

# Meridian

## Pathways Master Plan



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Plan Overview

Pathways offer numerous aesthetic and recreational opportunities, as well as commuter options for traveling to and from destinations in the city of Meridian. Residents who desire to go for a family bicycle ride to the park or library, or experience an undeveloped natural area, or bicycle or walk to work will benefit from a system of safe, well-connected pathways. Pathways often help raise property values, provide common space for social interactions, improve overall community safety, and encourage healthy lifestyles. When designed properly, they also can improve conditions related to over-use in sensitive environmental areas.



A high-quality pathway system is a marker of a community where it is pleasant to live, work, and play. Meridian's Master Pathways Plan Update (referred to as the Plan) uses the term 'pathway' to describe shared use paths, multi-use trails, and hiking pedestrian paths designed for non-motorized usage. Sidewalks, paths, and bike lanes directly adjacent to roadways are noted when they provide a link between pathways or between a pathway and a destination. Pathway users may include but are not limited to: bicyclists, non-motorized scooters, in-line skaters, users of other wheeled devices like Segways or electric assist-bicycles, roller skaters, wheelchair users (both non-motorized and motorized), walkers, and runners.

The City of Meridian has many opportunities to enhance their existing pathways system. Many of its parks already have their own internal circulation pathways. Some of them have been formally developed and others have been created by user demand, where people have simply walked and created a path. In addition, as residential development continues to occur in the city, the pathway system will continue to grow as developers build their portion of the overall pathway system.

As part of the development of the Plan, project staff analyzed the existing pathway system and street network. The Plan recommends improvements that will upgrade the existing system where needed, fill in the missing gaps, and connect to significant environmental features, schools, public facilities, local neighborhoods, and business districts throughout the region.

## Vision

*The Plan* proposes the development of a pathway system that identifies a core system of pathways based on the existing canal system within the City of Meridian. This core system of pathways is enhanced by the developer-implemented pathways that will provide connections to and through many residential areas while creating a larger citywide loop. This system of pathways – explained in more detail in Chapter 3: Design Guidelines – gives community members a wide variety of pathway options throughout the city and to other parts of the metropolitan region.

The recommended pathway network proudly echoes the agrarian history of Meridian and the entire Treasure Valley. It reflects the desire of Meridian’s leaders to leave future generations with a pathway system that provides more than just a transportation option. Better, the pathway system is intended to complement and enhance efforts to:

- Enhance residents’ appreciation of the agrarian history of Meridian and the importance of the canal system to the Treasure Valley.
- Promote and offer healthy recreation, transportation, and community-gathering options.
- Improve community safety.
- Boost regional economic growth.
- Discover and appreciate the Treasure Valley’s rich beauty, both now and into the future.

This Plan is intended to be a guide for pathway development over the next 20 to 50 years. By taking a long view, it includes projects that may be decades away and are dependent on a series of potentially major changes, which may or may not happen. This long view sets forth the vision, the implementation of which depends on City and resident leadership and support.

## Benefits of Pathways

Updating and implementing the Pathways Plan will help the City of Meridian achieve a first-class recreation and transportation system. Improvements to pathway facilities result in expanded recreation and mobility options for those who seek to integrate a healthy lifestyle into their daily activities. Given the scenic beauty of the area, pathways also offer important recreational opportunities with relatively low impacts to the natural environment.

Widespread concern over national health issues and rates of obesity make opportunities for recreation increasingly important for individuals, communities, and governmental organizations. Studies show that frequency of pathway use is directly proportional to the distance that one lives from pathway access points, and regular pathway users see health benefits. It



logically follows that communities with greater access to trail and pathway systems and recreational opportunities will have healthier populations.

Recreational opportunities and transportation alternatives are important to the health of all Meridian residents, not just to those enjoying the pathway system. People choosing to ride or walk rather than drive are typically replacing short automobile trips, which contribute disproportionately high amounts of pollutant emissions. Since bicycling and walking contribute no pollution, require no external energy source, and use land efficiently, they effectively move people from one place to another without adverse environmental impacts.

Walking and bicycling are also good choices for families. A bicycle enables a young person to explore their neighborhood, visit places without being driven by parents, and experience the freedom of personal decision-making. More trips by bicycle and on foot mean fewer trips by car. In turn, this means less traffic congestion around schools and in the community, and less time parents spend driving their children around. There are also more opportunities to speak to neighbors and more “eyes on the street” to discourage crime and violence. It is no accident that communities with low crime rates and high levels of walking and bicycling are generally attractive and friendly places to live.



The extent of bicycling and walking in a community has been described as a barometer of how well that community is advancing its citizens’ quality of life. Streets that are busy with bicyclists and walkers are considered to be environments that work at a human scale, and foster a heightened sense of neighborhood and community. These benefits are impossible to quantify, but when asked to identify civic places that they are most proud of, residents will most often name places where walking and bicycling are common, such as a popular greenway, neighborhood market, Main Street, or downtown.

An integrated and consistent pathway system can further result in significant economic benefits to Meridian and the surrounding communities. This includes improvements in real estate values for homes near quality facilities and ‘pedestrian-friendly’ areas, retention and attraction of quality employees for businesses, and direct expenditures from visitors touring on expanded pedestrian and bicycle routes.

## Related Plans and Background Documents

### Meridian Comprehensive Parks and Recreation System Plan (2003)

The Mission Statement for the 2003 plan notes: “Meridian Parks and Recreation seeks to provide opportunities for the citizens of Meridian to participate in life enhancing activities by offering quality year round recreation programs, and a well designed and maintained parks system.”



Linking the parks together and with the neighborhoods is a comprehensive system of off-street pathways. This overall concept is called “the String of Pearls,” where the “pearls” are parks and the “string” is the pathway system. Supplementing this string of pearls will be open space areas, parks serving specialized functions, and private mini parks maintained by private homeowner groups.

One of the objectives of the plan was to utilize linear parks, canals, and watercourses for pathways.

Section 3.2 of the Plan focuses on the existing and proposed pathways and trails. The section provides design and development policies, as well as recommendations for proposed pathways and financing options. Some of the policies include:

- Trails that follow along canals, stream corridors, and drainage ways provide natural linkages from urban development to recreational areas. Trails located parallel to these amenities provide connections with natural areas that are desired by citizens. In addition, trails in these locations minimize the loss of land for development at urban densities compared to situations where trails might need to bisect developable lands.
- Stream and canal corridors provide essential ecological functions that need protection from the impacts of development and human activity as these streams travel through urban areas.
- Developers should be encouraged to provide and build pathways and trails within their proposed developments to link with the city’s overall trail system.
- The Parks and Recreation Department should assume responsibility for pathway and shoulder maintenance only. Adjoining property owners and/or homeowners association should assume landscape maintenance of the remaining areas.
- The City should be sensitive to private owners when trails are proposed adjacent to private property.
- Trails should be developed throughout the community to provide linkages to schools, parks, and other destination points. Each proposed trail should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine if it should be part of the city’s trail network.

This plan emphasizes recreational pathways. The primary purpose of this trails system is to provide recreational walking, bicycling, and hiking opportunities. These same pathways may also meet some transportation needs as well.

### **Ada County Highway District (ACHD) Pedestrian-Bicycle Transition Plan (2005)**

The Pedestrian-Bicycle Transition Plan (PBTP) is intended to provide a comprehensive plan to enhance the Ada County urban area pedestrian and bicycle system. This effort was initiated by the Ada County Highway District (ACHD) with a primary emphasis on addressing federal pedestrian planning guidelines and the regulatory requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). ACHD’s PBTP contains a summary evaluation of the existing pedestrian and bicycle facilities; and provides comprehensive recommendations for future facilities. Key components of the PBTP include:



- A Community Involvement program to effectively engage major stakeholders and local jurisdictions in the PBTP effort.
- An inventory and condition assessment of all existing sidewalks and curb ramps in the urban area of Ada County.
- A methodology for prioritizing pedestrian projects.
- A bikeway route map.
- A Local Design Guide for pedestrian facilities, including recommended changes to existing ACHD design standards.
- Recommended measures to implement the PBTP, including the identification of high priority project examples.

### **City of Boise (ID) Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan (2004)**

The Comprehensive Plan notes that walking, biking, hiking, in-line skating, canoeing, and other trail- and pathway-related activities are important to Boiseans. This importance is demonstrated by extensive use of the Boise River, Greenbelt system, and Boise Foothills trails.

During 1992 and 1993, the Ada Planning Association (now called Community Planning Association or COMPASS) initiated a countywide pathway planning effort, in anticipation of federal opportunities for pathway funding as part of the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act (ISTEA). The City should continue participating in regional planning for trails and pathways to encourage connectivity and advance cooperation, coordination, and joint funding efforts for maintaining and expanding the trail and pathway systems.

A system of recreation-oriented multiple-use pathways, trails, and public trailhead parking is proposed to complement the on-street pathway system. The individual elements of the proposed recreational trails and pathways facility plan are described later in the comprehensive plan.

One of the more relevant trails described is the Canal Trail. The plan notes that the idea of a multiple-use system of canal trails is discussed in the 1978 Bicycle–Pedestrian Design Manual for Ada County. The 1993 Comprehensive Parks & Recreation System Plan recognized the potential for developing a looped multiple-use trail system associated with a number of canals. Sections of canals are widely recognized and used by the community for walking, running, and recreational biking. Recreational use is primarily focused on the ditch rider roads. General public sentiment suggests that recreational use of the canals is supported and should be addressed by the City to provide for improved safety and management of these potential recreational trail corridors.

The Plan also recommends that the City implement its 2000 Memorandum of Understanding with the Nampa Meridian Irrigation District regarding coordination of, cooperation in, and review of the canal trail proposal. The City should also work with area canal companies, legislators, and the Bureau of Reclamation to address liability issues.



Development of a canal trail system will require that the City acquire title to lands constrained by canal easements from private owners. The City will also need to address operational safety and maintenance needs for the continued delivery of irrigation water and provide both neighborhood and community trailhead access points.

### **Ada County Highway District (ACHD) Five Year Work Program (2006)**

Each year, the Ada County Highway District (ACHD) adopts the Five-Year Work Program (FYWP) as a plan for the agency's capital programs over the next five years. It is developed through input of the six cities and county governments in Ada County, ACHD's Capital Improvements Citizens Advisory Committee, ACHD's Neighborhood Advisory Committee, citizens and neighborhood associations, and other planning agencies and documents. Projects that will influence bicycle and pedestrian mobility and accessibility within Meridian include:

- Intersection improvements at: Ten Mile/Ustick, Linder/Ustick, Meridian/Ustick, Linder/McMillan, Locust Grove/McMillan, Pine/Linder, Ten Mile/Franklin, Overland/Meridian, Main/Waltman/Meridian/Central, Meridian/Victory, and Eagle/Victory
- Corridor improvements of: Fairview from Meridian-Cloverdale, Overland from Linder to Meridian, Franklin from Black Cat to Linder, Ten Mile from Franklin to Ustick, and Meridian and Main couplet through downtown.

### **COMPASS Communities in Motion Draft Regional Transportation Plan (2006)**

One of the goals of the plan is to provide options for safe access and mobility in a cost-effective manner in the region.

The plan notes that with traffic and congestion on the rise, more options are needed such as transit, bike lanes, and walking paths. The discussion about the issues of jobs/housing balance is also a factor. If people live closer to their jobs, the commute is not nearly as difficult as traveling across the region.

Ada County jurisdictions support pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The Boise River Greenbelt is over thirty miles long and runs along the Boise River through the Cities of Boise, Garden City, and Eagle. The City of Kuna has a half-mile stretch of Greenbelt along Indian Creek, and Meridian has a small portion along the Ten Mile Canal. These are used for recreation, but can also serve as a corridor for bike and pedestrian commuting.

In 1996, an Ada County bicycle and pedestrian plan, Ridge-to-Rivers Pathway Plan was adopted by the COMPASS Board. This plan for bicycle and pedestrian transportation will be updated and expanded into other counties in the future.

The pathway system has classifications for non-motorized routes. The Ridge-to-Rivers Pathways Plan in Ada County provides details on the various paths and on-street routes for non-motorized travel. It is anticipated that the Ridge-to-Rivers Pathways Plan, or a similar plan, will expand soon beyond Ada



County. The focus of Communities in Motion is the non-motorized routes that can be used for transportation rather than recreation.

### **Idaho State Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (1995)**

In comments received during the public process for this plan, it was noted that the state should:

- Place greater emphasis on separated bike paths for children and family transportation
- Recognize a network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities which also includes pathways outside of the highway right-of-way
- Provide better maintenance of all pathway facilities
- Encourage railroads to sell unneeded properties along inactive tracks for other non-motorized transportation needs
- Preserve abandoned rail corridors for trails and rail banking
- Provide better coordination of all transportation providers and inter-modal connections

In addition, Idaho's extensive network of trails also serves a transportation function under certain circumstances. It is important to identify and assess existing corridors that have potential to provide vital links or major components of a bicycle/pedestrian transportation network. Cooperatively, the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation will pursue the respective goals, strategies, and actions where opportunities for partnerships are presented.

The plan encourages local jurisdictions to develop regional and local master plans, as appropriate, of bicycle and pedestrian considerations and adopt them to be included as the transportation element of comprehensive land-use plans.

### **City of Meridian Comprehensive Plan Update (2006)**

Throughout the comprehensive planning process, citizens affirmed that the goals, objectives, and action items contained in this plan are based on key community values:

- Manage growth to achieve high-quality development
- Enhance Meridian's quality of life for all residents
- New growth should finance public service expansion
- Protect Meridian's self-identity

A few identified action items include the following:

- Identify waterways, wetland and other natural resources for preservation.
- Identify feasible interconnected greenbelt areas along waterways, railroad, etc.



- Develop an agreement with Nampa Meridian Irrigation District (NMID) and other irrigation districts, to allow use of easements for recreation, bike/pedestrian pathways by the City of Meridian.
- Develop and maintain greenbelts along waterways.

In 1996, COMPASS adopted the pathway recommendations laid out in the Ridge-to-Rivers Pathway plan (1996). The goals of the plan include developing a bikeway and pathway system that encourages non-motorized transportation and enhances recreational opportunities. The city also coordinated with the Nampa-Meridian Irrigation District on pathway planning efforts.

Two types of existing and proposed pathways are identified in the Ridge-to-Rivers Pathway Plan for the Meridian area. These include on-street bikeways and multiple-use paths. On-street bikeways consist of bikeways on the roadway network which may be any combination of sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and bicycle routes designated to create a safer environment for all users. Multiple-use paths consist of facilities separated from the road right-of-way for the purpose of both recreation and non-motorized transportation.

The City of Meridian shall secure the right of public and recreational access for public use where City-designated public pathways are within irrigation district canal or drain easements or rights-of-way.

Under the Transportation discussion, the plan notes that, “In order to minimize congestion in the future, several strategies should be incorporated to ensure adequate infrastructure” including the construction of “pathways that encourage use by bicyclists and pedestrians (and) can decrease road congestion and add to the community’s quality of life.”

### **Downtown Meridian Transportation Management Plan (2006)**

The Downtown Development & Marketing Strategy notes that, “Commercial services, schools, recreation, public transportation, and employment centers should be located within and in close proximity to the center. This will enhance market connections and access via a wide variety of desirable transportation modes, including public transit, foot, bicycle and car. Further, to foster community connection within the city center, refinements to the system of Downtown green spaces and pedestrian pathways are recommended.”

Within the City of Meridian, some overlap exists between the bicycle and pedestrian networks. Pedestrian circulation within each of the circulation districts is, in general, adequately provided for by the overall sidewalk system. ACHD and the City have recently identified a number of specific improvement needs to this system and are working to address them. In addition, the City’s Comprehensive Plan also identifies opportunity for multiple-use paths that accommodate both bicycles and pedestrians through implementation of the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) Ridge-to-Rivers Pathway Plan. One such facility currently connects Tulley Park at Linder Road to Meridian Road.





For bicycles, the Ridge-to-Rivers Pathway Plan identifies several on-street bikeways that include a combination of sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and bicycle routes designated to create a safer environment for all users.

### **Ridge-to-Rivers Pathway Plan Update (1996)**

Ridge-To-Rivers is a comprehensive Pathway Plan designed to improve pathways in Ada County. These paths are intended to accommodate persons with disabilities, pedestrians, bicyclists, trail enthusiasts and other non-motorized uses.

One of the goals of this plan is to “develop a comprehensive multiple-use path system to complement the on-street system and enhance recreational opportunities through the expansion of the Boise River Greenbelt and other waterways as well as inter-neighborhood connections.”

The plan notes the need to preserve railroad corridors within Ada County for the purpose of converting those corridors into multi-modal transportation corridors with a pathway element.

The plan also recommends that all new developments along waterways, railroad corridors, or utility rights-of-way be encouraged to include multiple-use paths or at a minimum, reserve an easement for future use of such facilities.

## **Plan Scope and Public Process**

The Plan followed a series of research, field, and public process activities from the summer through the winter of 2006. Research activities included:

- Assessment of existing pathway facility plans in Meridian and the Treasure Valley.
- Field assessment of entire 2003 existing and proposed pathway system using Global Positioning System (GPS) devices. The field assessment was completed over the course of a week using teams of two walking the existing and potential pathway corridors in the city of Meridian.
- Evaluation of bicycle and pedestrian needs, such as safety problems, demographic and geographic population, and facility deficiencies.

Public Outreach activities included:

- Four meetings with the Meridian Pathways Technical Advisory Committee, a group with half a dozen stakeholders and group representatives (see inside cover)
- Two public open houses
- Meetings with representatives from the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), Ada County Highway District (ACHD), Nampa Meridian Irrigation District (NMID), Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS), and the City of Boise.



- City Council presentation on December 5, 2006.

## Goals and Objectives

The City of Meridian Pathways Plan Update aims to develop a comprehensive network of multi-purpose pathways that link important pedestrian generators, environmental features, historic landmarks, public facilities, Town Centers, and business districts.

### Goal 1: Providing Recreation Opportunities

The primary goal of the City's pathways network is to provide a connected system of pathways providing residents with the option for passive recreational opportunities not typically supplied by parks and facilities, such as jogging, walking, and bicycling.

### Goal 2: Pathway Development and Regional Connections

Provide a pathway system through the city to seamlessly connect regionally significant pathways with local pathways and ensure that new development and subdivisions connect to this system. Establish and enhance regional pathway connections to the adjacent communities of Eagle, Nampa, Boise, and Kuna.

### Goal 3: Access

Develop a pathway system for people of all abilities, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized pathway users. Link to a complementary system of on-road bicycle and pedestrian routes to provide connections between city facilities where no pathway corridor exists.

### Goal 4: Community Linkages

Link pathways to residential neighborhoods, community facilities like the library and city hall, parks, schools, athletic facilities, swimming pools, historic districts, the downtown, as well as other commercial and retail activity centers in Meridian.

### Goal 5: Amenities

Locate trailheads at or in conjunction with park sites, schools, and other community facilities to increase local access to the pathway system and reduce duplication of supporting improvements. Furnish pathway systems with trailhead improvements that include interpretive and directional signage systems, benches, drinking fountains, restrooms, parking and staging areas, and other services.

### Goal 6: Maintenance and Emergency Access

Develop pathway design and development standards that are easy to maintain and access by maintenance, security, and emergency vehicles.

### Goal 7: Preservation

Preserve existing public rights-of-way and other easements for future pathways and accessways, particularly powerline and utility corridors.

