

Vision for Pedestrian, Biking, and Hiking Mobility in Belfast

*Submitted February 2008
at the request of the Belfast Vibrancy Committee by
the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition and Belfast Trails*

Summary

At the request of the Belfast Vibrancy Committee, the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition and Belfast Trails have prepared here a vision for pedestrian, biking, and hiking mobility in Belfast. Our vision outlines specific priorities for improvements in sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, bike lanes, handicapped mobility, and recreational walking routes within the city, as well as a general vision for hiking trails and bike routes that connect the downtown with outlying areas and other local points of interest.

First we outline some goals and benefits to the community of having safe and efficient ways for citizens to move around Belfast and surrounding areas without a car. The second section identifies critical improvements needed for safe pedestrian and bike mobility along routes to key destinations. The third through fifth sections suggest other improvements for sidewalks and cross walks, bike lanes, and in town trails and connecting trails. Finally, we propose some next steps for moving forward to further refine and implement this vision.

Appendix A provides a summary table of key destinations and critical improvements needed to address immediate safety concerns.

Report authors

***Belfast Trails** strives to create a healthier community by developing safe, accessible and attractive travel routes for motorless use.*

***The Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition** is a group of organizations and individuals working to support conservation and stewardship of natural, scenic, historic, and public access resources of the Belfast Bay watershed through research, community building, and education.*

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Section 1: Goals and Benefits

Goals:

- Ensure that the citizens of and visitors to Belfast have safe, viable, and attractive pedestrian, bicycle and wheelchair access to new and existing businesses, public services and residential areas in Belfast.
- Promote healthy and economical alternatives to automobile transportation in and around Belfast.

Benefits to the community:

- Promotes individual health and fitness for young and old alike
- Provides safe, viable, low-cost transportation options for youth and those without cars
- Improves handicapped access to businesses and services
- Fosters community
- Makes Belfast an attractive destination for tourists
- Reduces in-town automobile traffic by creating viable & efficient alternatives
- Conserves fuel use, supports the city's climate protection effort
- Reduces air pollution
- Increases recreational opportunities, supports YMCA and hospital fitness programs
- Reduces demand for parking

Section 2: Critical Needs (Route 1 crossings)

Route 1 crossings at Rte. 52, Belmont Ave/Rte 3, and Rte. 141 are heavily used pedestrian and bicycle routes that connect downtown Belfast with key destinations outside the bypass (ie. Troy Howard Middle School, Reny's Plaza, East Side School). We view them as critical because they are the most lacking in infrastructure and planning in terms of safety relative to their high rate of pedestrian use (or potential use) and because they involve routes and intersections with heavy auto traffic.

1. Rte 52: (Destinations: Bank of America property, Walsh Ball Field, Little River Community Trail, YMCA, Troy Howard Middle School)

Status: Community members, the city, and MDOT are currently finalizing a plan to improve pedestrian safety at this intersection. These improvements will be funded by the Safe Routes to School program and the City. Contact Margot Carpenter (338-2385) for more information.

2. Main St./Belmont Ave./Rte. 3/: (Destinations: Reny's Plaza, Rte. 3 commercial district, UMaine Hutchinson Center)

Status: This heavily used pedestrian route is difficult to walk because sidewalks are discontinuous. One cannot walk from the post office up Main St. to Family Dollar and Camden National Bank without crossing the street. Heading from town toward Reny's one has to walk up Main St. hill across from the post office as there is no sidewalk on the left except for a paved drainage swale next to Family Dollar (Fig. 1). At the cemetery one crosses Main St. on a crosswalk to continue sidewalk access on the left side of the street. From here the curb cuts are long with short stretches of sidewalk in between (Fig. 2). Starrett Drive has a crosswalk but no pedestrian crossing signal, so traffic is never stopped at the traffic light (Fig. 3). Next one must cross Rt. 3 to continue on sidewalks, and again, no pedestrian signal exists at this signaled intersection. There is no crosswalk for the Rt. 1 on-ramp. New sidewalks are in place from Reny's to Wendy's on both sides of Rt. 3, and there's a pedestrian signal at the new Reny's entrance (Fig. 4).

Need: All pedestrian crossings should be clearly marked at curb cuts, and a pedestrian walk signal should be added to the intersection at Starrett Dr. for crossing both Starrett Dr. and Rt. 3. Bike lanes should be added to both sides of the street from the post office all the way out to Reny's using the MDOT model seen in Fig. 4 for split lane situations.



Figure 1. Parking and drainage swale next to Family Dollar



Figure 2. Long curb cuts on Belmont Ave interrupt sidewalks



Figure 3. Starrett Dr./Belmont Ave. intersection is busy and has no pedestrian signal



Figure 4. The new Reny's entrance has turn lanes, bike lane, and pedestrian signal

3. Rte 141: (Destinations: East Side School, East Side businesses on Rte 1, Patterson Hill/Robbins Rd. residential community)

Status: This crossing is exceedingly dangerous for pedestrians (Fig. 5), who have four traffic sources to evaluate before deciding to cross (traffic entering Rt. 1 from Rt. 141, two lanes of northbound traffic, and one lane of southbound traffic). Drivers do not expect to see pedestrians here since it is a busy traffic area, and the speed limit changes from 45 mph to 35 mph 500 feet from the crosswalk (at the east end of Veteran's Memorial Bridge, heading east). Many people from the east side walk to town including young people going to the high school or to downtown businesses, and other residents going to work in town and using downtown services. There is not good sight distance for northbound traffic coming off the Veteran's Memorial Bridge, and drivers' attention is focused on the intersection, not the crosswalk

There is no crosswalk between Robbins Rd. and the East Side School.

Need: MDOT and Belfast have worked together on a traffic audit, which is in its final draft. The audit contains recommendations for improving the intersection for pedestrians, and the city should ensure that these are implemented. The state is also considering reconfiguring the entire intersection to make it safer and more efficient. The city should work to keep this process moving forward and to ensure that pedestrian access and safety are a top priority in the design.

A sidewalk should be constructed between Robbins Rd. and the East Side School on Rt. 141 (Fig. 6).



Figure 5. Rt. 1/ Rt. 141 intersection is dangerous for pedestrians



Figure 6. Sidewalk on Rt. 141 ends at Robbins Rd. instead of at the East Side school or Keene Mobile Home Park

4. Outer Congress St: (Destinations: Coastal Workshop, Belfast Airport, Industrial Park, Little River Community Trail.)

Status: Although the Route 1 crossing at Outer Congress Street currently has no pedestrian facilities, it is presently a safe crossing because of the good line of sight and relatively low pedestrian use. As traffic increases, future improvements may be warranted.

Section 3: Sidewalks and Crosswalks

The City used a five-year sidewalk plan to guide the improvement and construction of new sidewalks beginning in 1998. It appears that the plan was not updated after 2003. Belfast Trails and Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition would like to offer to review the condition of sidewalks in 2008 so that the City can develop a new plan for continued improvements. We would also like to cooperate with wheelchair users and accessibility experts to help the city improve its sidewalks specifically for wheelchairs.

General recommendations:

- Mark all crosswalks prominently with high visibility cones for a longer portion of the year (ie. not just in summer).
- Review and update the 1998 sidewalk plan
- Inventory condition of all sidewalks (and identify problems for wheelchair access)

In compiling information for this report, some specific areas stood out as needing attention:

High St. (between Miller and Belfast Glass): replace or renew sidewalk and curb, add green space & trees. (Currently in discussion)

Rte. 3 from in town to Reny's, through the Rte. 1 interchange. (Figures 1, 2, and 3)

Church St. (between Market and Anderson): Clearly mark pedestrian right of way past Duval's

High St. (MaLleod's to Waterfall Arts): Minimize length of and mark pedestrian crossings. Clarify pedestrian route and wheelchair route.

Walkway from Post Office to Family Dollar (Figure 1)

Starrett Drive: Clearly mark pedestrian right of way from Hannaford and Ocean State Job Lot to Rte. 3, mark and minimize street crossings.

East Side: Improve sidewalk from footbridge to Perry's Nut House

Section 4: Bike lanes

We recommend using Miller Street as a well-designed model for bicycle travel; it has no painted centerline and has well-marked bike lanes on each side.

General recommendations:

- Research/compile other recommendations — this section needs fleshing out

Section 5: In-town trails

These are “trails” that offer recreational, cultural and scenic walking routes within the City, connect significant destinations, or allow public access to the shore. Some examples are listed here; others may be identified. These trails contribute to Belfast’s vibrancy, and should be promoted in tourism guides.

1. Rangeways (Public rights of way to the shore)

Recommendation: Review the status of all City Rangeways and ensure that public access to the shore via the existing rights of way is maintained

2. Waterfront trail (Belfast Boathouse to west end of Footbridge)

Recommendation: further develop, post signs, landowner negotiations, integrate into Stinson property use.

3. The Muck / Kirby Lake Nature Trail (Grove Cemetery to the Muck and beyond)

Recommendation: develop concept with input from the City, design interpretive signs, landowner negotiations

4. Museum in the Streets

Section 6: Connecting trails

This section describes trails (either existing or envisioned) that connect the City of Belfast with other trail systems, other communities, or other destinations outside the immediate City. We envision initiative, funding and maintenance for these trails to come from other organizations, such as the BBWC, Coastal Mountains Land Trust. Support from the City would be in the form of cooperation in planning, letters of support for funding, and acknowledgment of the value trails bring to the community.

1. **Rail Trail** to City Point Bridge

Recommendation: Support development by Coastal Mountains Land Trust.

2. **Little River Community Trail** and **Outer Greenway Trail** (Belfast River Water District to Stover Preserve via Little River Community Trail, Troy Howard, and the Hutchinson Center)

Recommendation: This trail would form a ring around Belfast, from the Little River Water District to the Stover Preserve on the Passy River at Doak Rd. Endorse BBWC efforts to develop this trail, support access to trail heads and development of safe parking options.

3. **East Coast Greenway**, an interurban pedestrian and bicycle route connecting the entire East Coast, from Florida to Maine and the Maritimes

Recommendation: Continue collaboration and cooperation with this initiative

4. **Maine Birding Trail**: Belfast is part of the Maine Birding Trail (see Mainebirdingtrail.com)

Recommendation: Continue collaboration and cooperation with this initiative

5. **Inter-town trail connectors** for hiking and skiing

- a) Moose Point State Park and Searsport
- b) Frye Mountain
- c) Durham State Forest & Northport
- d) Hurds Pond

6. **Passagassawaukeag Canoe Trail** and **Goose River Canoe Trail**

Section 7: Other considerations

1. An important aspect of promoting car-less mobility is making it possible for citizens to travel between Belfast and other population centers such as Rockland, Bangor, and Augusta. We would like to see the City prepared to collaborate regionally with other municipalities or state-level organizations – possibly even take the initiative – to create regular public transportation routes that connect job, service, and shopping centers as well as the outlying communities those routes will pass through.

Section 8: Summary of proposed next steps

To move forward with this vision, we recommend the City Council appoint a “Mobility Committee” of not more than five individuals. This group would meet this spring and begin with the following actions:

1. Further refine this vision and clarify priority projects
2. *Identify* specific information needs (e.g. research sidewalk conditions, intersection use, bicycle route use, disability access needs, etc.)
3. Coordinate a way for students (through Service Learning) or other volunteers (BBWC members, Senior College, or interested individuals) to research that information.
4. Publicize the work of the committee and recruit interested individuals to help with specific mobility projects.
5. Work with the City in spring 2008 to implement any simple, immediate low-cost improvements, such as setting out crossing cones for a longer season.

The Mobility Committee would be the primary “engine” for implementing a mobility vision for the City. It would work with the City Council to ensure that the vision is implemented in a coordinated way, that decisions are based on good information, and that the vision evolves as needed.

At any point a priority is identified, the Mobility Committee would establish a sub-committee (“project team”) to proceed with developing and implementing that project, Project teams would work directly with the Mobility Committee. As an example, over the next five years, teams might work on specific projects: (by example only -- not suggested as a priority list). The number of projects underway at once depends on the capacity of the Mobility Committee and volunteer availability.

2008

Rte. 52 (existing, Margot Carpenter leader)
Rte. 141 intersection & East side sidewalks
Belmont Ave corridor

2009

Downtown sidewalks

2010

Rangeways
Waterfront trail

2011

Bike lanes

2012

Regional public transportation