

Chapter 7

Programs and Policies



The Woodlands Township Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan



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According to The League of American Bicyclists, the “5 E’s” are building blocks to support a bicycle friendly community and include Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation & Planning. These five elements can enhance the pedestrian experience as well as the cyclist experience. The Woodlands Township has existing programs in place that align with the “5 E’s” and support safe, comfortable opportunities for walking and biking within the community. This section reviews these existing programs and introduces new programs and policy ideas The Township may consider implementing along with the specific project recommendations in **Chapters 5 and 8.**

7.1 Existing Programs

There are a few existing programs that support the active community within The Woodlands, enhancing the ability to walk, run or ride safely to and from destinations.

Bicycle Friendly Community

The Woodlands has maintained the Bronze Level Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) designation since 2011 from The League of American Bicyclists. The designation is determined by reviewing the “5 E’s” associated with existing bicycle facilities within a community. The Woodlands is one of seven Bicycle Friendly Communities in Texas. Feedback is provided from The League of

FOOT NOTE

Walking instead of driving 10 miles a week would eliminate 500 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per year.



American Bicyclists after receiving this designation that will help the community strive for the next level (Silver Level). Some of the feedback The Woodlands received include recommendations to implement a Complete Streets strategy; ensure the availability of widespread bicycle education opportunities; develop a bicycle master plan (which is being accomplished through this Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan); research bike sharing feasibility; and require large employers to provide end of trip facilities such as showers and lockers. These recommendations are described in more detail below as possible programs or policies The Township may consider implementing.



Figure 7.1 Existing Pathway Bridge

Safe Routes to School

In an effort to combat the perpetual epidemic of childhood obesity, in addition to contributing to the reduction of congestion and pollution, pioneering communities such as The Woodlands have employed programs that encourage children to walk or bike to school. The Woodlands promotes International Walk to School Month in October as an environmental event in which twelve area schools participated in 2015. The Safe Routes to School program uses a combination of engineering, education, encouragement, and enforcement to develop a coordinated action plan to improve access to and safety of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Adopt-A-Path

The Woodlands offers the option to Adopt-A-Path, seen in **Figure 7.2**, to groups who wish to keep their community clean and attractive. Entities such as businesses, neighborhoods, school groups, and scout troops have participated in the program. Adopt-A-Path allows groups to advertise their commitment to the beautification of The Woodlands while teaching ownership and respect for the environment.

Bike Month

Bike Month is organized by Bike The Woodlands Coalition and The Township. Its main purpose is to showcase the bicycling potential of the community. Residents have the opportunity to ride their bicycles for recreational and utilitarian purposes, connect with their community, and participate in a variety of events. This is done by exposing the existing bicycle and pedestrian network in addition to raising awareness for existing needs and gaps in the system. Bike The Woodlands Coalition is



Figure 7.2 Adopt-A-Path Sign



the local advocacy organization for cyclists. Not only does this organization provide Bike Month events, it also promotes other educational, encouragement, and evaluation & planning events throughout the year such as seminars, studies, organized rides, and more.

7.2 Recommended Programs

Education, encouragement, and enforcement programs for walking and biking provide opportunities to increase safety and awareness and promote walking and/or biking as an alternative to driving. The following are program suggestions that could be implemented by The Township.

Bike Share

The Township could consider initiating a bike share program such as B-cycle (this is just one brand that is common in Texas) to allow residents and tourists to rent bicycles for short periods of time to get around. Strategic placement of bike share stations would be necessary to accommodate people getting from place to place throughout The Township. Other cities in Texas have successfully implemented bike share programs, including the City of Houston, with a current network of over 30 stations. Bike share encourages more people to get around by bike by providing the opportunity to rent a bike instead of driving a car or walking to and/or from a destination.

Open Streets

This is a program that could be coordinated with The Township and local businesses or vendors to close a portion of a street for a period of time on a weekend day to only allow for non-motorized use. These Open Streets events occur all over the nation and world, allowing for street vendors, booths, music, etc., and the opportunity for people to enjoy a safe, car-free community event. This encourages physical activity – walking, running, roller blading, skateboarding, biking, etc. - while enjoying local vendors and other festivities.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Count and Monitoring

The Township has performed some pedestrian and bicycle counts throughout the community along the pathways. The establishment of a formal count and monitoring program could provide the opportunity to obtain routine data on key corridors to help with understanding usage and developing trends that could assist with planning for future projects or necessary maintenance.

Safety Trainings

The Township could partner with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office and/or the Harris County Constable's Office to provide safety trainings for both motorists and pedestrians/cyclists either for adult users or through the schools. Understanding and following the rules of the road are extremely important to both motorized and non-motorized users. These trainings could be free to encourage higher attendance and could possibly be linked to potential curriculum at the local schools. The events would introduce the rules that are applicable to vulnerable users of the road (people walking, biking, etc.) to help raise awareness and encourage safety.

Enforcement

The Township could partner with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office and/or the Harris County Constable's Office to hold periodic law enforcement checks at crosswalks or key intersections where there may be a lot of pedestrian/bicycle activity. This could help support awareness of the frequency of these users and the rules of the road. Tickets would not necessarily have to be issued, but direction could be provided to pedestrians/cyclists as an educational opportunity about enforcement.



Security

The Township could partner with the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, the Harris County Constable's Office, and/or a mounted patrol to provide additional security along more remote trails and/or trails adjacent to residential areas. Officers/troopers could patrol during daylight hours to provide a law enforcement presence and interact with the community. They could also report any unsafe conditions to Township staff and/or the Board of Directors for evaluation and resolution.

Safety Team or Committee

Through volunteer and/or Township staff efforts, a safety team or committee could be developed to specifically evaluate and analyze pedestrian and bicycle crashes within The Woodlands and provide recommendations for improving overall safety at incident locations to Township staff and/or the Board of Directors. This group could also help develop programs and events to encourage pedestrian and bicycle safety in The Woodlands.

Coordinator Position

The Township could identify and/or employ someone to act as a pedestrian and bicycle coordinator for the community. This individual could support both transportation needs as well as parks and recreational needs of the community and be responsible for helping to implement the recommendations from the Plan.

7.3 Recommended Policies

Below are a few policy-related suggestions that could enhance the overall environment for pedestrians and cyclists within The Woodlands while supporting the recommendations of the Plan.

Bicycle Parking

The Woodlands Commercial Planning and Design Standards should be updated to add a section on bicycle parking in addition to its current vehicular parking requirements. The update should include language on how many bicycle parking spaces are required per building use in addition to specifying the particular type of bike rack to install to provide a secure way to store or lock up a bicycle. (Best practices and standards can be found through The Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals, or APBP, under "Essentials of Bike Parking: Selecting and Installing Bike Parking that Works").

Facility Type Design Standards

The Woodlands Commercial Planning and Design Standards should be updated to include the various types of pedestrian and bicycle facilities identified in the Plan. The Design Standards should identify each facility type (pathway, shared use path, bike lane, etc.) and encourage any new development to abide by the standards including national design guidelines such as NACTO and AASHTO as appropriate.

Path Hours

According to Township Amended Order No. 019-09 regarding rules and regulations governing the use of park, recreation, and open space areas, park hours are from dawn to dusk unless specifically posted otherwise or designated in Amended Order No. 019-09. The current general policy of the Township regarding roads and pathways is that use is permitted at any time as a course of transportation. To address some public safety and security concerns, the Township could consider as part of a future amendment to the rules and regulations the establishment of pathway hours on designated paths, either existing or implemented through the Plan, with input from the community.



Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodations

The Township should develop a policy or statement that encourages new construction and reconstruction projects planned within The Woodlands to review the Plan and consider incorporating Plan recommendations for bicycle and pedestrian facilities. This could apply to the restriping of the roadway to include a bike lane, the inclusion of a sidepath project that is consistent with the Plan, etc. The policy or statement should also direct contractors to follow routine roadway maintenance procedures for the safety of pedestrians and cyclists during construction. In addition, traffic control plans associated with construction projects should include provisions for safely routing cyclists and pedestrians through/around the construction zone and to/from any access points impacted by construction activities. The above holds true for routine path maintenance operations as well. Any existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities impacted by construction or maintenance should be thoughtfully considered and addressed to safely accommodate pedestrians and cyclists.

7.4 Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan Ordinance

A sample ordinance was prepared and can be found in **Appendix E** that provides guidance for bicycle traffic regulations; use of sidewalks; access from alleys, driveways, or buildings; parking; riding restrictions; and helmets.