

Section 4

Trails System Policy Framework

A. The Context for Trail Resources

The increased dependence on automobiles is not just a phenomenon affecting communities in metropolitan areas like the Twin Cities or even St. Cloud with its infamous “Division Street”. Increasingly, small towns, even those in Todd County, are experiencing more reliance on automobiles.

A central reason for the increased reliance is growth and expansion along major highway corridors and at the edges of communities. The ease of building on undeveloped land at the periphery of communities has outweighed the “higher” front-end costs and inconveniences of redeveloping within the downtown or previously developed areas. This sprawling pattern of growth and development has resulted in our increased dependence on vehicles. We have increased the distances between important places in our communities while at the same time made the pedestrian movements from place to place more dangerous.

Over the past ten to twenty years, new developments in Todd County have more often been constructed along the busy highways that travel through the communities, most without consideration or provision for the pedestrian. For example, new commercial developments constructed over the past year in Long Prairie (U.S. Highway 71 corridor) and Staples (U.S. Highway 10) are some local examples.

Communities in Todd County each have their own versions of “division street”. With seven of the eleven cities in the County bisected by federal highways, new major commercial developments are, almost as a rule, separated from the rest of the community’s pedestrian infrastructure and residential neighborhoods. Further compounding the problems of integrating safe pedestrian circulation is the fact that all the cities in the County are small towns with populations under 3,500 people. The smaller cities do not typically have the financial, administrative or technical resources needed to ensure the development of adequate pedestrian facilities.

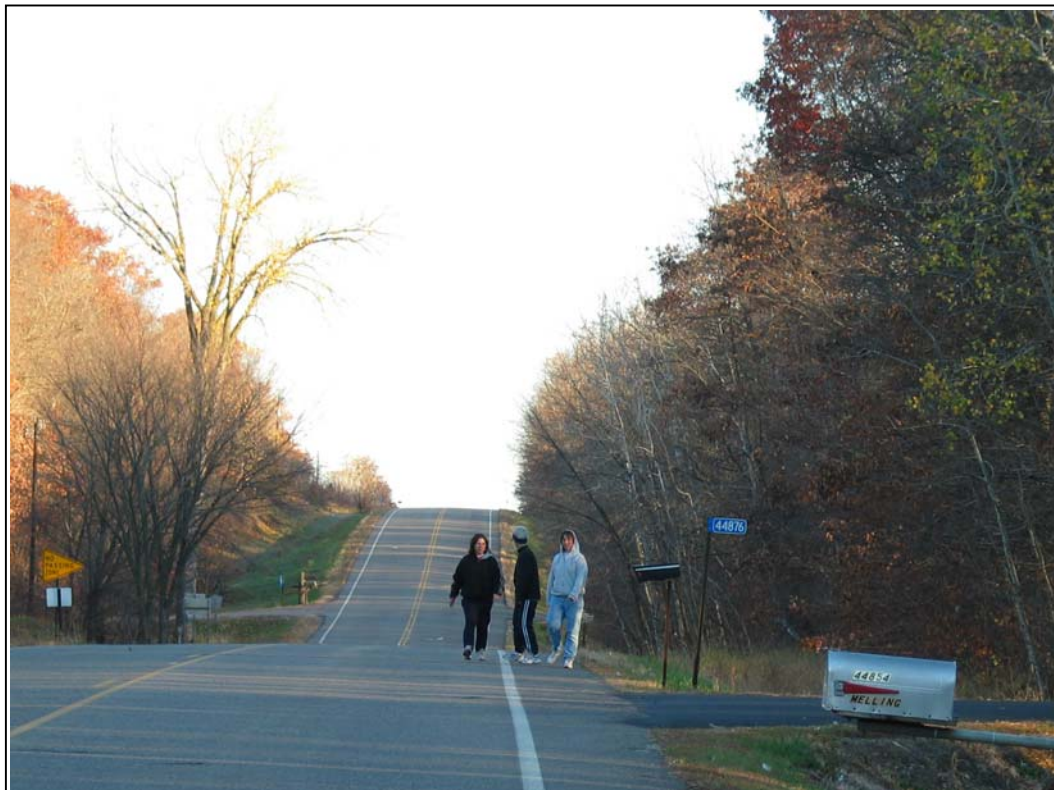
Finally, the lack of facilities for pedestrians is not just a “city” issue. As more density develops in the rural portions of Todd County, either around the lakes or in other highly desirable amenity areas such as Sylvan Shores, more citizens are commenting on the need for trails. For example, citizens identified that the pavement surface of County Road 47 along the east side of Birch Lake nor its shoulders does not provide safe and adequate space for pedestrians or bicyclists. A tragic accident at railroad crossing in

unincorporated village of Philbrook and other crossings in the County are yet another safety concern for residents.

Are children able to safely walk to school? Can customers easily cross the highway to purchase goods or services? Can seniors enjoy a leisurely walk and return home safely? Do we get enough exercise as a society? Are there recreational activities that can promote economic opportunities for local businesses? The recreational planning process for Todd County is working to address these and other questions and concerns.

Trails and sidewalks are the **linking facilities** that connect people with important as well as everyday places. We all benefit from them regardless of our age, place of residence or economic and social class. Trails provide a range of year-round outdoor recreation opportunities including snowmobiles, all terrain vehicles, and waterways or canoe routes. Yet trails and sidewalks are expensive part of the public infrastructure. How can we create safe and economical systems without breaking the bank?

Over the past 30 years, the Todd Area Trails Snowmobile Association has developed an extensive trail system in the County. The Association has worked successfully for three decades in partnerships with landowners, local officials, and state agencies to create a countywide network of trails totaling over 450 miles in length. Private, local and state funding sources have been used to create and maintain the system. In addition, members of the trail association have contributed their own time to help create and maintain the system. In summary, the County and its citizens have already been successful in developing and maintaining trails. Collaboration has been the key to their success.



B. Trail System Goals, Objectives and Actions

The following goals, objectives and action items outline the County’s policy framework regarding trails:

Goal 1 – Enhance Existing Trail Resources. Protect and enhance the existing trail systems and facilities that we already have in Todd County.

Objective A – Snowmobile Trail System. Support and assist in the wise development and the safe use and enjoyment of the snowmobile trail system in the County managed by the Todd Area Trails Snowmobile Association.

Actions:

1. Trail User Education Programs. Support and assist the Association, Sheriff’s Department, the MN DNR and other organizations in educating snowmobile trail users and the general public on safe trail riding practices.
2. Landowner Information Program. Assist in the distribution of information to landowners and the general public on their rights and responsibilities as well as those of Association in operating the trail system.
3. Public Relations. Support the Association, chambers of commerce, and other organizations in the development and distribution of maps for the snowmobile trail system. Incorporate safe trail use practices and regulations on the maps and public relations documents. Distribute information about the businesses and organizations that provide products and/or services available to the users of the snowmobile trail system.
4. Volunteer Safety Patrols. Assist the Association and the Sheriff’s Department in organizing and coordinating of volunteers who can help in the monitoring use of the trail system.
5. Trail System Maintenance Program. Support efforts by the Association to work with the landowners, cities, townships, County and state highway departments and other organizations to identify areas of the trail system where there are safety and nuisance issues as well as potential design solutions.
6. Nuisances/Trespassing Complaint Response Program. Support the development and administration of a coordinated complaint and response program by the Association, law enforcement officials and local government representatives to help more efficiently and effectively address nuisance and trespass concerns.
7. Enforcement Program. Support the proper and swift enforcement of snowmobile regulations by the Sheriff’s Department and the MN DNR.
8. Economic Development Opportunities. Work with local businesses, chambers of commerce, Todd Area Trails Snowmobile Association, and cities and townships to support and enhance economic opportunities in relation to the snowmobile trail system.

Objective B – Long Prairie River. Support the safe access to and wise use of the Long Prairie River.

Actions:

1. Citizen Input Forum. Meet with landowners, sporting and conservation groups, local and state officials and other interested persons to gather input (issues, concerns, assets and opportunities, etc.) on the use of the river as a recreation resource.
2. Preliminary Project Design. Support the development of a preliminary project design study to identify and preliminarily design alternative sites and facilities to support the use of the river. Develop the project design study in a series of phases to accommodate the staged development of the project.
3. Project Coordination. Support the various project coordination tasks needed to fund and construct the selected projects (funding, design, bidding, contract administration, etc.).
4. Funding Development. Work with private, public and non-profit sources to establish and secure funding resources needed for the local, state.
5. Final Project Design. For public sites and facilities, prepare the appropriate design and construction documents to guide construction.
6. Project Construction. Oversee the construction of public facilities.
7. Maintenance Program and Operations. Support the periodic and ongoing maintenance of the facilities and sites. Work with local groups and organizations to maintain and operate the facilities.

Objective C – Lake Wobegon Trail. Support and coordinate the development, maintenance and operation of the Lake Wobegon Trail for a wide variety of uses on a year-round basis.

Actions:

1. Construction. Complete the 8-mile segment of the Lake Wobegon Trail in Todd County.
2. Use and Maintenance. Work with local groups and organizations including the snowmobile associations, local communities, and other trail organizations to support the maintenance and use of the trail. Maintain the trail as per the previously determined agreements. Inform the public and interested organizations about the maintenance agreements and seek their support, either in-kind or financially.
3. Annual Community Events. Support and assist in holding annual community events that use the trail (fund drives, walkathons, bikeathons, running races, etc.)
4. Economic Development Opportunities. Work with local businesses, chambers of commerce, bicycle clubs, civic and fundraising organizations, and cities and townships to support and enhance economic opportunities in relation to the Lake Wobegon Trail.

Objective D – Municipal Trails and Sidewalks. Assist the municipalities in coordinating the development and construction of safe and cost effective sidewalk and trail systems.

Actions:

1. Inventory of Existing Public Sidewalks and Trails. Assist in preparing digital inventories and mapping of all existing public sidewalks and trails in all municipalities in the County.
2. Community Sidewalk and Trail Plans. Support the development of plans to guide the construction, replacement and maintenance of sidewalks and trails in each community. Where appropriate link community trails with the snowmobile trail system and other county trail networks.
3. Safe Routes Program. Work with the school districts and the municipalities to identify, designate and install signage for “safe routes”. These are designated routes for children to walk from their homes to schools, playgrounds, parks and other community destinations. Identify at high-risk areas as well as designated crosswalks.
4. Youth Education Program. Work with the school districts and the state highway department to provide education programs for youth on safe pedestrian practices.
5. Coordinated Capital Improvements. Work with the County and state highway departments and the municipalities to coordinate the construction of pedestrian facilities to help reduce project costs.
6. Maintenance Program. Work with the County and state highway departments and the municipalities to coordinate the maintenance of trails and sidewalks and to reduce costs.

Objective E – Existing County Roadway Network. Support the safe use of the existing county roadway network for pedestrian and bicycle modes.

Actions:

1. Inventory of Existing Roadways. Support efforts to update the inventory of roadways in the County (right-of-way widths, cross section design, culverts and other drainage facilities, pavement and shoulder widths, paving condition, traffic volumes, etc.).
2. Existing Designations. Review the existing designations and design standards for roadways in relation to pedestrian and bicycle use.
3. County Roadway Pedestrian Study. Work with the County Highway Department to develop and/or update guidelines for the use of local and county roads for pedestrians and bicycling.
4. Signage Program. Develop a signage program to identify designated pedestrian/bike routes on local and county roads.

Goal 2 – Private Trails. Promote the development of private trails in the County to enhance greater recreational opportunities.

Objective A – Birdwatchers Trail Network. Support the establishment and development of a voluntary network of bird watching trails on a neighborhood or local area.

Actions:

1. County Biological Survey. Support the distribution of maps and information on potential high quality habitat areas in the County to bird watching clubs and other conservation organizations to encourage the formation of neighborhood bird watching groups.
2. Bird Watching Workshops. Provide information to landowners on ways to design, construct, and maintain trails specifically for bird watching activities. Assist in coordinating speakers from resource agencies such as the MN DNR, US FWS and other agencies and organizations. Encourage a multi generational participation in the bird watching workshops.
3. Area 1. Provide technical assistance to support the development of a neighborhood bird watching trail system.
4. Area 2. Provide technical assistance to support the development of a neighborhood bird watching trail system.
5. Area 3. Provide technical assistance to support the development of a neighborhood bird watching trail system.

Objective B – Private Developments. Support and/or require the design and construction of integrated trail systems (for all appropriate modes – pedestrians, bicycle, horse, snowmobile, ATV, etc) in more intensely developed areas of the County that are outside the cities.

Actions:

1. Sylvan Shores. Support the design of a trail system to link neighborhoods and facilities in the Sylvan Shore community. Integrate the trail systems into other County trail systems.
2. Lake Associations. Work with lake associations to plan and design the location of public and private trails within their communities.
3. New Planned Unit Developments. Amend the County’s zoning ordinance to include standards for pedestrian facilities for new planned unit developments. Require that the trail networks be integrated into other local and county trail systems.

Goal 3 – Expansion of Existing Trails. Support the expansion of the existing public trail systems and facilities.

Objective A – New Subdivisions. Require new subdivisions and replatted subdivisions to provide adequate facilities for safe and cost effective pedestrian movement on public trails and/or sidewalks.

Actions:

1. County Subdivision Regulations. Update the County subdivision regulations so that they require the provision of adequate land and facilities for trail systems.
2. Municipal Subdivision Regulations. Support the updating and amending of municipal subdivision regulations so that they require the provision of adequate land and facilities for trail systems.

Objective B – Connecting Trails. Support the development of connecting trails, both public and private, with other local, County and regional trails as well as other major destination places in communities in the County.

Actions:

1. Lake Wobegon Trail Connections. Support efforts by local communities to design and construct local trails that connect with the Lake Wobegon Trail.
2. Bertha-Hewitt Trail. Support efforts by students from the Bertha-Hewitt school district to design and construct a public trail that connects the two communities.
3. Dower Lake Trail. Support efforts to design and construct a trail from the City of Staples to Dower Lake Park.

Goal 4 – New Trails. Support the study and development of new public trails and facilities.

Objective A – Scenic Byways Program. Develop a system of scenic roadways in the County.

Actions:

1. Scenic Byways Master Plan Study. Develop a more detailed study that plans the development of a scenic byways program for the County. Address signage and funding issues.
2. Public Relations. Develop a scenic roadways map and informational materials. Distribute the informational materials to the public.

3. Scenic Byways Route One. Develop the first phase of the scenic roadway system in the County.
4. Scenic Byways Route Two. Develop the second phase of the scenic roadway system in the County.
5. Scenic Byways Route Three. Develop the third phase of the scenic roadway system in the County.

Objective B – Osakis Lake/Battle Point Park Trail. Support the design and development of a trail that circles Osakis Lake and connects it with Battle Point Park, the City of Osakis and residential neighborhoods around the lake.

Actions:

1. Local Project. Provide assistance to local groups and organizations to initiate interest and support for the project. Encourage the identification of a lead local organization for the project.
2. Project Coordination Assistance. Provide assistance to the lead local organization on project coordination tasks needed to fund and construct the project (funding, design, bidding, contract administration, etc.).
3. Citizen Input Forum. Encourage the lead local organization to meet with landowners, the lake association, local and state officials and other interested persons to gather input (issues, concerns, assets and opportunities, etc.) on the development of the trail.

Objective C – North-South County Trail System Study. Develop a study for the future development of a trail system running in a north and south direction through the County. Connect the trail with the Lake Wobegon Trail on the south and the trail system in Wadena County on the north.

Actions:

1. Citizen Input Forum. Meet with landowners, trail organizations and groups, local and state officials and other interested persons to gather input (issues, concerns, assets and opportunities, etc.) on the development of the trail system.
2. Preliminary Project Design. Support the development of a preliminary project design study to identify and preliminarily design alternative alignments for the trail system. The design should consider the trail in a series of segments and phases to accommodate the staged development of the project.
3. Official Map. Prepare and adopt an official map to designate the selected alignment.

Objective D – ATV Trail System Study. Develop a study for the future development of ATV trails and facilities in the County.

Actions:

1. Citizen Input Forum. Meet with landowners, trail organizations and groups, local and state officials and other interested persons to gather input (issues, concerns, assets and opportunities, etc.) on the use and development of facilities for ATVs.
2. ATV System Study. Prepare a study that provides guidance on the development and use of ATV trails and riding facilities or ATV parks in the County.
3. Trail User Education Programs. Support and assist the Association, Sheriff's Department, the MN DNR and other organizations in educating ATV trail users and the general public on safe trail riding practices.
4. County Policy. Develop and/or update the County's policies regarding the use of public rights-of-way (ditches) for ATVs.
5. Staples Community College Heavy Equipment Site. Explore the feasibility of developing an ATV facility at the Staples Community College Heavy Equipment Site.
6. Public Lands. Explore the feasibility of using public lands in the County for the use of ATVs. Work with the appropriate agencies to review potential opportunities for ATV use as well as areas that have a high priority for protection from ATV riding.

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