

Wausau MPO

C/O County Transportation Planner
Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department
210 River Drive
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**Slow Down Campaign and Bike and Walk Week Proclaimed
Transportation Culture Change Initiated**

When elected municipal leaders from the 14 communities that comprise the Marathon County Metropolitan Planning Commission (Wausau MPO) jointly sign a proclamation April 21, they will set in motion a transportation culture change in the Wausau metropolitan area that will result in motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians working together to improve public safety and develop alternative methods of personal transportation.

A proclamation signing ceremony to launch a Slow Down Campaign and Bike and Walk Week events will take place Tuesday, April 21 at 2:00 p.m. in Room 3, 212 River Drive immediately following the MPO meeting.

During the past 18 months, the seeds of change were sewn when elected officials, municipal employees and over 50 volunteers worked to create a metro area bicycle and pedestrian plan. The plan applies to the Wausau MPO cities of Mosinee, Schofield, Wausau; villages of Kronenwetter, Rothschild, Weston; and the towns of Bergen, Maine, Mosinee, Rib Mountain, Stettin, Texas, Wausau, Weston.

Additionally, the statewide Safe Communities coalition and local American Family Insurance agents have organized a "Slow Down Campaign" to make streets safer in 31 Wisconsin counties, including Wausau MPO communities. The slow down effort is aimed at reducing chronic speeding and slowing motorists operating at unsafe speeds through neighborhoods in partnership with local law enforcement agencies. The campaign coincides with the end of the school year when young pedestrians and bicyclists and their families are on the sidewalks and streets.

When signed, the proclamation will launch a celebration of the newly created Wausau MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan that the officials unanimously adopted January 13. Their action will set in motion the development over the next 20 years of on-street and off-street resources that will support alternative transportation methods in their communities.

The Bike Ped Committee, as it is known, has organized Bike and Walk Week May 9-16 to raise public awareness, encourage public safety and promote the healthy and sustainable alternatives to motor vehicles that bicycles and walking provide. The committee has joined with the Slow Down Campaign to expand public awareness and increase public safety.

Bike Ped Committee members represent walking, running and biking clubs; wellness, health and education organizations; trail development groups; the Convention and Visitors Bureau, businesses, law enforcement and government agencies at local, county and state levels.

Origins of the Culture Change

When the bike ped committee began its work in 2007, Judy Burrows, Vice Chairwoman, and Program Director, Chronic Disease and Prevention Team, Marathon County Health Department, suggested the task would be to change the culture in the community.

Development of a bike ped plan was instigated by the Healthy Eating Active Living, or HEAL, Coalition. HEAL members proposed a community-wide response to the Marathon County Community Health Assessment identification of obesity as one of its top six priorities. HEAL promotes increasing physical activity and healthy food choices to prevent and reverse obesity. HEAL focuses on schools and youth organizations, worksites and adults, and community norms and support for active living.

Dave Mack, Marathon County Transportation Planner, through the Wausau MPO, joined energies with HEAL and organized the bike ped committee. A bike ped plan was developed and the committee is now prepared to provide road maps and recommendations for improving public safety and the on-street bicycle transportation network in the Wausau metropolitan area.

The plan also contains recommendations for connecting the Mountain Bay Trail to the urban area and expanding and developing additional off-street trails to create an intra-urban trail network.

Slow Down Campaign

Contacts: Cheryl Wittke, Executive Director, Safe Communities, Madison, Wisconsin, (608) 256-6713; Ronald Klick, Slow Down Campaign Coordinator, (608) 242-2259; and Sara Gast and Kelly Christiansen, American Family Insurance, 359-8900.

The 2009 Slow Down Campaign will occur April 27 - May 15, and begin with a kickoff event at the Wausau MPO meeting April 21. There will be a short presentation by area spokespersons urging motor vehicle drivers to slow down and drive responsibly, along with encouraging others to take action to make our streets and highways safer.

Event organizers are extending an invitation to people to attend the event and learn how to organize a Slow Down Campaign in their neighborhood, and the benefits of biking and walking.

Slow Down Campaign yard signs are available to any individual or group. Many police or sheriff departments, along with American Family Insurance Offices in the target counties will have signs available starting in mid-April. Visit the Safe Communities website at www.safercommunity.net for specific locations.

The Safe Communities website has tips for running a campaign, a sample press release, and other information that an organizer will find valuable. For more information Safe Communities can be contacted by e-mail at: slowdown@safercommunity.net or by calling (608) 256-6713.

The Safe Communities is a local public/private partnership that sustains joint action by area agencies, businesses, and neighborhoods to save lives and prevent serious injuries. Over 350 organizations are active members.

Bike and Walk Week Activities May 9-16

New Bike Route and Trail Map

A new Wausau MPO bike route and trail map will be published. Funding was provided by the UW School of Medicine and Public Health from The Partnership Fund for a Healthy Future through the Marathon County Health Department. The map will be available through local bike shops, the Convention and Visitors Bureau and other outlets.

The map displays the existing and proposed on-street bike routes and off-street trails in the metro area.

All Law Enforcement Agencies Participating

All law enforcement agencies have committed to be present on the streets to contribute to increased public safety, including Everest Metro Police Department, Kronenwetter Police Department, Marathon County Sheriff's Department, Rothschild Police Department, Wausau Police Department and Wisconsin State Patrol. Officers from each department have participated with the committee in developing the bike ped plan.

The Everest Metro Police Dept. will host the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Teaching Safe Bicycling workshop Saturday, April 25 at the Village of Weston headquarters, 5303 Mesker Street. The class begins at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 4:30 p.m. Contact Larry Corsi, 608 267 3154.

Officer Brenda Pellowski and the Everest Metro Police Dept. will hold a Bike Rodeo May 2. Contact her at 359 4202.

Bike Commuters Share Personal Experiences

For people who decide to change their transportation method, local bike-to-work commuters have provided essays for publication and online blogs via local media and Internet outlets. The authors are Scott Andrews, Wisconsin Public Service, Greg Falk, Greenheck Corp., and Peter Kohlmoos, Shepherd and Schaller Sporting Goods. They will share with new bike commuters their first-hand knowledge about how to bike commute and tell what their experiences have taught them.

Bike To Work Pilot Employers

Five area business and government organizations have agreed to be the pilots for the first bike to work week event. They will provide their employees with bike racks, showers and change facilities. The organizations and contact people are Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Amanda Sapp, 845 3225; Green Bay Packaging, Marty Olson, 845 4201; Greenheck Corp., Greg Falk, 841 8723; Kolbe and Kolbe, Ann Micholic, 842 5666; Marathon County Employees Wellness Committee, Dorothy Kalmon, 261 1926.

The businesses will offer free classes at work by Randy Lackman and John Nowaczyk, Rib Mountain Cycles, and Greg Falk, Greenheck, on how to safely and successfully bike commute to work.

The Marathon County Employees Wellness Committee is sponsoring presentations by Nick Krcma, City Bike Works of Wausau, April 21 from 10:00 - 11:30 am, and April 30 from 2:30 - 3:30 pm, at 212 River Drive, Room 5. The presentation will focus on bike safety, rules of the road, bike maintenance, choosing the right bike and biking for health.

Bike and Walk to School Events

Dot Kalmon, Safe Routes to School Coordinator, Marathon County Health Department (261 1926), has organized a Bike and Walk to School Day event May 15 in D.C. Everest and Wausau district schools, and with private schools.

Parents and pupils will be offered safe bicycling and walking presentations. Bike helmets will be sold at schools at reduced prices. Slow Down campaign flyers and information will be distributed at schools. Every pupil that participates will be recognized at a welcome station at school and rewarded with a safety flasher for bike or backpack.

The Everest District will hold its first Family Run and Walk event May 9 (Tracy Ravey, 359 4211 ex 1229).

Bicycle Repair and Sales Shops Participating

Local bicycle shops have agreed to distribute the Wausau MPO bike map, and bicycle and pedestrian laws and safety information provided by the Wisconsin Department of

Transportation. They will also provide customers with bikes, gear and maintenance services. Employees are also teaching bike commuting classes.

Events Will Promote Wellness and Healthy Activities

The HEAL Coalition will be promoting bike to work and staying active events at their work sites (Amanda Ostrowski, 261 1911).

The Aging and Disabilities Resource Center arthritis awareness program will host a walk on the City of Wausau River Edge Parkway. The group is promoting “Exercise, the Best Arthritis Medicine” education and awareness activities (Peggy Kurth and Ann Jefferson 261 6084).

Motorists are the Target Audience

As established by the Bike Ped Committee, Walk and Bike Week will promote the following goals of the national League of American Bicyclists:

- Motorists Will Share the Road
- Bicyclists Will Ride Safely
- Bicyclists Will Wear Helmets
- The Legal System Will Support Safe Bicycling
- Roads and Paths Will Safely Accommodate Bicycling

Bicycle Laws

Under Wisconsin law, a bicycle is defined as a vehicle. The operator of a vehicle is granted the same rights and subject to the same duties of the driver of any other vehicle.

A motorist passing a bicyclist in the same lane is required to give the bicyclist at least 3 feet of clearance, and to maintain that clearance until safely past.

Bicyclists should ride on the right in the same direction as traffic, as far to the right as is safe and reasonable, not as far right as possible. Bicycles may use the center of a lane when they are making a left turn.

Bicyclists are required to use the same hand signals as motorists. Hand signals are required within 50 feet of a turn. The signal is not required continuously if both hands are needed to control the bicycle.

Bicycles are not required to use the sidewalk except in the City of Wausau where bicycles are required to use the sidewalk on Grand Avenue from Forest to Kent streets.

A new state law allows a bicyclist facing a red signal at an intersection, after stopping as required, for not less than 45 seconds, to proceed cautiously through the intersection before the signal turns green if no other vehicles are present at the intersection.

Pedestrian Laws

A pedestrian is any person on foot or any person in a manual or powered wheelchair.

The operator of a vehicle is required to reduce speed, or stop if necessary, to avoid endangering, colliding with or interfering in any way with pedestrian travel.

Motorists are required to yield to pedestrians at:

Marked Crosswalk - Any portion of a highway clearly indicated for pedestrian crossing by signs, lines or other markings on the surface.

Unmarked crosswalk - In the absence of signs, lines or markings, that part of a roadway, at an intersection, that would be formed on the road by visually connecting the lines of the sidewalks on opposite sides of the roadway.

Motorists shall yield the right-of-way to pedestrians or to a person who is riding a bicycle or electric personal assistive mobility device at an intersection or crosswalk where traffic is controlled by signals.

At an intersection or crosswalk where traffic is not controlled by traffic control signals or by a traffic officer, the operator of a vehicle shall yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian, or to a person riding a bicycle or electric personal assistive mobility device in a manner which is consistent with the safe use of the crosswalk by pedestrians, who is crossing the highway within a marked or unmarked crosswalk.

Vehicles to Stop at Stop Signs and School Crossings

Every operator of a motor vehicle approaching a school crossing, which is controlled by an adult school crossing guard, shall follow the directions of the school crossing guard. If directed by the school crossing guard to stop, the operator shall stop the vehicle not less than 10 feet nor more than 30 feet from the school crossing and shall remain stopped until the school crossing guard directs the operator to proceed.

Pedestrians to Walk on Left Side of Highway

Any pedestrian traveling along and upon a highway other than upon a sidewalk shall travel on and along the left side of the highway and upon meeting a vehicle shall, if practicable, move to the extreme outer limit of the traveled portion of the highway.

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