

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE FACILITIES AND ENVIRONMENTS

Key Issues

General Pedestrian Environment

Some highlights of the pedestrian environment in McKownville are as follows:

- While the sidewalk system is not continuous for the length of Western Avenue in the Study corridor (the Albany City line to Johnston Road), most of the street has sidewalks in both directions. That said, a significant amount of the existing sidewalks do not meet the Town's standard for width (5') and/or construction type (concrete), with the majority of nonstandard sidewalks failing to meet the width standard. In addition, due to settling and/or initial construction method, a significant number of sidewalk sections in the corridor, particularly along the westbound side of Western Avenue between the City line and Fuller Road, are significantly below the level of the grass and/or street adjacent to them and thus prone to silting and ponding. In addition, both along Western Avenue and along the side streets having sidewalks, many sections are heaved, misaligned or cracked.
- Fuller Road has an asphalt sidewalk along its southbound side, generally in good condition and 5' in width. An unusual feature of the pedestrian environment on this road is the installation of a WALK/DON'T WALK pedestrian signal head and a curb ramp leading to a concrete pad on the east side of Fuller Road at Executive Park Drive, but with no sidewalk leading away from this pad.
- The existing sidewalks along area side streets (see Figure 1-1) are generally of substandard width. In addition, a number of the older sidewalks are overgrown with grass – some to the point of being virtually covered by grass – and/or heaved by tree roots.
- Street crossings, particularly across Western Avenue, are among the most challenging pedestrian issues in the Study area. In the corridor, there is considerable variation in street crossing width, time to cross, level of accommodation provided (e.g., crosswalks and WALK/DON'T WALK heads) and motorist behavior and awareness of pedestrians.
- The internal routes north of Western Avenue provide emergency and homeowner access, and remain important for internal bicycle and pedestrian circulation. While people from outside the area use them, the routes are short, not well connected, and duplicative of the sidewalks proposed for Western Avenue. Thus, maintenance of these routes is perhaps best oriented toward preserving localized use rather than encouraging broader use.
- The Thruway/Northway corridor forms a barrier to pedestrian (and bicycle) travel which tends to impose a requirement of car use for travel. In fact, there is a tendency on the part of some to consider McKownville to be east of the Northway and Westmere west of the Northway, notwithstanding the fact that the original McKown patent extended to Johnston Road. The location of the McKownville United Methodist Church on Western Avenue west of the Thruway bridge is one of many reminders of the continuation of McKownville to the west.

General Bicycle Environment

- Bicycle travel along the major roads in the Study area – Western Avenue and Fuller Road – is fairly well-accommodated from the perspective of provision of space, although traffic volumes, speeds and turning maneuvers present challenges to cyclists. Generally, it is the more skilled cyclist that will use Western Avenue or Fuller Road for regular commuting or other transportation functions, as these streets are simply not comfortable for the average cyclist. The environments on these streets (1)serve as something of a cap on the potential for getting people out of their cars in favor of cycling and (2)reduce the range of mobility options available to McKownville residents.
- Along Western Avenue and Fuller Road, intersections with right turn lanes tend to present challenges to cyclists, as they must determine where to position themselves so as to continue on their trips as they approach these intersections (particularly where they will be continuing to travel along Western Avenue through such intersections).
- On the secondary roads in the area, such as McKown, Schoolhouse, Church and Johnston Roads, there are no accommodations for cyclists. In addition, as these roads have generally evolved over time from farm-to-market-type roads to collectors and minor arterials, they can presently be characterized as narrower than desirable, somewhat winding in spots, with higher speeds and volumes than are desirable for a cycling route. At the same time, for people who would travel longer distances into Guilderland and Albany by bike, these are the most direct routes to Western Avenue from outside the Study area. As such, they present obstacles to the potential commuter or errand-running cyclist, in addition to recreational riders.
- On the local/neighborhood streets in the Study area, motor vehicle traffic volumes tend to be such that cyclists can use these streets without any accommodation such as a bike lane. However, there does appear to be a problem of motorist awareness of cyclists on some of these streets, such that BIKE ROUTE or other such signage might be helpful in raising motorist awareness of the potential to encounter cyclists as they travel along these streets.

Challenge in Establishing Facility Hierarchies

Throughout the Study effort, recurring themes in the discussions were on the need for new and/or improved facilities to build toward something of a *hierarchy*, starting from Western Avenue and Fuller Road, then to the next busiest group of streets in the area (e.g., Church, Johnston, McKown and Schoolhouse) and then on to something of a set of either local collectors or strategic connections (e.g., a connection between Patricia Lane and the Westmere School, or between Stuyvesant Plaza and Crossgates Mall). This concern will affect both the identification of travel networks and the prioritization of individual projects needed to get these networks developed.

That said, a key challenge facing the community is that Western Avenue – potentially the major route for longer-distance, purpose-oriented travel both within McKownville and for connections between it and surrounding areas – is regarded by many people as more of an impediment that one must surmount to travel than as an actual transportation route for pedestrians and cyclists. In the course of public meeting, telephone conversation and ad hoc contact discussions, the Study

Team consistently heard from residents, students, store employees and bicycle club members that, simply put, “no one uses Western Avenue in McKownville if they can avoid it.” Most of these people did however note that if one’s destination was along Western Avenue, the thought process was one of finding a route that entailed traveling along or across Western Avenue for as short of a distance as possible.

Sidewalks: New Construction versus Reconstruction

It is also worth noting with particular regard to sidewalks that during the Study’s public outreach efforts, there were a considerable number of comments regarding locations where sidewalks exist, but are seen as being of poor quality, substandard width, prone to flooding/puddling or otherwise inadequate for their purposes. These observations appear to be borne out by inventories conducted by the McKownville Improvement Association and field-checked by the Consultant Team.

Given an apparent need for both new sidewalk connections and rehabilitation of existing sidewalks, a key consideration became that of whether the “first order of business” was to bring *existing* facilities up to standard or on accepting these facilities for the moment and concentrating early improvement efforts on creating *new* facilities to bridge gaps in the pedestrian transportation system and extending coverage to new areas. Overarching this question is the broad aim of the Study effort to identify key steps for promoting *basic mobility*. That is, while much of the Study effort was about enabling area residents to have *choices* with regard to mode of travel, there is a more essential need to provide suitable accommodations for those people who are unable to drive because of age, infirmity or lack of vehicle availability (e.g., UAlbany students).

The general consensus of the Study Steering Committee was that the construction of the sidewalks holding the greatest promise for use should be a higher priority than the reconstruction of existing substandard sidewalks should. The qualification to this rule would be that where there are existing sidewalks which present hazards or other defects which effectively preclude their use (severely heaved or broken sections, for example), improving such sidewalks should also be a high priority. In practice, the distinction may come with regard to *funding*: new sidewalk construction will tend to be a larger effort requiring pursuit of funding through the CDTC Spot Improvement Program, the NYSDOT Transportation Enhancement Program, legislative member items or other such sources, while many spot repairs of problems such as those just mentioned could be done out of the Town’s current highway maintenance or parks and recreation budgets.

Latent Demand for Sidewalks

The most common direct measures of demand for sidewalks are (1)pedestrian counts and (2)worn paths where sidewalks do not exist. While these measures provide definitive proof of pedestrian activity, it oversimplifies the matter to rely exclusively on them to provide guidance to decisions regarding sidewalk construction. In addition, no matter when a pedestrian count is

taken, it becomes a “hit or miss” issue as to whether the peak times of demand were captured during the count period.

At the Study’s public workshops, several people related specific examples of places where they *would* walk if proper facilities were provided. In addition, the Team frequently heard area residents and workers state very specific areas such as Western Avenue between Church and Schoolhouse Roads presented such a *package* of obstacles that they effectively precluded consideration of what could amount to fairly lengthy walk trips.

Accordingly, as the Study Team examined the existing sidewalk system with an eye toward identifying promising locations for new sidewalk construction, it used several bases in addition to observed pedestrian activity and worn paths, including the following:

- Relative proximities of residential, office and retail developments
- System gaps (e.g., areas where two sidewalks come close but do not meet)
- Isolated “barrier” locations where a single obstacle appears to dissuade people from making walk trips
- Public comments on desirable locations at which to develop sidewalks
- Potential shortcuts that would significantly reduce walking distances (particularly staying on public property)

Recommendations

Note: Recommendations SW-1 through SW-14, along with the current conditions of Study area sidewalks, are summarized in Figure 1-1 on the following page.

SW-1: Johnston Road Sidewalk Improvements

- *Description:* Construction of new sidewalks along the northbound (east) side of Johnston Road. Two sections are indicated: Western Avenue to the Town Center driveway (~200’), and the Town Center driveway to Westmere Elementary School (~250’).

For maximum benefit, the two sections should be progressed as a set.

- *Estimated Cost:* \$15,000
- *Additional Notes:* This improvement would not only enhance pedestrian and transit access to the Town Center shopping opportunities, but also provide part of an important pedestrian link between the Alton Road/Hungerford Road area and the Westmere Elementary School. As was noted during the Study effort, this would be the only neighborhood in the Study area from which children could potentially walk to and from the Westmere School without crossing a busy highway.

It was also noted that pedestrians have difficulty crossing the Western Avenue/Johnston Road intersection because of conflicts with both left- and right-turning vehicles. Two tools for addressing these conflicts which will be discussed in greater detail in the Traffic Operations chapter are (1) pedestrian button-actuated “NO RIGHT TURN ON RED” signs and (2) the development of signal phasing plans which will provide red arrow indications to left turn movements conflicting with crossing pedestrians when the appropriate pedestrian button is pushed. These treatments should also be progressed for this intersection.

SW-2: Western Avenue Eastbound Side Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of new sidewalks and some reconstruction of existing sidewalks along the eastbound (south) side of Western Avenue. Eight sections are indicated:
 - 1690 Western Avenue to Alton Road (~935’ of new construction)
 - Church Road to the Thruway Bridge (~400’ of new construction)
 - the Thruway Bridge to Schoolhouse Road (~475’ of new construction)
 - around Fuller Road Alternate (~1200’ of new construction)
 - Fuller Road to the Holiday Inn Express (~125’ of reconstruction and ~750’ of new construction)
 - west of McKown Road to Westlyn Court (~600’ of new construction)
 - Westlyn Court to Arcadia Avenue (~725’ of reconstruction)
 - Hillcrest Avenue to the City line (~725’ of new construction).

It may be desirable to progress the coterminous projects as sets, e.g., Church Road to Schoolhouse Road, and west of McKown Road to Arcadia Avenue.

- Estimated Cost: \$185,000
- Additional Notes: Where it is not possible to fit a full five foot-wide sidewalk within the available right of way on this side of Western Avenue, “jogs” of the centerline toward the other side of Western Avenue might be considered when reconstruction of Western Avenue takes place in the future; alternatively, 3’ wide or 4’ wide sidewalks may be permissible for short lengths in order to complete connections. Negotiation of easements with property owners to secure sufficient space for a 5’ wide sidewalk is also an option which has worked elsewhere. Needs indicated in Project SW-3 may also be relevant to these considerations.

*Please click on FIGURE 1-1 on the Web page
for the Sidewalk Map*

SW-3: Western Avenue Westbound Side Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of new sidewalks and some reconstruction of existing sidewalks along the westbound (north) side of Western Avenue. Five sections are indicated:
 - UAlbany to Waverly Place (~100' of reconstruction and ~1000' of new construction)
 - Waverly Place to Fuller Road (~2400' of new construction)
 - In the vicinity of the McKownville Reservoir to Fuller Road Alternate (~625' of new construction)
 - Mobil (1667 Western Avenue) to Gabriel Terrace (~190' of new construction)
 - 1677 Western Avenue to Johnston Road (~535' of new construction)

It may be desirable to progress the SUNY to Fuller Road section as a set.

- Estimated Cost: \$150,000
- Additional Notes: Where it is not possible to fit a full five foot-wide sidewalk within the available right of way on this side of Western Avenue, “jogs” of the centerline toward the other side of Western Avenue might be considered when reconstruction of Western Avenue takes place in the future; alternatively, 3' wide or 4' wide sidewalks may be permissible for short lengths in order to complete connections. Negotiation of easements with property owners to secure sufficient space for a 5' wide sidewalk is also an option which has worked elsewhere. Needs indicated in Project SW-2 may also be relevant to these considerations.

SW-4: Crossgates Mall Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of new sidewalk accessing the mall via a connection to Rapp Road (approximately 125').
- Estimated Cost: \$4,000
- Additional Notes: The indicated new sidewalk would bridge a gap. Other improvements which would potentially improve pedestrian access to the Mall include the modification of parking rows, perhaps by removing one half row of parking spaces in favor of a marked and protected walkway or by installing a sidewalk between two head-to-head parking space rows. It should be noted that this would likely be a very difficult “sell” to the Mall owners and would not be likely to see significant use, given that the existing Mall sidewalks (including the transit center area) provide an approach for the majority of current or potential walkers.

SW-5: Church Road Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of new sidewalks along the northbound (east) side of Church Road. Two sections are indicated: Western Avenue to Tice Road (~2500'), and Tice Road to Farnsworth Drive (~4600').

- Estimated Cost: \$220,000
- Additional Notes: Creative use of available space, negotiation of an easement (possibly focusing on the large vacant parcel on the northbound side of Church Road) and/or employment of substandard widths along certain sections may be in order.

SW-6: Strawberry Lane Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of a new sidewalk along the southbound (west) side of Strawberry Lane from Schoolhouse Road to Abele Park (approximately 250').
- Estimated Cost: \$8,000
- Additional Note: This improvement is seen as a short-term priority given both the general critical need for safe pedestrian access to recreational areas and for the potential for high pedestrian travel to the Park from nearby residences.

SW-7: McKown Road Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of a new sidewalk along the southbound (west) side of McKown Road. A possible segment breakout would be as follows:
 - Western Avenue to Williams Court (~725')
 - Williams Court to Short Street (~780')
 - Short Street to Woodscape Drive/Abele Park path access path (~625')

It may be desirable to progress these three segments as a set; if this is not done, there are varying arguments as to which segment would provide the most immediate benefit. That is, while working in the sequence indicated would provide a progression and tie into the existing sidewalk on Williams, the Short-to-Woodscape section arguably merits the earliest effort to provide pedestrians with greater physical separation from traffic.

- Estimated Cost: \$65,000
- Additional Notes: McKown Road includes several sections along which it may be very difficult to fit a 5' wide sidewalk within the existing right of way. Narrower sections may be in order for short lengths; alternatively, the Town may wish to investigate the potential costs of acquiring easements or additional right-of-way which would enable it to construct a consistent 5'-wide walk for the entire length of the project. Also, it was noted that this sidewalk connection would be quite beneficial to CDTA patrons.



*Figure 1-2
Walkers with Groceries, McKown Road*

SW-8: Williams Court Sidewalk Improvements

- *Description:* Construction of new sidewalks and some reconstruction of existing sidewalks along the eastbound (south) side of Williams Court. Three sections are indicated:
 - McKown Road east 150' (first new construction section)
 - Westlyn Court west 150' (second new construction section)
 - Middle section (250' of reconstruction)
- *Estimated Cost:* \$17,000
- *Additional Notes:* Identified as a low priority by members of the Steering Committee.

SW-9: Westlyn Court Sidewalk Improvements

- *Description:* Reconstruction of existing sidewalks along the northbound (east) and southbound (west) sides of Westlyn Court. Two sections are indicated: Western Avenue south to Williams Street, including the short one-way southbound section of Westlyn (~450'), and Williams Street north to Western Avenue along the northbound side of the street (~510')
- *Estimated Cost:* \$30,000

- Additional Notes: It was noted by members of the Steering Committee that this project would help establish a connection between this neighborhood and Abele Park, should the McKown Road and/or Pinnacle Place-Abele Park connections also be made. A connection via Short Street was also suggested to aid this connection, although it should be noted that Short Street would present challenges from the perspectives of streamside trail continuity or and/or fitting in a standard-width sidewalk, possibly requiring negotiation of easements or the purchase of right-of-way.

SW-10: Brookwood Avenue Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Reconstruction of existing sidewalks along the full lengths of one or both sides of Brookwood Avenue. Approximate total sidewalk length is 1500’.
- Estimated Cost: \$45,000 (see note below)
- Additional Note: The sense of the Steering Committee was that it would be logical to first progress this reconstruction on only one side of Brookwood. This would likely reduce the cost of providing some improvement to Brookwood by roughly 50 percent.

SW-11: Northeast Quadrant Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of new sidewalks and some reconstruction of existing sidewalks along either or both sides of Fuller Road, Elmwood, Parkwood, Glenwood and Norwood Streets, Knowles Terrace and Waverly Place, as follows:
 - Fuller: ~1650’ new construction
 - Elmwood: ~500’ new construction, ~1750’ reconstruction
 - Parkwood: ~1625’ reconstruction
 - Glenwood: ~1500’ reconstruction
 - Norwood: ~95’ new construction, ~2900’ reconstruction
 - Knowles Terrace: 875’ reconstruction
 - Waverly Place: 750’ reconstruction
- Estimated Cost: \$350,000
- Additional Notes: Possible priority order:
 - Fuller
 - Norwood (community crossroads/tie to UAlbany)
 - Elmwood (pedestrian shortcut between Western Avenue and Fuller Road)
 - Parkwood and Glenwood
 - Knowles and Waverly

SW-12: Mercer Street Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construction of new sidewalk along one side of Mercer Street between Fuller Road and the utility right-of-way, to tie into the proposed Freedom Quad – Stuyvesant Plaza Trail (see Project TRL-1). Approximate total sidewalk length is 1075’.
- Estimated Cost: \$35,000
- Additional Note: Mercer is a relatively low-volume street; thus, this project could be broken up into stages if desired. Should this be done, starting work at the Fuller Road end of this section may be preferable from the perspective of mitigating conflicts between pedestrians and motor vehicles based on considerations of traffic volume and speed. The Steering Committee also noted that this is a relatively isolated improvement standing to benefit a small number of people, which could affect its timing unless local residents were receptive to the idea of a sidewalk district.

SW-13: Schoolhouse Road Area Pedestrian Crossing Improvements

- Description:
 - Install crosswalk from sidewalk along eastbound (south) side of Western Avenue to refuge island.
 - Install pedestrian buttons outside curb line and at refuge island tied to alternating lights attached to “PEDESTRIAN CROSSING AHEAD” sign along Fuller Road Alternate slip ramp.
- Estimated Cost: \$30,000
- Additional Notes: Also see Project IS-5 for additional elements related to the design and operation of this intersection.

SW-14: Schoolhouse Road Sidewalk Improvements

- Description: Construct a sidewalk from McKown Road to Vaughn Drive
- Additional Notes: Listed for reference here, this project is likely to be progressed by Albany County.

SW-15: Zoning Ordinance Provisions to Facilitate Multimodal Travel

- Description: Draft new zoning ordinance provisions to enhance multimodal mobility including building setback minimization (to encourage placement of buildings closer to roads, with parking behind buildings), parking lot interconnections (to reduce short-distance motor vehicle travel between driveways and provide for pedestrian and bicycle connections

between businesses) and the inclusion of transit centers/park-and-ride lots with pedestrian and bicycle accommodations in larger developments such as office parks and shopping centers.

- Estimated Cost: \$2,000 to \$5,000 for ordinance language development and legal notices.
- Additional Notes: Also see related ordinance recommendation BK-3.

BK-1: Designation of Town Bike Routes in McKownville

- Description: The following facilities are potential candidates for inclusion in a Town Bike Route system. Further study is needed to determine which facilities are appropriate or could be made appropriate for designation as Town bike routes. The Town will first need to establish criteria for selecting Town bike routes.
 - Western Avenue across Town
 - Fuller Road from Western Avenue to City Line
 - Schoolhouse Road from Western Avenue to Town Line
 - Church Road from Western Avenue to Johnston Road
 - Johnston Road from Church Road to Town Line
 - McKown Road from Western Avenue to Abele Park access
 - Strawberry Lane from Schoolhouse Road to Abele Park
 - Norwood Street from Western Avenue to SUNY
 - Elmwood Street from Western Avenue to Fuller Road
 - Woodscape Drive from McKown Road to Town Line
 - Alton Road from Western Avenue to Patricia Lane/Hungerford Road
 - Ruth Terrace from Patricia Lane/Hungerford Road to Tice Road
 - Tice Road from Ruth Terrace to Church Road
 - Western Avenue - Schoolhouse Road connection around Fuller Road Alternate Ramp
 - New McKown Road-Abele Park connection
- Estimated Cost: Designation would be an action of the Town Board, with costs largely limited to those associated with preparation of resolutions/other Town forms and legal notices.
- Additional Notes: See Recommendation BK-2 for the details of what this designation would be intended to achieve.

BK-2: Multi-Stage Bike Route Improvement Program

- Description: Progress a long-term program of staged improvements to the bike routes designated under project BK-1 above. The improvement stages are as follow:

- Stage 1: install “BIKE ROUTE” signs (with trailblazer arrows at major crossroads and where route turns corners) at major crossings and at half-mile intervals
 - Stage 2: install “WATCH FOR BIKES” or SHARED ROADWAY signs at narrow/higher speed locations and those where there are sight distance concerns
 - *Examples:* Western Avenue, Fuller Road, Schoolhouse Road northbound and southbound approaching Thruway bridge, Church Road southbound south of Western Avenue (existing sign), Church Road eastbound (northbound) east of Farnsworth Drive
 - Stage 3: spot improvements (widening if possible without unduly compromising buffers between private properties and the roadway edge, or traffic calming) at locations of concern discussed in Stage 2 concept. Improvements listed would be in addition to those presented in other projects in this listing.
- Estimated Cost: Stage 1 \$35,000, Stage 2 \$11,200, Stage 3 \$120,000

BK-3: Bicycle Parking Ordinance

- Description: Adopt bicycle parking provisions in the Zoning Ordinance as a means of promoting bicycle travel to local destinations. In providing for a needed *destination treatment* – parking at the end of a bicycle trip – this action would complement Project SW-14, which provided for bike-friendly internal site design. There are numerous examples of adopted bicycle parking ordinances across the country from which the Town can draw in developing its own ordinance; the caution would be that in considering any such ordinances as models for a Town ordinance, their schedules of parking requirements should be compared to existing local developments to determine whether they are practical or would require refinement. That is, for example, based on a survey of existing ordinances, a current “average” requirement for high schools would require that Guilderland High School provide approximately 500 bicycle parking spaces.
- Estimated Cost: \$2,000 to \$5,000 for ordinance language development and legal notices.

Notes on Other Topics

Destination Treatments

The Study Team noted several locations where the key obstacles to cycling or walking are at one endpoint of a trip rather than “along the way.” The parking lots at Crossgates Mall, for example, are difficult to cross by bicycle or on foot from Western Avenue, due to concerns of both distance and conflict with motor vehicles. Destination treatments such as shortcut paths, textured pavement and the installation of bollards or other physical installations would be desirable to facilitate pedestrian and cyclist access to the Mall. Similarly, it would be advisable to “look outward” from major destinations such as Price Chopper, 1450 Western Avenue, Stuyvesant Plaza, UAlbany and other larger commercial or institutional uses to identify opportunities for access enhancement. Such opportunities could be exploited either when

applications come before the Town for expansions or other modifications to these properties, or in some cases incorporated into future roadway improvement projects for Western Avenue or Fuller Road. In addition, some of the other tools discussed in this report, such as access management and intersection-based improvements, will have applicability to the access points for these sites.

Toolbox of Intersection Treatments Benefiting Cyclists

Several of the improvements recommended earlier in this chapter or to be discussed in the Traffic Operations chapter are geared toward enhancing the comfort and safety of bicycle travel. Because a number of these treatments are potentially applicable to numerous other locations in the neighborhood (and indeed, elsewhere in the Town as well), following is a brief review of some of the major steps which could be taken to improve the cycling environment at intersections.

- *Separate Stop Lines for Cyclists*: Providing stop lines in line with bikeable shoulders or bike lanes (typically slightly narrower than standard stop lines) can give cyclists a head start in proceeding through signalized intersections once they get a green light. In addition, where there are bus stops right at intersections, separate lines can provide an official sanction of sorts to cyclists' being further "into the box" to avoid buses.
- *"Trace" Lines for Turns through Intersections*: Particularly at broad, busy intersections, providing dotted lines showing the Providing stop lines in line with bikeable shoulders or bike lanes (typically slightly narrower than standard stop lines) can give cyclists a head start in proceeding through signalized intersections once they get a green light.
- *Right Turn on Red Prohibitions*: Where feasible, prohibiting right turns on red can have the practical benefit of reducing "rolling rights on red" as well as reducing the frequency of situations in which a driver looking to his/her left for an opportunity to make a right on red does not see a cyclist waiting at the intersection on the same corner. This reduces the potential for the cyclist to be struck by the motor vehicle.
- *All-Red Signal Phases*: In addition to providing pedestrians with safer crossing opportunities, these phases can benefit cyclists. That said, a bicycle's status as a vehicle may require that, legally, a cyclist would have to walk his/her bicycle through the intersection during the all-red phase.
- *Positioning Pedestrian Buttons to be Cyclist-Accessible*: Related to the previous point, if a cyclist waiting at an intersection can easily reach a pedestrian button which would request a green phase or an all-red phase with WALK indications, the ease and efficiency of cycling would be enhanced. A key design consideration is that of how to achieve this ease of access to the button – if the button already exists and is attached to a standard vertical traffic signal strain pole or a separate pole installed in the ground specifically to position and support the button, it may be necessary to provide a short "flare out" of the curb or the pavement area to allow the cyclist to comfortably reach the button. More creativity in positioning the button

so as to provide comfortable access to both cyclists and pedestrians would be allowed for in retrofits at locations which do not already have buttons.

- *Drain Grate Retrofits:* As a general practice, it is desirable to install drains which do not have their main grate strips running parallel to the direction of travel (or which do not have the “parallel line” design at all), for this eliminates the possibility of a cyclist’s catching a tire in a grate. This concept is specifically mentioned *here* because depending on the configuration of an intersection, the drain may be placed at an undesirable location relative to the path that a cyclist may be taking in traveling through an intersection. If these grates do have their main strips running parallel to the direction of travel, one “quick fix” would be to weld strips of steel *across* the main strips. This should not have a significant adverse impact on drainage.
- *Incorporate Bicycle Considerations into Maintenance and Protection of Traffic Strategies:* While this is also a generally desirable action, it is important to bear in mind that when road work takes place, intersections frequently become *transition points* into work zones. Signage and the placement of any physical barriers (e.g., cones, barrels or Jersey barriers) should be planned with an eye toward ensuring that a travel space is established at the intersection and maintained through the work zone. If it is not practical to accommodate cyclists through the work zone, detour signage should be clear, worded specifically to cyclists and positioned well in advance of the intersection at which the detour would take effect.
- *Maintain the Orientation of Bike Lanes through Intersections:* The graphic presenting recommended improvements to the intersection of Western Avenue and Church Road includes the relocation of the eastbound Western Avenue bike lane to the *inside* of the right turn lane which serves drivers intending to turn both to Church Road and to Fuller Road Alternate. At other locations where a roadway flares out as it approaches an intersection to provide a right turn lane, it would be prudent to avoid cyclist (and motorist) uncertainty to maintain the position of the bike lane in the same line as it was before the road flared out. “WATCH FOR BIKES” or other suitable signage should also be provided, to ensure motorist awareness of cyclists as the beginning of the road flare approaches.

Accessory Treatments/Finishing Steps

As discussed earlier, motor vehicle traffic presents numerous types of challenges to pedestrian and cyclist mobility in the Study area; it thus follows that no single tool can be realistically expected to completely remedy the challenges pedestrians and cyclists face at any single location, for at every location in the corridor, the problems are multifaceted. For example, pedestrians walking along Elmwood Street near Fuller Road face the combination of not having a sidewalk (no *physical separation* from motor vehicles) high traffic speeds (a *behavioral* problem) and through traffic (meaning drivers may not be aware of the potential for encountering pedestrians or cyclists traveling along or across the street – an *awareness* problem). Even with a set of *design treatments* implemented with the aim of improving the conditions at hand, experience indicates that problems could continue to exist (or new problems arise) even after significant improvements have been made with the aim of enhancing walkability or bikeability.

In many cases, it can be argued that the lack of an *education* element in a project is to blame. One example that might apply to the Elmwood Street example would be the installation of “WATCH FOR PEDESTRIANS” or “SHARED ROADWAY” signs to raise motorist awareness at the scene.

Another more specific point on signage would be that while the additional connection between McKown Road and Abele Park to be presented as Project TRL-4 in the “Trails and Recreational Areas” chapter is certainly desirable, in the short run there are other steps which should be taken such as installing signage to direct people to the existing connection.

A general comment would be that without creating a proliferation of signs on streets to the point that they become “part of the background” because they have lost their uniqueness, it is important to include this education function in the implementation of Study recommendations to ensure that motorists, pedestrians and cyclists all know their rights and responsibilities as they travel about the neighborhood.

Crossings

The public meetings held during the Study effort saw numerous comments raised regarding the difficulty of crossing busy streets in the area, particularly Western Avenue. The experiences related by public meeting participants generally pointed to the following three aspects of Western Avenue:

- The *width* of this street requires that pedestrians have a substantial amount of time to complete a crossing. Pedestrians need to wait for motor vehicles to complete their maneuvers before they can cross; also, they may experience confusion regarding when they are permitted to cross the street.
- The *absence of pedestrian facilities* such as crosswalks and countdown timers results in pedestrian uncertainty regarding where to cross and whether the opportunity exists to safely complete a crossing. The uniform provision of these facilities at all signalized intersections in the corridor would (1)sanction the presence of the pedestrian in the intersection and (2)make clear when the crossing opportunities existed.
- The *conduciveness of current street design to aggressive and/or high-speed driving* tends to impose a hesitance on the parts of pedestrians to cross the street. At some locations, this hesitance is particularly well-founded, as there does not appear to be much evidence in motorists’ behaviors that they are aware of the potential to encounter pedestrians as they proceed through the corridor.

The recommendations for intersection improvements to be presented in the “Traffic Operations” chapter offer tools for addressing these elements of the corridor, combining enhanced pedestrian infrastructure with traffic calming and other treatments emphasizing improved control of motor vehicle flows.

Three principles which can be incorporated into all projects progressed in the area stand to substantially enhance pedestrian comfort and safety.

- Proper Frame of Reference: While Western Avenue is clearly critical to the larger transportation system of the larger area and indeed the region, it is as important to recognize that the approach to managing Western Avenue cannot solely be based on the need to move traffic through the corridor as quickly as possible. That is, if anything, improvements to this road should be developed with an understanding that the levels of congestion and delay experienced by motorists *cannot* be remedied with a construction solution. It is thus important to consider *other* objectives such as enhancing pedestrian comfort and safety when developing project concepts for this street. In fact, it can be argued that the urgency of “leveling the playing field” between motorists, pedestrians and cyclists calls for an *emphasis* on mitigating conflicts between transportation activities and the communities – even if this mitigation comes at a cost to motor vehicle level of service – so as to truly restore the levels of personal mobility, comfort and safety that had been experienced in the past. Several of the intersection improvement recommendations presented in the “Traffic Operations” section illustrate how this frame of reference can be reflected in project design.
- Aggressiveness: It is important for the Town and the residents of McKownville to maintain their efforts to keep the message discussed in the previous item prominent when improvements to intersections along the corridor are being scoped out. As an example of why this vigilance will be necessary, the NYSDOT Highway Design Manual chapter on traffic calming includes a number of reference tables and narrative discussions on where on the State highway system different traffic calming tools may or may not be appropriate. For a busy facility such as Western Avenue upon which the desire to maintain traffic flow may dissuade project designers from incorporating traffic calming features, vigilance in providing the local perspective particularly on those challenges facing pedestrians looking to cross Western Avenue will be critical to ensuring that these concepts have a real chance at being included in project designs.
- Consistency: The CDTA Multi-Modal Program project will improve a number of intersections near CDTA bus stops. The Study Steering Committee noted the importance of seeing treatments such as pedestrian crosswalk enhancements, countdown timers, sidewalks, lighting and streetscaping improvements at the ends of the Western Avenue corridor within the study area and then *consistently replicated* along the way. This would help to send motorists a clear and consistent message regarding the neighborhood setting and the potential for encountering pedestrians (and cyclists) while traveling through the neighborhood. This consistency is particularly critical along the section of Western Avenue between the Albany line and Fuller Road, given both the uniformity of the road’s cross-section and the presence of a large residential neighborhood immediately adjacent to Western Avenue. Treatments at both signalized and unsignalized intersections in the corridor need to be as consistently applied as possible, *both* to reinforce the message to motorists *and* to provide pedestrians and cyclists with a consistent, predictable level of accommodation as they travel along this road.

Maintenance

The year-round maintenance of sidewalks, shoulders, bike lanes and other pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure is critical to assuring the availability of safe, comfortable travel systems. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are not “build it and forget it” installations. Maintenance can be as important to travelers using these modes as it is for motor vehicles, with sweeping and snow plowing being the main examples.

The small rock which a car tire rolls over without a driver’s noticing any perceptible change in control could quite easily cause a cyclist to crash. Similarly, sidewalks must be kept clear of debris, for while most pedestrians are able to avoid such impediments, this may not be true for those pedestrians – particularly the elderly and/or handicapped – who may not see the debris or who may be less secure in their footing. In the worst case, the process of walking out into traffic or bicycling around a hazard may cause an accident.

Clearing snow from sidewalks, shoulders and bike lanes is critical to further the goal of four-season availability of walking and cycling as viable travel modes. Keeping these facilities clear enhances opportunities both (1)for those people who regularly walk or cycle for transportation purposes to continue doing so in the colder months and (2)for other people to be able to do so on an occasional basis (e.g., warmer times during the winter, there is a snow cover but it might otherwise be a pleasant day).

The Town (particularly the Parks Department, having the labor availability during snow season) handles sidewalk plowing along Western Avenue, and is on the one hand theoretically equipped to do this along other roadways, but on the other there presently are not many sidewalks apart from those along the major roads (Western Avenue and Fuller Road, in particular).

An important note on plowing is that when snow is plowed from parking lots or roadways, it often ends up on sidewalks. This problem is magnified when snow or slush continue to be cleared from roads after snowfall has ended, for what is plowed while not having much of an effect on motor vehicle operations while still on the road becomes much denser and prone to icing when it is plowed onto sidewalks. While snowplowing is a challenging task, especially during major storms, sensitivity to this dynamic is in order. Toward this end, the Town does have a commercial snowplow law which specifies fines for covering sidewalks with such “second hand snow.”

In addition to general maintenance, it is critical that the *physical conditions* of bicycle and pedestrian facilities be checked regularly, with timely repair/rehabilitation efforts when deficiencies are found. In addition to the direct injury-avoidance benefit of such condition monitoring, there is a preventative effect rooted in pedestrians’ and cyclists’ *expectations* regarding the availability of a facility. That is, if a facility is known by “regular users” to be in poor condition, they may assume that it is not an available option and take another route.

Sidewalk Law

At its October 15, 2002 meeting, the Town Board passed a law which in essence requires developers to construct sidewalks along all State and County roads in the Town in the course of pursuing their projects, unless the land in question is zoned agricultural. The law includes a provision that the Town Board can by resolution add Town roads to the list of facilities to which the law applies.

Based on the range of comments received during this Study regarding the need for sidewalks around the neighborhood, it would be prudent for the Town to make explicitly clear that the specific facilities included either in the initial law or in the set of facilities assembled and expanded upon by resolution over the course of time be seen as a *minimum* rather than a *maximum* level of additional sidewalk coverage for the Town. Given the relatively low cost to the Town of sidewalk maintenance, particularly when related to the useful life of these facilities, the Town should encourage construction of these facilities by private parties wherever practical, in addition to making efforts of its own to progress sidewalk development through such means as pursuit of Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC) Spot Improvement Program and Transportation Improvement Program funds.

Ordinance/Law Enforcement

At the public meetings, there was frequent mention of enforcement of traffic laws which serve to protect pedestrians and cyclists as a key to enhancing the environments for this mode of travel. “Rolling” right turns on red (that is, without full stops), speeding, disregarding of traffic signals and driving on shoulders/bike lanes (the latter is a particular problem on the eastbound approach to Western Avenue/McKown/Norwood) are among the more common Vehicle and Traffic Law violations in the corridor.

The Town Police Department makes substantial efforts to enforce traffic laws. It is the sheer frequency with which these violations take place combined with police resource limitations which results in the perception that the Police Department is failing to enforce these laws. From a practical standpoint, it is also important to note that the aim of enforcement is not to create a “gotcha” environment or to assure a revenue stream, but to reinforce the notion that the traffic laws need to be obeyed – that is, to enhance the safety of the travel environment by promoting compliance with the law. That said, the Town Police Chief has expressed a willingness to enforce laws that would enhance traffic safety, specifically including a lower speed limit. This point will be revised in the Traffic chapter.

While resource limitations may preclude establishment of dedicated patrols or other mechanisms for ongoing, focused efforts aimed at promoting pedestrian and cyclist safety, it may be possible to conduct periodic campaigns to promote safe behavior on the parts of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. Such campaigns could be coordinated either by the Town or groups such as the Pathways Committee or the McKownville Improvement Association, and be complemented by short-term enforcement efforts such as a morning rush hour “rolling right on red” detail at one or more known trouble spots such as Western Avenue/Church or Western Avenue/McKown.

Municipal ordinances covering issues beyond traffic were also discussed in some detail at the public meeting. The most common examples of such ordinances concerned trash removal and the requirement that public rights-of-way and alleys be kept clear, so as to allow for through travel. The matter of public alleys will be discussed shortly; the comment here is that code enforcement and police officials generally point to a lack of formal complaints as the reasons why certain situations are not addressed through the enforcement process – people make note of a problem, but they do not formally bring it to the attention of the appropriate authorities, and thus nothing gets done. There is ample evidence that the residents of McKownville are willing to take ownership of their neighborhood; a degree of vigilance in this regard is also necessary to ensure that pedestrian and cycling routes are not only in place but kept usable.

Intermunicipal Coordination of Improvements

It was noted in the Executive Summary that for many people, improvements within the neighborhood affect only parts of their “total trips.” While this point may on its surface apply particularly to motor vehicle travel, the location of UAlbany, the State Office Campus and other local educational, employment and commercial opportunities nearby means that even pedestrians and cyclists would benefit from more of an effort on the part of the Town to work with the City of Albany to improve the complete paths people are taking in the area.

Notes on Other “Official and Unofficial” Facilities

As noted earlier, people living and working in the area have made a point of seeking out safe walking and cycling routes to complete their trips. The results of this process are readily apparent, in the forms of worn paths along utility rights of way (as will be discussed in the chapter on trails), between the dead ends off Western Avenue and the UAlbany campus, along the Krum Kill, and in other areas. In addition to these routes, there are some little-known (perhaps except to immediate area residents) public facilities being used for pedestrian and bicycle connections, such as the alley system north of Western Avenue and east of Fuller Road, as located in Figure 1-3 on the following page.

The chapter on trails will note a number of opportunities for purchasing land, securing rights-of-way or simply cleaning up already-public land to enhance the quality of these routes and to more completely integrate them into the area’s pedestrian and bicycle transportation system. In cases such as the alley system illustrated above, there is also a need to protect these facilities both as thoroughfares and for their original purposes of allowing for underground access to water, stormwater and sanitary sewer lines for repairs and improvements. As such, it is important to ensure that adjacent owners have not over time located vehicles, sheds, lawn furniture or other fixtures so as to make *de facto* claims on these public spaces as extensions of their own properties. In addition, these public alleys are being used by some motorists as thoroughfares and/or to access their garages when the garages are behind their houses, without direct street access; it is important to preserve the passability of these alleys.



Map courtesy of Town of Guilderland Planning Department

Figure 1-3
McKownville Alleys Map

A number of these alleys have trees, bushes or other natural growth encroaching on them and thus are only a car-width across. It does not seem appropriate to widen these facilities so as to accommodate cars, pedestrians and cyclists, for widening them would be likely to increase motor vehicle speeds, which would increase the degree of potential conflict with pedestrians and cyclists. Similarly, it does not seem appropriate to encourage pedestrian and cyclist use of these facilities through their inclusion in some sort of official travel network; rather, they should continue to have the “neighborhood amenity” status they do at present. That said, should opportunities present themselves, certain strategic extensions to the alley system should be considered, such as an extension of the alley between Fuller Road and Elmwood Street to provide access to the signalized Fuller Road crossing at Executive Park.