

Mat-Su Borough Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (BPP) Public Participation Plan (PPP)

1. Project Overview

a. Project Purpose

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) is Alaska's fastest-growing borough. As the population of the MSB increases, there is a growing need for transportation infrastructure that provides safe and reliable non-motorized routes to schools, recreation areas, residential neighborhoods, trailheads, and businesses for all residents. According to the Alaska Highway Safety Annual Report, twenty percent of all roadway fatalities in Alaska involve non-motorized users. The MSB Bike and Pedestrian Plan (BPP) aims to develop a detailed and prioritized list of bike and pedestrian infrastructure throughout the MSB that would increase safety and connectivity while promoting a healthier and more active lifestyle for Borough residents. The BPP will identify connectors between urbanized areas, recreation areas, and the backcountry so that MSB residents can enjoy all that the Mat-Su has to offer. Whether residents are looking to bike from their home in Willow to downtown Wasilla, or adventure from Chickaloon to Hatcher Pass, a better-connected network based on the MSB BPP will help get residents where they are going.

b. Project Scope

This is a Borough-wide project. Several communities within the MSB will be the primary focus of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan which are: Chickaloon, Houston, Palmer, Sutton, Talkeetna, Wasilla, Willow and other communities such as, but not limited to, Butte and Lazy Mountain. Within these communities, the bike and pedestrian network will be evaluated, and recommendations will be provided. The BPP will also look for opportunities to connect communities with the existing recreation and backcountry trail systems in the surrounding area. The areas between the communities are along state highways of which the Alaska DOT&PF will ultimately be responsible for creating and maintaining where trails are needed or deficient.

c. Vision and Goals

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough envisions equitable access to a safe bike and pedestrian transportation network where residents and visitors of all ages and abilities enjoy an improved quality of life through healthier, better-connected communities.

The goals of the BPP are:

- Inventory and document the bike and pedestrian network to identify gaps and deficiencies
- Review the MSB Code, design criteria, the MSB Subdivision Construction Manual, and MSB policy to identify potential changes that will help implement the plan's recommendations
- Create a prioritized list of projects to start building out the bike and pedestrian network
- Educate the public on the vision and goals of the BPP
- Solicit public input on the plan's gap analysis and other findings
- Identify funding mechanisms to help implement the plan's recommendations.

2. Purpose and Guiding Principles

a. PPP Purpose

The purpose of the Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to define an outreach and engagement strategy for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (BPP) that will ensure equitable access to the planning process and the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the plan.

- b. Guiding Principles
 - i. Equity and Inclusion

For the BPP to be responsive to the needs of MSB communities, an explicit dedication to equity, inclusion, and environmental justice is required. The MSB planning staff, with the support of the RESPEC consultant team, will continually evaluate and improve the PPP to ensure that equity and inclusion are core elements in the planning process. Public participation will be conducted regardless of race, gender identification, religion, nation of origin, marital status, disability, or socioeconomic status. Strategies will be developed and implemented to be inclusive of differently abled residents, such as picture-heavy outreach materials for those whose first language is not English.

- ii. Community-Driven Planning Framework

The planning process will only be successful with community consultation and support. A community-driven plan takes this several steps further, defined by active engagement and leadership of the process. The PPP strives to utilize the planning process for community awareness, participation, and continued leadership of the BPP in the MSB, following the completion of this PPP.

3. Outreach and Engagement Strategies

- a. Community Stakeholders and Groups
 - i. Identification

A stakeholders list was identified through a collaborative effort between the MSB planning staff, the RESPEC consultant team, and the BPP Steering Committee. This list is intended to capture input and participation from diverse community and stakeholder groups on transportation and economic issues related to the BPP. The BPP Stakeholder List should be considered a living document that will be continuously updated.

- ii. Communication and Outreach

Direct and concise communication is imperative to the BPP's planning effort. Communication will be accessible via multiple media, adhering to the PPP's guiding principles (outlined above). The final BPP document will rely heavily on graphics to communicate the plan's goals, strategies, and benefits to the widest range of residents, including those with limited English language proficiency.

Outreach to stakeholder groups will follow the review of existing MSB plans (transportation, recreation, trails, and community), along with identification of policy, facility, and infrastructure needs. Once existing MSB plans and data gaps are identified, material for community feedback will be generated. Support will be provided for public and stakeholder events, as well as community events.

Public outreach efforts will be carefully coordinated with trusted community partners and organizations that can assist the consultant team. Outreach is directed towards reaching outlying community members, underrepresented groups, and individuals previously unengaged in non-motorized transportation planning.

iii. Stakeholder List

Connecting with trusted stakeholders early in the process and reaching a broad demographic of MSB communities will be crucial for gathering representative data in support of the BPP. The following Stakeholder List was initially developed internally between MSB planning staff and the RESPEC consultant team and then evaluated by the BPP steering committee. These stakeholder groups are identified for distribution of the comment map for community input and for assisting with the identification of community effort towards the BPP. Each organization is listed below:

1. Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation
2. Mat-Su Health Foundation
3. MSB Land Management
4. MSB Public Works
5. MSB Planning & Land Use
6. MSB Parks, Recreation, and Trails Advisory Board
7. MSB Assembly
8. Alaska Veterans & Pioneer Home
9. Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
10. Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers Club
11. American Lung Association
12. American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
13. My House (Mat-Su Homeless Youth Center)
14. Mat-Su Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
15. Identity Inc (LGBTQ+ advocacy in Alaska)
16. Alaska Veterans Health Administration
17. United Way
18. Mat-Su Ski Club
19. Alaska Climate Action Network
20. Palmer Chamber of Commerce
21. Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce
22. Mat-Su Valley Board of Realtors
23. Private Developers
24. Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau
25. Valley Transit
26. Sunshine Transit
27. Chickaloon Area Transit Systems
28. Backcountry Bike and Ski
29. Alaska bicycle Center
30. Safe Routes to School Committee
31. Health and Human Services Board
32. MSB Transportation Advisory Board
33. MSB School District Transportation

b. Steering Committee

i. Monthly Committee Meetings

The MSB Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Steering Committee is made up of eleven members representing different stakeholder groups within the borough. The RESPEC consultant team has scheduled monthly

meetings with the steering committee to ensure the representatives play a guiding role in the focus areas and the process of the plan. The steering committee representatives are:

- Jesse Sumner, MSB Assembly Member
- Stacie Stigar, Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers (VMBAH)
- Julius Adolfsson, ADOT&PF Statewide Bike and Pedestrian Coordinator, Rural Transit Planner
- Joe Metzgar, MSB Land Management
- Joshua Shaver, Alaska Pioneer Homes
- Mike Campfield, MSB Public Works
- Adam Bradway, MSB Planner
- Wes Hoskins, Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation
- Tracy Kalytiak, Mat-Su Health Foundation
- Jim Beck, Mat-Su Health Foundation
- Patricia Owens, Parks, Rec, and Trails Advisory Board

ii. Presentation Materials and Meetings Minutes

The steering committee meetings are currently held virtually via Microsoft Teams. Presentation materials will be developed in addition to an agenda and meeting minutes by the RESPEC consultant team. Meeting documentation will be uploaded to the project website as it is completed for future viewing.

4. Public Participation

a. Interactive Comment Map

The RESPEC consultant team has created an interactive map that provides public input at specified locations. The public can add comments by dropping a “pin” on a given location and then type in a comment associated with that location’s pin. Map users will be able to provide a “like” or “dislike” on the generated comments so popularity for specific comments can be categorized.

b. Public Meetings

Several public meetings are proposed throughout the project to inform and receive feedback from members of the community. Public meetings will be advertised using several outlets including social media, the project website, and links from the MSB Planning Website with appropriate notice. Meeting materials will be developed by the RESPEC consultant team with both MSB planning staff and steering committee oversight. Each public meeting’s content will build upon the previous meeting, incorporating and responding to public input as it is received.

Public meetings will be scheduled to maximize accessibility and ease of community attendance. Virtual and in-person meeting options will be offered, following best practices for meetings based on local COVID-19 conditions. Meeting times and in-person locations will be chosen based on accessibility to a wide range of MSB residents, especially traditionally underrepresented groups in the planning process. The RESPEC consultant team and MSB Planning staff will coordinate facilitating in-person public meetings and meeting materials.

The RESPEC consultant team, MSB planning staff, and the steering committee will explore additional strategies to ensure that public meetings are accessible to a wide range of community members, including holding several rounds of the event on different days of the week and at different times (to work around

different schedules), translating event fliers and materials into commonly spoken, non-English languages, and providing recordings of presentations.

c. Planned Community Events

Informational booths and tables will be staffed at planned community events to share information and engage community members in the process. Community events will be an important distribution point for the comment map, information, and additional involvement opportunities in the future.

Potential events for engagement will be identified by the RESPEC consultant team and confirmed by MSB planning and the steering committee. Events will be chosen to ensure broad participation from the community to maximize community engagement.

d. RESPEC Project Website

The RESPEC consultant team will develop a project website that includes a general project overview and meeting notices, completed plan content, and project updates. This project website will also feature a contact form to direct comments to the consultant team, as well as provide access to the comment map.

e. QR-Code Access to Project Website and Comment Map

The QR codes provide a simple path for the public to connect the real world to online resources in the public participation process. QR codes will be included on paper flyers shared at events and posted in key locations throughout the community to provide quick and easy access to the project website and boost comment map engagement.

f. Social Media

There are several social media groups such as ... that the RESPEC consultant team, MSB planning staff, and steering committee are aware of. Either the RESPEC team or MSB planning staff will reach out to other groups using their perspective social media pages to share meeting notices; public feedback opportunities, including the comment map; and other project updates.

g. Flyers and Posters

One-page flyers and posters will be created on an as-needed basis for planned community events and placed in obvious locations to create awareness and garner public involvement.

h. Local Radio & Newspaper

Public outreach efforts will include, but are not limited to, local radio stations: KSKA 89.7 Public Radio, KVRF 89.5 Big Cabbage Radio, KNLT FM 95.9 The Pass, 100.9 FM KAYO Classic Country radio, and 96.9 FM KYSC Classic Rock station along with local newspapers, such as Frontiersman, Great Lander MatSu Valley, and The People's Paper. The RESPEC consultant team may coordinate with the MSB planning staff to share BPP public meeting announcements and information via local radio stations and printed materials to increase the project's reach.

5. MSB Related Plans and Programs

a. 2016 MSB Trails Plan

The MSB Trails Plan was initially adopted in 2000 and updated several times over the years. The most recent update was completed in 2016 and then adopted in June 2017. This plan focuses on the

backcountry and underfunded trails through the MSB, unlike the separated trails that run parallel to the road system. Our intention in reviewing the 2016 MSB Trails Plan is to incorporate connections between the bike and pedestrian network associated with the motor vehicle network and recreational trails system. The reason for this is due to the many trail users having to use a motor vehicle to reach the recreational trail or using a bicycle along with the bike and pedestrian network with pathway gaps which further risk to not only the cyclist or pedestrian but also to motorists.

b. 2035 MSB Long Range Transportation Plan

The Bike and Pedestrian Plan is seen as a supplemental chapter to the 2035 MSB Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) that was adopted in 2017. The LRTP assessed growth within the MSB over the next 20 years and provides overarching transportation goals for the MSB. As the MSB is the fastest growing in Alaska and has been for the last 20 years, we plan to incorporate the key elements from the 2035 LRTP into the Bike and Pedestrian Plan. This will ensure that the Bike and Pedestrian Plan will not interfere with the current transportation system goals of the MSB and will complement the LRTP with longevity and resiliency in mind.

c. Official Streets and Highways Map

The purpose of the Official Streets and Highways Plan is to have a logical road network with relevant classifications based on use and volume that also addresses safety concerns. The map depicts corridors for future road projects based on development and build-out estimates that gauge where the MSB population is going to work and live in the next two decades. The estimated completion date for the plan is in the summer of 2022. The BPP will utilize the OSHP map as part of the Bike and Pedestrian Plan to further complement the forecasted development and road construction in the MSB.

d. 2011 MSB Economic Development Strategic Plan

Although developed in 2010 and adopted in 2011, there are still several strategies to be utilized from the MSB Economic Development Strategic Plan. As part of the MSB BPP, an updated economic analysis will also be developed. A prioritized list of projects will be incorporated into the BPP meant to increase tourism, recreation, and hospitality spending. This will be done using the 2011 MSB Economic Development Strategic Plan, a current economic analysis, and input from several individuals. The updated bike and pedestrian network will promote connectivity to areas that will benefit from better infrastructure and facilities.

e. Community Comprehensive Plans [Matanuska-Susitna Borough - Plans \(matsugov.us\)](http://matsugov.us)

There are 16 comprehensive community plans across the borough, 1 borough-wide comprehensive plan, and 3 city plans for Houston, Wasilla, and Palmer. These plans provide an opportunity to reach communities from a procedural point of view and incorporate their needs into the Bike and Pedestrian Plan. By including the community comprehensive plans, we can integrate bike and pedestrian facilities in areas ranging from neighborhoods to common travel locations such as the local grocer and/or place of worship.

f. Capital Improvement Program

The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is a nomination-based program that can be utilized in the implementation of the changes to the Bike and Pedestrian network. There are several criteria to be met to be included in a CIP and once the Bike and Pedestrian Plan is adopted, many of the projected additions or changes to the network will qualify as valid CIP projects.

6. Evaluation of Efforts

The RESPEC consultant team will continually evaluate public outreach efforts, following an adaptive management framework. Draft and final deliverables and engagement activities will be reviewed and refined by several members of the RESPEC consultant team, MSB planning staff, and steering committee members before they are shared with the public. Community input will be encouraged at every step of the process and integrated into the draft and final deliverables. Public input will be strongly encouraged at public meetings and planned events and integrated into the plan. The planning process may be re-evaluated and adjusted at any time based on public and stakeholder feedback, within budget and scope constraints.

7. Public Participation Schedule

