



## Complete Streets Strategies Align with Sustainability Goals

The Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the MPO for the Missoula, Montana urban area, has worked closely with local partners to advance multimodal networks and facilitate increased transit and active transportation mode share. This work is conducted in response to the community's desire for increased access to desired destinations and reduced impacts on the environment from carbon emissions.

### Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Goals

Through the public engagement process, the Missoula MPO identified five goals to guide the 2050 LRTP. These goals highlight the region's priority for multimodal accessibility and environmental sustainability.

1. Improve safety and promote health to enhance quality of life.
2. Advance sustainability and community resilience to protect natural resources and address climate change.
3. Expand mobility choices to improve efficiency and accessibility for people and goods.
4. Connect and strengthen communities to create a more equitable region.
5. Maintain assets and invest strategically to boost economic vitality.

### LRTP Scenario Planning and Complete Streets Focus

The Missoula MPO took a scenario planning approach to identify the list of projects for its 2050 LRTP, Missoula Connect, published in 2022. Although each scenario was different, they all included complete streets projects in response to the five goals of the plan and mode share targets. The plan calls for a shift from single occupancy vehicle (SOV) travel to less carbon intensive modes, including biking, walking, and taking transit.

These scenarios included:

1. **New Connections.** Focus on expanding the roadway network through complete streets reconstruction (streets designed to be safe for all multimodal transportation users), new trails, and bridges.
2. **Enhanced Connections.** Focus on closing gaps in the network, including greenway construction and intersection improvements, and development of a key complete street and protected bike lanes.
3. **Regional Equity.** Focus on projects with high equity scores and those that provided connections in disadvantaged communities.

Each scenario was evaluated for a set of metrics related to the plan's goals (see **Table 1**) using the agency's travel demand model and additional off-model analyses. Among the off-model analyses was an evaluation to estimate increases in traveler comfort and safety related to projects like neighborhood greenways, intersection and crossing improvements, and increasing levels of protection on bicycle facilities.

The scenarios included sets of the highest scoring projects from an initial project screening and scoring.

### Highlights

- Focus on transportation mode choice for residents
- Use of scenario planning to inform project prioritization
- Complete Streets projects help meet multiple goals
- Strong coordination with regional partners and transit agency

### Context

Missoula MPO is the metropolitan planning organization for the Missoula urban area, which includes the City of Missoula and surrounding land, though it does not reach the extent of Missoula County. The MPO serves a population of 82,000 residents within 263 square miles.



Table 1. Metrics for Scenario Analysis

| Long-Range Transportation Plan Goal                                                                      | Scenario Analysis Metrics                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Improve safety and promote health to enhance quality of life.                                            | safety, health, parks access                                        |
| Advance sustainability and community resilience to protect natural resources and address climate change. | vehicle miles traveled, greenhouse gas emissions, non-driving trips |
| Expand mobility choices to improve efficiency and accessibility for people and goods.                    | connectivity, accessibility, delay                                  |
| Connect and strengthen communities to create a more equitable region.                                    | equity, affordability, support for growth                           |
| Maintain assets and invest strategically to boost economic vitality.                                     | good repair, cost effectiveness, economic development               |

The analysis found that each scenario made progress towards the five LRTP goals, though metric values varied. For example, all three scenarios showed a decrease in GHG emissions and an increase in connectivity, however, the Enhanced Connections and Regional Equity scenarios made more impact on mode share goals and the New Connections scenario made more impact on delay.

Based on the scenario analysis and public and stakeholder input, the MPO developed a Recommended Scenario, which included all projects that were included in both the Enhanced Connections and Regional Equity scenarios, along with additional projects from all three scenarios determined to be top priorities by stakeholders. The final list included 71 capital projects, 21 of which were complete streets projects and 32 of which were active transportation projects. Feedback from public engagement showed that residents identified complete streets projects as the most important project type, followed by trails and shared-use paths, which will make progress towards the plan's mode shift goals.

## Partnerships and Transit Coordination

In 2024, the Missoula MPO and Missoula Urban Transportation District (MUTD), the regional transit agency, developed the update to Missoula Connect and the Transit Strategic Plan as part of a combined project, working on the same schedule with the same consulting firm. This coordination allowed both agencies to work together to identify projects that would support improved mobility and accessibility in the region. Coordination is important as the MPO is working toward a target to reduce the drive-alone commute share to 34 percent of total mode share by 2045 and increase walking, biking, and transit mode shares. Both plans include the same five overarching goals. The City of Missoula's Land Use Plan and Parks & Trails Plan updates were also conducted concurrently with the Missoula Connect update and Transit Strategic Plan for further coordination.

In response to both the MPO's mode share goals and public feedback, the MUTD is expanding some of its routes and increasing frequency of service. The agency is also beginning to transition its fleet to zero-emission vehicles, with a goal of full fleet transition by 2035.

The mode share targets and strategies are supported by the City of Missoula's "Our Missoula" growth policy, adopted in 2015, which prioritizes context-sensitive infill and transit supportive development. The growth policy, developed with extensive public and stakeholder engagement, was designed to maintain the desirability and livability of Missoula amidst economic and population growth. The 2045 Our Missoula Land Use Plan confirms the focus on inward



Figure 1. Public engagement activity showcasing LRTP project scenarios.  
Source: Missoula MPO.



development and support of multimodal transportation options. Each plan supports modal shifts from SOV travel to active transportation and transit, thereby addressing environmental sustainability goals related to reduced carbon emissions.

## Key Takeaways

- **Focus on transportation mode choice for residents.** A transportation system that works for everyone includes multimodal choices that provide access to desired destinations.
- **Close partnership with local agencies and transit agencies.** Strategic coordination with local agencies helps ensure that each agency is advancing strategies that are supportive of shared, regional goals. Missoula's coordinated updates of the LRTP, strategic transit plan, city land use plan, and parks & trails plan demonstrate a commitment by regional and local agencies to work together to meet the community's vision. This coordination is also supported by alignment of goals across plans.
- **Use of scenario planning to inform project prioritization.** Scenario planning and the use of performance metrics illustrates how choices made in the transportation plan impact regional goals. Quantitative scoring informs the selection process, which also considers regional equity and local priorities in the final decisions.
- **Complete Streets projects help meet multiple goals.** Complete streets networks can facilitate safe and attractive multimodal options, contribute to reduced carbon emissions through use of active transportation and transit, and enhance a community's livability through urban design improvements.

## Resources

- Missoula Connect 2050. <https://www.missoulampo.com/long-range-transportation-plan>
- Activate Missoula 2045. <https://ftp.mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/brochures/missoula-tranplan.pdf>
- Missoula Connect Update and Transit Strategic Plan Executive Summary. <https://www.engagemissoula.com/long-range-transportation-plan>
- Our Missoula Growth Policy. [https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/34746/OurMissoulaGP\\_full?bidId=](https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/34746/OurMissoulaGP_full?bidId=)
- Our Missoula Land Use Plan. <https://ourmissoula.konveio.com/our-missoula-2045-land-use-plan-final-adoption-draft?iframe=true>