**Active Transportation/Nonmotorized Transportation**

**Background**

Active transportation, also known as nonmotorized transportation, is increasingly recognized as an important consideration when planning and designing transportation systems. Active transportation modes include walking, bicycling, skating, skateboarding, and travel in wheelchairs and other mobility assistive devices. Active transportation occurs on trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, roadway shoulders, and within the travel lanes. Transit service is an important counterpart to many active transportation trips, since access to and from bus and rail is often made by a nonmotorized means.

Pierce County began formally planning for nonmotorized travel in the 1990s. The 1992 Pierce County Transportation Plan included policy language instructing the County to develop a comprehensive plan for nonmotorized transportation. After an extensive public involvement process, the Pierce County Nonmotorized Transportation Plan (NMTP) was adopted in 1997. The latter plan contains policies and an extensive list of prioritized project recommendations, both on road and off road. The NMTP later became a section of the Transportation Element of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan.

Subsequent to the NMTP, Pierce County has adopted Community Plans for 11 different unincorporated areas of the county. Most of the Community Plans have included nonmotorized project recommendations which primarily have either reinforced or supplemented the nonmotorized project recommendations in the NMTP. The Community Planning efforts revised the NMTP project descriptions and relative priorities in many cases. A more detailed discussion on project recommendations occurs later in this section.

**Active Transportation Planning Requirements**

In 2005, the Growth Management Act (GMA) was amended with the passage of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5186 (**ESSB 5186**). This amendment requires the transportation element of a comprehensive plan to include a pedestrian and bicycle component to include collaborative efforts to identify and designate planned improvements for pedestrian and bicycle facilities and corridors that address and encourage enhanced community access and promote healthy lifestyles.

Under the GMA, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is required to review and certify the transportation elements in comprehensive plans to ensure that they conform to GMA transportation planning requirements and are consistent with PSRC’s regional growth strategy and transportation plans (**Vision 2040** and **Transportation 2040**). The PSRC Local Comprehensive Plan Checklist requires a pedestrian and bicycle component that includes strategies, programs, and projects to improve walking and bicycling. The Vision 2040 Multicounty Planning Policies (MPP) provide specific direction on the ways that Comprehensive...
Plans need to be consistent with regional policy. The following MPPs are particularly pertinent to contents of the active transportation section of Comprehensive Plans:

- **MPP-T-11** Prioritize investments in transportation facilities and services in the urban growth area that support compact, pedestrian- and transit-oriented densities and development.
- **MPP-T-14** Design, construct, and operate transportation facilities to serve all users safely and conveniently, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users, while accommodating the movement of freight and goods, as suitable to each facility’s function and context as determined by the appropriate jurisdictions.
- **MPP-T-15** Improve local street patterns – including their design and how they are used – for walking, bicycling, and transit use to enhance communities, connectivity, and physical activity.
- **MPP-T-16** Promote and incorporate bicycle and pedestrian travel as important modes of transportation by providing facilities and reliable connections.

The [Pierce Countywide Planning Policies](#) also include policies relating to active transportation. In particular, policy TR-12 states that the County shall plan and implement programs, as appropriate, for designing, constructing and operating transportation facilities for all users, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. Pierce County policies relevant to nonmotorized planning and implementation are found at the end of this section.

### Existing Nonmotorized Projects

As mentioned earlier, there are nonmotorized project recommendations with the [Nonmotorized Transportation Plan (NMTP)](#) and the 11 Community Plans. When a project is coincident in the NMTP and a Community Plan, the Community Plan project description and priority rating takes precedence since the Community Plans are more recent documents and are intended to provide detail to the countywide Plan.

The projects in all of the plans were selected by citizen committees. To give projects a relative sense of priority, the committees were asked to place each project in one of four categories: Premier, High, Medium, and Low. The NMTP projects by category are listed in Table 12-R.

**Table 12-R: Nonmotorized Transportation Plan Projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Type</th>
<th>Premier</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing County Road</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New County Road</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Trail or Path</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City or Town</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State or Federal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 12-R shows, the roads in the unincorporated area (County) are classified in the NMTP as three different project types. The proposals on an *Existing County Road* consist of paved shoulders, sidewalks, wide curb lanes, and/or a trail or pathway adjacent to the roadway. The proposals on a *New County Road* refer to new roads that are proposed for construction that will have pedestrian and bicycle facilities when built. The *County Trail or Path* category encompasses proposals for exclusive nonmotorized facilities that are not within a County road right-of-way. In total, there are 402 projects in the unincorporated area proposed within the NMTP. It should be noted that some of these projects have now been constructed or have been annexed by Cities.

Table 12-R also lists projects in the NMTP that are planned by municipalities and the State or Federal government. These were not given a priority rating, since they are out of the control of Pierce County.

The Community Plan projects are listed in Table 12-S, identified by the area and priority rating. Only those Community Plan projects that included nonmotorized elements are listed.

**Table 12-S: Community Plan Projects that Contain Nonmotorized Elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Plan</th>
<th>Premier</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alderton-McMillin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anderson &amp; Ketron Islands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browns Point &amp; Dash Point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederickson</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gig Harbor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Peninsula</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-County</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkland-Spanaway-Midland</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Hill</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Anderson & Ketron Islands and Browns Point & Dash Point did not assign priorities.*

Map 12-19 and Map 12-20 show the location of NMTP and Community Plan projects. As noted, there is overlap between projects in the different plans, as well as overlap with the NMTP.
Map 12-19: Nonmotorized Project Recommendations in Adopted County Plans
Map 12-20: Nonmotorized Project Recommendations in Adopted County Plans
PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

Pierce County has numerous existing programs and strategies that address the provision and promotion of active transportation facilities and travel. The effort to address and promote nonmotorized travel will increase and diversify over time. The following is a summary of existing and proposed programs related to active transportation.

COMPLETE STREETS

Policy 12.2 in this document instructs the County to endorse the concept of complete streets, which promotes roadways that are safe and convenient for all users. In 2014, the Pierce County Council adopted Ordinance 2014-44s, pertaining to the provision of complete streets. Complete streets is a term used to describe project implementation that provides for safe and convenient roadways for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motor vehicle drivers of all ages and abilities. The ordinance was listed in The Best Complete Streets Policies of 2014, a report published by the National Complete Streets Coalition, a program of Smart Growth America.

The ordinance specifically pertains to newly constructed or reconstructed roads and directs Pierce County to provide features for all users when building new roadway connections or completing major reconstruction of a road. In the urban area, these roadway elements typically would include paved shoulders for bicyclist and sidewalks for pedestrians and other users. In the rural area, where sidewalks are not typically constructed, the improvement would typically consist of a paved shoulder. In some cases, a gravel shoulder or roadside trail or pathway might be constructed.

The Complete Streets ordinance includes provisions for precluding the construction of elements for all modes where there are extreme technical, fiscal, or environmental challenges or other reasons where such improvements are not in the best interests of the County or residents. In these cases, the ordinance recommends that the County consider nearby facilities where nonmotorized users can travel in absence of complete streets implementation on the facility that is under construction.

The ordinance also directs the County to consider projects on roadways that are not undergoing major construction, such as standalone shoulder paving and sidewalk construction. Pierce County has several standalone active transportation projects listed in the 2015 Transportation Programs document, which is a six-year program of projects that is published annually. One of these projects, Park Avenue South between 125th Street South and Garfield Street South, was awarded a $429,000 grant from the 2014 Washington State Transportation Improvement Board Urban Sidewalk Program.

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS

Pierce County coordinates with school districts to plan and implement safe routes to school for students who travel by nonmotorized means. The three elements of a successful program are engineering and infrastructure improvements, education and encouragement activities, and
enforcement. The County regularly applies for grant funding through the State’s Safe Routes to School grant program, but has had limited success in the funding competition. The County strives to expand upon this program and achieve more success in obtaining funding. In 2015, Pierce County has allocated $200,000 for staff support for developing a plan with public school districts for identifying priorities, feasibility, and financing options for walking routes near schools.

### Transportation Demand Management

Pierce County has been involved in Transportation Demand Management (TDM) activities since the 1990s. The primary focus has been on working with large employers to reduce the number of drive-alone commute trips, as required by the Washington State Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Act.

Pierce County is now investing in more all-inclusive strategies to encourage travel behavior changes for all types of trip purposes. Bicycling and walking to destinations are important components of any TDM program. Goal T-27 in this document instructs the County to encourage alternate travel modes within an efficient multimodal transportation system that reduces and shifts travel demand to improve the flow of people and goods. In order to develop a successful TDM program, there must be connectivity to other modes such as walking bicycling, cars, and transit. A combination of modes often come into play when taking transit (i.e., walking or bicycling to a transit stop or station). Or sometimes the TDM strategy is simply planning for one mode, such as bicycling or walking. The Transportation Demand Management (TDM) section describes the Pierce County TDM Plan and strategies in greater detail.

### Trail Development

The Pierce County Parks and Recreation Department is the lead agency developing trails in the unincorporated areas of the County. Pierce County Public Works provides support in this effort, including project design and right-of-way acquisition activities. Pierce County coordinates with municipalities and organizations such as ForeverGreen Trails and the Foothills Rails-to-Trails Coalition in planning and implementing trail projects.

Natural and built environmental constraints preclude trail construction in some areas, making sidewalks and roadway shoulders essential extensions of the trail system. Policy 12.1.1 in this document instructs Public Works to work collaboratively with other organizations, including Pierce County Parks and Recreation to develop the Pierce County Regional Trail System, community nonmotorized connections, and local access.

Trail development in the County has largely focused on the Regional Trail System, through the guidance of the Pierce County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan. The 25-mile long Foothills Trail in eastern Pierce County, seventeen of which is currently paved, is the most notable example of trail development in the unincorporated area. More recently, the Public Works and Parks and Recreation Departments are collaborating to identify a system of community connectors that would link schools, parks, and neighborhoods in Pierce County and tie into the Regional Trail System. The desire is to develop a system of trails where possible;
however, it is clear that constraints will require some of the connectors to be sidewalks and/or roadway shoulders.

**AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

The *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) became Federal law in 1990 and has been updated numerous times over the years. ADA requires public entities to inventory facilities for deficiencies and create a transition plan to bring facilities into compliance with accepted standards. In 2014, Pierce County inventoried all sidewalks, curb ramps, pedestrian crossings, and traffic signal systems located on public roadways in unincorporated Pierce County to determine whether they were in compliance.

In 2015 the County initiated an ADA Transition Plan to document the strategy and timeline for bringing pedestrian facilities into ADA compliance. Ultimately, all facilities will need to be compliant. It should be noted that the ADA Transition Plan will only address existing facilities, not the construction of new facilities.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

As noted earlier, there are a number of roadway improvement projects that have constructed nonmotorized improvements as part of the larger project. Key examples of such projects are the Canyon Road East corridor south of SR 512 and the 176th Street East corridor. Both of these projects increased the number of through lanes and added significant sections of sidewalk for the community.

While these projects are significant in scope, it is evident that there is strong community support for more nonmotorized facilities. This desire for additional walkways and paths has been (and continues to be) expressed in numerous meetings held in community forums. As noted earlier, there are many plan recommendations within the Community Plans and the Nonmotorized Transportation Plan, but very few specifically nonmotorized projects are funded and implemented. The strategy for this Transportation Element calls for the targeting of approximately $20 million through 2030 for the purpose of constructing nonmotorized facilities. These funds may also be used to address projects that may be required as part of the Transition Plan efforts.

One target for expending the above noted $20 million may focus on the needs arising from the ongoing work with the schools, communities, and other stakeholders to build more facilities under the Safe Routes to School Program. The County Council has already tasked staff with reporting on the issue of Safe Routes to School. This Transportation Element suggests that both the short and long term funding capacity of the County be examined to support a program that would work with the local schools and other interested parties to develop partnerships and apply for grant opportunities that would strengthen the chances of winning awards for such a program. For example, in developing this nonmotorized section, Public Works staff worked with the Parks Department in developing a very conceptual network of possible candidate active transportation facilities that could link not only schools to communities but other places.
Figure 12-O below shows a very preliminary product that requires more stakeholders to discuss not just the need for specific types and location of active transportation facilities but also the funding and scoping of tasks involved in achieving success in realizing these valued facilities. It is anticipated that the conversations with nonmotorized stakeholders and an understanding of the needs and resources will result in an updated nonmotorized/Active Living strategy.

**Figure 12-O: Conceptual Graphic – Active Living Facilities**
Ultimate Capacity

This Transportation Element recommends that the County endorse and adopt measures that would enable the designation of Ultimate Capacity Roadways. As noted earlier, the end result of this designation would allow certain roadways to carry traffic above their designated service standard without being subject to the transportation concurrency requirements. It is important to note that such roadways in being Ultimate Capacity would be reviewed for their operational and safety needs for all users, both motorists and pedestrians. Identification of these needs may also bring certain nonmotorized projects forward for possible implementation.