

Example of successful op-ed about Livable Streets

Published in the Columbia Daily Tribune June 1, 2004

This op-ed makes strong arguments for Livable Streets in Columbia, MO. They have a specific vision for how Livable Streets will work in their community. You can tailor many of the points made in this op-ed to your own community.

*Highlighted portions indicate passages of particular relevance to advocates seeking to tailor their own op-eds.

By adopting new street standard policies, Columbia can create a community resource that will benefit all of us, and generations to come. We are positioned to become known as Columbia: The City of Trails!

Currently, more than half of Columbia's streets lack sidewalks and the handful of bicycle lanes that exist are scattered around the city. As a result only 7.5% of work trips in Columbia are completed by walking or biking. In cities with quality facilities, such as Davis, CA, Madison, WI and Boulder, CO, the percentage of walking and biking trips exceeds 15%, more than twice Columbia's rate.

A 15-month planning process involving local homebuilders and developers, key departments and volunteer commissions of the City of Columbia, and local health/environmental groups, concluded in August, 2003.

The Model Street Standards Working Group (the Group) recommended that new residential streets (70% of all streets) be slightly narrowed from 32' to 28' in order to help slow vehicles in neighborhoods, save money and reduce impervious surface. Narrower residential streets are common around the country. The National Association of Home Builders recommends 24-26' residential streets to reduce cost and storm water runoff. Springfield, MO has a 27' standard for local streets, and Omaha, NE utilizes a 25' standard. For major collector and arterial streets, the Group recommended that areas previously set aside for on-street parking (now typically prohibited) be narrowed slightly

and used instead for bike lanes. Pedways (8' shared use paths) were recommended for one side of major collectors and arterials, the most heavily trafficked streets, to provide a comfortable place for cyclists who prefer to be separated from high-speed automobiles, pedestrians, wheelchair and mobility device users, and others.

While the recommendations call for many street widths to be narrowed slightly, they call for ALL vehicle travel lanes to be no less than 12' wide, the width of travel lanes on I-70.

The typical automobile is 5'-6' wide. School buses are about 8' wide. Combined with our growing nature trail system, the proposed street standards will lay the foundation for an outstanding bike/ped/wheelchair network similar to those in Davis, Madison and Boulder, other college towns with which Columbia competes economically. Transportation choice is something Columbians desire, as illustrated by the almost 1,400 Columbians who left their cars at home and chose active transportation during the recent Third Annual Mayor's Challenge: Bike, Walk and Wheel Week.

And how much extra will it cost to build streets according to the new standards? Little or nothing! According to Columbia Planning Director Roy Dudark, who provided staff support for the Group, the cost savings achieved with narrower residential street widths will offset most if not all of the extra cost of bike lanes and pedways.

Economic benefits

Development of a quality bike/ped/wheelchair network will be good for our local economy. According to REDI, Columbia should exploit the presence of MU to expand our technology-based economy. At the heart of that strategy is the need to recruit and retain knowledge workers, especially the highly productive researchers and graduate students that fuel the MU research enterprise and other high-tech companies. Columbia competes with other university towns, many of which boast multi-modal transportation networks and other quality outdoor recreation opportunities - amenities that are viewed as highly desirable by knowledge workers. Columbia has no mountains, beaches and oceans, nor recreational lakes, but we do have a beautiful and gently rolling terrain that lends itself to a quality bike/ped/wheelchair network.

For many years, the Chamber of Commerce has led the effort to recruit retirees to Columbia. According to Columbia gerontologist Ann Gowans, Ph.D., "roughly 50% of those who make detailed plans for their retirement are looking for a place where they can use their legs and their bikes to get around." Columbia will compete more effectively for retirees with a quality multi-modal transportation network. Quality bike/ped/wheelchair facilities increase real estate values. According to a 1999 Urban Land Institute study, "Homebuyers are willing to spend an additional \$20,000 for a home in a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood," and a Colorado State Parks study found that, "Homes within one block of an urban trail are more easily marketed because of their proximity to the trail." Many local real estate ads draw attention to the close proximity of houses to the MKT and other trails.

More than 3,500 households in the Columbia Metro area do not own a vehicle. The monies saved from NOT operating a vehicle can be invested in housing, education and the local economy, helping many to increase their quality-of-life.

Health benefits

A quality bike/ped/wheelchair network will have long-term benefits for the health of Columbians, and will help to avert a nationwide public health crisis that threatens the financial security of the country.

Over the last 30 years, childhood overweight has tripled and continues to rise, while the percent of children who walk/ bike to school has fallen from 66% to 10%. Two-thirds of adults are now overweight and one-third are obese, leading to diabetes, heart disease and stroke. This disease epidemic is causing an estimated reduction in life expectancy of 8-20 years for obese individuals, and an explosion in health care expenditure. The cost of overweight and obesity exceeds \$100 billion annually and will soon eclipse health care costs associated with tobacco use.

The tragic human suffering and enormous financial burden are the result of a lifestyle gone astray. Just thirty minutes of moderate physical activity (such as walking) every day would cause most people to avoid these dire consequences. But the easiest way to achieve physical activity is unavailable to many of us today because neighborhoods, employment centers and places of business are being designed

exclusively for the automobile. According to Richard Killingsworth, Director of Active Living by Design, "Community design and limited transportation choice often prevent people from leading physically active lives."

We must become a more physically active society. Experts agree that incorporating biking and walking into our daily routines is the best strategy to improve our health. A quality multi-modal transportation network that encourages biking and walking is essential.

Community benefits

Finally, there are community benefits to having a quality bike/ped/wheelchair network.

Facilities that encourage people to bike, walk or wheel increase the social capital of neighborhoods and business districts. People get to know their neighbors, they look out for each other, quality of life increase and crime is deterred. When a walk-to-school program was initiated in Chicago, neighborhood crime decreased in areas where children and parents were walking every day.

Summary

The proposed street standards represent little or no additional cost over the old standards. Adoption of the proposed street standards will insure the ongoing creation of a quality multi-modal transportation network that will add enormous value to our city. We can become Columbia: The City of Trails.

Chip Cooper, President, PedNet Coalition;
Ian Thomas, Ph.D., Board Member, PedNet Coalition;
Michael Szewczyk, M.D., Chair, Columbia/Boone County Board of Health;
Ann Gowans, Ph.D., Chair, Columbia Parks and Recreation Commission
Steve Kullman, Chair, Columbia Bicycle/Pedestrian Commission
Fred Murdock, Ph.D., Chair, Columbia Disabilities Commission;
Daniel C. Vinson, MD, MSPH, MU Dept. of Family and Community Medicine;
Tom LaFontaine, PhD, Chair, Mayor's Council on Physical Fitness and Health;
Judy Knudson, RN, Chair, Mayor's Challenge Bike, Walk, and Wheel Week Committee;
Leigh Lockhart, Owner, Main Squeeze Natural Foods Cafe;
Vickie Robb, Principal, Russell Boulevard Elementary School;
Columbia SAFE KIDS Coalition

Letter to the Editor Example

Letters to the editor are even shorter than opinion or commentary pieces. Typically, newspapers look for letters that are 250 words or less. When writing a letter to the editor, try to reference an earlier article or issue that appeared in the paper, and try to be as specific and hard-hitting as possible.

This letter to the editor is from The Kansas City Star, December 2017

Healthy Streets

If you were told there was a treatment that could result in weight loss, improved heart health and better moods, would you turn that down? The city council of Kansas City has just such an opportunity before it with consideration of a "Complete Streets" ordinance.


Complete Streets would prioritize all modes of transportation, making our streets safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, the elderly and the disabled.

Research shows that inactivity is a significant factor in heart disease and stroke. While active transport inately increases our physical activity, Complete Streets also affect our overall health by increasing access to essential goods and services, such as the grocery store and local health clinic.

Diverse and active transport help reduce the health disparities that hamper our underserved neighborhoods.

Voting for Complete Streets is a vote in favor of livable neighborhoods and a culture of health and a rejection of ZIP code as a main determinant of life expectancy.

Dr. Sanjaya Gupta
President, American Heart Association
Chapter, Kansas City, Leawood



Press Release

Example of press release that ran in the newspaper in Texas County, MO. It highlights an upcoming Livable Streets meeting and why it's important for the community.

Join community administrators to learn more about improving the health of Cabool

[Cabool, MO]- Healthy Schools Healthy Communities is spearheading an initiative called Livable Streets, to increase awareness of the importance of promoting a healthy, vibrant community that provides safe, accessible places for people to bike, walk and exercise.

They will host a meeting about Missouri Livable Streets policy on January 25 from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. for local leaders and community members to learn more about Livable Streets policy. The meeting will be held at Cabool Housing Authority, 6B Cedar Bluff Ave. A light meal will be provided.

Many rural communities across the state have seen a rise in diabetes and obesity rates, leading some to explore ways to support healthier lifestyles. That's why Livable Streets is gaining popularity in many rural areas. Simple projects like improving sidewalks or adding crosswalks not only provide a safer way for people to exercise, but also look attractive to funders when planning larger community improvement projects.


Texas County's prevalence rate for diabetes is 10.7 percent and 32.6 percent for obesity, higher than the state average. Exercise plays a large role in preventing and managing chronic diseases like these. Additionally, improved infrastructure provides safer alternatives for people who are in wheel chairs or have other impairments.

The event will present an opportunity for community members, groups and leaders to ask questions and learn more about creating safe, livable streets in Cabool.

For questions or additional information, contact Earlene Stoops, Community Wellness Coordinator for Healthy Schools Healthy Communities at 417-967-4131 or stoops@texasmo.org.

###

About Missouri Livable Streets: Missouri Livable Streets works to ensure that communities have flexible policies in place so all Missourians have access to safe transportation options, regardless of ability, age or income level. Missouri Livable Streets is a project of the Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition (MOCAN) and maintains a statewide advisory committee.



Example Q&A for Radio or Talk Show Interview for Texas County

There are two upcoming public meetings about Missouri Livable Streets. I'm not sure if many people are familiar with Missouri Livable Streets. Can you tell us a little about it?

Missouri Livable Streets is an initiative that's really seen recent growth in Missouri's communities. To date, more than 35 communities have adopted Missouri Livable Streets policies. It's a design approach supported by policy that's meant to make our communities more connected and open to people regardless of age, ability or mode of transportation. So key elements of Livable Streets could be adding/improving sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or medians. Policies look different depending on the community. Some might require new construction to include sidewalks, others might simply pass policy that recognizes Livable Streets as a community priority.

Why are Missouri communities adopting Livable Streets policies?

It's important to establish a shared vision for our community. A community improvement project, like Missouri Livable Streets is a practical option to take on many of the issues Missouri's rural communities are facing. And it doesn't cost anything to pass a policy. In fact, some communities have found that simply having a policy in place looks attractive to funders when these communities seek out funds for community betterment projects. It shows funders that we value our community and are looking for ways to address issues in our community. In terms of business development, businesses are attracted to healthy, vibrant communities that have parks, trails and common areas where people gather. Livable Streets policies can eventually lead to that kind of investment from outside businesses.

Why is this important for Texas County?

Like communities across Missouri and the country, we have a much more sedentary lifestyle than our parents and grandparents. Most of our jobs have us sitting for up to 8 hours a day. That, coupled with a diet that contains less nutritious, more processed foods has led to an increase in chronic disease like diabetes and obesity. Texas County's diabetes rate is 10.7% and our obesity rate is 32.6% - that's higher than the state average. So communities are having to get creative in how we address this public health issue. Missouri Livable Streets is one issue communities have found beneficial. It makes providing safe, accessible places for people to walk, bike and exercise a priority.

What can people expect with a Livable Streets policy in place?

We want to add/improve sidewalks in Texas County so people can have safe places to walk and exercise. This isn't about coming in and spending money on new construction, it's working with and improving what we already have. Down the road, once we have a policy in place and have shown that we have a vision for our community, we can attract funding for larger projects.

It looks different community to community. For example, in Caruthersville they're advocating for sidewalks so kids in the Walking School Bus program can safely walk to school. Other places like McDonald County have a long term plan of expanding their trail system to connect their communities.

What can you tell us about the upcoming Missouri Livable Streets meeting?

We have two upcoming meetings. The first is in Cabool on January 25th from 5:30p-6:30p at the Cabool Housing Authority. The second is January 26th from 5:30p-6:30p at Texas County Health Department. Abbi from PedNet Coalition out of Columbia, Mo will be there to lead the meeting. She's worked with communities all over the state on raising awareness of Livable Streets.

Also, our leaders have recognized how important this is to our county. We have both mayors, along with leaders from business, health, housing and school coming to the meetings. But we really want our community residents to come out so they can learn more about the project. It's a chance to ask questions, and make your voice heard about the direction of the community. If you want your voice heard- this is the place! It'll also be a fun time to mingle and grab a free meal. So we hope to see everyone there! You can call me at 417-967-4131 or email at stoops@texasmo.org for more information.