



Small Towns and Rural Communities

Activity-Friendly Routes to Everyday Destinations

What are activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations?

Activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations are connections that let people safely and easily walk, bike, or move actively using an assistive device to reach key locations, such as homes, parks, libraries, general stores, schools, and other community amenities. Activity-friendly routes look different in every community, but can include sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, or access to transit stops.

Learn more about activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/activepeoplehealthynation/index.html>

A common misconception about activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations and other initiatives to support walking, biking, and moving actively is that these initiatives only work in big cities and suburban areas. The truth is, activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations play an important role in rural communities: they connect all of the amenities that make rural places unique. Whether it be a shared-use path to a worksite, a bus stop to a park, or an attractive alley to the town square, activity-friendly routes can help people move safely and connect to the natural landscapes and attractions your community has to offer.



Photo: City of Warsaw, MO

Many rural communities have reaped the benefits of activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations. For example, **Warsaw, Missouri** gradually built an extensive mixed-use trail network to connect its downtown to various parks and amenities along its historic riverfront. As a result, Warsaw attracted over \$4.5 million in private investment and increased tourism revenues, as well as improved health and quality of life for many of its 2,100 residents.¹



Photo: Craig Workman (City of Whitefish, MT)

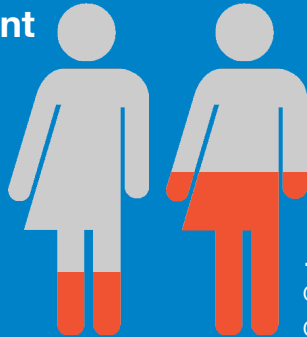
Similarly, **Whitefish, Montana** secured a federal TIGER grant (now known as BUILD) to convert its main street, which is also designated as a state highway, into a safer, more comfortable place for people walking, biking, and moving actively with assistive devices. With this grant, Whitefish planted street trees, added marked crosswalks with curb ramps, and reconfigured the street to better balance the needs of people working, shopping, and moving actively in the community with the needs of traffic passing through.²

The need for activity-friendly routes in rural communities³

Activity-friendly routes save lives by preventing **traffic crashes** through safer, slower street design that balances the needs of all people who share the street. Traffic crashes kill a disproportionate number of people in rural areas:

Activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations are also safer and healthier for **older adults**. They increase independence, reduce isolation, and dramatically improve quality of life for these individuals, who make up a larger portion of the rural population:

Only **19 percent** of the U.S. population lives in rural areas...



...but **49 percent** of all traffic deaths occur in rural areas.

17 percent of the rural population is age 65 or over, compared to **13 percent** of the population in urban areas.

Another common misconception about activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations is that they are too expensive for rural communities, or that there are no funding sources available to support them. However, the reality is activity-friendly route projects such as Complete Streets cost about a third as much to build compared to typical car-oriented transportation projects.⁴ If Complete Streets are implemented during routine repavement projects, the cost is even smaller.

Small towns and rural areas are eligible for federal funding through rural set-asides, usually distributed by the state department of transportation or a rural planning organization. This includes programs such as the Federal Transit Administration's Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP), which distributes funds to support rural projects in states' transportation improvement plans.⁵



Photo: City of Warsaw, MO

CALL TO ACTION

Look for opportunities to implement Complete Streets and activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations as part of ongoing projects, beginning with connections to downtown and natural areas and gradually expanding the network. Work with state departments of transportation to seek partnerships and funding through federal rural set-asides.

1. National Complete Streets Coalition (2018) The Best Complete Streets Initiatives of 2017. Available from: <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/best-complete-streets-initiatives-2017/>.

2. U.S. Department of Transportation (2020) All Awarded Projects 2009-2019. Available from: <https://www.transportation.gov/content/awarded-projects-2009-2019>.

3. American Public Transportation Association (2017) Public Transit's Impact on Rural and Small Towns: A Vital Mobility Link. Available from: <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/APTA-Rural-Transit-2017.pdf>.

4. Smart Growth America (2015) Safer Streets, Stronger Economies: Complete Streets Project Outcomes from Across the Country. Available from: <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/evaluating-complete-streets-projects-a-guide-for-practitioners/>.

5. Federal Transit Administration (2020) Formula Grants for Rural Areas - 5311. Available from: <https://www.transit.dot.gov/rural-formula-grants-5311>.

Icon courtesy of OliM of the Noun project.