

Recommendations for Active Transportation Advocacy in New Hampshire



Introduction

Interest in active transportation is on the rise even as federal funds dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian transportation have declined in recent years. Because of this, the bicycle and pedestrian movement in New Hampshire is at a turning point. Bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups must do a better job communicating their demands if they are to win policy victories, while also continuing to improve access to active transportation. If New Hampshire can successfully increase bicycling and walking rates, there are enormous potential benefits: a healthier population with fewer injuries and deaths from collisions; less pollution;¹ less traffic; more transportation options for all, especially low income individuals; and an improved sense of community.² By coordinating advocacy efforts and focusing on policy changes at state and local levels, New Hampshire has the potential to transform the transportation landscape, generating real change that will significantly increase levels of bicycling and walking.

This report is based upon numerous key informant interviews with state and regional leaders as well as attendance at a Transport New Hampshire listening session. In this report, we review the current state of bicycling and walking and the advocacy movement in New Hampshire, and then recommend action in five key areas to help New Hampshire move to the next level.

Background

As a small rural state, New Hampshire has both struggles and opportunities with regard to the active transportation environment. While a limited funding base and distances between destinations pose challenges to creating a safe, comprehensive network for bicycling and walking, New Hampshire's substantial advocate community and small size may make it easier to influence decision makers and the general public.

New Hampshire is currently  #27 on the League of American Bicyclists' list of Bicycle Friendly States, having fallen five places from its 2012 position as #22. This decline is attributed to a lack of a statewide Complete Streets policy, the fact that fewer than 1 percent of workers commute by bicycle, the absence of dedicated state funds for bicycling, and an outdated bicycle and pedestrian plan.

1 Safe Routes to School National Partnership, "Safe Routes to School and Traffic Pollution," 2012, http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Air_Source_Guide_web.pdf.

2 Thomas Gotschi and Kevin Mills, "Active Transportation for America: The Case for Increased Federal Investment in Bicycling and Walking," 2008, http://www.railstotrains.org/resources/documents/whatwedo/atfa/ATFA_20081020.pdf.



Cover photo: John W. Corrigan, New Hampshire Safe Routes to School Coordinator

The State of Advocacy

New Hampshire has a large number of dedicated advocacy organizations at all levels working on access to active transportation (see Appendix A, Graphic 7). Strong partnerships exist between the health and transportation worlds, and, while funding issues still exist, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT) has increased its interest in and dedication to active transportation over the last few years.

Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure demand grew originally out of the recreational users' needs in the state. Initiatives that pushed for additional recreational trails, rail trails, and hiking started the movement, but the bicycle and pedestrian movement has since shifted to a demand for better infrastructure that supports active transportation for commuters and in everyday life. Dedicated federal funds for Safe Routes to School projects have also assisted in increasing demand by improving infrastructure, **teaching children active transportation skills** and showing ways that people of ages can participate in active transportation.

Notably, there are numerous organizations doing similar bicycle and pedestrian work at the state, local and regional levels in New Hampshire. Many of these groups are successful in organizing rides, teaching skills and providing safety trainings, as well as general promotion of bicycle and pedestrian activities. While the dedication and involvement of each of the organizations is admirable, there appears to be an overall emphasis on individual behavior change – despite its limited role in addressing dangers faced by people bicycling and walking – rather than a focus on bigger policy and social norms changes that could support safe bicycling and walking for all people.

In addition, New Hampshire's movement suffers from a deficit of coordination between all of the organizations. As a result, the varied goals of individual organizations make it difficult to present a clear and unified message to decision makers, the DOT, and the general public. This confusion is negatively affecting each organization's ability to improve active transportation.

There are differences in what many of the groups are requesting and what they consider to be the best use of

decision makers' limited time. Additionally, the large number of people involved in decision-making processes causes confusion about who is best to approach for different policies (See Appendix A, graphic 4). By working together, organizations could discover ways to streamline their messaging, leverage funds and share knowledge about and connections to decision makers. In addition, they might find cause to merge some of the groups into one or more cohesive organizations. Coordinating conversations will also strengthen grassroots efforts across the state.

There are numerous organizations doing similar bicycle and pedestrian work at the state, local and regional levels in New Hampshire. Among these groups, there is an overall emphasis on individual behavior change — despite its limited role in addressing dangers faced by people bicycling and walking — rather than a focus on bigger policy and social norms changes that could create environments that support bicycling and walking for all people.

Demographics and Statistics

Of New Hampshire's 1.3 million residents, 21 percent are under 18 and 15 percent are over 65 – slightly fewer children and slightly more older adults than national averages (national rates are 23.5 percent under 18 and 14 percent over 65). Like the rest of the country, New Hampshire has high obesity rates, with obesity levels at 27.3 percent of adults, making it the 28th most obese state in the nation.³ In terms of measures of poverty, just under 24 percent of New Hampshire students qualify for free or reduced lunch. While a smaller number than many states, this is still almost a quarter of the students in the state. In the past five years, the percentage of children in poverty increased from 6.5 percent to 10.9 percent of persons younger than 18 years.⁴ A new report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in

3 Trust for Americans' Health, "F as in Fat, 2013," <http://healthyamericans.org/reports/obesity2013/?stateid=NH>.

4 United Health Foundation, "America's Health Rankings," <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/nh#sthash.RuIo9uh2.dpuf>.

August 2013 showed that New Hampshire experienced a decline from 15.5 percent to 14.6 percent in obesity rates among 2- to 4-year-olds from low-income families between 2008 and 2011.⁵ New Hampshire's population is 94.4 percent white, with roughly 400 refugees entering New Hampshire every year. In 2012, there were 108 motor vehicle deaths, which is a 20 percent increase from the previous year, while pedestrian deaths rose 6.4 percent and cyclist deaths were up 6.5 percent.⁶

Prioritization of Underserved Communities

While there is a need for better active transportation infrastructure across the entire state, rural areas and low-income urban areas (especially in refugee neighborhoods) are underrepresented by active transportation advocacy groups. At the same time, these underserved communities are often the very places where significant numbers of residents are already walking, and frequently have particularly dangerous traffic conditions. Underserved communities also tend to have the highest levels of obesity and the least access to transportation options. People living in these areas may not self-identify as active transportation advocates, but may have significant interest in safe access to bicycling and walking. Involving existing community groups in work around safe, equitable and complete streets may have significant potential to increase support for active transportation while improving the outcomes of this work.

Funding and Tax Information

New Hampshire has a unique tax structure, which presents an equally unique set of challenges in funding major expenditures such as education, transportation and public health, often pitting these issues against each other. There are several issues with New Hampshire's funding that make it difficult to find additional funds to support active transportation: the state does not have sales or income taxes, all toll funds must remain within the toll system, and gas taxes must be spent on roads and bridges.

5 "Centers for Disease Control Vital Signs," last modified August 6, 2013 <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/ChildhoodObesity/index.html>.

6 "Traffic Safety Performance (Core Outcome) Measures For New Hampshire," Accessed December 2013, http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/departments/nrd-30/nca/STSI/33_NH/2012/33_NH_2012.htm.

New Hampshire's small population, combined with recent funding cuts to all federal transportation programs, means that the state does not receive enough federal money to adequately cover costs associated with developing a safe, comprehensive network for active transportation. Because of this, it is imperative that the state have strong policies in place to ensure that these funds are used in strategic, smart, and innovative ways.

Because of these limitations, it is imperative that the DOT be resourceful and strategic with any federal funds that could be used on bicycle and pedestrian projects. The state has announced it will spend the remaining dedicated SAFETEA-LU Safe Routes to School funds – funds from the last federal transportation bill that are only available for Safe Routes to School programs and do not require a local match – by awarding grants to eleven new communities for infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. The goal is to spend all the funds by the end of 2015, which DOT staff admitted was an aggressive timeline.

Despite its proactive stance on awarding these funds, the state has not been as successful in ensuring that the funds are actually spent, with a low obligation rate for the SAFETEA-LU funds of only 43 percent spent. A number of projects have given funds back or have been stalled because of changes in staff/volunteers. Another concern is that the infrastructure projects require extensive understanding of the Federal Highway Administration standards, which many local transportation departments and schools do not have experience with. Advocates are concerned for the future of Safe Routes to School, as some momentum seems to have been lost when it was absorbed into the MAP-21 TAP program. Under TAP, money has been set aside for recreation trails, but New Hampshire will not fund non-infrastructure Safe Routes to School projects, and each community must come up with a 20 percent match for all funds.

Statewide Transportation Plans

The New Hampshire Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Plan is in the process of being updated. This update was a partnership effort between the DOT, the Governor's Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation (GATIC), and all nine of the Regional Planning

Commissions (RPCs). There were 25 opportunities in the fall/winter of 2013 for the general public to make their ideas, suggestions, and concerns heard by DOT staff. Reports indicate that attendees were pleased by the attention given to active transportation and expect bicycle and pedestrian projects to be well-represented in the plan, though pressure may be necessary to ensure that language is as strong as needed.

The existing Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan from 2000 is out of date and in need of a complete overhaul. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Advisory Committee has created a subcommittee to discuss the possibility of revising the document in the near future.

Complete Streets

Complete Streets policies are one of the key approaches that many communities have taken to increasing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure while normalizing these modes of transportation in an affordable fashion. Complete Streets policies formalize a jurisdiction's commitment to plan, design, construct, operate and maintain streets so they are safe and convenient for users of all ages and abilities. Policies direct decision makers to fund, plan for, design and construct streets to accommodate all anticipated users, including people walking, bicycling, using public transportation and driving private cars or freight vehicles.⁷ One important aspect of these policies is that they assist in ensuring the most strategic use of limited funds, which would be extremely beneficial for New Hampshire.

Advocates and leaders have been discussing the desire for a statewide Complete Streets policy in New Hampshire, but the general belief is that more policies should be put in place at the local/regional level before attempting to pass a statewide policy. New Hampshire has only three Complete Streets resolutions in the entire state, in Keene, Portsmouth and Concord. This is an extremely small number for the state, as more than 500 Complete Streets policies exist across the country, and nearly 150 of those were adopted in 2012 alone.⁸

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Assessments of New Hampshire's Assets

Appendix A of this report includes power maps that lay out relationships between the majority of regional/state level groups in a direct and clear way. Transport New Hampshire is working on a network map that will act as a supplement to the power maps, by showing the individuals involved with or interested in transportation. These mapping projects will clearly show all connections throughout the state. Transport New Hampshire will analyse this data to identify gaps in capacity and influence.

The NH Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Advisory Committee plans to complete an inventory of infrastructure assets throughout the state, which will look closely at existing infrastructure, projects that are currently under construction, and projects that are in need of additional funds. Once completed, these documents could be extremely useful to the overall assessment process.

Key Agencies, Committees, and Commissions

The DOT seems to recognize that interest in active transportation is growing, but they still consider active transportation projects to be "add-ons," and they are decades behind on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure needs. There are numerous employees who are truly dedicated to active transportation and who also have the ear of decision makers. That being said, the entire department appears to be short staffed, lacks funds, and is restricted to working on projects that are deemed important by state-level legislators. They are also anticipating a massive deficit in 2015. The DOT is discussing raising additional funds through gambling, as well as revising gas tax regulations

⁷ "Complete Streets Coalition – Changing Policy," Accessed December 2013, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/changing-policy>.

⁸ "List of Complete Streets Policies," Accessed December 2013,

<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets/changing-policy/complete-streets-atlas>.

and raising the tax, but nothing will be decided before late 2014. There are some concerns that the DOT is too strict regarding federally funded projects, but the issue seems to be a lack of constructive conversation between DOT staff and local grant recipients regarding Federal Highway Administration requirements.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Advisory Committee was re-established in 2013 after being dormant since 2006. This committee has had a significant impact for both the DOT and the overall active transportation movement in the state. The committee has provided an organized way for active transportation experts to

communicate directly with DOT staff, while also creating a much-needed space for high-level advocates to better foster relationships between the groups they represent.

The nine regional planning commissions (see Appendix A, Graphic 3) are also actively involved with transportation decisions across the state. Several of the RPCs have dedicated staff whose primary roles are to work on bicycle and pedestrian projects. Because of their working relationships with DOT and control over regional projects, these staff members can have long-lasting and far-reaching impacts on active transportation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will provide key advocates the tools to move active transportation to a higher priority for decision makers, DOT, local and regional government and the general public.

1. Convene Key Advocates to Align Goals and Strategy

Identifying Goals and Strategic Plan

The first recommendation is that a small group of key advocates come together to discuss this report and develop joint goals and a shared strategy to advance walking and bicycling across the state. These goals should include, but are not limited to, capacity building, advocacy training, and passing local complete streets polices (with the intention of eventually passing a statewide policy). By deciding on one basic strategic plan for active transportation that all (or most) organizations can support, they will be more prepared to rally interest from decision makers and the general public.

Recommended key advocates who should convene and coordinate:

- Tim Blagden– Director of the Bike Walk Alliance of New Hampshire
- Rebecca Harris– Director of Transport New Hampshire
- Mark Samsel– Co-chair of the Bicycle Pedestrian Transportation Advisory Committee

Lead State Organization

In light of the problems that have existed with inconsistent messaging to decision makers, it would be helpful to have one organization to coordinate the other groups and ensure they speak with a unified voice. Given the recent addition of a paid, full-time director position, and because of the influential work they have done in the past, we recommend that the Bike Walk Alliance of New Hampshire (the Bike Walk Alliance) should serve as the head advocacy group for the state. In addition, the League of American Bicyclists already identifies them as the head state advocacy organization. The Bike Walk Alliance should work to make sure that all state level advocacy efforts are consistent with the goals and strategic plan that the key advocates have identified.

2. Conduct Policy Assessment

Policy Assessment

In order to determine the most effective way to use scarce resources to create improved environments for bicycling and walking, New Hampshire needs to conduct a detailed policy assessment. The assessment should include three components. The first component should focus on all policies (ordinances, plans, policies, processes, and procedures) that reference or affect active transportation. By knowing what exists, it will be easier to hold DOT and other governing bodies accountable for policies that have already been approved.

The second component should pull together examples of successful active transportation policies and best practices from other states. This will allow advocates to gauge what is possible, identify state-level barriers they may encounter, and collect examples of policy language that can best address their concerns. It will also give advocates the ability to understand where New Hampshire's active transportation policies stand on a national basis.

The third component requires assessing the impact and effectiveness of current policies. This will identify policies that were successful in creating active transportation opportunities as well as determine whether DOT is enforcing existing policies. This will also highlight language that is too vague or not strict enough, where the policy should be strengthened, or where there is additional need to focus on implementation. Understanding which approaches are more and less successful in New Hampshire will be vital to the success of future policies.

Funded Project List

Key advocates should also compile a list of communities that have applied for state and federal active transportation funds and a list of projects that were funded. It can be extremely useful to map the funded projects with a data overlay. This type of mapping can illuminate relationships between location, income rates, health statistics, ethnicity and crash data. (For more explanation of how data can assist in driving decision making, see our report on how Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can assist active transportation efforts.)⁹ This type of mapping can also identify areas that are not applying for funds, which tend to be places that are in most need of assistance (see below, recommendation #5).

3. Create a Strong, Unified Strategy and Message

Unified Message

As discussed in the background section and visualized in Appendix A, Graphic 7, it appears that the large number of state and regional advocacy organizations is creating

⁹ Safe Routes to School National Partnership, "A Framework for GIS and Safe Routes to School," 2013, http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/A-Framework-for-GIS-and-Safe-Routes-to-School_0.pdf.

confusion for decision makers and the general public. To remedy this, we recommend that the key advocates discuss the roles that each of the state and regional organizations can play in implementing the strategic plan (as discussed in recommendation #1). Conversations should happen with each of the organizations to ensure they are on board with the goals and strategic plan, as it is not possible to unify the statewide message without first unifying the goals and strategy. Once the regional and state advocacy organizations are in agreement with the goals and strategy, advocates should focus on better communicating consistent messaging throughout the state.

Additionally, at this point in the process, key advocates should resist the urge to start identifying benchmarks such as increased amount of sidewalk miles or a specific number of additional active transportation funds. There are numerous steps that need to be taken to better understand the current funding available, existing policies, advocacy best practices, and ways to better address equity concerns before the benchmarks can be set.

Advocacy Training

In order to transform the transportation landscape, advocacy training should occur across the state. These trainings should focus on critical skills that new and experienced advocates need, such as implementing key organizing tactics in strategizing, funding, and conducting campaigns; marketing and communicating a direct, clear message to the general public and decision makers; and fostering a successful working relationship with DOT and RPC staff. The Bike Walk Alliance plans to bring in national leaders to facilitate such training in 2014. This training will provide an opportunity to disseminate and emphasize the unified message described above.

Engaging the General Public

In addition to improving communication with decision makers, advocates need to be more proactive in creating and demonstrating demand from the general public. Except for the occasional organized opportunities for public input, the current situation does not allow locals to consistently voice their opinions at the state level, because there is confusion on how to best be heard. By identifying one state organization as the leader that will provide a

comprehensive place to discuss ideas, these voices will be better organized and their collective demand will have a greater impact.

4. Focus on Policy

Advocating for Better Policies

In order to create impactful, long term change that will significantly improve New Hampshire's environment for bicycling and walking, advocates will need to shift their focus from education and encouragement to policy strategies. Advocates must identify areas where new active transportation policy is needed, ensure that all transportation policies contain an emphasis on active transportation and improve the strength and effectiveness of existing and proposed policies. Efforts should also focus on creating a coordinated demand that applies pressure from both the general public (grassroots) and high-level decision makers (top-down).

The assessments set out in recommendation #2 will enable advocates to determine priorities for policy change. Potential policies to support at the state and local levels may include policies supportive of Safe Routes to School, new road design guidelines, traffic calming measures, traffic laws that increase safety for bicycling, zoning revisions, required bicycle and pedestrian curriculum in the education system and drivers' training programs, bicycle parking ordinances, ensuring maintenance of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and many more.¹⁰ Working with national organizations to obtain model language for policies and assess pros and cons of policy options will inform policy decisions.¹¹

Pass Complete Streets Policies

A Complete Streets policy at the state level will have the biggest impact on the state, but will require a significant

10 ChangeLab Solutions, "Getting the Wheels Rolling: A Guide to Using Policy to Create Bicycle Friendly Communities," 2012, <http://changelabsolutions.org/bike-policies>; Safe Routes to School National Partnership, "Safe Routes to School Local Policy Guide," 2011, http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Local_Policy_Guide_2011.pdf.

11 ChangeLab Solutions, "Model Bicycle Parking Ordinance," <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/bike-parking>.

amount of effort and time from all advocates and is unlikely to pass without significant preparatory work in the form of successful policies in many cities and counties. Therefore, we recommend that state advocates work closely with local advocates to pass local complete streets policies. This approach was taken in Minnesota and North Carolina, which have seen success by creating a state-wide campaign to encourage local policy adoption as a first step in pursuing a state law. Research should be done to identify roadways that are state, local and regionally maintained and owned, as local/regional policies will not have as much impact in areas with roads that are predominantly state owned.

The Bike Walk Alliance of New Hampshire is currently researching successful city and state policies that could be revised to fit the needs in New Hampshire. Advocates should work to ensure that these policies institutes specific requirements rather than merely suggesting bicycle and pedestrian involvement in projects.¹² National models will also assist with this process.¹³

Maximizing Spending on Bicycling and Walking

In addition to advocating for better policies, advocates should push DOT to dedicate all MAP-21 Transportation Alternatives Program funds to bicycle and pedestrian projects, as well as work to increase dedicated state funds for bicycle and pedestrian projects and programs, especially those focused on safety, eliminating gaps in the network and increasing access to active transportation. As bicycle and pedestrian needs are consistently addressed over time, the environment will eventually support a shift in behavior and bicycling and walking levels will increase.

5. Emphasize Equity and Cultural Competency

Prioritization of Underserved Communities

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a clear need to prioritize projects in underserved communities. By using the funding assessment discussed in recommendation #2,

12 National Complete Streets Coalition, "Complete Streets Policy Analysis 2011," <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs-resources/cs-policyanalysis.pdf>.

13 ChangeLab Solutions, "Model Complete Streets Policies," <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/laws-resolutions-cs>.

advocates can target areas that have not been properly represented. They can do this by:

- Carrying out special outreach or awareness campaigns that engage these communities in active transportation and Safe Routes to School discussions.
- Assisting such communities with application processes to ensure they are submitting competitive applications and providing support once the project has been funded.
- Requiring DOT and RPCs to award extra points to applications from underserved communities based on percentage of free and reduced lunches, income or health disparities and high incidents of bicycle and pedestrian injuries.

Please see Appendix C for more information on prioritizing underserved communities.

Tailor Advocacy Efforts

In addition to prioritizing projects in underserved communities, advocacy efforts need to be tailored to fit the varying demographics across the state. Rural areas (especially in the North Country) are less likely to have high-speed internet; refugee areas will respond better when their community leaders are involved. Advocates should make sure that plans for communication reach as many people as possible and will best address the real concerns in underserved communities. By working to ensure that they are empowering people to make changes in their neighborhoods, advocates can foster lasting relationships while making infrastructure and policy improvements. Equity issues must be discussed and addressed so that all people, especially the ones who use walking as their primary form of transportation, can safely and effectively participate in active transportation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we recommend that the Bike Walk Alliance of New Hampshire serve as the main statewide advocacy organization for active transportation. We recommend that key advocates decide on a strategic plan as well as goals to increase access to active transportation across the state. Key advocates should work with all state and regional organizations to ensure that a unified message is communicated to both decision makers and the general public. As advocates shift from a focus on education to a focus on policy change, thorough policy assessments will identify strengths and weaknesses of existing policies, identify gaps, and include examples from other states.

A primary goal for advocates should be to pass Complete Street policies in as many localities as possible over the next few years. Once this has occurred, efforts should be spent on passing a Complete Streets policy at the state level. Finally, advocates should prioritize underserved communities in all their work, noting the needs of rural, low-income, and refugee communities. This process requires community engagement, needs assessment, and implementation of policies and projects that address those needs.

Additional Resources

[New Hampshire Bicycle Friendly State Report Card](#) (League of American Bicyclists, 2013)

[New Hampshire Transportation By The Numbers](#) (Tripnet, 2013)

[New Hampshire Laws Applicable to Motor Vehicle and Bicycle Transportation](#) (New Hampshire Department of Transportation)

[Ethnic Community Profiles](#) (Governor's Office of Energy and Community Resources)

Active Transportation Sphere of Influence



New Hampshire has a number of professions interested in active transportation. While each of these professions has its own focus, they all recognize the important role active transportation plays in the overall livability of New Hampshire.

Planning Organizations



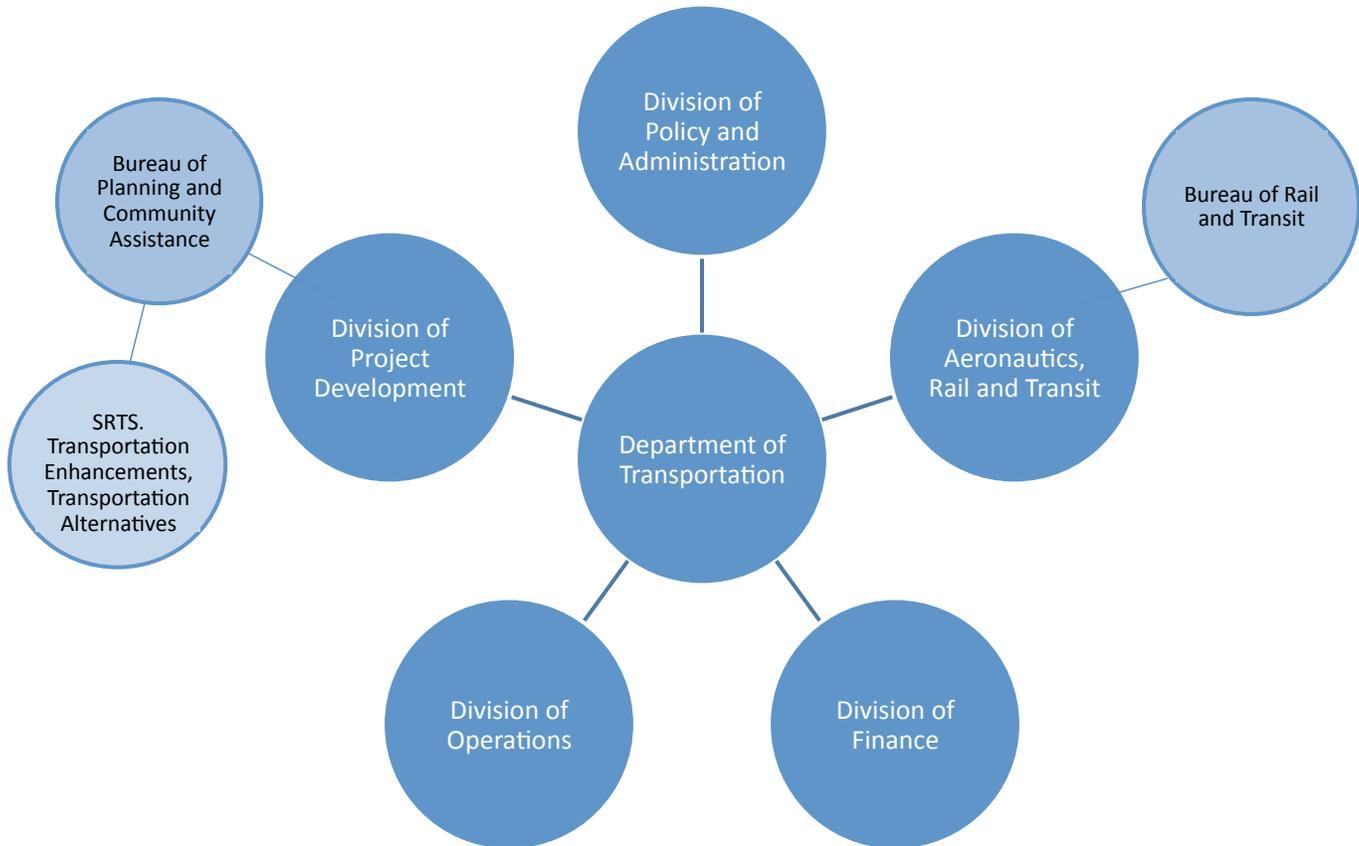
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Regional Planning Commissions



Regional planning commissions are required by New Hampshire statute to prepare regional master plans, compile housing needs assessments and review developments of regional impact. Commissioners from each of the nine Regional Planning Commissions are members of the New Hampshire Association of Regional Planning Commissions, an association that coordinates the activities of the RPCs on a statewide basis by providing information and technical assistance to its members and other groups and organizations.

Divisions Within DOT



New Hampshire Department of Transportation is made up of five divisions that address all transportation projects and issues in the state. Active transportation projects are addressed by the Division of Project Development and the Division of Aeronautics, Rail and Transit.

Health Organizations with Active Transportation Interest



These statewide organizations all recognize the importance of active transportation for the health of New Hampshire residents. While their main goals focus mostly on overall health and livability, each group currently works with active transportation advocates throughout the state.

Leadership and Policy Makers



There are a number of positions that have decision-making power regarding active transportation in the state. Advocates need to clearly understand who these people are and identify the best ways to connect with them.

Active Transportation Advocacy Groups



There are a large number of state and regional advocacy groups focused on active transportation. While each of these groups serve a role in increasing the demand for active transportation, communication must be streamlined if they are to have lasting positive impacts on active transportation.

Questions for Advocates

The key questions that follow will help advocates coordinate efforts and can serve as a reminder for organizations to think about how to be most effective. The purpose of these questions is to outline major themes regarding active transportation in the state of New Hampshire, identify ways to improve communication with the public and major decision makers and foster conversations that address how like-minded organizations can better work together to improve active transportation for all residents. These questions can not only jump start this conversation, but can also serve as a regular touchstone for ensuring that progress is occurring, key themes are addressed and strategy is revised as needs evolve.

1. Create a strong, unified message for all advocates

- Why are we all here? Why do we each care about active transportation?
- What are the major strengths each of our organizations bring to the table?
- What are the main themes that we want to address in all of our messaging?
- What is the biggest, most comprehensive goal you /your organization would like to see New Hampshire achieve in the next ten years?

2. Better communication with the general public

- How can we increase our reach to the general public?
- How can we ensure that all interested and affected have a voice and a venue to be heard?
- What opportunities were lost because we did not have the right/best people at the table?
- What decision makers are our biggest critics?
- What decision makers are our biggest supporters?

3. Policy, procedure and programmatic assessment

- What have been some policy successes that have come out of our most recent efforts?

- What statewide policies have made it difficult to improve active transportation?
- Are there policies or ordinances that exist that are not being properly enforced?
- Does current policy language encourage or require active transportation?
- What funding exists at the state and regional levels that can impact active transportation?
- What funding have we lost because of a lack of a coordinated effort?

4. Relationship with DOT

- How can DOT better assist in ensuring that active transportation projects are regarded as worthwhile, important projects?
- How can we work to better educate DOT staff on active transportation?
- Are there ways that DOT could be better structured to ensure that active transportation is properly addressed and projects are successfully managed?

5. Access and equity

- Are we considering underserved communities in our efforts?
- How can we better address rural concerns?
- Why have rural communities typically been left out of the active transportation discussions?
- What decision makers are actively involved in rural communities?
- What rural community leaders should we engage?
- How can we address issues affecting urban areas?
- How are the needs of refugee populations being addressed?
- Are underserved and/or rural communities receiving a enough funds and attention?



Safe Routes
to School
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Appendix C

Overcoming Obstacles in Underserved Communities



Serving vulnerable communities through the federal Safe Routes to School program is a priority for the Safe Routes to School National Partnership. We hope that this resource will help state advocates and state Departments of Transportation work together to develop proactive policies to assist the most underserved communities in planning for, applying for and implementing Safe Routes to School grants.

Underserved communities can face many challenges associated with applying for and implementing Safe Routes to School grants. For example, applying for a federally-funded Safe Routes to School award through a state Department of Transportation (DOT) can be a time-consuming endeavor requiring expertise and assistance from local planners and engineers, as well as coordination with the school district and city. Once a project is awarded funding, local award recipients must comply with federal highway regulations, which can require additional expertise and staffing to complete paperwork and submit for approvals. Additionally, the program is operated on a reimbursement basis, meaning that schools and localities must expend the funds and then wait for reimbursement.

Examples

Given the varying circumstances within states, state Departments of Transportation have different approaches for engaging underserved communities in Safe Routes to School. Some states may utilize just one of the best practices identified below, while others may offer a package of initiatives. Examples from twelve state Safe Routes to School programs, including contact information, can be found in the Safe Routes to School National Partnership website's **State Resources section**.

These aspects can create challenges for underserved communities in a number of ways. Schools in underserved areas are often understaffed, meaning that their availability to spearhead a Safe Routes to School award may be limited. These schools also face significant challenges in absorbing the costs of carrying out a Safe Routes to School project while waiting for reimbursement. Finally, these communities may lack access to city or county engineering staff with the expertise necessary to implement the project and comply with federal and state regulatory processes.

Yet, underserved schools and communities are often the very institutions where significant numbers of children are already walking to school in areas with dangerous traffic conditions, high crime rates and other threats to personal safety. These schools may also lack the resources to bus children, and the parents may be unable to drive, walk or bicycle their children to school. Underserved schools also tend to have the highest levels of childhood obesity and low community involvement. More needs to be done to ensure that Safe Routes to School funding reaches communities that have the greatest needs. Targeted awareness campaigns, direct financial support, staffing, training and technical assistance can all increase the ability of an underserved school to compete for state funds and successfully launch a Safe Routes to School program.



Safe Routes
to School
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Partnership

Appendix C

Overcoming Obstacles in Underserved Communities

Good Policies

Several states have paid attention to the concerns of underserved schools and communities, and are utilizing different approaches to address these special needs and challenges in the application process, through planning, and through implementation. Many state DOTs have chosen different mechanisms or initiatives to help underserved communities. Several types of approaches are identified here:

1. Develop an assessment of the state's underserved schools, and how the current Safe Routes to School program is serving those schools. By completing this analysis, states can better understand the obstacles and set targets for providing funding to the most vulnerable communities.
2. Develop a comprehensive initiative specifically for underserved communities. Some states have chosen to develop and fund a special Safe Routes to School program to ensure that infrastructure improvements and programs are implemented in underserved communities. Another approach is to require a minimum amount guarantee or percentage for the most vulnerable communities in future application cycles.

3. Carry out a special outreach or awareness campaign. Given the staffing shortages in many underserved schools, it can require extra effort to ensure that these communities are aware of Safe Routes to School awards and consider applying. Some states have carried out special outreach efforts to reach underserved communities.
4. Provide funding for planning awards. Another approach that some states use is to provide small planning awards with much-simplified applications. These awards provide funding to help smaller and underserved communities do the initial assessments and develop plans that are necessary for applying for a larger-scale award.
5. Award extra points on applications. Some states have chosen to ensure adequate representation of underserved communities by providing extra points or consideration during the application review process if a community or school meets a certain income level criteria or has a minimum percentage of children receiving free or reduced school lunches.
6. Offer engineering assistance. Underserved communities can be deterred



from applying or fall behind in completing a project due to a shortage of engineers or planners. Several states have contracted with statewide planning or engineering firms that provide expertise to underserved communities at the state's expense, or with costs built in to the award amount, to help them develop plans and carry out Safe Routes to School projects.

7. Assist with matching requirements. Some states have found ways to provide the 20% match required when using the new MAP-21 funds. This effort can help to alleviate the stress that this new requirement has created for underserved communities and will ensure that these communities are still able to apply for the funds.

Resources

- Safe Routes to School National Partnership developed a [Low-Income Resource Guide](#) for volunteers and professionals implementing Safe Routes to School in low-income schools and communities.
- Arizona Safe Routes to School Planning Assistance Program: <http://www.azdot.gov/MPD/srts/PlanAsstPrgm.asp>
- Iowa Traffic Engineering Assistance program: <http://www.iowadot.gov/traffic/teap.html>
- Active Living Research Safe Routes to School web page features reports on low-income communities and equity issues: <http://www.activelivingresearch.org/taxonomy/term/208>
- Active Living Resource Center, Safe Routes to School Pilot Program focused on low-income schools: <http://www.activelivingresources.org/saferoutestoschool8.php>
- Safe Routes to School National Partnership's Local School Project Evaluation Report, which analyzes programs in ten low-income schools around the country: http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/media/file/Health_Evaluation_Feb_2010.pdf
- Pilot evaluation of a walking school bus program in a low-income, urban community. This study was conducted in three diverse, socioeconomically disadvantaged, public elementary schools in Seattle, Washington: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/9/122>