

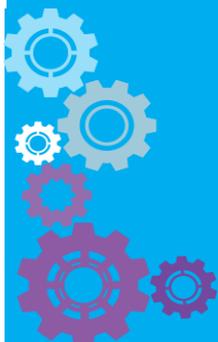


# Marathon County: Connecting Bike Routes



## Key players:

- Department of Public Works in each of the 7 municipalities
- MPO bike/pedestrian committee chair
- City planner
- County health department
- Regional DoT bike/pedestrian coordinator
- Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Local cycling groups
- Media partners
- Highway commissioner



In 2009, the Wausau Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) adopted a bicycle/pedestrian plan, which included a goal of increasing signage to improve connections between existing bike routes. The Wausau MPO area already had great trails and bike-friendly roads, but it wasn't always clear how to get from one trail or route to another. By the summer of 2013, a coalition of local and county government employees had succeeded in installing more than 600 signs along 10 new routes that span 105 miles and connect seven municipalities. A website, [Bicycle Wausau](http://BicycleWausau.com), was also created to promote the new routes.

## First steps

When the Marathon County Health Department (MCHD) had a small amount of extra grant money in 2010, MCHD decided to spend it on signs for bike routes. Department of Public Works (DPW) employees from seven municipalities met at MCHD to pick up the signs. When additional grant money was received in 2012, MCHD brought the DPW representatives together again to discuss strategies to make the Wausau area more bike-friendly. As the project progressed, individuals from other government organizations were recruited to join the team. The group met monthly to decide how to connect routes, design the route signs, and create an implementation plan.

## Starting the conversation

When local DPW and MCHD employees started meeting as a group, they spent the first several meetings without an agenda, which allowed them to discuss current bicycling infrastructure concerns and successes, and brainstorm ways to link the system so anyone could get on a bike and ride the metro area. These first few meetings built relationships and fostered a willingness to work together on the project.

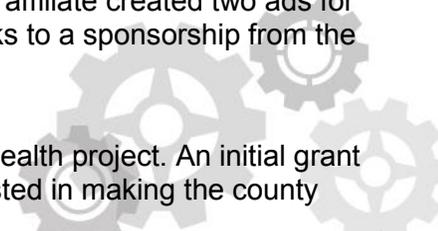


## Gaining community support

Once the routes were agreed upon and the map was developed, the team gained community support by reaching out to the Convention and Visitors Bureau, local cycling clubs, and media partners. The Convention and Visitors Bureau agreed to distribute the new maps to hotels, malls, and kiosks and promoted the bicycle routes on its website. Cycling clubs and local bike shops distributed maps and promoted the new routes to members and customers. The team held a press conference in May 2013, right before Bike Week, that highlighted the collaborative nature of the signage project and discussed the positive impact the project would have on the community. The local CBS affiliate created two ads for the routes, which aired throughout the summer, thanks to a sponsorship from the Marshfield Clinic.

## Challenges

Obtaining funding can be a challenge for any public health project. An initial grant was provided by Marathon County, which was interested in making the county



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more bike-friendly to attract young professionals. The group planned on creating four or five new routes and printing maps with this grant. After discovering that there were more routes and miles than anticipated, they realized that more funding would be needed to ensure signs would be installed along all routes at the same time. Part of a Transform Wisconsin grant was used to cover the additional funding need.

## Key lessons

- Involve the DPWs, city planning departments, and highway commissioner in the planning process. These professionals have valuable knowledge about how to design routes and where and how to install route markers.
- Use the first few meetings to establish relationships before setting or pushing a specific agenda.
- A small monetary investment can result in significant social capital. When the MCHD purchased the first set of signs, the investment was only about \$300. This generated good will and built a relationship between MCHD and the local DPWs, which was critical to this project's success.
- It doesn't always take a big monetary investment to implement a successful Active Community strategy. The total cost for this project was about \$30,000 and covered over 100 miles of bike routes. By focusing on improving connections between existing trails and routes instead of building new trails, the team was able to make a big impact on a small budget.

## Get started in your community

Do you want to make your community more bike-friendly by connecting existing bike routes and increasing signage? Start with these steps, and consult the [Active Community Toolkit](#) and the [Wisconsin Active Communities Alliance website](#) for more resources!

- Recruit a committee to create the routes, design the signs, and promote the project. See Key Players on page 1 for ideas on who can help.
- Assess the current state of bike routes and projects in your area. Are there existing projects to improve trails or add shared-lane markings (sharrows) or bike lanes to roads? Where are current routes located?
- Design routes that connect existing trails and bike-friendly roads. Consider how these will be used (family-friendly routes, bicycle commuting). Look for routes or connections that will likely have the highest use and therefore the greatest impact.
- Agree on a design for the signs. Standard highway signs can be used, and the top part of the sign can be customized. For the Marathon County project, this top portion is a different color in each municipality and has the municipality's logo. Every sign also has the Wausau Area MPO logo, which provides visual continuity along the routes.
- Consider creating a Memorandum of Understanding to highlight everyone's commitment to the plan and outline who is responsible for sign installation and maintenance.
- Gain community support by contacting the media, local businesses, cycling clubs, the chamber of commerce, and the convention and visitors bureau. After the signs are installed, distribute maps of the newly connected routes to local organizations and promote the routes in your community!

## Resources:

[Active Community Toolkit](#)

[Wisconsin Active Communities Alliance](#)

[Bicycle Wausau](#)

[Regional DoT Bike/Ped Coordinators](#)

