



PlanWorks Case Study

Coordinated Approach to Integrating Health in Corridor Planning East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission



This case study is an excellent example of integrating health into corridor planning. While the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission did not use PlanWorks to develop their corridor plan, the PlanWorks Health in Transportation Application will be very useful in helping other agencies interested in this approach.

Executive Summary

East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (ECWRPC) staffs three MPOs in the central region of Wisconsin: Appleton (Fox Cities), Oshkosh, and FondduLac. ECWRPC has been engaging the public health community for many years, beginning with the Safe Routes to School Program in 2007.

In 2014 identified College Avenue as a corridor of interest for considering health. The Appleton (Fox Cities) Transportation Management Area (TMA) and Oshkosh Metropolitan Planning Organization Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan identified this corridor as one of the most important corridors for additional study. In addition, numerous local planning documents and capital improvement plans included the corridor. Connecting the airport to downtown, the business community identifies the corridor as the “Gateway into Fox Cities”. College Avenue Corridor is essential to the region, but needed improvements to support health as well as the business interests.

Later that year FHWA issued a call for letters of interest to pilot test the Health in Transportation Corridor Planning Framework (Framework). This presented a unique opportunity for ECWRPC to get technical assistance while engaging the many stakeholders interested in the corridor. The corridor was selected, and in 2016 ECWRPC, began the College Avenue Corridor Planning Study.

As part of the corridor study, ECWRPC conducted stakeholder committee meetings where a question format drawn from the Framework Steps was used to collect input for the study as well as developed goals and objectives for the corridor. Through the stakeholder meetings, priorities for the corridor were laid out clearly, and stakeholders were able to share openly why they cared about the corridor. Participants included the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Northeast Region, Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Northeast Region and the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce,

Project Snapshot

- The East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission used a collaborative corridor planning process to advance the combined transportation, public health, and economic vision for the College Avenue corridor.
- Using the FHWA Health in Transportation Corridor Planning Framework as a supporting process, stakeholder meetings resulted in decisions on goals and objectives that were mutually beneficial.
- Although funding for specific projects in the corridor is limited, partner agencies are aware of their role and opportunities to support implementation of the recommended improvements.

among others.

The inclusion of health professionals and health impacts showed committee members how transportation options can influence these interests, in addition to illustrating individual roles in implementing recommendations. As a result, WisDOT expanded its traffic study to include the full corridor and continued the partnership with ECWRPC to consider health interests in this corridor and future studies.

Agency's Challenge

The 4.5-mile College Avenue corridor is located within three municipalities and one county; where it transitions between a county highway, State highway, and local road sections. The corridor has limited bicycle and pedestrian facilities as well as minimal transit access. For example, bike paths and sidewalks are non-existent in places where a foot path shows the need for access. Transit service does not have sufficient service hours or in the right time of day to meet all public needs.

Surrounding land use is largely commercial and industrial; with most businesses located near the Appleton International Airport. Residential sections are located primarily to the south on the county highway and State highway portions. Interested stakeholders in the corridor include the business and public health communities, each with their individual priorities related to sections of the corridor and changes needed. ECWRPC is the lead planning agency, but WisDOT is the implementing agency for a portion of the corridor. The challenge for ECWRPC is to keep every partner informed and participating while recognizing the interests and needs that are specific to individual groups.

Funding decisions and project selection require a great deal of explanation and education for all stakeholders, particularly regarding the topic of health. ECWRPC struggles to use health assessments, which are largely qualitative, in comparison to the other quantitative measures that are used to rank projects for funding. A portion of the College Avenue corridor is designated for Surface Transportation Program (STP) Block Grant funding prior to the corridor study. This allows some improvements to move toward implementation, including those that address health. A free dental

and health clinic is located on county highway portion of the corridor. Using Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG) funding, bicycle and pedestrian accommodations will be added for access to these services. There are also discussions about transit access in the future. ECWRPC continues to look for ways to adjust the project prioritization process to more fully consider health.

ECWRPC has been engaging the public health community for many years, beginning with the Safe Routes to School Program in 2007. At that point, the health departments began inviting transportation planners to help with community health improvement plans. Now the relationship is reciprocal: public health participates in many transportation committee meetings.

In 2014 ECWRPC was developing the Appleton (Fox Cities) Long-Range Land Use and Transportation Plan to include a "health and safety" theme and using local, county, and state health data to support goals, existing conditions, recommendations, and performance measures. The College Avenue Corridor was rated one of the highest for additional study in the Oshkosh MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. At the same time, ECWRPC was selected to participate in the Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute to identify how health and planning professionals can work together to increase health of the community through the built environment. This convergence of interest around health and transportation along with the opportunity to use the Framework in a corridor planning study led ECWRPC to submit a letter of interest to FHWA to initiate the College Avenue Corridor study.

The Corridor Planning Process

The College Avenue Corridor study followed the Framework Steps, representing the technical process that is commonly used for corridor planning. Framework Steps 1 through 3 were completed during the nine-month test period.

ECWRPC staff used stakeholder committees to inform the corridor planning study with different perspectives. The leadership committee, which included the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Northeast Region, the Fox Cities Economic Regional Partnership, and the WisDOT Northeast Region, was supported by three



Figure 1: Health in Transportation Corridor Planning Framework

subcommittees, representing the different corridor sections. Committee meetings were used to share perspective and inform specific Framework Steps.

To inform the scope of the corridor study, East Central staff contacted local and State traffic engineers and asked them to prepare answers to the following questions for the first meeting:

1. What existing conditions and transportation challenges do you currently see along the corridor?
2. What assets and considerations are present that should be noted from the beginning of this study?
3. 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?
4. What future improvements are scheduled for the corridor?

Questions to Consider

One similarity between the Framework and the PlanWorks Decision Guide is the identification of questions to consider. This approach allows information sharing without a presumed action. By posing the questions to a diverse group of participants in a corridor planning process, more information becomes available to consider. Before decisions are made, both partners and stakeholders have a strong understanding of the various tradeoffs.

Similarly, public health professionals were asked to address a different set of questions at this meeting:

1. 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)?
2. How are the health issues identified within the plan?
3. How is the corridor planning study helping to achieve bigger picture planning goals related to health, emission reductions, and multi-modalism?
4. Why is this of interest to public health agencies and other State health stakeholders?

This approach allowed sharing of perspectives and examples. By dividing into smaller groups for discussion, participants were able to identify challenges, opportunities, and an overall vision for the corridor. 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.

The second stakeholder meeting focused on the existing conditions within the corridor. Data was provided using a GIS interactive story map. The vision identified in the initial meeting was compared to the challenges and opportunities available within the corridor. Recommendations were developed and examined through both the transportation and health lens in order to prioritize potential options.

At this meeting the corridor goals and objectives

were also identified. The participants were asked to consider a key question: What public health outcomes (determinants/behaviors/choices) can our decisions affect?

The goals and objectives shown below are the outcome of this meeting.

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.

The second goal combines economic development with “physical and mental wellness” to illustrate the

importance of community support for health to attract the workforce needed in Appleton.

Decision Guide Connections

The College Avenue Corridor Study followed Framework Steps 1-3 during the test period. These activities can be linked to the key decisions for corridor planning as shown below.

- **COR-1 Scoping.** Input from a variety of partners and stakeholders helped identify the full needs of the corridor at the outset of the study.
- **COR-2 Problems and Opportunities.** By dividing into small, diverse groups for discussion, participants were able to identify challenges, opportunities, and an overall vision for the corridor.
- **COR-3 Goals.** Goals and objectives developed for the corridor combined transportation, economic, and public health priorities to advance the vision for College Avenue.

Stakeholder Collaboration

ECWRPC staff developed the College Avenue study with the support of long established relationships with partner organizations. Past planning processes and the Safe Routes to School Program have engaged health partners for many years. Although the Wisconsin DOT is an ongoing partner agency, the College Avenue corridor planning process created a new understanding for the DOT about some of the common interests in this corridor. As a result, the Northeast Region expanded a planned traffic operations study to include bicycle and pedestrian accommodations and facilities. This action provided consultant services which would have been necessary for the regional staff to fund.

Diverse stakeholder participation requires ongoing education of various groups on the transportation decision making process. ECWRPC staff are familiar with how difficult it is for those outside the transportation process to understand the amount of time it takes to implement changes and how priorities are developed among competing projects.

Language and terminology can also be a barrier to understanding, but this is overcome with ongoing relationships and mutually held interests.

The Appleton Area (Fox Cities) business community is an ongoing participant in the Appleton (Fox Cities) MPO transportation planning process. The importance of attracting and retaining a young professional workforce is dependent on an inviting environment as well as multimodal transportation options. To realize the full potential of College Avenue as a “gateway” to the Fox Cities region, the business community maintains a close relationship with all local partners and stakeholders.

Because the ECWRPC has adopted a collaborative approach to planning since the 2007 Safe Routes to School Program was initiated, the trust developed between public agencies representing transportation and health interests is entrenched in agency culture. This trust is a primary outcome on working together as standard practice; becoming familiar with individual processes and requirements as well as identifying strategies that support the community interests as a whole. Decision makers are provided with information that is more cross-cutting and shows how individual interests will be met as decisions are made.

Key Outcomes

The College Avenue corridor planning effort remains active as individual improvement projects are identified and prioritized for funding. ECWRPC staff report

constantly improving relationships with other community agencies. When seeking approval from the county or city decision makers, it has been more productive for public agencies to work together in order to get everyone on board prior to making a decision. A health-in-all-policies ordinance was adopted by the City of Appleton recently, recognizing the importance of public agencies working together, as demonstrated in the region. Other noted key outcomes are:

- Participation of health professionals and identifying the potential health impacts of transportation investments showed all participants how decisions can influence their interests and highlight their role in implementing solutions.
- Active transportation options and improved transit service are key supports for greater physical activity and support for populations needing access to jobs and services. All partners have indicated support for improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in the corridor.
- Additional support for corridor improvements on both a large and small scale is possible through partnership and shared resources. Although sufficient transportation funding for many of the improvements is not currently available, partners work together to identify small changes that can occur in the short term.

For more information

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Resources

Testing the Health in Transportation Corridor Planning Framework in Appleton, Wisconsin
https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/health_in_transportation/planning_framework/framework_test_cases/appleton/case_study/index.cfm