



Creating and Measuring an Active Transportation Network in Moscow, ID

Challenge

Moscow, Idaho is a small city near the University of Idaho with a footprint of under seven square miles and a [population](#) of about 25,000. Moscow residents demonstrated support for active transportation projects, and the city built some bikeways and walkways, but until recent years, the city had not been focused on building staff capacity to implement widespread multimodal projects or gathering data to determine their impacts.

Solution

The city received a \$10,000 grant from [Idaho Smart Growth](#)—a nonprofit organization that educates Idaho citizens and implements statewide smart growth policies—to administer a multifaceted, complete streets effort. Idaho's Department of Health and Welfare contracted with Idaho Smart Growth to manage the project, which stemmed from a joint initiative of the Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Department of Health and Human services to support projects related to public health. The effort included, in addition to dedicated staff training: (1) iCount, a pedestrian and bicycle counting program, and (2) developing a recommendation for a bicycle-friendly greenway. The city identified these initiatives and developed an [Active Living Task Force \(ALTF\)](#) to implement them.

In 2011, the ALTF designed and began implementing the [iCount program](#) to count bicyclists and pedestrians on busy roadways. The program's two main objectives are to: (1) create a baseline of active transportation counts for the city of Moscow, and (2) provide information to the [National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project](#). Volunteers conduct the counts on one day each year at peak commuting times in approximately 30 strategically placed locations, based on the traffic density of the area. Collecting data just one day each year may result in accuracy issues, as fluctuations in weather can strongly influence the number of people walking and bicycling. By using volunteers, the iCount program demonstrates how a small town can begin to implement bicycle and pedestrian counts with limited resources. Each count requires approximately 40 staff hours.

The city has successfully utilized outside resources to administer the iCount program. For the last few years, the city has provided a 12-month sustainability fellowship position for iCount administration through AmeriCorps; the fellow completes additional projects such as updating the city's greenhouse gas emissions inventory and evaluating recycling programs. University of Idaho Professor Mike Lowry built a data entry system for the iCount program. The city reviews the bicycle/pedestrian data to evaluate before-and-after analytics and demonstrate utilization of active transportation routes to stakeholders and the public. For example, the city will begin construction on a bicycle/pedestrian underpass in 2018, in a location it selected with the support of iCount data. The underpass, at the intersection of Idaho State Highway 8 and White Avenue, will provide a safer crossing for bicyclists, pedestrians, and schoolchildren who attend a nearby charter school. The underpass will also enhance access to jobs by providing new connections between the city's public transportation hub, the east side of Moscow where a major marketplace is located, downtown Moscow, and other residential areas.

In addition to developing the iCount program to collect data, city staff wanted training before the city of Moscow could embark upon developing a greenway, a designated route for walking and biking along an existing

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roadway. Several staff members spanning multiple job functions attended a training workshop on active transportation implementation through Portland State University's [Initiative for Bicycle and Pedestrian Innovation](#) in Portland, Oregon. When the staff members returned from the training, they were able to clearly articulate how they could feasibly implement an active transportation network, which was key to their success.



Greenway sign design by local artist. (Image courtesy of the City of Moscow)

The ALTF found that there was strong public support for the greenway through a town hall discussion and survey. Next, the ALTF identified and tested a proposed route for the greenway. Through this test route, as well as considerations from the city's Streets Department and [Transportation Commission](#), the city finalized the 3.7-mile route. The greenway, which opened in 2016, runs through a series of attractive residential areas with low vehicle speeds and volumes. Staff found that few barriers existed in making the greenway a reality—they used the existing right of way as its foundation and integrated funding for sharrows into the city's existing road budget. Additional funding was only needed for signage to brand the greenway and indicate its path. The city hired a local artist to design signs indicating the greenway route and connected network, paying for this work with local funds. The biggest challenge in implementing the greenway was finding enough room to accommodate parking, vehicle travel, and bicycle travel; the city solved this challenge by implementing sharrows and other strategic roadway design elements. The greenway provides increased access to jobs and amenities, including multiple parks, an indoor recreation center, aquatic centers, and public transportation connections.

Conclusion

Moving forward, the city of Moscow plans to continue improving the overall bicycle and pedestrian network by identifying areas for additional greenways and sidewalks. For example, the University of Idaho campus and the city's downtown lie on opposite corners of Moscow's Urban Renewal District, with rail tracks no longer in use running between them. The city is evaluating ways to redevelop the railroad track into a biking and walking path that would better connect the university and the rest of the city.

Other organizations in Moscow are implementing complementary programs to improve safety for active modes. In 2017, the [University of Idaho's Safe Routes to School initiative](#) received two years of dedicated funding from the State's Transportation Alternatives Program, a set-aside of the [Surface Transportation Block Grant Program](#), to spread awareness and implement programs to enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety, particularly for schoolchildren. At the 2017 [Officer Newbill Kids Safety Fair](#), local law enforcement and fire department staff participated to enhance active transportation safety education, and the city gave 500 bike helmets away to area youth.



Volunteers and staff from local organizations teach kids about bike safety. (Image courtesy of the Officer Newbill Kids Safety Fair)

Receiving a critical grant helped the city of Moscow transform their active transportation planning approach to have a more strategic focus on data and infrastructure connectivity, both of which align with the Federal Highway Administration's priorities. The city of Moscow is using the momentum generated from the iCount and greenway projects, as well as the plans laid out in the 2014 multimodal plan, [Moscow on the Move](#), to further improve its active transportation networks.

Federal Highway Administration: www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability

