

CASE STUDIES OF BICYCLING & WALKING IN SMALL COMMUNITIES: *ARCADIA, FLORIDA*



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Prepared by the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University's Small Urban, Rural and Tribal Center on Mobility (SURTCOM) for District 1 of the Florida Department of Transportation.

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COVER IMAGES

Front Cover Top: Mailman delivering mail by walking; speed feedback sign

Front Cover Middle: Bicyclist riding along low-volume Hickory Street

Front Cover Bottom: Pink Koch building and curb extensions in historic downtown Arcadia, Florida

The back cover presents a photo collage of people walking and bicycling in Arcadia, Florida, as observed by the case study researchers while on-site.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Arcadia, Florida, a community of approximately 8,000 people in west-central Florida, leveraged a walking audit and a follow-up bicycle and pedestrian master plan for the community to develop the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure present in Arcadia to date. Rectangular rapid flash beacons (a sign with flashing lights) that bring attention to street crossings, a non-motorized bridge that connects to a low-volume roadway, a multi-use pathway, a rehabilitated historic downtown with curb extensions and no vertical visual obstructions (i.e. removal of signal lights), and resources accessible in the core of the community (i.e. grocery stores, post office, and a library) are infrastructure and concepts that support walking and bicycling in Arcadia, Florida.

INTRODUCTION

Walking and bicycling have become increasingly popular modes of transportation and the existence of dedicated infrastructure to support active modes offers benefits to a community and its residents. While examples of active transportation infrastructure found in larger communities are well documented, this infrastructure can look different in rural communities and documented examples are lacking. This research effort aims to address this gap. Case studies from fifteen communities with fewer than 10,000 residents were developed. The case studies feature existing rural bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure located across five states, to include: Arcadia, LaBelle, and Taylor Creek in Florida; Calvert City, Corbin, and Morehead in Kentucky; Pelican Rapids, Pipestone, and Walker in Minnesota; Ruidoso, Silver City and Truth or Consequences in New Mexico; and Fair Haven, Morristown, and the Town of Hartford in Vermont. Communities were selected using a prioritization process developed through a cooperative effort between the state departments of transportation and the researchers. More details about the research project, Case Studies of Communities of Less Than 10,000 People with Bicycle & Pedestrian Infrastructure, as well as additional case studies can be found at:

https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/research_projects/case-studies-of-communities-of-less-than-10000-people-with-bicycle-pedestrian-infrastructure/

Case studies provide a detailed description of each community including a discussion of recent planning efforts related to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, supporting programs, and partnerships. Site visits, approximately one day per community, were conducted from June through December of 2021. During these visits, researchers collected spatial data and photographs to document existing infrastructure. Within this day visit, researchers also captured photos of people walking and bicycling in the communities, which can be found on the back cover of each case study. They also reached out to local advocates and community leadership. Lessons learned and best practices were documented from reviewing the planning documents and speaking with advocates and community leadership. The case studies aim to provide peer communities with the knowledge and encouragement to support additional implementation of active transportation infrastructure in rural communities across the US.

This case study focuses on Arcadia, Florida.

BACKGROUND OF THE COMMUNITY

Arcadia, Florida has approximately 8,072 residents (2019), and experienced a 5.7% population increase since 2010. It is located in and serves as the county seat for, DeSoto County, in west-central Florida (Figure 1). The community's boundaries encompass 4.4 square miles, which is a very bikeable distance.



Figure 1: Location of Arcadia, Florida of DeSoto County in south central Florida.

The following paragraphs provide demographic and socioeconomic data about the community, so that peer communities can better understand similarities and differences between their community and this case study community.

The average age of Arcadia residents is 32.6 years old (2019). Approximately 14.6% (2019) of homes in Arcadia are vacant which includes seasonal housing, vacant housing for rent/sale, and vacant housing held off the market.

Approximately 11.7% (2018) of Arcadia residents are employed within the community; a statistic which may provide a level of understanding regarding residents' commute distance and potential interest in walking or biking to work. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 4.9% of people in Arcadia walk and 0.0% of bicycle to work for their daily commute. Arcadia has a 6.2% (2019) unemployment rate. Considering household income, both the average and extremes, Arcadia's median household income is \$29,964 (2019), with 12.7% of households earning less than \$10,000 and 1.0% earning more than \$200,000. Approximately 34.8% (2019) of Arcadia's population lives in poverty, as defined by the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive 14.

COUNTY TYPOLOGY

According to the rural classification methodology used in *Emerging Technology and Opportunities for Improved Mobility and Safety for Rural Areas*, Arcadia is located within a county that was designated as a Destination County Type. A Destination County Type offers recreational opportunities and is popular among retirees.

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Arcadia, Florida had a post office established in 1883, becoming incorporated as a town in 1886. The post office is currently located near the historic downtown (Figure 3). Located at the crossroads of US17 and SR70, Arcadia has historically been an agricultural community including emerging crops of blueberries and vegetables. Arcadia is a rural, inland community, but is in relative proximity to Florida's coasts. Therefore, some may consider Arcadia a "bedroom community." Historic downtown Arcadia has the "Tree of Knowledge" (Figure 2), which is originally where the politicians would conduct speeches.



Figure 2: The Tree of Knowledge in historic downtown Arcadia, Florida.

There are several grocery stores located within Arcadia, Florida, including some of the larger chains. While some are located somewhat further afield, one is accessible via the multi-use pathway (see #5 in Figure 7). Pharmacies are located throughout the community.

The DeSoto County Library is in the interior core of the community. A bicycle rack (see #8 in Figure 7) is located outside of the front of the library and is utilized by patrons.

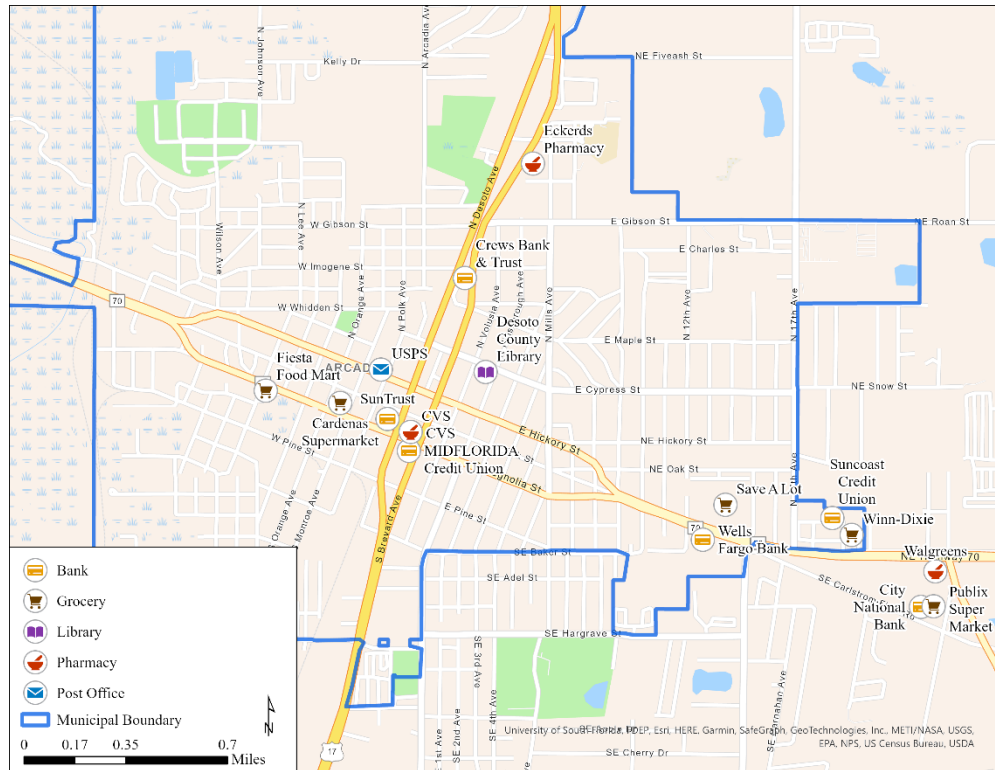


Figure 3: City map of Arcadia, Florida showing boundaries and services.

HEALTH

The 2009 Walkability Audit cited DeSoto County as ranking second worst out of Florida's sixty-seven counties when comparing the percentage of the population that is overweight.

Through cooperation between the health department and the City of Arcadia, a third of a mile long sidewalk was built around Lake Katherine. There are exercise stations positioned along the sidewalk.

PRESENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION ENTITY

Arcadia, Florida is home to South Florida State College's DeSoto Campus. The DeSoto Campus is very close to the high school, which can provide accessible higher education opportunities to Arcadia's youth without requiring a vehicle to access the campus. However, there currently exists a gap in clear connectivity between these two institutions. There is no bicycle or pedestrian facility along Turner Avenue between the entrance road to the college and Gibson Street. In addition, while there are sidewalks along the college's entrance road, there are warnings for the potential presence of alligators (**Error! Reference source not found.**). *Figure 4: Alligator. warning sign.*



TOURISM

Tourism can result in many visitors that are atypical of an otherwise small, rural community. Being able to walk and bike instead of driving around town can reduce the number of trips being made around town by this influx of people, which could otherwise result in significant traffic congestion. Furthermore, revenue from visitors can often be leveraged to improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

A multi-use trail connects three recreational vehicle/manufactured home communities to nearby businesses (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Multi-use trail in Arcadia, Florida.

Arcadia Main Street is a non-profit organization designed to improve all aspects of downtown Arcadia. On the topic of walking and biking, Arcadia Main Street identifies their approach as ensuring that “downtown is aesthetically pleasing to the eye as well as pedestrian-friendly.”

Arcadia has one of the largest groupings of antique dealers in the state of Florida, all located in the historic downtown area. The local dealers' association sponsors a "4th Saturday Antique Fair" each month bringing an additional 60 to 120 independent dealers as well as tourists into the community for the event.

The community has a championship rodeo, which brings a significant economic benefit to Arcadia. The impact of this event on the community is demonstrated by a mural celebrating the rodeo found near the historic downtown (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Mural celebrating the Championship Rodeo in Arcadia, Florida.

TIMELINE

A timeline of events is provided below to describe major milestones for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure development and supporting programs in Arcadia, Florida.

Table 1: Timeline of major milestone events for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Year	Event
2004	DeSoto County Long-Term Recovery Plan
2008	DeSoto Countywide Greenway Bicycle and Sidewalk System Master Plan
2009	Walkability Audit conducted and a report created
2010	Downtown Arcadia Improvement Concept Plan
2012	McSwain Park Conceptual Plan
2012	The City of Arcadia Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan is published

EVOLUTION OF *PLANNING* FOR BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Two planning documents will be described for Arcadia, Florida in this section: a walkability audit and a bicycle and pedestrian plan. In addition, a key consideration identified within Arcadia's Land Development Codes will be highlighted.

A walkability audit was conducted in 2009. The report suggests that “truly walkable communities” are those where “walking isn’t just a form of exercise, but also a means of transportation.” The audit noted that, “DeSoto County and Arcadia have an abundance of ‘places’ and a historic form that makes the communities a good place to live and invest.” In

particular, the walkability audit described Arcadia as DeSoto County's "most recognizable town." The walkability audit recommended that 20% of city investments be dedicated to supporting walkability. It also recommended creating a master plan that includes Magnolia, Oak, and Hickory streets, which are in the community's core. The walkability audit suggested that Arcadia was replacing its agricultural and industrial income with tourism income and from small business investments. What follows is a list of some efforts that were identified within the walkability audit as "Arcadia and DeSoto County's Low Hanging Fruit" (those in bold text appear to have been completed; more are presented within the audit):

- **Change rules to allow for occupation of the top floors of buildings in historic downtown Arcadia by residents**
- **Use curb ramps extensively in the downtown**
- Use "strong vertical walls of green" on SR70 and US17
- "Provide attractive, functional **bike racks**"
- Identify sidewalk gaps, thereby supporting **children walking to schools** and travel by seniors
- **Address gaps in sidewalks along US17 and SR70**
- **Require speeds of 25mph or lower in the downtown and 30mph or lower in the historic district**
- Install mini circles
- **"Repaint and increase visibility of crosswalks"**
- **Remove crosswalks marked in yellow**
- "Eliminate staff and owners from parking on the main street" in downtown
- Install wayfinding signs
- Expand farmer's markets
- Create community gardens
- "Start a bike club, offer free bike repairs, a clinic, and otherwise incentivize biking as a lifestyle"
- **Create a DeSoto County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan**
- **"Launch a 'walking school bus' program"**
- Apply for a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grant
- "Start an 'active transportation' workday"

The appendix of the 2009 walkability audit provides: 1) A Walkable & Bicycle Friendly Checklist for DeSoto County, and a 2) Healthy Development Checklist.

In 2012, a bicycle and pedestrian plan was developed for Arcadia to "effectively integrate bicycle and pedestrian travel within the core downtown area and primary access routes to the downtown area while helping to create a more livable environment, allowing for viable mobility choices for commuting as well as for recreational purposes." The corridors of US17 and SR70 along with the downtown area defined by the square being bordered by Manatee Avenue (west), Hillsborough Avenue (east), Cypress Street (north), and Pine Street (south) were the focus area of the study. The plan identifies fatal, severe injury, and non-injury bicycle and pedestrian crashes occurring within the community between 2008 and 2010 on two separate maps. To develop the plan, an accessibility assessment was conducted on April 26, 2012, and a field review on May 17, 2012. The plan notes that "most pedestrian

crashes occur when the pedestrian is attempting to cross the roadway.” They also highlight the need for a network or system of routes and facilities instead of an isolated sidewalk or bike lane. Finally, they highlight that infrastructure can become worn out, outdated, and obsolete. The plan outlined thirty needs for Arcadia and provided very specific suggested improvements for the intersection of Oak Street and the following four intersections: Monroe Avenue, Polk Street, DeSoto Avenue, and Brevard Avenue. The plan highlights four principles: 1) pedestrians want and need to cross the street safely, 2) drivers need to understand the pedestrian’s intent, 3) keep crossings short, and 4) speed matters. The plan identified four funding sources (Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), Transportation Alternatives Program/Safe Routes to Schools Program (SRTS), Local Agency Program (LAP), and Resurfacing, Restoration, and Rehabilitation (3R)) and identified how local funding and approaches could be leveraged to create a more complete bicycle and pedestrian network. The effort also included five public involvement workshops in April through July of 2012.

Arcadia’s Land Development Codes were reported as requiring sidewalks for any new development. In addition, the codes also require the installation of bicycle racks.

EXISTING BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Table 2 summarizes bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure identified across all case study communities, noting which ones were observed while on-site in Arcadia, Florida.

Table 2: Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure found across all case study communities, noting those found in Arcadia.

Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Infrastructure in Case Study Communities	Presence in Arcadia
Bicycle Lane	X
Bike Rack	X
Shared Lane Markings	
Sidewalk	
Defined Bike Route (by signage)	
Multi-Use Pathway	X
Trail (soft surface)	
Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) Crossing	X
Mid-Block Crossing	X
Crosswalk	X
Sidewalks	X
Bridges that enable walking or biking	X
Underpasses that enable walking or biking	
Parklet	
Benches	
Repair Station/Air Pump	
Speed Bump/Speed Table	
Speed Feedback Sign – Permanent	X
Speed Feedback Sign – Portable	
Signage	
<i>Bike/Ped Crossing Sign with light emitting diode (LED) lights</i>	
<i>Bicycle May Use Full Lane</i>	

Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Infrastructure in Case Study Communities	Presence in Arcadia
<i>Share the Road</i>	
<i>State Law, Yield/Stop for Pedestrian in Crosswalk</i>	
<i>Steep Grade</i>	
<i>Drive Slow in Residential Areas/Please Slow Down</i>	
<i>Traffic Calming Area</i>	
<i>Weight Limitations</i>	
<i>Interpretative/ Wayfinding Information</i>	
<i>Walking Routes</i>	
<i>Entertainment District</i>	

At least one member of the community who grew up in Arcadia, Florida recalls bicycling on the sidewalks as a child, noting that he expects those sidewalks to have been around for more than a half century. Currently, Arcadia does not have plans to add any additional sidewalks. Rather, over time, they are replacing their aging sidewalks.

With primary arterials (US17 & SR70) creating a cross through the community, facilitating crossings of these state roads for bicyclists and walkers is a challenge. The state roads do have rectangular rapid flash beacons (see #4 in Figure 7) with a median refuge island in between. However, the volume of traffic and the size of the vehicles can make crossing intimidating.

From a walkability perspective, the historic downtown is a gem. The sidewalks have curb extensions, thereby facilitating short crossings for pedestrians (see Figure 6 and #9 in Figure 7).



Figure 6: Curb extensions in downtown Arcadia.

The community also noted that signal lights were replaced with four-way stops to create a more aesthetically pleasing historic downtown. Without the visual obstructions, historic buildings like the Pink Koch Building are more visible (see bottom left photo on the cover page). These efforts were reportedly the result of the 2009 walkability audit and the bicycle and pedestrian master plan created in 2012.

Bicycle lanes do exist on US17 and SR70, although they appear to be primarily used by a select group of cyclists. This could potentially reflect the large volume of traffic, along with the heavy vehicles and speeding that is reported to occur on these roadways. However, at least one individual within the community traveling in a motorized wheelchair was observed using the bicycle lane for travel.

A bridge, exclusively for the use of bicyclists and pedestrians, crosses the Peace River (#1 in Figure 7). Morgan Park (#3 in Figure 7) has pedestrian walkways and a bicycle rack (#2 in Figure 7) near its entrance. One of the busier local roads, Turner Avenue, has a rectangular rapid flash beacon (RRFB) (#4 in Figure 7), which brings attention to anyone using the crossing. While a relatively short stretch, a multi-use pathway runs in front of a major shopping center, connecting the sidewalks heading towards the core of Arcadia to three recreational vehicle/manufactured home communities (#5 in Figure 7). SR70 has an RRFB. This location is a two-stage crossing, facilitated by a median refuge island (#6 in Figure 7). SR70 currently has two motor vehicle lanes with a bicycle lane (#7 in Figure 7). A bicycle rack is provided in front of the library (#8 in Figure 7). Curb extensions and painted concrete provide short crossings and sense of place for the historic downtown (#9 in Figure 7). A crosswalk (#10 in Figure 7) across Gibson Street connects the high school to the sidewalk that runs towards the South Florida State College – DeSoto Campus, although there is a gap.

BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE MAP

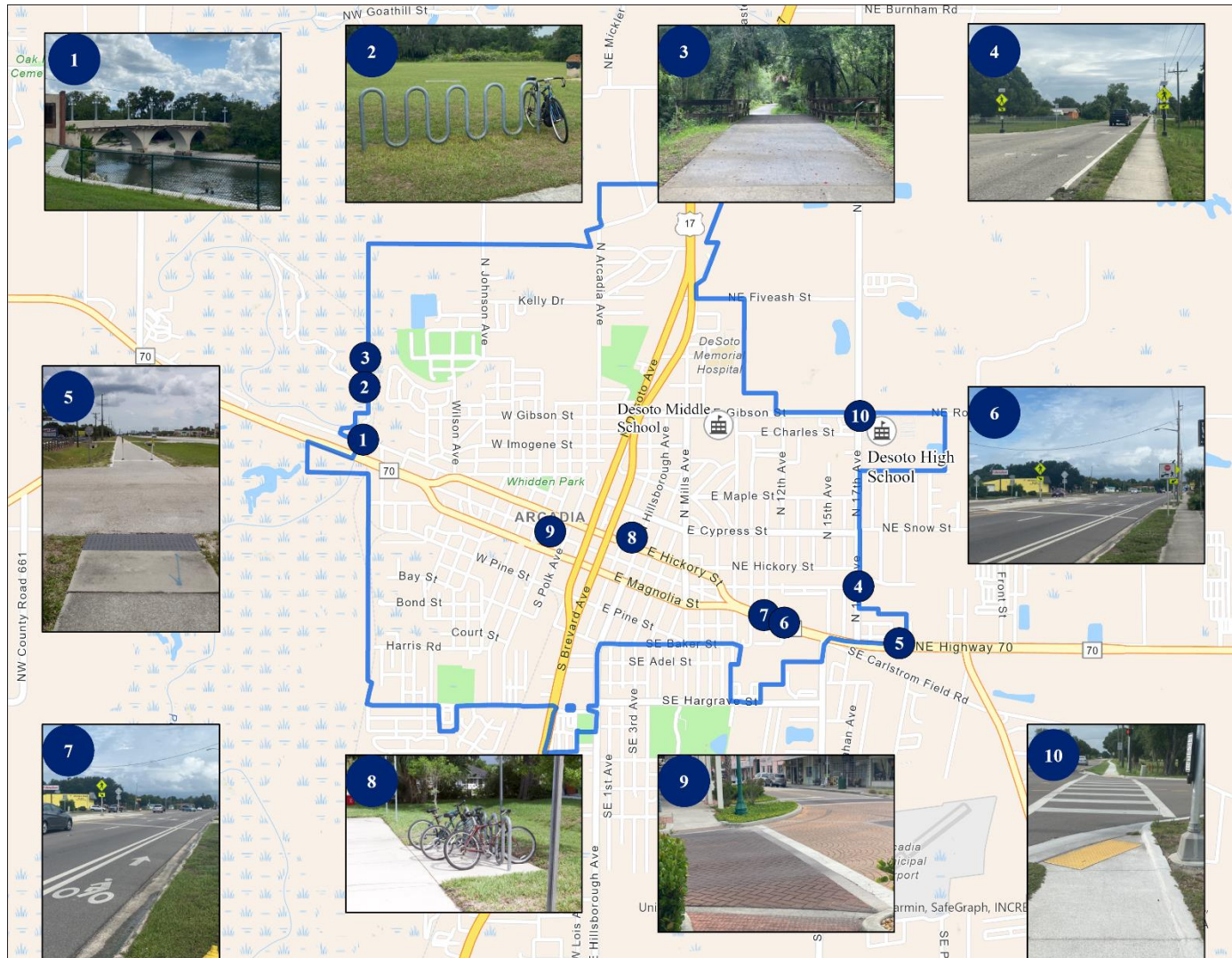


Figure 7: Arcadia Bicycle & Pedestrian Infrastructure Map.

SUPPORTING PROGRAMS FOR BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Arcadia was found to have at least two examples of programs that support walking and bicycling within the community that were observed while on-site or documented in reports (Table 3).

Table 3: Bicycle and pedestrian supporting programs in case study communities, noting those found in Arcadia.

Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Supporting Programs in Case Study Communities	Presence in Arcadia
Demonstration/Pilot Projects	
Art Walks/Historical Walk/Children's Walk/Health Walk	X
Sculpture(s)/Statue(s)	
Mural(s)	X
Little Free Library	

The Lake Katherine exercise loop is well-utilized by community members. In addition, a historical society has developed a walking tour, with QR codes that provide information available in the downtown core. A printed book describing the walking tour is also available for purchase. Discussions with community members reported that at some point in time, the community had tried a walking school bus to the elementary school. In addition, the sheriff's department is believed to annually conduct helmet fitting events.

The [Ride for Tiny Town](#) is held annually on DeSoto County roads, originating in Arcadia. In 2021, the Ride for Tiny Town was selected as Event of the Year by the Florida Bicycle Association. One hundred and thirty-four riders participated in the even in 2021.

PARTNERSHIPS TO PLAN & IMPLEMENT BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The 2009 Walkability Audit suggests that there was some coordination between the county and Arcadia, Florida.

Local leadership reported serving on the Central Florida Regional Planning Council. Plans of the Central Florida Regional Planning Council discuss pedestrian and bicycle considerations.

FUNDING FOR BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) paid for the installation of exercise stations in coordination with the sidewalk installed around Lake Katherine.

The 2004 DeSoto County Long-Term Recovery Plan was sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the State of Florida's Department of Community Affairs (DCA).

The 2008 DeSoto Countywide Greenway Bicycle and Sidewalk System Master Plan was sponsored by the DeSoto County Planning Department and the Florida Department of Transportation Local Agency Program.

The 2009 Walkability Report was sponsored by the DeSoto County Health Department, the Florida Department of Health's Office of Performance Improvement, and the Multi-State Learning Collaborative.

The 2010 Downtown Arcadia Improvement Concept Plan was sponsored by Arcadia Main Street and the DeSoto County Health Department.

The 2012 McSwain Park Conceptual Plan was sponsored by Leadership DeSoto.

The 2012 City of Arcadia Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan was sponsored by The Beautification Committee and Main Street Arcadia.

LESSONS LEARNED

While enthusiasm for making a more walkable and bikeable community existed from about 2009 through 2012, this interest seems to have waned in the present. Recent discussions seem to have reignited an interest in looking further into supporting these modes. Therefore, there is a need for providing follow-up on previous engagements, potentially by state departments of transportation or others. As an example, while it appears that modifications were made to SR70 in terms of providing mid-block crossing, sidewalks and bike paths along this roadway, there may be a need to evaluate how well it is serving all users, particularly those trying to cross the state highway. There have been suggestions by locals that the midblock crossings are not as well utilized (people choose to jay walk instead), which suggest that an increased frequency of crossings, improved level of service for the use of the crossings (perhaps a pedestrian hybrid beacon), or greater compliance by motor vehicles is needed.

THE FUTURE OF BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

Leadership within Arcadia plan to use the strategic planning/visioning session to discuss walking and bicycling improvement opportunities for the community. In particular, the City of Arcadia would like to provide bicycle and pedestrian connections to the Arcadia Club, which is part of the Boys & Girls Club. However, a challenge noted was the "year lost" due to the coronavirus pandemic.

KEY POINTS

The 2009 Walkability Audit did bring about changes. Modifications have been made to SR70 (mid-block crossings, bike lanes, a reduction from 5 motor vehicle lanes to 4), curb extensions and removal of traffic signals in the downtown historic core, and the development of the 2012 Arcadia Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. Therefore, Arcadia has seen success in identifying and addressing bicycle and pedestrian issues. However, as identified during the site visit, while success has been achieved, there is more work to be done. With ten years passing since the 2012 bicycle and pedestrian plan, efforts to improve walking and bicycling in Arcadia seemed to have waned.

Arcadia, Florida found success in developing plans and conducting studies. Therefore, if a plan or study has not been completed, this could be a first step that a community should consider. As noted in the 2009 Walkability Audit, the value of conducting such audits is that it “allows all people to see conditions and opportunities,” as well as ensuring that those who design corridors envision them through the various modes (motor vehicle, walking and biking) that are expected to use them.

There is a need to evaluate facilities that were installed to support walking and bicycling to ensure that they are functioning as designed.

Continuing to engage the community about walking and bicycling will help to sustain the momentum.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO APPLY IN OTHER SMALL COMMUNITIES

The following are successful strategies employed by Arcadia:

1. Develop a bicycle and/or pedestrian plan
2. Invite the community to walk and bike within their community, even those that may never have done so before

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