

Testing the Health in Transportation Corridor Planning Framework in Appleton, Wisconsin

College Avenue Corridor as a Pilot Study for Coordinated Approach
to Integrating Health

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Acknowledgments

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East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission	Valley Transit
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Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau	Well City Fox Cities
Fox Cities Cycling Association	Wisconsin Department of Health and Human Services – Northeast Region
	Wisconsin Department of Transportation – Northeast Region

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Background

College Avenue, located within the Appleton Transportation Management Area (TMA), is a 4.5-mile corridor connecting Appleton International Airport to downtown Appleton. The Appleton TMA and Oshkosh Metropolitan Planning Organization Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan was adopted in October 2014, and identified this corridor as one of the most important corridors for additional study. Several partners have discussed the opportunity of developing College Avenue from the Appleton International Airport to downtown Appleton as the “Gateway into the Fox Cities.” The corridor project is listed in the Appleton TMA Transportation Improvement Program and Long-Range Land Use/Transportation Plan, and local planning documents and capital improvement plans include the corridor.



College Avenue Aerial View

The College Avenue corridor is located within three municipalities. Along its length, it is a county highway, a State highway, and a local road, each with its own distinct cross section. Currently, College Avenue is a four-lane highway with speed limits ranging from 30 to 55 mph. It has limited bicycle and pedestrian accommodations and limited access for transit. The surrounding land use is primarily commercial (retail stores, grocery stores) and industrial development. The Fox River Mall is located directly adjacent to this corridor. Businesses are located generally near the west end of College Avenue near the airport. Residential development is located primarily to the south of the corridor on the county highway and State highway sections.

The corridor study was intended to provide a vision for what a multimodal corridor could be in the future and to identify the potential health implications of various alternatives. The modes of transportation considered include vehicles, transit, freight, and bicycle and pedestrian.

The county highway portion is a rural section connecting Appleton International Airport and the Fox River Mall. This four-lane highway has speeds from 45 to 55 mph. Existing transit



State highway with Frontage Road section

routes do not extend to Appleton International Airport. Currently no

bicycle and pedestrian facilities occur along this section, but a trail running perpendicular to the highway across from Appleton International Airport connects to adjacent communities.

The State highway portion, extending from I-41 to the Railroad Viaduct Bridge, is a four-lane roadway with a frontage road system. The land use throughout this section of the corridor is primarily retail. One block to the south are residences and an elementary school where community members need to cross the highway.



County Highway near the Fox River Mall and I-41

College Avenue from the Railroad Viaduct Bridge to Downtown Appleton is an urban section located within the City of Appleton. Although transit routes are located along this corridor, the Railroad Viaduct Bridge narrows and is a pinch point for vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The bridge has no bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. Sidewalks are located on both sides of the roadway after the bridge.



College Avenue near downtown Appleton

Framework Steps Completed

East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning

Commission (East Central) provides staff support for both the TMA and the Oshkosh MPO, and led the corridor study. Initially conceived as a 12-month project, the College Avenue Corridor study was later anticipated to take a month or two longer due to the length of the corridor and number of stakeholders involved. Steps 1 through 3 of *Health in Transportation Corridor Planning Framework (Framework)*¹ were completed during the nine-month test period.

Various stakeholders were invited to participate in the corridor planning process. Before the first committee meeting, East Central staff contacted stakeholders regarding their roles in the study and participation on the leadership committee. East Central staff built on relationships previously established with each stakeholder through work on local Safe Routes to School Coalitions.

Three subcommittees, with participants representing different disciplines, were formed to examine issues for each corridor section. At each committee meeting, a stakeholder from a different discipline discussed why they are involved in the corridor planning process and why the corridor is important. This sharing from different disciplines helped committee members better understand the important role each organization has in developing recommendations and the impact of those recommendations.

The Framework guided communication among the diverse stakeholders. It informed the team at the outset of the study and provided information to support development of the stakeholder group, outline the project, and initiate the study process. Framework questions guided participants in sharing information about their interest in the corridor. Participants with health and transportation focuses were asked to share their unique priorities for the corridor from their professional perspectives.

Partnerships and Stakeholders

East Central staff had developed relationships with partner organizations through past planning processes and their Regional Safe Routes to School Program. Having these established relationships facilitated a quick start to the corridor study and use of the Framework.

The Framework provided a clear mechanism for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Northeast Region and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Northeast Region (WisDOT – NE Region) to work together on a corridor study. Although work in the region to build capacity around transportation and health is ongoing, this study was the first time these agencies worked together to consider potential health impacts of transportation facilities along a corridor. This very specific, project-level collaboration was new to the stakeholders. The Framework helped assemble multiple departments at the local and State levels to witness how the results of such a project could be mutually beneficial.

¹ Health in Transportation Corridor Planning Framework: FHWA 2016

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/health_in_transportation/planning_framework/the_framework/index.cfm

WisDOT-NE Region was planning a traffic operations study on the State highway segment of the corridor to the Railroad Viaduct Bridge. After attending a few meetings on the broader corridor study, the agency expanded the scope of the traffic operations study to include the entire corridor from Appleton International Airport to downtown Appleton. In addition, in response to the feedback and discussions resulting from this study, WisDOT-NE Region hired a consultant for their traffic operations study to review bicycle and pedestrian accommodations and facilities along the corridor. The original scope of their traffic study did not include bicycling and walking.

One challenge of bringing stakeholders from varied disciplines together is understanding each other's language and the process needed to implement corridor improvements. From the beginning of the corridor study, it was emphasized to committee members that this corridor study is a learning opportunity. Committee members were encouraged to ask questions so they could better understand how each local department might be affected or could help implement corridor improvements. This open forum approach helped build relationships and deeper understanding of mutually held goals for the corridor.

Detailed View of Activities

East Central staff used an approach that combined some of the activities listed in individual Steps. Meetings included appropriate information from sequential Steps to support the intended outcomes. Information from Steps 1 and 2 was used for the first meeting, and Steps 2 and 3 information was used for the second meeting.

Step 1: Define Transportation Problems and Public Health Issues

For the first stakeholder committee meeting, staff from the Fox Cities Regional Partnership presented information on the economic impact of the corridor. The presentation included both a business perspective and the importance of active transportation options along the corridor for the recruiting and retaining young professionals in the area. Public transportation was considered essential to this purpose. East Central staff used the Framework to help craft initial conversations with stakeholders to build on their existing knowledge and priorities and then to apply that perspective to the corridor study.

For the first meeting, East Central staff used the Framework to identify the scope of the corridor planning study. Before the meeting, East Central staff contacted local and State traffic engineers and asked them to answer the following questions in their presentations:

- What existing conditions and transportation challenges do you currently see along the corridor?
- With any corridor, good aspects and bad aspects are always present. What assets and considerations are present that should be noted from the beginning of this study? (Hint: Are there deficiencies in the corridor that could be addressed, or are there areas that are working great that could be mimicked in other areas?)
- What future improvements are scheduled for the corridor?

Similarly, prior to the meeting with all stakeholders, East Central staff contacted public health professionals and asked them to address the following questions in their presentations to the group:

- What health issues are understood to be a priority for the community? Such as, what are the major priorities through the community health improvement plan (CHIP)?
- How are the health issues identified within the plan?

- How is the corridor planning study helping to achieve bigger picture planning goals related to health, emission reductions, and multimodalism?
- Why is this of interest to public health agencies and other State health stakeholders?

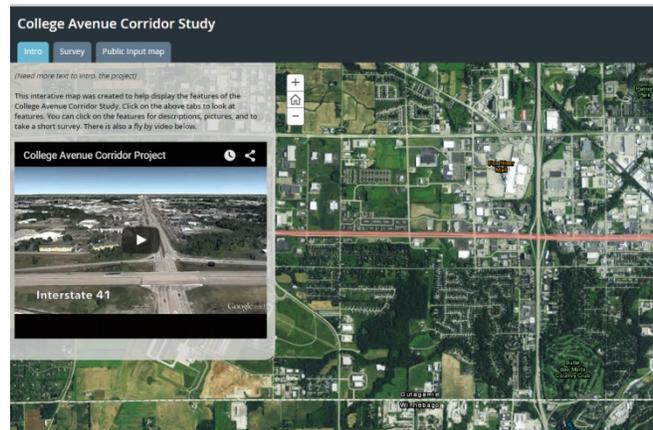
One outcome from this approach was that the Outagamie County Public Health Director provided an example of how a potential client needed to get to free dental services located on the County Highway Corridor. At the meeting, the committee was divided into smaller diverse groups and asked to identify challenges, opportunities, and an overall vision for the corridor. Among the three subcommittees, the overall vision was to create a corridor that would provide improved transportation access through all modes while enhancing the corridor to create the “Gateway to the Fox Valley” through beautification.

Step 2: Identify Needs, Resources, and Public Health Priorities

At the second stakeholder meeting, staff from Appleton International Airport discussed the economic impact of the College Avenue Corridor on out-of-town guests and how the corridor serves as the “Gateway to the Fox Cities Community.” This discussion provided a touchstone for meeting.

East Central staff presented existing conditions data to the committee using a GIS interactive story map. The presentation included some of the challenges, opportunities, and the vision the committee discussed at the first meeting.

After the meeting, East Central staff worked with the committee to launch an interactive map that enabled community members and businesses to show challenges and opportunities they see along the corridor. The committee used this public-engagement approach to develop recommendations, examine associated health impacts, and prioritize the recommendations.



Interactive map used for public input

Step 3: Develop Goals and Objectives that Protect and Promote Public Health

At the second stakeholder meeting, committee members began developing goals and objectives based on transportation and economic priorities while considering the potential health impacts. Committee members were asked to keep these questions in mind while completing this exercise:

- What are the transportation and public health goals and objectives for the corridor?
- What public health outcomes (determinants/behaviors/choices) can our decisions affect?

Goal

The College Avenue corridor provides a safe, accessible, and interconnected transportation network for all users to travel to destinations along and adjacent to the corridor.

- **Objective:** Efficient mass transit options are provided along the full length of the corridor where major points of destination (employment, commerce, retail, and residences) are connected through an efficient, well-designed public transit system.
- **Objective:** The entire College Avenue corridor provides an interconnected network of active transportation opportunities for all users, ages, and abilities including, but not limited to, bicycle lanes and racks, sidewalks, paved trails or designated pedestrian ways.

- **Objective:** The roadway provides automobile users (including freight, commerce, service, and private vehicles) a reliable, convenient, and safe means of travel to destinations along and adjacent to the corridor.
- **Objective:** Users of all abilities will be able to safely and efficiently navigate each intersection through active transportation accommodations.

Goal

The College Avenue corridor allows for future development opportunities by creating an environment where businesses want to locate and helps create a prosperous Fox Valley Community.

- **Objective:** Businesses along and adjacent to the corridor are easily accessed by users of all abilities through all modes of transportation.
- **Objective:** The full corridor provides a location for area businesses to promote worksite wellness programs and places for physical and mental wellness.

Although the second goal is focused on economic development, it acknowledges the importance of “wellness” to promote economic interests.

Decision Maker Support

East Central has a history of working with health professionals on local Safe Routes to School and public health coalitions. Recently, the agency participated in the Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute with local planners and public health professionals to focus on health in planning. Because East Central has been integrating health concepts into the Long-Range Land Use/Transportation Plan and the Congestion Management Plan, the Framework was a natural fit for the College Avenue Corridor Study.

East Central used the Framework to educate elected officials and their staff for a better understanding of how one decision can impact and be mutually beneficial for other departments and partner organizations. Although the highway/public works departments continue to add bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on roadways for transportation, the health department views bicycling and walking accommodations as opportunities for community members to increase their physical activity through active transportation. Community development and the Fox Cities Economic Regional Partnership see the benefit of having bicycle and pedestrian accommodations and public transit because more companies are seeking locations with these accommodations. The inviting environment supports recruitment and retention of young professionals. All partners were interested in collaborating on these improvements for individual benefits.

Although decision makers were generally supportive at the beginning of the study, the process and discussion clearly illustrated a strategy for integrating health considerations into the transportation process.

Outcomes

The inclusion of health professionals and health impacts of transportation options along the corridor showed committee members how transportation options along the corridor can influence their interests, as well as their role in implementing the recommendations. The Framework helped identify stakeholders that should participate and illustrate the mutual benefits for everyone involved. This dynamic helps build support for implementing the recommendations.

Throughout this process, active transportation options and transit routes were shown to align well with health coalitions trying to encourage more physical activity opportunities within the community. East

Central staff will continue to work with WisDOT-NE Region on another corridor study in the near future using the Framework as part of the corridor study process.

Case Study Synopsis

The Framework provided an opportunity and pathway to advance the work on integrating health and transportation in the Appleton TMA. Using the Framework catalyzed increased dialogue and clear identification of shared interests and priorities among diverse stakeholders representing health, transportation, and economic interests. After participating in initial stakeholder meetings, where public health staff shared their interests and concerns about the corridor, WisDOT expanded the scope of their previously planned traffic study to include the full corridor and multimodal components.

For More Information

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