designate to Habitat for Humanity. Habitat for Humanity 500 is a 500 mile bike ride that last 7 days.

Every year a new route is chosen in the Midwest, most often in Minnesota. The main purpose of the ride is to raise awareness about the need for decent, safe, affordable housing. In the summer of 2007 the ride ended in St. Cloud.

**Lake Wobegon Regional Trail Ride**

For the second year in a row Catholic Charities has sponsored a bike ride on the Lake Wobegon Trail to benefit the St. Cloud Children’s Home and local participating faith communities. The ride starts in St. Joseph and wind through several small communities and ends in Sauk Centre. The ride promotes family fun and exercise for a great cause.

**William’s Wobegon Ride**

Area Girl Scouts have decided to honor Julianne Williams, a former Girl Scout & Teen Outreach Volunteer, who died at the age of 24. Williams promoted the empowerment of girls and young women in the area. It was on 8-mile ride held in fall 2007.

**Tour of Saints**

The Tour of Saints ride has been going strong for 28 years now. Every summer riders from all across Minnesota gather at the College of St. Benedict (CSB) in St. Joseph, Minnesota for a joy filled bike ride. The ride begins and ends at CSB. Riders chose to participate in either a 35-mile or 50-mile bike ride. Along the way cyclist will enjoy miles of scenic beauty.

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byways. There are several rest stops along the route with sweet treats and cold drinks. There is typically help along the way as well in case you and your bike need a lift. Accommodations are also available for those traveling some distance to participate in the ride.

Caramel Roll Ride
This began as a way to promote the Lake Wobegon Trail and the communities along it and turned into a yearly fun family bike ride event. Cyclist show up for the ride at the designated starting point, one of the communities along the trail, and ride to which ever community they desire to finish at. Drinks, food, and shelter are available in the communities. Along the way they can grab a free gourmet caramel roll baked by local restaurants. The event is cosponsored by the Stearns County Park Department and Lake Wobegon Trails Inc.

6. Intercity Element and Rural Areas

Intercity roads are major roadways that connect one city to the next. One example of that would be the connection of Avon to Richmond via County Road 9. Many people in the rural areas of Stearns County rely on intercity elements for their everyday transportation. Intercity roads are important in urban areas as well, however, they are of more concern in the rural areas due to the limited access to surrounding cities and townships. This section will also cover cities with a population less than 5,000, which is basically every city in Stearns County except for the St. Cloud Metro Area.

Rural Government Reaction
It is apparent that there is a need for increased bikeways throughout the rural areas of Stearns County. Based on a survey completed by the Stearns County Parks Department in fall 2007, many rural areas do not have a sufficient amount of bikeways available to residents. The Stearns County Parks Department has also inventoried the county roads which have enough right-of-way for cyclist, only to discover that many of the rural county roads are lacking in the amount of roadway provided for area cyclist.

The return rate for the survey of bikeways in Stearns County cities and townships was nearly seventy percent. Just over fifty percent of the cities and townships (population less than 5,000) in rural Stearns County were highly supportive of an increased amount of bikeways, to include the development of rail-trails, in their area. All of the local governments, except for Paynesville, have fewer than five miles of documented bikeways within their jurisdiction. One of the major connecting bike facilities for this part of Stearns County is the Lake Wobegon Trail, which affects seven rural communities. However, this trail unfortunately does not extend into the St. Cloud Metro Area at this time.

As with any issue there is resistance from some to implement more bikeways in the rural areas of the county. Some residents and very few jurisdictions feel that constructing more bikeways will only hinder their community. Occasionally jurisdiction’s feel there is no need

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16 www.tourofsaints.com
17 See Table 6
18 See Table 7
for bikeways due to their distance from larger cities and parks. The assumption is made that it is easier and safer just to drive, however, if area residents were asked the opinion may be different. Another reason for resistance against the construction of trails is the amount of funding needed.

**Rural Bikeway Need**

Sources including the Stearns County Preliminary Comprehensive Plan, the 2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey of Minnesota, and the Stearns County Survey: 2006 Resident Study, have all lead to the recognized demand for more trails and bikeways in Stearns County. One of the largest issues facing local governments is the ability to obtain development funds for new facilities. By working with the county there is an increased chance of constructing more bikeways. This working relationship can lead to closer ties with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), federal funding and grants.

It is stated in chapter five of the Stearns County Preliminary Comprehensive Plan that the top most requested outdoor facility was walking and biking trails. Based on these findings Stearns County has stated in the Comprehensive Plan that “any potential trail route that expands the regional nature of the existing trail system will also be considered for county funding or technical assistance.”

Another comment made in the County’s Comprehensive Plan is to support the widening of paved shoulders along rural roads to allow for safer biking and walking.

The Soo Line, which runs between Albany and Brooten, is a 26 mile abandoned rail corridor that is owned by Stearns County. When asked what outdoor recreation facility should be developed along it, 37 percent of respondents answered a walking and biking trail. To top it off and to show the desire for the trail; of the 37 percent in favor of a walking/biking trail, 48 percent said they would be in support of a tax increase to construct and maintain the trail. The same sort of response was acquired when Stearns County residents were asked if they would support a tax increase for an extension of the Lake Wobegon Trail. 44 percent responded that they would support an increase in taxes.

**7. Urban/Suburban Element**

Areas with a population greater than 5,000 fall into the category of urban/suburban; in Stearns County this would include the cities of Waite Park, Sartell, St. Joseph, St. Cloud and their associated townships. These areas are most often covered by the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO). The APO is the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area’s transportation planners. It is their mission to successfully coordinate transportation planning, to include bicycle and pedestrian transportation, across jurisdictional boundaries in the metro area of St. Cloud. Therefore, this section will be limited in its data as more in-depth information can be found in the APO’s 2030 Transportation Plan.

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19 14% of respondents.

20 Stearns County Preliminary Comprehensive Plan, Chap. 5, pg 17.
St. Cloud Area Planning Organization

As a way to more successfully understand the need for bikeways in the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area, the APO has created the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. As mentioned earlier\(^{21}\), the Bike and Ped Committee is a way for the public to discuss their concerns with bikeways in the Metro Area. Some of the biggest concerns facing the St. Cloud Area are the lack of even one safe and separated east to west and north to south pedestrian bicycle corridor, the cost to increase existing road width, and major barriers such as Division Street.

A Future Concern

As with the rural regions of Stearns County, the primarily urban and suburban areas need more bikeways. There is a need for trail linkage between the metro area and surrounding regional trails such as the Lake Wobegon Regional Trail. These extensions will not only serve recreational and tourism needs but in addition serve as a daily mode of transportation for some.

In May 2006 a survey was conducted by Stearns County regarding the use of trails in the area. When asked whether the county had enough conveniently located trails, 64 percent answered yes\(^{22}\). However, with the population likely to increase by 34 percent by 2025\(^{23}\), the demand for more bikeways is likely to increase as well. With this population increase, the amount of travel is expected to increase by 56 percent between 2000 and 2025.

DOT research related to using bicycles as transportation found the following:
- 40% of commuters would commute by bicycle if safe routes were available.
- 40% of all vehicle trips in the U.S. are within 2 miles of home.
- 50% of the working population commutes 5 miles or less to work.
- Bicycles are the 2\(^{nd}\) most preferred mode of transportation.

The lack of bike routes and links to regional trail systems was a major concern for St. Cloud Area residents according to the 2003 St. Cloud Comprehensive Plan\(^ {24}\).

St. Cloud Area Bicycle and Pedestrian Enhancement Projects 1994 to 2003

<table>
<thead>
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<th>FY</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Project Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Beaver Island Trail (7(^{th}) Street South to Sportsman Island Road)</td>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Ped/Bike Facility (Northside Park to City of Sauk Rapids)</td>
<td>Sartell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Ped/Bike Facility (4(^{th}) Street South to South Sartell City Limits)</td>
<td>Sauk Rapids</td>
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\(^{21}\) Chapter 5, pg 15.
\(^{24}\) Appendix A: Summary of Community Visioning.
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<th>Year</th>
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<td>Beaver Island Trail</td>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Sportsman Island Road to Montrose Road)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Scenic River Trail</td>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3rd Street South to McKinley Park)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Beaver Island Trail</td>
<td>St. Cloud</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SCSU Campus to Civic Center)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Lake Wobegon Trail</td>
<td>Stearns County</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(CR 133 to APO West Boundary)</td>
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Source: 2030 Transportation Plan, Chapter 9, pg 17.

8. Bicycle Safety

Understanding bicycle safety guidelines is the means to a safe trip on any form of bikeway. Getting the word out about bike safety doesn’t have to be preached but it does have to be effective.

Education and Enforcement

In order to generate a more informed population on bicycle safety we must begin by informing school aged children. As these children begin to grow so does their ingrained knowledge of proper bicycle etiquette. By training and monitoring kids regularly on correct use of bicycles we can protect children from unnecessary accidents. However, children are not the only group using bikes. Many adults use them as well for recreation and transportation. In which case, motorist and cyclists alike need to learn the manners of the road; something that should be further emphasized during Driver’s Education classes.

Some of the chief problems seen on the roads today for bicyclists and motorists are as follows:

1. Failure to yield on road right-of-way.
2. Inattention/distraction.
3. Disregard of traffic control devices.
4. Improper/unsafe lane use.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation in cooperation with the State Bicycle Advisory Committee has created eight simple rules of sharing the road.

1. Bicyclists may ride on all Minnesota roads, except where restricted.
2. Bicyclists should ride on the road, and must ride in the same direction as traffic.
3. Motorists must at all times maintain a three-foot clearance when passing a bicyclist.
4. Bicyclists must obey all traffic control signs and signals, just as motorists.
5. Bicyclists and motorists must yield the right-of-way to each other.
6. Bicyclists must signal their turns and should ride in a predictable manner.
7. Lights and reflectors are required at night.
8. Bicyclists should always wear helmets.\textsuperscript{25}

In the St. Cloud Metro Area over a five-year span from 2002 – 2007 there were over 200 accidents between vehicles and bicycles. The Stearns County area outside of St. Cloud only experienced five vehicle/bicycle accidents in the same time period\textsuperscript{26}. A combination between the risk of biking and the crash statistics of the area indicates that there is a need for more bike safety enforcement.

How to Promote Safety
Information on safe bicycle usage should be made available at schools, employment areas, recreation facilities, and other places where the general public can easily access it. A helmet promotion program is another great way to support safe biking. This program would emphasize how to correctly wear helmets, illustrate the amount of protection provided by helmets, supply helmets at a reduced price, and reward individuals for proper use. Also, by updating bikeway maps regularly cyclists will become more aware of new routes that may be safer for them to use than their typical route. By promoting safe bicycling we can decrease the amount of bicycle accidents and increase the number of bicycle users.

9. Implementation

In order to make a difference in the way individual’s bike in Stearns County we need to have an approved plan; and that plan is the Stearns County Bikeway Plan in accordance with the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan. Goals and values set forth in a comprehensive plan are built into local law helping to enforce a community’s vision.

Stearns County Comprehensive Plan
At the time of this documents construction, Stearns County was in the process of updating its comprehensive plan for 2007. Objective number three in the transportation chapter states that “In all roadway improvement projects, consider how needs of pedestrians and bicyclists can be met through right-of-way improvements, safety improvements, and involvement of these users in the planning process.” Another statement in the County’s Comprehensive Plan is to “support creation and expansion of trails that serve not only recreational and tourism but also daily transportation needs.”\textsuperscript{27} It is statements such as the ones stated that are encouraged through local law making it possible to improve the areas bikeways.

Coordination and Participation
It is important to coordinate such efforts with all stakeholders. Two of the largest organizations that affect bike facility development are the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT). The DNR plays a large part in funding, constructing and maintaining trails throughout Minnesota, therefore, cooperation between the county and the DNR is a must. Mn/DOT is an organization that has provided funding and corridors for pedestrian bicycle trails. MnDOT’s primary focus is transportation; as a result their interest in bike facilities is quite

\textsuperscript{25} “Share The Road”. Mn/DOT and the State Bicycle Advisory Committee. www.sharetheroadmn.org
\textsuperscript{26} St. Cloud Police Department. Office of Records. Nov. 17, 2007
large. Bikeway standards for the state of Minnesota were written by Mn/DOT making coordination with them a requirement. The documents that need to be considered are entitled the Mn/DOT Bicycle Modal Plan and the Mn/DOT Facility Design Manual. A third group Stearns County must work with is the St. Cloud APO due to the coordination and funding role they play in the development of trails and bikeways in the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area.

Other stakeholders include local governments, the federal government, regulatory agencies, special interest groups, sporting groups, various businesses, residents, and transit providers. By becoming more involved with these players the county is more likely to get the approval and support to move ahead in the implementation of additional bikeways and improved facilities. The County Highway Department ultimately decides the width of road shoulders on county roads.

**Use of Additional Resources**

By keeping in constant coordination with bikeway trends presented by various resources Stearns County can ensure proper bikeway improvements. The Mn/DOT web site is updated regularly with information on the design, planning, funding, and safety issues for bicycling. This web site also offers links to federal and state information on biking. The St. Cloud APO has created a Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee that allows community members to get involved in bikeway planning for the area, allowing the county access to public opinion regularly. Stearns County administers surveys on occasion to obtain a broader perspective on bikeway facilities throughout the entire county as well.

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