

# Chapter 24: Bicycles and Pedestrians

## INTRODUCTION

Bicycling and pedestrian facilities serve a number of functions within the Rutland Region. They serve recreation, health and transportation needs. They also serve distinct use patterns: localized facilities move users within a site or small area, like a village, while longer-distance connectors link localized facilities, towns, or villages to one another.

Formal pedestrian and bicycle facilities have played a secondary role in the Region's transportation network in the recent past. This is a result of the Region's disparate rural settlement and work patterns, the inconvenience of this mode for inter-town travel, the Region's weather, and the choice over the past half century to focus time and funding on road networks for automobile and truck traffic.

This chapter is focused on the link between bicycling and walking and the transportation network as a whole in the Rutland Region, recognizing that bicycling and walking are energy efficient, healthy, and environmentally friendly modes of transportation that can support economic development in compact villages and downtowns.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities provide key support in the Region's transportation infrastructure. While they rarely serve as the primary means of travel to work for people – just five percent of Rutland County residents reported walking or bicycling to work in the spring of 1999 (source: *US Census, 2000, SF 3*) – however walking makes up a segment of most trips. These modes are used by people who live near to work or school, work in villages or downtowns, visit the Region, or are shopping, running errands, visiting friends, or making innumerable other short-distance trips.

Facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists in

the Rutland Region are scattered and generally offer little connectivity between towns. Facilities are limited for the most part to the downtowns of the Region's largest communities and on-road facilities for bicycling.

### *Pedestrian Facilities*

Most walking and pedestrian facilities are concentrated in the Region's downtown and village areas, notably in Rutland City, Brandon, Fair Haven, Poultney, West Rutland, Killington, Castleton, Pittsford, Proctor and Wallingford. All have extensive sidewalk networks throughout the center connecting the higher density residential areas. Recent transportation enhancement grants have buoyed efforts to improve sidewalks.

Sidewalks in these areas are in varying states of repair, depending upon the quality of construction and maintenance they have received over the years. Several communities have made concerted efforts to maintain and clean sidewalks in business areas.

Limited sidewalks and pedestrian access have been provided alongside commercial and industrial buildings outside of village



### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Pedestrian travel within communities reduces the parking demand, turning movements and the parking maneuvers which can result in accidents.



Killington Pico Cycling Club website

Roads can be designed to accommodate bicyclists, such as this one in Middlebury

**CONNECTING  
THE PLAN**

Sidewalks were key elements of many of the Region's historic villages. In some cases, they were paved over during the past century. Towns are now rediscovering that these areas are useful in maintaining vibrant villages

and downtown areas around the Region. Infrastructure in these places has focused almost entirely on efficient circulation between parking areas and retail and employment centers.

***Bicycle Facilities***

Bicycle facilities in the Region are extremely limited. The only delineated or separated paths for bicycle use are behind the downtown Rutland shopping plaza,

along the former Delaware and Hudson Railroad between Poultney and Castleton, and connecting West Rutland recreation center to Vermont Route 133.

Signed bicycle routes, which share travel lanes with vehicles, are posted in each quadrant of Rutland City. Local, State, and Federal roads, designed primarily for vehicular traffic but legally permissive of bicycles, make up the remainder of the bicycle network. Few of these roads were built and are regularly maintained with cyclists in mind. In many communities, limited vehicular traffic allows cyclists to use rural roads in relative safety.

Trees, road signage, parking meters, and a handful of dedicated racks in downtown Rutland and Killington serve as parking facilities for bicycles in the Region. No public sheltered or protected bicycle parking facilities are present.

**UNMET NEEDS**

***Dedicated bicycle facilities for inexperienced riders***

Studies have demonstrated that most people would prefer to bicycle on paths separated from motorized traffic because of concerns for safety. In the Region, there are virtually no paved paths dedicated to use by bicycles and pedestrians.

Because of this, there are no formal places for children and others to learn and become comfortable with riding bicycles for transportation purposes. Bicycle commuters are forced to share narrow travel lanes in an environment suitable only for experienced riders.

***Safe links between communities and to popular destinations.***

Bicycle-friendly links between residential and commercial areas are poor throughout much of the Region. In most communities, cyclists are forced to share busy State Routes, using travel lanes or narrow shoulders to travel between major

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Walk Rutland, started in 2005 under the Rutland Area Physical Activity Coalition, was very successful. Regular walks took place in towns across the Region.

points. Inter-municipal links, especially in areas that have high numbers of potential users because of population densities and terrain, such as the Business Route 4 corridor between West Rutland and Rutland City, have not fostered bicycle use. In some areas, using bicycles to get to popular retail and employment centers is discouraged by prohibitions on use of roads by bicycles.

***Sidewalk maintenance***

Sidewalk maintenance is not consistent throughout the Region. In many communities, sections of sidewalks are missing or have suffered from deferred maintenance that make them unpredictable and unsafe for pedestrians. This is especially true in neighborhoods immediately outside of village and city centers. Winter snow and ice removal is also a challenge in most communities. Shared responsibility for upkeep and maintenance between property owners and municipalities exacerbates both problems.

***Missing links to schools***

Several communities around the Region offer no suitable means for children to walk or bicycle to school in a safe environment. Schools located outside historic village centers are especially prone to these missing links. With few alternatives, parents choose to drive or have their children bussed to schools. This incurs additional financial burdens and limits the amount of exercise children get.

***Development that discourages walking and cycling***

Residential and commercial developments over the past several decades have been designed in such a way as to discourage people from using any form of transportation other than the motor vehicle. Among the chief obstacles for pedestrians and bicyclists:

- Wide parking areas between streets and

retail storefronts that make for unpleasant and potentially unsafe environments.

- Individual commercial buildings on their own lots make for long travel distances between stores, employment areas, and homes.
- Homes built on cul-de-sacs far away from services make bicycle and pedestrian trips longer and less convenient.

***Limited Local Funds***

Towns have limited funds for transportation infrastructure maintenance and enhancement. Expenditures for bicycle and pedestrian facilities are often low priorities when roads are deteriorating and equipment needs replacing. As a result, these facilities continue to have missing links and limited maintenance.

**FUTURE TRENDS**

***Increased bicycling and walking***

The link of physical activity to health has received much publicity of late. The number of programs, such as Vermont League of Cities and Towns “Walk across



**FAST FACT**

A number of towns around the Region have recently added to their sidewalk networks. Poultney, Rutland City, and West Rutland have led the way, adding and upgrading significant stretches for use by walkers.

State/ Federal transportation enhancement applications and grants have been a major source of funding for these improvements.



Pedestrian and bicycle facilities are limited in the Region, including in Pawlet

Bennington County Regional Commission



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Pedestrian facilities are vitally important for those who do not drive, children and the elderly. Providing pedestrian access for these groups can improve their health, quality of life and the community. Facilities include not only sidewalks but also other amenities such as benches and landscaping, to help pedestrians feel welcomed, comfortable and safe.

Vermont,” and the common presence of pedometers on people’s belts all confirm this trend. Bike Vermont and other bike touring companies have expanded. Funded in part by the Bowse Trust and VTrans, the Rutland Area Physical Activity Coalition has been involved in a number of programs such as Bike Smart, a four point bike safety presentation for fourth and fifth graders, and Movement Movement Exercise Program, designed to help people who are at risk for diabetes to walk.

### *Increased Municipal Attention to Pedestrian Infrastructure*

Recent history suggests that a growing number of communities in the Rutland Region are actively seeking State, Federal, and other funds to improve their sidewalk networks, partly as a result of the renewed interest in villages and downtown areas.

### *Rising Gasoline Prices*

Increasing worldwide demand for oil and uncertain long-term supply will continue to affect gasoline prices for the foreseeable future. Spikes in prices may force individuals and families to seek alternative forms of transportation for the majority of their trips. As this trend develops, the usefulness of good sidewalk and bicycle networks will become increasingly apparent.

## MEETING CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS

### *Better Identify Needs*

It is important to identify bike and pedestrian user groups, to recognize the range of possible bike and pedestrian facilities, and understand current levels and types of activity. With an



understanding of these issues, it is possible to develop a clear set of goals and measurable objectives toward which the Region can work.

### *Existing Funding for Facilities*

A series of Federal and State grants are available for communities to develop and improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Federal transportation budgets of the past ten years have demonstrated a commitment to improve this type of infrastructure. Local communities must present a match of between ten percent and twenty percent. In many cases, planning, coupled with the willingness to commit resources, either dollars or in-kind, can leverage additional funds to develop infrastructure.

Secure, convenient and visible bicycle racks, placed at locations which meet the needs of potential users, such as libraries, schools and commercial centers, make bicycle travel a more viable mode for certain types of trips.

### *Reviewing Local Regulations*

Local zoning and subdivision regulations can encourage or require bicycle and pedestrian facilities to be included through forms of development review. This approach can be especially effective in areas where the community has identified a particular corridor that pedestrians and bicyclists frequently travel.

### *Inclusion of bicycle/pedestrian facilities in roadway projects*

The Federal requirement, instituted with Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, encouraged the integration of modes in projects. Roadway projects such as reconstruction, widening or paving should provide bicycle and pedestrian access. Greater continuity for bicycle and pedestrian travel will be achieved by removing barriers and missing links.

The regional bicycle network requires

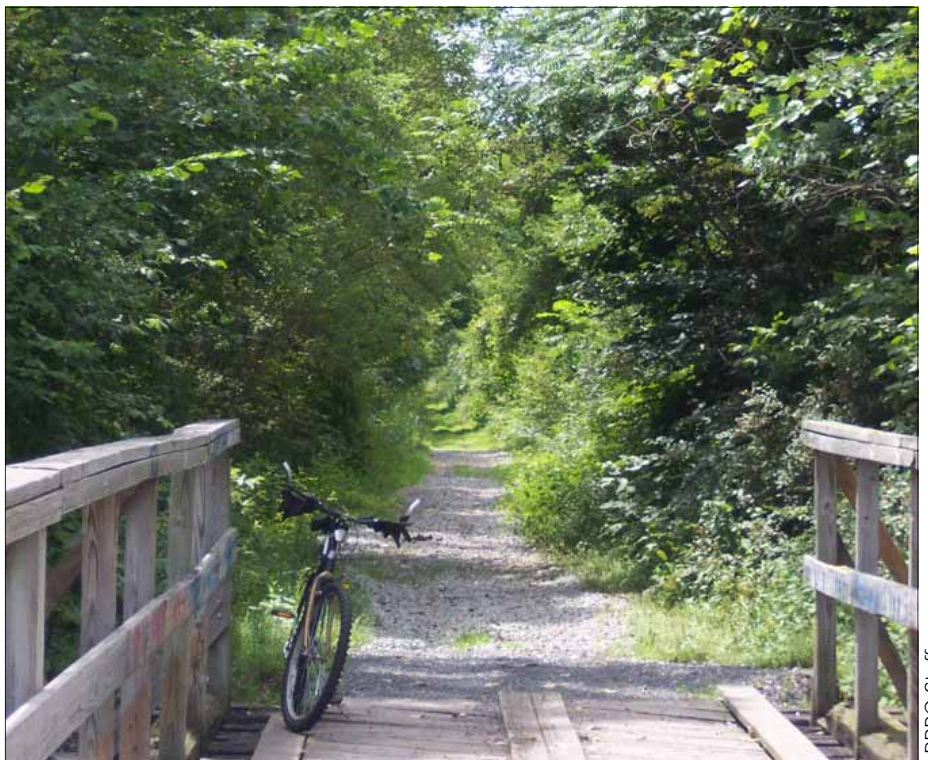
consistent and paved shoulders, a minimum of four- feet wide. Specifically this includes Routes 4A, 30, 100, 103, 133 and 140. Incorporating pedestrian facilities into new development projects is less costly than retrofitting and may include sidewalks, crosswalks, landscaping and traffic calming. The City of Rutland has many missing links in the network, and efforts should be made to complete sidewalks in these areas.

### *Maintenance of existing facilities*

The maintenance of shoulders and sidewalks is a constant need. When maintenance is neglected, their usefulness diminishes.

### *Education of Bicyclists, Pedestrians and Motorists and Enforcement of Laws*

Educational programs about the economic, transportation system performance, environmental, health and social benefits of biking and walking can and should be directed at bicyclists, pedestrians and motorists of all ages and



RRPC Staff

The former D & H railway in Castleton and Poultney has become a multi-use trail

experience levels. Educational programs can also be targeted at the general public and public officials .

Smart biking and walking skills will create safer conditions for all road users. Bicyclists need to know how to ride safely. Safety includes obeying the rules of the road and wearing helmets. Motorists need to know how to safely share the road with bicyclists. Pedestrians need to be educated about walking facing traffic and crossing roads. Enforcement of laws equally among motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians will increase safety.

### *Connecting Modes*

The easier it is to switch between modes, the more likely it is that people will utilize different modes. Bike racks should be installed on “The Bus” to encourage travel by these two modes.

- Work with the local organizations to promote infrastructure for safe and comfortable bicycle, pedestrian and vehicular travel.
- Develop a Regional Bicycle Plan for an interconnected network of bicycle paths, and routes to access key facilities within the region.
- Work on planning studies and pedestrian plans for village/town centers.
- Work with local officials to increase awareness of the economic benefits of bike/ped facilities.
- Assist communities in locating and securing funds for planning and implementation of bike/ped facilities.
- Educate bicyclists, pedestrians and motorists about safe riding, walking and driving.
- Review land uses and zoning adjacent to transportation projects; work with local decisions-makers to address conflicts, opportunities and interdependencies.

## **RUTLAND RPC ACTIONS**

- Ensure that road improvement projects incorporate bike/pedestrian facilities.

