

Transportation and Sustainability

Transportation accounts for 32.4% of carbon emissions in the Little Rock metro area's carbon emissions, the single largest source of man-made carbon emissions in Central Arkansas and higher than the national average ([pg. 60](#)). The Little Rock metro area's vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is the highest out of 52 comparable communities ([pg. 5](#)). While unfortunate, this understanding is also empowering because it identifies transportation as an area where changes could yield relatively large sustainability dividends.

Transportation and Equity

The high carbon footprint of transportation in our metro area has much to do with prioritizing the efficiency of automobile movement over other transportation modes. However, high VMT is not the only outcome of this prioritization. When our transportation network is built to serve people in personal automobiles, safe movement on that network begins to *require* personal automobiles. Mobility for residents who can't or prefer not to drive personal automobiles becomes less efficient and more dangerous. Households without cars become less mobile and more at risk when they attempt to move. This creates obstacles in arriving to work and school on time; compromises upward mobility; and perpetuates cycles of poverty. This committee seeks to make transportation more equitable.

The City of Little Rock is committed to increasing sustainability and providing equitable services, including mobility, for all of our residents. These goals will help the City better address this commitment.

Vision

Changes to the City's built environment over time will allow residents safe and efficient mobility through walking, biking, transit, and personal automobile. Necessary changes include better accommodation of this movement on our street grid and through off-street trails. **Ultimately, our on- and off-street transportation grid will allow anyone that wants to travel anywhere in Little Rock to do so without a car.** In order for people to choose to move without a car, the City will also prioritize infill and dense, mixed-use development that brings origins and destinations closer together to make active transportation easier and its efficiency more competitive with personal automobiles. These changes will increase sustainability, but also increase public health, transportation equity, public safety, livability, infrastructure, attracting and retaining a creative class workforce, and economic development.

Key Domains

The Little Rock Sustainability Commission's transportation goals are intended to reduce Little Rock's contribution to climate change, while reinforcing Little Rock's commitment to equity, health, and safety. To do that, we recommend focus on the following three domains:

Promote Smart Growth

Smart growth is an approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement and discourages urban sprawl.

Create Networks

A lack of infrastructure supporting walking or biking (sidewalks, bike lanes, shared use trails) is the most important single barrier to active transportation in Little Rock. Encouraging zero or low carbon emissions transportation requires a complete, dense network connecting origins to destinations. This network is a prerequisite to a major shift in transportation mode use.

Transportation Choice

This goal includes measures beyond network planning and installation, such as shared micro mobility options, transit options, and other measures to reduce VMT and transportation carbon emissions.

Promote Smart Growth

The following goals fall within the Promote Smart Growth domain. The Sustainability Commission acknowledges that we may not be able to address all of these goals within the next five or ten years, but feels it is important to outline these goals holistically. We also acknowledge that this list may be incomplete; that the City may accomplish important items within the Smart Growth domain that aren't explicitly considered below. Listing these goals specifically is only meant to guide stakeholders to impactful actions.

- 1. Understand Smart Growth Policies:** Work with experts within and outside our community to increase awareness of Sustainability Commission, Planning Commission, City Planning and Development, developers, the public, elected officials, and other relevant stakeholders of Smart Growth Policies and how they relate to building a more sustainable urban environment.
- 2. Limit Roadway Expansion:** Evidence continues to demonstrate that roadway/highway expansion does not reduce congestion in the long run, but rather subsidizes and incentivizes single occupancy vehicular travel, increasing regional vehicle miles traveled and promoting sprawling development.
- 3. Identify Locally-Viable Smart Growth Policies:** Work with local planning and development stakeholders to determine which smart growth policies are appropriate and achievable in our community.
- 4. Obtain Smart Growth Policy Grants:** Obtain outside funding to plan and develop our community in ways consistent with Smart Growth Policies.

5. Discourage Downtown Surface Parking: Surface parking lots are often called missing teeth in a walkable landscape. Surface parking lots discourage walking by creating greater distances between origins and destinations and making the walks less interesting and inviting.

6. Promote Dense Development: Incentivize dense, mixed-use development in our urban core and discourage sprawling development.

Create Networks

The following goals fall within the Create Networks domain. The Sustainability Commission acknowledges that we may not be able to address all of these goals within the next five or ten years, but feels it is important to outline these goals holistically. We also acknowledge that this list may be incomplete; that the City may accomplish important items within the Smart Growth domain that aren't explicitly considered below. Listing these goals specifically is only meant to guide stakeholders to impactful actions.

1. Create a Master Transportation Plan: Our Master Street Plan is the definitive policy and plan for our transportation network, determining how developers construct new streets and how the City resurfaces/reconstructs streets. We propose that the City work with an outside consultant to repeal the Master Street Plan and replace it with a Master Transportation Plan integrating the needs of all travel modes.

2. Institute Community Master Transportation Plan Oversight: The Complete Streets Ordinance, Section 5, calls for Complete Streets implementation on all new, reconstructed, or resurfaced road unless one of five exceptions is met. This language should be expanded to include other elements of the Master Transportation Plan (e.g. trail installation) and a City Commission should oversee Master Trail Plan implementation and any exceptions granted.

3. Adopt NACTO: The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) has a set of design guidelines that may, at times, be more appropriate than the currently used American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines. The City should officially become a NACTO City to justify the use of these urban-specific transportation guidelines.

4. Improve On-Street Bicycle Infrastructure

5. Improve Sidewalk Network: From 2012-2017, the City has built or contracted the building of approximately 2 miles of sidewalk per year and repaired approximately 1.5 miles of sidewalk per year. Sidewalk construction and repair is haphazard.

6. Install Wayfinding Signage: Installing wayfinding signage helps pedestrians and cyclists navigate the city and legitimizes these traffic modes to all road users. The downtown area has recently installed pedestrian wayfinding signage. The City should install wayfinding signage for cyclists along installed on-street bicycle routes (e.g. MUTCD D1-2c) and along shared-use trails (e.g. Arkansas River Trail) to better utilize them as bicycle transportation highways.

7. Install “Bicycles May Use Full Lane” signage: Stop installing “Share the Road” (MUTCD W16-1P) signage. It’s unclear to all road users whether the sign is intended to address motorists or cyclists and what specific behaviors are being encouraged/discouraged. Instead install “Cyclists May Use Full Lane” (MUTCD R4-11) when appropriate.

8. Implement Road Diets: A road diet is a way to change how people move about on a roadway (often by narrowing or reducing the number of vehicular traffic lanes) to increase safety for all road users and create space for bicycle and pedestrian traffic modes.

9. Close the Arkansas River Trail Loop: The Arkansas River Trail (ART) is the region’s premiere walking and biking recreational facility. Bicycle transportation, and thereby sustainability, would be greatly served by completing the entire loop to a standard that serves users of all ages and abilities.

10. Southwest Trail: The Southwest Trail will be a primarily recreational trail connecting Little Rock to Hot Springs, however within Little Rock it will very much serve a transportation function. The City of Little Rock has been awarded Phase 1 of a three phase project to create the Southwest Trail from the ART to Central High (dubbed the Central High Corridor).

11. Midline: The Midline is a proposed east-west bicycle/micro mobility corridor approximately along the I-630 corridor. By 2025, we should have a complete Midline with all sections separated from vehicular traffic at least by conventional bike lanes or mixed with vehicular traffic in bike boulevards.

12. Tri-Creek Greenway: The Tri-Creek Greenway is an important addition to Little Rock’s regional trail network and promotes equitable and sustainable transportation.

13. Southeast Trail: The Southeast Trail is currently a road route from the Clinton Library to Terry Lock and Dam. The intention is to create a separated, shared-use trail facility providing the same connectivity. This trail would connect downtown Little Rock to the Clinton National Airport and to the Little Rock Port. By 2025, the City should have funding in place to complete the Southeast Trail from the Clinton Library to the Little Rock Airport.

14. Improve Pedestrian and LIT Network Funding: Our transportation grid is currently built to move motor vehicles. Substantial, sustained investment is required to create infrastructure to retrofit our grid to accommodate multiple transportation modes and decrease carbon emissions.

Transportation Choice

The following goals fall within the Transportation Choice domain. The Sustainability Commission acknowledges that we may not be able to address all of these goals within the next five or ten years, but feels it is important to outline these goals holistically. We also acknowledge that this list may be incomplete; that the City may accomplish important items within the Smart Growth domain that aren't explicitly considered below. Listing these goals specifically is only meant to guide stakeholders to impactful actions.

1. Offer Shared Micro Mobility: Shared micro mobility offers a more sustainable and equitable transportation option. With bikeshare, e-scooters, and/or other shared micro mobility options, commuters can park their cars for the day and move within the micro mobility coverage area with ease. As micro mobility coverage areas expand, and as residents move closer to their places of employment, more Little Rock residents will be able to use these systems as commuting options from home to work as well.

2. Improve Bike/Micro Mobility Parking: An important obstacle to bicycle and micro mobility parking is the availability and distribution of parking opportunities. We will improve our bike parking network by:

3. Bike Friendly Community Designation: The City of Little Rock achieved League of American Bicyclists (LAB) Bike Friendly Community status (Bronze) in 2016. We will seek Bike Friendly Community Status (Silver) in 2024 and are taking key steps now to reach that goal.

4. Walk Friendly Community Designation: The self-assessment and feedback provided by LAB's Bike Friendly Community process has proven invaluable. The Walk Friendly Communities program offers a similar opportunity for improving pedestrian considerations. The City of Little Rock is working on an application for Walk Friendly Community status. We will use the feedback provided by the process to improve the walkability of Little Rock moving forward.

5. Adopt Vision Zero: The fear of being struck by a motor vehicle is the most significant barrier to biking in Little Rock and among the most significant barriers to walking in Little Rock. Mode shifts toward walking and biking require a substantial increase in perceived and actual safety of

those activities. Adopting [Vision Zero](#) will justify and guide the necessary steps to promote walking and biking transportation.

6. Increase Bicycle Parking: Little Rock bicycle parking is rare and sporadic. A strategically-placed network of bicycle parking can encourage ridership. Launch of bikeshare may be an opportunity to create this bicycle parking network.

7. Improve Transit Options: A car-optional transportation system throughout Little Rock requires quality pedestrian, bicycle, and transit options (for short, medium, and long trips). Encouraging transit as a transportation solution requires increasing its convenience. The City should work with the transportation experts at Metroplan and transit experts at Rock Region Metro to consider what suite of interventions would maximize transit ridership.

8. Continue the Friendly Driver Program: The Friendly Driver Program is a two-hour certification program by the City of Little Rock to teach drivers to better drive around bicyclists and pedestrians and their associated infrastructures. The Friendly Driver Program encourages mode shift directly (58% of participants feel more comfortable walking or biking as a result of the course) and indirectly (increasing safety for bike and pedestrian modes).

9. Automatic Counters: [SMART](#) goals must be measurable, but measuring bicycle and pedestrian use is challenging. The City should seek to acquire mobile and permanent automatic bicycle and pedestrian counters in order to assess the efficacy of interventions intended to increase bicycle and pedestrian activity and prioritize future interventions. In cooperation with Rock Region Metro, consider the possibility of installing automatic bicycle counters on their bus bicycle racks.

10. Increase Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety: One of the most significant disincentives for bicycle and pedestrian transportation is the fear of being struck by an automobile. National advocacy consultants such as Smart Growth America, the League of American Bicyclists, and People for Bikes have considered the current state of bicycle- and pedestrian-friendliness in Little Rock and consistently rank increasing safety as a top priority.