

Project U-Turn

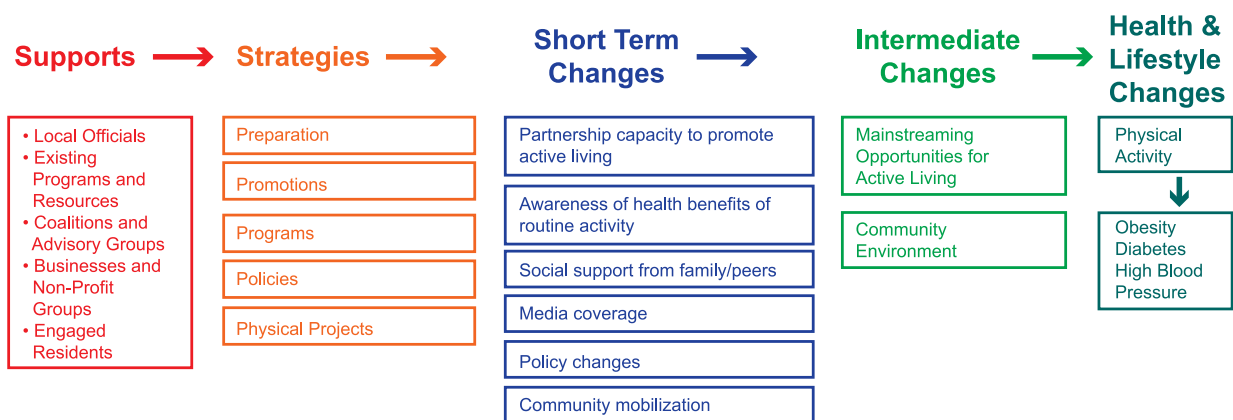
Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Jackson, Michigan | 2003-2008

Early on a Saturday morning, a man stopped at a yard sale in Jackson, Michigan, to purchase a used bicycle. He explained to the woman running the sale that he intended to donate the bike to a program that provided a free bicycle, safety classes, and maintenance lessons to recent parolees. The woman, inspired by his story, gave him a few other used bicycles to donate. This is just one example of how residents of Jackson were motivated to become involved in a growing active living movement.

“Active living” is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of activity each day. In November 2003, the Walkable Communities Task Force received a five-year, \$200,000 grant as part of the Active Living by Design national program (www.activelivingbydesign.org) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. By advocating for changes in community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the Active Living by Design initiative intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.¹

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model provided five active living strategies to influence community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5Ps represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate, and long-term community changes. This inclusive model allowed the Walkable Communities Task Force and its lead agency, the Fitness Council of Jackson, to engage the community through advocacy, programmatic, and promotional efforts while ensuring the built environment and policies supported active transportation.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model



The Fitness Council of Jackson (Fitness Council) was founded in 1982 to support local efforts to improve the health and well-being of Jackson residents. After attending a conference for the National Association of Governors’ Councils, the Fitness Council’s Executive Director was inspired to approach health promotion from an environmental perspective and eventually sought out funding through Active Living by Design (ALbD).

In the early 2000s, a Walkable Communities Task Force (Task Force) was formed to increase physical activity through the creation of environments more conducive to walking and biking for recreation and transportation, as well as through educating and encouraging citizens to be active. Prior to the ALbD grant, the Task Force supported the development of a city-wide bike route and fitness trails, with efforts including a “Destination-based Bike Routes Map,” serving as the basis for ALbD physical project efforts. The City of Jackson recognized the Task Force as an advisory group for pedestrian and bicycle issues.

¹ The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria’s evaluation efforts.

The ALbD grant provided an opportunity for the Fitness Council and Task Force to work together and build upon their efforts to increase physical activity. Specifically, Project U-Turn aimed to increase the proportion of short trips (i.e., destinations within two miles walking and five miles biking) by means of active transportation. Resources were focused on promotions and programs, while Task Force meetings instigated policy change and physical projects, simultaneously promoting walking and biking and creating a safe environment in which to do so.

Over course of the grant period, the Task Force saw many successes. From 2005 to 2006, there was a 63% increase in active transportation. Six miles of bike lanes were created and over 50 zebra-striped crosswalks were installed. Overall, staff and partners stressed the importance of building purposeful partnerships, diversifying funding sources, and strategically utilizing existing resources.

Jackson, Michigan

Jackson, Michigan, home to 36,000 residents, is a working-class community located about 40 miles west of Ann Arbor and about 35 miles south of Lansing. Manufacturing, public utilities, and health care are the largest industries, and the community is also home to a large state prison complex. The city recently faced a loss of automobile-related manufacturing jobs, resulting in increasing unemployment rates (from 6.5% in 2002 to 9.5% in 2008). Subsequently, a number of Jackson residents began traveling to Lansing or Ann Arbor for work.

On average, Jackson residents have less education compared to state and national averages. Nearly 30% of residents live below the poverty level, and Jackson's wages are among the lowest in the Midwest. The percentage of children receiving free or reduced lunch exceeds 50% in eight of Jackson's ten public elementary schools. Residents are relatively young (median age of 30 years) and somewhat diverse (20% African American, 73% Caucasian, 4% Hispanic).

Michigan is consistently among the top states in terms of prevalence of obesity and overweight adults. In 2002, one in five Jackson residents was obese, and two thirds of the population was overweight. Thirty-nine percent of Michigan children have elevated cholesterol compared to the national average of 25%. Diabetes, heart disease, and asthma are prevalent health conditions.

Prior to the ALbD grant, very few Jackson residents commuted by walking or biking, despite living within five miles of schools, churches, parks, entertainment, and shopping. The local transit system was not particularly conducive to active living due to limited operational hours (6am to 6pm daily), a small service area, and a lack of on-bus storage space. Although 50% of elementary students and 70% of high school students lived within 1.5 miles of their schools, most traveled to school in cars. Many residents associated alternative modes of transportation with being underprivileged or disenfranchised. Other barriers to active living included harsh winters, traffic safety issues, a lack of bike racks, and the poor condition of sidewalks, streets, and intersections.

“Well, it’s interesting because when we made our pitch [for the grant], we said, if it can happen in Jackson, it can happen anywhere because its blue collar, automobile-oriented, non-university town. Basically when the malls went up, the downtown died... It was a town where there was not a single mile of bike lanes or bike signs or anything.” -Staff



Despite a lack of transportation infrastructure, Jackson is home to a number of recreational opportunities. Its 22 parks cover 635 acres and includes athletic fields, a water park, a skate park, athletic courts, swimming pools, golf courses, and recreation centers.

Preparation

Partnership

The Fitness Council served as lead agency for the ALbD grant, taking on responsibility for administering the grant and implementing programs and promotions. The Fitness Council worked with two partnerships to shape active living efforts: Student Coalition for Walkable Communities (Student Coalition) and Walkable Communities Task Force (Task Force).

The Student Coalition, developed in the first year of the grant, was composed of high school students and was formed to play a major role in transforming Jackson. Unfortunately, the group proved difficult to sustain and dissolved early in the grant period. During its short existence, the Student Coalition conducted a number of assessment activities, gave presentations to build support for active living, and developed youth-focused projects (e.g., Cool Bus).

The Walkable Communities Task Force, formed prior to the ALbD grant, was an interdisciplinary partnership of over 30 organizations representing a variety of disciplines, including health, education, law enforcement, and architecture. While the partnership's membership was diverse, members were all linked by their community goal of increasing active transportation. Many partners were inspired to join the Task Force by personal interests, while others represented organizations with complementary intentions. The Task Force took responsibility for policy and physical project efforts.

“The first meeting I came to I was just astonished at how diverse a group of people were at this meeting. I thought, this is what can make anything successful... It was just this broad range of people, and they may not have all had the same reason for wanting to improve non-motorized transportation, but they all had the same goal. They might have all had different directions to come at, but they all had the same goal. It always excites me when I see that!” -Partner

The Task Force originally met monthly, but by the final year of the grant, met only bi-monthly. At meetings, partners discussed the development, implementation, and maintenance of Project U-Turn efforts and brainstormed new ideas to promote walking and biking in Jackson. Partners took on different roles within the partnership, depending on the project or task at hand, and also served as volunteers and advocates.

The partnership connected through an online community board (i.e., Google Groups) and brown bag events to encourage participation from those who could not attend meetings. The Project Director worked to establish and maintain relationships with individuals and organizations in the Task Force and within the Jackson community by networking and attending other agencies' meetings.

The Task Force and Fitness Council looked to the other ALbD communities for ideas and expertise. Several efforts were inspired by other communities' efforts. For example, Cleveland, Ohio, shared its Complete Streets resolution as a template for Jackson's own resolutions. Omaha, Nebraska, suggested a billboard campaign and Columbia, Missouri, served as the inspiration for Jackson's Walking School Bus program.

Staff, partners, and community members described a number of other strengths of the Task Force:

- The Task Force members spanned multiple generations and included individuals with diverse experiences.
- The Task Force was strengthened by the realizations that members shared common interests, including the goals of the Task Force.
- Because Jackson was a smaller community, partners had more opportunities to interact and develop close relationships.

“I think that is probably one of the best things that came of this, even though it’s not a thing that you can touch or feel, but the idea that a whole bunch of people came to realize they all really wanted the same thing, and that’s how things get done.” -Partner

Staff, partners, and community members also noted a number of challenges faced by the Task Force:

- Fitness Council, the lead organization, and Walkable Communities Task Force, the core group, who both worked on numerous components, struggled to maintain a clear, consistent identity for their ALbD work.
- The Task Force struggled to maintain an active and engaged partnership.
- Partners' participation varied throughout the grant period, with some actively involved in efforts and others only attending meetings.
- Changes in staff at partner organizations disrupted the participation of several members of the Task Force and made it challenging to maintain the momentum and energy of the group.
- It was difficult to move the energy past the meeting room doors and institutionalize it in the partners' home organizations.
- Partners' interest and involvement suffered during the project's later years.
- The Task Force lacked a strong representation from the faith-based community.
- Staff turnover at the lead agency created gaps in leadership and made it difficult to maintain momentum.

“Nothing ever happens quickly, I mean the difficulty that [the Project Director] faces is that he’s coming in to an organization that is diverse. It’s so difficult to maintain everybody’s interest on a subject for a long time...” -Partner

The table below lists the partners involved in the Walkable Communities Task Force partnership.

Members of the Walkable Communities Task Force Partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center for Family Health • Fitness Council of Jackson* • Allegiance Health (formerly Foote Hospital) • Foundation for a Healthy Community • Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports • Jackson County Health Department • Lifeways • Michigan Fitness Foundation
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jackson Public School District <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frost Elementary School - George Long Elementary School - Jackson Arts and Technology Academy - Northeast Elementary School • Spring Arbor University • Western School District
Parks & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cascades Cycling Club • City of Jackson Parks, Recreation, and Grounds • Jackson YMCA • League of Michigan Bicyclists
Urban Design, Planning & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Jackson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Development - Downtown Development Authority - Engineering - Historic District Commission - Transportation Authority • Jackson County Region 2 Planning Commission
Community Leaders, Policy- & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jackson City Council
Other Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Jackson Police Department • Jackson County Department of Aging
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers Energy • Dawn Foods • Pedal & Tour, Inc. • The Enterprise Group • TLC Eye Care of Michigan • Westwood Mall • Woodard & Associates
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jackson Citizen Patriot
Community & Faith-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disAbility Connections • Friends of Falling Waters Trail • Jackson Area Career Center • Region II Community Action Agency

*Organization that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

Leadership and Champions

The Fitness Council was an ideal lead agency because of its established connections within the community and missions to “lead [the Jackson] community to life-long physical activity.” The Fitness Council served as a regional council of the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness, Health, and Sports, which was established to improve the health of and increase physical activity among Michigan residents. Over the past two decades, the Fitness Council held a variety of fitness-related events from health fairs to races and supported local physical education teachers through the Physical Educators’ Network.

The ALbD grant supported one staff person for Project U-Turn. The Project Director was responsible for developing the long-term plans for the project as well as the day-to-day activities associated with the grant. This included a number of tasks, such as connecting partners with resources, seeking funding opportunities, managing the project budget, filing taxes, networking with partners, communicating with residents and partners, and coordinating events.

“I think we’re just administratively heavy here. Maybe it feels like that because I guess other programs have program coordinators or whatever you call them that deal with the programs and then the executive director doesn’t do all that, but... I mean I haul all the boxes of water and food to our events and clean it up afterwards and I do everything from janitor stuff to high level decision making. It’s just, everything you can think of I do.” -Staff

The role of Project Director was held by several individuals over the course of the five-year project. The first Project Director was also on the staff of Michigan Fitness Council and had extensive experience working in the active communities field for several years prior to her role with Project U-Turn. She was well-respected in the Jackson area and had many professional ties to Jackson leaders.

Shortly after taking the position, the Project Director was offered a new opportunity with the Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness and was transferred out of Jackson. She continued to assist with Project U-Turn during the transition in leadership. Other Project Directors followed before a more permanent staff person was secured. This Project Director held the position for three years. Her background in public health and active living was an asset.

“Things like how do bike lanes get worked into a city’s budget, how much do they cost, what’s the actual standard, which roads are we allowed to put them on, which ones are we not, you know all things like that I had no idea about.” - Staff

The final Project Director for Project U-Turn during the ALbD grant took over the position during the fourth year. His background in urban planning was a natural fit for Project U-Turn’s active transportation goals.

“[The previous [Project Director], she had a Master’s in public health, and a lot of her relationships were with public health officials and health services... I’ve focused more on transportation, because that’s my area of interest as an urban planner, and trying to reach groups that don’t do the same thing that we do.” -Staff

Having multiple Project Directors during such a short project was advantageous in the fact that each leader brought different strengths to the project. However, each new Project Director had to be oriented to the project and establish relationships with the partners. The numerous transitions in leadership led to a loss of momentum.

The Student Coalition, while short-lived, benefited from strong leadership as well. A high school student served as youth advisor for the grant proposal and led the Student Coalition. His passionate advocacy for active living inspired many people, teens and adults, to get involved in Project U-Turn. To build this leader's capacity, the Task Force sent him to the International Youth Summit on Urban Sustainable Transportation in Ottawa, Canada. Unfortunately, as key youth graduated from high school, The Student Coalition's efforts diminished. In the third year, the Fitness Council hired a youth director to revitalize the Student Council and create a more sustainable model for engaging youth. However, this effort was not successful.

Several other individuals emerged as champions of Project U-Turn. While the initial Project Director's formal involvement in Project U-Turn was brief, she continued to offer assistance, encouragement, and guidance to the project for several years. Staff and partners described her as a "coach" and "cheerleader." The city's Assistant City Engineer also emerged as a champion of active living. His quiet work behind the scenes and dedication led to great progress in terms of infrastructure development. [Specifically, he shepherded a number of physical improvements through local government. In addition, he and other staff members in the city's engineering department served as role models by walking and biking to work.]

"The fact that there are multi-disciplinary partners at the table, and the fact that they, the partners themselves, care so much about this has been a strength. There's a lot of passion." -Staff

By the end of the grant period, a support for active living came from a number of unexpected sources, including the arts district, economic development groups, and river and trail advocates.

Funding and Resources

The Task Force reached out to a number of local, state, and national funding sources to expand the resources available to support and nourish its active living efforts. Over \$3.6 million in financial and in-kind support came from the following sources:

- Allegiance Community Programs Grant
- City of Jackson Department of Engineering
- Consumer's Energy Foundation
- Dick Allen Lansing to Mackinaw Bicycle Tour (DALMAC) grant
- Hearst Foundation
- Jackson City Police Department
- Jackson County Community Foundation
- Local cable and radio stations
- Members, sponsors, and other contributions
- Michigan Department of Energy Community Energy Project
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
- Michigan Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School
- Michigan Governor's Council
- Michigan Nutrition Network
- Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative
- Michigan State Medical Society
- Pedal & Tour, Inc.
- Ruth Mott Foundation
- Speckard-Knight Foundation

Community Supports and Challenges

Despite the barriers to physical activity in Jackson, Michigan, the timing was right and the environment ripe with unique assets and related efforts to create an active living-friendly environment. Prior to the ALbD grant, the Downtown Development Authority was working to revitalize Jackson's urban center through initiatives, such as façade improvements, Main Street designation application, cleaning and greening projects, downtown event coordination, and retail recruitment.

The business sector also showed its support by contributing resources, despite the downturn in the economy. For example, partner and local bike shop Pedal & Tour, Inc. donated meeting space for Task Force meetings as well as in-kind office space for the Fitness Council. Community residents also demonstrated an interest in designing communities to be conducive to physical activity. Residents frequented local parks and trails and several citizens participated in the Task Force.

“There was a really good response by the community to [the active living] concept even though it was a pretty new concept to think about... The community members were really interested and actively engaged in that concept with us as we had these groups.” -Staff

The Task Force benefited from the involvement of several local government officials. These officials helped build the capacity of the partnership by providing insight to the political processes and technical aspects of environment change.

While the Task Force received much community, organizational, and political support, these pledges did not always translate into action. The financial realities of many of the Task Force's proposed projects became barriers in the economically depressed community. The Project Director put in many hours communicating with city council members to encourage continued support and action.

“Around here, nobody is opposed to physical activity, but it's when the pen hits the checkbook that it's difficult. So, the city council's always willing to support something as long as it doesn't cost anything.” -Staff

Community Assessment

In order to better understand the barriers and assets in the community and develop meaningful active living efforts, the Task Force conducted a number of assessment activities, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, audits, and feasibility studies.



Prior to the ALbD grant, the Task Force completed a broad, community-level inventory of Jackson’s physical activity environment, including policies and planning efforts, pedestrian and bicycle safety and facilities, community resources, and public transportation, funded by the Governor’s Council in Physical Fitness’ Promoting Active Communities Award. The inventory results led to a plan for active transportation improvements that informed the work plans during the ALbD grant.

The Student Coalition worked with the Jackson Transit Authority to evaluate youth perspectives of public transportation through a bus rider survey, transfer station checklist, and bus stop checklist. Both established and first-time riders were asked to express opinions about bus services and suggest ways to increase youth ridership. The survey results demonstrated that there were noteworthy differences between the perceptions of youth who ride the bus regularly and those who do not. The survey and checklists also revealed barriers affecting riders of all ages, including dirty bus shelters.

The Task Force conducted walking audits and surveys at elementary schools participating in Safe Routes to School. Walking audits helped determine whether the streets and sidewalks around schools were walkable and bikeable. Surveys captured attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to walking and biking to school. Students, parents, and school staff were encouraged to participate when possible. During the winter months, the Task Force also conducted snow shovel audits to encourage residents to keep their walks clear for students. Results from these assessment activities were used to create action plans.

“Having done the [Safe Routes to School] audits, it gave us a handle on what kind of things that were needed. So we did that with a lot of schools. We always tried to get people from the schools involved wherever we could...” -Partner

In the second year of the grant, the Student Coalition completed an assessment of bike rack locations in the city and wrote letters to business owners requesting that they install bike racks. During the same year, the Task Force conducted a bicycle and pedestrian study. Volunteers recorded the number of bicyclists and pedestrians at ten locations around the city. They also recorded data about helmet and bike lane usage. The Task Force intended to repeat the data collection at the end of the grant period.

The Task Force received \$20,000 to hire a non-motorist transportation firm to conduct a study for Jackson Public Schools to determine the feasibility of different transportation methods. The firm examined which students could walk and bike to school, if it was possible to expand that number of students by cutting bus routes, the financial, service, and other potential impacts of the Safe Routes to School program. The study demonstrated potential savings of more than \$500,000 per year if some bus routes were replaced with walking and biking programs.

Project U-Turn also conducted surveys and audits related to worksite behaviors, policies, and environments as part of the Foot Energy program, worksite-based, active-transportation program. University of Michigan planning students conducted a review of all current policies related to walking and biking in Jackson and gave suggestions for improvement. In the final year of the grant, the city’s GIS coordinator completed a map of Jackson’s sidewalk network.

The Task Force found the assessments useful for revealing important information about Jackson and its residents. For example, the youth bus assessment helped bring to light the maintenance problems of Jackson’s busses in addition to the youth’s opinions. Similarly, the walking audits of the school neighborhoods exposed areas that needed improvements, including sidewalks and intersections.

Policies and Physical Projects

Policies and physical projects, related partner, staff and community implementation activities, and associated challenges are described as follows:

▶ **Complete Streets Resolutions**

- The Region 2 Planning Organization, the Jackson County Road Commission, and the City of Jackson all adopted Complete Streets resolutions.
- The resolutions pledged that bicycling and walking accommodations using the latest design standards would be a routine consideration for planning, design, construction, maintenance, and operating activities.
- By passing the resolution, all three agencies clearly stated their commitment to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for community members.

▶ **City Master Plan**

- The partnership was also instrumental in the research, development, and adoption of a Jackson City Master Plan.
- The new master plan incorporated active living principles, including walkability, non-motorized transportation measures, and bike routes.

“The city has now finally got a master plan – which they may or may not pay any attention to, but it exists – that talks about planning and development throughout the city, and walkability among other things is built into that, walkability and non-motorized transportation. Our plan for the bike routes was incorporated into that plan.” -Partner

▶ **Falling Waters Trail**

- The Task Force worked with the Friends of the Falling Waters Trail to create a 10.5-mile, east-west component of the Jackson County Regional Trail Network.
- The linear path, completed in 2007, connected three townships with Jackson’s Inter-City Trail using the old Michigan Central railroad bed.



► **Grand River Artswalk**

- The City of Jackson sought opportunities to present itself as a healthy, livable, and community-oriented city, attractive to new residents and new businesses.
- The City of Jackson began work on the Grand River ArtsWalk path along an old railroad line connecting downtown Jackson to the Armory Arts Project, a growing art community, to expand the county trail network.
- Artswalk was designed to create recreational space near downtown, contribute to the economic development of the Mechanic Street corridor, and provide access to the Grand River.
- When the project stalled due to difficulty obtaining an easement from the railroad company, the Task Force rallied community members to support the project through a letter-writing campaign.
- In the final years of the grant, the Task Force elicited a commitment of resources from the city to complete the path.



► **Cool Bus Project**

- As a result of youth assessment activities, Project U-Turn worked with the Jackson Transportation Authority to redesign the interior and exterior of a bus to create a “Cool Bus” and to map out a special evening bus route to popular youth destinations (e.g., movie theater, mall).
- The Student Coalition created a scale model of the Cool Bus for use in presentations throughout the community to collect more ideas about what a Cool Bus should look like and where it should travel. The Student Coalition spoke with over 100 youth for their input on the project.
- The Cool Bus project was not completed during the grant period because of difficulty securing funding and the dissolution of the Student Council.
- Out of this effort came ideas about other ways to improve the public transportation system for all users, including improvements to shelters (i.e., adding seats), sidewalk repairs, and ADA accessibility enhancements.

► **Street Design Projects**

- Many streets were renovated or redesigned in a more pedestrian-friendly manner, including smoother, wider sidewalks; plantings, art, and other aesthetically pleasing amenities; curb cuts and traffic islands; and crosswalks restriping.
- Based on the Task Force’s Destination-based Bike Routes map, the city worked to enhance Jackson’s bike paths, including restriping all lanes and creating new paths.
- The Department of Transportation installed bike route signage and realigned all intersections where bike lanes intersected with streets to improve safety.

► ***Safe Routes to School Policies and Physical Projects***

- The Task Force utilized the 5E model (i.e., engineering, education, enforcement, encouragement, and evaluation) along with the 5P model to develop its Safe Routes to School effort.
- In the first year of the grant, the Task Force worked with Frost Elementary to pilot Safe Routes to School efforts. Over the course of the grant, Safe Routes to School activities were implemented at seven other schools.
- The Task Force worked with students, parents, and school staff to conduct assessment activities (e.g., walk audits, surveys) to shape action plans to increase walking and biking to school. Follow-up assessments tracked changes and identified strengths and weaknesses of the efforts.
- Action plans included policies and physical projects to improve safety, such as new zebra-pattern crosswalk striping, no-turn-on-red signage, parking lot restructuring, pedestrian islands, bike lanes, and flashing pedestrian signals.
- In the second year of the grant, the school district named the first district-wide Safe Routes to School coordinator in the state. The position was supported by an ALbD Special Opportunities grant.

► ***Foot Energy Physical Projects***

- As part of the Foot Energy program, a worksite conducted policy evaluations and worksite audits to create action plans for increasing physical activity.
- Based on worksite audits, the worksite installed lockers in the fitness room and bike racks outside the building and purchased three bikes and 20 helmets to start a company bike rental program to encourage employees to check-out bikes to travel to meetings, lunch, and other activities.

► ***Other Policies and Physical Projects***

- The Jackson Transportation Authority provided bus schedules and two free passes to encourage new riders to try the bus.
- In the fourth year of the grant, city engineers and cycling advocates attended a Michigan Department of Transportation training on developing on-road cycling facilities.
- The Jackson Transportation Authority also installed bike racks on their buses, vastly expanding the bikeable distances in Jackson.
- Bike racks were installed in front of public and private businesses downtown.

Challenges and Successes

Partners, staff, and community members identified several successes to developing and implementing policies and physical projects:

- The Task Force went after the low-hanging fruit, often pursuing simple, convenient changes over larger, more costly ones.
- In order to limit the impact of sidewalk construction on private property, the Task Force focused on building sidewalks on public property.
- When local businesses were slow to install bike racks, the Task Force began to work with the government to add street furniture.

“You’ll notice that, we don’t have a very good [bike lane] network here. It seems kind of haphazard how they’re placed. Really what that is, is low-hanging fruit. It’s where we can fit on-street parking along with a bike lane, or where we were doing a road project already so it was easy to redesign the lanes.” -Staff

Partners, staff, and community members identified several challenges to developing and implementing policies and physical projects:

- Land acquisition was the biggest obstacle to the Task Force, and partners opted to avoid resource-intensive negotiations in favor of identifying alternative sites. As a result, physical projects (e.g., bike lanes, sidewalks) were not always well-connected.
- After the construction of new trails, the community began to complain about trail users parking on the side of the road, which limited drivers' visibility.
- Maintenance of bike lanes proved to be a problem as lanes required frequent cleaning from debris built up, creating a hazard for cyclists.
- Some roads lacked appropriate signage to indicate the presence of bike lanes, and some drivers neglected to share the road with cyclists, even when roads were well-marked.
- A non-motorized master plan effort stalled when local government officials decided the effort was too ambitious.

“I’m trying to get the message out there that it’s not a parking problem it’s an access problem. If the trail reached more people, fewer people would have to drive to it. I say it a lot but I don’t think I’m getting the message out there because stuff keeps showing up like that, but we’ll get it, eventually.” -Staff

Programs and Promotions

Programmatic and promotional efforts, related partner, staff and community implementation activities, and associated challenges are described as follows:

▶ Annual Meetings

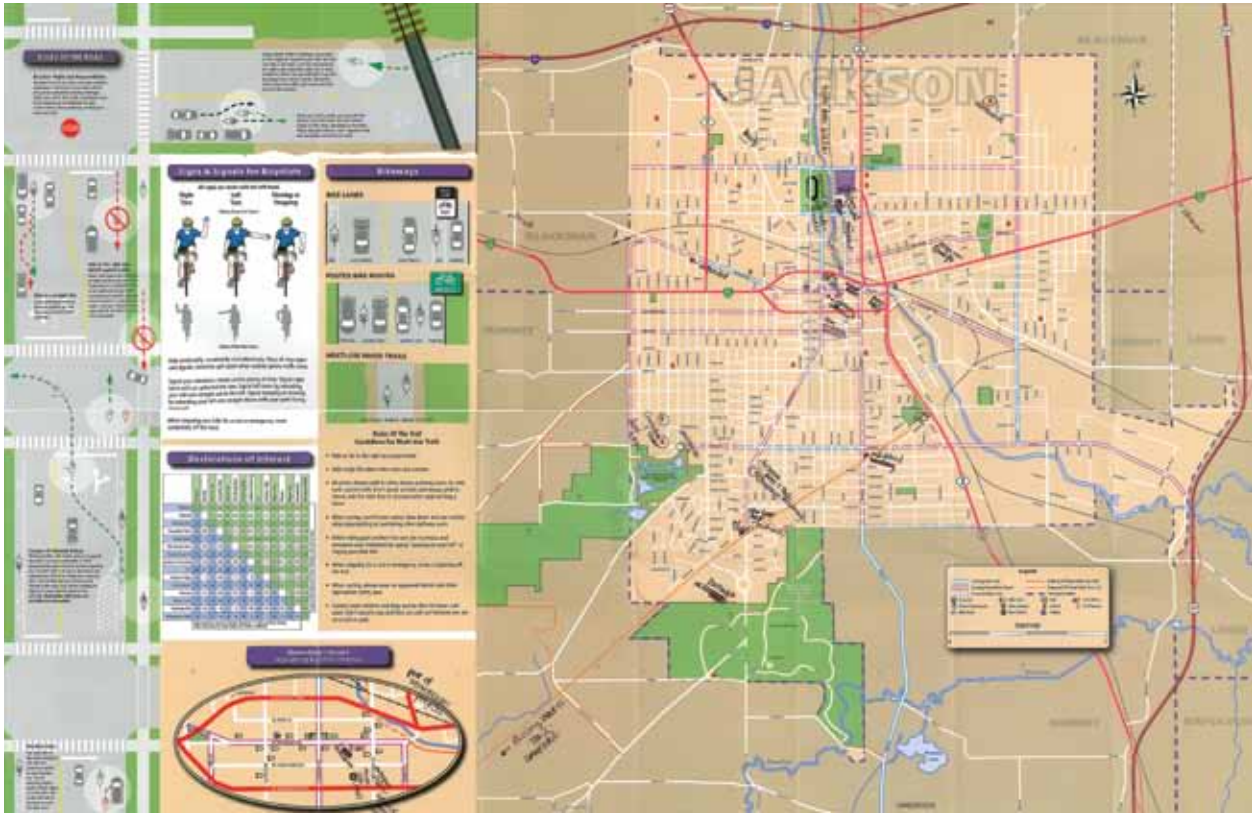
- During the first year of the grant, the Student Coalition introduced Project U-Turn to the community through a Kickoff/Challenge dinner during which youth leaders delivered a powerful sales pitch for the project’s vision and mission and challenged other community leaders to commit their support. Over 200 people attended the event.
- In the second year of the grant, 100 residents attended a dinner during which youth from the Student Coalition provided an update on Project U-Turn.

▶ Website/Newsletter

- The Fitness Council of Jackson featured the Task Force’s efforts on its website (www.fitnesscouncil.org), which was created to facilitate public access to information about Project U-Turn, active transportation, and health.
- Several periodic newsletters were distributed electronically and in print, including an Active Jackson newsletter, a Fitness Council of Jackson newsletter, and a Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness newsletter.
- The Task Force’s newsletter included a section telling the personal stories of people who have adopted a more active lifestyle (i.e., made a U-turn) and how they have benefited from this change.

► **Promotional Materials**

- A number of other promotional materials were distributed by the Task Force partners, including a Friends of the Falling Waters Trail brochure, a Smart Commute Day brochure, an Active Winter Calendar featuring ways to stay active in the winter, a frequent walker punch card, an annual fitness directory, and backpack communications about Safe Routes to School and Walk to School Day.
- The Task Force worked with the Cascades Cycling Club and the League of Michigan Bicyclists in the third year of the grant to create a comprehensive bike map featuring existing and proposed routes across Jackson County. The maps were distributed online and at local bike shops. Over 2,000 maps were distributed.



► **Media**

- The Task Force used press releases and media kits to attract media attention to its active living efforts.
- Each year, Project U-Turn received over 30 media hits from local newspaper, radio, and television outlets.
- In year two, the project was featured in a Newsweek article, “Designing Heart Healthy Communities,” published in the October 3, 2005 issue.
- A local television station created an eight-minute promotional video about Project U-Turn.
- In the fourth year of the grant, Project U-Turn staff and partners had 12 television appearances.



► **Billboard Campaign**

- In May 2006, a community-wide billboard campaign was launched to promote active living and, more specifically, to promote a bike-friendly community.
- More than 300 community members responded to billboards, radio spots, and newspaper ads urging them to register their support for bike lanes in the community on the Fitness Council website.
- These supporters were then provided with updates on active living efforts and were called upon to support initiatives (e.g., Artswalk, Complete Street resolution).

► **Foot Energy**

- In the second year of the grant, building off the success and model of Safe Routes to School, the Fitness Council launched the Foot Energy program at Lifeways, a local mental health provider, with approximately 70 employees, to encourage employees to commute to work and run errands using active transportation.
- Participants filled out online surveys to identify barriers to active transportation. Based on their answers, employees received three Personalized Active Transportation Plans that provided walking and biking routes to frequently- visited destinations and tips for overcoming barriers.
- Employees also received maps of one-, two-, and three-mile routes past common destinations, an Active Winder Calendar, and other promotional items.

“The idea is that you work with employers to develop... it’s basically safe routes to school for work, where you really evaluate what they’re providing on the worksite, and what’s available around the worksite, what the infrastructure’s like, where you could walk and bike to lunch, how you could fit walking and biking into your daily work and how you could accommodate walking and biking, commuting, that kind of thing.” -Staff

► **Smart Commute Day**

- Smart Commute Day encouraged area residents to try healthier, greener, and cheaper ways to commute to work, including walking, bicycling, and taking the bus.
- Inter-business competitions, prizes, and free breakfast enticed people to try a more active commute and generated interest for other worksite-based efforts (e.g., Foot Energy program).
- The event grew from 165 participants in the second year of the grant to 520 participants in the fifth year.

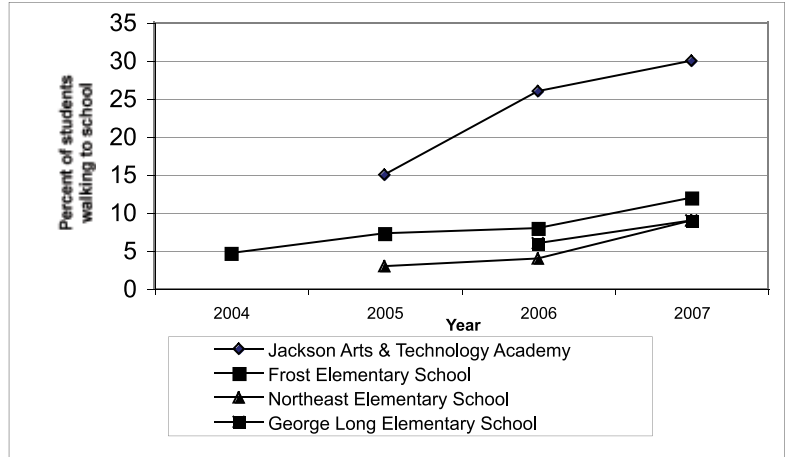
“I remember the first year, [Smart Commute Day] was fairly small. We connected it with employers and tried to get employer challenges, and get larger employers to send groups out or to form groups, and have kind of a contest out of it. That’s worked up till now, and it’s grown every year.... It did just encourage people, give people a reason to commute for that day. Some of them did it anyway, but a lot of them were new people, and I think it’s gone a long ways towards...having people, more people using bikes.” -Partner

► **Presentations**

- Fitness Council staff and Task Force representatives gave presentations about Project U-Turn at a number of meetings and conferences, including the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, the YMCA Activate America Coaches Pre-Conference, the YMCA Activate America Conference, the Healthy and Livable Communities Conference, the Annual Social Marketing in Public Health Conference, National Bike Summit, Pro-Walk/Pro-Bike conference, the National Coalition for the Promotion of Physical Activity, the Michigan State Board of Education, Safe Routes to School National Conference, and the Bike Ed conference.

► *Safe Routes to School Programs and Promotions*

- Staff and partners stated that the Safe Routes to School program was one of the most successful efforts of Project U-Turn.
- Eight elementary schools from four school districts in Jackson County participated in the program, and a number of the participating schools showed an increase in the percentage of students walking to school.
- In the second year of the grant, the Task Force assisted with the development of the Michigan Safe Routes to School Toolkit.
- The Task Force sponsored daily and weekly Walking School Buses, with support from an ALBD Special Opportunities grant, in which designated adult leaders picked up children from homes or pick-up points along a designated route.
- Safe Routes to School work received national attention when one of Project U-Turn's former Project Directors became chair of the National Safe Routes to School Partnership.
- Jackson's Safe Routes to School efforts were featured in several trade publications, including Planning and Zoning News, Michigan Society of Planning, and Parks and Recreation Magazine.
- The success extended beyond Jackson's schools, as neighboring communities turned to Jackson to help start their own Safe Routes to Schools programs.



► ***International Walk to School Day***

- In the first year of the grant, the Task Force distributed a Walk to School Day media kit to five media outlets.
- In the first year of the grant, a 10-second public service announcement about Walk to School Day aired 30 times a week for six weeks on a local television channel. A three-minute promotional video also aired.
- The Task Force also utilized backpack inserts and neighborhood mailings to promote Walk to School Day events.
- The Task Force created a Walk to School Day map that indicated the preferred routes to school and the location of crossing guards. This map was distributed to families within walking distance of schools.
- Over the course of the grant, seven Jackson-area schools held annual International Walk to School Day events.
- The event grew from 600 participants in the first year to 1,200 in the fifth year.



► **Community Bikes program**

- In the fourth year of the grant, the Task Force received a contract with the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative to provide a transportation solution for ten new parolees each month.
- The Task Force collected donated bicycles, helmets, and locks to distribute to parolees. Program graduates and community residents volunteered their time to rehabilitate bicycles.
- Parolees worked with certified bicycling instructors to learn the basics of bicycle safety, bike security and maintenance, and route selection.
- About 60% of participants reported that they continued to use their bikes for transportation one month after completing the program.



“I’m having a lot of fun on the bike, and I’ve been enjoying it. I have a lot of health issues, obesity and heart issues and stuff like that, and this program has just made a big difference in my life.” -Community Member

► **Other Promotional and Programmatic Efforts**

- The Task Force, the City Parks and Recreation department, and the Center for Family Health hosted a bike safety event that offered free helmet fitting and bike safety lessons to nearly 200 children, who decorated their helmets to make them look “cool.”
- In the third year, Jackson received a Silver designation from the “Promoting Active Communities Award” committee at the Michigan Department of Community Health/Governor’s Council on Physical Fitness. Jackson also received an Honorable Mention from the American League of Bicyclists “Bike Friendly Community” award program.
- On Bike Safety Day, the Task Force distributed 75 helmets to elementary school students and held discussions with police representatives on cross guard programs.
- In the fourth year of the grant, six residents completed the League of American Bicyclist Road One class as part of the League Certified Instructor training process.

Challenges and Successes

Staff, partners, and community members noted several successes related to developing and implementing programmatic and promotional efforts:

- Parolees participating in the Michigan Prisoner Re-entry Initiative were provided opportunities to contribute to their community in a meaningful manner by rehabilitating bikes for others' use.
- The newspaper and radio ads seemed to have a higher rate of return than the television promotions.
- Jackson's size meant that it was large enough to have a range of media outlets but small enough for the media outlets to devote a sizable proportion of time to Project U-Turn.
- The Task Force viewed promotions as the link between programs, policies, and physical projects in the community.
- Success for school-based programs and promotions required continuous encouragement at all levels (student, parent, teachers, administrator).
- Programs and promotions were implemented with minimal staff support by using existing resources that could easily be adapted for new audiences. For example, Safe Routes to School efforts utilized the guidebook and application process developed by the State of Michigan.

“I think our added layer of really promoting walking and biking for the whole city kind of helped propel [active living] into a phase where it actually happened because it had be lingering and lingering a long time.” -Staff

Staff, partners, and community members noted several challenges to developing and implementing programmatic and promotional efforts:

- Maintaining a cohesive message to identify the work of the Task Force was challenging.
- It took a long time for the Task Force to develop its brand.
- Messages about the economic and environmental benefits of active transportation may have resonated better with the community.
- The Walking School Bus program faced a number of challenges, including an unwillingness to permit children to walk with strangers, a lack of participation by students, and discouraged volunteers.
- Schools without internal champions were slower to take on new projects.
- It was difficult to convince employers that worksite health programs (e.g., Foot Energy) were cost-beneficial in terms of medical expenses.
- Employers were hesitant to invest in programs they did not think their employees would utilize.
- Many employers preferred simple efforts (e.g., creating a small on-site gym, subsidizing gym memberships) over adopting and institutionalizing programs.
- Employees and employers were concerned about the distance or time required to walk or bike to destinations.

Sustainability

As the ALbD grant came to an end, many of the community organizations that had contributed also ended their support. This proved to be the largest obstacle to sustainability faced by the Task Force. Because they spent most of the five-year grant developing and expanding programs, the Task Force and Fitness Council did not build the funding support that was needed to sustain most of their work. They hoped community organizations would adopt and institutionalize efforts.

In the fourth year, the Fitness Council began a membership campaign and established a sponsorship committee. It also made a list of potential long-term sponsors in an effort to diversify and stabilize funding sources.

A number of the Task Force's efforts were sustained after the ALbD grant. The school district had the trained staff, institutional experience, and resource assistance to continue Safe Routes to School efforts, including infrastructure enhancements, school policies, and programs. The Community Bike Program established funding and supports to sustain itself without major input from the lead agency. The Task Force intended to use the success of the bike program as a model for a community bike recycling and education program that would reach a much larger audience, including other community members facing transportation obstacles.

The Fitness Council of Jackson continued to be the lead agency in advocacy and programming. The Walkable Community Task Force remained a permanent advisor to the city council on issues of walkability as well as building a healthy community through public infrastructure and policy. The Task Force developed a strategic plan for creating more meaningful, systematic change toward a walkable, bike-friendly community. This sustainability plan was designed to maintain existing accomplishments and create a vehicle for continuity of goals in anticipation of personnel changes. The partnership developed and outlined a plan with three specific goals: (1) establish non-motorized infrastructure project priorities; (2) develop guidelines for non-motorized components of road projects; and (3) strengthen local ordinances in support of walkable, bike-friendly communities.

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