

Reviving the I-275 Bikeway: The Potential for Community Enhancement



An Interim Report
March, 2006

In the Summer of 2005, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Michigan Chapter, in conjunction with the League of Michigan Bicyclists, began a study of the Bikeway with funding from the GreenWays Initiative of the Community Foundation for Southeastern Michigan. The study consists of two phases: 1) Consultation with individual communities on the feasibility of making connections to the Bikeway, and their overall impression of it; and 2) Forming an organized structure to provide for coordinated communication between communities and MDOT Metro Region for the long-term sustainability of the Bikeway. This report summarizes the first phase of the effort in Wayne and Oakland Counties. The University Region of Michigan Department of Transportation, which covers Monroe County, has since expressed interest in restoring the Monroe portion of the Bikeway. The type of information included here on Wayne and Oakland communities will be collected for Monroe before the inventory is taken and added to this report as an addendum.

While this report was authored by Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance (formerly Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Michigan Chapter), the League of Michigan Bicyclists and Landscape Architects and Planners, Inc. contributed to the collection of data contained herein by participating in the community meetings and collaborating towards the production of the GIS map of the I-275 corridor.

What is the I-275 Bikeway?

The I-275 Bikeway is a 40+ mile 8 foot-wide paved asphalt path which runs the length of the I-275 freeway on the west side of the Detroit metropolitan area. It is situated at least 30 feet from the freeway and in most cases is barricaded from adjacent landowners by fencing. From north to south, the bikeway passes through the communities of Novi, Farmington Hills in Oakland County, Livonia, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Wayne, Van Buren Township, Romulus, Huron Township in Wayne County and Ash Township and Frenchtown Township in Monroe County. Adjacent communities which do not actually have the bikeway running through it, but are close enough for a nonmotorized connection include: Northville Township, Plymouth, Westland, Belleville, and Flat Rock.

The Significance

The value of the I-275 Bikeway as a contiguous corridor for nonmotorized transportation and recreation has increased over the last few years as multi-use trails near various points along the bikeway have been developed, and more are in a conceptual stage. A high quality, well-maintained 40 mile artery connecting all the above communities would provide for the recreational and transportation needs of a wide diversity of users, such as bicyclists, runners, in-line skaters, hikers, walkers, physically challenged persons, cross-country skiers, and others. It is a strategically important segment of the statewide and regional trail networks as indicated on maps and plans published by the Michigan DNR, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance and various Southeast Michigan greenways plans.

While many see a high risk for crime, a restored and improved Bikeway, which is promoted by communities, will attract increased trail use, thereby increasing “eyes and ears” on the trail and the deterrence of crime. This has been proven in trail studies all across the nation.

The I-275 Bikeway is a key north-south component of the Southeast Michigan nonmotorized network.



The Current Status

Michigan Department of Transportation restored approximately 9 miles of trail in the last few years which has led to a renewed interest in the restoration of the whole corridor as the main north-south spine in the Metro Region nonmotorized network. At the same time, Rails to Trails Conservancy Michigan Chapter (now Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance) and the League of Michigan Bicyclists began to hear from their members that a restored Bikeway as a main spine was needed to enhance and connect with the other trail activity happening in the area. A 2004 inventory of the trail done by these two groups in June, 2004 revealed the immensity of the job at hand. Some 65 waypoints and 104 pictures were taken to capture the extent of work needed.

The MDOT Metro and University Regions will take an engineering inventory of all the renovations that need to be done, estimate what they will cost, and also determine the feasibility and cost of some of the new improvements cited here.

The Bikeway has been severely encroached by vegetation.



Community Connections

After an all-communities meeting in August, 2005, which introduced communities to the project, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, the League of Michigan Bicyclists and a professional landscape architect from Landscape Architects and Planners, Inc. met in September and October, 2005 with representatives from each community either individually, or in groups of two-three communities until all the I-275 Bikeway communities in Wayne and Oakland counties were consulted. To help prepare for the meetings and get perspective on the status of each communities' nonmotorized transportation planning, a list of twelve questions was distributed prior to the meeting:

1. Where are any existing multi-use trails and/or sidepaths?
2. Do you have any on-road bicycle facilities?
 - bike lanes
 - designated bike routes
 - roads with wide paved shoulders
3. Does your community have a nonmotorized transportation plan?
4. Have your staff or elected officials proposed any new bicycle facilities – on- or off-road?
5. Do you have publicly owned land within a 2-mile radius of the I-275 bike path?
6. Do you have any new developments going in within a 2-mile radius of the I-275 bike path? Are any of the developers community-minded?
7. Do you have an elementary or middle school within 2 miles of the bike path?
8. Where do most of the citizens live in your community?
9. Where is the biggest density of population in your community?
10. What are the biggest engineering obstacles to connecting to the I-275 bike path?
11. What are your community's top concerns about connecting to the I-275 bike path?
12. What are the lowest ADT roads within a 2-mile radius of the I-275 bike path?

The survey answers, along with individual consultations with each community, a review of nonmotorized plans, and some windshield checks of various segments of the Bikeway provided the information that follows. It is a snapshot of community attitudes about the I-275 bikeway and its proposed restoration, the present conditions along the bikeway, and new improvements needed as seen from a “first glance” perspective. The future I-275 Bikeway community advisory body will focus with MDOT on the details of implementing these opportunities. Many thanks to the following individuals who took the time to answer our questions and discuss their community plans and perspectives with us:

Novi: *Timothy Schmitt, Planner*

Mark Spencer, Planner

Farmington Hills: *Dana Whinnery, Asst. City Manager*

Dale Countegan, Director, Planning & Community Development

David Boyer, Director of Special Services

Northville Township: *Jennifer Miller, Staff Planner*

Livonia: *Robert Schron, City Engineer*

Plymouth Township: *James Anulewicz, Director of Public Service*

Susan Vignoe, Public Service

Westland: *Kevin Buford, Dept. of Public Works*

Canton Township: *Brad Sharp, Parks Manager*

Todd Zilincik, P.E., Engineer

Wayne: *Peter McNerney, Community Development Director*

Van Buren Township: *Dan Swallow, Environmental Director*

Romulus: *Carl Brooks, Dept. of Public Works*

Kristin Irwin, Parks and Recreation

George Simko, Dept. of Public Works

Huron Township: *Linda Spangler, Huron Township Trustee*

Anita Twardesky, Chair, Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative

It is interesting to note a few general observations about the Bikeway that most had in common:

- All felt the revitalization of the I-275 Bikeway deserves to receive some attention because of all the trail activity happening at both ends and along the corridor. The Bikeway could serve as the main spine connecting all these efforts
- Most want to see one body doing the coordination of the whole trail, rather than individual piecemeal efforts. They also want to see a sound plan for the improvement and restoration of the whole I-275 Bikeway.
- Most had some form of nonmotorized plans at various stages of implementation, many of which included good potential connections to the Bikeway.
- All felt the Bikeway had problems with dangerous crossings, fear of crime, lack of signage, lack of access for emergency vehicles, drainage problems, and lack of maintenance in addition to needing the surface restored.

This report does not highlight the many restoration needs since those will be taken into account in the MDOT engineering inventory.

Oakland County Community Perspectives

Oakland County officials have been discussing ways of connecting their southwestern communities to the regional trail network, Oak Routes, and particularly the main artery which traverses across the county, from South Lyon to Rochester. An M-5 corridor connection to the I-275 Bikeway appears to be the best option. Further consultation with the Oakland Trails Advisory Council within Oakland County Parks and Recreation and MDOT will help to flesh out these plans.

Novi *Population: 51,934*

Novi's recently adopted master plan has a section on nonmotorized transportation. As part of the adoption process, they requested public input via a survey. Survey results showed 100 percent support for more trails and greenways, and a majority indicated support for a dedicated funding source to build and maintain trails. A few mentioned that connections to the Bikeway were needed. City planners are very enthused about extending the Bikeway north along Meadowbrook Rd. and M-5 to trail connections in north Oakland County, and there have been discussions with Oakland County and MDOT Metro Region about that.

Needed Connections to I-275: Potential connecting routes from I-275 could lead to their community sports park at 8 Mile and Mayberry and also to the downtown along Griswold. Sidewalk connections are needed along 9 Mile. Ten Mile Rd. has a wide shoulder in one direction, which could serve some of the nonmotorized traffic.

Dangerous Crossing to Remedy: Eight Mile Road may need a grade-separated crossing.

The Eight Mile Road Intersection Is a Hazard!



Farmington Hills *Population: 82,111*



Directional Signage is Needed

Farmington Hills has a nonmotorized advisory committee, including public members, that meets 3-4 times per year. Like Novi, they too would like to see the Bikeway connect to the trail system in north Oakland County. Their nonmotorized focus has been on completing sidewalks along all the major mile roads in the city. They foresee opportunities with the Bikeway for corporate sponsorship for signage, for both history and nature interpretation as well as for directions to destinations and safety precautions.

Needed Connections to I-275: Since most of the residents live on the opposite side of I-275 from the pathway, bridge improvements for non-motorized traffic are needed at the major mile roads. Eleven Mile could provide a connection to their community complex, Cossack Center. The Bikeway could use a new access at Ten Mile which passes overhead, perhaps via a connecting link on restaurant property. Nine Mile is the most accommodating connection with gaps in the sidewalk due to be finished soon, but the at-grade crossing needs a marked crosswalk.

Wayne County Communities

There are several Wayne County communities, Northville, Plymouth, Canton, Livonia, and Westland, in the midst of a Western Wayne Transportation Study. The study will have a nonmotorized transportation component, which could include the I-275 Bikeway.

Wayne County currently provides some maintenance along the I-275 Bikeway but not in all communities. All communities currently pay a Wayne County park millage, but not all communities have a Wayne County park in their jurisdiction. Some discussion ensued about the millage which could be used for the I-275 Bikeway where there are no parks.

Northville Township

Population: 21,036

Northville Township has a nonmotorized plan, that mainly consists of sidewalks and trails that connect private subdivisions. They also have an ordinance that requires developers to construct master plan nonmotorized connections when they develop their property, and the Township works to fill gaps in-between developments.

Needed Connections to I-275: A new mixed use complex on the Hawthorn site on Haggerty Rd. offers potential for connection for both commercial and residential access to and from the Bikeway. Schoolcraft College represents a potential new access point since it abuts the Bikeway. There has been discussion in the past about connecting to Hines Parkway at an additional point, perhaps along Six Mile or Seven Mile. The sidewalks along Seven Mile are sporadic, and only a short gap exists to make the connection on Six Mile Rd., but access across the bridge over I-275 from the east side is difficult. The Bikeway crosses underneath Five Mile, but a new connection here could provide access to an ice cream shop, a golf dome and a restaurant.

Livonia

Population: 98,936

Livonia officials observed that citizens do more walking than biking, with a majority of the children riding within the subdivisions. They have no nonmotorized plan, but they do already have quite a few multi-use trails within their five parks (Rotary, Bicentennial, Meis, Tiffany, and Clements Circle). All but one subdivision is located on the opposite side of I-275 from the Bikeway, so their residents would all have a problem accessing the Bikeway if the bridge does not accommodate non-motorized use. Only the bridge at Seven Mile provides this kind of access, and, fortunately, there are sidewalks on both sides of Seven Mile Rd.

Needed Connections to I-275: Sidewalk completion along Six Mile Rd. could provide access to a concentration of restaurants at Newburg Rd.

Dangerous Crossing!: Eight Mile Rd. crossing

Plymouth Township

Population: 27,798

Township officials did a nonmotorized analysis several years ago and identified goals to connect to the Hines parkway at different points and to significant destinations, with an emphasis on utilizing existing trails. They also focus on connecting sidewalks along major mile roads.

Needed Connections to I-275: The connection from the Bikeway where it connects with the Hines Drive bikepath is not clearly marked. In fact, it is impossible to tell where the path picks up again on the east side of I-275 from the Parkway. Also, the Lakepoint Soccer Park at Haggerty and M-14 was proposed for a connection several years ago, and MDOT approved it, but opposition from adjacent neighbors curtailed the proposal. This would be an ideal connection as a rest stop with bathrooms, water and a connection for safe routes to the New Morning School. Also, opening the fence in several areas along M-14 would provide adjacent residents access to the Bikeway. Ann Arbor Road has a new large shopping center and condominium complex under construction just ½ mile from the Bikeway, but the bridge over I-275 is not pedestrian/bike friendly.



The Bikeway route in Hines Park picks up again somewhere in those trees up ahead.

Westland

Population: 86,602

Westland is located on the opposite side of I-275 from the Bikeway, but sees a benefit for their citizens to be connected to it. Both Westland and Canton Township officials agree the William P. Holiday Forest and Wildlife Preserve may offer potential for a trailhead, both as access to the Bikeway and also to the hiking trails within the woods. The Friends of Holiday Park noted they would want to be included in discussions about this.

Canton Township

Population: 76,366

Canton Township has proposed new trails in their master parks and recreation plan that offer potential to connect to the Bikeway. One is along an ITC utility corridor, which connects to Walker Winter Elementary School on Michigan between I-275 and Hannan. The township has multi-use trails available at Flodin and Heritage Parks. Canton Township is also the site of the only MDOT rest stop which has the Bikeway running through it, complete with ample bicycle racks and well-maintained landscaping. However, the many residences adjacent to the rest stop are fenced off from accessing the Bikeway at this point. This is not likely to change due to concerns about highway travelers having access to the neighborhood.



The Bikeway at the MDOT Rest Area



The Cherry Hill Viaduct

Needed Connections to I-275: A new access point and connections along Cherry Hill, which passes over the Bikeway, would be beneficial for trail users to get to the new neighborhood/theater complex and to provide access for the large residential population living between Palmer and Cherry Hill.

Koppernick Rd. is also a good point for connection from the Bikeway because it is low traffic and would connect to the Holiday Preserve, where there is potential for a trailhead.

Dangerous Crossing!: The crossing over Ford Rd. takes place via a ¼ mile connector on the north side of Ford Rd. to a traffic light at Lotz Rd. Although there are several restaurants and businesses at the corner of Ford Rd. and Lotz, the journey to the traffic signal ¼ mile away to get over Ford Rd. is both uninviting and inconvenient. A better solution would be to create an overhead ramp and bridge for trail users.

Michigan Avenue is probably the most dangerous crossing of the whole trail, though there are lots of businesses and restaurants that trail users could access if there were safe connections. **NOTE:** This area requires a special study to make the right connections. Canton Township has discussed connecting to Lotz Rd., which is just a short distance from the Bikeway. Lotz is a relatively low traffic road which could be used to access a proposed trail on the north side of the Rouge River. The trail could connect to Hannan and Glenwood, which are also low-traffic roads, though there are a few driveways to cross.



Michigan Avenue is currently an unprotected crossing.

Wayne *Population: 19,051*

While the City of Wayne does not have a nonmotorized plan, it does have several existing multi-use trails: Washington Trail, Goudy Park, Mill Trail, and Attwood Park. They would also like to have the trail along the Rouge River which would connect to their downtown. If Wayne were to work in conjunction with Canton Township, it could connect to the Bikeway.

The Bikeway could connect with downtown Wayne along the Lower Rouge River.



Van Buren Township *Population: 23,559*

Van Buren Township has recently completed a greenways study, which includes several proposed trails. One of the proposed trails along an ITC corridor starting at Riggs Road could eventually connect to Ypsilanti.

Needed Connections to I-275: Tyler Road, which currently passes over the Bikeway would be a good new access point because it is a good route to the City of Belleville and there is an abundance of residential development along the way. The bridge over I-275 on Tyler is also fairly safe for nonmotorized use.

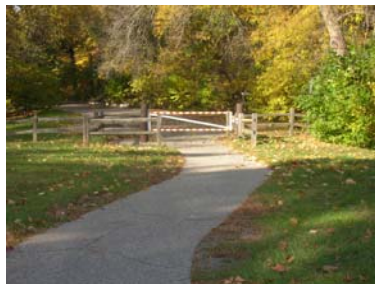
A connection along Ecorse Rd. could link to restaurants and businesses, but the bridge over I-275 is dangerous.

Dangerous crossing!: Due to the many industrial properties and trucks, Van Born is not a good road for a connection.

Romulus *Population: 22,979*

This is where the Bikeway detours away from the freeway and travels down Hannan Rd. in order to pass under I-94. It then travels down Northline to get back to the freeway ROW. The Bikeway receives heavy use from bicyclists and walkers in Romulus, so they are very enthused about seeing restoration and improvements. Wayne County has been actively mowing and brush hogging the trail two to three times a year in this jurisdiction. There was discussion about using TIFA money from the downtown development authority to improve Bikeway connections to downtown.

Needed Connections to I-275: Romulus would like to see a connection to their new recreation center, ½ mile from the Bikeway at Northline and Wayne Rds. Also, a loop trail incorporating the Bikeway could be established if a connecting trail or on-road facility was developed along Hannan down to the stub pathway in Lower Huron Metropark. The other alternative would be to provide bikelanes on Hannan to Huron River Dr. to the official entrance into the park. Huron River Dr. has plenty of room in the ROW for bikelanes and it is not a high traffic road. A case could also be made for connections to Elmer Johnson Park.



Unused Entrance on Hannan Rd.



Lower Huron Metropark Pathway



The Connection to the Bikeway

The Lower Huron Metropark presents an opportunity for a looped trail incorporating the I-275 Bikeway



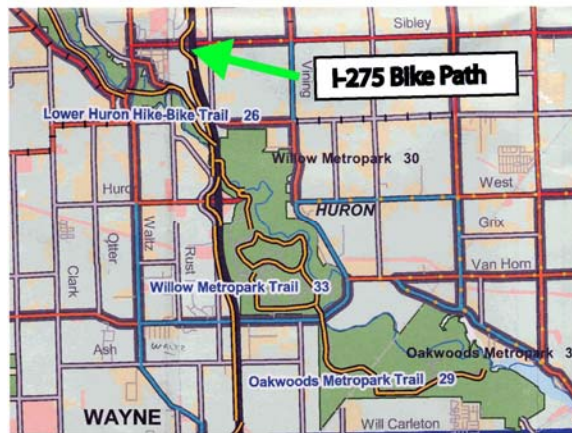
Huron Township *Population: 11,139*

Huron Township is a rapidly growing community, with approximately 500 to 800 new homes expected in the next 5 years. Because there is not much development at this point, it is a good time to provide the nonmotorized infrastructure before the roads feel the pinch of high traffic congestion. They have a proposed trail plan to link up to the Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative. It will link up their primary residential areas: New Boston, Walz,

and Willow. Their first priority will be the Walz Rd. Connector, which will link up New Boston, the location of highest population density, with the Lower Huron Metropark. A massive new development, Pinnacle, at Huron and Wahrman is right next to the Bikeway, but plans have been on hold for several years. This park may incorporate some residential and commercial along with industrial sites.

Needed Connections to I-275: Since the village of Willow is only $\frac{3}{4}$ mile down, a connection down Willow Rd. would provide residents with access to the Bikeway. King Rd., which extends east from where Huron River Dr. turns abruptly to the south (about 1 mile east of the Bikeway) is a high priority connector for the Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative. This connector will link up nonmotorized access to Brownstown Township and Woodhaven.

NOTE SPECIAL STUDY AREA: Another connection to Willow Metropark is needed at Van Horn Rd., which could then link up to the I-275 Bikeway by way of S. Huron Rd. and the existing metropark trail. Bridge abutments in the park at the Huron River currently exist at this location. The connecting trail would get heavy use from Huron High School students who currently use the cemetery for track workouts and for residents in a large new subdivision $\frac{1}{2}$ mile north of there on Huron River Dr. A connection along S. Huron Rd. could also provide trail users with access to an ice cream shop and a restaurant at the S. Huron Rd. and I-275 location.



The above recommendations from communities will be given additional analysis by MDOT engineers in their I-275 Bikeway inventory.

A Few Words about Sustainability

When the restoration and initial improvements on the I-275 Bikeway are finally done, will trail users flock to the new “gem”? Will the public decide that they will now start to commute by walking or bicycling to their favorite store, park or restaurant or their work or school?. “Build it and they will come” is not necessarily true in this case after there have been 30 years of intermittent maintenance, isolationism from the communities, and a spiraling decline in surface conditions. It is also true that trails need events and other promotions to encourage the public to become acquainted with their new recreation and transportation facility. While Michigan Department of Transportation can refurbish, improve, and perform most of the maintenance, there are many other considerations to keep the Bikeway operating efficiently and to improve its stature as a community asset. They can be classified under the categories of Maintenance, Development, Interaction with the Public, and Administration. The following are recommendations to serve as a beginning discussion for cooperative operation of the I-275 Bikeway.

TASK	MDOT	INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY	BETTER DONE COOPERATIVELY
MAINTENANCE			
Mowing	X	X	X To achieve a higher standard than just once/twice per year
Tree Trimming/Brush Removal/Litter Pick-up	X	X	X To achieve a higher standard than once/twice per year
Surface Repair: Sweeping Weed Killing Grading Erosion Patching Inspection of Drain Pipes Inspection of Bridges	X		
DEVELOPMENT ISSUES			
Construction Standards	X		X To Set the Standard
Crossing Permits	X Too many crossings affect the whole trail		
Easement Permits	X	X Individual jurisdictions are able to more easily negotiate easements	
Landscaping & Amenities	X	X	X To Set the Standard for uniform quality & appearance
Signage	X		X To Set the Standard for uniform appearance & ease of use
Realignment Issues	X Poor design affects trail integrity	X Realignment issues need to be okayed within each individual jurisdiction	
INTERACTION WITH THE PUBLIC			
Law Enforcement		X	X Could realize cost savings if efforts coordinated
Trail Promotion		X	X For optimum visibility & continuity
Event Coordination			X To avoid confusion of the public & duplication of effort
Fundraising with the Public		X	X Larger Area to Draw From
Volunteer Project Management	X		X One Contact Point = Less Confusion
ADMINISTRATION			
Grant Writing	X For State Sources	X For Individual Sources	X Score Higher with Regional Focus; Avoid Competition
Trail Representation	X		X
Liability Insurance	X		
Development of Trail Usage Rules	X		X Avoid Confusion = Better Adherence to the Rules if they are uniform

A Mechanism for Cooperation

As noted above, many of the above functions are better done cooperatively for better coverage, cost savings, and efficiency. For example, each community has law enforcement that could patrol the trail. However, will the officer or patrol stop at the boundary if he or she foresees an incident further down the trail? Routine checks of the entire trail would ensure a safer, more secure trail. As another example: Will a Boy Scout troop wanting to use the whole trail for an event have to contact each community for a use permit? Or will each group contact MDOT, adding an extra responsibility that is not usually within their realm? The public sees only one trail, unaware of the particular jurisdiction at any given point. A trail is more user friendly if there is one point of contact to get parking directions, sightseeing information, volunteer opportunities, etc. Fundraising for trails is best done at every possible level and coordinated together into an "implementation quilt" to get the job done. MDOT, individual communities and a coordinated regional effort will all have their strengths with particular types of revenue sources, whether through grant writing or community outreach, but coordination is necessary to fit it all together.

Trails in Michigan that run through multiple jurisdictions are often managed by an interlocal government trail commission as provided under the Michigan Trailways Act, denoted as MCL 324.72106 under state law. The following Michigan trails have such an agreement: Paint Creek Trail, Polly Ann Trail of Oakland County, Huron Valley Trail, Betsie Valley Trail, Downriver Linked Greenways Initiative, Macomb Orchard Trail, and Southern Links Trailway. Two others in multiple jurisdictions, the Fred Meijer Heartland Trail and Traverse Area Regional Trails are operated by their own private nonprofit organizations. Interlocal commission agreements establish a formal protocol which can be relied upon for decision-making about the trail. The agreements address such items as membership, termination of membership, powers of the commission, officers, meeting schedule and format, etc.

An interlocal government commission for the I-275 Bikeway offers a structured platform for discussion about trail decisions, a catalyst for combined synergy with MDOT for getting the trail developed, improved, and promoted, one point of contact for public inquiry and volunteerism, and a coordinated interface with the Southeast Michigan regional trail effort.

A Memorandum of Understanding between Michigan Department of Transportation and all the communities through which it travels is another option which is not as structured, but offers a platform for agreement about how the trail will be managed and operated, and how often communities will meet to discuss issues.

A discussion on these options should evaluate the roles of each with respect to the Bikeway, what are the strengths that each brings to the table, and how much authority should be given to each to make the I-275 Bikeway an outstanding major artery for nonmotorized transportation and recreation for Southeast Michigan .