



Iowa's Living Roadways

**community
VISIONING**

**designing livable communities, 2020
adult random-sample survey &
high school student study
Elkader, Iowa**





"Elkader is a safe community and a lot of people use the trail."

"Lighting is something that could improve. Other than that I feel safe and comfortable in this community."



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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 Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology, ISU visioning program staff conducted a survey to better understand the transportation patterns and behaviors, needs and desires of Elkader residents. To supplement the data collected from adult residents, program staff also conducted focus groups and a survey at Central CSD Middle School/High School.

Why Do A Survey?

The survey gives the visioning steering committee 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 We Did

RANDOM-SAMPLE SURVEY OF ADULTS

Surveys were mailed to 300 randomly selected residents living in Elkader 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 234. A total of 48.7%. (A response rate of 20% is considered valid.)

We asked survey recipients what routes they used most often for going to work, walking, and biking. We also asked whether or not residents would like a recreation trail and where they think it should be. 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 Elkader. The results of the survey are summarized as follows:

- Willingness to Help
- Enhancement Priorities
- Commuting Routes
- Walking Routes
- Desired Qualities

HIGH SCHOOL STUDY

ISU design interns interviewed one 9th grader and held a focus group with three upperclassmen to understand the factors and conditions that affect transportation use among these unique users. Like the transportation assets and barriers workshop held with other user types, the high school focus groups employed small-group conversations, mapping, and photos of the best and worst to understand local transportation.

The survey addressed high school students' experiences and needs as drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists. The questionnaire was similar to that used in the random-sample survey mailed to adult Elkader-area residents. Respondents were asked to identify routes to school, walking routes, and biking routes. In addition, we asked what qualities and features

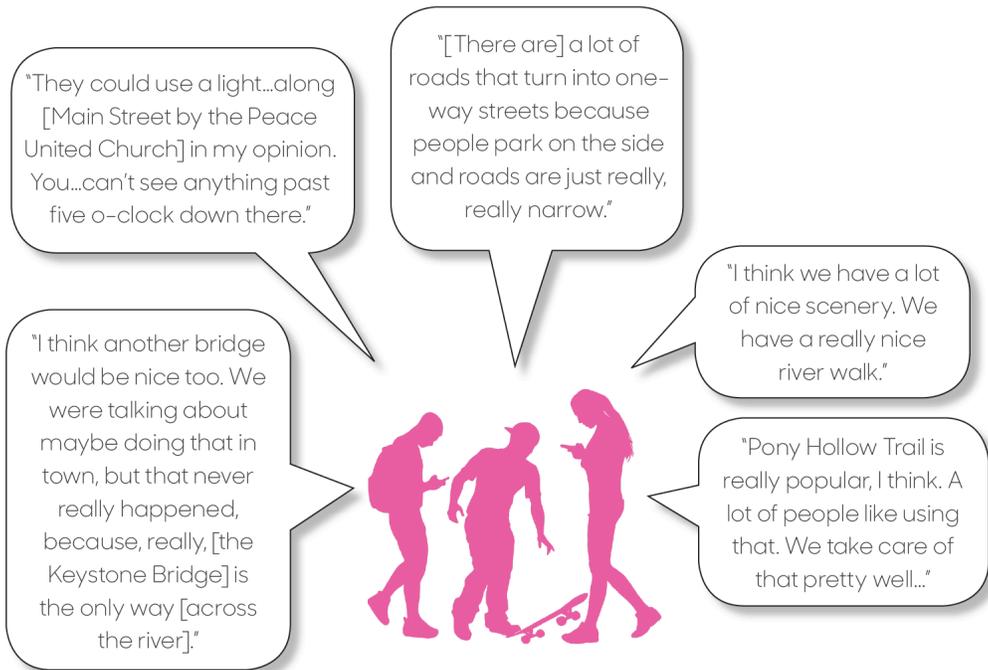
are important to youth when they engage in these activities. Survey respondents were self-selected; a total of three students completed the questionnaire. The results of the high school study are presented as follows:

- Focus groups: what they said
- How students travel and why they go that way
- Priorities and desired features
- Biking routes

Routes to school and walking routes are combined with the commuting and walking routes identified by adult respondents.

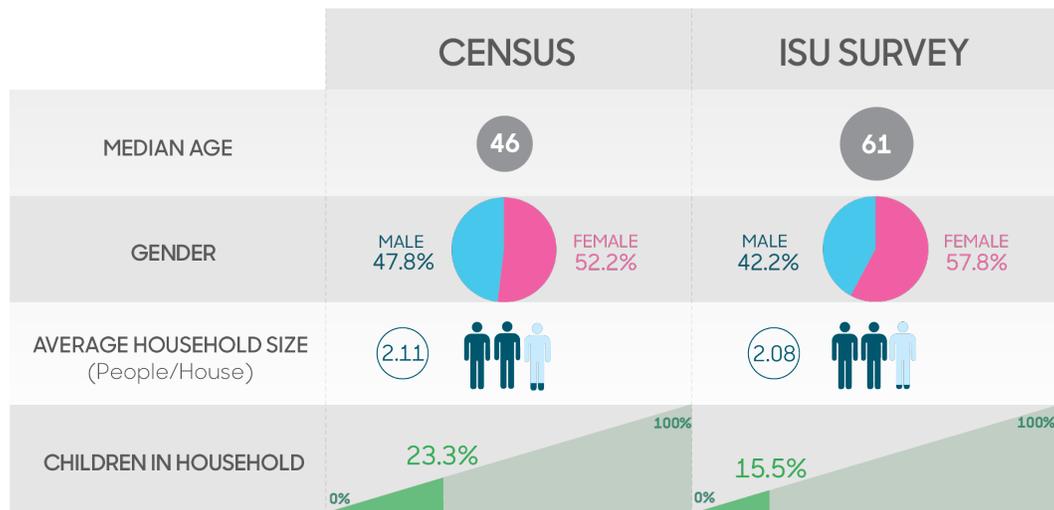
High School Focus Groups: What They Said

High school focus-group participants primarily drive and walk to local destinations in town. Their concerns, which are similar to other focus-group demographics, include the conditions of the sidewalks, rough and narrow streets, lighting and visibility, and flooding. Like other groups, high school students value the Pony Hollow Trail, the river walk, and the scenic areas in and around Elkader. Participants identified better lighting, a new dam, flood mitigation, and a school track as desired improvements.



RANDOM SAMPLE SURVEY: How Did We Do?

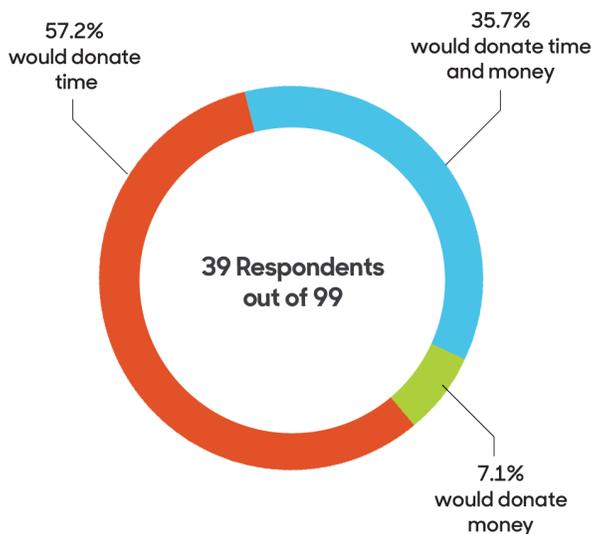
The demographics of the respondents are somewhat different from those obtained from the 2019 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimate. For example, the survey respondents median age of 60.9 is significantly older than the 2019 estimated average age for Elkader residents of 45.9. In terms of gender, the percentage of female survey respondents is higher than that of the census. Average household size of survey respondents is nearly the same as the 2019 estimate, and the percentage of households with children is significantly lower.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.

ARE PEOPLE WILLING TO HELP?

More than 39% said YES!



Willingness to implement change

Most adult survey participants who answered this question are willing to contribute their time to community improvements (57.2%), while 35.7% would contribute their time and talent. More than 7% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to contribute financially.

Compared to other small towns in Iowa, Elkader residents are 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 Elkader is 4% below this average.

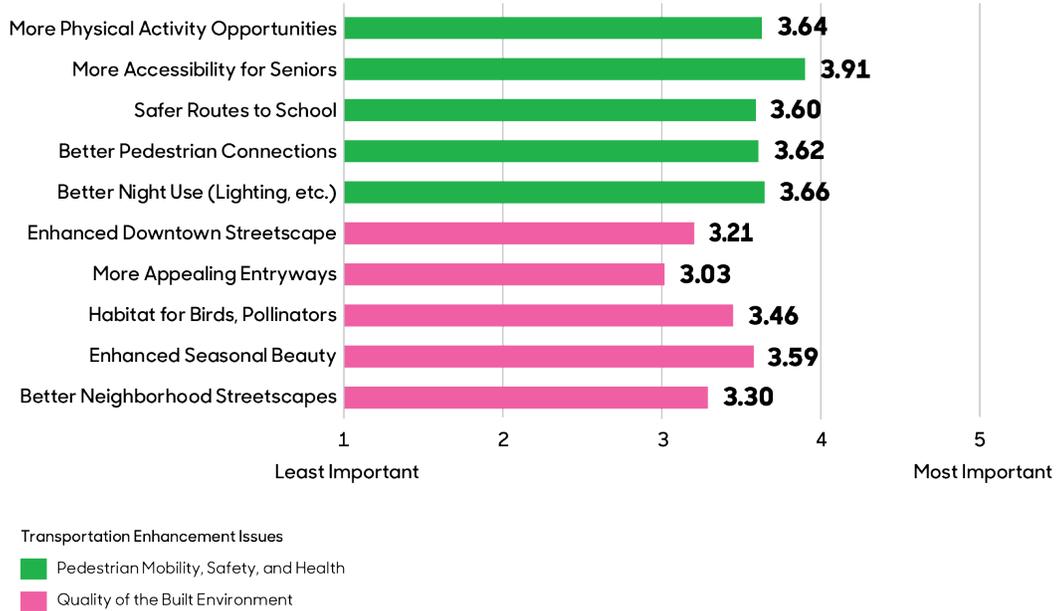
How Do You Get People to Help?

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).

IMPORTANT ENHANCEMENTS AMONG ADULTS

Mobility, Safety, and Health!

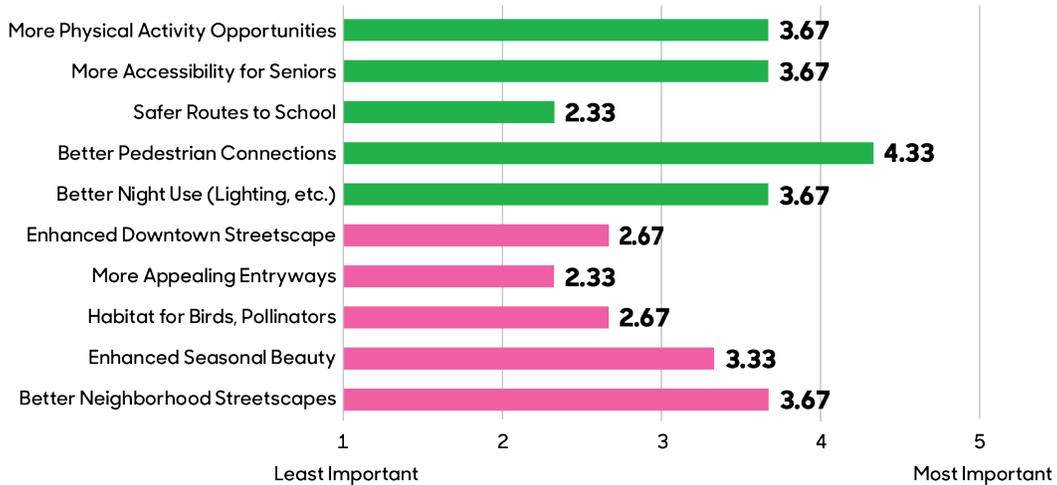


Importance of transportation enhancement by type (96 responses)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, participants in Elkader ranked creating more accessibility for seniors as most important, with a mean value of 3.91. Other types of transportation enhancements that address pedestrian mobility, health, and safety are also considered important, such as better lighting for night use (3.66), providing more physical activity opportunities (3.64), providing pedestrian connections (3.62), and creating safer routes to school (3.60). In terms of quality of the built environment, survey respondents consider enhanced seasonal beauty as most important (3.59), followed by habitat for birds and pollinators (3.46) and better neighborhood streetscapes (3.30).

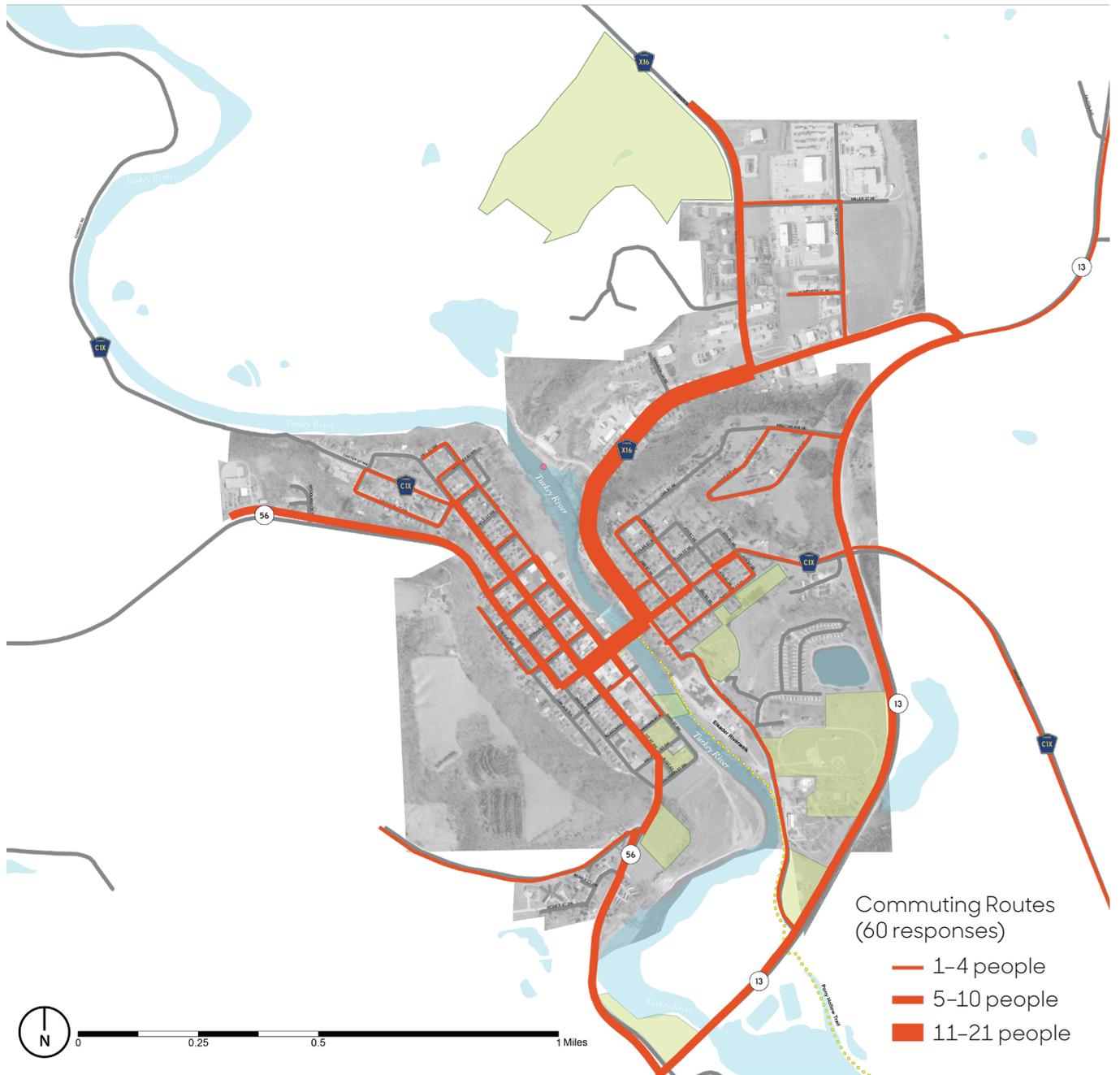
IMPORTANT ENHANCEMENTS AMONG STUDENTS

Mobility, Safety, and Health!



Importance of transportation enhancement by type (3 responses)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, high school survey participants ranked creating better pedestrian connections as most important, with a mean value of 4.33. Other types of transportation enhancements that address pedestrian mobility, health, and safety are also considered important, such as providing more opportunities for physical activities, creating more accessibility for seniors, and providing better lighting for night use (3.67 each). In terms of quality of the built environment, survey respondents consider better neighborhood streetscapes (3.67), and enhanced seasonal beauty as important (3.33). These results are similar to those of adult survey respondents and consistent with themes that emerged during the focus groups.



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

Routes To Work and School

This map shows the commuting routes identified by 60 survey respondents, three of whom were self-selected high school students who identified the routes they take to school. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. The primary commuting corridors in Elkader are Highways 13 and 56 north-south. A number of people also travel north on County Road X16 or west on Highway 56. In town, North High Street to West Bridge Street is the most heavily traveled route.

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.

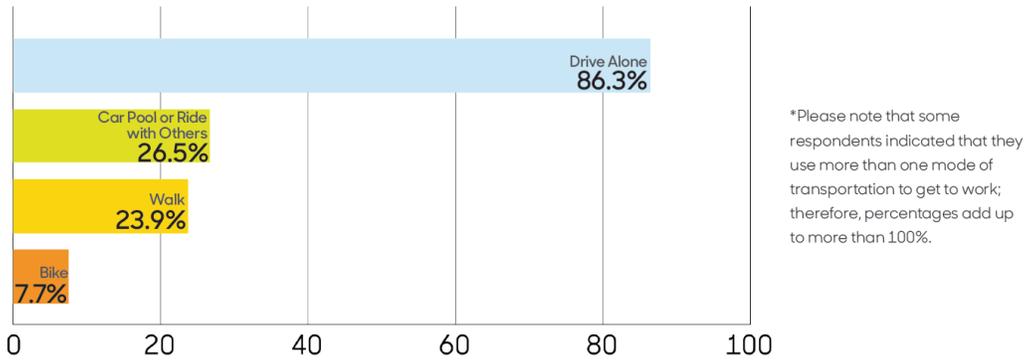
"[We should] add a pedestrian bridge over the Turkey River connecting Founders Park to the campground so pedestrians do not have to cross busy intersections and hold up traffic."



"...the three-way stop crossing the river on Bridge Street is confusing and [unsafe]."

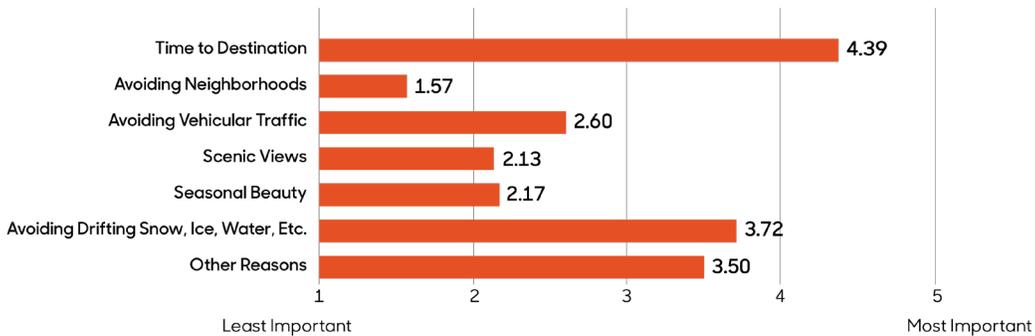
How Adults Travel

Most survey respondents drive to important destinations such as the convenience store, the post office, school, and church (86.3%). More than 26% car pool or ride with someone else. Nearly 24% of participants indicated that they walk, and 7.7% bike to destinations.



(117 responses)

Why They Go That Way

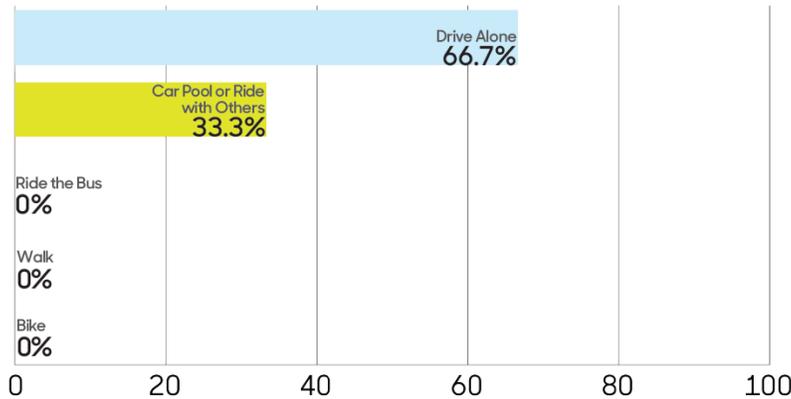


(50 responses)

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 Elkader participants, time to destinations is the most important factor, with a mean value of 4.39. Avoiding weather-related issues such as snow and ice (3.72) is the second most important factor determining commuting routes. Other reasons, such as avoiding farmers, avoiding speed traps, and driving the most efficient route are also considered somewhat important, with a mean value of 3.50. Scenic views, seasonal beauty, avoiding vehicular traffic, and avoiding neighborhoods are not critical factors in determining commuting routes.

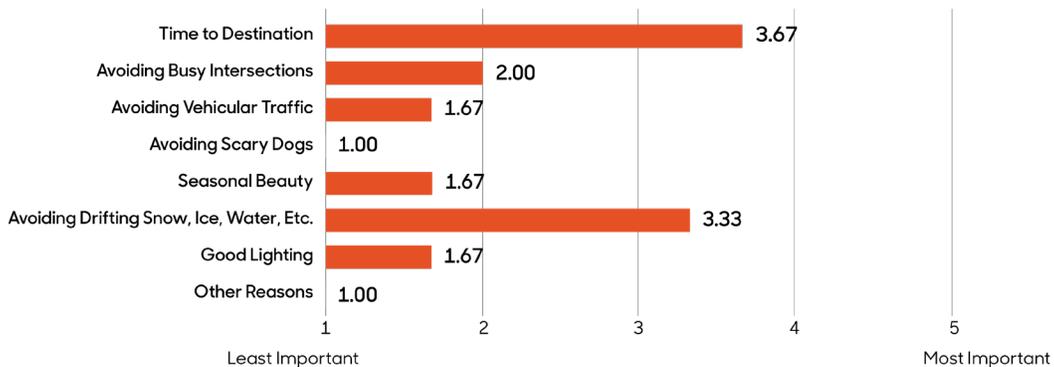
How Students Travel

Most high school survey participants drive alone to local destinations. None of the respondents rides the bus, walks, or bikes to get around town.



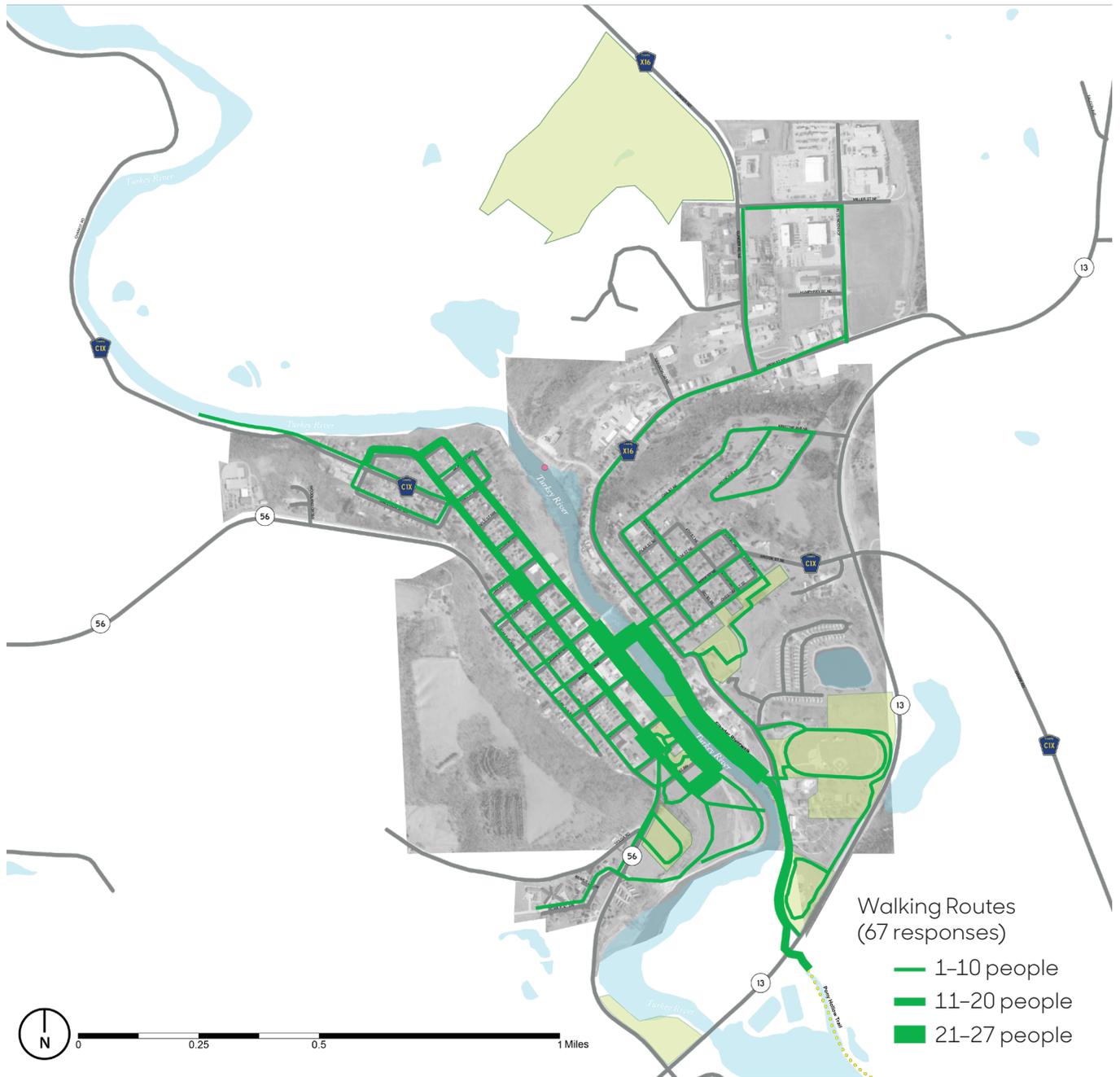
(3 responses)

Why They Go That Way



(3 responses)

High school survey respondents were asked to draw the routes that they take to school on a map. These routes are included with the commuting routes identified by Elkader residents. They were also asked to rank characteristics and features that factored into their choice of route to school on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important. Among high school survey participants, time to destination is the most important factor, with a mean value of 3.67. Avoiding weather-related issues such as snow and ice (3.33) is the second most important factor determining routes to school. Avoiding busy intersections and vehicular traffic, avoiding scary dogs, seasonal beauty, and lighting are not considered important.



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

Where People Walk

This map shows the walking routes identified by 67 survey respondents, three of whom were self-selected high school students who completed the survey. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. Survey respondents indicated that they walk primarily along the river walk on either side of the Turkey River. People also walk on the Pony Hollow Trail. Some respondents also indicated that they walk on the streets of Elkader, with the most frequently walked streets in town being Main and 1st Streets. The most heavily traveled segment of North 1st Street is the block where the high school is located.



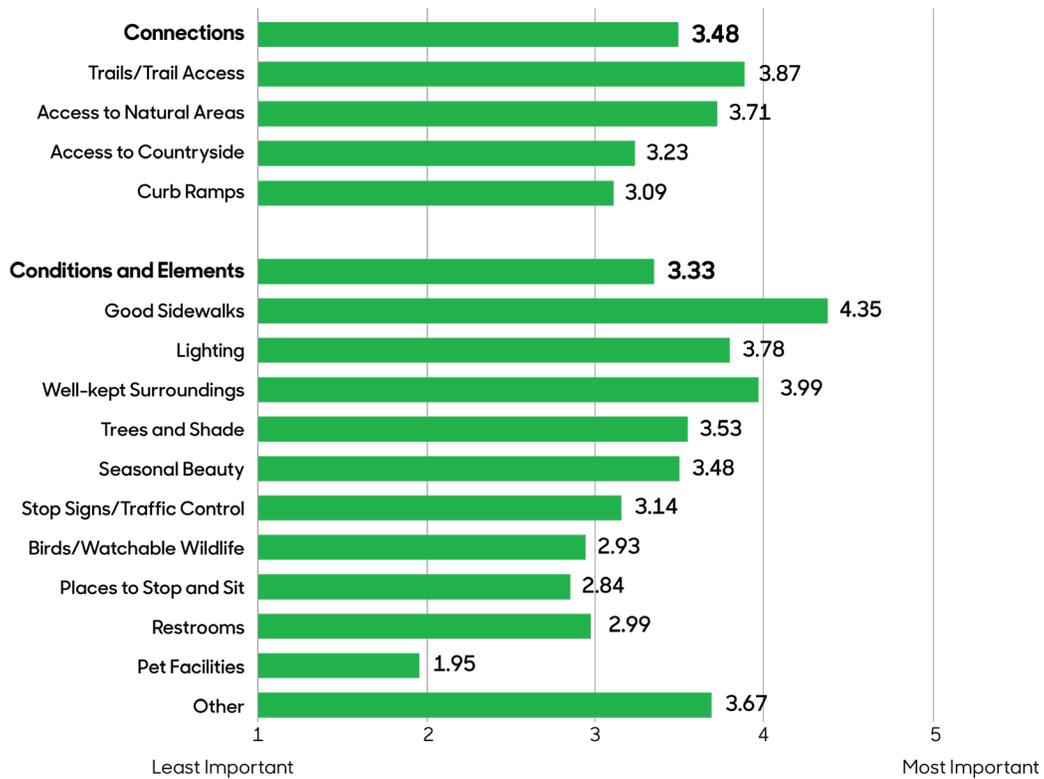
"More walking trails outside of town would also be great. This could also include bike trails."

"We need to make all corners wheelchair/stroller friendly."



Adults' Desired Walking Route Features

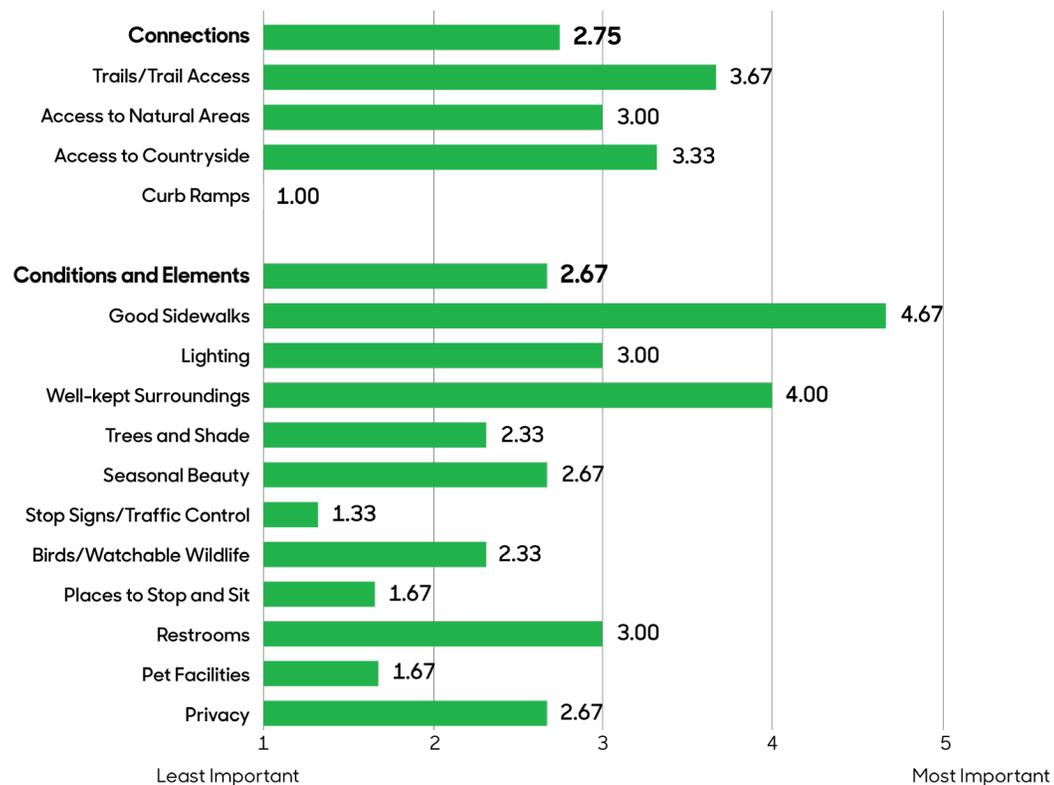
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, survey participants ranked the characteristics and features that made their walking experience better. These features are categorized as either "connections" or "conditions and elements." Among Elkader participants, connections are of slightly more important than conditions/elements, with mean values of 3.48 and 3.33, respectively. In terms of connections, access to trails is most important with a mean value of 3.87. Good sidewalks (4.35) are the most important element to walkers, followed by well-kept surroundings (3.99) and lighting (3.78). Other reasons such as well-maintained roads and sidewalks are important to residents.



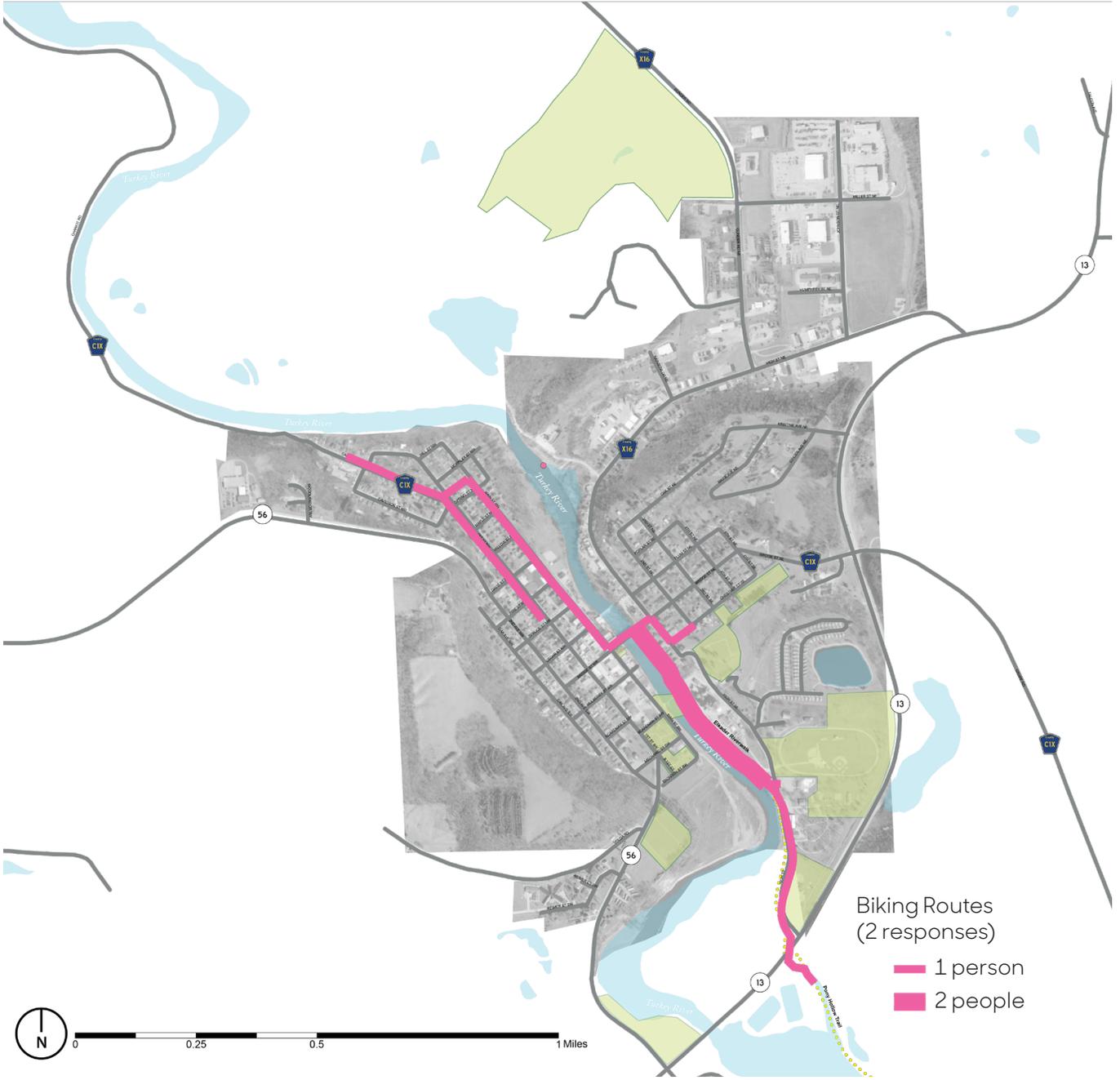
(71 responses)

Students' Desired Walking Route Features

High school survey respondents were asked to draw the routes that they take when walking on a map. These routes are included with the walking routes identified by Elkader residents. They were also asked to rank characteristics and features that factored into their choice of walking routes on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important. These features are categorized as either "connections" or "conditions and elements." Among participants, connections are relatively more important than conditions/elements, with mean values of 2.75 and 2.67, respectively. In terms of connections, access to trails is most important with a mean value of 3.67. Good sidewalks (4.67) are the most important element to walkers, followed by well-kept surroundings (4.00). Restrooms and lighting are somewhat important, both with a mean value of (3.00).



(3 responses)



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

Where Students Bike

This map shows the biking routes identified by two high school students who completed the survey. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. The primary biking route in Elkader is the river walk. High school students indicated that they also ride on the Pony Hollow Trail. They also bike on North Main and North 1st Streets.

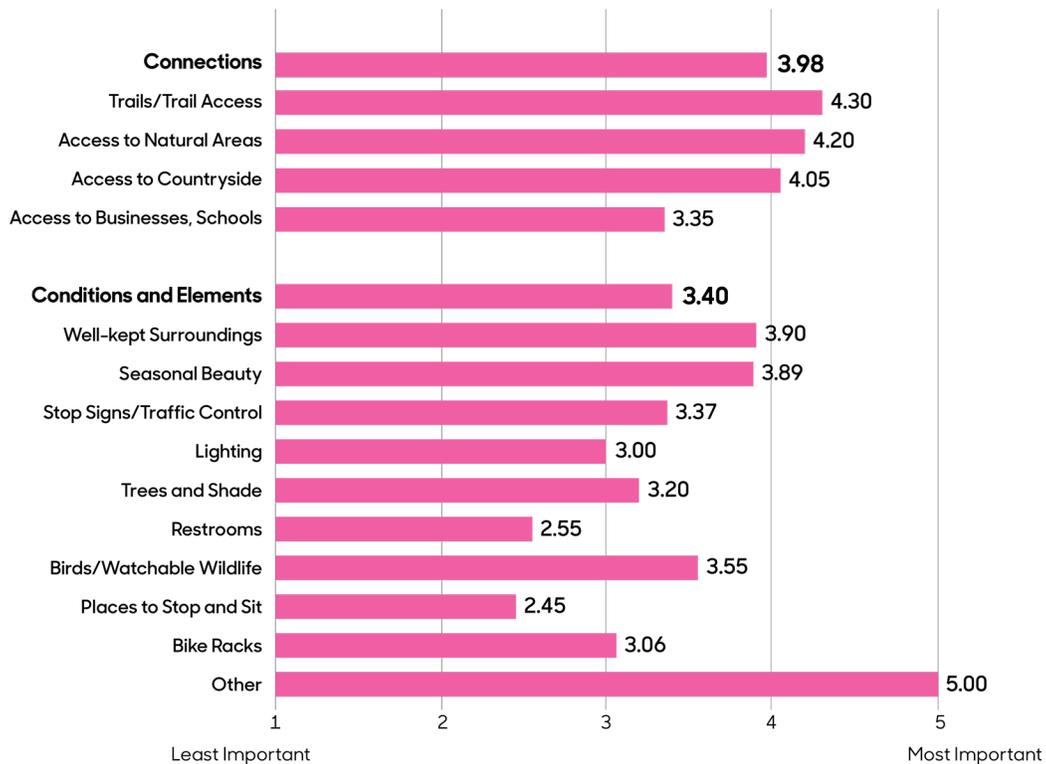
"[There are] no bike racks!
We need them! I'd ride
more often for business if
we had them."



"Most people watch for
bicyclists or pedestrians."

Adults' Desired Bike Route Features

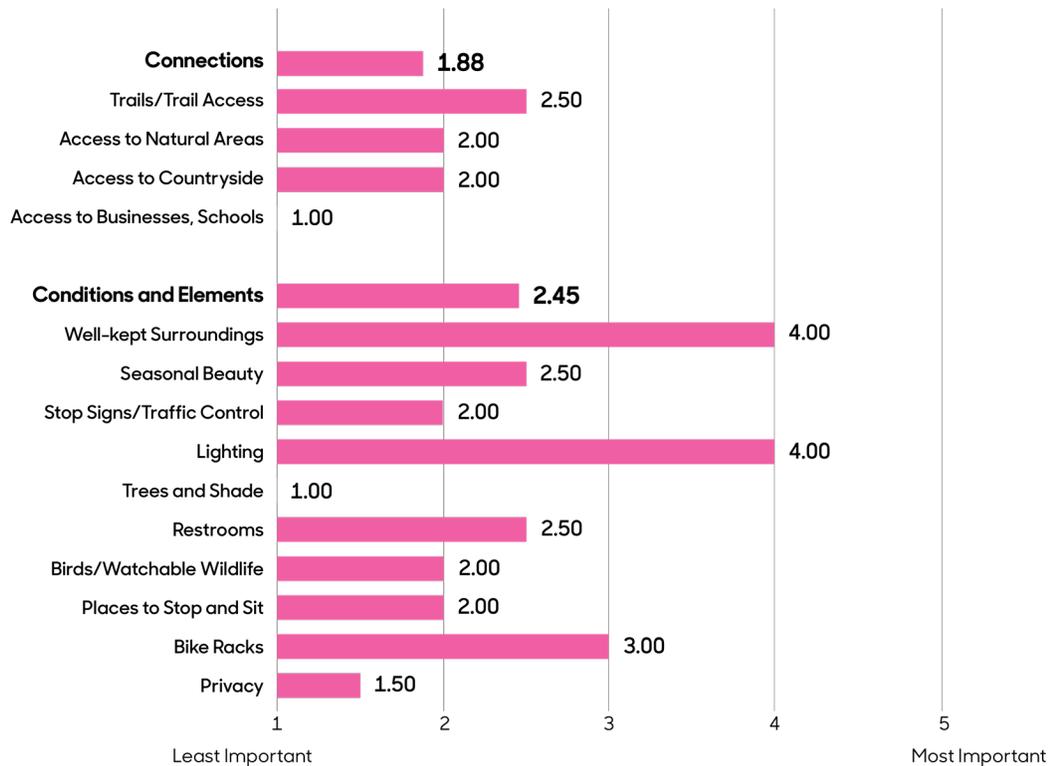
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, survey participants ranked the characteristics and features that made their biking experience better. These features are categorized as either "connections" or "conditions and elements." Among Elkader participants, connections are of significantly more important than conditions/elements, with mean values of 3.98 and 3.40, respectively. In terms of connections, access to trails is most important with a mean value of 4.30. Other factors, such as paved and well-maintained trails are the most important element to cyclists, with a mean value of 5.00. Well-kept surroundings (3.90), seasonal beauty (3.89), and watchable wildlife (3.55) are also important features.



(20 responses)

Students' Desired Bike Route Features

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, high school survey participants ranked the characteristics and features that factored into their choice of biking route. These features are categorized as either "connections" or "conditions and elements." Among participants, conditions/elements are relatively more important than connections, with mean values of 2.45 and 1.88, respectively. Well-kept surroundings and lighting are equally important, both with a mean value of 4.00. Bike racks are somewhat important, with a mean value of 3.00. High school students do not consider the other factors as important when selecting biking routes.



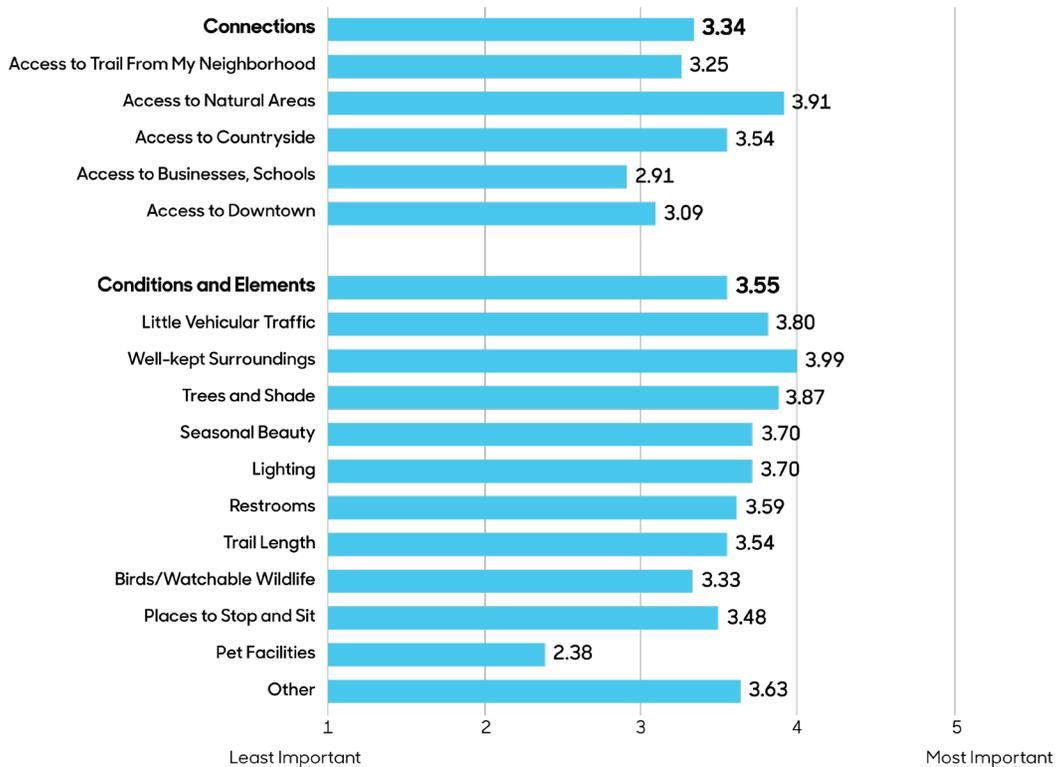
(3 responses)

Adults' Desired Trail Features

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 and elements are more important to Elkader trail



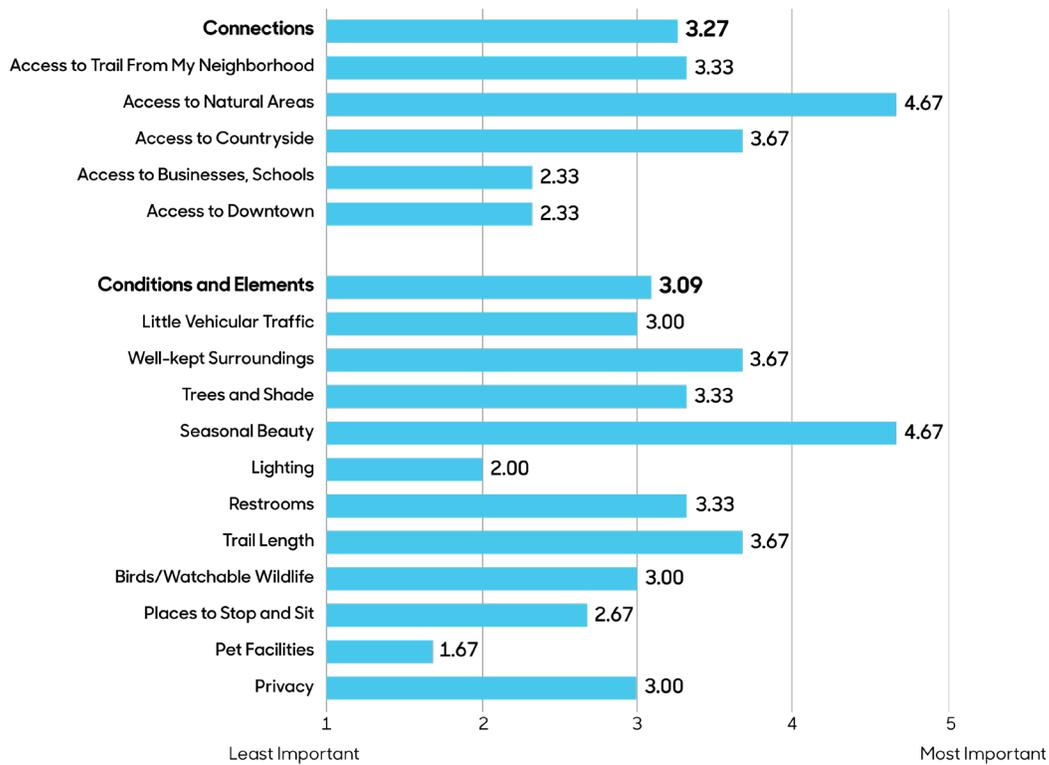
users than connections, with mean values of 3.55 and 3.34, respectively. In terms of connections, access to natural areas is considered most important, with a mean value of 3.91. In terms of conditions/elements, well-kept surroundings (3.99) is the most important element, followed by trees and shade (3.87), little vehicular traffic (3.80) and seasonal beauty and lighting (3.70 each).



(96 responses)

Students' Desired Trail Features

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 walking route features, they are categorized as either "connections" or "conditions and elements." Connections are more important to teenage trail users than conditions/elements, with mean values of 3.27 and 3.09, respectively. In terms of connections, access to natural areas is considered most important, with a mean value of 4.67. In terms of conditions/elements, seasonal beauty (4.67) is the most important element, followed by well-kept surroundings and trail length (3.67).



(3 responses)

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