



Iowa's Living Roadways

**community
visioning**

designing livable communities, 2023

Denison, Iowa





"I feel like we are greatly lacking walking trails and...parks throughout our community. I see a need on the western, older side of town for children to have places to play and exercise."



"Street conditions [are] a serious problem in Denison."

"There aren't many roads connecting [the north part of town] with highways or other parts of town. A route or routes that would connect highways to schools would especially be beneficial."



Introduction

The Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program is a collaboration involving the Iowa Department of Transportation, the Living Roadway Trust Fund, Iowa State University, and Trees Forever. One of the primary objectives of the Community Visioning Program is to assist participants in the process of building livable communities—that is, creating an environment that not only meets residents' basic needs but is also aesthetically appealing.

With assistance from Iowa State University's Survey Research Services staff in the Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology (CSSM-SRS), ISU visioning program staff conducted a survey to better understand the transportation patterns, behaviors, needs, and desires of Denison residents. Surveys were mailed to 900 randomly selected residents living in Denison and the surrounding area. To increase the response rate, the study was publicized through the local media and follow-up packets were mailed to nonrespondents.

With adjustments for ineligible respondents (e.g., incorrect addresses, no longer living in the community), the final sample size was 802. A total of 183 people returned surveys, for a response rate of 22.8%. (A response rate of 20% is considered valid.)

Why Do A Survey?

The survey provides the visioning steering committee with objective, representative information for the goal-setting phase of community visioning. The quantitative data collected from survey responses complements the qualitative information gathered from the focus groups at the transportation assets and barriers workshop.

The modes of transportation that residents use and the routes they take suggest suitable types of transportation enhancements in these areas. Having a sense for people's willingness to help either financially or with their time is important because many transportation enhancements are funded from multiple sources, including grants, private donations, in-kind contributions, and volunteers. Understanding what types of improvements are important to residents gives the committee insight into how to prioritize projects.

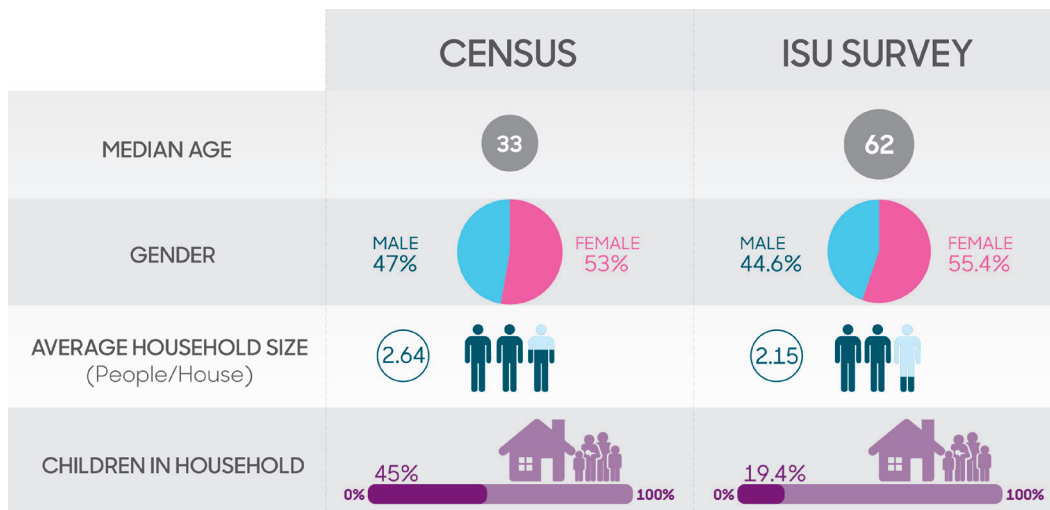
What Did We Find Out?

We asked survey recipients what routes they use most often for going to work, walking, and biking. In addition, we asked what qualities and features are important to trail users. We also discovered what residents think is most important in terms of transportation enhancements that address issues such as accessibility, mobility, and safety. Finally, we learned whether or not residents are willing to contribute their time or their financial resources to making enhancements to Denison. This report summarizes the results of the survey as follows:

- Willingness to Help
- Enhancement Priorities
- Commuting Routes
- Walking Routes
- Biking Routes
- Desired Trail Features

How Did We Do?

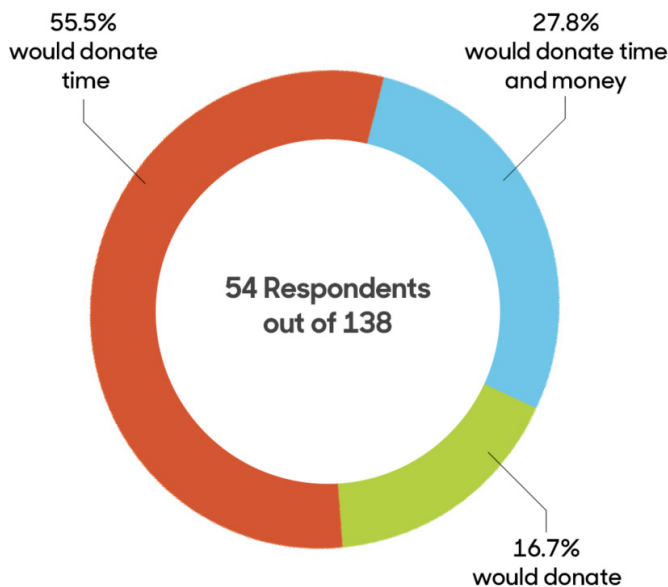
The demographics of the respondents are somewhat different from those obtained from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS). For example, the survey respondents median age of 62 is significantly older than the ACS estimated average age for Denison residents of 33. In terms of gender, the percentages of male and female survey respondents are similar to that of 2021 ACS estimates. Average household size among survey respondents is significantly lower than the 2021 ACS estimates, and the percentage of households with children among survey responses is much lower.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey.

ARE PEOPLE WILLING TO HELP?

39% said YES!



Willingness to implement change

Most survey participants who answered “Yes” to this question are willing to contribute their time to community improvements (55.5%), while 27.8% would help financially and contribute their time. More than 16% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to contribute financially.

Compared to other small towns in Iowa, Denison residents are somewhat less willing to become involved in improving their community. In 2014, on average, 43% of residents in small, rural towns volunteered to help with a community project.¹ The percentage of Denison residents willing to be involved is 4% lower than this average.

How Do You Get People to Help?

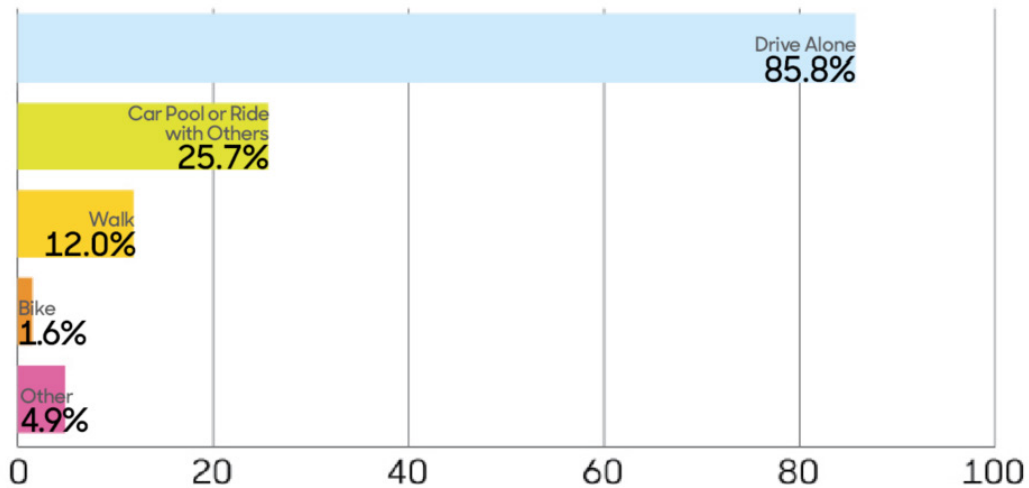
In 2014, the most common reason residents in small-town Iowa said they didn’t become involved in community projects is that no one asked them (34%). Twenty-eight percent on average said that they don’t have time, which is significantly lower than the 2004 average of 59%. Sixteen percent indicated that they didn’t know how to become involved, and 7% said that no community project needed volunteers.¹ These results indicate that the best ways to get people involved in community projects is to simply ask, along with advertising opportunities through traditional and social media outlets.

¹ *Sigma: A Profile of Iowa Small Towns 1994 to 2014* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, 2015).

How Do Denison Residents Travel?

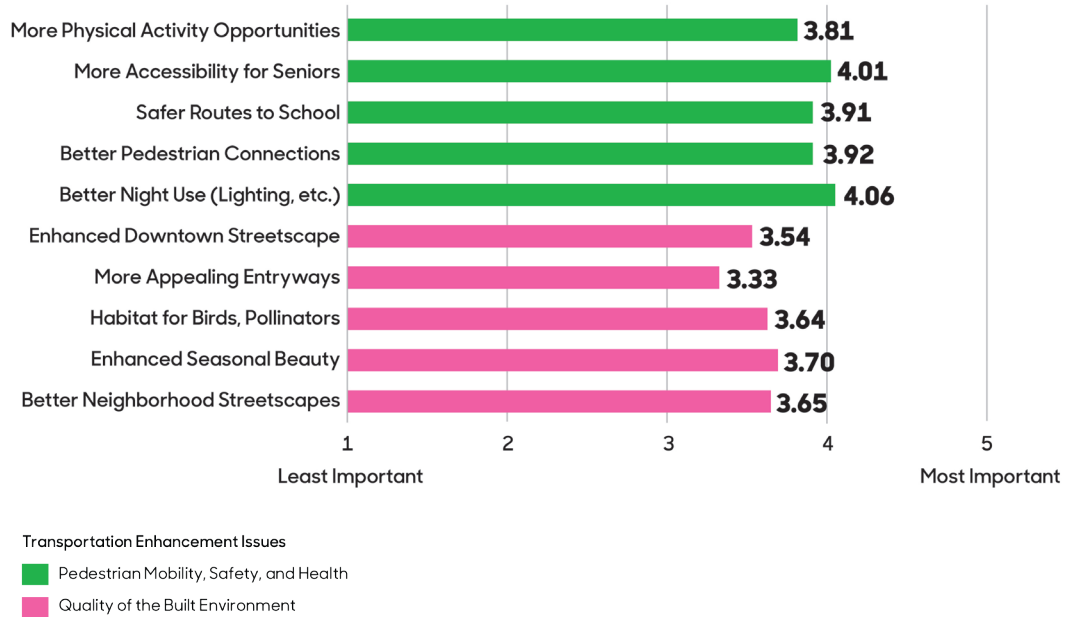
Most survey respondents drive to important destinations such as the convenience store, the post office, school, and church (85.8%). More than 25% car pool or ride with someone else. Some people indicated that they walk (12%) and/or bike (1.6%), but the primary mode of transportation in Denison is by vehicle.

Please note that some respondents indicated that they use more than one mode of transportation to get to work; therefore, percentages add up to more than 100%.



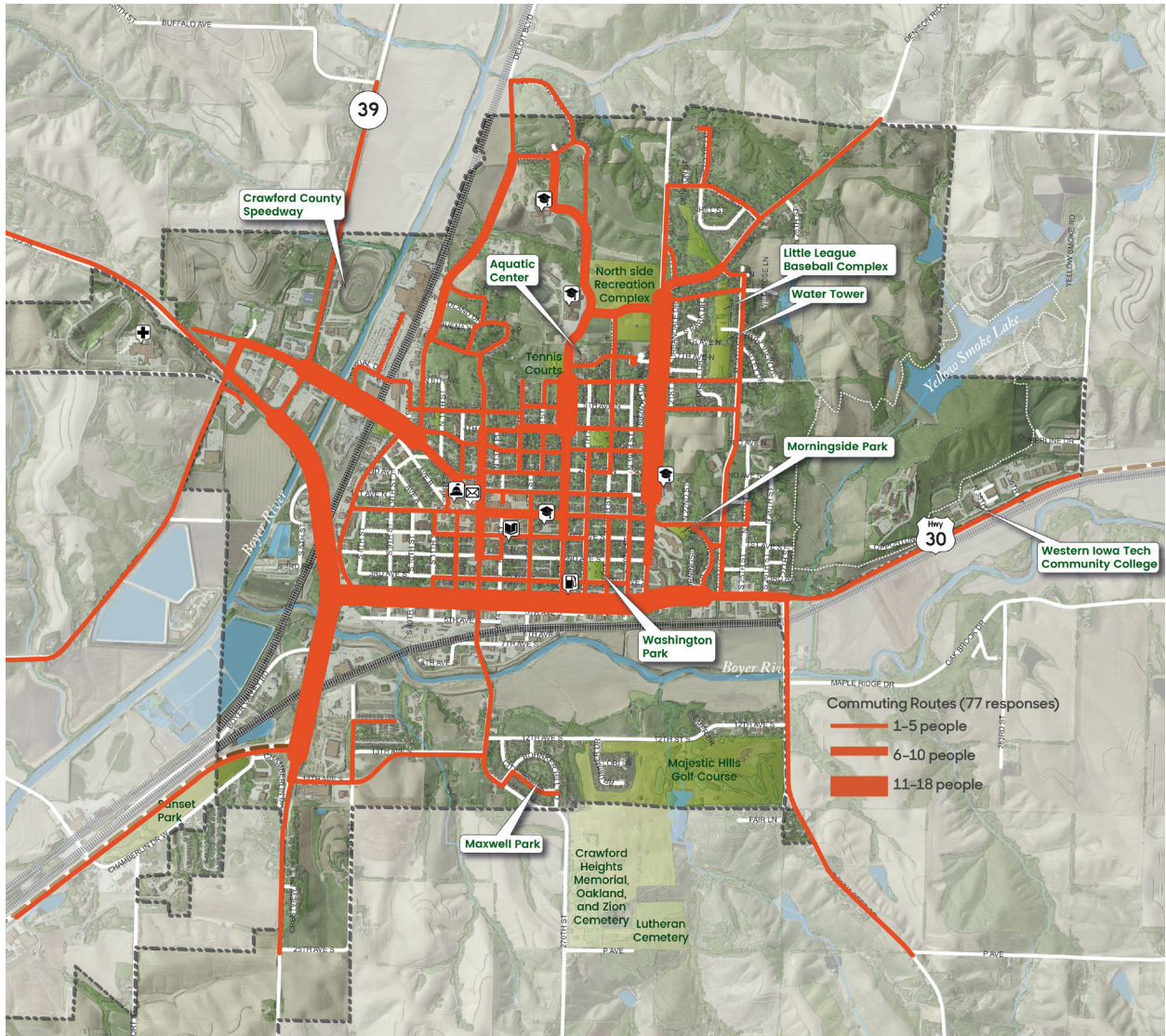
WHAT TYPES OF ENHANCEMENTS ARE IMPORTANT?

Mobility, Safety, and Health!



Importance of transportation enhancement by type (156 responses)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, participants in Denison ranked improving night use as most important, with a mean value of 4.06. Other types of transportation enhancements that address pedestrian mobility, health, and safety are also considered important, such as providing more accessibility for seniors (4.01), creating better pedestrian connections (3.92), and developing safer routes to school (3.91). In terms of quality of the built environment, survey respondents consider enhancing seasonal beauty as most important (3.70), followed by improving neighborhood streetscapes (3.65) and creating habitat for birds and pollinators (3.64). These findings are consistent with the views expressed by focus group participants during the Transportation Assets and Barriers workshop held in March 2023.



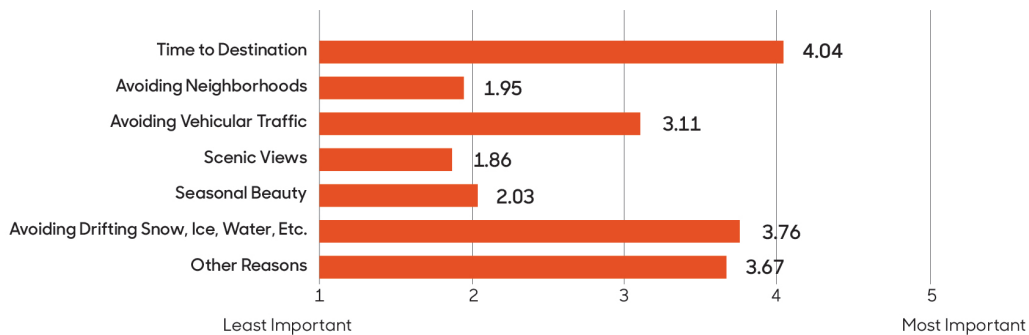
Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislib/>.

How People Get To Work

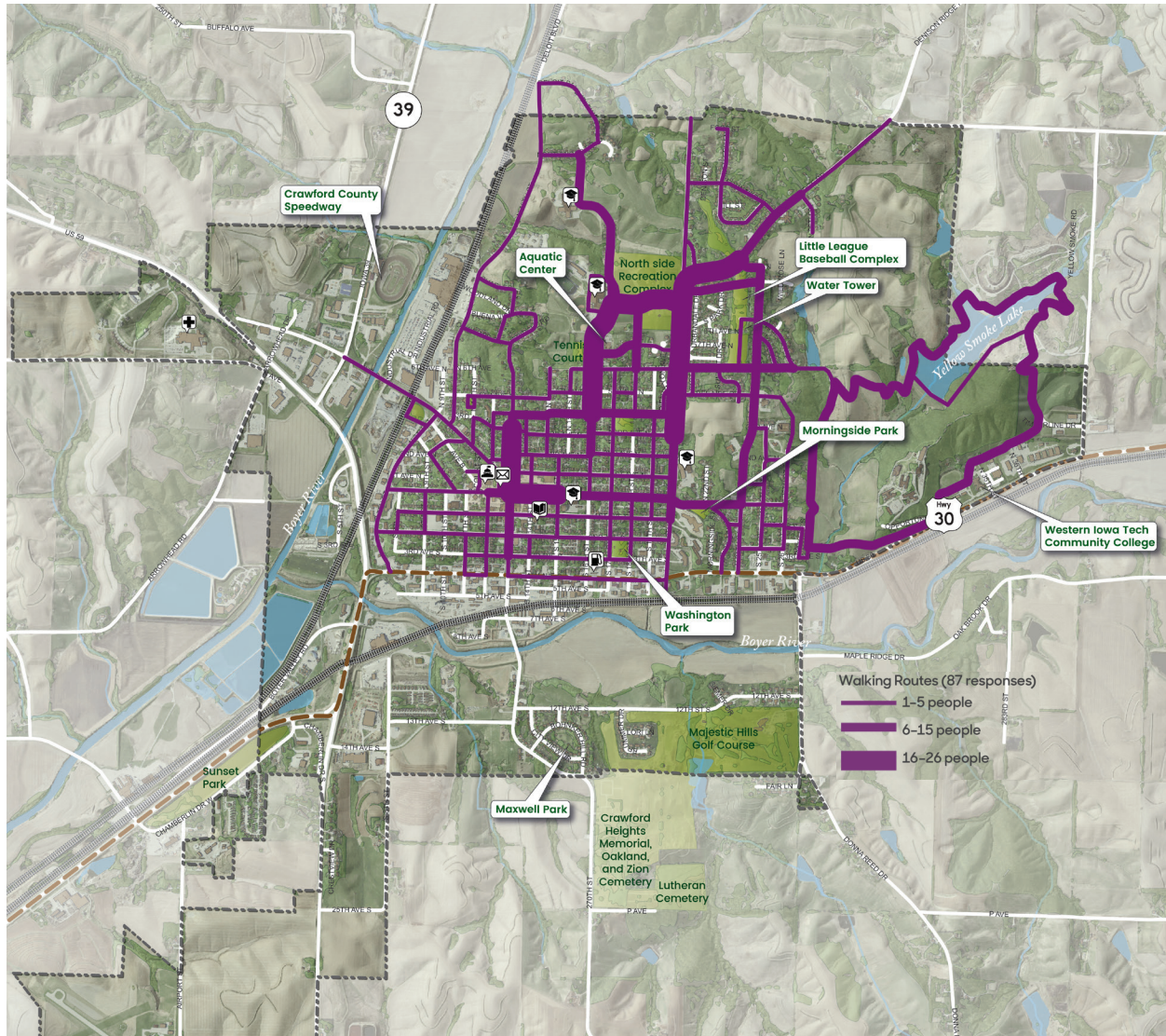
This map shows the commuting routes identified by 77 survey respondents. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. The primary commuting corridors into and out of Denison are Highways 30, 141, and 59. Some commuters take Arrowhead Road and Highway 39 on the west side of town, while other take Donna Reed Road/County Road M36 on the east side. The most heavily used corridors in town are N 20th Street, N 16th Street, Avenue C, and Highway 30.

The circulation patterns that emerge when routes for biking, walking, and commuting are overlaid suggest suitable types of transportation enhancements. For example, where pedestrian and vehicular traffic intersect, such improvements could include creating better visibility, defining crossing points, or improving signage.

Why They Go That Way



On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, survey participants ranked the characteristics and features that factored into their choice of commuting route. Among Denison participants, time to destination is the most important factor in determining commuting routes, with a mean value of 4.04. Avoiding weather-related issues such as snow and ice is also somewhat important (3.76), followed by other factors that include avoiding school traffic, road conditions, avoiding road construction, and avoiding intersections with stop signs (3.67). Scenic views, seasonal beauty, and avoiding neighborhoods are not critical factors in determining commuting routes.

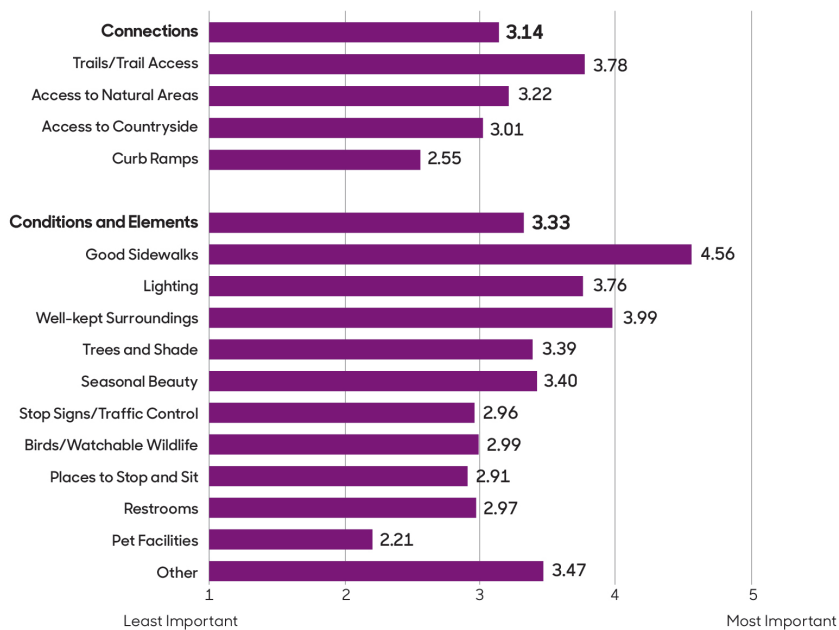


Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislib/>.

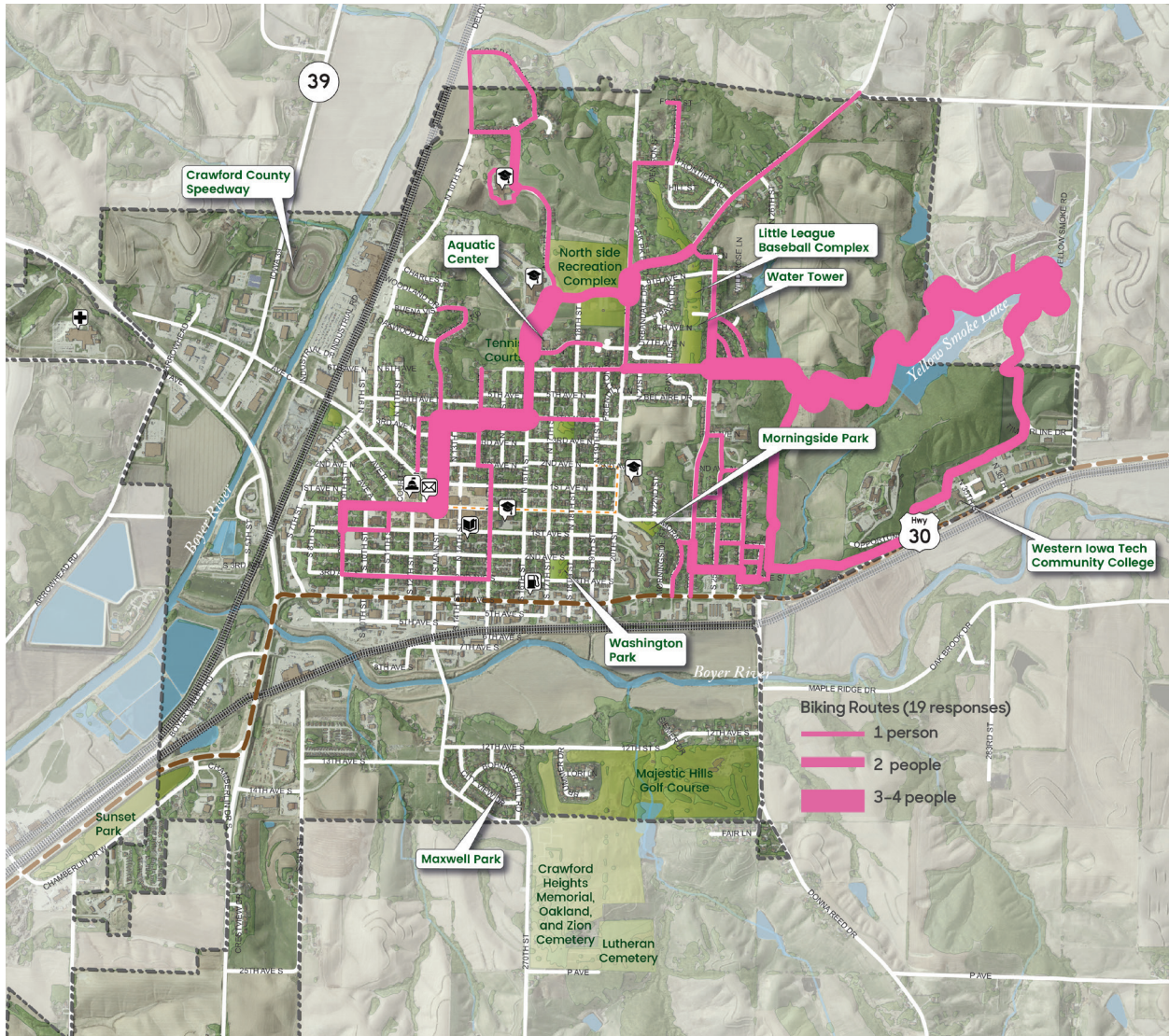
Where People Walk

This map shows the walking routes identified by 87 survey respondents. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. The Wheels to Heels Trail to and through Yellow Smoke Park is a popular walking route among survey respondents. People also walk along city streets; the most heavily traveled of those include Ridge Road, N 20th Street, 8th Avenue N, N 16th Street, and Broadway and N Main Street in the downtown area. Walkers also use N 24th Street, 4th Avenue N, and 6th Avenue N somewhat frequently.

Why They Go That Way



On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, survey participants ranked the characteristics and features that made their walking experience better. These features are categorized as either “connections” or “conditions and elements.” Denison participants consider conditions/elements to be more important than connections, with mean values of 3.33 and 3.14, respectively. In terms of connections, access to trails is most important with a mean value of 3.78. Good sidewalks (4.56) are the most important condition/element to walkers, followed by well-kept surroundings (3.99) and lighting (3.76). Other elements such as topography, traffic levels, and snow removal affect walkers’ route choices (3.47).

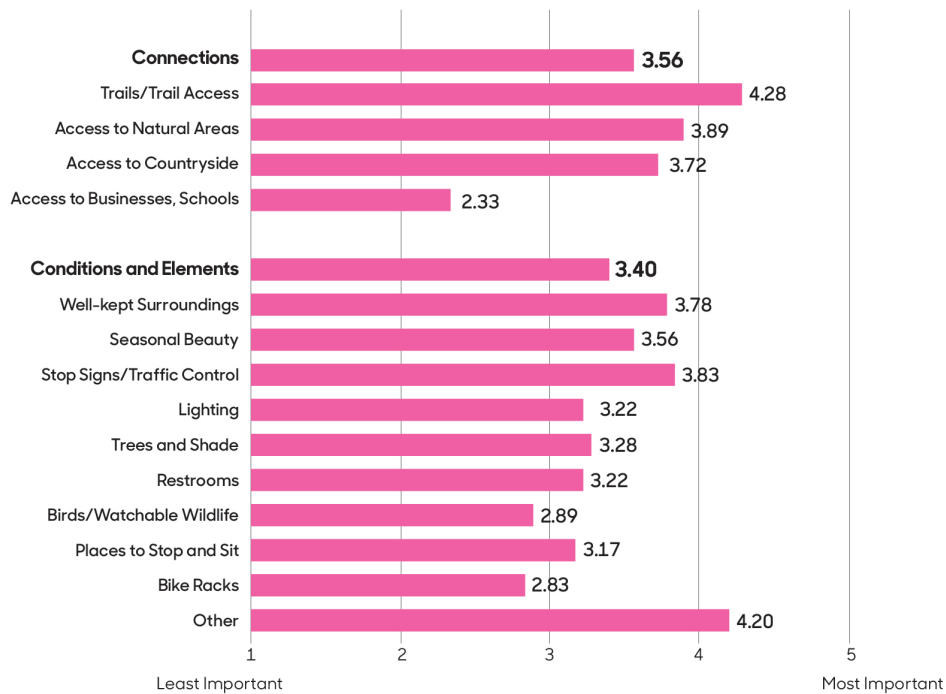


Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislib/>.

Where People Bike

This map shows the biking routes identified by 19 survey respondents. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. Cycling routes are similar to those of walkers, including the Wheels to Heels Trail to and through Yellow Smoke Park and along city streets such as Ridge Road, N 20th Street, 8th Avenue N, N 16th Street, Broadway, and N Main Street. People also bike in the neighborhood nearest the trail access point.

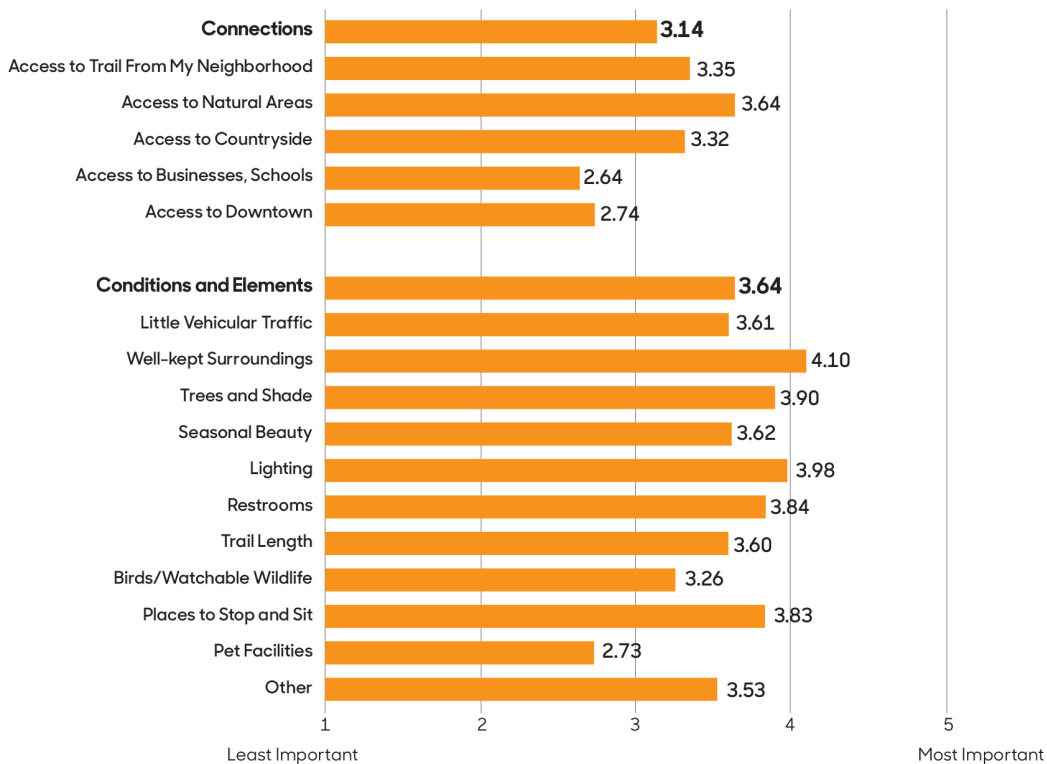
Why They Go That Way



On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, survey participants ranked the characteristics and features that made their biking experience better. These features are categorized as either "connections" or "conditions and elements." Denison participants consider connections more important than conditions/elements, with mean values of 3.56 and 3.40, respectively. Access to trails is most important connection to survey respondents with a mean value of 4.28. In terms of conditions/elements, other factors such as connections to well-established bike trails, safety for children, and "grand views" are most important (4.20). Stop signs/traffic control (3.83) and well-kept surroundings (3.78) are also of significance.

Desired Trail Features

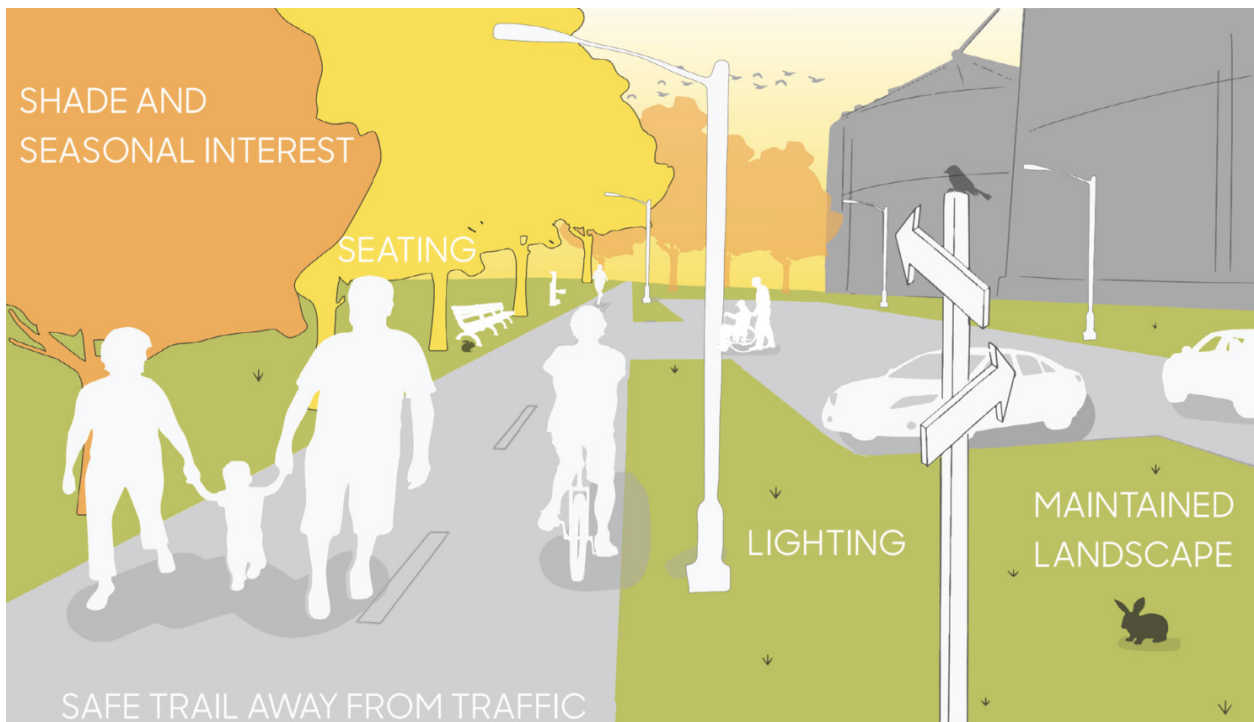
Trails are off-street paths that are paved or unpaved and can be used by pedestrians and cyclists. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, survey participants ranked the characteristics and features that made their trail experience better. Like the bike route features, they are categorized as either "connections" or "conditions and elements." Conditions/elements are more important to Denison trail users than connections, with mean values of 3.64 and 3.14, respectively. Access to natural areas is the most important connection among trail users, with a mean value of 3.64. In terms of conditions/elements, well-kept surroundings (4.10) is most important, followed by lighting (3.98). Trees and shade (3.90), availability of restrooms (3.84), places to stop and sit (3.83), and seasonal beauty (3.62) are also valued by trail users.





"[I] would like to connect to bike trails [that are] already established."

"Access [to] trails [from] many of the housing areas and [connections between] these areas are lacking. Housing areas are only connected by streets..."



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