Making Montgomery County More Walkable
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Since kicking off in September 2019, the Montgomery County Pedestrian Master Plan team has been working on many exciting projects as part of our master planning efforts. **The Pedestrian Plan** (PMP) is the County's first countywide master plan to improve the pedestrian environment for people walking and rolling (using a mobility device). When complete, the PMP will help the County prioritize necessary improvements to sidewalks, paths and crossings while making policy, design, and programming recommendations to create systemic change in how pedestrian spaces are constructed and maintained.

To provide the most appropriate recommendations, staff are working to understand all aspects of the pedestrian experience in the County, including: the quality of sidewalks and trails, current pedestrian travel behavior, locations of pedestrian involved crashes, and identifying new pedestrian connections. These efforts have led the project team to develop the interesting data collection tools and analytic approaches discussed below. These tools may be helpful to you as you work to improve pedestrian conditions in your own community.

Pedestrian Level of Comfort

The Pedestrian Level of Comfort (PLOC) is an approach to understanding the relative comfort levels of sidewalks, trails, and crossings. This approach will sound familiar to people who have interacted with the Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) methodology. In fact, the PMP team developed the PLOC methodology after successfully using the LTS approach as part of the 2018 Countywide Bicycle Master Plan.

Developing the PLOC methodology was necessary so staff could provide more helpful insights into the quality of the pedestrian environment by understand sidewalk and trail locations, as well as pedestrian comfort levels. The complete methodology can be found **here**.

The PMP team is collecting the data required for this analysis using ArcGIS, the County's aerial imagery, and Google Streetview. A snapshot of the status of PLOC countywide can be seen on the **interactive map**.

Pedestrian Shortcut Map

Through conversations with community members, it became clear that there are many informal pedestrian connections that people use every day to get from Point A to Point B as quickly as possible. The PMP team was interested in identifying these connections so, through private development or the County's Capital Improvement Program, many of them can eventually be turned into sidewalks and trails – made accessible and safe for more people.

The team developed an **interactive map** where community members could draw the connections they used, upload pictures and descriptions, and up-vote or down-vote other submissions. This way, we were able to identify many more connections than otherwise. To date, over 500 connections have been shared.

Student Travel Tally

The Pedestrian Master Plan will establish a goal to increase student walk rates to school. Understanding how many students walk to school today is essential to outlining how to encourage more to do so. Staff worked closely with Montgomery County Public Schools to adapt the **National Center for Safe Routes to School Student Travel Tally** so it could be easily completed at all public schools. Our student survey in late 2019/ early 2020 received over 70,000 responses.

With the survey responses and the Pedestrian Level of Comfort data, staff will be able to look at the walk-to-school data and sort schools into four different groups:

1. High walk mode share and comfortable Pedestrian Level of Comfort
2. High walk mode share and uncomfortable Pedestrian Level of Comfort
3. Low walk mode share and comfortable Pedestrian Level of Comfort
4. Low walk mode share and uncomfortable Pedestrian Level of Comfort

Countywide Pedestrian Survey

For people interested in pedestrian planning, it is no secret that data on pedestrian activity and perception is often spotty. To address some of the gaps in pedestrian data availability, the PMP team contracted with a consultant to conduct a countywide statistically-valid pedestrian survey. This survey went out to 60,000 households in late 2020 with a unique link to a survey website.

We were fortunate to have a 4.1% response rate which worked out to a 2% margin of error at the countywide level. Respondents were asked about how often they walked, how long they walked, their walk purposes, what improvements would make them more likely to walk, how COVID-19 affected their walking trips, and many other questions. You can find the survey report **here**. These data will provide important insights for the PMP's existing conditions report and will identify recommendations to prioritize to increase the amount of walking. This will also act as a benchmark for future surveys to help understand how the County has made progress on achieving Pedestrian Master Plan goals.

As the Pedestrian Master Plan progresses, the project team will draw on these existing conditions efforts to make valuable recommendations supported by data. Creating a strong existing conditions foundation will ultimately create a better plan and a more walkable Montgomery County.