



CHAPTER 5 PROGRAMS RECOMMENDATIONS



5 Program Recommendations

While improving infrastructure is critical, the importance of encouragement, education, enforcement, and evaluation programs should not be underestimated. These efforts can ensure that more local residents know about new and improved facilities, get the tools they need to integrate walking into their daily activities, and receive positive reinforcement for walking. In essence, the new and enhanced programs market the idea of walking to local residents and encourage a shift to walking as a transportation option. The following chapter presents recommendations for low-cost ways to increase walking in Bellingham. The City will look to access funding and build partnerships to implement programs in coordination with infrastructure improvements over time.

5.1 Safe Routes to School

Purpose: Increase the number of children walking and bicycling to school, and improve safety for children who walk and bicycle.

Audience: Parents, children, school neighbors, teachers, and school staff

Potential Partners: Bellingham School District, City of Bellingham (Public Works, Police), Whatcom County Health Department, Whatcom Council of Governments, Bellingham Police Department, Bellingham Transportation Commission, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Program Description: Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a national and international movement to help more children bicycle and walk to school and improve traffic safety for children who do walk and bicycle. Safe Routes to School can include a variety of multi-disciplinary programs aimed at promoting walking and bicycling to school and improving traffic safety around school areas through education, incentives, law enforcement, and engineering measures. SRTS programs typically involve partnerships among municipalities, school districts, community and parent volunteers, and law enforcement agencies. The primary goals of SRTS programs are to improve safety, health, and fitness habits for children while improving air quality and diminishing traffic congestion. Most SRTS programs focus on elementary and middle school travel.

Numerous Bellingham agencies and organizations already acknowledge the importance of the Safe Routes to School initiative, including the City of Bellingham, the Bellingham School District, the Whatcom County Health Department, and the Whatcom Council of Governments. These partners have collaborated on specific grant-funded SRTS efforts at selected elementary schools, and are actively seeking to continue this collaboration. The specific SRTS recommendations, below, are intended to support these existing efforts and help to expand and institutionalize SRTS in Bellingham.

5.1.1 Bellingham School District SRTS Task Force

City departments should work together and with other partners to convene a Safe Routes to School Task Force. This task force would bring together parties with a shared interest in youth health and safety, neighborhood livability, increasing active transportation, and expanding Safe Routes to School throughout the Bellingham School District.

The primary function of the Task Force is to coordinate the activities of all partners, but other key duties include the following:

- Coordinating on infrastructure projects that affect school travel
- Developing a strategic plan for implementing the district-wide SRTS efforts
- Securing and expanding long-term, stable funding for SRTS efforts in Bellingham
- Developing an evaluation strategy and collecting data for evaluation
- Overcoming barriers to implementing a crossing guard program by creating a pilot program and addressing policies
- Creating and implementing school siting policies that support healthy and active transportation
- Studying the potential to reduce bus service and repurpose its budget for SRTS efforts
- Determining which policies and programs are needed to address equity

5.1.2 Education Activities

Numerous educational activities have already been implemented in selected Bellingham schools, including assemblies and in-classroom safety education. These education programs, and others as desired, should be continued and expanded to all schools in the Bellingham School District. WCOG is currently developing a four-week educational program about transportation for a YMCA camp, and this curriculum can be used for Safe Routes to School efforts as well. The goal of these programs is to provide children and parents with information about *why* and *how* to walk and bicycle to school.

5.1.3 Encouragement Activities

Numerous encouragement activities have already been implemented in selected Bellingham schools, including Walking Wednesdays and Walk and Bike to School Day. These encouragement programs, and others as desired, should be continued and expanded to all schools in the Bellingham School District. The goal of these programs is to provide children and parents with compelling, fun reasons to walk and bicycle to school.



5.1.4 SRTS Coordinator Position

A Safe Routes to School coordinator is essential for consolidating, expanding, and continuing any Safe Routes to School program. While SRTS programs can generate outstanding volunteer support from parents, this support will be transitory, as their children will inevitably graduate to the next school. The SRTS Coordinator could be housed at the Bellingham School District and/or could be embedded at the City of Bellingham some of the time. In the long run, the ideal coordinator would be a full-time, permanent position, but to start having a part-time SRTS coordinator or one that is grant funded or a temporary position (e.g., an AmeriCorps member) could have tremendous value to help launch a SRTS program to a much higher level.

5.1.5 School Action Plans (5 Es)

School Action Plans bring together community stakeholders to identify barriers to active transportation for each school and develop a written action plan for addressing those barriers. The flexibility of the School Travel Plan framework tested in a pilot project allows communities to customize their approach to fit local circumstances.

Through a five-step process, each school, with assistance from the community stakeholders, writes a School Travel Plan that includes an action plan describing steps they plan to implement, such as the following:

- Engineering improvements at or near school sites (e.g., pedestrian crossings, repairs/upgrades to sidewalks, signage)
- Introduction of school infrastructure (e.g., bike shelters, bike racks, lockers)
- Education (e.g., traffic safety education, education about personal security)
- Community mobilization (e.g., walking school buses, walking buddies, ride sharing)
- Encouragement (e.g., celebrations of physical activity and environment)
- Event days, recognition and rewards for walking/biking

Schools create a School Travel Plan (STP) to show how they intend to make travel to and from their sites safer and more sustainable for pupils, parents, and teachers. The STP document itself should then link to the school's development or improvement plan. It is an important tool in reducing the number of students who travel to school by car. STPs are created in consultation with the whole school community, and will be different from each other to reflect the local situation and current trends. In addition to safer travel, STPs are about improving health, broadening education, and providing equity.

5.1.6 Pilot Crossing Guard Program

One school could be selected as the pilot for a crossing guard program. The SRTS Task Force may work on policy changes that are needed before a pilot program can be deployed, and can secure funding for a pilot as needed. In addition, the Task Force should determine what the goals of the program are and how the program will be evaluated.

5.1.7 Safe Route to School Maps

Suggested Safe Route to School Maps show stop signs, signals, crosswalks, sidewalks, paths/trails, overcrossings, and crossing guard locations around a school. These can be used by families to identify the best routes for walking or biking to school. Safe Route to School Maps should be distributed at the beginning of the school year and at any other appropriate times such as during special events. Maps should also be made available on an ongoing basis, either online or in paper form from the school office. Maps should be updated annually, if needed, to account for changes to the walking and bicycling routes due to construction, new facilities or treatments, or other changes.

5.2 Neighborhood Walking Maps

Purpose: Encourage walking by providing route and facility information and highlighting walking destinations.

Audience: Bellingham residents

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham (Public Works), Whatcom County Health Department, Whatcom Council of Governments, Neighborhood Associations

Program Description: One of the most effective ways of encouraging people to walk is through the use of maps and guides to show where you can walk, and to guide people to enjoyable routes and destinations for walking. Bellingham's strong neighborhood ethic lends itself naturally to neighborhood walking maps, which have the added advantage of being an appropriate scale for a complete walking map. Neighborhood walking maps could be developed for each neighborhood, or be combined if appropriate, and actively distributed to residents. As funding is available the maps should be updated on a regular basis as new facilities are implemented.

5.3 Traffic Safety Campaign

Purpose: Improve safe behavior on the part of all road users, particularly to mitigate dangers to pedestrians.

Audience: All road users

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham (Public Works, Police), Bellingham School District, Western Washington University, Whatcom Transportation Authority, NWRC Senior Information and Assistance, Whatcom County Health Department, Whatcom Council of Governments, Whatcom County Traffic Safety Task Force

A high-profile marketing campaign that promotes safe behaviors of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists is an important part of creating awareness of walking and improving safety for all road users. A well-produced safety campaign will be memorable and effective and encourage all road users to obey traffic laws and share the road safely. Most importantly, the campaign should emphasize responsibility and respect between road users.

Key messages to emphasize include the following:

- Every corner is a crosswalk.
- Yield to pedestrians in crosswalks, even on multi-lane streets.

- Speeding kills; modulate your speed to protect pedestrians.
- Red light running is extremely dangerous and leads to serious and fatal crashes.

A traffic safety campaign in Bellingham should combine compelling graphics and messages with an easy-to-use website focused at motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists. The safety and awareness messages can be displayed near high-traffic corridors (e.g., on billboards), printed in local publications, and broadcast as radio and/or television ads. The program could be created from scratch, or it could be licensed from another community.

5.4 Themed Walks

Purpose: Provide opportunities for residents and visitors to experience Bellingham on foot.

Audience: General public and visitors

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham (Public Works), Downtown Bellingham Partnership, Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism Board, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce

Project Description: The City could work with partners to create one or more guided tour routes based on themes such as a historic tour and/or a public art tour. The three historic tours created by the Downtown Bellingham Partnership are a good starting place. Live tours could be hosted by knowledgeable tour guides (annually or more frequently as demand permits) and should be publicized widely. The tour routes could be preserved in a brochure and/or a self-guided (e.g., iPod-based) tour as well so that people can participate even if they are unable to attend the guided tour. In addition, regular fun walking events can be hosted by various partners featuring community highlights such as the Downtown Art Walk, the Farmer's Market, and local cafes and coffee shops.



5.5 Open Streets Event

Purpose: Encourage walking, biking, and physical activity by providing a car-free street event.

Audience: General public, generally within a particular community but can be promoted citywide

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham (Public Works, Police, Planning & Community Development, Parks and Recreation), Downtown Bellingham Partnership, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Whatcom County YMCA, Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism Board, PeaceHealth, active living retailers (e.g., running, walking, recreational equipment), Bellingham Farmer's Market, Whatcom Community Foundation, Whatcom County Health Department, Council of Governments

Program Description: Open Streets programs have many names: Ciclovias, Open Streets, Sunday Parkways, Summer Streets, Sunday Streets, etc. Ciclovias, which originated in Bogotá, Colombia (hence the Spanish name), are periodic street closures (often on Sundays) that create a temporary park that is open to the public for walking, bicycling, dancing, hula hooping, roller skating, etc. They have been very successful internationally and are rapidly becoming popular in the United States. They promote health by creating a safe and attractive space for physical activity and social interaction, and are cost-effective compared to the cost of building new parks for the same purpose. These events can be weekly or one-time events, and are generally very popular and well-attended. A new collaborative online initiative called the Open Streets Project has launched to share information and experiences; this will undoubtedly be of service for Bellingham in launching an open streets event: <http://openstreetsproject.org/>



Open streets event organizers should consider lessons learned and best practices from other communities. Some recommendations include the following:

- Make sure that there are programmed, family-friendly activities along the route such as concerts, dance and exercise classes, and food vendors; an “open street” alone is not sufficient to draw participants (and especially not on a repeat basis).
- These events lend themselves to innovative partnerships and public/private funding. Health care providers whose missions include facilitating physical activity are often major sponsors. Businesses may also support the event if it brings customers to their location.
- The cost of organizing the event can be mitigated through volunteer participation, as this type of event lends itself to enthusiastic volunteer support. However, this will require a high level and quality of volunteer recruitment and management to be sustainable in the long run.
- Police costs to manage the road closure will be one of the largest costs. Work with the police to develop a long-term traffic closure management strategy that uses police resources where needed but also allows well-trained volunteers to participate in managing road closures.
- Informing residents along the route about what it means for them is essential. They should be informed numerous times (3 to 6 times is not too much), including a reminder the day before the event. Expectations about vehicle access to and from residences should be managed clearly.
- Consider linking parks, schools, and other public assets. If possible, organize a route that introduces residents to good walking and bicycling routes that they can use at other times as well.
- The greatest value to the community comes when an open streets event happens on a regular basis (e.g., monthly during pleasant weather months). For this to be successful, different routes and/or different activities should be considered.

5.6 Professional Development Courses

Purpose: Educate and train planners and engineers on pedestrian facilities and policy issues.

Audience: Professionals in planning, engineering, landscape architecture, etc.

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham (Public Works, Planning & Community Development), Whatcom Council of Governments, Western Washington University

Program Description: Professional development courses provide training to transportation professionals who may not have received extensive experience or training in pedestrian facilities. This can be a successful way to institutionalize knowledge of pedestrian facility design at an institution and create an agency culture that values walking. Potential topics include the following:

- Bellingham Pedestrian Master Plan
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities Standards - NACTO, MUTCD, AASHTO
- ADA Compliance for Transportation Facilities - PROWAG, ADA Transition Plans, and liability issues, etc.

- Complete Intersections – including operations, lighting, planning, accessibility, etc.
- Complete Streets – implementing the policy
- Trail Design Standards
- Pedestrian Facilities – planning, design, and implementation
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Integration with Transit
- Working with Law Enforcement on Traffic Safety Campaigns

Sample program: Institute for Bicycle and Pedestrian Innovation: <http://www.ibpi.usp.pdx.edu/>

5.7 Marketing Campaigns

Purpose: Encourage walking, biking, and transit trips through outreach to community residents

Audience: Whatcom County residents

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham Public Works, Whatcom Council of Governments, Whatcom Transportation Authority, Whatcom County

Program Description: The Whatcom Council of Governments runs a number of programs that promote walking, bicycling, and transit, and also provides resources and staff partnership to support similar community efforts. The City of Bellingham should continue to partner with WCOG on promotional efforts such as Whatcom SmartTrips, Safe Routes to School programs, and individualized marketing strategies.

5.8 Speed Reader Board Loaner Program

Purpose: Raise awareness of speeding and reduce speeding

Audience: Motorists

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham (Public Works, Police), Bellingham School District

Program Description: Speed radar trailers can be used to enforce speed limit violations in known speeding problem areas. In areas with speeding problems, police set up an unmanned trailer that displays the speed of approaching motorists along with a speed limit sign. The Bellingham Police Department currently has a speed radar trailer but it would need repair before it could be deployed.

Speed radar trailers can be used as both an educational and enforcement tool. By itself an unmanned trailer effectively educates motorists about their current speed compared to the speed limit. As an alternative enforcement measure, the police department may choose to station an officer near the trailer to issue citations to motorists exceeding the speed limit. Because they can be easily moved, radar trailers are often deployed on streets where local residents have complained about speeding problems. If frequently left in the same location without officer presence, motorists may learn that speeding in that location will not result in a citation and the strategy can lose its benefits. For that reason, radar trailers should be moved frequently.

5.9 Pedestrian Crossing Enforcement Actions

Purpose: Increase driver awareness of and yielding to pedestrian right-of-way in crosswalks; increase pedestrian safety at crosswalks.

Audience: Motorists

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham (Public Works, Police), Bellingham Transportation Commission, Northwest Washington's Area Agency on Aging

Program Description: Crosswalk enforcement actions (sometimes known as “pedestrian stings”) raise public awareness about the legal obligation of motorists to stop for pedestrians at crosswalks. While crosswalk enforcement actions do result in tickets being distributed, the greater impact comes through media publicity of the event to reinforce the importance of obeying pedestrian crossing laws.

Most crosswalk enforcement sites are selected because they have been identified as locations where pedestrians have trouble crossing and/or where a large volume of pedestrians (especially vulnerable pedestrians such as children and seniors) is expected. High-crash locations may also be candidates for enforcement actions. Downtown is a logical first priority for pedestrian crossing enforcement actions.

If locations near schools are selected, the best timing for an enforcement action is the back-to-school window just after school has begun for the year. Locations should be selected by the Bellingham Police Department in consultation with City engineers and planners. If any complaints from the public have been received about problem crossing locations, they should be considered during the selection process. School officials will also have valuable input about school crossing locations that would benefit from targeted enforcement.

Once locations have been determined, the Police Department prepares by marking the safe stopping distance with cones. Then plainclothes police officers or trained volunteer decoys attempt to cross at corners and marked mid-block crossings just before a vehicle passes the cone. (Decoys may also be notable community members (such as the mayor) to increase media interest in the event.) If motorists fail to yield to the pedestrian in a crosswalk, a second police officer issues a warning or a ticket at the officer's discretion. It is recommended that the enforcement action be recorded on video to support issued violations should a motorist challenge the ticket.

The Whatcom Council of Governments has a chicken costume, and the City of Bellingham has a bee costume, either of which could be used to create a “hook” to attract greater media attention and public notice. The costume could be used by the decoy. In addition, the chicken or bee character could be used to educate the public about crosswalk laws and encourage people to pay attention to crosswalks (e.g., by offering a prize to people who spot the chicken/bee).

5.10 Walk Friendly Community Designation

Purpose: Establish and promote the City's commitment to a walkable Bellingham.

Audience: All residents and visitors

Potential Partners: City of Bellingham, Western Washington University, Bellingham Transportation Commission, Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce

Program Description: Walk Friendly Communities (WFC) is a national recognition program developed to encourage towns and cities across the U.S. to establish or recommit to a high priority for supporting safer walking environments. The WFC program recognizes communities that have shown a commitment to improving walkability and pedestrian safety, mobility, access, and comfort through comprehensive programs, plans and policies. Communities can apply to the program to receive recognition in the form of a Bronze, Silver, Gold, or Platinum designation. There is no cost to apply for a WFC designation, though it is estimated to take approximately 20–60 hours of time to complete an application. Further information is available at <http://www.walkfriendly.org>. Questions about the program can be directed to info@walkfriendly.org.

The WFC program is maintained by the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center's Pedestrian and Bicycling Information Center, with support from a number of national partners.