

Building an All Abilities Transportation Network

Understanding the Current Ramsey County Landscape

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Question 1: What are the current principles that the departments of Public Works, Public Health, Parks and Recreation and the Regional Rail Authority follow when developing the County’s transportation network?

There are core transportation principles that are clearly shared across all four departments:

- Mobility for All In Ability to Use the County’s Transportation Network
- Safety for All When Using the County’s Transportation Network
- Implement a True Multi-Modal Approach
- All Transportation Principles and Policies Should Align with Comprehensive Planning
- Agreement on Transportation User Categories: Pedestrians, Cyclists, Transit Riders, Drivers/Parkers, Freight Operators
- Communities should always be meaningfully engaged

Other principles that were cited by one department and likely have countywide value as part of a unified transportation vision that priorities access, safety and mobility for all users:

Public Health

- Equity in transportation must be a priority (particularly health equity)
- Stronger countywide evaluation will be needed after stronger alignment of transportation values and priorities

Public Works

- Finding the right balance isn’t often a technical or safety issue, but rather one of values and vision – what blend of transportation features best serve the community today and tomorrow
- Partnerships are key to implementing a vision on a transportation network
- 90% of the County’s roadway system is targeted in one fashion or another for enhancing bike network connections through current County/City plans
- No decision-making process will make all users happy in the short-term (but a safe, equitable and effective system will make the entire community stronger in the long-term)

Parks and Recreation

- Strategies to Use: Transform Systems, Identify Policy, Enhance the Built Environment, Engage Communities
- Pedestrians and bicyclists should be able to move freely and safely on a safe and well-integrated system that connects people and places in Ramsey County
- Walking and biking should be a comfortable and integral part of daily life in Ramsey County for people of all ages and abilities

- The Bike Plan's Goals have broader applicability to future transportation system design than just in Parks and Rec or just applied to bikes
- Prioritize the most vulnerable users to ensure all users have equitable safety and mobility on the transportation network
 1. Pedestrians (Remember – all trips start and end as a pedestrian)
 2. People who Bike
 3. Transit Users
 4. Drivers/Parkers
 5. Freight Operators

Regional Rail Authority

- Safe and accessible last-mile connections to transit are vitally important to building a strong, multi-modal community
- All future projects start from an assumption that they will be multi-modal, not if they will be

Question 2: What are the primary documents that currently guide the vision and implementation of the Ramsey County transportation network?

Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)

- Owned/Maintained by Public Health (available on Ramsey County website)
- The plan spans the years of 2014-2018 and focuses on connecting multiple community systems to promote physical activity (schools, child care, health care providers, businesses, community organizations, other governments, etc.). CHIP also requires detailed health equity data be included in future reports back to the state which has an implication for transportation. This plan will remain a key driver for outlining and implementing health in all policies for Ramsey County.

Ramsey County Pedestrian and Bike Plan

- Owned/Maintained by Parks and Recreation (available on Ramsey County website)
- The plan was accepted by the Board in February 2016 and outlines a strategic vision, prioritization of non-motorized transportation system users to ensure mobility and safety for all by focusing on the system's most vulnerable users.

Context Sensitive Solutions Approach to Transportation (note: not a formal document)

- Applied by Public Works on every project
- This approach incorporates principles and guidelines that evaluate the appropriate context for each project. It applies policy decisions on how to best utilize public right-of-way based on past practice, alignment with legal and funding requirements, engineering judgement and community engagement. Many issues that arise and are addressed currently on a case-by-case project basis are not technical or safety issues but rather policy decisions on how to best utilize limited right of way space.

NOTE: There are many secondary documents that remain vitally important to actually implementing projects, but the three items listed above are the strongest in terms of trying to understand the County's overall approach to planning and implementing its transportation network in a way that results in mobility and safety for all.

Strengths of Current Primary Document Landscape:

- All core elements needed for a holistic transportation planning and implementation approach are already referenced in Ramsey County's primary documents
- All primary documents recognize that context in different neighborhoods matters and multiple user groups must always be considered for every project
- The primary documents demonstrate that multiple areas of the County are committed to playing an active role in developing a strong transportation network

Weaknesses of Current Primary Document Landscape:

- Only two of the above documents are actually documents; it would benefit County residents and departments to transparently depict in a unified transportation guiding document Ramsey County's policy and implementation approach
- More detail is needed around specifying implementation approaches that enact the County's transportation vision; those implementation approaches need to balance flexibility and specificity to that successfully guide projects across the changing contexts of neighborhoods and still align the County's implementation vision for every project
- Clarity is needed for how planning and implementation on Ramsey County's transportation network applies across various user categories and provides specific approaches to ensuring the most vulnerable user group's mobility and safety needs are always considered first

Question 3: How have the primary Ramsey County transportation policy and planning documents come together over time?

A Timeline of Recent Progress

2010

- Context Sensitive Solutions: County discusses Complete Streets Policy and ultimately works with Public Works to instead refine the Context Sensitive Solutions approach

2014

- Countywide Health Improvement Plan is completed and strategic implementation plan is adopted by the Ramsey County Board in May 2014. This established the foundation for a health in all policies approach and equity lens to transportation planning, design and implementation, and for the first time explicitly established a role outside of “infrastructure” departments in transportation discussions and decision-making.

2016

- The Ramsey County Board accepts the Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan as a guiding document for pedestrian and bicycle planning and implementation. The Board also directed staff to incorporate the plan into the next comprehensive plan update in transportation, parks, public health and other areas. The Board also directed staff to coordinate, collaborate and partner with others on the funding and development of the Connected Ramsey Communities Network and a walkable and bikeable community for all ages and abilities.

2016

- Ongoing planning work continues on multiple Ramsey County transit corridors that include: Gateway, Riverview, Rush Line and High Speed Rail to Chicago. All corridors contain a multi-modal planning component and will provide opportunities to increase non-motorized transportation in Ramsey County.

Key Takeaways after the Comprehensive Scan:

- Four important dates have all occurred within the past 6 years and signal a rapidly changing transportation planning and implementation environment, and action has not yet unified the above county work into a full-scale, holistic transportation vision and implementation approach for Ramsey County.
- Without Board discussion and specific actions that next seek to unify the previous work listed above, there are somewhat aligned but somewhat different directions and priorities being implemented across different departments that affect different aspects of the transportation network; bikes and pedestrians were the focus in 2016

but that same focus needs to now carry across all user groups to fully understand policy implications and develop implementation strategies.

- The 2016 conversation around pedestrians and bikes outlined many elements of a holistic transportation network conversation and provides a strong place from which to move future County conversations forward.
- The following topics need to be addressed to unify the planning and implementation of the County's transportation network and would also align with regional and national best practices:
 1. Prioritize transportation system users by category to ensure the most vulnerable users are always considered during planning and implementation
 2. Clarify and adopt a unified policy statement for Ramsey County's transportation network that is shared across departments
 3. Align specific implementation and design strategies in Public Works, Public Health, Parks and Regional Rail that align with the prioritized vision
 4. Develop new, shared performance measures that measure future progress and highlight areas for future work
 5. Include all of the above in a publicly available, unified countywide transportation network planning and implementation document
 6. Utilize a consistent approach with built-in flexibility and partnership for implementation strategies across Ramsey County communities that differ in context