



NASHVILLE AREA

Metropolitan Planning Organization

MEDIA RELEASE

Second Field Count of Bicyclists & Pedestrians Confirms that Many Middle Tennesseans are Walking and Bicycling

MPO leads volunteers in second region-wide data collection effort; helps with National Bike/Ped Documentation Project

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Nashville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization has just completed its second unannounced region-wide count of bicyclists and pedestrians, documenting approximately 5,700 bicycle and pedestrian trips at 23 sampled locations throughout five counties on Sept. 13. The numbers are up nearly 50% from the 2009 counts. Middle Tennessee's counts are a volunteer-driven project, coordinated by the MPO and part of the National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project – a nationwide project to provide data to help planners and policy makers better understand the need for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

“Our 2009 and 2011 counts just provide a snapshot of pedestrian and bicycle traffic on one given weekday, but they're important for several reasons,” said Leslie Meehan, the MPO's senior planner for walking and bicycling. “They provide insightful data that we can reference when proposing or seeking to fund bicycle and pedestrian transportation projects in our MPO planning area, and we're also contributing to a national study that compiles our data with that of 100-plus communities across the nation. We are impressed that the number of bicycle and pedestrian trips is trending upwards, which we believe demonstrates a desire to walk or bicycle to a destination. These facilities are important for everyone, including car drivers, since even drivers are pedestrians as they walk from their cars to their final destinations.”

Non-motorized transportation planners have historically lacked a uniform way to document facility usage and demand. Without accurate and consistent figures on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure demand and usage, it is difficult to measure and justify the benefits of investing in facilities like sidewalks and bikeways, or understand what factors influence trips made by walking and biking – especially when compared to the copious amounts of data that exist for modes like the automobile.

The National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project assumes that, in order to estimate existing and future bicycle and pedestrian demand and activity, agencies like MPOs must start conducting counts and surveys in a consistent, standardized manner – similar to those used by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) for motor vehicle models.

Both the 2009 and 2011 counts will help the MPO to: build the region's database of bicycle and pedestrian count information; understand the facility needs and uses of bicyclists and pedestrians; gather information on potential trends for walking and bicycling trips (by conducting counts at the same locations year-over-year); and share data with the National Bicycle & Pedestrian Documentation Project.

Nineteen percent of the people counted by trained volunteers were on greenways; the others were walking and bicycling on sidewalks and streets. The number of trips taken on sidewalks and bicycle lanes increased significantly, suggesting that more people are using these roadway facilities for daily transportation and commuting trips. The top count location overall was Belmont Boulevard and Bernard Avenue near Belmont University in Nashville, where volunteers noted over 1,300 trips: 1,177 pedestrian trips and 127 cyclist trips. The counts were conducted in Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson and Wilson counties during peak commute times [7:00-9:00 a.m., and then 4:00-6:00 p.m.] on Sept. 13, 2011.

A majority of the count locations had a 50% or more increase in bicycle and pedestrian trips over the 2009 counts. The intersection of Middle Tennessee Boulevard and East Main Street in Murfreesboro had a 92% increase in trips. Bicycle

lanes were recently added to Middle Tennessee Boulevard and there is a new walkable retail development at the intersection with several restaurants and shops, and new townhomes are located just down the street. The intersection of Mallory Lane and Liberty Pike near Centennial High School and a new Whole Foods in Franklin had an 81% increase in bicycle and pedestrian trips. Cumberland Drive and South Greenwood Street in Lebanon next to Cumberland University had a 75% increase in trips and South Water Avenue and West Main Street in downtown Gallatin had an astounding 383% increase in trips. Downtown Gallatin recently underwent a complete streetscaping project that includes pedestrian-friendly street crossings with brick paver crosswalks, as well as decorative elements such as landscaping and light poles.

“Fifty percent of trips taken in U.S. metro areas are three miles or less and nearly thirty percent of trips are one mile or less. The average person can walk one mile in about twenty minutes and can bicycle the same distance in less than half that time. Creating safe, convenient routes for those who want to walk or bicycle for short trips –to work, school, or elsewhere– is a critical component of any metropolitan region’s transportation plan,” added Meehan.

One-third of Americans don’t own cars, and 12 percent of all trips in America are by walking or bicycling. And despite the fact that 55 percent of Americans want to bike more than they do now, drive less and walk more, 65 percent of trips under one mile are still taken by automobile due to inadequate facilities for active transportation. With Tennessee now ranked fourth in the nation for obesity rates (up from second in 2009), the MPO seeks to pursue infrastructure policies that reflect a desire for healthier options to get around communities, including safer, more convenient means to walk or cycle for routine trips.

Investments in the non-motorized modes help increase access to transit, provide safe and reliable transportation choices for trips of short distances, promote physical activity, improve air quality and lower the region’s overall carbon footprint, and encourage infill redevelopment of existing centers and corridors that may be nearing capacity on the supporting roadway infrastructure. These outcomes support the goals of the MPO’s 2035 Regional Transportation Plan, which has three policy priorities: 1) A Bold New Vision for Mass Transit, 2) Support for Active Transportation and Walkable Communities, and 3) Preserving and Enhancing Existing Roadways. The 2035 Plan programs Federal transportation dollars for regional transportation projects in the counties of Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Wilson and Williamson as well as portions of Maury and Robertson Counties.

For more information on MPO efforts to support a regional transportation system that’s safer and more inclusive of active trip-making, visit NashvilleMPO.org/BikePed.

About the Nashville Area MPO:

The Nashville Area MPO is the federally-designated transportation planning agency for over 2800 sq. mi. and more than 1.5 million people throughout Davidson, Rutherford, Sumner, Williamson, Wilson, and parts of Maury and Robertson counties. Serving as a regional partnership among the U.S. DOT, Tennessee DOT, local elected leadership, local planning and public works directors, the business community, and citizens across the five-plus county planning area, the MPO leads in the development of the region’s long-range transportation plan and short-range Transportation Improvement Program, and contributes to ongoing conversations about issues such as land use, economic development, climate change and the environment, safety and security, and health.

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