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Qualitative User Needs Analysis

Summary of Strategic Public Involvement Plan

Aiken County recognizes that the success of any community improvement plan is dependent upon a meaningful community involvement effort. Aiken County conducted a pro-active stakeholder and public involvement program for the development of the Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan focused on soliciting local government and community interaction throughout the study process. The process was designed to be responsive to citizen participants and was committed to utilizing the knowledge and understanding of citizens to address important issues. The ARTS/Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan: A Guide for Community Involvement and Consensus (GCIC) was developed at the onset of the study to define how stakeholders, the public, and study team staff involvement roles and opportunities throughout the planning effort. Outreach activities were developed to offer multiple opportunities for engagement at varying levels of involvement. The full GCIC document is included in Appendix G.

The public participation framework included four primary groups to guide the development of the Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The four groups were: (1) Project Steering Committee; (2) Stakeholder Interview Group (3) Targeted Focus Group; and (4) Community Organizations and General Public. The roles and membership for each of these groups are defined in detail in the GCIC.

The GCIC included an outline for activities including two public workshops; education and information booths at public events; a study website; on on-line survey; a study fact sheet; press releases; study database development and maintenance; media education and advertisement; and advisory and stakeholder meetings. The following sections include results of several of these outreach activities.

Summary of Survey Results

To engage local residents, a Citizen Survey was widely available and promoted from September 8 to November 15, 2011. The survey included 20 questions related to biking and walking conditions in the ARTS/Aiken County Area. See Appendix D to view the complete survey. To guide the study team, the survey questions were designed to gather citizen input regarding:

Frequency of walking and biking to particular types of destinations
Reasons for not walking or biking more frequently
Types of facilities that would likely influence more frequent biking
Specific destinations desirable for walking or biking connection
Roadway corridors desirable for improved accommodation of walking and biking
Facility types that may influence increased biking in the region
Program concepts to consider to promote safe walking and biking

The following activities were utilized to promote participation in the study survey:

Survey available on City of Aiken and Aiken County websites with user-friendly links to the sites: www.BikeWalkARTS.com and www.WalkBikeARTS.com

Aiken County Steering Committee Member outreach
Press Releases to Local Media
Targeted Aiken County Focus Group Meeting
Targeted outreach to University of South Carolina, Aiken

Targeted outreach to Eat Smart Move More of Aiken County
Targeted outreach to City of Aiken Recreation Committee
Targeted outreach to Silver Sneakers
Targeted outreach to Ashley Cooper Bridge Race Aiken County Participants
Targeted outreach to Aiken City Bike Patrol
Targeted outreach to City of Aiken Seniors Commission
Targeted outreach to City of Aiken Parks, Recreation and Tourism Staff
Targeted outreach to Aiken Bicycle Club
Targeted outreach through City of Aiken Utility Newsletter
September 9 & 10 – Booth at Aiken’s Makin in Aiken
September 17 – Booth at ARTS in the Heart in Augusta
September 24 – Booth at Aiken Bluegrass Festival in Aiken
September 30 – Booth at 5th Friday by Aiken Chamber of Commerce
October 3 - Public Workshop in Aiken, South Carolina
October 29 – Booth at Jack O’ Lantern Jubilee in North Augusta

A total of 361 responses from the South Carolina study area were recorded during the two month survey period. Of the respondents, 47% of the responses were from City of Aiken residents, 34% from Aiken County residents, 14% from North Augusta residents, and 5% from Edgefield County residents. Females comprised 57 percent of the respondents and 43 percent were male. The ages of the respondents ranged from age 10 to over 70 years of age. The respondents reported their daily work commute destinations as approximately:

50 percent commute to the City of Aiken;
10 percent commute to Aiken County;
10 percent commute to Georgia;
8 percent commute to Savannah River Site;
2 percent to commute to North Augusta
2 percent commute to Edgefield County

Approximately 19 percent of the respondents reported that they do not commute or commute outside of the study area to work on a daily basis.

The survey was designed to gather information regarding the frequency of biking and walking in the Aiken County area and further engaged the respondents to identify the reasons they do not currently walk or bike more frequently. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents reported that they do own a bicycle. When asked specifically about biking activities, the most frequent destinations or trip purposes respondents reported for biking on a seldom to daily basis are: for fitness and leisure (60%); to parks and trails (40%); for shopping or errands (20%); and to a gym, YMCA or Recreation center (20%). Thirty percent of the respondents reported never riding a bike at all.

The most common reasons for not biking or biking infrequently were reported as follows: roads do not feel safe; distance from home to work, school or shopping; lack of bicycle parking at destinations; and lack of knowledge of best bicycling routes. Twenty percent of the respondents reported that they do ride frequently while 17 percent of the respondents reported that they do not have an interest in bicycling. Of the survey respondents that do bike to specific destinations in the region, Figure 5-1 illustrates the frequency with which they do so. Figure 5-2 defines the obstacles respondents cited that prevent more frequent biking.

When asked specifically about walking activities that occur on a seldom to daily basis, the most frequent destinations or trip purposes that respondents reported are: for fitness and leisure (82%); to parks and trails (52%); to a gym, YMCA or Recreation center (29%); to shopping or errands (27%); to civic events or civic buildings (26%); and to school (19%). Ten percent of the respondents reported a lack of interest in walking in the Aiken County Region.

The most common reasons for not walking or walking infrequently were reported as follows: roads do not feel safe and distance from home to work, shopping, or school. Thirty-five percent of the respondents reported that they do walk frequently while 10 percent of the respondents reported that they do not have an interest in walking. Of the survey respondents

Figure 5-1 Frequency of Biking by Destination in the Aiken County Area

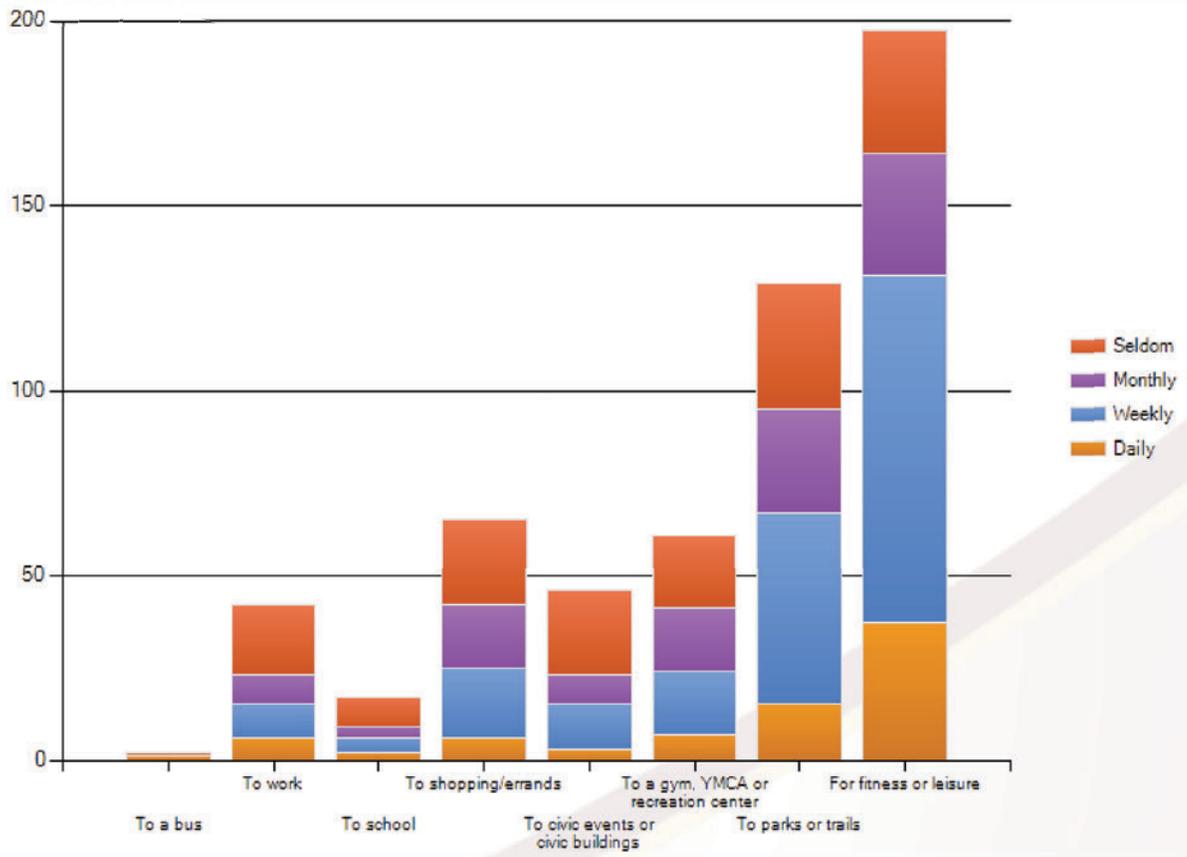
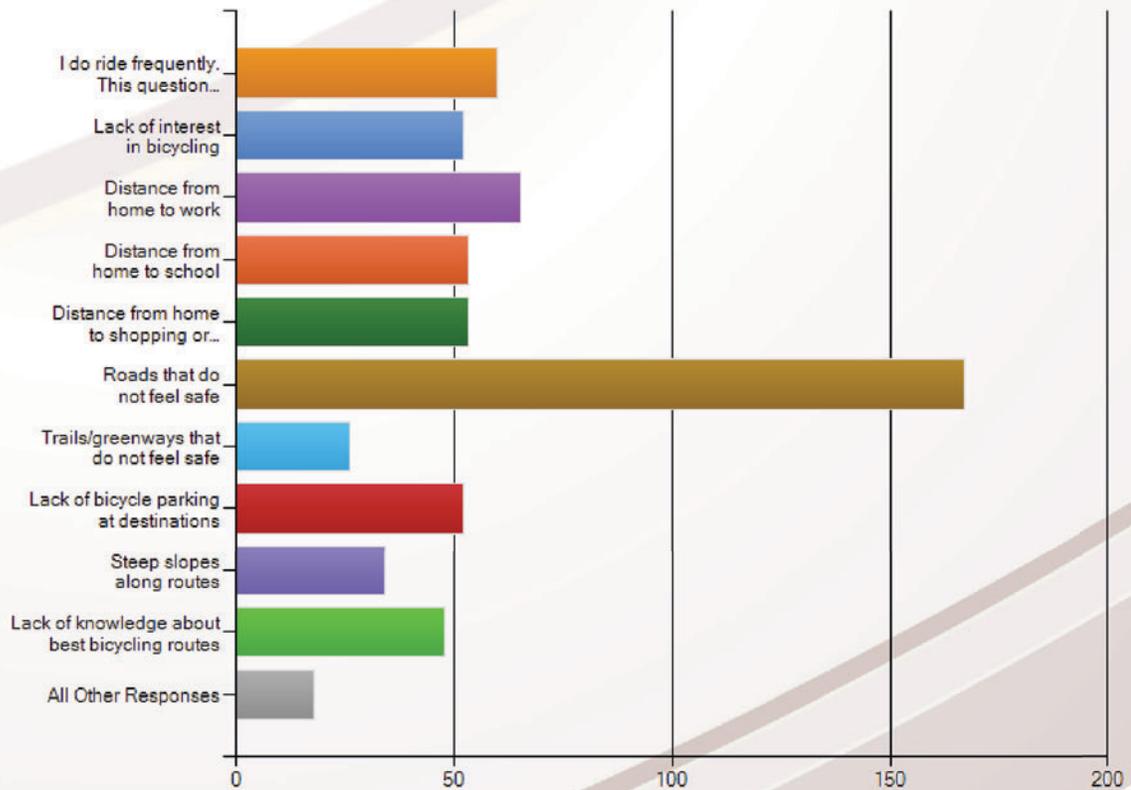


Figure 5-2 Reasons for Not Biking or for Biking Infrequently in the Aiken County Area



that do walk to specific destinations, Figure 5-3 illustrates the frequency with which they do so. Figure 5-4 defines the obstacles respondents cited that prevent more frequent walking.

The survey further explored types of bicycle facilities that could have a positive impact on the biking environment in the Aiken County area. Participants were asked to consider several types of bicycle facilities ranging from off-road paths, on-road infrastructure, pavement markings, and signage. The participants ranked each type of facility as "very likely" to "very unlikely" to influence them personally to bike more frequently. The facilities reported as most likely to have a positive impact on biking in the region in order of preference were: off street greenways, striped bicycle lanes, bicycle boulevards, signed bicycle routes, and wide outside travel lanes. It should also be noted that all of the facilities listed in the survey received more positive feedback than negative feedback with the exception of using "sharrow" pavement markings. The majority of respondents reported that "sharrows" would not likely have a positive influence on the frequency of biking. Figure 5-5 illustrates the responses regarding feelings about particular types of biking facilities. The orange and blue portions of the bars indicate the levels a respondent feels that a facility would have a positive influence on them to bike more often.

Respondents were also asked to select the potential program concepts they believed would be effective in promoting safer walking and biking in the Aiken County area. The programs selected as most likely to be effective in order of frequency were:

Media campaign to educate motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians
Media campaign encouraging residents to bike, walk, and live an active lifestyle
Safe Routes to School Program to engage schools, parents, and local officials
Local Police Enforcement Programs
Workshops for children/youth that teach safe bicycling skills
Safe Routes to Transit program to improve walking and biking access to bus stops

Figure 5-6 illustrates the support of the various program concepts presented in the survey.

The survey also sought to gather information regarding specific destinations, corridors, and intersections respondents feel are important for improved access, connectivity, and facility improvements. The questions used in this portion of the survey allowed the respondent to provide input in their own language and the study team sorted, grouped, and applied uniform language to like responses to the level of accuracy allowable given different levels of detail and specificity. The results generated by these questions served as a guide to ensure that frequently cited responses were considered as priority investment areas during the technical planning evaluation and ultimately in ranking recommended transportation system improvements.

The most commonly cited destinations respondents would like to be able to walk or bike safely to were downtown areas, schools, recreation areas, shopping areas, medical districts, and existing walking or biking facilities. The most frequently cited specific destinations in Aiken County are listed in Table 5-1.



Figure 5-3 Frequency of Walking by Destination in the Aiken County Area

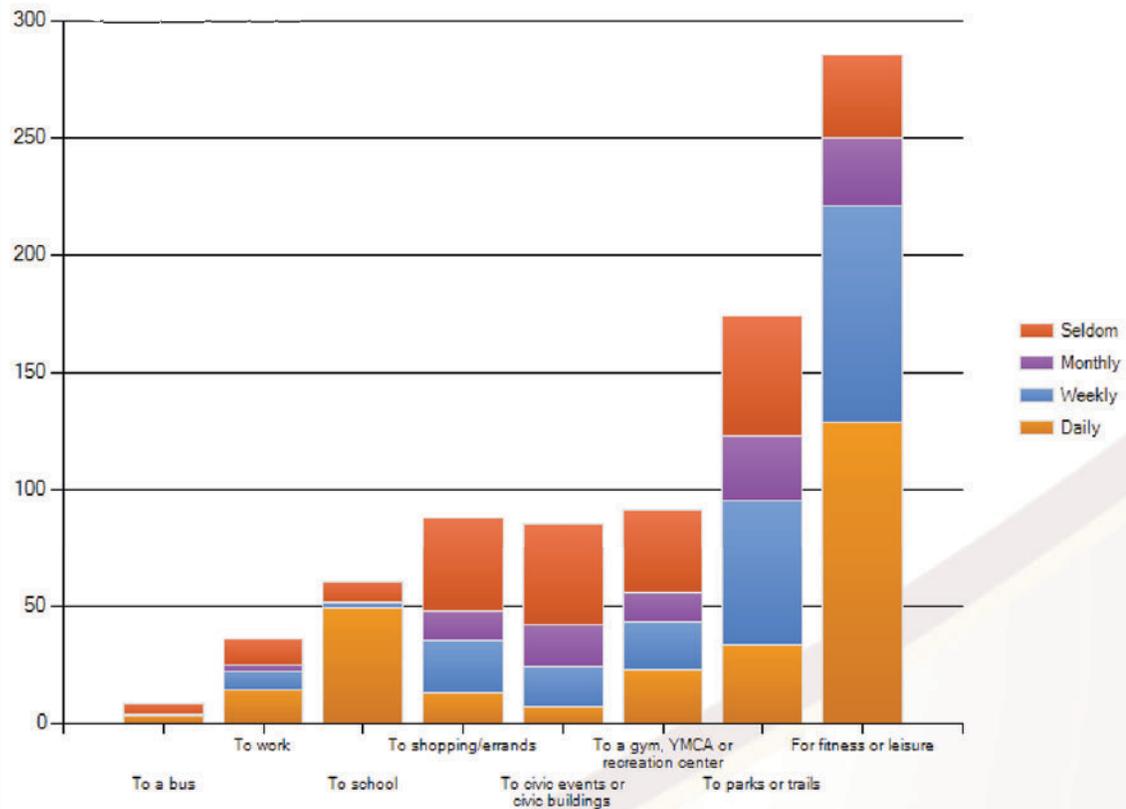


Figure 5-4 Reasons for Not Walking or for Walking Infrequently in the Aiken County Area

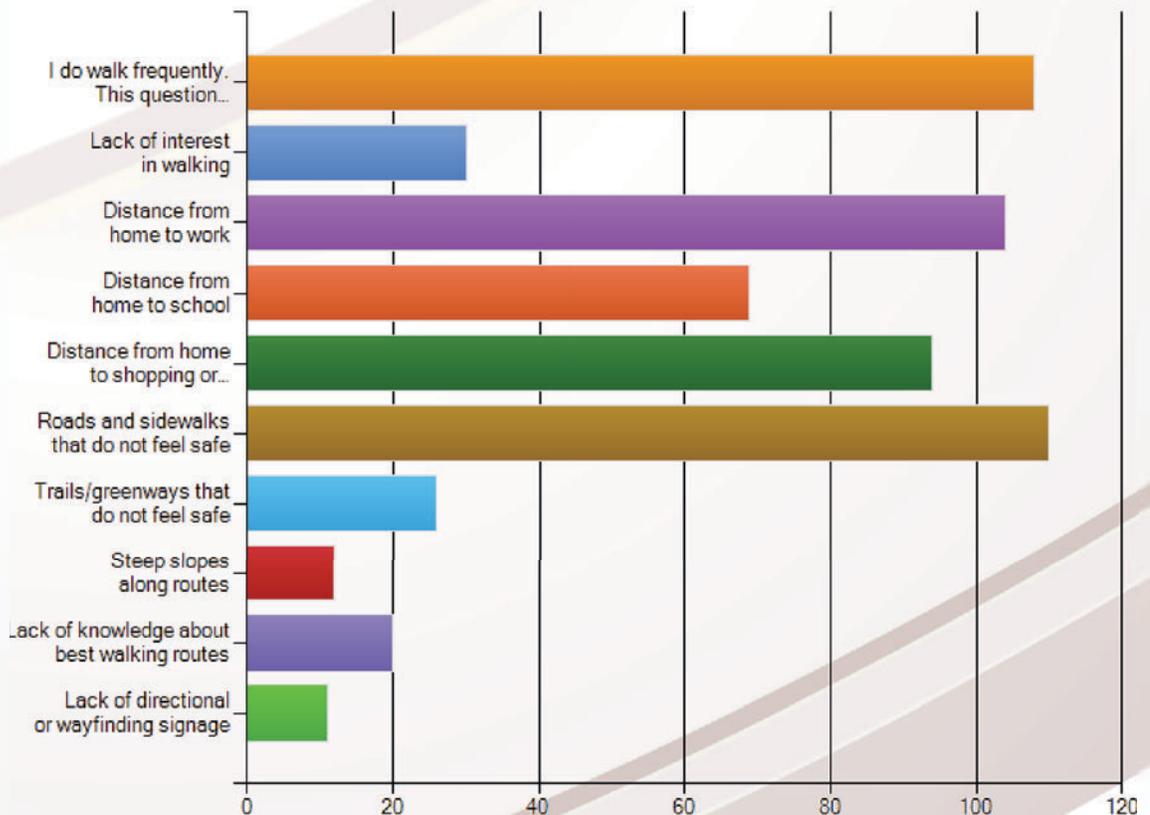




Figure 5-5 Influence of Bicycle Facilities to Bike More Often

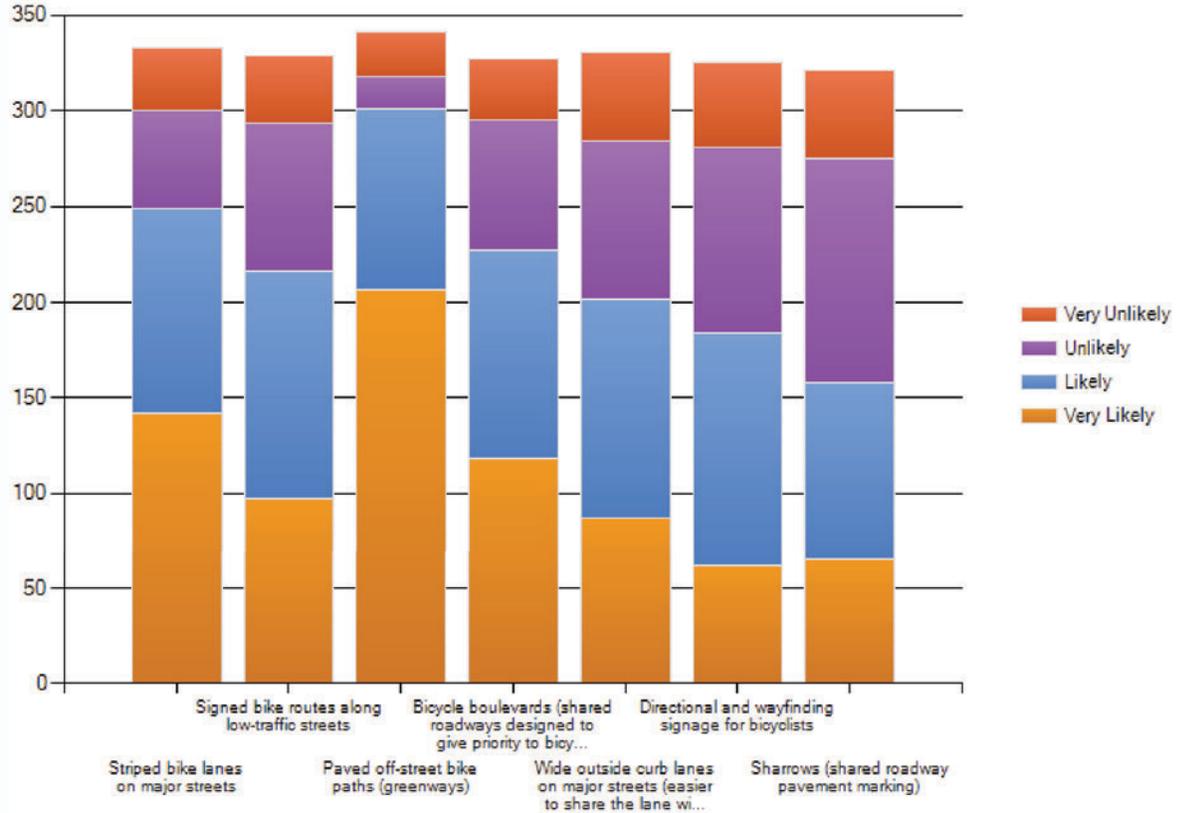


Figure 5-6 Potential Program Concepts to Promote Safer Walking and Biking in the Aiken County Region

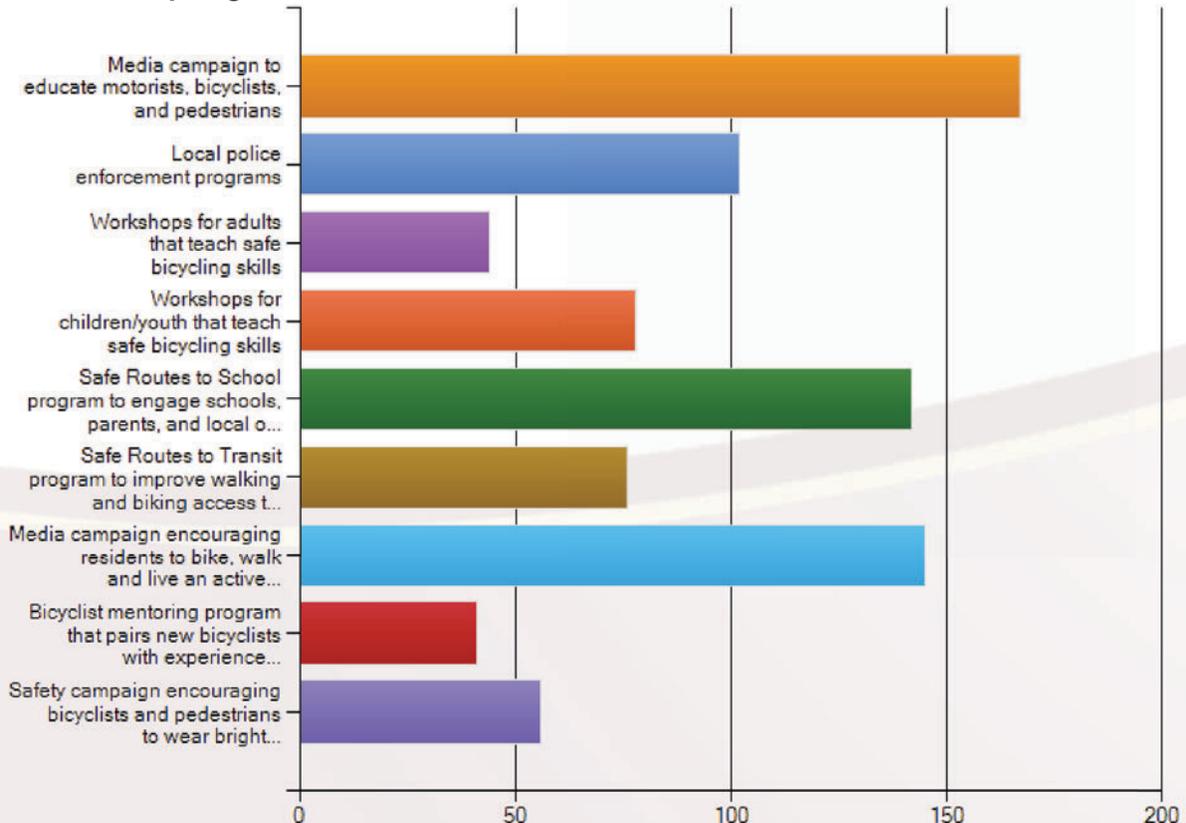




Table 5-1: Destinations Aiken County Area Respondents Would Like to Walk or Cycle Safely To (South Carolina)

Number of Responses	Destinations
15 or more	Aiken Downtown Aiken Mall Aiken Regional Hospital Aiken Wal-Mart Hitchcock Woods O'Dell Weeks Activity Center University of South Carolina-Aiken
11-14	Citizens Park North Augusta Greenway Whiskey Road
7-10	Aiken High School General shopping/grocery/gyms North Augusta Downtown South Aiken High School Southside of the City of Aiken
4-6	Aiken Bypass Aiken Elementary School Hopeland Gardens Pine Log Road Richland Avenue Riverview Park Savannah Rover Site University Parkway

bicycle and pedestrian connectivity including: Aiken downtown, Aiken Mall, Aiken Regional Hospital, Aiken Wal-Mart, Hitchcock Woods, O'Dell Weeks Activity Center, University of South Carolina – Aiken, Citizens Park, North Augusta Greenway, and Whiskey Road. Table 5-2 lists South Carolina roadway corridors that respondents would like to see improved to accommodate bicycling. South Carolina corridors indicated as desirable for improvement to accommodate walking are listed in Table 5-3.

In comparing the most commonly cited South Carolina corridors desirable for accommodation of biking with those desired for a better walking environment, there was notable overlap in the two priority lists. In South Carolina, 11 of the 13 most cited biking corridors were also noted as desirable for walking: Aiken downtown, Banks Mill Road, Georgia Avenue, Hitchcock Parkway, Pine Log Road, Richland Avenue, Silver Bluff Road, University Parkway, Whiskey Road, Martintown Road, and Powderhouse Road. Each of these corridors provides connectivity to the top ten previously noted destinations desirable for

Table 5-2: Roadway Corridors Respondent Would Like to See Improved to Accommodate Bicycling (South Carolina)

Number of Responses	Biking Corridors
15 or more	Aiken Bypass Aiken Downtown Banks Mill Road Georgia Avenue Hitchcock Parkway Pine Log Road Richland Avenue Silver Bluff Road University Parkway Whiskey Road
11-14	Highway 1 Martintown Road Powderhouse Road
7-10	Five Notch Road Highway 118 Laurens Street North Augusta Greenway South Boundary Avenue
4-6	Dibble Road Hayne Avenue Highway 19 Highway 25 Highway 302 Highway 421 Park Avenue Trolley Line Road Vacluse Road

Table 5-3: Roadway Corridors Respondents Would Like to See Improved to Accommodate Walking (South Carolina)

Number of Responses	Walking Corridors
15 or more	Pine Log Road Richland Avenue Silver Bluff Road Whiskey Road
11-14	Banks Mill Road University Parkway
7-10	Aiken Downtown Hitchcock Parkway Highway 118 Bypass Powderhouse Road
4-6	Dibble Road Georgia Avenue Martintown Road Trolley Line Road York Street

Finally, intersections respondents would like to see improved to accommodate safe pedestrian crossing are listed in Table 5-4. The majority of the intersections in each table overlap with previously identified corridors desirable for walking. The following intersections may indicate key locations desirable for crossing each corridor and will be considered in the improvement prioritization.



Table 5-4 Roadway Intersections Respondents Would Like to See Improved to Accommodate Safe Pedestrian Crossing (South Carolina)

Number of Responses	Pedestrian Intersections
11-14	Pine Log Road and Silver Bluff Road Whiskey Road and Pine Log Road Whiskey Road and South Boundary
7-10	Whiskey Road and Dougherty Road Whiskey Road and Silver Bluff Road
4-6	Laurens Street and Richland Avenue Pine Log Road and Banks Mill Road University Parkway and Richland Avenue
3	Aiken Mall and Target/Lowes Georgia Avenue and Martintown Road Knox Avenue and Martintown Road Whiskey Road and East Gate Drive Whiskey Road and O'Dell Weeks Activity Center Whiskey Road and Price Avenue

Summary of Focus Group Comments

During the Needs Assessment Phase of the Aiken County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, a focus group panel met for a facilitated discussion of bicycle and pedestrian needs throughout the Aiken County area. The focus group was designed to bring together citizens with diverse interests throughout Aiken County. The complete notes from the focus group meeting are in Appendix D. The key findings emerging from the meeting are:

Conduct activities to promote courtesy between motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians
Focus on involving private sector investment
Capitalize on areas that are already suitable for cycling and walking to promote image of user-friendliness and economic benefits
All planning for new facilities should address walking and biking
Inter-governmental planning and funding of improvements is key
Provide a safe connection between Aiken, North Augusta, and Edgefield
Connect the North Augusta Greenway to the Augusta Canal
Plan for those who walk and bike out of necessity as opposed to simply for recreation
Address sidewalk gaps and opportunities to connect to key destinations
Examine bus routes, sidewalk connectivity to stops, and shelters
Install bicycle racks at public buildings

Summary of Public Workshop Activities

The first public workshop was held during the Needs Assessment phase of the study on October 3, 2011 at the City of Aiken Municipal Building.

A presentation was delivered covering the following material:

- National Bike-friendly, Walk-friendly Trends
- Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Evaluation, and Equity
- Existing Conditions
- Goals and Objectives
- Public Outreach Efforts and Opportunities

Following the presentation, workshop participants engaged with study team staff at four break-out stations focused on: walking programs, walking infrastructure, bicycling programs, and bicycling infrastructure. At the break-out stations, participants marked locations of opportunity and concern on large maps, completed questionnaires related to walking and biking programs, and engaged in discussions of walking and biking needs. All

discussions were documented on flip charts to create a list of needs and opportunities to be incorporated into the planning process. In addition, general comment forms were also distributed to all participants for submittal of additional information relevant to the study process. A summary of the key findings from the public workshop are as follows:

Bicycling Infrastructure:
Bicycle parking is needed
Shoulders needed on rural roads
Recreational trails are preferred over on-road facilities
Connect equestrian trails and expand access
Bicycling Programs:
Targeted law enforcement needed for motorists and cyclists
Chamber of Commerce support to encourage biking and walking and to secure private sector sponsors
Safety education regarding laws, lights, clothing
Incorporate bicycle safety training in schools and through employers
Online tool for planning safe walking and biking routes
Walking Infrastructure:
Ramps and handrails are needed throughout Aiken for wheelchairs and mobility carts
Ensure roadside landscaping does not hinder walking infrastructure or hinder driver visibility
Walking Programs:
Increased public transportation would promote walking as a viable option
Partner with Aiken Downtown Merchants Association to emphasize economic benefits of pedestrian accommodation
Lower or better enforce speed limits in downtown Aiken
Improve pedestrian crossing conditions at key intersections in town and outside of town
Partner with retiree population to encourage senior citizens to walk for health

The complete Needs Assessment Public Workshop Notes are included in Appendix D.

A second public workshop was held during the Recommendations Phase of the study.

Key Findings

Needs Assessment Phase

Key Survey Findings

The most common reasons for not walking or walking infrequently were reported as follows: roads do not feel safe and distance from home to work, shopping, or school. The most common reasons for not biking or biking infrequently were reported as follows: roads do not feel safe; distance from home to work, school or shopping; lack of bicycle parking at destinations; and lack of knowledge of best bicycling routes.

The facilities reported as most likely to have a positive impact on biking in Aiken County in order of preference were:

- Off street greenways,
- Striped bicycle lanes,
- Bicycle boulevards,
- Signed bicycle routes, and
- Wide outside travel lanes.

The programs selected as most likely to be effective in promoting walking and biking in Aiken County in order of frequency were:

Media campaign to educate motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians
Media campaign encouraging residents to bike, walk, and live an active lifestyle
Safe Routes to School Program to engage schools, parents, and local officials
Local Police Enforcement Programs
Workshops for children/youth that teach safe bicycling skills
Safe Routes to Transit program to improve walking and biking access to bus stops

The Top Destinations Aiken County area Respondents Would Like to Walk or Cycle Safely to are:



Aiken Downtown
Aiken Mall
Aiken Regional Hospital
Aiken Wal-Mart
Hitchcock Woods
O'Dell Weeks Activity Center
University of South Carolina-Aiken
Citizens Park
North Augusta Greeneway
Whiskey Road

Need for positive promotion of bicycling through activities and media
Plan for those who walk and bike out of necessity as opposed to simply for recreation
Recreational trails are preferred over on-road facilities
Partner with the private sector to match funding for facilities, finance wayfinding signage, designate a bicycle park and ride area

Key Survey Conclusions

In South Carolina, 11 of the 13 most cited biking corridors were also noted as desirable for walking: Aiken downtown, Banks Mill Road, Georgia Avenue, Hitchcock Parkway, Pine Log Road, Richland Avenue, Silver Bluff Road, University Parkway, Whiskey Road, Martintown Road, and Powderhouse Road. Each of these corridors provides connectivity to the top ten identified destinations desirable for bicycle and pedestrian connectivity including: Aiken downtown, Aiken Mall, Aiken Regional Hospital, Aiken Wal-Mart, Hitchcock Woods, O'Dell Weeks Activity Center, University of South Carolina – Aiken, Citizens Park, North Augusta Greeneway, and Whiskey Road.

Key Focus Group and Public Workshop Findings

The following themes were noted throughout the Focus Group and Public Workshop outreach activities:

Connect the North Augusta Greeneway to the Augusta Canal
More bicycle parking is needed
Shoulders needed on rural roads
Identify "easy opportunities" and implement: fill in short gaps, erect signage, utilize opportunities like alleys and creeksides, add pavement markings
Capitalize on areas that are already suitable for cycling and walking to promote image of user-friendliness and economic benefits
Increased education for cyclists and motorists is needed
Law enforcement awareness and support of cycling community is needed