

CHAPTER 2 : PLANNING PROCESS



Overview

The Active Transportation Plan began as a result of the Michiana on the Move: 2040 Transportation Plan. During the planning process for this long range plan, it was evident that a significant need was to identify projects meant for those who do not necessarily use a personal vehicle for transportation. In order to better discuss, identify and plan for bicycle and pedestrian needs, MACOG decided to develop a complementary plan focusing on the transportation network for walkers, bicyclists, and transit riders. The nine month planning process started in September 2015, with the formation of the Active Transportation Steering Committee and a Public Engagement process. Figure 2.1 illustrates the planning process from start to finish, and the engagement that took place, to gather information and form the vision, goals, and recommendations of the plan.

Advisory Groups

MACOG utilized the knowledge of three advisory groups to form the Active Transportation Plan including a steering committee, focus group stakeholders, and local public agency representatives.

The initial step of the planning process was the formation of the Active Transportation Steering Committee. With over 30 individuals, the Committee is made up of a broad range of representatives from the regional community including technical staff from towns and cities, elected officials, universities, public transit agencies, bicycle and trail advocacy groups, county health departments, business partners, convention and visitor's bureau representatives, and chambers of commerce. The Steering Committee was charged with guiding the planning process, shaping the focus and deliverables, and providing technical

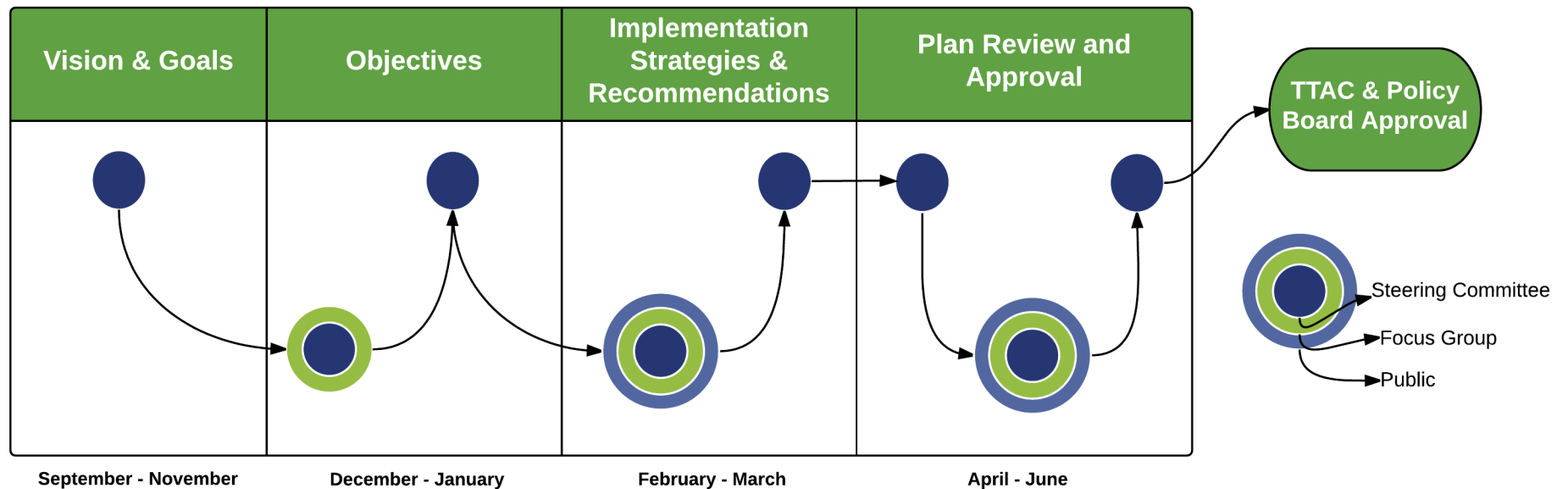


Figure 2.1- The Active Transportation Planning Process



Several Active Transportation Steering Committee Members

review of all work included in the plan. Discussion of these elements took place over the course of five meetings held starting in September 2015.

In addition to the Steering Committee, a larger group of stakeholders were identified to be included in three Focus Groups meeting. The first two meetings took place in Goshen and South Bend in December and January. During these meetings participants were divided into smaller groups to discuss strategies and projects that would improve and enhance walking and biking in the region. The third focus group meeting took place in Nappanee and served as the Active Transportation Summit. The Summit provided an opportunity to share what was happening locally concerning bike and pedestrian investments, as well as best practice examples from around the state. Participants also identified regional infrastructure priorities during a mapping workshop.

A smaller focus group was also held at the University of Notre Dame to engage university students on how they use active transportation and how our region can further promote active transportation in the future.

Local public agencies were involved throughout the entire planning process, however individual meetings were also held. In September and November, at the beginning of the planning process, meetings were held to identify current plans and projects as well as brainstorm priority projects. Later meetings took place in April and May to discuss findings and establish a more formalized list of projects and programs.

Public Engagement

Public engagement is a crucial component of ensuring a successful plan. MACOG engaged the public in a variety of ways from the beginning of March through April, encouraging them to participate in the active transportation survey and comment on needed projects and areas of concern through an interactive map.

MACOG promoted the survey and interactive map through different efforts including online, personal, print, and news promotions. Having an online presence through a project website and social media is important in sharing information in today's society. A website (www.macog.com/activetransportation) was created to provide the public with more information about the Active Transportation Plan such as the purpose, process, and future ways to participate. Summaries to the steering committee and focus group meetings were provided. The website also served as a way to access the online survey and interactive map. Visitors to the site were directed to take the survey, then follow up with mapping comments about areas of concern and identifying projects or improvements needed along specific corridors. In total, over 60 areas of concern and 206 miles of potential projects were identified. To view the public comment on the interactive map, please see Appendix F.

Information regarding the Active Transportation Plan and survey were also shared on social media via stakeholder promotion and a press release was shared with news outlets in the region. MACOG

attended, and provided display boards and materials to distribute when unable to attend, at various social events including the Bicycle Michiana Coalition 2016 Bicycle Swap meet, South Bend Green Drinks, Syracuse Safety Day, Farmer's Markets, First Fridays, and several racing events in the region.



A Snapshot of the Active Transportation Website

Survey Results

350 people across the Michiana region (Elkhart, Kosciusko, Marshall, and St. Joseph Counties) responded to the online survey distributed by MACOG. These surveys provided a quick and convenient way to ask 25 questions regarding active transportation in the region including bicycle and walking habits, preferences, and values. A complete summary of online survey results can be viewed in Appendix F.

Overall, the majority of respondents (86%) felt it was very important to have access to safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian routes within their community. Stressing that importance, nearly 78% said they would consider active transportation when looking for a place to live and work. Over half the respondents said they were very interested in biking more often for transportation purposes, while 1 in 3 were very interested in walking for transportation.

Health and Quality of Life measures are emphasized in the values section of the survey. The top reasons why respondents walk or bike currently are for health, both personally and for the environment; overall enjoyment; and exploring their community. Similarly, the top reasons for investing in bicycling and walking include increasing health and physical activity, creating safe routes for walking and bicycling to school, enhancing access to and experience of the natural environment, and improving facilities in city or town center, main streets, and near transit stops.

While the number of respondents did not offer a full representation of the Michiana population, the survey still provides a snapshot and baseline information for values and items that can be emphasized and compared to in future planning efforts.

Public Review

The Active Transportation Plan will be out for public comment from June 16 to July 7. An open house will be held in each county in order to provide the public a chance to provide comments, ask questions, and give feedback. The open houses will be held between 4 and 6 pm on the following dates and locations:

June 21, 2016: Goshen Public Library, Schrock Auditorium

June 22, 2016: Kosciusko County Community Foundation

June 28, 2016: Plymouth Public Library

June 29, 2016: St. Joseph County Public Library, Dickinson Conference Room

In addition, MACOG plans to attend various community events to receive feedback and engage those who might not be able to attend open house dates:

Others TBD

