



Iowa's Living Roadways

**community  
visioning**

**designing livable communities, 2023**

**Independence, Iowa**





"There needs to be better dedicated access for pedestrians and bikes across the railroad tracks and across the downtown bridges."



"Independence has done well over the past few years to enhance trail systems and parks...We feel safe walking at all times and enjoy having a variety of areas to explore in town."

"While maybe not feasible, a public transit route would be nice. The way the town is set up one route with a loop to main destinations could possibly work."



## 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 Independence residents. Surveys were mailed to 600 randomly selected residents living in Independence 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 532. A total of 145 people returned surveys, for a response rate of 35.5%. (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.

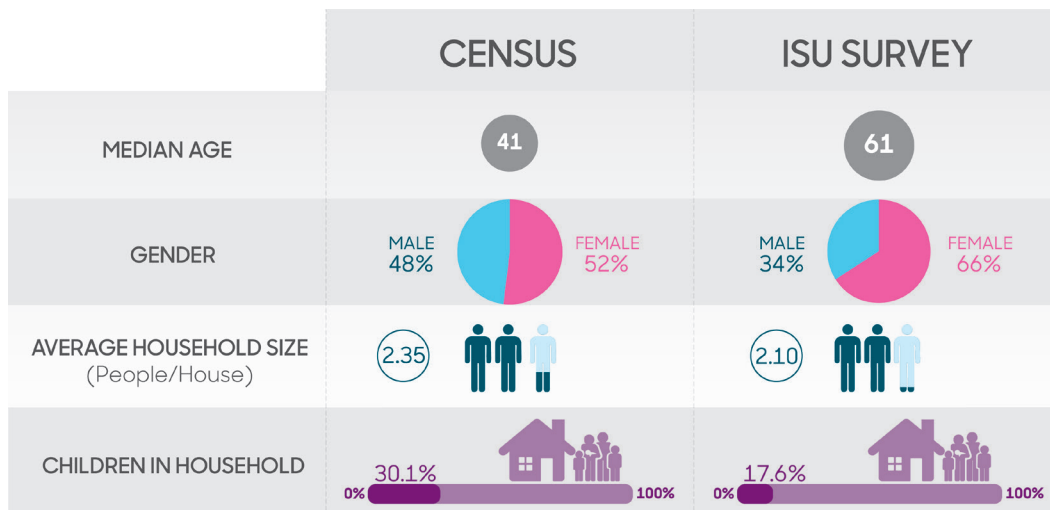
## What Did We Find Out?

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 Independence. This series of boards 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?

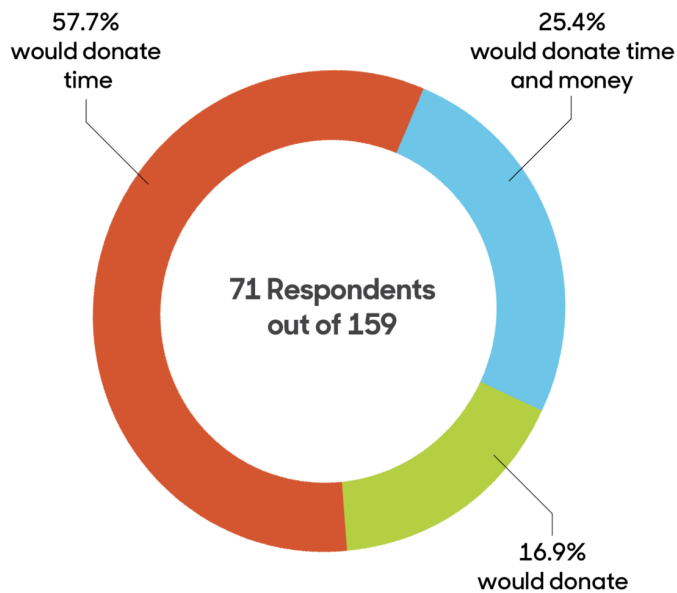
The demographics of the respondents are somewhat different from those obtained from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS). For example, the survey respondents median age of 61 is significantly older than the ACS estimated average age for Independence residents of 41. In terms of gender, females are significantly over-represented at 66% of respondents compared to the ACS estimate of 52%. Average household size among survey respondents is somewhat lower than the ACS estimate, and the percentage of households with children among survey responses is significantly lower.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey.

# ARE PEOPLE WILLING TO HELP?

## 45% said YES!



### Willingness to implement change

Most survey participants who answered “Yes” to this question are willing to contribute their time to community improvements (57.7%), while 25.4% would help financially and contribute their time. Nearly 17% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to contribute financially.

Compared to other small towns in Iowa, Independence residents are somewhat more 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.<sup>1</sup> Independence exceeds this average by 2%.

## How Do You Get People to Help?

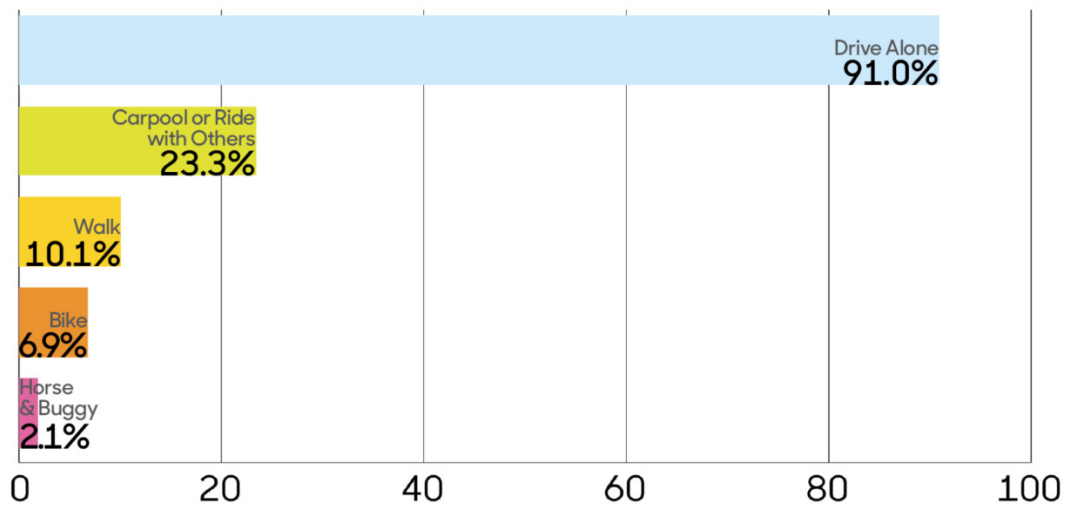
In 2014, the most common reason residents in small-town Iowa said they didn’t become involved in community projects is that no one asked them (34%). Twenty-eight percent on average said that they don’t have time, which is significantly lower than the 2004 average of 59%. Sixteen percent indicated that they didn’t know how to become involved, and 7% said that no community project needed volunteers.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

## How Do Independence Residents Travel?

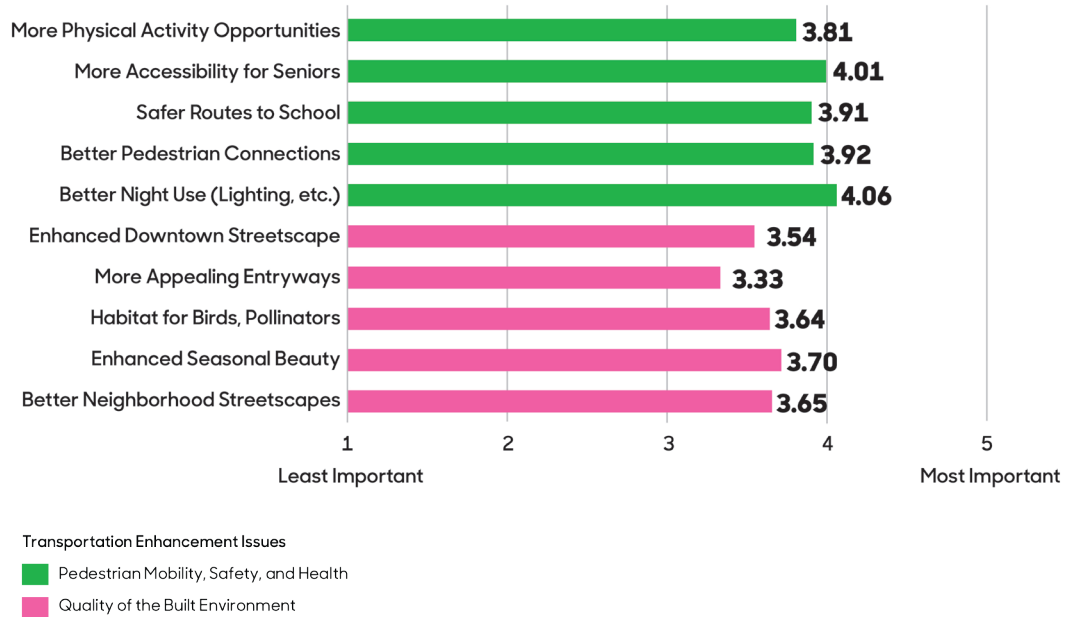
Most survey respondents drive to important destinations such as the convenience store, the post office, school, and church (91%). More than 23% carpool or ride with someone else. More than 10% of respondents indicated that they walk and nearly 7% bike. A small percentage of people use horse and buggy for transportation (2.1%).

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?

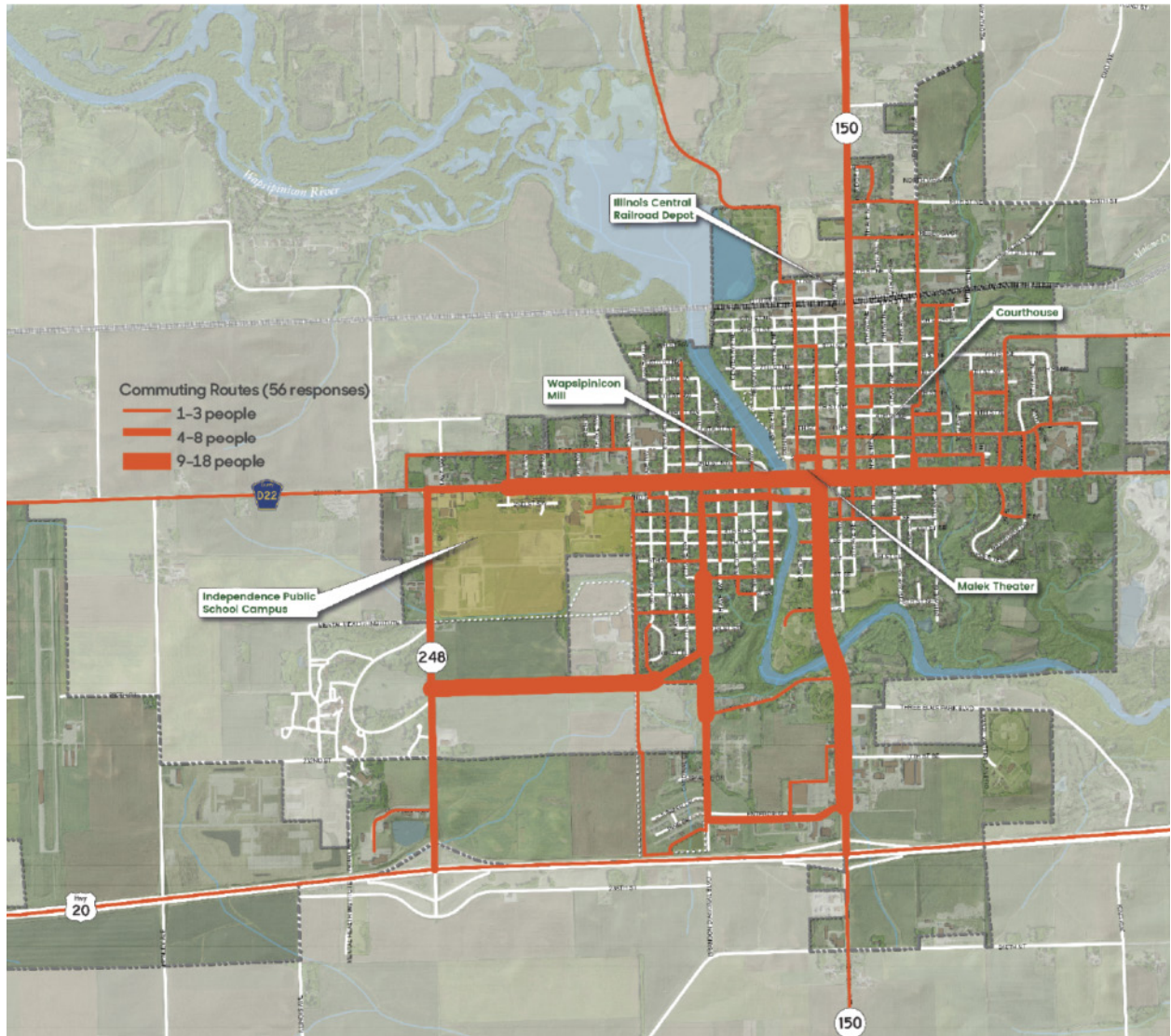
## Mobility, Safety, and Health!



### Importance of transportation enhancement by type (175 responses)

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most important, participants in Independence 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 significant, including improving accessibility for seniors (4.01), creating better pedestrian connections (3.92), developing safer routes to school (3.91), and creating more opportunities for physical activities (3.81). 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 February 2023.





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

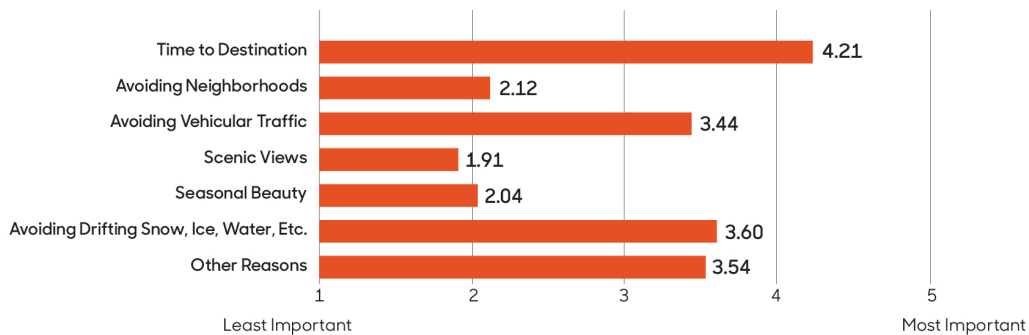


## How People Get To Work

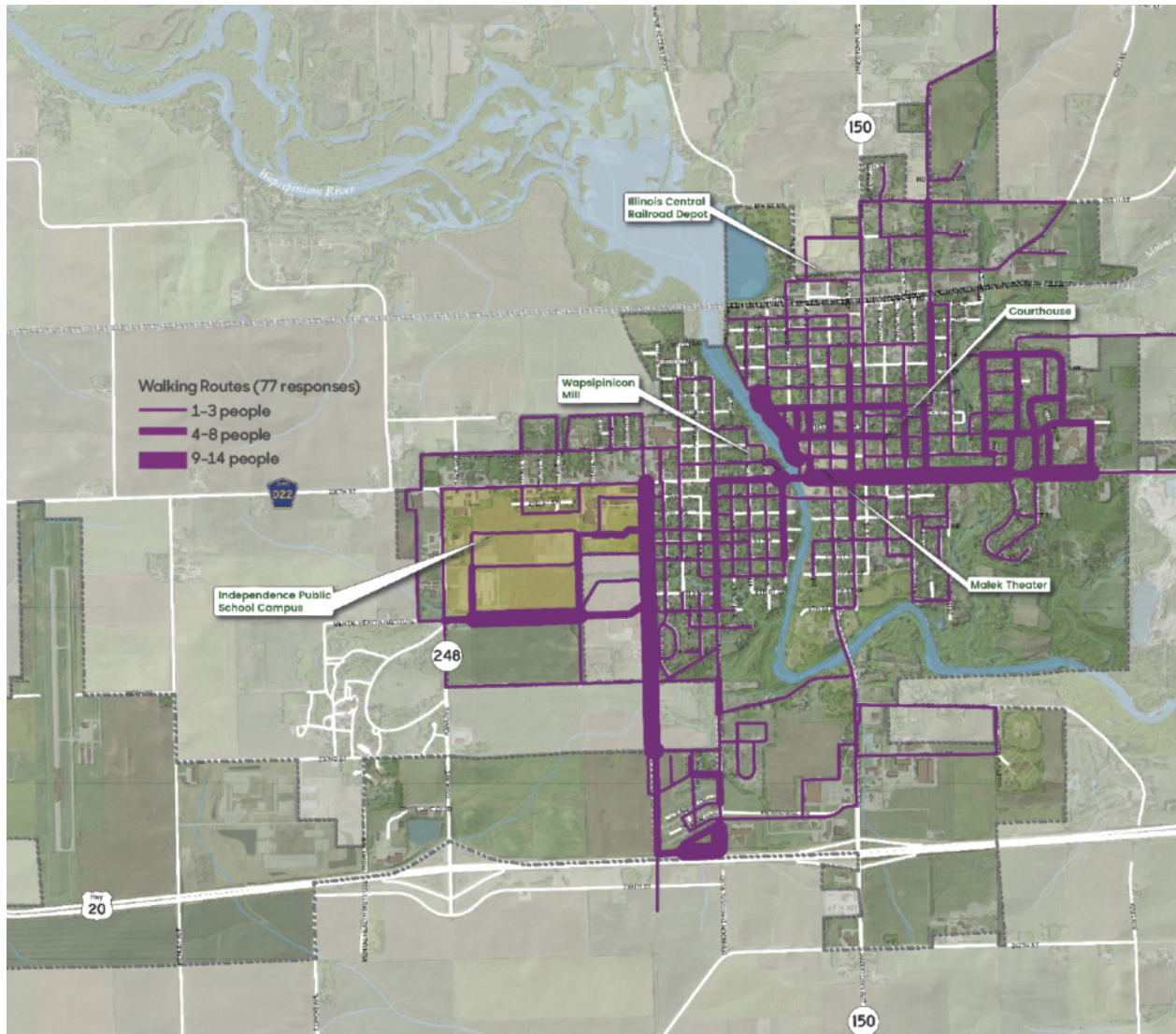
This map shows the commuting routes identified by 56 survey respondents. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. The primary east-west commuting corridor into and out of Independence is County Road D22/1st Street, and Highway 150 is the major north-south route. The most heavily used corridors in town are 1st Street, 5th Avenue NE, 3rd Avenue SE to US 20, Bland Boulevard, and Iowa Avenue, which also connects to US 20.

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 Independence participants, time to destination is the most important factor in determining commuting routes, with a mean value of 4.21. Avoiding weather-related issues such as snow and ice is also somewhat important (3.60), as well as other reasons—which include avoiding stoplights, availability of gas, and taking the most direct route (3.54)—and avoiding vehicular traffic (3.44). Scenic views, seasonal beauty, and avoiding neighborhoods are not critical factors in determining commuting routes.

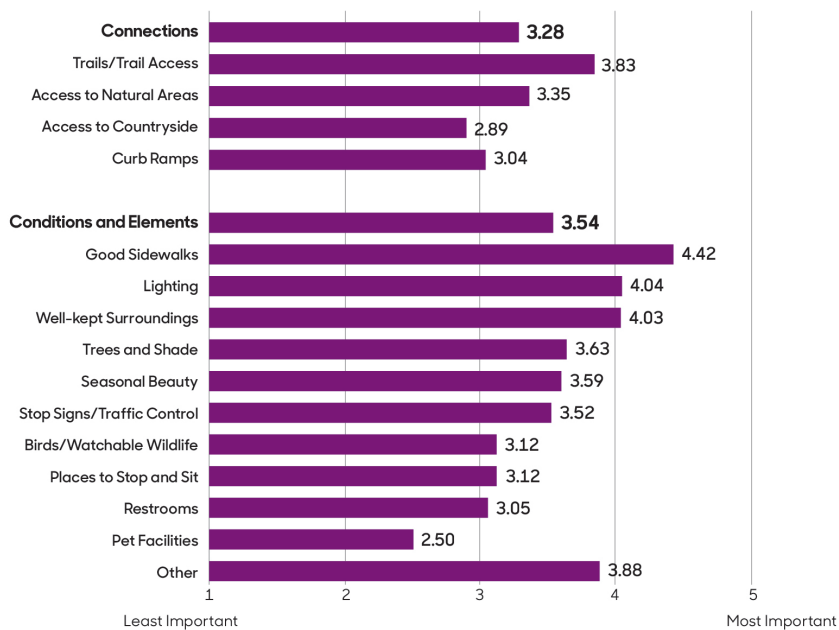


Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislib/>.

## Where People Walk

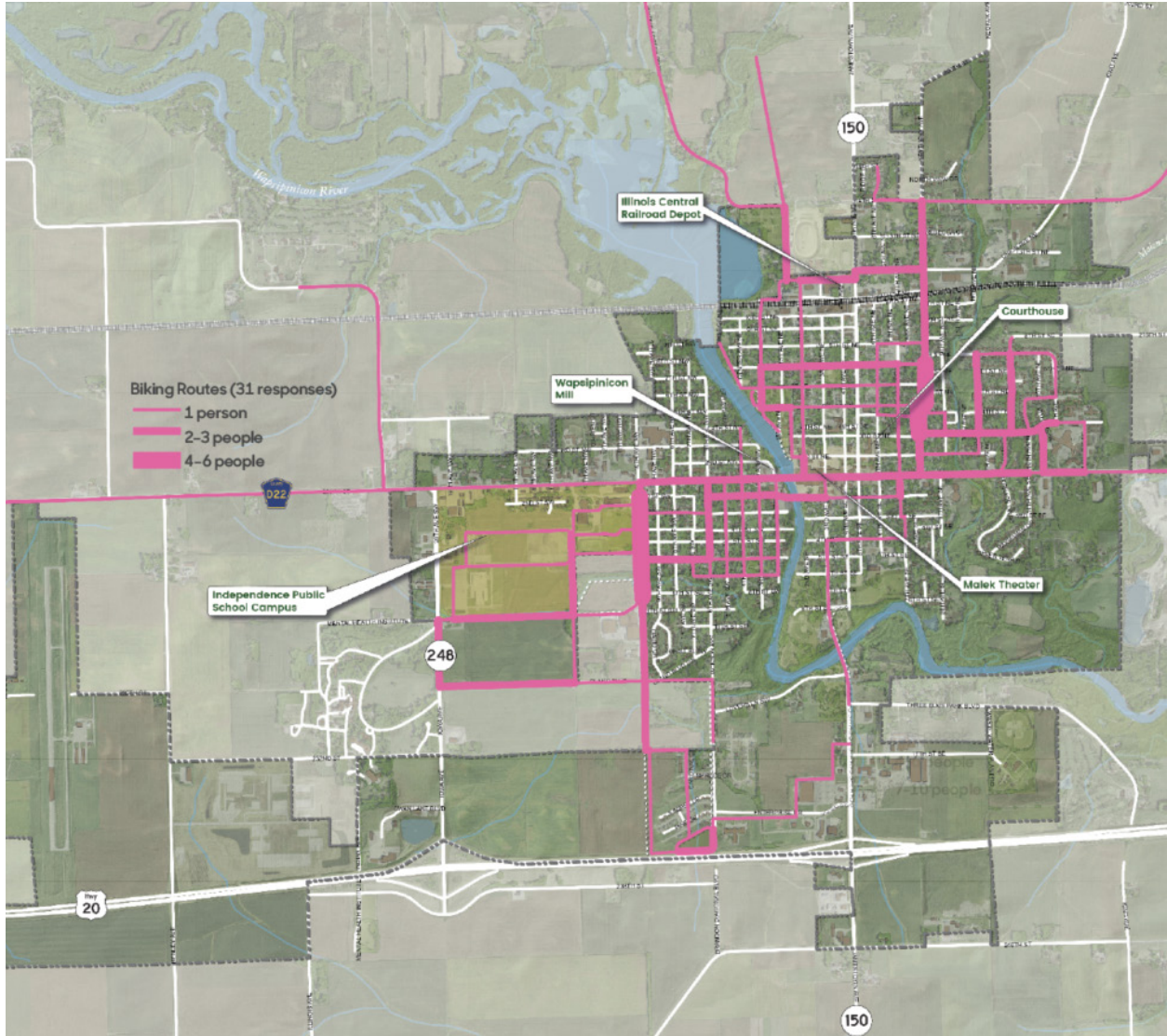
This map shows the walking routes identified by 77 survey respondents. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. Riverwalk Trail, Liberty Trail, Triangle Park Trail, and the trail by the hospital are popular walking venues among survey respondents. Streets in town frequented by walkers include 1st Street from the river east to the hospital, portions of 8th Avenue NE, 6th Avenue SW, streets connecting to River Walk Trail from the east, and the residential streets northwest of the hospital.

## 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.” Independence participants consider conditions/elements more important than connections, with mean values of 3.54 and 3.28, respectively. In terms of connections, access to trails is most important with a mean value of 3.83. Good sidewalks (4.42) are the most important condition/element to walkers, followed by lighting (4.04) and well-kept surroundings (4.03), and other factors, including sidewalk or trail surface, low traffic, views of community activity, proximity to destinations (3.88).



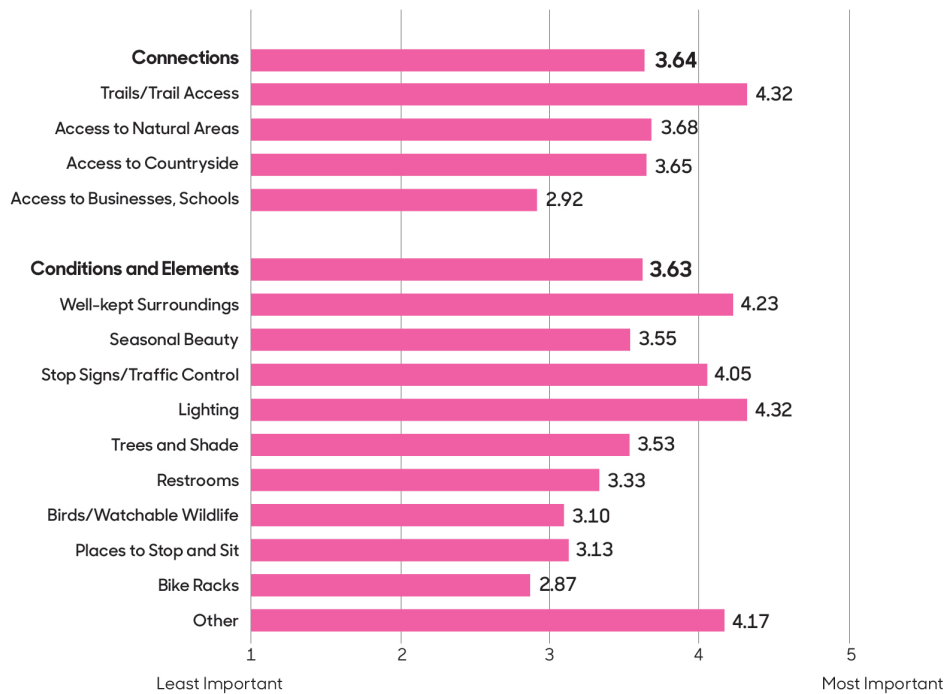


Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislib/>.

## Where People Bike

This map shows the biking routes identified by 31 survey respondents. The frequency that the routes are used is depicted by their width, with most frequently used routes being the thickest. Bikers most often use Liberty Trail, as well as the Triangle Park Trail and the trail by the hospital, although to a lesser extent. Popular city streets for biking include 1st Street, portions of 8th Avenue NE, and 7th Street NE and 5th Street NE, presumably to access River Walk Trail. Some people bike out of town along County Road D22 and 205th Street to the east.

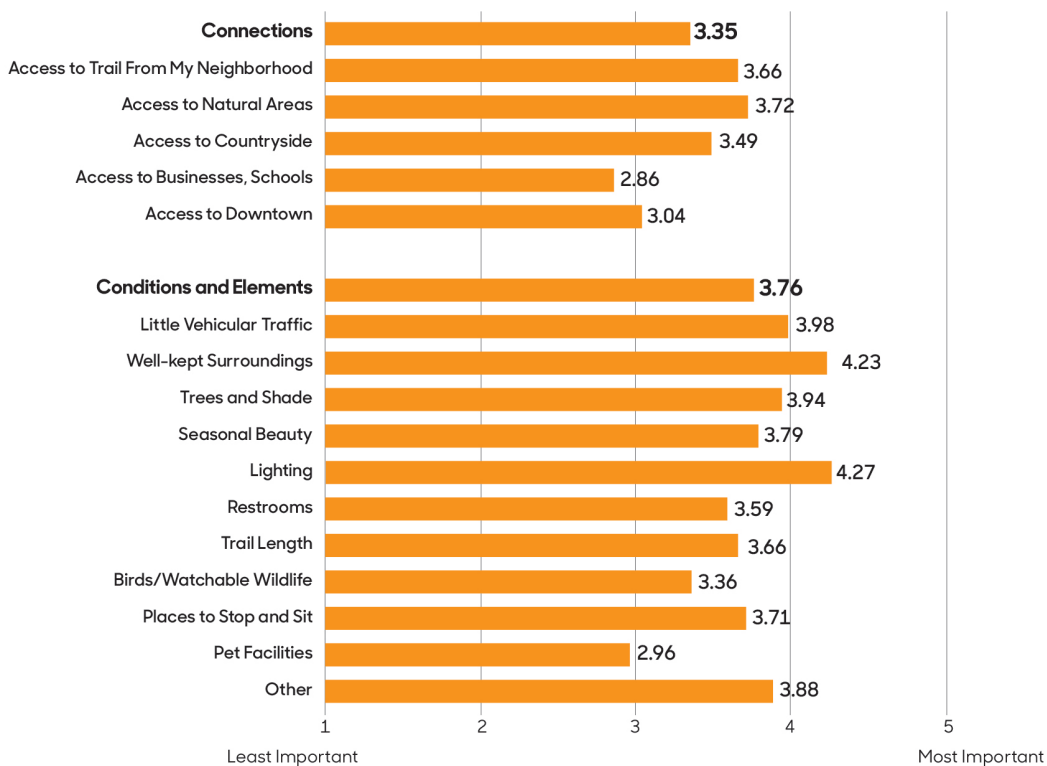
## Why They Go That Way



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." Independence participants consider connections and conditions/elements almost equally important, with mean values of 3.64 and 3.63, respectively. Access to trails is most important connection to survey respondents with a mean value of 4.32. In terms of conditions/elements, lighting (4.32) is the most important among bikers, followed by well-kept surroundings (4.23) and other factors, which include traffic volume, trail/lane width, and clean surfaces (4.17). Stop signs/traffic control (4.05), seasonal beauty (3.55), and trees and shade (3.53) are also significant elements.

## 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 Independence trail users than connections, with mean values of 3.76 and 3.35, respectively. Access to natural areas is most the important connection among trail users, with a mean value of 3.72. In terms of conditions/elements, lighting (4.27) is most important, followed by well-kept surroundings (4.23). Little vehicular traffic (3.98), trees and shade (3.94), and other factors (3.88)—including trail surface, proximity to parking, multiple access points, and the availability of trail maps—are also significant for trail users.

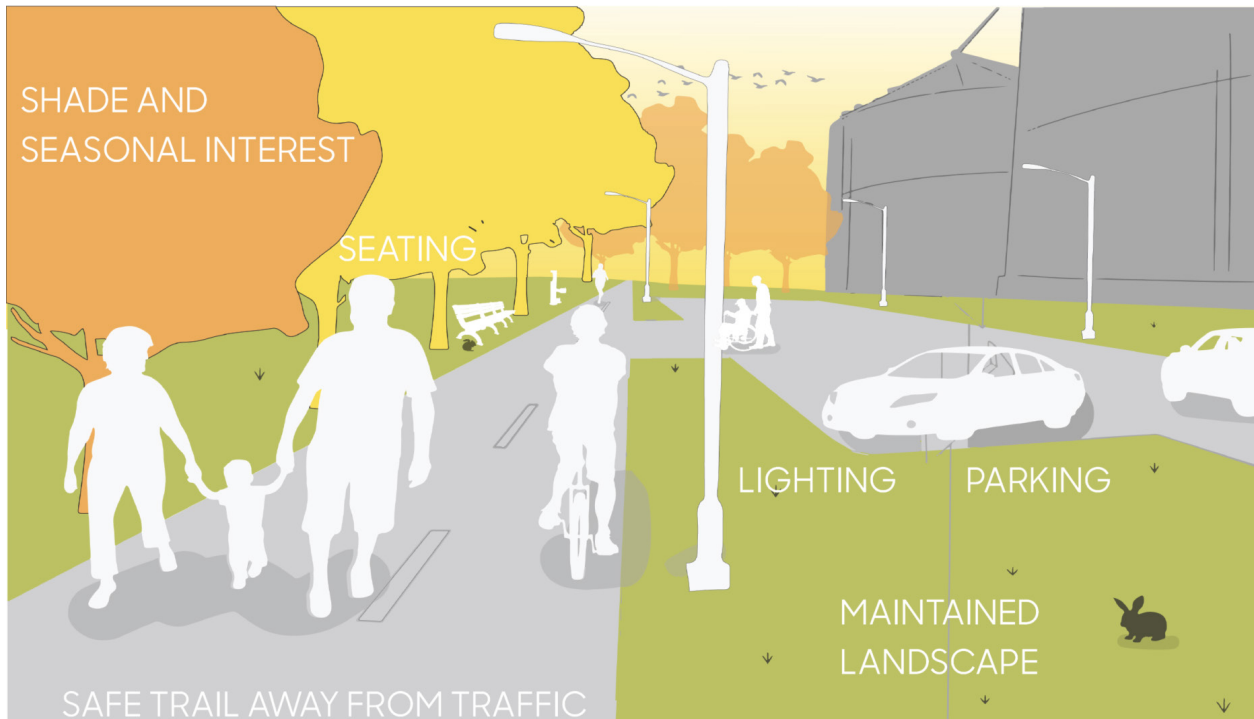






“Liberty Trail could use better lighting other than in proximity of the schools after dark. (It is a great trail.)”

“I would like all trails connected. For example, the trail on the east side of the river is great, but too short. I want to walk and/or bike in natural areas—not downtown.”



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