A History of Promoting an Active Lifestyle

Akron has worked over the last 60 years to ensure that people can move safely from place to place, no matter what mode of transportation they use.

Access to safe, reliable transportation is a social determinant of health. It affects a person’s access to healthcare, education, and employment. Akron believes that getting residents out for a short trip by bike or on foot can make a difference in someone’s health, whether it’s once a week or once a day. Akron hosts regular events aimed at getting community members active and improving opportunities for active transportation.

Bike-N-Brainstorm

Bike-N-Brainstorm events help the City understand the challenges people face when trying to navigate Akron by bike. They meet outside, take a bike ride together, and then talk about their experiences on the ride. These brainstorming sessions have helped city planners and leaders hear directly from community members and have led to numerous improvements to active transportation infrastructure. Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) has found outdoor brainstorming sessions to be more productive compared to brainstorming in a conference room.

“Move with the Mayor”

“It’s one thing to put it on paper and put it on a slideshow. It’s another thing to see it on the road. We learn by temporary hands-on experience, and that helps us be successful in a lot of communities.”

Dan Horrigan
Mayor, Akron, Ohio

BIKE-N-BRAINSTORM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

> How long was the ride?
> Which streets were involved?
> What was the route?
> What did you feel on the ride?
> Would you ride this route on your own?
> How often do you ride?
> Where do you ride to?
> Do you ever ride your bike to complete an errand?
> What changes would you like to see in your community to encourage you to ride your bike?
> What changes in your community would make you feel more comfortable riding your bike?
Akron tests out proposed infrastructure improvements by making temporary changes to the built environment. These opportunities help residents experience the new infrastructure and provide feedback before decisions are finalized.

Jane’s Walk
Jane’s Walk is a citizen-led walk inspired by urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs. Citizens pick the route and topic discussed. Participants get an hour of physical activity and perhaps most importantly, build relationships with fellow community members.

Move with the Mayor™
Akron’s goal of getting residents moving is consistent with Move with the Mayor™. Mayor Dan Horrigan has encouraged physical activity by hosting walking competitions and community bike rides. Akron has used the Move with the Mayor™ materials while cross-promoting other activities. The mayor’s leadership has helped foster a love of physical activity in the community.

Measuring Success
Akron finds short-term success in getting residents active at community events, Darryl Kleinhenz, Land Marketing Officer said. “It’s gratifying that these events help the public to push for improving active transportation access. Helping people develop self-efficacy to get out on their own, drawing attention to what could be improved, and taking steps to do so are all forms of success.”

Both the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration commended Akron for its public engagement practices. Additional success in the previous year include completing their long-range transportation plan, Transportation 2045, which includes plans for more than $40 million to promote active transportation and improvements to pedestrian infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Hosting small, informal events can help break down barriers to active transportation. Events don’t have to be grand to be effective.

2. Giving residents hands-on experiences helps the City gather public input and identify areas where we need to improve.

3. Your first idea, event, or solution may not be the most successful. Commit to iterating.

4. Partnerships are critical. Akron partners with their local health department as well as schools and hospitals. Informal one-time events have often created avenues for future collaboration.
CASE STUDY

City-Health Department Linkages Strengthen Health Promotion

Developing partnerships is a critical component of Akron’s strategy for promoting cardiovascular health. The Mayor’s Office, Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS) and Summit County Health Department collaborate on the shared vision of making Akron a place where people can safely live, work, and play.

Safe Routes to School

This partnership has led to the Safe Routes to School initiative to empower kids (and their parents) to travel to school using active modes of transportation—by bike or on foot. Giving kids experiences with active transportation early on helps them grow up with more confidence to walk, bike or take public transportation on their own. “It’s a domino effect and it starts to create the idea of, ‘Hey, I could have my son, daughter walk to school and feel safe that they can do that. And/or I can walk to school with them and get that cardiovascular health myself and be a little active,’” said Kristi Kato, MEP - Supervisor, Summit County Public Health, Health Equity and Social Determinants Unit. We see parents walking their children to school, and we always commend them for that and draw attention to it. That domino effect can be very far reaching, especially when we’re partnering with the health department and schools.”

The Akron Safe Routes Team brightened the sidewalks around schools by painting activity stations, yoga poses, hopscotch, and wayfinding animal prints with chalk. The purpose was to encourage students to walk or ride their bicycles to school.

“We want these kids to realize, you can get from your house to the school by riding a bike or walking.... That encouragement, especially at their ages, is really important.”

“It’s a domino effect and it starts to create the idea of, ‘Hey, I could have my son, daughter walk to school and feel safe that they can do that. And/or I can walk to school with them and get that cardiovascular health myself and be a little active.’”

Kristi Kato, MEP, Supervisor, Summit County Public Health, Health Equity and Social Determinants Unit

MOVE WITH THE MAYOR™ AKRON

Dan Horrigan
Mayor, Akron, Ohio

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Students who rolled to school were provided bike helmets and bike locks. Minor bike repairs were also made. The Safe Routes to School events were marketed through a flyer that included safety tips for walking, scooting, biking, and rolling. The flyer and information were translated into:

- Arabic
- Bosnian
- Burmese
- Farsi
- French
- Karen
- Nepali
- Pashto
- Spanish
- Swahili

Due to COVID-19, data collection efforts to evaluate the program were postponed. Akron Safe Routes plans to administer travel tallies in the Fall of 2022 and collecting parent surveys in tandem.

Partnering on Safe Routes to School has strengthened the relationship between the Mayor’s Office, AMATS and the Summit County Health Department, and led to future collaborations, including co-hosting several annual events. Their partnership has opened funding opportunities through the state of Ohio for infrastructure around schools to create safer routes; funding for two non-infrastructure projects, totaling $120,000, was awarded.

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**How to Form or Strengthen Partnerships**

- **REACH OUT** and identify common goals
- **START** with a one-time event or project
- **CROSS-PROMOTE** other agencies’ events
- **SUPPORT** events by running a booth or attending informally
- **IDENTIFY** funding opportunities to further collaborative projects

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“We can’t stress enough to cities to reach out to health departments, and other partners, to see how they can work together, whether it’s an informal one-time event, which will create avenues for other events, or whether it is a very formal partnership. It’s a win-win-win.”

Kristi Kato, MEP, Supervisor, Summit County Public Health, Health Equity and Social Determinants Unit