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The Region's First Ever Bicycle and Pedestrian Draft Master Plan is Here

The Lehigh Valley has a robust road and bridge network, more than 300 miles of trails and a public transit system that serves more than 5 million riders a year.

Transforming those components into a seamless transportation network for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and even drivers is key to the region becoming one of the nation's most livable.

That's the mission of Walk/RollLV, the Lehigh Valley's first ever active transportation masterplan. The Lehigh Valley Transportation Study released the first draft of Walk/RollLV Wednesday, opening up a 45-day public review process designed to give community leaders, elected officials and the general public the first look at the blueprint for improving walking, biking and accessibility in the roads, trail and transit system.

The Walk/RollLV plan looks to change habits with suggestions that include dedicated bike lanes, pedestrian safety improvements, traffic calming and ways to better connect the region's trail and sidewalk network, linking not only the communities within the region, but connecting the Lehigh Valley to networks in neighboring regions.

In short, it's designed to move from a philosophy of moving cars and trucks to one of moving people.

"We are quite literally trying to bring about culture change," said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley. "It's not going to happen overnight, but the people of the Lehigh Valley have made it clear they're ready for this. People want this. It's important to our future."

Creating a safer transportation system will not only save lives, but it will encourage more people to get out of their cars for recreation and commuting and that will improve public health by reducing obesity, lowering blood pressure, preventing heart disease and promoting overall better health. It will also enhance transit ridership.

"Every transit bus rider starts off as a pedestrian," said Owen O'Neil, Executive Director of the Lehigh and Northampton Transit Authority. "If we can get more people out of their cars and walking, they're much more likely to notice their transit options."

The masterplan has been more than a year in the making by the LVTS, LVPC, consultant Toole Design and dozens of community partners. It includes an analysis of the current network, identification of where the gaps are and where filling the gaps can have the most impact. That process included giving people across the region a chance to log their experiences – good and bad – on an interactive online map of the region's existing network.

Most of the plan's recommendations call for general design modifications that can improve safety and increase the number of people walking, biking and using transit, but it also rolls out a list of site specific recommendations for ten Bicycle Commuting Corridors and five Catalytic Projects. The Bicycle Commuting Corridors include well-traveled places like Hamilton Street through Allentown, New Street through Bethlehem and Northampton Street through Easton, while Catalytic Projects include creating a Catasauqua Area Trail and Transit Initiative and an ambitious plan to better connect Easton to the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Trail.

"The Priority Bicycle Commuting Corridors are projects in places where we think we could have the most significant impact in getting more people to walk, ride or use transit to commute," said Geoff Reese, LVPC Director of Environmental Planning and project manager for the Walk/RollLV plan. "The Catalytic Projects have the wow factor. These are projects that would have an immediate, dramatic impact."

The Walk/RollLV Plan is unusual for how it has been put together. It included major contributions from a specially-convened Multimodal Working Group, who met monthly and welcomed anyone with interest to join the conversation. Over the year, more than 250 people participated, including many from some of the region's most active bicycle, pedestrian and transit agencies.

"This plan is all about the community, so we felt it was important that the community had an active role in helping to shape it," Bradley said. "This is about more than just transportation. It's about our health, our economy and our quality of life."

Funders of the plan include the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Keystone Conservation Partnerships Program, PennPraxis, South Whitehall Township, the University of Pittsburgh and the Pennsylvania Department of Health through the State Physical Activity and Nutrition Grant and Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The draft plan is available at <https://www.lvpc.org/walkrolllv.html>. It will remain open for public comment through January 18. Then it will be updated, based on comments made, and be up for approval by the LVTS and LVPC early next year.

From there, it will be used to plan future transportation projects. *FutureLV: The Regional Plan* passed last month includes millions of dollars to be allocated to pedestrian, bicycle and transit projects over the next 25 years.