

DATA AND TREND ANALYSIS

# Parks and Streets



*Parks and open space are key contributors to quality of life. Parks and open space strengthen residents' physical, psychological, and social wellbeing by providing opportunities for recreation, stress reduction, and social interaction. Natural areas provide environmental benefits by preserving natural resources, reducing air pollution and managing stormwater runoff.*

## DESCRIPTION

Parks are an important component in supporting healthy communities in Ramsey County. They support good health by increasing physical activity, improving mental health, and supporting community interaction and social connectivity.<sup>1</sup> They provide a safe and accessible venue for people to play and exercise away from potentially hazardous situations, like busy streets or commercial zones. Parks also have environmental benefits, such as reducing air and water pollution and mitigating the urban heat island effect. These environmental benefits, in turn, protect the health of residents.<sup>2</sup> Access to parks is largely influenced by proximity to parks. The closer one lives to a park, the more likely the park will be used for physical activity. In addition, those who feel protected from traffic, crimes and other hazards are more likely to utilize parks.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW WE ARE DOING

In Ramsey County, 81.2 percent of the population has access to a park within 1/2 mile.<sup>3</sup>

## DISPARITIES

In Minnesota, white people use parks nearly twice as often as other populations, and rarely note any safety concerns, while populations of color are more likely to use the parks for fishing, special events and picnicking, and are more likely to note safety concerns about being in the relatively isolated spaces of regional parks. Park accessibility varies across Minnesota, and is a concern for adults and children with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

## RISK FACTORS

Nationally, factors that limit access to parks include:<sup>1</sup>

- Long distances to parks;
- Lack of physical infrastructure (e.g., incomplete or disconnected streets, lack of pedestrian crossings, lack of adequate street lighting, etc.);
- Crime and traffic safety concerns (e.g., dangerous or busy traffic areas, physical designs in parks that influence crime); and
- Lack of collaboration between local government agencies, nonprofits and community organizations in working toward unified park accessibility goals.

## WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

Ramsey County is home to nine county parks, six regional parks and five regional trail corridors. Many parks include lake access and provide a variety of recreation opportunities, such as boating, picnicking, play areas and swimming. Ramsey County is addressing the potential risk factors cited above in part through its “Active Living Ramsey Communities” (ALRC) initiative. Developed in 2004, ALRC supports active living by encouraging walking, taking the stairs and using recreational facilities. Ramsey County departments (including Parks & Recreation, Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health, Public Works, Libraries and Regional Railroad Authority) join municipalities, schools, businesses, health care entities, nonprofits, community groups, and residents to help more people engage in physical activity. The group works to reduce physical activity health disparities and support a way of life that makes physical activity in our neighborhoods and communities safer and easier, through initiatives such as the *Go Ramsey* mapping portal and the *Be Active! Be Green!* bench initiative.

## Information to note

- Ramsey County is home to nine county parks, six regional parks and five regional trail corridors.
- In Ramsey County, 81.2% of the population has access to a park within 1/2 mile.

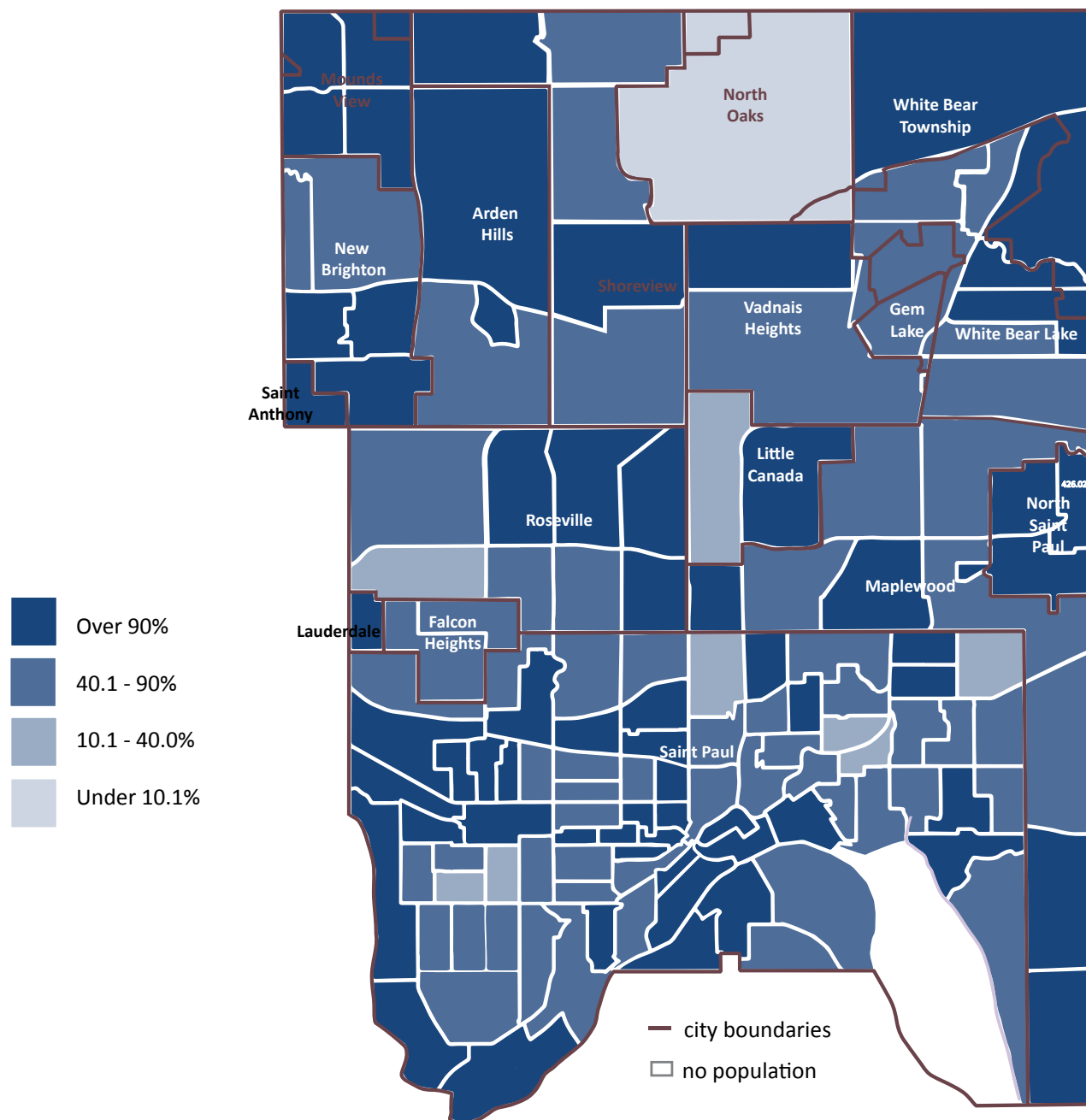
<sup>1</sup> Safe Routes to Parks: Improving Access to Parks through Walkability. National Recreation and Park Association. <http://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/park-access-report.pdf>. Accessed December 14, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Parks, Trails and Health. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/parks.htm>. Accessed December 14, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Community Health Needs Assessment. Community Commons. <https://assessment.communitycommons.org>. Accessed December 14, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> 2017 Minnesota Statewide Health Assessment. Minnesota Department of Health. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/healthymnpartnership/sha.html>. Accessed May 26, 2018.

Census Tracts with Park Access within 1/2 Mile, Ramsey County, 2013



Source: Ramsey County



## DESCRIPTION

Access to public transportation connects residents to jobs, social networks, health care and healthy food. It reduces traffic-related crashes, increases physical fitness and mental health, and reduces both gasoline consumption and the carbon footprint.<sup>1</sup> Public transportation is especially important for job accessibility in heavily urbanized areas, where traffic and parking can be barriers. Metro Transit offers an integrated network of buses, light rail and commuter trains as well as resources for those who carpool, vanpool, walk or bike in the Twin Cities metro area. Metro Mobility provides public transit services for riders unable to use regular buses due to a disability or health condition. Vanpool and Transit Link also provide services under contract with the Metropolitan Council. In 2016, there were 109 park-and-ride facilities in the metro area used by 18,000-19,000 people in the past five years.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW WE ARE DOING

Over 6 percent of Ramsey County residents utilize public transportation for their commute to work, compared to 3.5 5.1 percent of U.S. residents.<sup>3</sup> There remain several low income neighborhoods where residents have low access to vehicles in Ramsey County where there are very few public transit routes.

### BENCHMARK INDICATOR

Healthy People 2020: Increase trips to work made by mass transit  
U.S. target: 5.5 percent

## DISPARITIES

Transportation infrastructure can highlight disparities. Populations who are nonwhite or have low socioeconomic status (SES) tend to own fewer cars, drive less and take public transportation more.<sup>4</sup> Low SES populations tend to live closer to city centers to access public transportation.

## WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

Initiatives in Ramsey County and the greater metro area to improve access to (and experience of) public transportation include:

- A series of Arterial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects initiated by Metro Transit in 2015, beginning with the A Line, which provides an important connection between the Green Line in St. Paul and the Blue Line in Minneapolis. A nine-mile line will run between Woodbury and downtown St. Paul, connecting with the Green Line at Union Depot.
- Plans to add 150 shelters and improve an additional 75 by Metro Transit. Improvements focus on areas of concentrated poverty in St. Paul.
- Evaluation of ways to improve transit routes along the Riverview Corridor by the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority who works on transit-oriented projects that address the region's needs for mobility, improved transportation affordability, mitigation of traffic congestion and enhanced environmental quality. It also oversees Union Depot in downtown St. Paul. Their additional projects include:  
(continued on back)

## Information to note

- Ramsey County currently meets the Healthy People 2020 target for residents commuting to work using public transportation.
- The Twin Cities metro ranks 12th among 49 other major metropolitan areas in the U.S. for using public transportation to get to work.<sup>5</sup>
- Even though Ramsey County currently meets the Healthy People 2020 target for residents commuting to work using public transportation, there are several low income neighborhoods lacking transit routes.

## Community voice

*"Sometimes I don't have transportation to stores with good products."*  
- Hispanic Female, age 45-54

134 responses mentioned the health burdens of limited transportation. Due to limited transit options, respondents weren't able to reach healthier grocery stores and doctor appointments.

<sup>1</sup> Public Transportation Benefits. American Public Transportation Association. <http://www.apta.com/mediacenter/ptbenefits/Pages/default.aspx>. Accessed December 13, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Metro Transit. <https://www.metrotransit.org/about-metro-transit> ; <https://www.metrotransit.org/metro-mobility>. Accessed December 13, 2017.

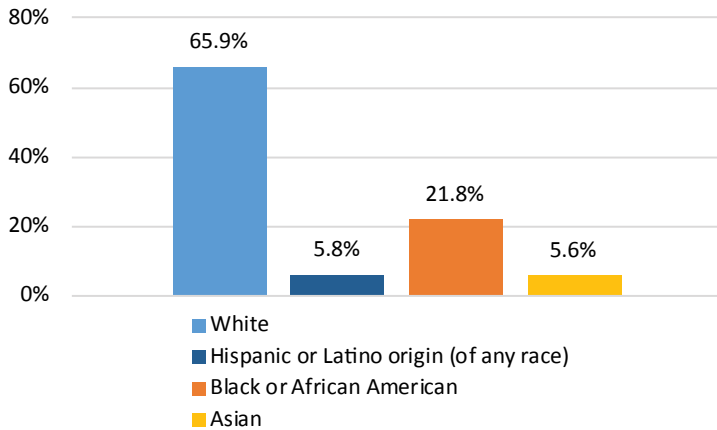
<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census American Community Survey 2012-2016. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_5YR\\_B08101&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_5YR_B08101&prodType=table). Accessed March 13, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Pratt GC, Vadali ML, Kvale DL, Ellickson KM. Traffic, Air Pollution, Minority and Socio-Economic Status: Addressing Inequities in Exposure and Risk. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2015 May; 12(5): 5355-5372.

<sup>5</sup> Access Across America: UMN ranks accessibility to jobs by transit. <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/access-across-america-umn-ranks-accessibility-jobs-transit>. Accessed December 13, 2017.

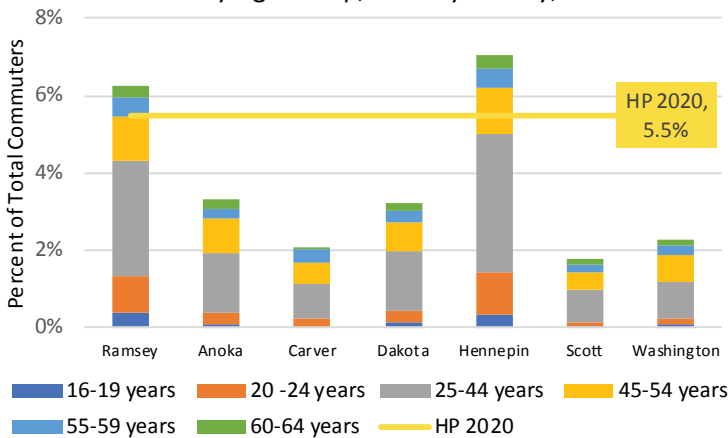
- A BRT route connecting Union Depot to downtown White Bear Lake (Rush Line);
- A BRT route connecting the southeastern suburbs to St. Paul (Red Rock Corridor); and
- A potential second daily train connecting Union Depot to Union Station in Chicago.

Use of Public Transportation to Get to Work by Race/Ethnicity, Ramsey County, 2016



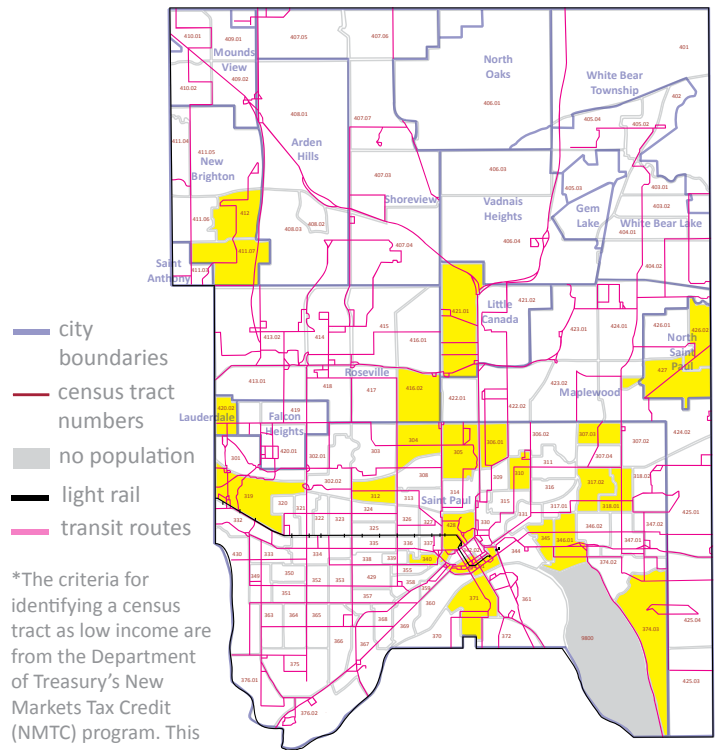
Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2016 1-year estimates.<sup>6</sup>

Residents Commuting to Work Using Mass Transit by Age Group, Ramsey County, 2016



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2012-2016.<sup>7</sup>

Low Income\* and Low Vehicle Access by City and Census Tract, Ramsey County, 2015



\*The criteria for identifying a census tract as low income are from the Department of Treasury's New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program. This program defines a low-income census tract as any tract where:

- The tract's poverty rate is 20 percent or greater; or
- The tract's median family income is less than or equal to 80 percent of the State-wide median family income; or
- The tract is in a metropolitan area and has a median family income less than or equal to 80 percent of the metropolitan area's median family income.

Vehicle availability is defined in the American Community Survey as the number of passenger cars, vans, or trucks with a capacity of 1-ton or less kept at the home and available for use by household members.

Source: USDA Food Environment Atlas.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census American Community Survey 2016 1-year estimates. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_1YR\\_S0802&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_1YR_S0802&prodType=table). Accessed March 14, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Census American Community Survey 2012-2016. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_16\\_5YR\\_B08101&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_16_5YR_B08101&prodType=table). Accessed March 13, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> USDA Food Environment Atlas. Web site. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas>. Accessed December 28, 2017.

## DESCRIPTION

In 2015, the Surgeon General of the U.S. issued a call to action to promote walking and walkable communities where people of all ages and abilities walk because it is a convenient, fun, safe and healthy choice.<sup>1,2</sup> Elements of walkability include road conditions, affordable housing near businesses, parks and public places to gather and play, and streets that are designed for bicyclists and pedestrians as well as transit.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the many health benefits associated with physical activity, making walking easier can improve safety, increase interaction among residents, improve local economies, and reduce air pollution.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the lack of walkable streets can lead to poorer health including high blood pressure, weight gain, chronic illness, depression and anxiety.<sup>5</sup>

## HOW WE ARE DOING

Ramsey County measures walkability by calculating the Pedestrian Level of Service (PLOS) of county streets. PLOS is determined by three factors: the presence or absence of sidewalks, the posted speed limit of the roadway and the surrounding land use context. Streets are then assigned a PLOS rating of good, fair, poor or hostile. Streets with a good rating tend to have lower speed limits, with sidewalks on one or both sides. Currently, fewer than half the streets in Ramsey County have a good PLOS. The percentage of streets rated good in areas of concentrated poverty is higher than the countywide average, mostly due to the higher number of sidewalks in these predominantly urban areas. The percentage of streets rated hostile in areas of concentrated poverty is equal to the countywide average. However, the percentage of hostile streets in areas of extreme concentrated poverty is higher than the countywide average, reflecting the burden that major highways and arterial roadways place on many of these communities. Hostile streets typically lack sidewalks and shoulders, meaning that pedestrians must travel in traffic lanes to reach local destinations. Other hostile streets such as interstate highways prohibit pedestrians and bicycles entirely. These streets carry faster, more dangerous vehicle traffic, and expose pedestrians to high levels of noise and air pollution. They also tend to have fewer homes and other buildings that face the street, which reduces peoples' ability to observe activity on the street and correlates with higher rates of crime.<sup>6</sup>

## DISPARITIES

At the national level, research has shown that people of color and older adults are overrepresented among pedestrian deaths.<sup>7</sup> In U.S. metro areas lower median household income and higher rates of people without health insurance both correlate with a higher risk of being struck and killed by a car while walking.<sup>8</sup> Areas of extreme concentrated poverty in Ramsey County have a higher percentage of streets with a hostile PLOS than the (continued on back)

## Information to note

- Lack of walkable streets can contribute to a sedentary lifestyle and associated negative health impacts.
- In Ramsey County, fewer than half the streets are rated as having a good Pedestrian Level of Service.

<sup>1</sup>Step It Up! The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/walking-and-walkable-communities/index.html>. Accessed August 7, 2018.

<sup>2</sup>Ramsey County-wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan: Purpose, Vision and Goals. Ramsey County. <https://www.ramseycounty.us/sites/default/files/Projects%20and%20Initiatives/Section%201%20-%20Purpose%20Vision%20and%20Goals%20Web.pdf>. Accessed October 25, 2017.

<sup>3</sup>Walkable Neighborhoods. Walk Score. <https://www.walkscore.com/walkable-neighborhoods.shtml>. Accessed August 15, 2017.

<sup>4</sup>Seymour MW. Walkable Mississippi: Introduction to walking and walkability issues. Mississippi State University Extension. 2017. <http://extension.msstate.edu/sites/default/files/publications/publications/p3110.pdf>. Published July 2017. Accessed August 7, 2018.

<sup>5</sup>National Physical Activity Plan. National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity. <http://www.ncppa.org/national-physical-activity-plan>. Accessed August 7, 2018.

<sup>6</sup>Active Design Supplement: Promoting Safety. John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. 2013. [https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-injury-research-and-policy/\\_docs/publications-resources/ActiveDesignSupplement.pdf](https://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-injury-research-and-policy/_docs/publications-resources/ActiveDesignSupplement.pdf). Accessed August 7, 2018.

<sup>7</sup>The best complete streets policies of 2016. Smart Growth America. <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/the-best-complete-streets-policies-of-2016/?download=yes&key=43751417>. Accessed July 19, 2017.

<sup>8</sup>Dangerous by Design 2016. Smart Growth America. 2017. <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>. Accessed August 24, 2018.

county average. Areas of concentrated poverty in Ramsey County have a higher percentage of streets with a good PLOS than the county average.

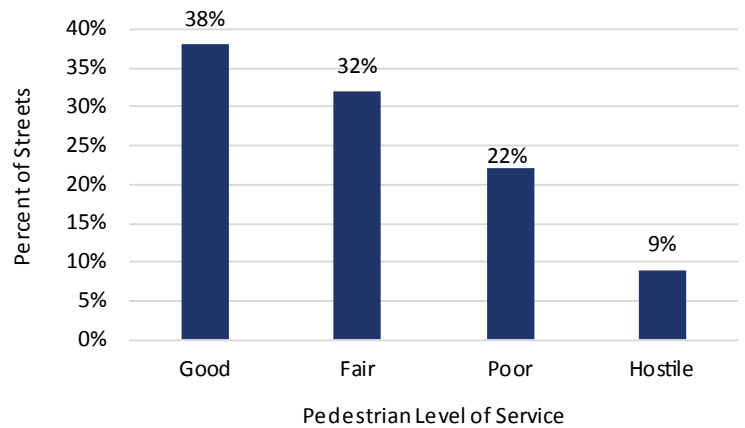
## RISK FACTORS

People in low-income households are nearly twice as likely to walk as people in other income groups, in part because they are less likely to own a car.<sup>9</sup> Some research has shown that socially vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people of color, people living in poverty, and people with lower educational attainment tend to live in neighborhoods with lower walkability.<sup>10</sup>

## WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

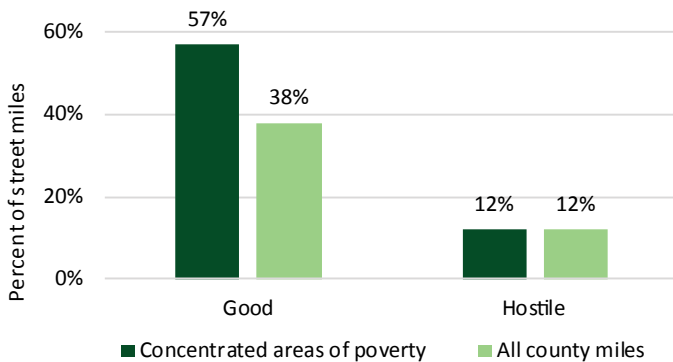
Ramsey County has implemented an All Abilities Transportation Network Policy, which prioritizes transportation system users to ensure the most vulnerable users (pedestrians) are always considered first during transportation planning and implementation. This creates a fundamental system change to encourage more walkable communities and neighborhoods through ongoing and future transportation projects. Additionally, Active Living Ramsey Communities is facilitating implementation of the Ramsey County-wide Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan by coordinating with other governmental units to create quality pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks, trails and other pedestrian-friendly facilities. Finally, Saint Paul – Ramsey County Public Health’s Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) encourages implementation of Safe Routes to School: a comprehensive framework that uses infrastructure to build safer, walkable areas around schools; and uses education, enforcement, and encouragement to build a culture and environment of safe walking for all.

Pedestrian Level of Service on Ramsey County Streets, 2016



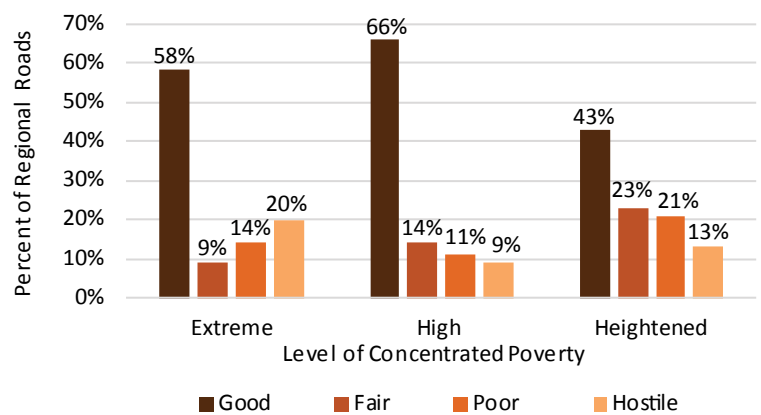
Source: Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department. 2017.

Pedestrian Level of Service in Concentrated Areas of Poverty, Ramsey County, 2016



Source: Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department.

Pedestrian Level of Service by Level of Poverty, Ramsey County, 2016



Source: Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department.

<sup>9</sup>Murakami E, Young J. Daily Travel by persons with low income. Paper presented at: African American Mobility Symposium; April 3-May 2, 1997; Tampa, FL. <https://nhnts.ornl.gov/1995/Doc/LowInc.pdf>. Accessed August 8, 2018.

<sup>10</sup>Bereitschaft B. Equity in neighbourhood walkability? A comparative analysis of three large U.S. cities. The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability. 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2017.1297390>. Published March 3, 2017. Accessed August 8, 2018.