

CASE STUDY

PROMOTING ALTERNATIVES TO PRIVATE VEHICLE TRAVEL IN ILLINOIS CITIES: FIVE CASE STUDIES OF EXCELLENCE

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This article presents five case studies highlighting municipalities outside of the Chicago metropolitan area that have made substantial progress in promoting non-automotive forms of travel. Charleston and Urbana are featured for their work promoting bicycle travel, Peoria for its transit service, and Galesburg and Rock Island for promoting walkability. With insights drawn from site visits, interviews, and U.S. Census Bureau and Federal Transit Administration data, the cases explore the unique strategies employed by each municipality and the factors they have in common, such as the effective use of external consultants, the development of intergovernmental support and deliberate communication with residents.

Cities that lie outside of major metropolitan areas often face formidable barriers when trying to increase residents' walking, bicycling and transit use. Low population densities and limited employment in central business districts—paired with a lack of strong advocacy organizations or well-developed bus and rail systems—often create major roadblocks to reducing reliance on private car and truck travel. These factors often manifest in strong cultural and political opposition to infrastructural investments for bicyclists, walkers and transit users, as such developments are perceived to potentially divert time and resources away from improving streets and roads for vehicular travel.

Some cities, however, have achieved significant success in promoting these alternatives, and they deserve recognition for their efforts. To cultivate an understanding of their achievements, this article provides five case studies of excellence, with each case focusing on an Illinois municipality outside of the Chicago metropolitan region that has made substantial progress promoting non-automotive forms of travel. After a brief review of the methods used to select these communities, a case study on each community will be presented. Charleston and Urbana are featured for their work promoting bicycle travel,

Peoria for its transit service, and Galesburg and Rock Island for their work promoting walkability.

As the cases show, the strategies employed by these communities have much in common: all have effectively garnered community support, made a mode of transportation that does not involve automobile travel a budgetary priority and resisted temptations to scale back the programs in the face of obstacles. They have all had the benefit of supportive councils and cooperative relationships with local organizations or advocacy groups, yet as the cases show, each adheres to a set of strategies with a distinctly local flavor.

By design, the cases were selected from Illinois communities outside of the Chicago and St. Louis metropolitan areas. This is not to suggest that municipalities in these areas do not deserve recognition for their efforts; rather, the authors determined that properly evaluating their achievements would require different measurement techniques and criteria beyond those considered in this study. It is the authors' hope that these five cases provide lessons relevant to all communities in our state.

METHODS FOR SELECTING CASES

The cases were selected after conducting two tasks. First, the authors reviewed data about transportation patterns from the U.S. Census Bureau and National Transit Database (NTD), collecting and evaluating data for all Illinois communities with a population of more than 20,000. Data from both sources were evaluated to identify the strongest performers, with a particular emphasis on trends observed since 2009. The period prior to 2009 was excluded partially to avoid the confounding effects of the Great Recession on cities throughout the state, which was beyond the scope of analysis. Evaluating the effects of that downturn would have required an entirely different set of tools.

The census data provide information about journey-to-work patterns related to bicycling, walking or transit use. These enumerations, provided through the American Community Survey, are often used in transportation analysis to understand how people rely on different modes of travel. These widely disseminated estimates are regarded as reliable and comprehensive; however, a limitation of this tool is that it does not provide information on trips unrelated to work or school, which account for well over half of all trips in many cities. The NTD conversely encompasses all trips but is primarily limited to bus, rail and paratransit service.

The second step was more qualitative; it involved identifying cities that have adopted best practices and those that have made commitments to creating and sustaining a more balanced transportation system over long periods of time. Once finalists were selected, a two-person research team visited each location in July of 2018 to meet and interview officials and advocates to discuss municipal policies and projects. Telephone interviews were subsequently conducted. From this information, the following five case studies of excellence were prepared.

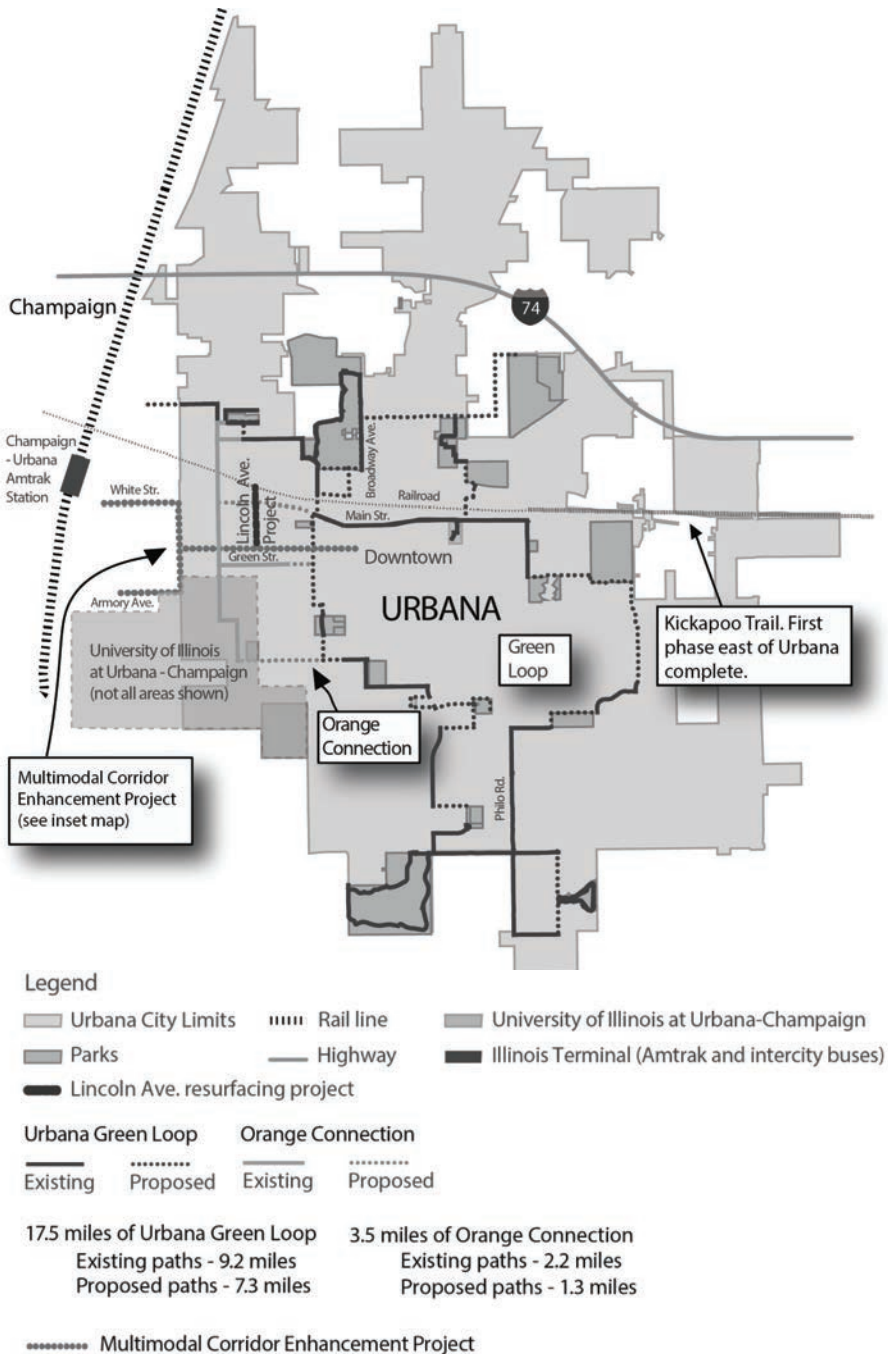
CASE 1 | URBANA

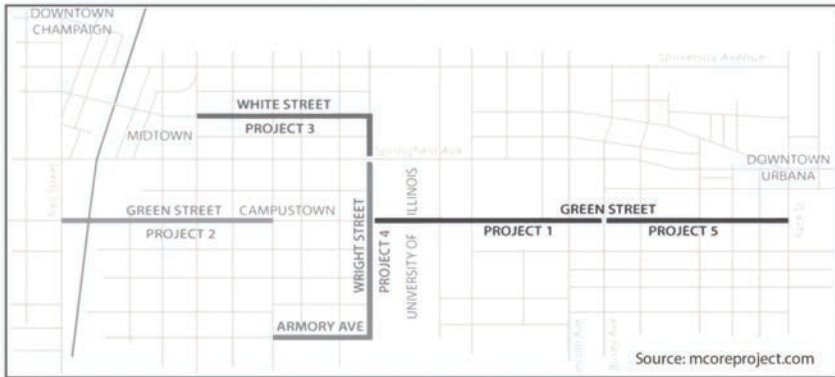
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE BICYCLE PLANNING

The degree to which the City of Urbana has encouraged non-motorized travel through the creation of trails, roadway engineering and a commitment to “complete streets” principles has made it a regional leader in bicycle policy. This city’s success is evident in the growing scale of its trail and bike lane system, testimonials from stakeholders and data from the American Community Survey. The latter showed that 6.7% of Urbana’s population used bicycling as their primary mode of transportation to work in 2016, more than twice as high as most other cities of its size. Although it is not surprising that the share of residents traveling by bike in this city tend to be higher than most due to the large and growing student population at the University of Illinois, Urbana also recorded an impressive 1.8% increase in bike-to-work travel since 2009. Most other university towns we evaluated had much smaller percentages of increase.

Urbana, with a population of 41,989, has seen a decrease in serious injuries and fatalities involving cyclists. This is exemplified in a 7% decline in the five-year rolling average of “A” injuries between 2014 and 2016 (where “A” injuries are those categorized as being “most severe” and consist of those resulting in major injuries and fatalities).¹ It is noteworthy that the drop in injuries took place while the bicycle and motor vehicle traffic rose sharply. Craig Shonkwiler, the assistant city engineer at Urbana’s public works department, noted that while improving safety issues was not the city’s initial motive for making infrastructure improvements, it has been an integral part of its bike-related programs.²

FIGURE 1
 NOTABLE AMENITIES AND FACILITIES FOR BICYCLE TRAVEL IN URBANA, ILLINOIS





The Multimodal Corridor Enhancement Project involves redesigning key corridors and transforming them into Complete Streets. Construction started in 2016 and will be finished in 2020. This initiative is separated into five distinct projects.

Map by Stijn van der Slot, DePaul University

As might be expected given Urbana's contiguous boundary with Champaign, the city also adopted a partnership-oriented approach, with its flagship project involving bike travel. The Green Street Multimodal Corridor Enhancement project (MCORE) was undertaken cooperatively by the City of Champaign, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District.³ Supported by funds from a federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant, the city embarked on its implementation in 2017 with a phased construction timetable allowing for a projected 2020 completion. This multijurisdictional initiative encompasses five projects, each with its own set of bicycle, pedestrian and transit components. The first phase ("Project 1") features raised bicycle lanes and green color-backed bicycle symbols along Green Street from Wright Street to Lincoln Avenue. The two-stage left turn boxes at the Goodwin Avenue and Green Street intersection complement bicycle lanes that sweep behind the transit loading platforms, allowing bicyclists to move around buses and transit riders boarding and alighting at stations. The city has already finished building Green Street from Wright Street to east of Lincoln Avenue, with landscaping slated for completion in the fall of 2018.

Another ambitious undertaking, the Lincoln Avenue and Springfield Avenue Resurfacing project, is planned for construction in 2019 and further demonstrates Urbana's commitment to multimodal travel. Among its key features are design changes and improvements to the pavement along a portion of Lincoln Avenue between Green Street and University Avenue. Improved

curbs and concrete medians separating opposing traffic lanes create a more controlled environment that benefits cyclists. The project also calls for eliminating the notorious safety hazard at the busy intersection of Lincoln Avenue and Main Street by installing enhanced bicycle and pedestrian crosswalks.

The Urbana Green Loop and Orange Connection are showpieces of the city's expanding trail system. This integrated system of paved trails connects downtown, including the Illinois Terminal (located in Champaign, the intermodal station used by Amtrak and intercity bus lines), residential neighborhoods and many popular campus locations. The Orange Connection runs mostly north to south on Urbana's west end, while the Green Loop primarily extends east to west near its downtown and through the University of Illinois campus. To date, 9.2 miles of the Green Loop and 3.5 miles of the Orange Connection have been completed.⁴ When finished, the system will extend 21 miles, more than twice its present length. Recent additions bring the total on-street bikeway mileage within Urbana to 19.5 "centerline" miles (distances measured at the street centerline).

Urbana designs its projects for a 20- to 30-year lifespan, which requires emphasis on good design and, in many cases, years of strategic spatial planning. The city has benefited from a mostly harmonious relationship between staff and its city council as well as strong and vocal constituent support, which has helped make bicycling a part of its political and civic culture. The roots of this collaboration date back to at least 2000, when the city council first began advocating and lobbying for a bike plan. Eight years later, the city published its first bicycle master plan, which was updated in late 2016 and stands out for having clear performance measures and guidelines.⁵ The plan lays out improvements needed in order to move each construction project from the concept stage to reality and calls for the city to draw upon recommendations from both the Vision Zero Initiative (a global program to eliminate traffic deaths) and the National Association of City Transportation Officials.

FIGURE 2

MASTER PLAN AND GREEN STREET CORRIDOR, URBANA, ILLINOIS



Left: Urbana Bicycle Master Plan; Right: Bicyclist and walkers on the Green Street Multimodal Corridor

Several initiatives illustrate the synergy that Urbana has with the University of Illinois and its larger neighbor, the city of Champaign, each of which has independently invested in trails and bicycle infrastructure:

- In July 2018, Urbana passed an ordinance giving it the authority to regulate dockless bikes, including where they can be parked. The following month, a dockless program was launched through a three-way agreement between the city, Champaign and the University of Illinois. Operated by VeoRide, a university-oriented provider of dockless bikes in several U.S. cities, this program allows users to ride for \$0.50 per minute or purchase a daily, monthly or annual subscription. VeoRide has reportedly submitted the serial numbers of 500 bikes, the maximum allowable for a dockless carrier in Urbana.⁶

- Planning is also underway to complete the Kickapoo Rail Trail, which presently runs 6.7 miles east of Urbana to neighboring St. Joseph. The Kickapoo is slated to eventually extend 24.5 miles, providing a direct link to Danville and other parts of Vermilion County. Built on former CSX Railroad right-of-way (a route that was once part of the Peoria and Eastern Railway), this trail will traverse one of the state's most diverse ecosystems when it is completed.
- Each May, Urbana and Champaign jointly host a Bike to Work Day, which attracts hundreds of riders, including many university students, and raises the profile of cycling in the region.

These and other initiatives make bicycling a prominent part of the city's culture. In 2014, Urbana was named Illinois' first gold-level bicycle-friendly community by the League of American Bicyclists.⁷ The Prairie Cycle Club, a social group for bicyclists in Champaign and adjacent counties, has a strong presence in the community and helps raise awareness of its bicycle-related agenda through sponsored rides and other programs.⁸ The result is a populace that sees bicycle travel as an essential component to their community's quality of life.

CASE 2 | CHARLESTON

INTEGRATING BICYCLE PLANNING INTO THE COMMUNITY'S "DNA"

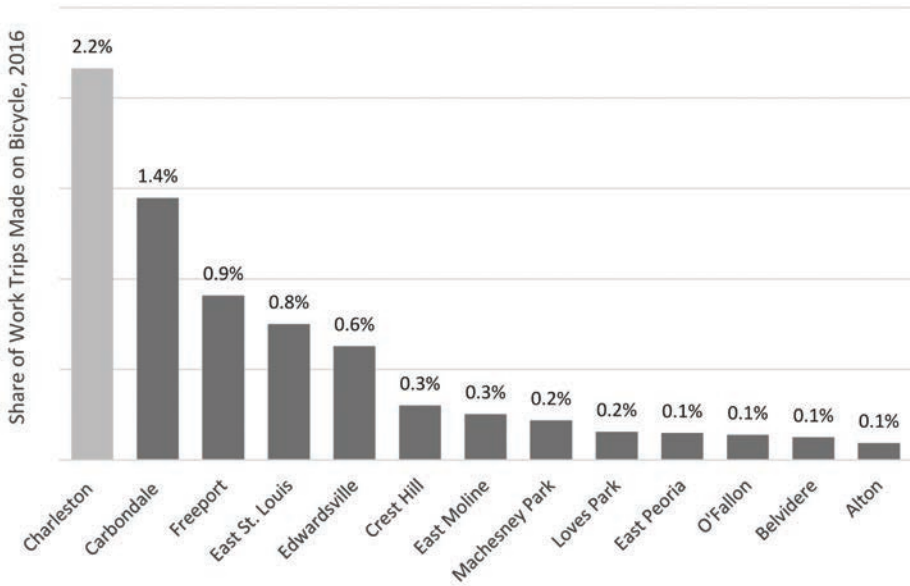
Charleston promotes bicycle travel in ways that are not typical of cities with relatively small populations or locations that are distant from major metropolitan areas. This city of 21,838 is located 139 miles from St. Louis, the nearest major metropolitan area, and stands out in its ability to mobilize and sustain grassroots support via a broad coalition of bicycle advocates. The coalition includes, but is not limited to, students and professors at Eastern Illinois University, hospital staff from Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Center, Bike and Hike (a local sporting goods store), local foundations and the municipal government. A supportive city council has also allowed staff and advocates to concentrate on advancing a broad set of policies that encompass both on-street and off-street improvements.

The results are evident: The American Community Survey shows that the share of Charleston's population using bicycling as their primary mode of transportation rose from 1.7% in 2014 to 2.2% in 2016, a 0.5% increase (Figure 2). While these numbers remain small, they are far higher than most

communities of a similar size, some of which have virtually no reports of using bicycles to reach the workplace. In addition, even as recently as 2010, the share of Charleston's commuters who bicycled to work was only 1.1%.

TABLE 1

SHARE OF WORK TRIPS MADE VIA BICYCLE IN 2016 IN ILLINOIS CITIES WITH POPULATIONS 20,000–30,000



Charleston and Carbondale easily had the highest shares of work trips made via bicycle in 2016, attributable to both the creation of bicycle infrastructure and the large student populations. The rise in share since 2014 in Charleston has been particularly large. Not shown: Collinsville and Granite City, both 0.0%. Source: American Travel Survey (2016).

Some of the groundwork for its bike-friendly policy was laid in the early 1990s, when the city council commenced work on the *Charleston Tomorrow* plan, deepening the city's understanding of its economic and social challenges. Momentum for bicycling grew when the city received a state transportation grant in the late 1990s to create the Lincoln Prairie Grass Trail, a crushed-limestone path extending nearly 13 miles between Charleston and neighboring Mattoon. Steve Pamperin, the city planner, noticed that employees at Sarah Bush Hospital had begun using the trail to cycle to work, an early sign of the degree to which the public would eventually embrace bike-related

improvements.⁹ Soon after the Lincoln Trail's completion, the city added bike lanes on 4th Street, 6th Street, 7th Street and Grant Avenue. This encouraged more residents to travel by bike and to ride off the trail and on local roads.

The city's sophistication in long-range planning has also grown considerably over the past two decades. By the mid-1990s, a report entitled *Charleston Tomorrow* was adopted by the city council. Organized as part of the state's Competitive Community Initiative, the report identified the need for a more strategic approach to city improvements, leading to the development of the Charleston Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in 1999 and updated in 2009.¹⁰ As part of the plan, municipal staff sought ways to take advantage of their city's unique topographic features by promoting rail/trail corridors for recreational use as well as a broader, community-wide pedestrian and bicycle system. Although most of Charleston (like many cities in central Illinois) lies on flat and arable land, Lake Charleston, on its southeast edge, is surrounded by steep glacial ravines regarded as being ideal for mountain biking and hiking. The presence of these beautiful natural features created a demand for outdoor recreational activity, which has long spurred advocates to informally champion the development of more hiking and biking amenities.

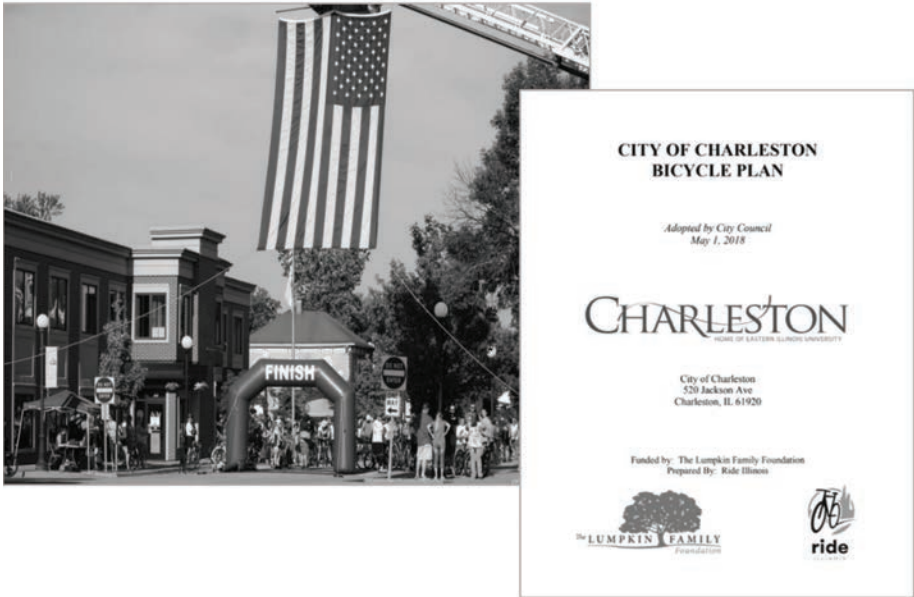
In 2013, advocacy groups headed by community leaders such as Brendan Lynch—the advocacy director of Bike and Hike and a board member of the local chamber of commerce—set into motion the first significant steps toward creating the Lake Charleston Bike Trails.¹¹ Drawing upon recommendations from the U.S. Forestry Service and the International Mountain Biking Association, local stakeholders solicited a great deal of public input and then spent 18 months hand-building these trails. In May 2018, the city opened nine miles of new hiking and biking trails to the public.¹² While little data exists on how many riders use this network, they are said to have quickly become popular among residents and visitors. Local bike shops—including Bike and Hike—have reportedly been selling more accessories (including adult helmets and bike lights) as a result.

Charleston crossed another milestone in May 2017 when the Lumpkin Family Foundation provided funding to allow Ride Illinois, a nonprofit organization devoted to cycling, to create a formal bike plan for the city.¹³ This spurred public workshops to solicit feedback and the creation of new committees to pursue more bike-related goals. After about a year of work, the city council approved and incorporated the City of Charleston Bicycle Plan into its comprehensive plan. As a result, funds for bicycle-related improvements became integrated

into the city's capital project budgeting cycle, providing resources for more trail expansion. According to Lynch, the sustained commitment to include bicycling in every city plan is "changing the DNA" of Charleston.

FIGURE 3

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS' INVESTMENTS IN BIKING



Left: Finish line at the Charleston Bike Race in downtown Charleston; Right: City of Charleston's 2018 comprehensive bike plan.

Pamperin credits the city council for recognizing that tourism, transportation and infrastructure are critical conduits to economic development and business expansion. For example, the Lincoln Prairie Grass Trail connects Charleston to neighboring Mattoon, strengthening community, economic and recreational ties between the two cities. The Lake Charleston Trails, meanwhile, serve a recreational role and, based on recent reports, support efforts to recruit students and professors to the university as well as medical professionals to the hospital. In 2017, the trail system won the city of Charleston's recognition by earning the prestigious Governor's Hometown Award, an honor granted by the Serve Illinois Commission, which is part of the Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service.¹⁴

Due to these efforts, Charleston has become a regional destination for bike-related activities and events. For example, the Charleston Chamber of Commerce hosts the Tour de Charleston, a premier downstate cycling event that draws hundreds of cycling enthusiasts to the community each summer. In fall 2018, the city held the Heart of Illinois Cyclocross Race, a USA Cycling-sanctioned event. In addition, Charleston has been designated a 2019 host for the hundreds of cyclists who will be part of Ride Illinois' Grand Illinois Bike Tour.

Several more bike improvements are on the city's horizon:

- By the summer of 2019, Charleston anticipates using Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program funds to pave the Lincoln Prairie Grass Trail, slated for completion by late 2019. This paved trail will include additional bike parking areas to be paid for through grant funding and will remove barriers to entry and encourage more residents to commute by bike. City officials and advocates plan to use the project's completion to draw attention to the advantages of biking and walking.
- By 2019, the city hopes to complete the installation of wayfinding signs and arterial lanes, both being critical components of the bike plan.
- A more distant goal—connecting the on-street bikeways to the lake and its trail system—is regarded as a way of bringing together different parts of the trail system. It also supports the city's intention of receiving certified "bicycle-friendly community" status from the League of American Bicyclists.

The pairing of grassroots advocacy efforts and strong policy initiatives has allowed Charleston to achieve a great deal over a relatively short period of time. This public and private partnership, from advocacy to execution, has succeeded in spite of the limitations on capital funding stemming in part from the absence of significant population growth in this community. This has required city officials to focus on projects generating the greatest payback within a tightly managed budget.

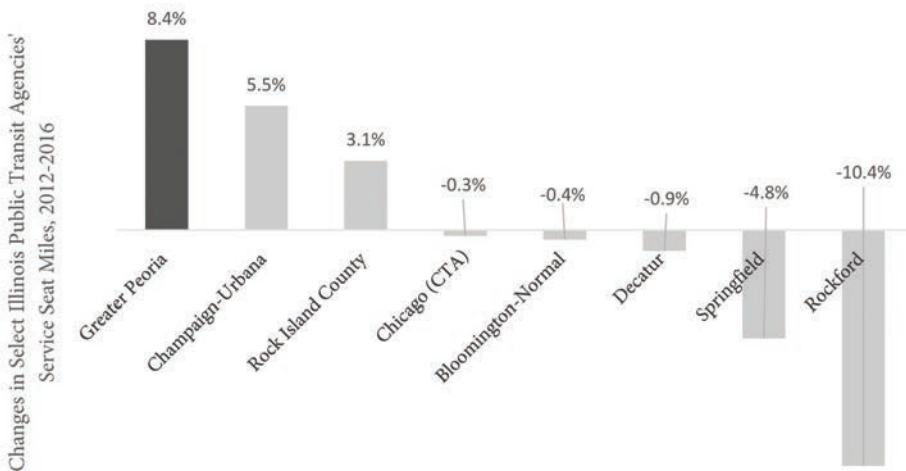
CASE 3 | PEORIA

PRESERVING A TRANSIT CULTURE THROUGH DIFFICULT TIMES

Peoria has one of the highest rates of transit ridership measured on a per capita basis of any metropolitan region in the state. The system handles 9.1 trips per regional resident annually, which is substantially more than Bloomington, Rockford or Springfield.¹⁵ Moreover, unlike most other areas with populations in the 100,000 to 150,000 range, where transit accounts for no more than 2% of work-related trips, the share in metropolitan Peoria stood at 3.8% in 2017, the most recent year with fully available data. Between 2009 and 2016, the share of residents in the region using buses for work trips increased by 1.2%.

TABLE 2

CHANGES IN SERVICE SEAT MILES BETWEEN 2012 AND 2016 AT PUBLIC TRANSIT AGENCIES IN ILLINOIS



The Greater Peoria Mass Transit District expanded seat miles of service by 8.4% between 2012 and 2016 spurred by new Sunday service and decisions to maintain routes despite a softening demand resulting from falling gasoline prices. Many other districts in the state cut service.

The Greater Peoria Mass Transit District, which operates under the name CityLink, has bus routes that serve about three-quarters of the urbanized area, including its most economically and socially underserved communities. This

is a high level of coverage considering that the region has more dispersed development patterns. Peoria has sustained a commitment to transit despite vicious industrial cycles that have led to dramatic changes (and often reductions) in employment at its manufacturing facilities from year to year. The transit system experienced significant declines in ridership in 2016 and 2017, which reduced passenger boardings by more than 20%, before enjoying a modest rebound in 2018.¹⁶ During the first six months of 2018, traffic was up 1.1% over the same period in 2017, a trend attributable in part to a sharp industrial rebound.

Doug Roelfs, General Manager of CityLink, attributed much of the recent jump in transit ridership to higher fuel prices, which has made driving more expensive.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the rebound also stems from a commitment to maintaining an expansive transit system of 1,699 bus stops in spite of past traffic drops, to continue to connect citizens who do not have ready access to cars with access to jobs, an emphasis that dates back many years.¹⁸ In fact, many of Peoria's original bus routes were created from a desire to bring employees to plants operated by construction equipment company Caterpillar, which has production facilities both downtown and on the metropolitan area's periphery.

The connectivity provided by this system revolves heavily around the CityLink Transit Center, a downtown hub at 407 SW Adams Street that opened in 1999. This canopied facility, equipped with multiple bus lanes and a heated indoor waiting area, is shared with Amtrak Thruway buses (coaches offering connections to Chicago via Bloomington-Normal), major intercity bus lines (including Greyhound, Trailways and Peoria Charter Coach) and CountyLink, the on-demand service funded by the county but operated by CityLink. Using smaller vehicles, CountyLink offers \$6 rides that often extend well into rural parts of Peoria County.¹⁹ Such synergy between local and long-distance buses is absent in many other metropolitan regions in our state, making it a compelling example of the connectivity provided by offering both private and public bus services under one roof. The transit center has long been equipped with a private daycare center, which is used by families reliant on public transportation. It is also within a few blocks of Peoria's minor league baseball stadium, Dozer Park, and a major Caterpillar production facility, both of which are important traffic generators.

Ridership on CityLink consists heavily of regular users who have no other modes of travel available to them—an increasingly common situation. To serve these riders better, CityLink has implemented several notable initiatives:

- CityLink added Sunday service on some routes in 2014, making it a seven-days-per-week operation.
- CityLink purchased new Remix route study software in 2017 to analyze data about route productivity, giving it a new tool to assess options for changing and consolidating routes, thereby stretching its limited operating dollars.
- CityLink is aggressive in offering incentives for college students at local colleges, including Bradley University and Illinois Central College, delivering both discounted passes and one-way trips for \$0.50 for students. The agency has also increased service and streamlined schedules to reduce running times between Pekin and Peoria, which has increased ridership.

The transit system also benefits from strong intergovernmental support. The city has helped stimulate transit use by promoting real-estate development around major transportation corridors and along the Illinois River in and near downtown. The latter strategy has resulted in new condominiums, parkland and other public open spaces, museums and entertainment that are favorably situated for transit use. As a result, according to Roelfs, younger citizens are driving less and using transit more.

The Tri-County Regional Planning Commission, the region's metropolitan planning organization, recognizes that the system needs to modernize and expand after years of largely maintaining the status quo.²⁰ According to Eric Miller, the commission's acting director, these efforts are essential in bridging the gaps that persist despite past efforts to better connect people to jobs.²¹ The system has not changed with the times to the degree that he and others believe is necessary. Illustrative of this problem is the fact that no major routes have been added in recent years. To close the gaps, the Peoria-Pekin Urbanized Area Transportation Study, an entity affiliated with the planning commission, has conducted an extensive technical analysis about ways to increase the system's coverage. A study published in 2015 outlined a wide range of federally funded transportation projects that could be implemented through 2021, plus high-priority corridors in which to channel investment.²² Each community in the Peoria urbanized area is invited to discussions about the use of any federal money received.

FIGURE 4

CITYLINK FACILITIES AND SERVICES IN PEORIA, ILLINOIS



Upper left: The canopy-covered bus platforms at the CityLink Transit Center in downtown Peoria; Lower left: A departing bus on CityLink's airport route, which runs every 30 minutes on weekdays. Right: The climate controlled waiting room at Transit Center.

According to Roelfs, there is hope that the transit system can pivot in the next several years. The construction of a second transit center north of the existing one, a facility called the Northside Transfer Zone, is a future project deemed necessary to expanding the service area to all of the urbanized regions. The preferred location for the transfer zone, a 1.2-acre redeveloped site near Interstate 74, would allow the agency to speed up service and attract riders in rapidly growing parts of town. The agency is working to ease concerns of neighborhood residents wary of this facility's construction and other challenges associated with such a significant undertaking. In addition, the city has been aggressive in rolling out diesel-electric hybrid buses and creating solar-powered bus shelters. CityLink also plans to install more sheltered bus stops and increase ADA-compliant service. In 2019, the agency will install automatic vehicle location software on its buses, thereby providing better information about passenger journeys, including the locations where they can board and alight buses.

These efforts exemplify CityLink's commitment to sustaining levels of service that are higher than those available in most other metropolitan areas of Peoria's size while gradually modernizing its buses and station as new technologies come to the fore.

CASE 4 | GALESBURG

MAKING PEDESTRIANS A PRIORITY

Galesburg's commitment to more pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, downtown revitalization and railroad grade separations has significantly increased foot traffic in the community. In 2016, 6.4% of the community's residents used walking as their primary mode of transportation to work, which is tied for the highest (with Rock Island, featured in Case 5) among the 11 cities outside the Chicago region with populations in the 20,000 to 40,000 range that do not have major universities. By comparison, in the 10 other Illinois cities of this category, an average of just 1.8% of people walk to work. Galesburg, which has a population of over 31,000, has seen a 0.8% increase in this measure since 2009, which is also well above most other cities of the same size.

TABLE 3

SHARE OF POPULATION THAT WALKS TO WORK AMONG ILLINOIS MUNICIPALITIES WITHOUT MAJOR PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES WITH POPULATIONS BETWEEN 20,000 AND 40,000



Source: American Travel Survey (2016). Based on 2016 American Travel Survey data, a higher share (3.8%) of Galesburg's population walked to work in 2016 than any other city in the state in the 20,000 to 40,000 range except Rock Island (featured in Case 5).

The size of Galesburg's downtown, which is laid out on a grid, hearkens to a time when the population was larger (the city had 37,000 residents in 1960, approximately 20% more than today). The area's building stock, however, is well-preserved and testifies to its rich cultural and industrial history. Galesburg is home to Knox College (a nationally-ranked liberal arts college), the birthplace of Ferris wheel inventor George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., and poet Carl Sandburg, and a major junction on Western railroads. Tracks extend in six directions from Galesburg—which has the country's second largest BNSF railyard—and eight Amtrak trains, including two Chicago-to-California runs, stopping daily.

FIGURE 5
PEDESTRIAN ORIENTED SPACES IN GALESBURG, ILLINOIS



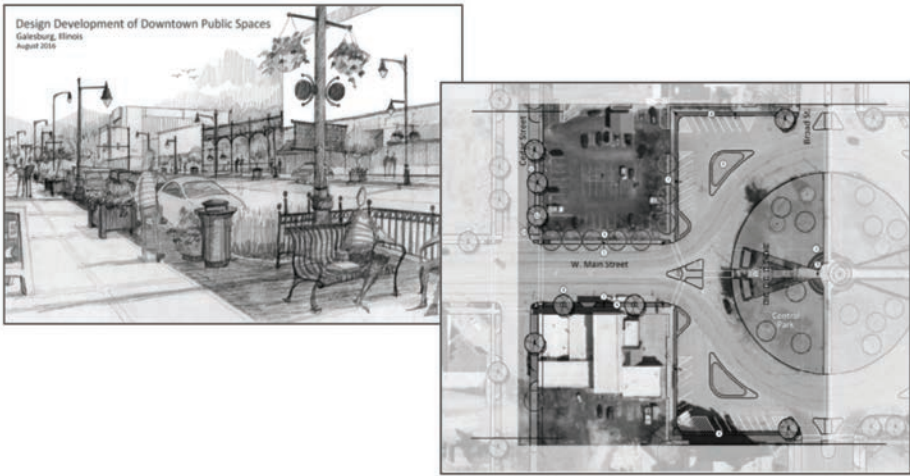
Top: Wide and well-maintained sidewalks on Main Street in Galesburg; Bottom: Passengers detrain the California Zephyr at Galesburg's Amtrak station, a short walk from downtown.

Largely a result of the intensity of rail activity, Galesburg has developed a more sophisticated approach to attracting and prioritizing funding for the creation of grade separations and “quiet zones” (i.e., crossings at which locomotive horns do not need to be sounded due to the presence of alternative safety measures) than most cities in Illinois. With a total of three grade separations costing more than \$57 million, it has made tremendous strides in completing projects due to its working partnerships with BNSF, support from the state government and active stakeholder involvement. The Bickerdyke Bridge, an overpass grade separation and quiet zone above BNSF rail tracks, was constructed on Seminary and Kellogg Street in 2014. The Reverend Jon A. Sibley Sr. Underpass, finished in 2018 (named for a citizen who was said to have spent his life building bridges between residents), was a particularly important milestone, putting East Main Street traffic below one of its busiest rail lines while also providing pedestrians with wider sidewalks. The city utilized funds from BNSF’s crossing closure incentives, the Illinois Commerce Commission and the Illinois Department of Transportation to help pay for quiet zone improvements. In 2015, Galesburg implemented a gas and electric utility tax to fund capital projects throughout the city. A 2019 project, the Park Plaza, is slated to draw upon this funding to further advance the downtown’s revitalization efforts.

According to Wayne Carl, Galesburg’s director of planning and public works, the grade separations have improved connectivity and public safety—outcomes considered critical to keeping downtown as the focal point of community life.²³ The closing of several retail stores at the once-popular Sandburg shopping mall in 2017 near the edge of town further contributed to the area’s vibrancy by redirecting shopping activity to downtown stores. Recognizing the difficulty of keeping this area well-patronized, the city has made sidewalk improvements, landscaping and citizen interaction with businesses, culture and entertainment the top priorities in its plan.

Galesburg turned to outside experts, the Springfield-based Massie & Associates firm, in 2016 to create its *Downtown Galesburg Strategic Plan for the Future*, which was the product of extensive citizen involvement.²⁴ Described as a “guiding document” for the 60-block area encompassing downtown and close-in neighborhoods, the plan weaves together transportation and business development goals with strategies for historic preservation and expansion of downtown living. Priorities include public art and supporting businesses such as a grocery store, a brewery, theaters and existing and proposed housing developments.

FIGURE 6 DESIGN DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR GALESBURG



Images from Galesburg's final 2016 report on design development for public spaces.

The “walking culture” that exists in Galesburg is a combination of historical factors and recent planning initiatives. Downtown Galesburg is in close proximity to apartments, condominiums and the 1,400 students who attend Knox College. The Seminary Street Historic Commercial District has 30 businesses and the Discovery Depot Children’s Museum (one of the city’s largest attractions), as well as several loft apartments on the street’s east side.²⁵ A building at 246 E. Main Street has become a mixed-use development success story, housing lofts and the Galesburg Community Foundation, which supports a wide range of local initiatives.²⁶

In accordance with the plan, the city has adopted best practices in sustainability to preserve and support national and state historic districts. Sections of Broad, Kellogg and Seminary streets are brick-paved, which slows vehicle traffic and recreates the historic aesthetic of downtown Galesburg. The primary sidewalks downtown are 14 feet wide. Walking and biking paths connect citizens to local parks and nearby Lake Storey, a popular recreational area, and the recently renovated Rotary Park has a new walking path around the park’s perimeter. Plants are suspended above sidewalks to provide shade and add a decorative element.

The city actively solicits public input through online surveys and public meetings. The Heart and Soul Project, implemented in 2015 through 2017, was a particularly large undertaking and allowed residents to submit ideas to enhance the city's future.²⁷ The county's public health department encourages residents to walk and bike as part of a well-being initiative while city fire chief Tom Simkins organizes a Safe Routes to School program that includes "walking school buses" (i.e., groups of students walking to and from school with chaperones). The city council has supported "Complete Streets" concepts to enhance both safety and economic development and has added bike lanes in previously slated reconstruction projects, such as along Fremont Street and North Seminary Street.

A third rail quiet zone was installed in August 2018 at a crossing near the Galesburg Railroad Museum, which is housed in a historic railroad edifice adjacent to the Amtrak station. The team working on Galesburg's comprehensive plan has recommended that the city consider converting Main Street into a three-lane road (it currently has four lanes) with bike lanes in each direction. A parks and recreation master plan is taking into account residents' desire to have more walking and biking trails.

Galesburg seeks to eventually connect all biking and walking trails to city sidewalks, making connectivity easier for those opting to avoid motor vehicles. Recognizing that retail sales throughout the region (and the country as a whole) have been soft in recent years, the community is striving to attract people by providing an ample mix of cultural, dining and retail amenities. For example, a plan is underway to erect a new Railroad Hall of Fame building in the heart of the city that will be within easy walking distance of the Amtrak station.

Galesburg's sophistication in downtown planning is rare for a city that is far removed from a major metropolitan area and has fewer than 40,000 residents. The city leverages technical tools, including quiet zones and a gas and electric utility tax, in ways uncommon among municipalities of its size. Goodwill between city hall and residents gives local planners the ability to experiment with strategies promoting pedestrian activity that are more commonly associated with affluent Chicago suburbs with much larger budgets.

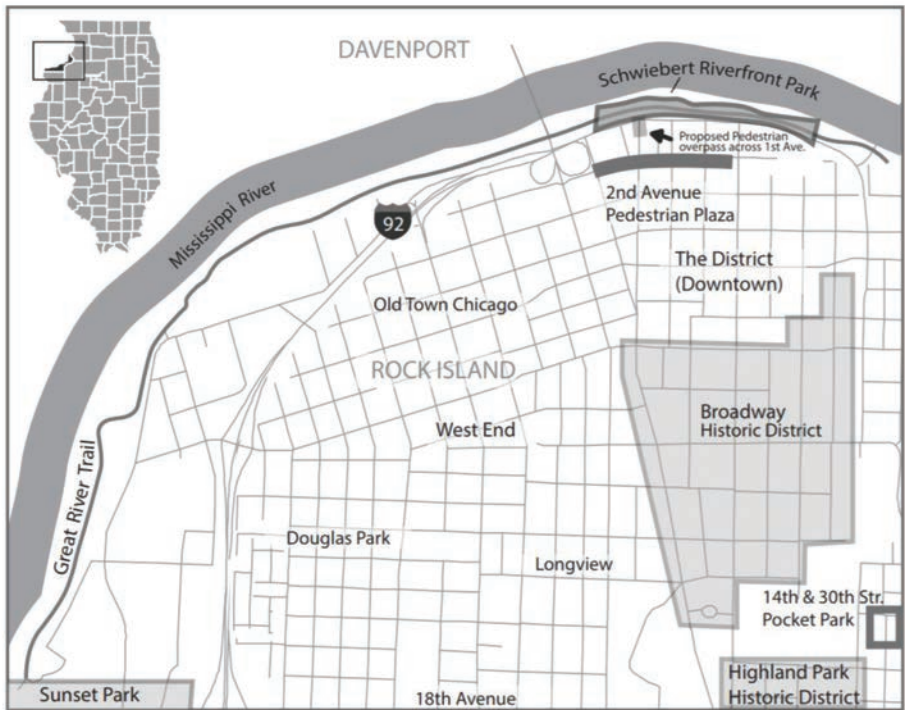
CASE 5 | ROCK ISLAND

STRENGTHENING HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND SERVING DIVERSE POPULATIONS

Rock Island supports the needs of its increasingly diverse population—including its sizable immigrant community—by investing heavily in projects that make it a more walkable city. Sidewalk reconstruction, new plazas and the inclusion of upper-floor housing in redevelopment projects have gradually transformed its downtown into a more vibrant and culturally-rich place. The payoffs of these efforts are evident in U.S. Census data: In 2016, 6.4% of Rock Island’s population used walking as their primary mode of transportation to work, an increase of 1.6% from 2012. By comparison, most cities of Rock Island’s size have only half that number (see Table 3 in the section on Galesburg).

Once having a Mississippi River waterfront lined with heavy industry—including a vast International Harvester manufacturing facility—in recent decades, Rock Island has struggled to make the transition to a more service-oriented economy. However, the transition has been abetted by the cooperative relationship that exists between municipalities of the Quad Cities, encompassed by Moline and Rock Island as well as Bettendorf and Davenport, Iowa, on economic development initiatives. World Relief, a humanitarian assistance organization with offices in Moline, has spurred the emergence of concentrations of immigrant communities in this metropolitan cluster. In Rock Island’s school district, more than 30 languages are spoken.²⁸ It is common for both adults and children in the immigrant communities to rely on walking as their primary mode of transportation.

The seven aldermen who comprise Rock Island’s city council have unanimously supported Complete Street policies, in which walkability is a preeminent goal. This governing body appointed Thomas Thomas as city manager in 2012 and Randy Tweet for this post in 2017, both of whom were committed to historic preservation and improvements to the downtown area popularly known as The District. Under Tweet’s leadership, the city council and city administration have made retail and community development top priorities, with each infrastructure project including a pedestrian component.

FIGURE 7**DOWNTOWN AND CLOSE-IN NEIGHBORHOODS OF ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS**

Rock Island's programs to enhance walkability have centered on its downtown ("The District") and historic districts. Schwiebert Riverfront Park, along the Mississippi River, is in close proximity to its central business district. Map by Stijn van der Slot, DePaul University

The cornerstones of these efforts are redevelopments that focus sharply on renovations of existing downtown buildings, most of which involve apartments or lofts on the top floors. The city's downtown revitalization plan, prepared by Chicago-based Houseal Lavigne Associates, and Renaissance Rock Island—the "umbrella name" for three organizations that support this effort—takes a positive view of public/private collaborations. Synergy between the undertaken projects has been a boon to The District, while in nearby residential neighborhoods there is a similar push to preserve older buildings that are well-situated to create pedestrian-oriented streetscapes. Roadway resurfacing is also tied to larger historic preservation goals with an eye toward walkability. When large-scale resurfacing projects are undertaken, for example, it is expected that sidewalk improvements will be part of the mix.

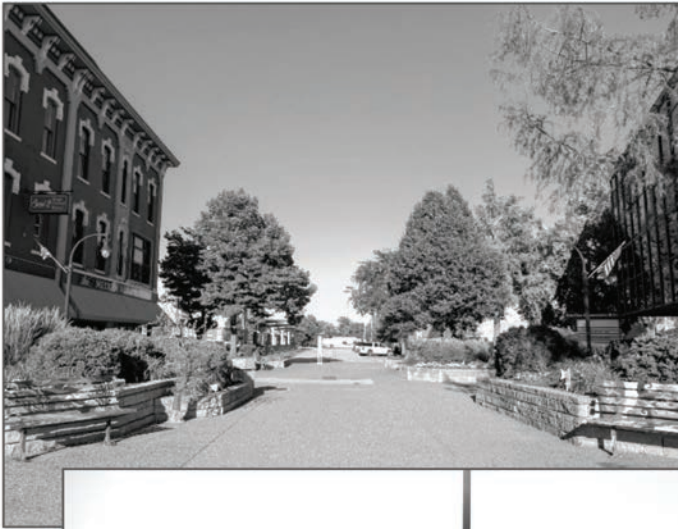
The groundwork for such strategies dates to the administration of Mark Schwiebert—mayor from 1989 to 2009—who, along with his staff, spent years working to relocate an underutilized casino to create an amenity that was ultimately named Schwiebert Riverfront Park in his honor. This 80-acre park opened in 2010 and offers striking vistas of the river, the Davenport skyline, and the historic railroad bridge that for a century served trains of the Rock Island Lines, the bygone major railroad once bearing the city’s name. This \$10 million amenity includes a performance pavilion, open green space and a splash park, giving walkers in The District another high-profile destination. The park was equipped with a landing dock in 2014.

Several more recent initiatives in The District exemplify the broad range of strategies being employed to make foot travel easier and more pleasant:

- When the demolition of a building at 14th and 30th streets was imminent, the city saw an opportunity to create more public open space and held numerous public meetings to solicit input about the best way to use the land. In response, the city attended to the building’s removal for the creation of a “pocket park” with murals, street furniture, bike racks and parking for food trucks, which quickly became popular upon completion.
- On 1st Avenue, east of downtown, efforts are now underway to create a two-way bike path, a railroad quiet zone and crosswalk “bump outs” to make street crossing shorter and safer for pedestrians.
- The city has set out to create a woonerf or “living street” on which all travel is reduced to walking speed, and the roadway is raised to be even with the sidewalks. Woonerf is a Dutch word, derived from the widespread application of this technique in the Netherlands. Although this novel idea has yet to receive the needed funding (a 2017 bid for state transportation funding was unsuccessful), Tweet and his staff continue to actively pursue the idea. Even if the woonerf is not built, The District is much more alive today than just a few years ago, particularly in the area around the reduced-traffic pedestrian plaza along 2nd Avenue from 17th to 18th Street.

FIGURE 8

PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED SPACES IN ROCK ISLAND



Top: The Second Avenue Pedestrian Plaza, notable for its extensive landscaping; Bottom: Photographers gather at sundown at the Schwiebert Riverfront Park.

FIGURE 9

AN ILLUSTRATION FROM ROCK ISLAND'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK SHOWING ITS EMPHASIS ON PLACEMAKING

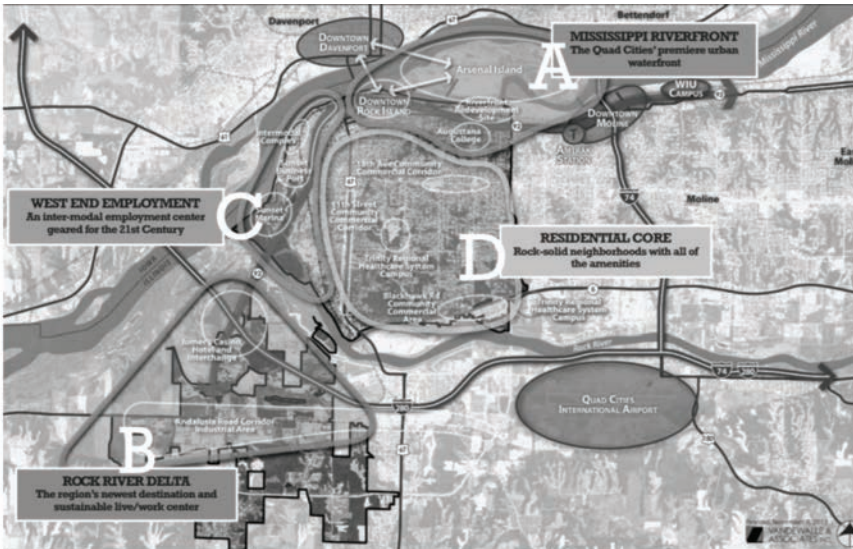


Image from Rock Island's 2014 Strategic Development Plan

Another strategy has been to increase city maintenance and repair of sidewalks. Prior to Tweet's term in office, the city offered a 50/50 sidewalk and curb replacement program, allowing homeowners and businesses to pay just half the cost of sidewalk resurfacing adjacent to their property; the city paid for the rest, up to \$50,000. Tweet's policy, however, is to fully fund such reconstructions, eliminating the match requirement while also making more dollars available. While the city typically completed 10 to 12 sidewalk projects annually in the old program, it now completes closer to 45 per annum. According to Tweet, the city has improved 134 locations in the last three years.

An emphasis on walking is also evident in the city's Safe Routes to School programs, which include engineering, education and encouragement components. At Longfellow Elementary School in 2018, the city provided approximately \$250,000 toward crosswalk, curb and sidewalk improvements to create a safer walking environment. Two other institutions, Frances Willard Elementary and Rock Island Academy, created walking and biking routes for student convenience and safety. Yard signs are routinely set up to spread awareness of the routes and reinforce safety practices.

Municipal staff in Rock Island consider making their city a vibrant and walking-oriented city closely tied to increasing its mainstream tourism appeal. In order to weave together its historic districts and expansive downtown more effectively, the city envisions creating a streetscape plan, one that may draw upon Complete Street principles. As these examples show, Rock Island stands out for its visionary efforts to fuse historical preservation, aesthetic improvement and pedestrian convenience to give its community a distinctive identity.

WHAT THESE CASES TEACH US

These five cases are instructive due to their similarities: In each instance, municipal leaders and community advocates adopted new ways of thinking about problems stemming from almost total reliance on private motor-vehicle travel. Each city created policies with the backing of coalitions of stakeholders and maintained nearly continuous communication with businesses, civic boosters and residents as a whole. Outside consultants were brought in to help prioritize capital projects and stretch limited budgets. The communities understood the importance of prioritizing good design to ensure that their investments had long-lasting effects.

Building public support proved critical to overcoming the obstacles. Few of the communities had the benefit of well-established advocacy organizations pushing for sustainable forms of travel. Urbana complemented the plans being pursued by Champaign and the university to maximize the value of its investments. Charleston leveraged informal efforts made by advocates and recreationalists while cultivating public support for an ambitious bike trail plan. Galesburg successfully contended with a street system riddled with railroad tracks that belonged to a carrier with headquarters more than 700 miles away. Rock Island improved its waterfront and studied the needs of its growing immigrant populations before moving ahead with ambitious programs to promote walkability. Peoria shifted its thinking away from providing transit service primarily for transporting workers to and from manufacturing plants and moved toward diversifying its service, including adding bus runs on Sundays.

Each of the five cities capitalized on the goodwill between the city council, city staff, development entities, and in the case of Peoria, a metropolitan planning organization able to represent an entire cluster of municipalities. The public input process was not formulaic or undertaken as a necessary evil. The

testimonials we heard from each official also made it clear that community leaders excelled in engaging constituents in a frank and interactive manner.

These cases are filled with examples of how years of work to build trust and goodwill can pay dividends. Urbana's staff cooperated with Champaign's staff and university leaders to create a culture conducive to long-range bicycle travel. Charleston acted on the friendships and trust between its city council, advocacy groups and a sporting goods store to create trails that improved access to its natural areas. Peoria used its long history of support for transit to sustain bus service even after precipitous ridership drops when most cities opted to make cuts. Galesburg worked closely with residents to build excitement around programs to transform its downtown into a more pedestrian-friendly place, while Rock Island worked in a highly sophisticated way with organizations long committed to urban redevelopment.

These five cities have come a long way in their bid to make it easier to walk, bike and use transit. This not only increases mobility and fosters economic development, but it could also lay out a path for boosting public health and safety. Each city deserves recognition as a case study of excellence.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ To read more about fatality and serious-injury reports, visit <https://reportcard.cuuats.org/summary/>

² Interview with Craig Shonkwiler, July 23, 2018

³ More information about the Green Street MCOE project can be found at <https://www.urbanainninois.us/node/7242>

⁴ View the 2016 Urbana Bicycle Master Plan and learn more about the Green Loop and Orange Connections trails on pages 192–193 at https://www.urbanainninois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/2016_Urbana_Bicycle_Master_Plan_0.pdf

⁵ For more information on the plan, visit <https://www.urbanainninois.us/bicycle-master-plan>

⁶ For information about the dockless program, visit <http://www.news-gazette.com/news/local/2018-08-16/c-us-first-shareable-bikes-expected-hit-streets-start-ui-semester.html>

⁷ To view Urbana's Bicycle Friend Community report card, visit <https://www.urbanainninois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/bfc-report-card.pdf>

- ⁸ For more information, visit <http://www.prairiecycleclub.org/>
- ⁹ Interview with Steve Pamperin and Brendan Lynch, July 23, 2018
- ¹⁰ For more information, visit the Charleston County website at https://www.charlestoncounty.org/departments/zoning-planning/CompPlan_history.php
- ¹¹ Interview with Steve Pamperin and Brendan Lynch, July 23, 2018
- ¹² For more information, visit https://www.charlestonillinois.org/vertical/sites/%7B48D19AF4-26A9-444F-A5B9-99631D71D5F2%7D/uploads/Trail_Map_2.1.pdf
- ¹³ To view the plan created by Ride Illinois for Charleston and Mattoon, visit <http://rideillinois.org/bike-plans-charleston-mattoon/>
- ¹⁴ For more information about the Governor's Hometown Award, visit <https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/serve/Pages/GHTA.aspx>
- ¹⁵ Federal Transit Database, June 12, 2018
- ¹⁶ Federal Transit Database, June 12, 2018
- ¹⁷ Interview with Doug Roelfs, July 24, 2018
- ¹⁸ For more information about bus stops, see page 57: <https://tricityrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/Envision-HOI-1.pdf>
- ¹⁹ To learn more about CountyLink, visit <http://www.ridecitylink.org/countylink>
- ²⁰ For more information about Peoria's regional collaborations, visit <https://tricityrpc.org/>
- ²¹ Interview with Eric Miller, July 24, 2018
- ²² To read about the Heart of Illinois Long Range Transportation Plan, visit <https://tricityrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/Envision-HOI-1.pdf>
- ²³ Interview with Wayne Carl, July 24, 2018
- ²⁴ Galesburg's downtown design development plan can be found at http://www.ci.galesburg.il.us/assets/1/22/Galesburg_Design_Development_of_Downtown_Public_Spaces_Final_Report.pdf
- ²⁵ To read more about the historic Seminary Street district, visit <https://seminarystreet.com/history.aspx>
- ²⁶ Public response to the Galesburg loft apartments was recorded in the following article: <http://www.galesburg.com/x425603874/Loft-apartments-draw-an-overwhelming-response>
- ²⁷ To learn more about the Galesburg Heart and Soul project, visit <http://www.galesburgheartandsoul.com/>
- ²⁸ Interview with Randy Tweet, July 24, 2018. Read more about Renaissance Rock Island at <http://www.rocksolidrockisland.com/who-we-are/>

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