

# Village of Downers Grove Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Existing Conditions Report  
Draft - 08/15/12



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## BACKGROUND

The Village of Downers Grove is committed to improving conditions for walking and bicycling around town. In 2000, the Village completed both a bicycle and a pedestrian plan. Now, through the support of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), the Village is embarking on an update to those plans. This plan will review what has been implemented and investigate additional efforts necessary to achieve all of the Village's aspirations.

This report summarizes the current state of walking and bicycling in the Village, based on observations and a unique public outreach process. It also looks into the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists through an evaluation of recent crash history. Finally, it reviews other planning efforts the Village and the region have engaged in, Village policies, and existing programs to determine how they might impact pedestrians and bicyclists in Downers Grove. Continued public input will hone the identified opportunities and needs as the planning process proceeds.

## BEING A PEDESTRIAN IN DOWNERS GROVE

Downers Grove has long recognized the value of its pedestrians. It has invested tremendous resources in its pedestrian infrastructure and leveraged the Main Street Metra station by developing a very walkable and successful downtown business district. The pedestrian friendly nature of Downers Grove sets it apart from many suburban communities in the Chicago metropolitan region.

Downers Grove has many popular destinations that draw both residents and visitors. Prominent seasonal events take place here throughout the summer as well, including the Downers Grove car show and the Downers Grove Market. All of this has created an area that is consistently active with people and one of the reasons for this is how pedes-



trian friendly the entire area is. Wide sidewalks, slow traffic, and crossings that are safe and convenient all have helped create this atmosphere and foster the success of the downtown.

Throughout the Village's neighborhoods, Downers Grove has a near comprehensive sidewalk network with a sidewalk on at least one side of almost every street. This is fairly unique among other suburban communities. The sidewalk network allows for residents to walk as part of their daily routine, whether it be walking to school, running an errand, walking the dog, or simply strolling around the neighborhood. However, barriers remain that keep people from walking more. The major arterials (e.g. Ogden

Avenue, Finley Road, 55th Street, 63rd Street, 75th Street) are difficult for pedestrians to cross, which separates residents from destinations such as parks and schools. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) tracks that bisect the Village also create a significant barrier for pedestrians. With only a handful of crossings, pedestrians would have to walk up to 3 miles out of their way in some places to get to a destination directly across the tracks. This can be a prohibitive barrier to walking in some cases. Difficult crossings caused by the rail tracks and major streets have created difficulties for pedestrians trying to reach major parks such as the Maple Grove Forest Preserve and McCollum Park, both of which are places people would like to be able to walk to.

The Village values its walkability and is motivated to further improve on it, which is evident from the continuing work to fill in gaps in the sidewalk network as well as its planning efforts. The recommendations in the recently adopted Comp Plan support improvements for pedestrians, including increased mobility for pedestrians and ensuring that walking is a comfortable and enjoyable activity. A healthy pedestrian

environment will take a multi-disciplined approach, which the Village also recognizes. The Comp Plan recommends mixed use development around transit, encourages the use of pedestrian-friendly elements such as streetscaping, and reducing the number of driveways along commercial corridors to improve the environment for pedestrians. Land uses that support an active lifestyle such as neighborhood-based commercial development are included in the plan, which puts shops within easy walking and bicycling distances from residents.

## STATE OF BICYCLING IN DOWNERS GROVE

### Bike Parking

As evidenced by the consistently full and often overflowing bicycle parking at the Main Street Metra station, residents routinely use bicycling for transportation in Downers Grove. During observations on typical weekday mornings, the bike racks on the



Main Street Metra - North Platform Bike Parking

north platform of the Main Street Metra station were completely full and nearly 10 additional bikes parked at unofficial parking spaces, such as poles or trees. The south platform has more bike parking than the north platform, with fewer people parking there on the days of observations, yet still were well-used.

The bike racks at the Belmont Metra station were about half full, despite the fact that the existing racks are temporary racks. Permanent racks are planned for this station.

This level of bicycle activity is not new to the Village. The 2000 Bikeway Plan as well as two Metra studies in 2003 and 2008 all found high levels of use at train station bike racks. Metra's studies found the Main Street station to be among the top ten for bike parking of all stations in the agency's service area.



The downtown area has one large bike rack at the corner of Main and Warren with several additional smaller racks scattered at nearby destinations. The bicycle club of Downers Grove donated a couple of racks to be placed at popular destinations on the south side of the downtown. These site-specific racks had varied usage during observations, but these types of racks are typically used for short-term trips, as opposed to the bike parking at Metra stations where bikes are typically left all day. Thus, it is more difficult to gauge the true demand of the short-term bicycle parking spaces. However, there were some locations where the racks were overflowing, indicating a need for additional parking.

Bike parking is available at other key destinations such as the library, schools, post office, and parks. Of note, no bike racks are available at the business park in the northwest area of the Village or at Village Hall.

### Bike Network

Downers Grove's street network is primarily a grid, which lends itself well to developing a Complete Streets network. There are many residential streets in the Village that are comfortable for experienced and confident riders as well as those who have much less experience. Residential streets have relatively low traffic volumes, low parking demand, and slow vehicle speeds that allow people to feel comfortable riding. Still, a few streets act as barriers to bicycle connectivity, particularly to the wide variety of skills and comfort levels inherent among bicyclists. Many would feel more comfortable on streets with bike lanes or prefer to be off the road altogether.

Formal, on-street bicycle facilities are limited in Downers Grove. A buffered bike lane is striped along portions of Dunham Road and 71st Street for a total of roughly one mile in each direction. Another bike lane is striped for one block along Warren Avenue.

Another 28 miles of streets are signed as bike routes, indicating to bicyclists which streets are preferred for biking. However, in some cases, the recommended routes simply end without connecting to other routes or destinations, dropping bicyclists at major streets that are uncomfortable for biking,

such as 75th Street or Butterfield Road. Developing a complete network that links bike routes together and to destinations will be a priority of this plan.

Street and rail crossings are major barriers to bicycling in Downers Grove, with the BNSF tracks being the most significant among them. The BNSF tracks essentially divide the Village in half with only a handful of opportunities to cross. Nearly 1½ miles separates the crossings at Belmont Road and Forest Avenue. Furthermore, some of the crossings that do exist are not comfortable for many bicyclists. Several major streets such as Ogden Avenue, 31st Street, 55th Street, 63rd Street, and Belmont Road also become barriers because they are difficult to cross due to high traffic volumes or speeds.

Even more intimidating to get across are the streets that border the Village: 75th Street, Butterfield Road, I-88, and I-355. These create barriers for people wanting to travel between Downers Grove and neighboring communities.

## SAFETY OF WALKING AND BICYCLING

Data from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Village of Downers Grove for the years 2007 through 2011 were analyzed to identify any specific locations or behaviors that are creating unsafe conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists. The data indicate that 74 bicyclists and 66 pedestrians were involved in motor vehicle crashes over that time period. One of those crashes resulted in a pedestrian fatality as the pedestrian tried to cross Butterfield Road.

None of the bicycle crashes resulted in a fatality; however, bicyclists in Downers Grove are injured more than average. The rate of injuries resulting from bicycle crashes per Downers Grove resident is nearly 1.5 times the national average. While the rate of pedestrian crashes in Downers Grove is consistent with national statistics, reducing crashes involving both bicyclists and pedestrians is a priority for the Village. Understanding what caused the crashes

and where they occurred will help the Village determine how best to increase safety.

Most of the crashes occurred at intersections; however, the crashes at non-intersections were more likely to be severe crashes. This is consistent with pedestrian and bicycle crash studies nationwide and is likely due to the speeds of the vehicles when the crash occurred. Vehicles tend to be traveling slower through intersections than midblock.

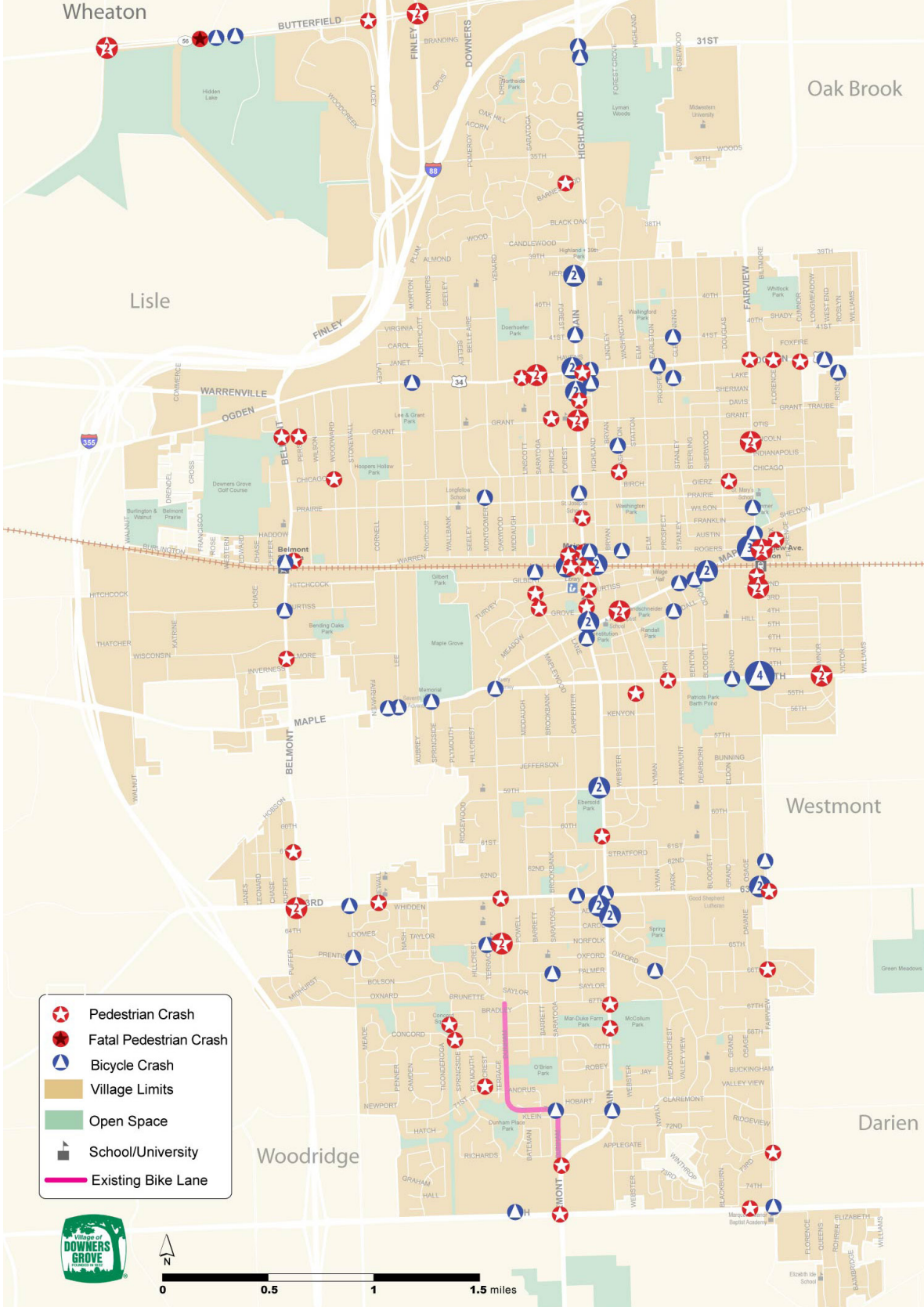
The map on the following page shows the pedestrian and bicycle crash locations and the number of crashes that occurred in the same location in Downers Grove from 2007 through 2011. Several places

Between 2007 and 2011, 66 pedestrians and 74 bicyclists were hit by cars. One of those crashes resulted in a pedestrian fatality. 56 bicyclists were injured, for a rate that is almost 1.5 times the national average.



Source: IDOT, Village of Downers Grove

# Bicycle and Pedestrian Crashes, 2007-2011



stand out for having a relatively high concentration of crashes. The intersection of 55th Street and Fairview Avenue had four bicycle crashes over this time period, the highest number of bicycle crashes at any individual intersection. Two of those involved a bicyclist who had been traveling along the sidewalk, crossing the road in the crosswalk, and a driver turning right on red.

## High Crash Intersections

55th Street & Fairview Avenue



Maple Avenue & Fairview Avenue



63rd Street & Fairview Avenue



Ogden Avenue & Main Street



Burlington Avenue & Main Street



Burlington Avenue & Forest Avenue



Corridors along Maple Avenue, between Main Street and Fairview Avenue, along Main Street in the downtown and between Ogden Avenue and Grant Avenue, and Ogden Avenue also stand out.

A closer look at the crashes in these areas that stuck out and a review of the written narrative in the crash reports revealed some trends. Three-quarters of the bicycle crashes at the high crash locations involved bicyclists who had been riding along the sidewalk and were crossing a driveway or an intersection through the crosswalk. According to previous studies, bicyclists riding on the sidewalk are involved in more motor vehicle crashes than bicyclists riding along a roadway.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is that most drivers are looking for gaps in traffic and are thus focused on the roadway. While they may also check the sidewalk for pedestrians, they are not anticipating people approaching at faster speeds and thus do not see a cyclist who may be farther away. Most of the bicyclists involved in these crashes were adult cyclists, which suggests that people of all ages feel more comfortable biking on the sidewalks than on the streets in Downers Grove. These crashes were particularly common along Main Street.

Among the pedestrian crashes, about half involved pedestrians crossing in a crosswalk, in which the driver was at fault, and half involved pedestrians crossing outside of a crosswalk or against a traffic signal.

One quarter of the sample of crashes reviewed involved drivers turning right on red. The right turn on red crashes were concentrated at the intersections of 55th/Fairview and Main/Ogden.

Along the Ogden Avenue corridor, several crashes were caused by drivers not seeing the pedestrian or bicyclist crossing the road. One reason for this may be that the pedestrian or bicyclist was blocked from the motorist's view by another vehicle. This type of crash, known as a "multiple threat" crash, is common on four-lane roadways. They are caused by a driver in the outside lane yielding to someone crossing the road, but at the same time blocking them from the view of someone driving in the inside lane, which often leads to a collision. One tool to counteract this type of crash is to install advanced stop lines at designated crosswalks along four-lane roadways.

<sup>1</sup> American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, *Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities*, 2012.



Several crashes along Ogden also occurred at drive-ways, when a bicyclist or pedestrian exited the driveway and entered the roadway to cross.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH

Public input on the existing conditions of bicycling and walking in Downers Grove was sought in a variety of ways. “Pop-up” meetings were held at popular Village events, including Bike to Work Week, the Downers Grove Car Show, and the Downers Grove Market at the Main Street Metra station. A larger open house was also held at Grove Fest.

An online survey was posted and advertised on the Village’s facebook page and distributed to stakeholders including the downtown merchants, the plan steering committee, and community members who had participated in other outreach events. More than 320 responses were gathered from the survey. In total, the public outreach process reached over 400 people.

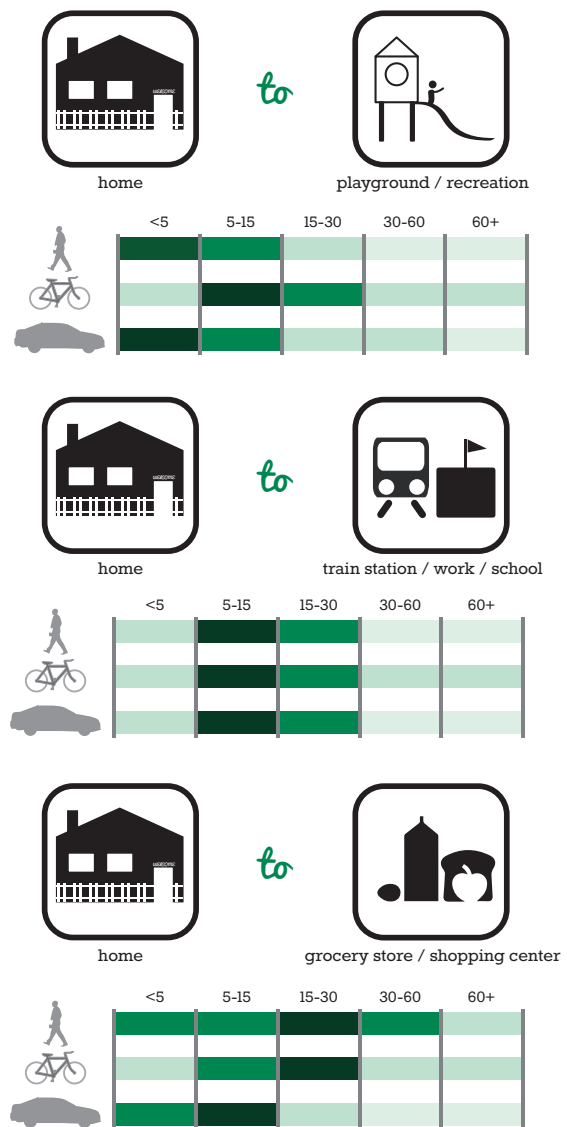
The primary motivation for people walking or biking in Downers Grove is for health, fitness, or recreation. Not having the time or traveling to destinations that are too far is what keeps the majority of people from walking more. For those wishing to bike more, it is the lack of facilities, both on-street and off-street, that is the deterrent. Difficult street crossings were also noted as a barrier for both pedestrians and bicyclists.

Participants were asked about their current travel habits - how far it takes them to get from home to the park, to work or the train, or to go shopping, whether they’re walking, biking, or driving. It’s the short trips that are the easiest to encourage people to shift from driving to walking or biking for. In Downers Grove, people seem to be driving fairly short distances to get to parks or other recreation facilities. As the primary motivation for walking or biking, encouraging people to walk or bike to these destinations is a natural fit. In fact, during the outreach process, many people indicated that they would like to walk or bike to the Village’s parks, but

that the existing connections are not safe or convenient.

Even the majority of car trips for commuting or shopping purposes are relatively short. This indicates that there may great potential to encourage more people to choose to walk or bike to their destinations rather than drive.

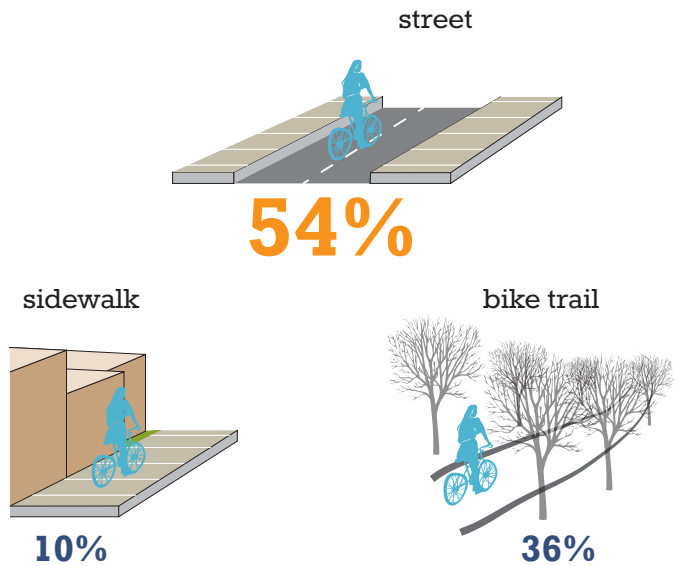
## How long does it take you to get from home to...



As mentioned above in the bicycle parking discussion, the Village of Downers Grove already has a significant population of bicyclists. Most of those who bike in the Village choose to ride on the streets, while over a third ride on off-street trails. A small percentage are more comfortable on the sidewalks.

To improve conditions for bicycling, most people agreed that the most important investment was to add on-street bicycle facilities, to both major streets and local roads. Adding off-street trails and improving crossings were secondarily seen as important investments.

## Where do you ride the MOST...



For pedestrians, the number one priority was to improve street crossings. This was followed by adding sidewalks where the network is incomplete.

## VILLAGE AND REGIONAL DOCUMENTS

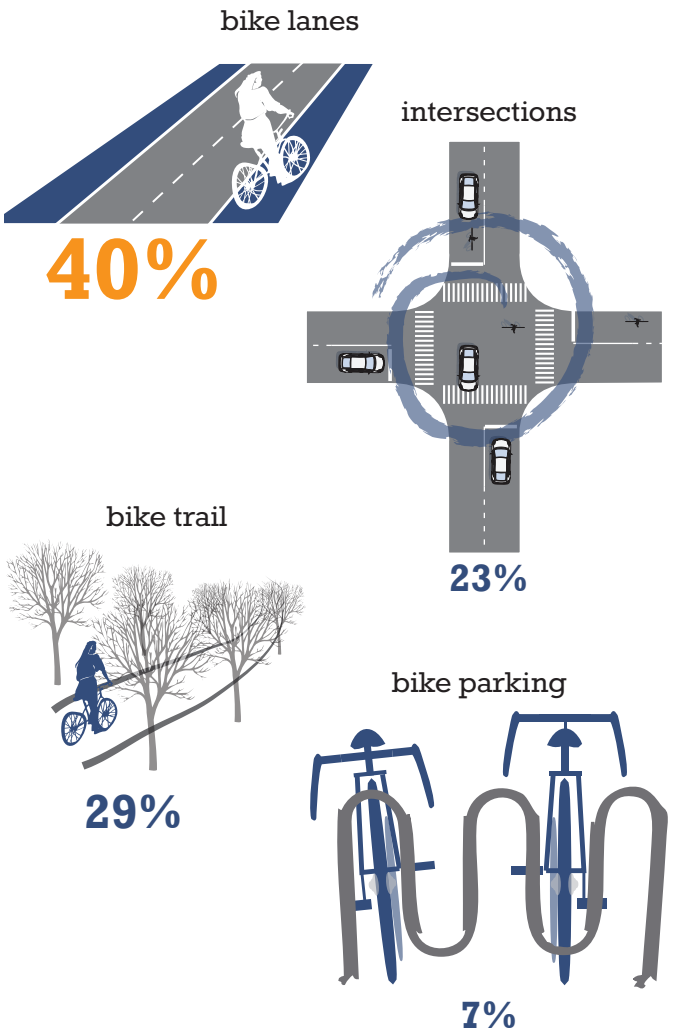
### Village of Downers Grove Bikeway Plan

Prepared in June of 2000, the Village of Downers Grove Bikeway Plan aimed to address the needs of bicyclists. Along with the companion Village Pedestrian Plan, the goals of the plan were to provide:

- Increased mode choice
- Additional opportunities for recreation
- Improved quality of life for all residents

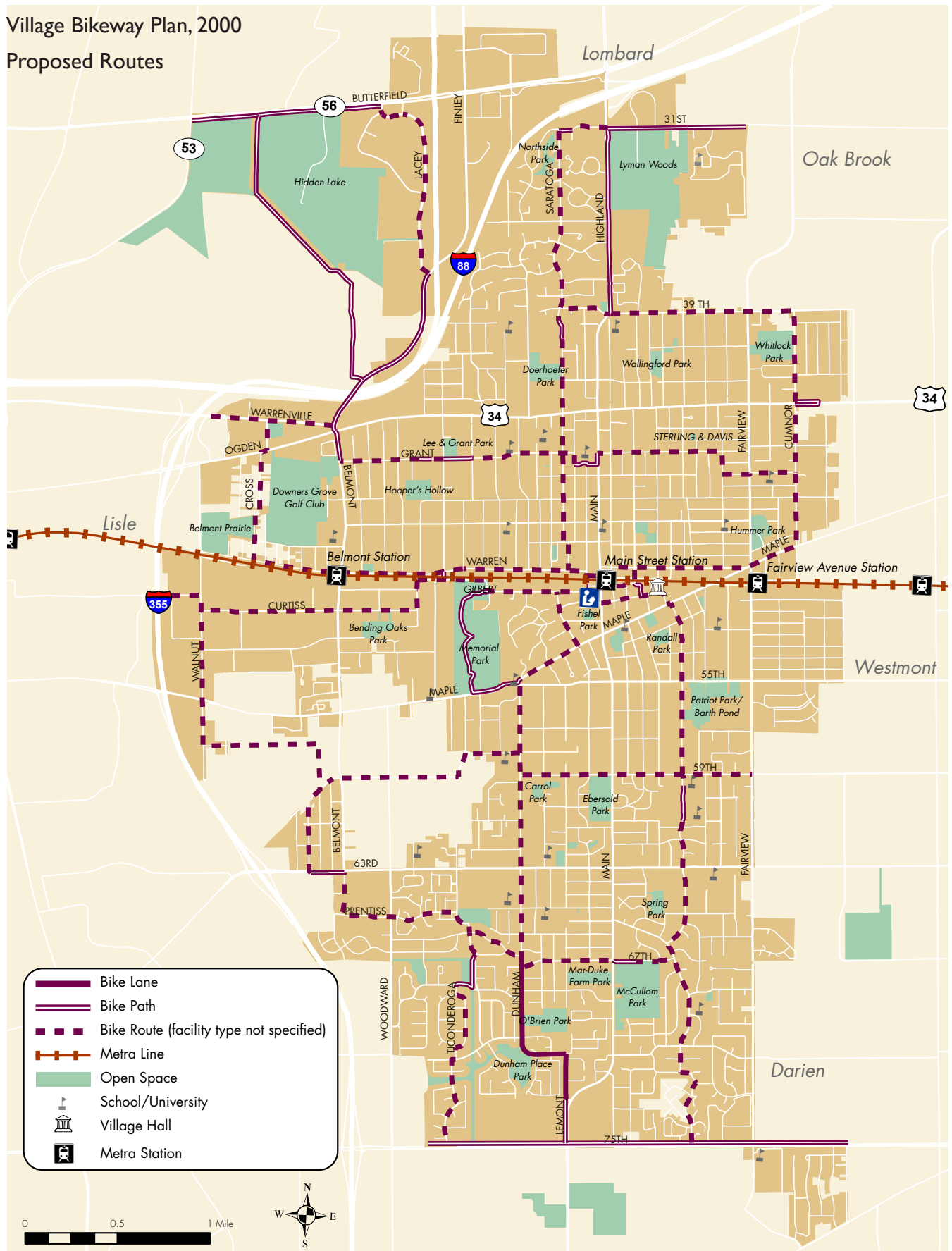
At the time the plan was prepared, the existing bicycling facilities consisted of three signed routes as suggested looped tours through the Village on local streets, several off-street paths that were independent from one another, and bike parking at Metra stations, schools, the library, and some shopping cen-

## Where should Downers Grove invest its resources?



# Village Bikeway Plan, 2000

## Proposed Routes



ters. On a typical weekday, 70-80% of the bike parking spaces at the Metra stations were used, in addition to a number of bicycles locked to unofficial bike parking spaces such as poles and trees.

The recommended bicycle network, shown on the previous page, included 29.7 miles of on-street and 11.1 miles of off-street routes that would connect users to Metra stations, the downtown and outlying commercial areas, schools, libraries, and parks via direct but lower-volume roadways.

Roughly 70% of the proposed network has been implemented.

### **Village of Downers Grove Comprehensive Plan**

The Village of Downers Grove Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan), adopted in October 2011, will guide future development and conservation in the village for the next 15-20 years. The Comp Plan is made of up several topical plans, covering land use, residential areas, commercial areas, transportation, parks and open space, community facilities, and key focus areas.

While the transportation plan focuses most specifically on bicycle and pedestrian issues, policies that are supportive of bicycling and walking were included in other focus areas, as land use and transportation are intrinsically linked.

Among the common themes were that the Village should continue to expand its sidewalk network to provide better connections between destinations. Neighborhood commercial development was encouraged, which facilitates walking and bicycling as transportation as it keeps destinations closer to residents.

Adding pedestrian amenities and improving the Village streets through streetscaping were also repeated throughout the document.

### **DuPage County Regional Bike Plan**

The DuPage County Regional Bikeway Plan was developed to establish bikeways that would serve as a means of transportation and provide recreational opportunities. The plan was originally developed in 1996 and was last updated in 2008.

The plan includes goals and policies in five categories:

1. Countywide Planning and Design
2. Countywide Safety, Promotion and Education
3. Countywide Intermodal (e.g. bike storage facilities)
4. Countywide Roadway System
5. Local Actions to Promote Non-Motorized Travel

One of the objectives is for local municipalities to develop a bicycle and pedestrian plan.

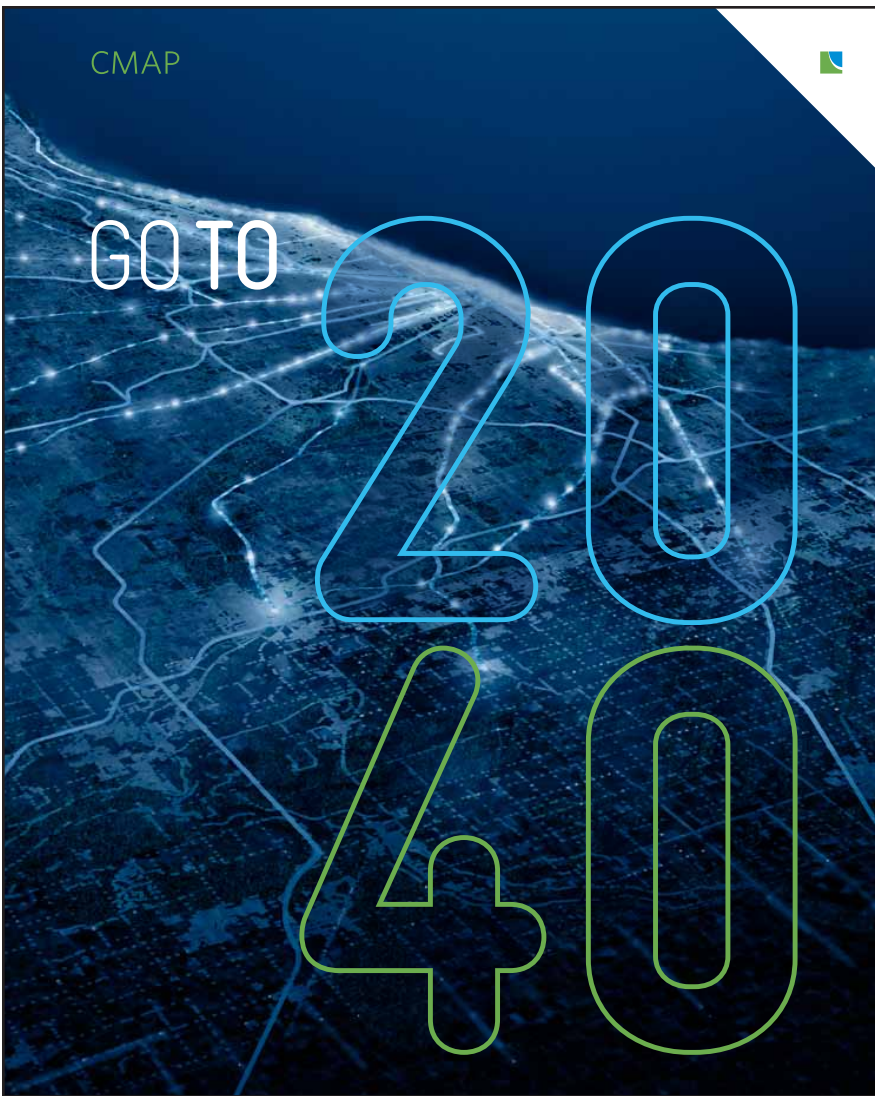
Downtown Downers Grove was one of the ten areas analyzed in greater detail as a Priority Travel Zone. Specific improvements given “moderate” priority were the 31st St/Highland Ave Downers Grove Route Extension, which would link office businesses to a popular community bike route, a trail along the Northern Illinois Gas right-of-way, and the Walnut Street Access Trail to provide a bikeway around a proposed Metra station at Walnut and Railroad Avenue.

Recommendations for pedestrian improvements were also included in the plan. The only recommendation affecting Downers Grove is filling in gaps in the sidewalk network along Ogden Avenue.

### **Neighborhood Traffic Study**

The Village is conducting neighborhood traffic studies on a continuing basis, focusing on a new neighborhood each time. One was recently conducted in 2011 for the area bounded by Maple Avenue and the BNSF tracks to the north, 55th to the south, Main Street to the west, and Fairview Avenue to the east. The study examined the existing traffic patterns on the residential streets within this neighborhood as well as the arterials and collectors bounding it.

The study resulted in recommended changes to the existing stop and yield signs within the neighborhood. One of the recommended changes occurs along the Fairmount Road bike route; the stop sign on Randall Road at Fairmount is recommended



## CMAP Go To 2040

CMAP recently released Go To 2040, a joint vision and roadmap for the seven-county region that makes up the Chicagoland area. The plan recognizes that in order to succeed as a region - attracting residents, reducing our environmental impact, and economically flourishing - we must make smart decisions about the uses of our resources. We must provide residents with access to jobs and communities with a good quality of life.

As transportation relates to this shared vision, providing residents with the economical and healthy transportation options such as walking and bicycling is an important component. The Village of Downers Grove Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan will support Go To 2040 by establishing goals and implementable strategies for the Village to begin to provide more choices to its residents.

## EXISTING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

### Bicycle-related Policies

Bicycles must be registered with the Village and are required to be properly equipped with brakes, a front light, rear reflector or light, and a bell.

According to Village Code, bicycling is not permitted on sidewalks in areas zoned for business or where it is otherwise marked as being prohibited. Outside these areas, sidewalk riding is permitted.

Parking bicycles to sign posts, trees, buildings, or other similar structures is unlawful, as is parking a bicycle so as to block the pedestrian way.

### Pedestrian-related Policies

The Village Code includes regulations concerning the construction of sidewalks with new construction as

to be reversed so that traffic on Fairmount have to stop while Randall traffic has the right of way.

The study of the boundary streets found that three out of the four have more capacity than necessary. Main Street has the most excess capacity and only Fairview Avenue is carrying enough traffic to be near its capacity.

The major intersections were also examined as part of this study and several recommendations were made for better operations and increased safety. Recommendations for 55th/Main and 55th/Fairview intersections called for adding turn lanes. Of note, the 55th/Fairview intersection had a high number of bicycle and pedestrian crashes.

well as a policy for where sidewalks should be added to already developed properties. The latter policy takes into account the proximity to pedestrian-oriented destinations, such as schools, traffic characteristics, and the existing sidewalk network.

It is unlawful to deposit snow onto the sidewalk, however, the code does not mention any requirements for private property owners to remove snow from the sidewalks adjacent to their property.

Right turn on red restrictions are imposed at a select six intersections in the Village, most of which are along Main Street. An additional four intersections have right turn on red restrictions when pedestrians are present.

## Programs

Village residents are encouraged to walk and bike and are educated on safe practices through a number of programs.

The Village of Downers Grove Police Department runs and participates in several education programs for children including Safety Town, Officer Patti, and Bicycle Safety.

The Police Department also has officers on bike patrol in the summer months. This is an important program that legitimizes bicycling on streets. When people see officers bicycling in the streets, they recognize that is the appropriate place for bicyclists to ride. Likewise, the police officers act as a role model for other bicyclists and by riding safely and obeying the rules of the road, can encourage others to do so as well.

The Village partners with the school district in a strong Safe Routes to School program and have successfully applied for state funding for improvements near community schools. Nearly \$200,000 was awarded to three schools in the last grant cycle to construct sidewalks and traffic calming treatments that would make it safer and easier for kids to walk and bike to school.

Several Downers Grove schools have clubs and programs that get kids moving and encourage healthy lifestyles. Fit Kids at Indian Trail Elementary teaches

5th and 6th graders the importance of exercise and nutrition and organizes games to engage the group in physical exercise. Lester Elementary has both a Walking Club and a Movin' in the Morning program to encourage kids to walk. Likewise, the Panther Pacers at Pierce Downer Elementary encourages walking or running with an incentive program, encouraging kids to reach a target distance over time. These types of programs are important to instill the value of physical activity in daily life and get kids in the habit of exercising.

The Village also partners with schools in developing and publishing recommended school walk routes. The routes are reviewed and revised, if necessary, on an annual basis by the Traffic and Parking Commission.