

Think Regional - Act Local

Walking Infrastructure Matters on Main Street

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Other posts by
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Walking Around Main Street

SEMCOG's latest Main Street seminar, [Creating Safe and Livable Main Streets](#), covered SEMCOG tools and resources that can be used to improve the walkability and mobility in commercial areas. This includes the SEMCOG/MDOT [Multimodal Tool](#) and the [Transportation Alternatives Program](#).

A quality main street is a place that invites you to stay for a while and meander. Whether you are stopping in for one thing, or staying for a few hours, the proximity of shops and amenities and the ease of access between them is a defining characteristic of a main street area. Most successful downtowns have shops, restaurants, and some public amenities, such as a plaza or library, all within a short walking distance.

Historic downtowns and main streets are generally already somewhat walkable places, due to the period in which they were constructed. However *aspirational main streets and downtowns* – places where the community desire is to *create* a main street – tend to have less pedestrian infrastructure. As well, buildings and uses tend to be more spread apart, creating a less walkable district. These factors take away from the “main street environment” that could exist, removing both convenience and liveliness.

For this reason, planning for all modes of transportation, especially walking, is essential for main street districts and downtown areas. In fact, successful transformations of districts often include the transformation of the public right of way to include wider sidewalks, buffers that separate pedestrians from traffic, and shorter crossings. An example case study of this is the recent transformation of Livernois between Clarita and 8 Mile in Detroit.



Livernois Avenue streetscape, City of Detroit

Keys to Pedestrian Success on Main Street





City of Farmington with tree buffers for the sidewalks

Keys to pedestrian success in a main street district include the following:

- Speeds of no more than 30 mph
- Wide sidewalks of at least ten feet in key areas
- Frequent crosswalks, with minimal crossing distances
- A buffer between the sidewalk and traffic, such as a planted strip with trees or parked cars

SEMCOG's Multimodal Tool

SEMCOG's Multimodal tool is useful for planning improvements to a main street or downtown area. This tool can be set to various land use contexts, such as Rural, Suburban, Urban Walkable, Small Town Hamlet or Village Commercial Corridor, and Main Street. Jenya Abramovich, AICP, SEMCOG Transportation Modeling and Mobility Planner III, explained how to use the tool in a main street context. She gave two examples, including Huron Avenue in Port Huron and Woodward Avenue in Royal Oak and shared that although all communities want streets that are walkable and safe, trade-offs are needed because there are many demands for the limited space in the right of way, especially in most main street contexts.



Huron Ave Alternative Four

Within the tool, users can choose how to prioritize users, such as pedestrians, bikes, automobiles, and freight. Users can add amenities, such as buffers, medians, on-street parking, and street trees. This tool, which is free and available online, can be used in corridor studies or grant applications.

SEMGOG's Transportation Alternatives Program Grant



Rochester Hills; sidewalk buffers and crosswalk improvements

Brian Pawlik, SEMCOG Transportation & Mobility Planner III, shared about the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), a competitive grant program that distributes approximately \$10 million in federal funding to local transportation projects in the SEMGOC region each Fiscal Year. Eligible projects include facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, such as crosswalks, sidewalk improvements, bike lanes, and Green Street Projects, which address roadway safety and complete streets elements while also reducing roadway runoff or reducing localized flooding. TAP funds are available to Act 51 agencies (which include county road agencies, cities, villages and transit agencies) and require a 20% match. Projects that meet regionally significant outcomes, such as projects that connect regional corridors and trails are likely to be prioritized. Examples shared include Bedford Township, Allen Park and Rochester Hills.

Learn More

We think of roads as infrastructure meant to get from people from one place to another, but in a main street district, the emphasis is not on getting *through* the district, but on the quality of the place when you are *in* the district. To learn more about SEMCOG resources and tools that were presented by Abramovich and Pawlik, and see the case studies, watch the [webinar recording](#). For additional information, you can also download the [TAP Applicant Guide](#) or the [Multimodal Tool User Guide](#).



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