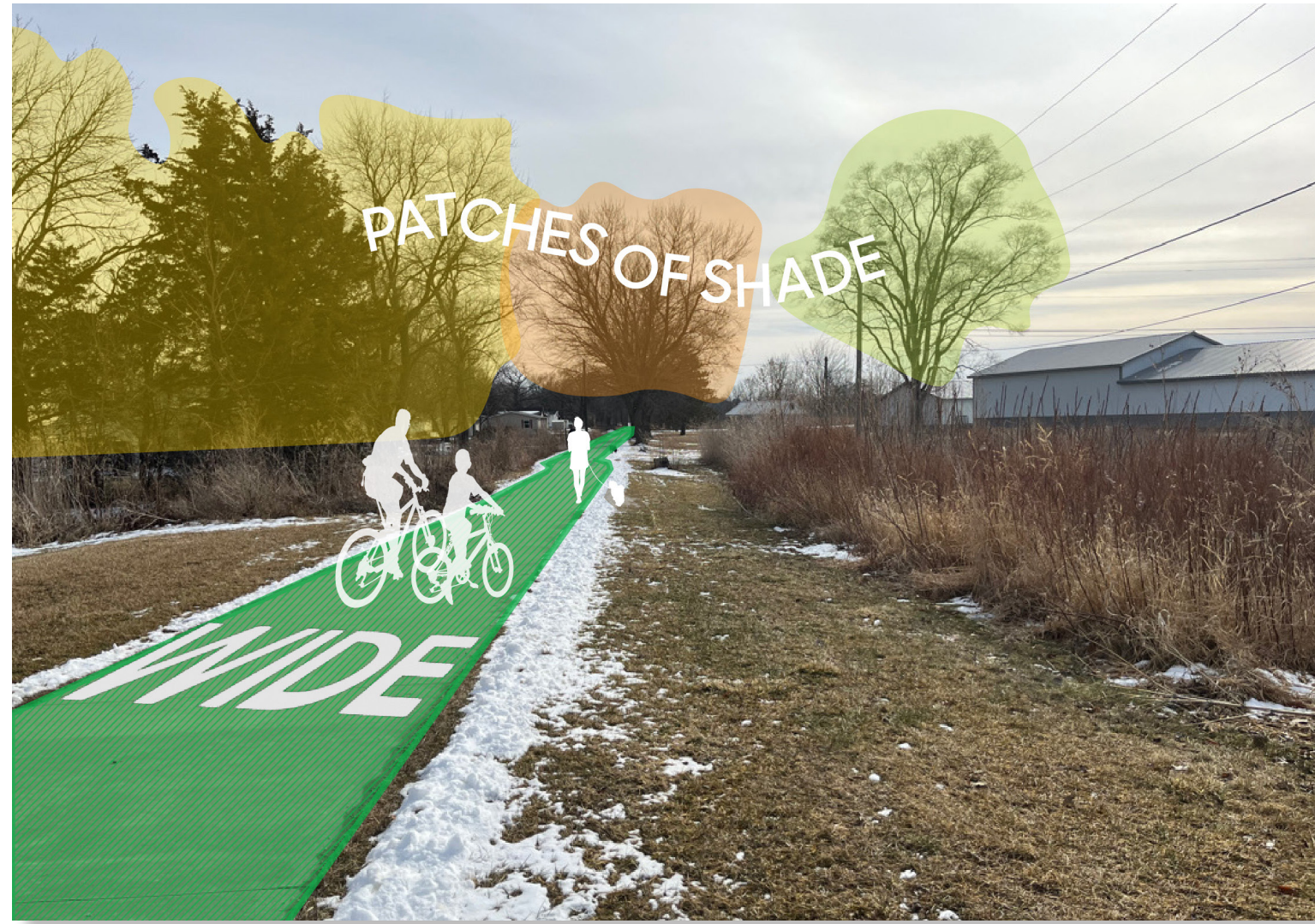




Historical buildings; wide, new sidewalks; and well maintained streets have made the downtown area a desirable destination.



The concentration of schools along 1st Street creates constant traffic, which, along with the absence of sidewalks, impedes kids' access to school.



The Liberty Trail is well shaded and has minimal traffic noise; it also provides good connections to the high school and road network.



Downtown streets are hard to cross because of high traffic, especially at school pickup and drop-off times.



Teacher's Park has lots of trees, green space, a riverfront view and a handicapped-accessible trail.



Pedestrians have trouble crossing at 1st Street and 5th Avenue, which are both part of Hwy 150, because of heavy traffic; the stoplight creates traffic congestion.

What Factors Affect Transportation in Independence?

Transportation is integral to small-town life and a vibrant economy. In the context of the Community Visioning Program, we recognize walking, biking, and driving as quintessential modes of travel to various destinations important to residents and visitors. Access to these destinations is crucial for many everyday activities—getting to work and school, participating in community events, and providing for basic needs such as food, health care, and healthy activity.

In this participatory assessment, we want to find out which factors and conditions affect transportation use in Independence, where these factors and conditions are most prevalent, and how they influence route and transportation choices locally. Because residents have the best knowledge of how Independence's transportation system works, we use focused, small-group conversations, mapping, and photos of the best and worst to understand local transportation.

Different Users = Different Needs

To capture insights about transportation from a variety of perspectives, we invited Independence residents with different transportation needs to participate in focus groups. A total of 36 residents attended Independence's workshop. Participants were separated into five user groups and the Independence steering committee.



(6 participants): This user group represents those in the community who engage in outdoor recreation, including cycling, walking, running, swimming, skiing, etc. The availability of multiple venues for outdoor recreation matters to this group.



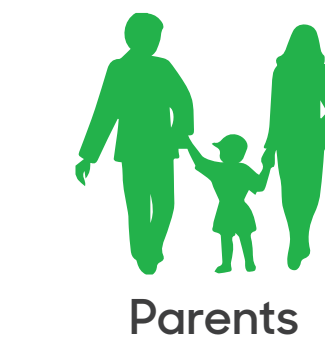
(2 participants): This user group is directly affected by accessibility barriers such as high curbing and uneven sidewalks that make it difficult to operate mobility-aiding equipment effectively. Handicapped parking, curb ramps, and smooth surfaces are critical transportation features.



(10 participants): Accessibility—both in terms of physical access and proximity—is a major concern for this user group. Because some people in this user group do not or are unable to drive, having goods and services within walking distance is important.



(7 participants): This group uses primarily non-motorized modes of transportation, so pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets and sidewalks are important. These users value the ability to get to destinations on foot or via bicycle and having goods and services within walking distance.



(3 participants): Safety of their children is a primary concern of this user group. Access to safe and easy routes to school activities is another significant factor to this group. Parents of young children desire smooth, wide surfaces for strollers.



(8 participants): The common denominator for this user group is that their observations are influenced by special knowledge of the transportation system acquired during the Community Visioning assessment process. As a result, this group is more representative of decision makers.



Actives


"Walking along the river is the best...you take in the nature... and the river's always changing... so it's kind of neat to see..."

"...[Highway]150 does travel through Independence,[so] we get a lot of 18 wheelers...and when they have to do roadwork...they have to divert those semis through neighborhoods...so 6th Avenue during construction basically becomes like a highway..."

"...we just paved...a really nice trail that follows [Highway] 150 south, and we put up that brand-new Independence sign... it looks very nice..."

"...if there was a safe way to get across town on a bicycle and go more than four miles, I would do that, but we have to go out on the county highways to get exercise..."

"...if people come to visit Independence...[they] pretty much have to get in a vehicle and keep moving from spot to spot. We have some amazing historical locations...but you can't go to...[them] without getting in a vehicle..."



Youth


"I like...[Liberty Trail]. It's really fun to get out and enjoy the weather...and the squirrels... and it's nicely paved and [has] cool trees."

"...when [my family goes] biking, we usually look for a trail...but there [are none] that we know of...so we go on the sidewalks [on the east side of town] but then we have to stop because there's a lot of traffic."

"I think...we should...make [public transportation]... accessible to people [who] don't have any other form of transportation."

"...it's kind of difficult getting out of school [onto 1st Street] because it's just so...cramped..."

"I'll bike, and then [the sidewalk will] kind of stop, and then I have to go to the other sidewalk on the other side of the street."



Parents


"There [are] areas where there [are] sidewalk and/or trails, and then there [are] areas where there's nothing and people are walking in the street."

"I'd like to see how the county's trail system can hook into different areas of the town trail system, so that [if] somebody wants to go on a bike ride, [they can] ride a trail from Independence to Brandon or Independence to Winthrop..."

"First Street from [5th Avenue SE] all the way out to the school...from 3:15 to 4:00, it's just littered with cars and it takes you 20 minutes to get through town..."

"[We need] a few bus stops on this side of town for the school to get those kids out to the high school, because not all of those kids drive."

"I just love this trail system that...connects all the schools through the sports complex, and now it comes all the way...to Triangle Park..."



Older Adults

"Riverwalk [Park is] the most accessible for us...it has pretty much everything. It's got the water...benches... [and] shade."

"The fact that we have the river down the middle of the community means the traffic funnels to the...two primary bridges through the downtown area...that's why the traffic does seem to congest there..."

"The intersection that causes the most problems...is probably [3rd Avenue and 1st Street]...[cars] have that right-turn option...you can have the right-of-way as a pedestrian and yet the drivers are still looking to make the right turn..."

"...the city...doubled the size of the street signs [downtown] so when you're driving along you can actually read them. Boy, that would be nice throughout [1st Street]."

"It'd be nice...to have benches or someplace where you can sit [throughout town]."



Mobility Challenged

"...it really is nice that people coming into town will be able to find places... because...they replaced the street signs...[Now] the printing is bigger and they're lower to the ground where you notice [them] better."

"...we [don't] have... an abundance of... handicapped-accessible parking places, and...some of them still have a curb that you have to get up over, which can be a problem..."

"[Riverwalk Trail] starts up in the north part on the river...and goes downtown to 1st Street...and you have to go up a flight of stairs to get to the sidewalk to continue to walk..."

"...the [1st and 2nd Street] bridges over the river, the sidewalks on those are badly in need of repair."

"...I would say Independence rates pretty well for its sidewalks compared to other communities..."



Steering Committee

"...signage maybe is an issue [because] we do have visitors coming, and a lot of times they're confused as to where they can go get food, where they can get lodging...just where to go."

"There is a lot of flooding along 1st Street W and 9th where [the] crosswalk is. If we have a heavy rain, it's like a little pond...if you're walking, you're going to have soaking wet feet and clothes trying to cross those areas."

"If you're trying to cross [1st] Street anywhere from Iowa Avenue all the way until you get to the school, there is nothing... you're playing Frogger."

"...[Liberty Trail] goes down and then you've got the trees on both sides...It's really very pretty there... And you don't get any traffic noise on there."

"I ride my bike to...different places, and I find that all of the sudden...if you're on a trail—poof—you're off a trail... it isn't always easy to reach a destination by bike."

Independence

What People Said

Transportation Assets and Barriers Analysis
 Julia Badenhop, Sandra Oberbroeckling, Britney Markhardt
 Iowa State University | Trees Forever | Iowa Department of Transportation



User Types

User Types	Destinations and Activities			Valued Features		Undesirable Qualities and Features						Most Desired Improvements and Activities			
	Liberty Trail	Riverwalk Park	Walking for Exercise & Recreation	Access to Natural Areas	Pedestrian Access & Connectivity	Flooding & Drainage Problems	Inadequate Sidewalk Infrastructure	Insufficient Parking	School Traffic Flow	Heavy Traffic & Congestion	Absence of Way-finding Signage	Safer Crossings for Walkers & Cyclists	Expanded Trail Network	More Efficient Traffic Flow at Schools	Improved Way-finding System
Actives	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mobility Challenged	●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Older Adults	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Youth	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	
Parents	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
Steering Committee	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●

Actives walk, bike, and run for exercise and/or recreation. They enjoy biking along the Amish Highway because it is scenic and doesn't carry much traffic. This group would like better access to the kayak ramp. Actives also want more trees and talked about proactively replacing ash trees.

Mobility-challenged individuals drive and walk to get around. They find that high curbs and tactile pavement on curb cuts are obstacles for people using wheelchairs and walkers. This group mentioned that there is not enough handicapped-accessible parking downtown.

Older adults primarily drive and walk. They would like more trees and landscaping along existing trails, along with better trail access. This group noted that while there is off-street parking downtown, many people don't know about it because there is no signage.

Youth walk, bike, ride the bus, and roller-skate. They enjoy going fishing with their families and swimming at the aquatic center. This group suggested solving the school traffic problem by building a subway system that would end at the school.

Parents drive and walk in town. They are primarily concerned with the safety of their children. This group suggested paving the existing gravel road near the school campus and extending it to 6th Street SW to help alleviate school traffic-flow problems.

Steering committee members travel by vehicle, UTV, side-by-side, and golf cart. This group also walks and bikes. Committee members worry that traffic issues on 1st Street will negatively affect businesses along that street. They find large parking lots, such as the lot at the end of the trail in Teacher's Park, to be visually unappealing.

Liberty Trail is a favorite walking and biking venue among all user types because it is nicely paved and shaded, and helps people connect to nature. Parents appreciate that their kids can use the trail to get to school without having to walk in the street.

Riverwalk Park is a major hub of the community and hosts many local activities for people of all ages. In addition to the trail that connects Teacher's and Beach Parks, Riverwalk Park provides access to the river and a variety of outdoor sports venues.

Walking is a popular pastime for residents, who enjoy walking with family, their friends, or their dogs in a variety of environments, including on the trails, along the river, to the mill and the many parks, and in the residential neighborhood near the hospital.

Both adults and youth take pleasure in experiencing nature, including scenic views, flowers, trees, and seasonal changes when they are out and about. Focus group participants mentioned the river and the scenic area by the old railroad bridge as particularly appealing.

Pedestrian access and connectivity are important factors for walkers. People are more comfortable using smooth wide sidewalks and intersections with curbs ramps and marked crosswalks, examples of which are on 1st Street near the library, the hospital trail and 4th Avenue SW.

People in every group raised the issue of flooding and incomplete broken and uneven sidewalks as a complaint among participants. A common complaint among participants was that many people, including children, walk in the streets because of the conditions of the sidewalk system.

Residents of all ages are dissatisfied with the limited availability of parking at several locations in town, including at the mill during the farmers market, downtown, Three Elms Park, and the Orchard Park.

Multiple schools in the same block, new teen drivers, and confusing speed limits wreak havoc on traffic flow into and out of the schools and along 1st Street. Drivers trying to avoid the area bring more traffic to residential roads, making parents anxious about their kids crossing the street.

Highway 150 brings a great deal of truck traffic through town, creating safety concerns for pedestrians and cyclists, turning trucks slow traffic and causing congestion. The bridges and railroad crossings also impede traffic flow.

Some focus group participants pointed out that visitors and new residents have trouble finding key destinations in town, such as the parks, trails, ball fields, and restaurants because of the absence of directional signage throughout town.

Making crossing streets and roadways safer for walkers and cyclists is a priority among adults. Some suggestions for improvements include push-button activated crossing signal on Enterprise Drive at Walmart, and pedestrian bridges across the river and near the schools.

Residents want more trails throughout town, as well as regional connections to neighboring communities. Both adults and youth would prefer trails that are separated from the roadway with some type of buffer. Some groups think more trails along the river would be beneficial.

Ideas for improving traffic flow near the schools were abundant during the focus groups. People proposed creating and/or changing the school-time speed limit, pedestrian bridges, and widening existing roadways.

Steering committee members, older adults, and active recreationists think that way-finding signage is needed to guide both residents and visitors to important local destinations, including the trails, the ball fields, and Three Elms Park.

Independence

Emerging Themes

Transportation Assets and Barriers Analysis
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