BURLINGTON
“GO FOR GOLD”
WALK-BIKE
BLUEPRINT

A Vision for
Making our Community
a National Leader
in Active Transportation
and Recreation

May 2013

A joint initiative of the City of Burlington,
the Burlington Walk-Bike Council, and Local Motion

With support from the Burlington Partnership for a Healthy
Community and the Vermont Department of Health

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FAQs about the “Go for Gold” Walk-Bike Blueprint...

WHAT IS THE BLUEPRINT ABOUT?
The Go for Gold Walk-Bike Blueprint is a collaborative effort of the City of Burlington, the Burlington Walk-Bike Council, and Local Motion whose purpose is to lay out a shared vision for how to make Burlington a world-class city for walking and biking. It is supported by the Burlington Partnership for a Healthy Community with funding from the Vermont Department of Health, and is sponsored by Dealer.com.

WHY WAS THE BLUEPRINT CREATED?
Our goal in creating the Blueprint is to chart a course for achieving gold-level recognition as a Walk-Friendly Community (WFC) and a Bicycle-Friendly Community (BFC). Both of these certifications are national-level programs that recognize municipal efforts to become better places to walk and bike while encouraging communities to do more.

HOW WALK- AND BIKE-FRIENDLY ARE WE NOW?
Burlington DPW applied for and received silver-level BFC recognition for the city in 2011 and intends to apply for WFC recognition this year. There are no WFC gold-level communities and only one BFC gold-level community in New England. This is an opportunity for Burlington to be a national leader.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR OUR COMMUNITY?
Becoming an even more walkable and bikeable community is essential not only to Burlington’s quality of life, but also to our transportation efficiency and our economic competitiveness. Walkability and bikeability not only benefit current residents but also help to attract new ones, helping Burlington compete with other communities to attract high-quality growth.

WHERE DOES BURLINGTON NEED TO IMPROVE?
Burlington already has many strengths with regard to walkability and bikeability. The biggest area of needed improvement is in infrastructure for walking and biking: safer crosswalks, continuous bike lanes, and so on. Therefore, many of the goals in the Blueprint focus on on-the-ground improvements.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?
City departments will work with Local Motion and the Burlington Walk-Bike Council to translate the ideas in the Blueprint into specific policy recommendations. At the same time, Local Motion will lead a campaign to build community support for the goals of the Blueprint.

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The development of the Blueprint is supported by the Burlington Partnership for a Healthy Community (BPHC), with funding from the Vermont Department of Health. BPHC is a nonprofit organization that works with a wide range of partners to create a healthier environment for all Burlingtonians. BPHC recognizes the public health benefits of living in a community where it is easy and convenient to walk or bike instead of drive, and is a strong ally in making Burlington more walk- and bike-friendly.
WHAT BURLINGTON IS DOING WELL TO SUPPORT WALKING & BIKING

City Leadership

Political Support for Bicycling
Burlington’s 2011 silver-level application indicated “lukewarm support for bicycling infrastructure by some at the top levels of city government.” This was historically a barrier to progress, but the current administration’s emphasis on walk-bike issues is a major step in the right direction. We are particularly heartened by several comments made by Mayor Miro Weinberger as part of his talk at UVM on transportation issues in November 2012:

“I am committed to moving away from this patchwork of bike lanes that has evolved through political convenience, to a more connected network... [that includes] not only dedicated bike lanes, but... protected bike lanes.” The mayor then noted that “to go beyond what we have now will require some political will.”

In addition, the mayor has certainly walked (and biked) his talk, with a Mayor’s Multimodal Tour each year, participation in multiple community rides, and active support for PlanBTV. This kind of leadership is essential to going for gold.

A Commitment to Encouraging Walking and Bicycling
Through the Burlington Department of Public Works’ (DPW) “bike set-aside fund,” the City makes a considerable investment each year in a variety of services that make walking and biking easier and more fun. One key investment that the City makes each year is Bike-Walk Month, in which DPW funds a series of activities and events in the month of May that are designed to get people walking and biking. This same fund is used to subsidize event bike parking services, BWBC meetings and events, and more. With assistance from Local Motion and the BWBC, the City highlights the importance and the joys of walking and biking and makes walking and biking a high-profile option for city residents.

Municipal Plans that Put Walking and Biking Front and Center
Over the last decade or so, the City of Burlington has consistently made walking and biking a core focus of its municipal plan and related planning efforts. From PlanBTV’s statement that “Biking is a Way of Life” to the Climate Action Plan’s listing of increased bicycle mode share as its first goal to the Transportation Plan’s core emphasis on Complete Streets, walking and biking are clearly municipal priorities. The essential next step is the development of a new walk-bike master plan for the city, which must be initiated in the next year if Burlington is to stay on track. Together, these plans will play a key role in ensuring coordinated and effective action as we go for gold.

A Strong Commitment to Enforcing Walk-Bike Rights and Responsibilities
Despite staffing shortages and myriad demands on officers’ time and attention, the Burlington Police Department has maintained a clear and consistent focus on safety for people walking and biking. (The same can be said of the UVM Police Department.) Through regular enforcement actions and an ongoing collaboration with Local Motion to educate walkers, bike riders, and motorists about the rules of the road, the Burlington Police Department is a leader in promoting a culture of mutual responsibility and respect on our streets and sidewalks. In fact, Local Motion is now “exporting” some of the strategies developed here in Burlington to communities elsewhere in Vermont to help their police departments improve safety.
Community Leadership

An Active and Engaged Walk-Bike Advisory Group
The Burlington Walk-Bike Council plays a key role in advancing Burlington’s walk-bike friendliness, and its importance cannot be overstated. The BWBC works closely with and advises the Department of Public Works and the Department of Parks & Recreation on infrastructure improvements and policy changes for bicycling and walking. The council also leads advocacy efforts and organizes events and activities that promote and celebrate walking and biking. The BWBC’s role as an advisor to the DPW regarding improvements for walking and biking will be stronger still if the group is formalized -- that is, chartered by the City Council and structured like the Conservation Commission. Taking this next step will position the group most effectively to play a major role in going for gold.

A Diverse, Vibrant, and Effective Walk-Bike Advocacy Community
Burlington’s silver-level bicycle-friendly community application listed 10 advocacy groups, more than either Corvallis or Missoula. These included Local Motion, the BTV Bike Cluster, the Burlington Bicycle Coalition, the UVM Bicycle Users Group, the Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition, the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council, the Vermont Mountain Bike Association, Fellowship of the Wheel, Lake Champlain Bikeways, and the Green Mountain Bicycle Club. A number of other organizations are actively involved in walk-bike advocacy, including the Burlington Partnership for a Healthy Community, AARP Vermont, and more. Burlington’s bicycle advocacy organizations are both diverse and cooperative, working well with each other and with others to advance bicycling in Burlington. They are and will remain an essential element of Burlington’s campaign to become a gold-level community.

A Strongly Supportive and Proactive Regional Planning Commission
The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) works closely with the City of Burlington to conduct studies, develop plans, and oversee projects in a range of areas that have bearing on the city’s walkability and bikeability. In particular, the CCRPC’s role as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (the only one in Vermont) allows it to play a substantial role in supporting and guiding transportation projects within the city. The CCRPC takes a very progressive approach to transportation planning, placing a major emphasis on helping its member communities create vibrant, diversified transportation systems. This resource is foundational to any effort to achieve gold-level recognition.

Support for Walking

Impressive Walk Mode Share
According to the most recent ACS census data, about 20% of trips to work in Burlington are made on foot. This almost certainly understates the mode share for walking overall, as it does not count walking to school, walking to the store, or any other non-work trips. Burlington’s walking mode share would be impressive in any community, let alone one as small as ours. The historic pattern of development in our community plays a critical role in Burlington’s walkability, and provides a solid foundation on which to make further improvements through targeted investments and other initiatives.

Accelerated Sidewalk Repairs
Since the sidewalk capital budget was created, the miles of sidewalks repaired each year has increased markedly. In the early 2000s, an average of 0.89 miles of sidewalk were replaced each year; with increased funding and strategic planning, the annual total increased to 2.29 miles replaced in FY2011. This program is a highlight of the city’s efforts to improve its transportation infrastructure, and could serve as a model for similar investment in bike-related infrastructure. Even so, overall sidewalk condition is still deteriorating faster than repairs are being made, largely because of the large backlog of deferred repairs.
that built up over the last few decades. Therefore, additional investment is needed to ensure that walking remains a viable transportation option in Burlington.

**A World-Class Sidewalk Plowing Program**
Burlington’s commitment to municipal sidewalk plowing is highly unusual. Most cold-climate communities -- even those that support walking and biking -- consider sidewalk snow removal to be a landowner responsibility. The result in such communities is a dramatic drop in walking in winter. Burlington’s consistently maintained winter sidewalks are a huge asset for the community, and are a major factor in encouraging year-round walking. The importance of DPW’s ongoing investment in this service cannot be overstated.

**Installation of New Crosswalk Technologies**
Over the last few years, Burlington has engaged in an ambitious effort to upgrade crosswalk signals to incorporate countdown timers, exclusive pedestrian phases, advanced pedestrian signals with right-turn prohibitions, and more. These technologies dramatically improve safety for walkers, and have added substantially to the viability of walking as a means of transportation in Burlington. Continued investment in improved crosswalk signals -- particularly in the core downtown area -- will help to generate a critical mass of walking traffic in the heart of Burlington and beyond.

**Consistent Investment in Crossing Guards**
Burlington’s commitment to walking and biking extends to the day-to-day issue of getting kids safely to school. With dozens of crossing guards deployed every day at key intersections around the city, Burlington takes safety for kids very seriously. Burlington DPW’s commitment to ongoing funding of crossing guards is among the least appreciated elements of our community’s walking and biking system, and is essential to a gold-level application.

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**Support for Bicycling**

**Substantial Existing Bike Infrastructure**
Compared to many cities its size, Burlington has substantial bike infrastructure, including shared-use paths, bike lanes, and shared lanes. Though there are a large number of gaps in Burlington’s infrastructure that will need to be addressed in order to qualify for gold, the infrastructure that exists for bicycling is mostly solid. In particular, the city’s willingness to experiment with a range of approaches -- not only bike lanes, but sharrows, buffered lanes, and more -- is an asset as we work towards gold.

**Many Options for Bicycling Education**
A variety of partners in Burlington have come together to make bicycle-related education available to a wide cross-section of Burlington residents. Local Motion offers bike commuter workshops in cooperation with the City, CATMA, and others; many schools participate in the Safe Routes to School program and offer bike skills trainings for kids; the Burlington Department of Parks and Recreation works with Local Motion to incorporate bike skills into several of its summer camps; the Burlington Department of Public Works publishes a high-quality free bike map of the city and environs; and more. Bicycle-related education is a major area of strength for Burlington, and while more can always be done -- such as expanding the SRTS program to all schools, offering education on bike/pedestrian safety for bus drivers and other professional drivers, and and adding bike/pedestrian safety to driver education classes -- we have a solid foundation for scoring high in this area.
Support for Complementary Modes

High-Quality Transit Service
High-quality transit service is an essential complement to a walk/bike-friendly city. Transit extends the range of walking and biking, making it possible for many more people to take advantage of walking and biking infrastructure at the beginning and end of their trip. Thanks to CCTA, Burlington enjoys 15 minute peak-hour headways on multiple routes, extensive express commuter services, full integration with Google Transit, innovative bus pass programs, bike racks on all buses, and more. In fact, CCTA is among just 6% of transit systems its size whose performance is equal to or better than the average for transit systems in at least four of six criteria relating to efficiency and effectiveness. CCTA’s commitment to frequent, high-quality service is well outside the norm for communities our size, and is a significant element in our overall appeal for walking and bicycling.

Transportation Demand Management that Yields Results
The Campus Area Transportation Management Association (CATMA) has been working with the hill institutions -- primarily UVM, Champlain College, and Fletcher Allen -- for well over a decade to reduce congestion and related impacts by providing employees of these institutions with support and incentives to carpool, take the bus, walk, or bike to work. Their work has resulted in a decline in single-occupant vehicle commutes among hill-institution employees from 73.8% in 2000 to 57.5% in 2010. The result has been not only an increase in walking and biking to and from these major employers, but also an improvement in conditions for people walking and biking on the Hill as well as support for the institutions land use and permitting matters. Combined with Burlington’s participation in (and awards received for) the Way to Go! Commuter Challenge, Burlington is in a strong position with regard to transportation demand management. Replicating and expanding CATMA’s success to Burlington employers is a key element in any effort to increase Burlington’s walk-bike friendliness.
OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD ON BURLINGTON’S WALK-BIKE FRIENDLINESS

New Investments in Walking Infrastructure

Pedestrian Priority at All Signaled Crosswalks
As noted above, Burlington has made great strides in recent years to upgrade its crosswalk signals to include countdown timers while additionally having them operate with advance and exclusive pedestrian phases. These improvements have made it considerably safer to cross the street wherever they are installed. The next step is a targeted set of policy changes regarding signal timing that will make crossing the street convenient as well as safe. The city should develop a downtown-wide walk-friendly zone with automatic advance pedestrian phasing and a city-wide policy for crossing times that accommodates the mobility needs of those 8 to 80 years old. These changes require little to no new equipment beyond that which is currently being installed; all they require is a commitment on the part of the City to making walkability a top priority.

More and Safer Mid-Block Crossings
While much of Burlington’s street network is on a grid with ample opportunities for crossing at intersections, there are a number of streets with long gaps between crosswalks. These include some of the most important arterials in the city: Pine Street, Shelburne Road, North Avenue, and so on. Burlington should establish a standard for the maximum allowable distance between crosswalks, and then add crosswalks as needed to meet the standard. In addition, crosswalks on high-speed, high-volume streets should be afforded additional measures to improve pedestrian visibility, such as installation of RRFB-type flashing pedestrian signs or HAWK signals where necessary.

New Pedestrian-Specific Public Spaces
Burlington has a variety of pedestrian-specific public spaces designed for intensive use and community interaction, among them the Church Street Marketplace, City Hall Park, and the Waterfront. However, there are a number of additional public spaces -- underutilized green spaces and over-designed roadways that could be redesigned to welcome and encourage more people-oriented use. Enhancing the pedestrian environment with amenities (benches, trees, interpretive signs, public art, places for social interaction) and transforming a few carefully selected locations to very slow-speed “shared streets” would dramatically increase the vibrancy of the city with minimal impact on traffic circulation.

Strategic Connections for Pedestrian Mobility
There are a number of places in Burlington where one can’t get between two adjacent places without traveling a long circuitous route -- which is a modest inconvenience for drivers, but a major barrier to increased walking and biking. Strategic pedestrian and bicycle connections would open up new routes for walkers and bicyclists that are more direct and off major roadways (and thus safer and more enjoyable). The new bike/walk master plan needs to prioritize the most promising connections and several City departments (Planning & Zoning, Parks and Public Works) need to collectively determine what tools are needed to advance these connections.
New Investments in Bicycling Infrastructure

Improved and Connected On-Road Bicycle Facilities
At the time of Burlington’s application, only 50% of our arterial roads had “bike lanes or wide shoulders,” compared to 90% and 98% for Missoula and Corvallis, respectively. In order to reach gold, Burlington needs to develop a comprehensive city-wide walk-bike master plan (as envisioned by DPW staff) and make substantial investments in carefully targeted improvements to our on-road physical infrastructure for bicycling. In particular, we identified the following areas for assessment and improvement:

1. Increase the percentage of arterial roads citywide with accommodations for biking
2. Expand options for safe bicycle travel through downtown, an area that currently functions as a major bottleneck to bike travel
3. Add bicycle facilities to secondary streets throughout the city, including bike lanes, sharrows, bike cut-throughs, counterflow lanes, cycle tracks, bicycle boulevards, and so on
4. Improve traffic signals and intersections for safe accommodation of bikes by adding marked bike-sensitive loop detectors, bike boxes, bike-specific signal request buttons, and so on
5. Emphasize protected bike facilities, with a focus on cycle tracks and separated paths

New Shared Use and Off-Road Facilities
Burlington has a great resource in its 17 miles of shared use paths, most prominently the lakeshore bike path. However, while Burlington’s 17 miles of paths are equivalent to 17% of its road network, Missoula’s 107 miles of paths are equivalent to 32% of its road network. The total mileage of shared use paths in Burlington falls considerably short of what other communities offer, even in relative terms. In addition, the application did not indicate that Burlington had any unpaved paths or mountain biking facilities.

Increased Bike Storage and Parking
At the time of its last Bicycle Friendly Community application, Burlington had 178 publicly owned bike racks, as compared to 1,400 in Missoula. (By way of comparison, Missoula is about 50% larger than Burlington in both population and land area.) Our application indicated that less than 15% of parks and recreation centers had bike racks, whereas Missoula had 91-100% coverage and Corvallis 46-60%. The application also identified gaps in bike storage at public housing, government buildings, the airport and other transit stations, office buildings, and retail areas. (The inventory did not include privately owned bike parking.) Overall, while Burlington’s bike parking has increased markedly in recent years, it still falls well short of what is needed to make bicycling a convenient and secure transportation option citywide. There is need not only for additional racks and lockers, but also for expansion of innovative strategies such as on-street bike corrals and high-visibility event bike parking. (That said, it is important to note that DPW has invested every year in additional racks and other parking strategies.)

Regular and Proactive Walk-Bike Facility Maintenance
Burlington has invested substantial sums in upgrades to sidewalks over the last few years and responds remarkably quickly when a citizen submits a complaint about the condition of a sidewalk or a pothole in a bike lane. That said, the city’s 2011 BFC application indicates a primarily reactive approach to routine (non-repair) maintenance, with no sweeping or snow clearance on any but a handful of shared use paths as well as a lack of prioritization of bike lanes in street sweeping and snow removal. In addition, bike lanes are often used partially for snow storage, making them unusable in winter. Since routine maintenance is even more important for walk-bike safety and access than it is for motor vehicles, Burlington should implement enhanced standards for clearance of snow and debris and renewal of pavement markings for sidewalks and bike facilities. Also essential is a mechanism for easy online reporting of bike lane hazards like ponding, potholes, and catch basin problems.
Public Works Policy Changes

Additional Capacity for Walk-Bike Assessment and Planning
According to its 2011 silver-level BFC application, Burlington does not have a specific program in place to reduce the number of cyclist/motor crashes, is not meeting targets for implementation of its bicycling plan, does not have a mechanism to ensure that biking is supported in traditionally underserved communities, and does not explicitly include mountain biking interests in planning efforts. These and other deficiencies are all symptomatic of a deficit of walk-bike planning capacity relative to what is needed to achieve gold-level recognition. Many staff across city government (and within DPW in particular) are deeply committed to walk-bike assessment and planning. However, there is not nearly enough staff time allocated to do the work, and our community’s needs outstrip staff capacity by a substantial margin.

A Citywide Parking Policy that is Supportive of Walking and Bicycling
Because space in Burlington is at a premium and cars take up a lot of room, decisions about parking policy for cars have a major impact on the possibilities for expanding walk-bike infrastructure (especially with regard to completion of a network of dedicated bicycle facilities). A comprehensive evaluation and updating of both on-street and off-street parking policy that ensures that vehicle parking does not come at the expense of safe and complete networks for walking and biking is essential. Current parking inventory can be utilized more efficiently, and if done right should open new and safer opportunities for new walk-bike infrastructure.

A Shift from Design Speed to Target Speed
Vehicle speed is a key variable in walk-bike safety and comfort, and Burlington has taken a big step in the right direction by passing a city-wide 25 mph speed limit. However, many drivers still travel considerably faster than the posted limit. The main reason is that the design speed of the city’s streets -- that is, the speed that feels comfortable and natural to a driver given the geometry of the street -- is generally much higher than the posted speed. The city should implement the standards for street geometry established in its excellent Transportation Plan -- including lane width, curb radii, and so on -- that function to reduce actual vehicle speed to levels that are safe and welcoming for walking and biking.

A Commitment to Full Implementation
As noted above, the City has many excellent plans that emphasize walking and biking. Particularly with regard to bicycle facilities, though, the City's follow-through on these plans has been spotty. Bicycle facilities are often most needed in precisely the locations where they are most difficult to implement, and it is essential that the City’s commitment to such facilities carry through even in circumstances where it would be much easier to leave a gap.

A Focus on Results
In an email from the League of American Bicyclists, BFC staff offered the following summary feedback regarding next steps for Burlington:
“For us, the [desired] outcome -- a lot of people are riding bikes for transportation and recreation -- is of greatest importance, particularly in the higher award categories. Burlington currently has a [bike commuter] mode share of just over 4%, which is a solid number but too low for its potential (as we have seen in the National Bike Challenge!). In comparison, Missoula has a mode share of 6.4% and Corvallis has a mode share of 11.9%. The city needs to evaluate what is keeping people from riding bikes more often and develop action steps to address these concerns.”

While commuter mode share is just one measure of bicycling on our community, it is clear that increasing the number of bikers on the streets is a critical indicator of the success of our efforts to improve Burlington’s bicycle friendliness. The fundamental goal of the Blueprint is to provide the city with a roadmap towards increasing the percentage of the city's transportation mix that happens by bike.
Innovative New City Programs and Initiatives

Extensive Use of Trial Installations and Resident Engagement
Transforming public rights-of-way to support walking and biking is all too often a costly and time-consuming undertaking. However, many gold-level communities are finding that it is more effective to install a lot of low-cost walk-bike infrastructure on a trial basis than to build a few permanent, world-class walk-bike facilities. Burlington should develop programs for empowering residents and businesses to take ownership of the process of planning low-cost walk-bike infrastructure on a trial basis (and, in some cases, installing and maintaining it as well). By combining low-cost methods such as new striping, temporary bollards, and movable planters with high-tech strategies for facilitating active community engagement, Burlington can move forward much more quickly than it has in the past.

An Emphasis on Public Art and “Seductive Design”
Effective public art should make public spaces more inviting for walking and biking, and design of public spaces at a human scale is a key factor in making human-powered transportation attractive for all. In combination with design of public spaces that entices people to walk and bike -- such as wayfinding, benches, trees, green streets, display windows, and the like -- public art can make people want to get out of their cars. Burlington’s arts scene is vibrant and community-focused, and the combination of art and design has tremendous potential for making Burlington and even better place for walking and biking.

Bike-Related Festivals and Community Biking Events
Burlington is a city of festivals, with one event after another almost year-round. However, very few of them are specifically bicycle-oriented. Though Burlington leads Corvallis in bike-related encouragement, Missoula does substantially more to encourage biking than Burlington does, including more community biking events, stronger promotion of National Bike Month, and a substantial public bike sharing program. In partnership with a variety of private and nonprofit partners, the City can play a key role in leveraging our community’s culture of celebration and fun to bring much greater emphasis to the joys of bicycling. Such events would add to Burlington’s attractiveness not only as a great place to live, but also as a top destination for tourists interested in active vacations.