

City of Billings Active Transportation Case Statement

Over the last decade, non-motorized transportation has become an increasingly important component of our progressive growing community of Billings and Yellowstone County. In 1995, citizens were asked to rate city-provided facilities. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents believed that there were “too few bike and foot paths”. Increased levels of bicycling and walking have resulted in significant benefits in terms of health and physical fitness, the environment, and transportation-related effects. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities have become an expression of community pride and character, and in many cases, they are a means of preserving the natural and historical resources of our region.

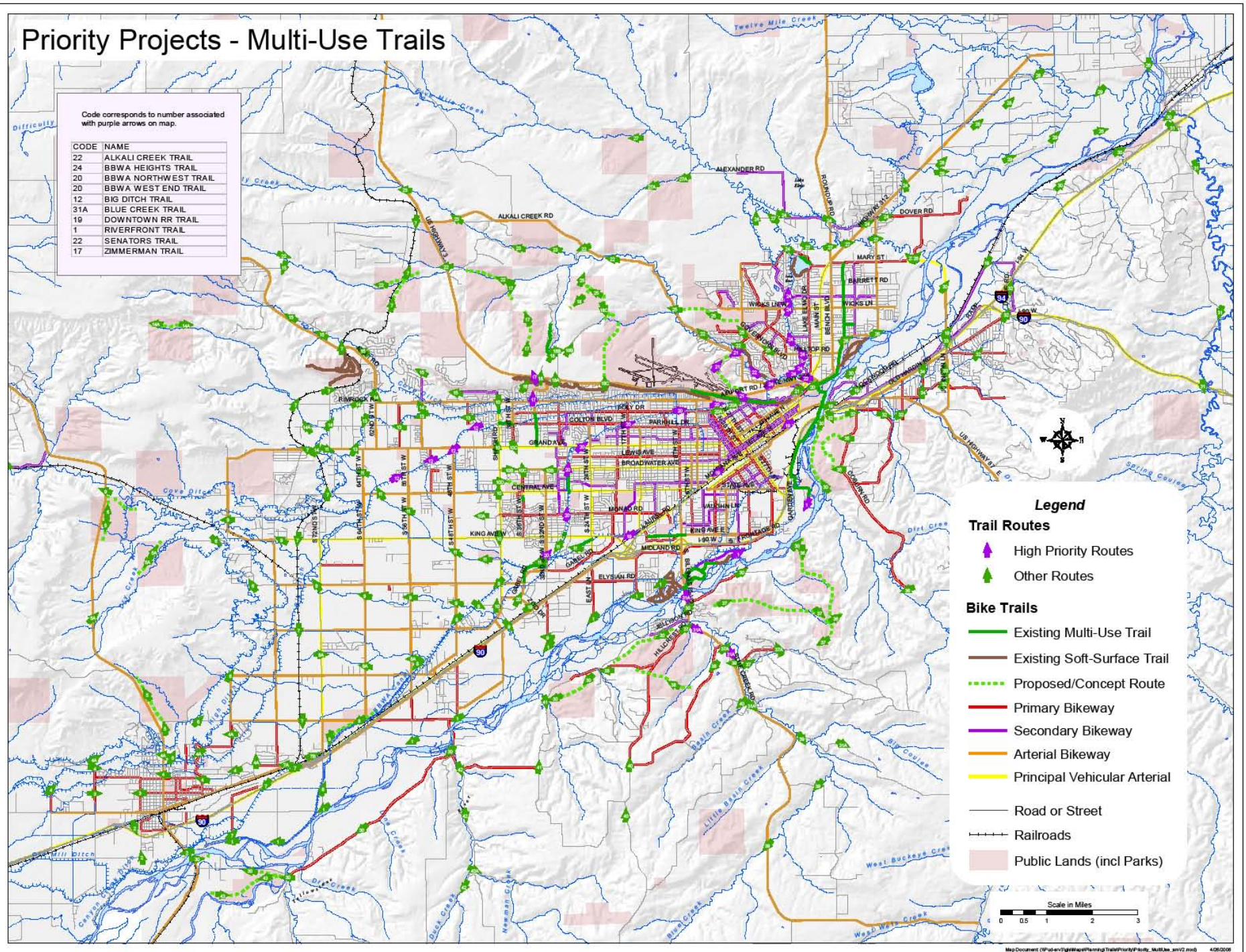
Bike Net, the original non-motorized transportation plan for the City of Billings and Yellowstone County, was adopted in 1995. When this took place, Billings took a decisive first step toward achieving a community vision of a city where quality of life is paramount. This vision included implementing a system of trails and bikeways that would invite Billings citizens to get off their couches and out of their cars. It included a set of recommendations that addressed policies, land use, education, enforcement and design. *BikeNet* was truly a pioneering document for the Billings community: educating us on the importance of trails, leaving a lasting legacy of interest groups, and trails that have set the stage for future development of the entire network. In its March 2002 issue, The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) gave the *BikeNet Plan*, its President’s Award of Excellence for “making the conscious choice to move in a [new] direction that encourages bicycle transportation.” Adopted in 2004, the updated plan is now called the *Heritage Trail Plan* and recognizes the work developed through the *BikeNet Plan* and is built on a community-based planning process that includes public participation and input as its cornerstone. The current *Heritage Trail Plan* is scheduled for updating in 2009.

Ideally, the *Heritage Trail Plan* should be implemented in its entirety at once. The realities of funding availability, however, make it necessary to consider the plan as a combination of many projects, both small and large, which ultimately will result in total implementation of the plan. Therefore, the Heritage Trail Plan includes an innovative method for prioritizing potential projects that is based on a system of prioritization based on objective data and calculations. This was set up in two separate prioritization methods, one for proposed primary on-street bikeways and another for proposed multi-use trails. The criteria for prioritizing on-street facilities was route continuity, non-motorized travel demand, bicycle compatibility index, and public opinion. The criteria used for prioritizing multi-use trails were safety, connectivity/accessibility, route continuity, aesthetic/recreational value, non-motorized travel demand, and public opinion.

Priority Projects - Multi-Use Trails

Code corresponds to number associated with purple arrows on map.

CODE	NAME
22	ALKALI CREEK TRAIL
24	BBWA HEIGHTS TRAIL
20	BBWA NORTHWEST TRAIL
20	BBWA WEST END TRAIL
12	BIG DITCH TRAIL
31A	BLUE CREEK TRAIL
19	DOWNTOWN RR TRAIL
1	RIVERFRONT TRAIL
22	SENATORS TRAIL
17	ZIMMERMAN TRAIL



Legend

Trail Routes

- High Priority Routes (Purple arrow)
- Other Routes (Green dashed line)

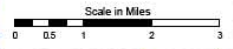
Bike Trails

- Existing Multi-Use Trail (Solid green line)
- Existing Soft-Surface Trail (Solid brown line)
- Proposed/Concept Route (Green dotted line)
- Primary Bikeway (Solid red line)
- Secondary Bikeway (Solid purple line)
- Arterial Bikeway (Solid orange line)
- Principal Vehicular Arterial (Solid yellow line)

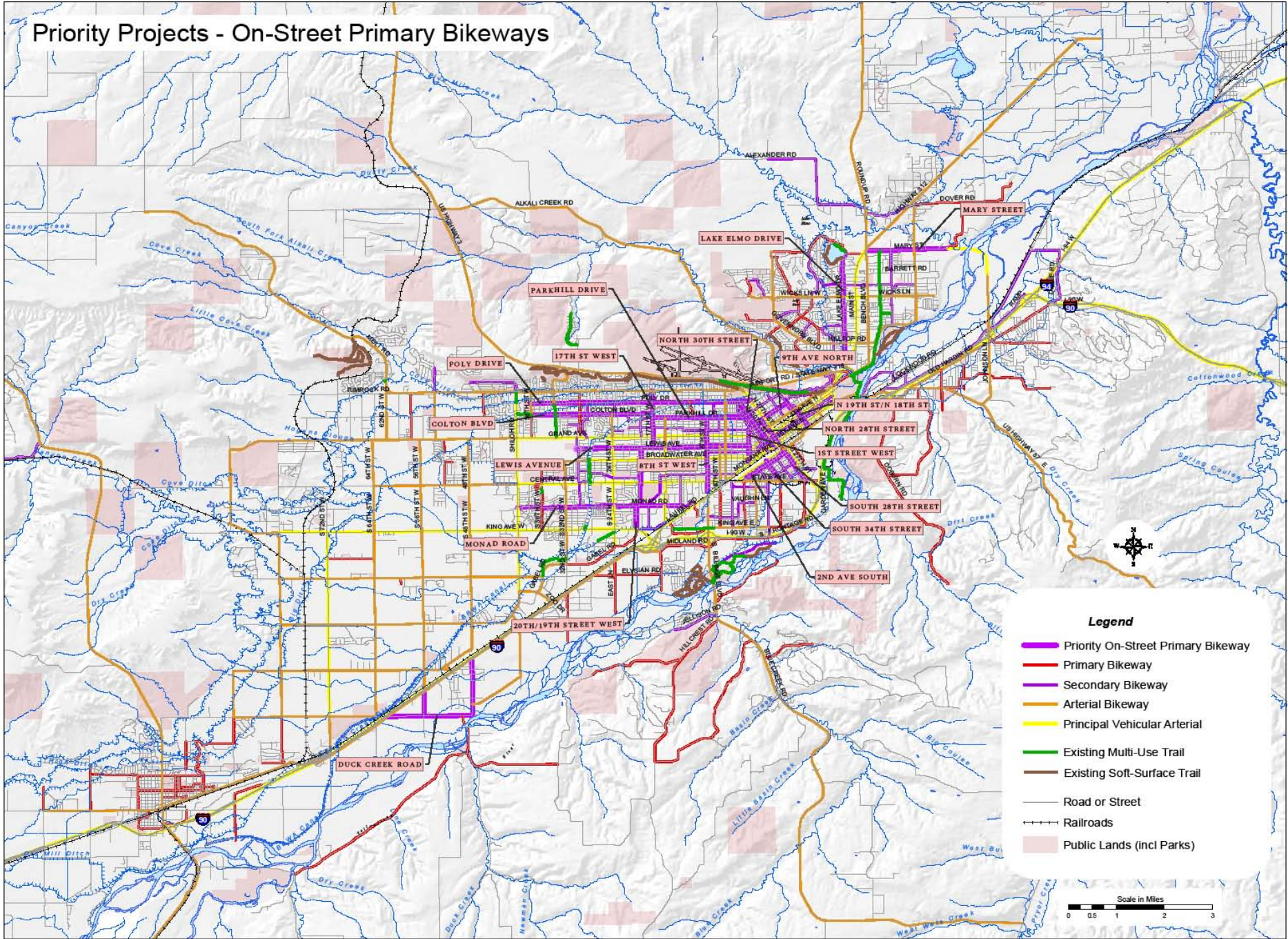
Road or Street (Thin black line)

Railroads (Black line with cross-ticks)

Public Lands (incl Parks) (Light pink shaded area)



Priority Projects - On-Street Primary Bikeways



Legend

- Priority On-Street Primary Bikeway
- Primary Bikeway
- Secondary Bikeway
- Arterial Bikeway
- Principal Vehicular Arterial
- Existing Multi-Use Trail
- Existing Soft-Surface Trail
- Road or Street
- Railroads
- Public Lands (incl Parks)



The BikeNet Plan and the current Heritage Trail Plan have been incorporated into other plans such as the Growth Policy, the Transportation Plan and the Parks 2020 Plan. This non-motorized transportation plan has also played an integral role in neighborhood plans and the update of subdivision regulations. With the plans adopted by both the Billings City Council and the Yellowstone County Commissioners, the City/County Planning Department hired a part-time Alternate Modes Coordinator (AMC) in 1999 to help implement the plan. This position was identified as an important aspect of the original BikeNet Plan as the creators did not want the plan to just take up space on a shelf in the library. Since that time, the AMC has worked closely with elected bodies and various community groups. These groups consist of BikeNet, the local trails advocacy group, and numerous groups in the community interested in supporting the plan, such as Yellowstone River Parks Association, the Rim Runners, Yellowstone Valley Cycling Club, civic groups, the health community, economic development organizations, and other groups interested in advancing the mission of alternative transportation options. This support can be seen by the number of letters of support that have been collected. The AMC has given hundreds of PowerPoint© presentations to interested groups about the importance and advancement of the trails and bikeways in the community.

The AMC has an active role on the State level, serving on the State Trails Advisory Committee and helped re-organize a state trails conference through Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) that was hosted in Billings in 2001. Since that date, the conference has been meeting on a bi-annual basis with the location moving each time to various communities throughout the state. Montana has a huge inventory of back-country trails in the mountains and valleys of publicly owned property, but FWP realizes that the state needs to place a stronger emphasis on urban trails where citizens can use them on a daily basis for both recreation and transportation. They make connections within the community, to other communities, and to other areas that interconnect.

Funding is a continual struggle both on the local and state level. Most of our funding for projects has been realized through the Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP), which provides approximately \$600,000 per year to Yellowstone County. In recent years, funding has been used to support trail projects and the missing sidewalk program, which are sidewalks within the immediate vicinity of public schools. During the early years of the CTEP program, funds were utilized to refurbish the old Depot Building which is used for community events and large gatherings.



Swords Park Trail

Picture courtesy of Billings Gazette



Trail through Mystic Park along Yellowstone River



Winter at Swords Park Trail



Pictures Courtesy of Billings Gazette

Trail corridor and marker at Stewart Park

Billings and Yellowstone County have effectively used additional funds through the Transportation legislation from the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Safe Routes to School (SRTS) the Community Mitigation Air Quality Fund (CMAQ), and the Transportation, Community, and System Preservation Program (TCSP). Most of these federal programs require a local match of 13% to 50%. In November 1999, the City of Billings taxpayers passed a General Obligation (GO) Bond by 63% of the vote for \$599,000 for local matching funds for the trail program. This was one of the first bond issues ever passed in the City. The GO Bond is almost exhausted and has helped establish numerous projects in the Billings community by providing the match for millions of dollars in federal funding.



Trail along Yellowstone River through Coulson Park
Interstate 90 Bridge in background

Another large contributor for local match has been the BikeNet organization. It reorganized in 1999 and became a 501 (c) (3) organization in 2002. BikeNet's vision is for improving the quality of life by making the Billings community an inviting place for bicycles and pedestrians. The vision includes transportation options, recreation enhancements, and improved access to resources by all populations, as well as, conservation of community resources. In 2000, BikeNet held its first fundraising effort with the Ales for Trails event which has now become one of the most enjoyed annual fundraising events in the City of Billings. BikeNet has sought sponsorship for the event from individuals and businesses and, to date has raised well over \$100,000 which has been exclusively used for matching funds for the various bike/pedestrian projects.



From left to right, top to bottom: County Commissioner Chair Jim Reno is a regular, volunteer with Ales. The Caledonians are a real hit with the crowd. YVCC presents a check to BikeNet for trails during the Ales event. Ales for Trails is great fun for everyone. State Senator Jeff Essmann and his wife have been sponsors and attend the event. A display area is set up at Ales for Trails for participants to learn about trail and bikeway projects.

In addition to the money raised through fundraising efforts, trail and bikeway projects have been successful in garnering matching funds through other grants from organizations and foundations, such as, Bikes Belong Coalition, the Mildred & Homer Scott Foundation, Montana Community Foundation, Fannie Mae Foundation, U.S. Bank, and St. Vincent's Healthcare. To date, we have built nearly 20 miles of hard surface multi-use trails which include bridges and underpasses, and expended approximately \$5.5 million. Our non-motorized plan identifies another 74 miles of paved multi-use trails.



During the awards ceremonies at St. Vincent Healthcare Heart and Soul Run, Jim Paquette, President and CEO presented a check for \$10,000 to Mayor Ron Tussing for trail projects and specifically for the matching dollars for the corridor connecting the MetraPark portion of the Dutcher Trail with and including the Main Street Underpass.

Opportunities for support for amenities along the trail such as benches, kiosks, landscaping, picnic tables and shelters have been realized through local groups such as Yellowstone River Parks Association (YRPA), BikeNet, Conoco, PPL Montana, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, Exchange Club, Church Groups, and the Yellowstone Conservation Council. It takes a community to build a trail and bikeway system. With the collective energy of individuals and organizations, we are working toward a network that our whole community has taken great pride in.



Faith Chapel Volunteers install walkways Heights Rotary builds a kiosk along the trail.

The Alternate Modes Coordinator reviews all subdivision plats for their inclusion of the Heritage Trail Plan. State law requires that all major subdivision preserve 11% of their property for parkland dedication or cash in lieu. If the Heritage Plan has identified a trail corridor within that subdivision, the developer can use that land preserved as part of their parkland dedication. We are now mapping those undeveloped corridors for future use.

There are also many opportunities in the Greater Billings area to hike or mountain bike on natural surface trails. Over 40 miles of these natural trails exist along the Yellowstone Riverfront, along the Rimrocks, and within the immediate bounds of the City. In close proximity to the community, are an additional 60 plus miles of natural trails on publicly owned recreational land.

As trail projects have been constructed, it has been an important aspect to determine the amount and type of usage the trails have received. Every other year, the Planning Department conducts a physical count on the trails on a weekday and again on a weekend day with volunteers counting the total uses by walkers, runners, bikers, skaters, etc., and if users are wearing helmets when biking or skating. This information shows us which trails receive the highest volume and since we began doing these counts in 2003, we have seen a 32% increase in the overall use on the trails. This past year, we started using an infrared scanner to also track usage on the trails and this information will be compiled and linked to a trail count map for quick reference.

In 2007, Parks, Recreation and Public Lands (PRPL) hired a consultant to conduct a recreational survey that included Billings' resident use of city parks and recreational facilities. The statistically valid survey was performed by nVision Research, Inc. an independent survey research firm from Denver, Colorado. The survey found that nearly 30% (28.9%) of households had at least one member of the household visiting the Heritage Trail pathway in the last six months. The survey also showed that the trail system was the most frequently visited facility of the aquatic and recreational facilities surveyed. From the survey results, the research company could determine that 10,500 households visited the trail system in six months and the number of household visits was 55,875. This survey helps confirm the popularity of the trail system to Billings residents.

One heartwarming story about the trail system is the Eagle Mount Bicycle Program. The mission of Eagle Mount Billings is "to provide opportunities in recreation to enhance the lives of children and adults with disabilities". Before the trail system was built, the only safe place for participants in this program to ride was in parking lots. Now with the trail system, a whole new venue has opened to where they can bike on their adaptive bikes in an environment that is not only safe but one that is aesthetically pleasing and allows them the opportunity to travel from one area of the City to another.



The Billings MET Transit System installed bike racks on all city buses in May 1996 and has seen a steady increase in usage, from 6,236 in FY 1997-98 to 12,745 in FY 2006-07. MET Transit promotes Bike, Walk, Bus Week by providing free busing during the week. Passengers are also allowed to bring their bikes on the bus provided the bus rack is full.

It has become a policy of the City of Billings Public Works Department that new and rehabilitated arterial and collector streets should include multi-use paths. Several streets have been striped with bike lanes and funding from CTEP is in place to stripe an additional 5-6 miles of bike lanes in various areas of the City that are part of the Heritage Plan where the road width will accommodate both on-street parking and a bike lane. We currently have 5 miles of streets with bike lanes and an additional 51 miles identified in our Heritage Trail Plan. Several road projects are already in the works at various stages of development that will include multi-use trails along one side of the project, which will help make additional connections within the community. These projects include King Ave. W., Aronson Road, Rimrock Road, and Shiloh Road.



Zimmermann Road built with multi-use trail



Lake Hills Drive built with bike lanes and parking.

Infrastructure is an important component of the active transportation system, but engineering is only one aspect and the network must also include evaluation, education, encouragement, and enforcement. The City of Billings has been evaluated through the Health Alliance, an affiliated partnership based in Billings, consisting of the Chief Executive Officers from the Billings Clinic, St. Vincent Healthcare, and the Yellowstone City-County Health Department (YCCHD). The Alliance was formed in 2001 to collaboratively address community-wide health issues. In 2005, YCCHD and its health alliance partners underwent an assessment of the public health system's performance. A key outcome of that assessment was an understanding for the need to perform a community health assessment and develop a community plan. In follow-up, the Alliance sponsored a comprehensive Community Health Assessment (CHA) in 2006 which used national (Healthy People 2010) and state benchmarks to identify opportunities for community health improvement. While no single health issue emerged as critical, the CHA identified heart disease, unintentional injury, physical activity, mental health, and nutrition as areas that warranted improvement. The Alliance's member organizations independently and collectively concluded that a community plan focused on a Healthy Places Initiative could help improve several indicators in the population's health, including those identified in the CHA.

The CDC defines healthy places as "those designed and built to improve the quality of life for all people who live, work, worship, learn, and play within their borders – where every person is free to make choices amid a variety of healthy, available, accessible,

and affordable options.” Similarly, the intent is to deliberately influence community projects and activities to increase the accessibility of healthy lifestyle choices.

The areas of improvement are derived directly from the CHA. Childhood and adult obesity, heart disease, diabetes, nutritional intake, unintentional injury, and chronic depression were identified areas of weakness. Physical activity, nutrition, and well-being were selected as the areas of improvement because of their inter-connectedness and their collective impact on the identified community weaknesses. Physical activity is arguably the most tangible of the improvement categories. Most people are aware that exercise is good for health and reduces risk factors for chronic diseases. The challenge is creating natural opportunities for physical activity in everyday activities.



Trail Trek Participants on Metra Park Trail



SeniorFest participants on Swords Park Trail

The Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is defined as “a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the effects within the population.” The purpose of HIA is to infuse health as a criterion for decision-making into community projects and plans, before the project or plan is implemented. In doing so, HIA becomes a tool directly in line with advocacy and encouragement for policies, programs or projects that are healthy by design. Transportation is a key component in the design of a community. How and where roads are built play a decisive role in how people move around in the system. If there are no accommodations for biking and walking safely, people are not as likely to engage in those activities; thus, playing into a more sedentary lifestyle that relates directly to chronic health issues, such as, obesity, diabetes, heart disease and depression.

A school-wide survey was conducted through the school district with the help of the PTA and Community Health Department to determine some of the barriers that affect the reasons children do not walk or bike to school. Those barriers include safety, traffic speeds, intersection crossings and convenience that we can now begin to address.

There have been a number of opportunities for education and encouragement of active transportation in the Billings community. The Billings Go Play! Campaign was launched in March 2007 through initial funding from St. Vincent’s Healthcare with support from MSU-B, Q-2 Television, Strange Sister Creative, and Spotlight Production. The

campaign is supported by the Yellowstone City/County Health Department, School District 2 and Yellowstone Valley Council PTA.

The goals of the campaign are to **motivate** our community, **activate** our community and **educate** our community. The Go Play! message was chosen because it was perceived as a fun, lively and motivating tag-line. The campaign activates the community by promoting and developing events that center on improving health through activity. We then use these events to distribute educational materials on health, fitness and safety provided by the Safe Routes to School Program (Montana Department of Transportation), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and the ThinkFirst Program (a joint cooperative between St. Vincent's Healthcare and the Billings Clinic). The ThinkFirst program covers bike safety, street safety, and playground safety. Helmets are sold at the annual Magic City Trail Trek (spring) and at a Saturday Live Booth that coincides with the Saturday Live Fun Run (fall). Both are family fun events centered on promoting health through activity and enjoyment of the Billings Trails and Park System. The GO Play! Campaign interfaces with other local events that promote biking and walking. It also produced radio and television public service announcements, billboard displays, and a bike tour map with promotional information to GO Green, GO Fit and GO Parks.



One of the Billboard designs for the GO Play Campaign

In celebration of National Bike to Work Week, May 12-16, Billings hosted its second Bike, Walk, Bus Week. The idea is to encourage businesses and organization to entice people in the Billings community to use alternate transportation modes during the week by providing incentives to their employees and/or the public to participate. We anticipate it will change people's lifestyles so that they lead a more active, healthy and **CAR**-free life. Back by popular demand was the Sneakers, Spokes and Sparkplug Challenge hosted by Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council and a free barbecue for those who participated in the event. This year, 12 teams participated in the competition. The bikers won with most of the walkers/runners finishing before the car drivers. YES for people power.



Teams participating in the Sneakers, Spokes and Sparkplug Challenge with barbecue for those using Alternate Transportation

Several elementary schools participated in Bike, Walk, Bus Week with special awards for children who biked or walked to school. One school also promoted “Healthy Habits Week.” At Highland School, children that biked, walked or used other self-propelled transport to school (some skateboarded or rode scooters) received a ticket. An additional ticket was awarded if they wore a helmet. Children without helmets were fitted for and received one through the HeadFirst Program (Billings Clinic and St. Vincent’s Healthcare). By using non-motorized transportation all week, they accumulated tickets to use in fun prize drawings. It was a great way to help encourage children to bike or walk to promote a healthier, active lifestyle.

The City of Billings hosted the second annual Trail Trek on Sunday, June 1, 2008 as part of the celebration for National Trails Day. The Trek started last year as part of the Montana State University marketing students’ Go Play! campaign to promote trails and bikeways. Initially, the goals of the Go Play! campaign focused on promoting physical activity and awareness of local trails with the intent of motivating, activating and educating people to engage in healthier lifestyles through pedestrian modes of transportation. This year marketing students were collaborating on the Go Play! campaign to promote cleaner air, physical activity, mass transportation (MET transit) and nutrition.

This year’s Trail Trek included biking, walking, jogging, rollerblading, and skateboarding up and down the Dutcher or Kiwanis Trail with entertainment along the way and a barbecue at Earl Guss Park.



The Trail Trek was a great family event.



Back at Earl Guss Park for a barbecue.

Several Elementary Schools, through their PTAs, are celebrating Bike and Walk to School Week in the fall. Parents involved in PTA are providing incentives and encouragement to students and the program is expanding each year to more schools. An elementary school librarian in Billings has created a library curriculum program geared to biking and bike safety. She has made this material available on CD to anyone interested.



Students participating in Bike or Walk to School Week in October

The Community Center sponsors SeniorFest in the spring which features a walking/biking event and encourages seniors to get out and get active. Numerous other events in the Billings community promote and encourage participants to live a more active lifestyle and have fun doing it. Some of the events are the Velo Bellas Woman's Tour, the National Awareness for Mental Illness (NAMI) Bike Ride, Yellowstone Valley Cycling Club (YVCC), Laurel Bike Tour, and the MS Ride. The Rim Runners have an array of running events throughout the year including the Women's Run which drew over 6,000 woman runners this year. YVCC offers many bike racing events and training rides during the year which are available to anyone.

The Billings City Council and Yellowstone County Commissioners formed a Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to advise the City Council, Mayor, the County Commissioners, Planning Board, and all departments and boards of the City and County with respect to the impact that City and/or County actions may have upon bicycling, walking or wheelchair access in the Billings Urban Area. This 7-person committee meets monthly.

For enforcement issues, the Billings Police Department utilizes six of their 134 sworn officers on bike patrol from May through September. This group of officers primarily patrols the downtown area and is providing support/safety for special events like parades and urban bike races. They also patrol the bike trails. There is a mandatory helmet law for children 16 years and under. One Yellowstone County Sheriff's Department deputy held a free bike rodeo for all children which included a bike obstacle course, bicycle safety check, and helmet check. Numerous information, safety materials and brochures with bike regulations are available through the Alternate Modes Coordinators office and on the City web site at www.ci.billings.mt.us and on the BikeNet

web site at www.bikenet.org. The Child Safety Fair and YMCA's Healthy Kids Day events provide additional bicycle safety and educational opportunities for children.

Currently, the City of Billings is applying for Bicycle Friendly Status through the League of American Bicyclists. We have advanced to the second phase after the preliminary application process and should be notified of our status some time after August 15. The Chamber of Commerce and several conference-size hotels in Billings have submitted a proposal to host the 2010 Pro Walk/Pro Bike Conference. Of the twelve communities submitting proposals, Billings is among the top six communities that are being considered. We are excited about the prospect of hosting such an event and sharing our "work in progress".

In the January 2008, Men's Health Magazine rated Billings as the most debt-free metropolis in the country. Two months later, Billings was rated as the sixth greenest medium-size city in the United States by Organic Gardening Magazine for instituting a Trash into Trees program, having over 2,600 acres of open lands, and an **ever expanding Heritage Trail system**. Finally, in May, BestLife Magazine ranked Billings as the third best place in the nation to raise a family.

Billings is coming of age in the whole active transportation and livable community scene, and, even with limited funding, we are doing our best to help advance the cause. We still have a long way to go as we need more interconnectivity between neighborhoods, schools, parks, businesses, commercial areas, trails, transportation hubs and transit. The connections are important so we have a seamless network between on-street bikeways and the off-street trail system. We need to develop a map overlay that shows where transit stops are located in relation to the bike corridors, so people can be more flexible using alternate transportation options.

As our community gradually emerged into a metropolitan hub for the surrounding region, our transportation network has had increasing difficulty traversing the geographic constraints imposed by the Rimrocks and the Yellowstone River which nearly intersect in the heart of the city. One of our primary arterial streets in the Heights, Main Street, is the busiest street in Montana. These are all hurdles we need to overcome with our non-motorized transportation system. We need to continue our education and encouragement piece. We need to do an assessment of our Safe Routes to School program so we can make improvements to eliminate the barriers and offer more encouragement so that all 23 elementary schools are participating in the Walk and Bike to School programs.

Part of our challenge is to improve the public's perception of cycling as an effective alternative to vehicular transportation and also a worthwhile recreational activity. This can be accomplished through programs like the GO Play! campaign and by incentive programs that businesses provide for their employees. As we upgrade existing policies and plans, such as the 2008 Growth Policy and Plan for Billings and Yellowstone County and the Heritage Trail Plan in 2010, the public involvement process will be crucial to help realize the importance our transportation system plays in the development of our community. We can incorporate these active transportation principles into the framework of our plan.

We must continue to collect more data, especially as it relates to the number of people in this community using alternate transportation for their commuter and errand trip needs. More businesses must be engaged and realize how active transportation will positively affect their bottom line.

The final aspect that continues to surface as we build the infrastructure to accommodate the active transportation in our community is the funding to maintain these facilities so they remain a viable and effective transportation network. Many times even though money is available for initial construction, there are no additional maintenance dollars available to preserve and maintain these structures and that is a crucial part of the whole system.

We are excited about the prospects and have the enthusiasm and energy to persevere, but we need the continued support of our policies bodies and the financial support from federal programs to continue to add to the system and make the dream a reality.

Now go back and view the picture on the front cover of this case statement. Can you understand the significance of this view? We are creating a better future for our children and grandchildren so they can lead healthy, productive lives and enjoy and preserve the beauty and the natural resources of the world that has been entrusted to us.

Executive Summary

The City of Billings and Yellowstone County have shown their commitment to active transportation through the development and adoption of the Greater Billings Non-Motorized Transportation Plan. With plans in place, some policies, regulations, programs, and projects have been developed and constructed so that we currently have nearly 20 miles of hard surface multi-use trails and have updated policies and regulations to include trails and bikeways as part of our transportation network. The community has shown their strong support through events, promotions, collaboration, and additional funding to make this a reality. We are willing to make the effort and know how important active transportation is to our future and the growth of this community, but we need continued and additional funding to bring it to fruition and to maintain it in the future.