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## **GREATER LOWELL BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Kickoff Meeting Summary

Date: May 6, 2025, 5:00-6:30pm

Location: Virtual (Zoom)

Prepared by: Amanuel Regassa, Transportation Planner II

### **Attendees:**

- George DeLuca
- Liz Ivanov
- Kyle Parker
- Ethan Yang
- Robert Klinkhammer
- Marlies Henderson
- Josh Warhurst
- Wendy Jepson
- Ray Tice
- Stephen Meno
- Phil Posner
- David Ganong
- Douglas Chandler
- Kelly Lynema (NMCOG)
- Amanuel Regassa (NMCOG)
- Jenny Raitt (NMCOG)
- Chris Hayes (NMCOG)
- Apple Gould-Schultz (NMCOG)
- Blake Acton (NMCOG)
- Catrina Meyer (Toole Design)
- Perri Sheinbaum (Toole Design)

### **Purpose of the Meeting**

The first Advisory Committee meeting formally launched the Greater Lowell Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (GLBPP), bringing together advisory committee members with a broad range of expertise, including pedestrians, runners, and cyclists; property managers and business owners; advocates for safe streets and trails; Vision Zero practitioners; planners, engineers, and architects; bike and pedestrian committee members; and residents with international mobility experience.

Jenny Raitt, Executive Director of NMCOG, welcomed the Advisory Committee members before Kelly Lynema, Deputy Director, launched into the project background. Kelly presented the plan's purpose, regional scope, and public engagement strategy, emphasizing the importance of cross-municipal connectivity, multimodal integration, and support for both recreation and everyday trips.

Catrina Meyer of Toole Design outlined the technical approach, including documenting existing conditions, identifying network gaps, and developing a regional network vision grounded in safety, equity, and accessibility. Catrina shared the draft goals for the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, explaining how they aligned with NMCOG's transportation priorities and Vision Zero principles. The project team facilitated breakout groups to gather initial feedback on the draft vision statement and goals to ensure they are representative of the community's needs and desires for the project.

## Key Themes from the Meeting

### 1. Vision and Aspirations for the Region

Participants expressed strong support for a long-term vision that promotes safe, connected, and equitable access to active transportation for people of all ages and abilities. Several emphasized the importance of designing for future generations, not just responding to current infrastructure constraints. In addition to physical improvements, participants underscored the need for a policy framework that favors walking and biking, including regulatory changes that facilitate access, safety, and infrastructure investment. Shared aspirations included:

- A cohesive regional trail and sidewalk network that transcends municipal boundaries.
- Mobility choices for all residents, including children, seniors, low-income households, and non-drivers.
- A transportation culture that normalizes biking and walking as practical, everyday modes of travel.

### 2. Lived Experiences & Local Challenges

Committee members shared valuable on-the-ground insight into barriers faced in their own communities. Key concerns included:

- **Safety:** High vehicle speeds, lack of crosswalks, unsafe intersections, and inadequate street lighting were frequently cited. E-bikes and scooters on sidewalks were also noted as a growing conflict with pedestrians.
- **Gaps in Connectivity:** There was broad agreement that many existing trails and sidewalks lack connections to destinations or across municipal lines, rendering them underutilized.
- **Equity & Access:** Multiple members underscored the need to prioritize residents who rely on walking and biking, particularly in underserved areas. Winter sidewalk maintenance, ADA accessibility, and public safety were recurring concerns.
- **Culture and Perception:** Some attendees noted the dominance of car-centric planning and a lack of political will to support safe infrastructure. Others described the negative stigma or skepticism toward biking, particularly in suburban settings.
- **Policy Constraints:** Utility corridors and design standards that prohibit mid-block crossings or trails adjacent to highways were noted as institutional barriers to implementation.

### 3. Opportunities and Regional Assets

Despite challenges, the region has strong foundations to build on:

- Popular trails like the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and regional towpaths are seen as anchor corridors.
- Active local committees and organizations—such as The Bike Connector and Safe Streets Tewksbury—have cultivated community interest and can support outreach.

- Several municipalities have begun implementing pedestrian and bike plans, creating a base for regional coordination.

#### **4. Draft Goals and Vision – Feedback Highlights**

The project team shared a draft vision and four supporting goals:

1. Promote safe and comfortable facilities
2. Develop a connected and cohesive network
3. Increase walking and biking for both recreation and utility
4. Ensure equitable and accessible facilities for all

The breakout group activity asked small groups of 4-5 Advisory Committee members to rank these goals and add additional goals that are missing. The goals are ranked based on number of votes and the italicized goals are new additions:

1. Develop a connected and cohesive network
2. Promote safe and comfortable facilities
3. Increase walking and biking for both recreation and utility
4. Ensure equitable and accessible facilities for all
5. Educate the region on safety practices for walking and biking
6. Support and enhance economic development in town/city centers

The breakout groups also shared their ideas on what a safe and connected bicycle and pedestrian network would look like and what barriers currently exist. The following emerged as the top answers:

- Address obstructions and improve maintenance on roadways, bicycle lanes, and sidewalks (i.e. potholes, snow clearance)
- Implement safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure at intersections and along high pedestrian and bicycle routes
- Improve connectivity of sidewalk, trails and shared-use paths, and bicycle lanes to allow for users to access more destinations
- Ensure facilities are accessible and inclusive for all ages and abilities
- Create new bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that is separated from vehicles to allow users to feel comfortable and safe

#### **5. Public Engagement Strategy**

The NMCOG team introduced a robust engagement plan, including:

- A multilingual online survey and interactive map launching in May.
- Pop-up events at community festivals and markets (June–August).
- Two public workshops planned for July (Lowell Senior Center).
- Targeted outreach to underrepresented communities, with assistance from advisory members.

Committee members suggested leveraging relationships with public health organizations, neighborhood groups, and employers to broaden outreach. Several also emphasized the need for shorter, bite-sized survey options for public events.

#### Next Steps

- Survey Launch: Mid-May through June; advisory members will assist in promotion.
- Public Workshops: Scheduled for July 8 and 9, from 5:00 to 8:00 PM (specific meetings times and locations TBD).
- Next Advisory Committee Meeting: Mid-to-late June (doodle poll forthcoming), anticipated to include review of survey results and preparation for public workshops.
- Website Updates: NMCOG will update the [project webpage](https://www.nmcog.org/glbikepedplan) (<https://www.nmcog.org/glbikepedplan>) and provide relevant documents, including an existing plans bibliography.

## 6. Conclusion

The kickoff meeting demonstrated a high level of commitment and enthusiasm from a diverse advisory committee. Members shared thoughtful insights and constructive feedback that will inform both the technical and engagement components of the GLBPP. The project team is grateful for their contributions and looks forward to continued collaboration to build a safer and more connected bicycle and pedestrian network in the Greater Lowell region.