CASE STUDIES OF BICYCLING & WALKING IN SMALL COMMUNITIES: *TAYLOR CREEK, 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: View from under a shelter along the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, looking towards Lake Okeechobee

Front Cover Middle: Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail near Taylor Creek

Front Cover Bottom: Okeechobee Battlefield Historic State Park entrance sign

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this case study was to identify bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and programs in Taylor Creek, Florida, an unincorporated U.S. Census Designated Place, that would be of interest to other peer communities. Taylor Creek is unique when compared to the rest of the communities included in this research effort because it is considered an unincorporated community. Locally, it is viewed as either a neighborhood in, or a bedroom community of, the nearby City of Okeechobee. Governance for Taylor Creek is at the county level, as it is an unincorporated area, not within the boundaries of the City of Okeechobee. The two most notable features of this unincorporated area are the multi-use connection between the residences of Taylor Creek and the City of Okeechobee and the multi-use pathway running along the levee of Lake Okeechobee, the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail, which is part of the Florida Trail. However, there are opportunities for greater connectivity between these features and for sidewalks or some treatment to support walking and/or bicycling along the two-lane roadways within the canals.

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 Taylor Creek, Florida.

BACKGROUND OF THE COMMUNITY

Taylor Creek, Florida, a U.S. Census Designated Place, has approximately 4,010 residents (2019), and has experienced a 7.8% population decrease since 2010. It is located in Okeechobee County, in south-central Florida, and is just outside of the boundaries of the City of Okeechobee. The U.S. Census Designated Place's boundaries encompass 4.2 square miles.

Figure 1: Map showing where Taylor Creek, of Okeechobee County in Florida is located.

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 Taylor Creek residents is 58.3 years old (2019). Approximately 26.6% (2019) of homes in Taylor Creek are vacant which includes seasonal housing, vacant housing for rent/sale, and vacant housing held off the market.

Approximately 3.0% (2018) of Taylor Creek 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. Taylor Creek has an 8.2% (2019) unemployment rate. Considering household income, both the average and extremes, Taylor Creek's median household income is $36,250 (2019), with 12.3% of households earning less than $10,000 and 1.0% earning more than $200,000. Approximately 22.4% (2019) of Taylor Creek's population lives in poverty, as defined by the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive 14.

According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 1.4% of people in Taylor Creek walk and 0.0% bicycle to work for their daily commute. The latter is a bit unexpected, as at least one individual was observed bicycling with panniers along the SE 32nd Street (Charles Harvey Highway) multi-use pathway towards Taylor Creek.

COUNTY TYPOLOGY

According to the rural classification methodology used in *Emerging Technology and Opportunities for Improved Mobility and Safety for Rural Areas*, Taylor Creek 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

Taylor Creek is unique from many of the other case study communities in that locals view Taylor Creek as a bedroom community or more of a housing development (or neighborhood) rather than as a separate community. The homes are designed around a series of canals, which primarily have two-lane, dead-end roadways. However, Okeechobee County's Tourist Development Council describes Taylor Creek as "a beautiful area full of

boats, food" and recreational vehicle campgrounds. One of these has easy access to the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail. Further, the Tourist Development Council describes it as an "ideal location for the most avid fisherman and water sports enthusiasts as it perches right on canals with access to Lake Okeechobee itself."

Figure 2 shows these residential streets (encircled with a blue polygon) as well as the location of banks and grocery stores located just west of Taylor Creek's boundaries in the City of Okeechobee.

Lake Okeechobee, the second largest inland lake in the contiguous United States, is very popular for sportsmen who boat and fish on the lake. Speckled perch and bass are sought after fish. Professional bass fishing tournaments are held in the region. The population in the area doubles from November to mid-April, as people from the north come to the area to get away from the cold and for fishing. Taylor Creek is governed by Okeechobee County administrators.

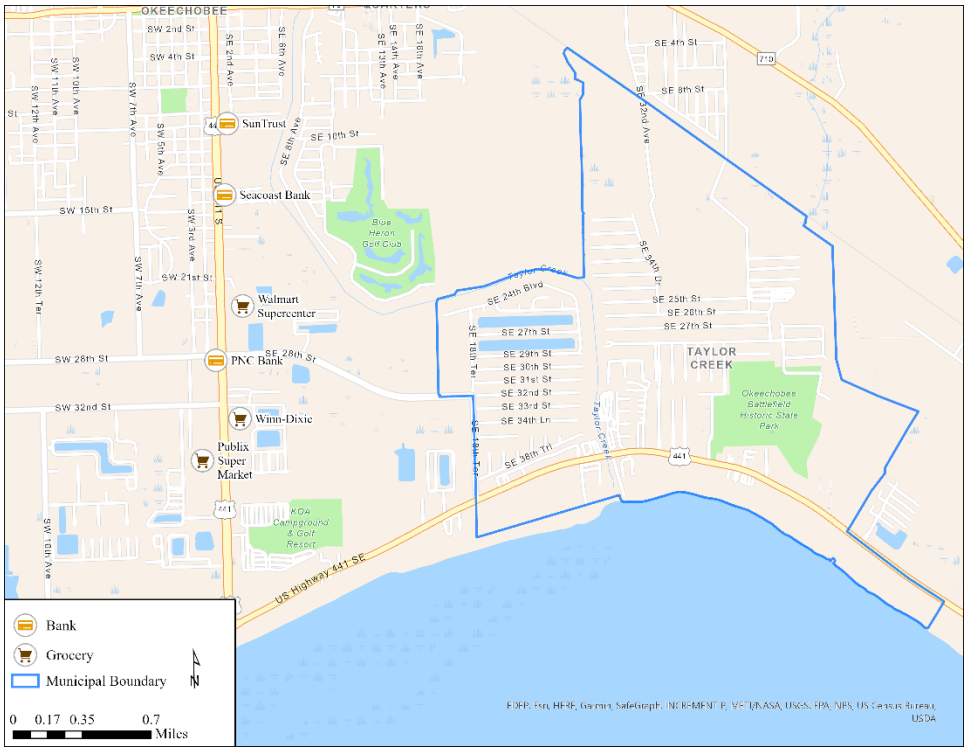

Figure 2: City map of Taylor Creek, Florida showing boundaries and services.

TIMELINE

Table 1 describe major milestones for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure development and supporting programs in Taylor Creek, Florida.

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

Year	Event
1948	A flood control system that includes the Taylor Creek Stormwater Treatment Area was created
1972	The flood control system was completed
1990's	The State of Florida and the Army Corps of Engineers opened the top of the levee around Lake Okeechobee to recreation, including the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail
2016	The Okeechobee County Commissioners propose beautifying the Charles Harvey Highway
2021	Construction on a roundabout at SE 18th Terrace and US-441 was completed

EVOLUTION OF *PLANNING* FOR BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Taylor Creek is an outlier in the communities chosen for case study development since it was the only community considered a U.S. Census Designated Place (CDP). A CDP is a statistical entity that the U.S. Census uses to represent unorganized communities which are generally recognized by locals. As an unincorporated place, a CDP lacks a formalized local governance. Currently, Florida has 509 CDPs. In Florida, a minimum population of 1,500 residents is required for a community to become incorporated. In counties where the population is greater than or equal to 50,000 residents, the requirement increases to 5,000 residents for a community to become incorporated.

In the case of Taylor Creek, through conversations with locals, it seems that the area is recognized more as a bedroom community or neighborhood to the City of Okeechobee instead of a separate unorganized community. As such, Taylor Creek does not have any specific planning documents, instead it has been mentioned in a few county-level planning documents. Unfortunately, these planning documents did not contain any mention of bicycle and pedestrian planning or development.

The Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization plan identifies the section of US-441 going through Taylor Creek as a Safety Priority Corridor. A Safety Priority Corridor requires "additional study to determine if system improvements can be made to create a safer environment for all roadway users. The Corridors were identified based on crash clusters of three or more."

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 Taylor Creek, Florida.

Table 2: Bicycle & pedestrian infrastructure found across all case study communities, noting presence in Taylor Creek.

Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Infrastructure in Case Study Communities	Presence in Taylor Creek
Bicycle Lane	X
Bike Rack	
Shared Lane Markings	
Sidepath	
Defined Bike Route (by signage)	
Multi-Use Pathway	X
Trail (soft surface)	X
Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) Crossing	
Mid-Block Crossing	X
Crosswalk	X
Sidewalks	X
Bridges that enable walking or biking	
Underpasses that enable walking or biking	
Parklet	
Benches	X
Repair Station/Air Pump	
Speed Bump/Speed Table	
Speed Feedback Sign – Permanent	
Speed Feedback Sign – Portable	
Signage	
Bike/Ped Crossing Sign with light emitting diode (LED) lights	
Bicycle May Use Full Lane	
Share the Road	X
State Law, Yield/Stop for Pedestrian in Crosswalk	
Steep Grade	
Drive Slow in Residential Areas/Please Slow Down	
Traffic Calming Area	
Weight Limitations	
Interpretative/ Wayfinding Information	
Walking Routes	
Entertainment District	

Running along Lake Okeechobee's shores is the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST) (#1 in Figure 6), which is part of the Florida Trail (see blue marker in Figure 3). LOST is a 109-mile multi-use path that runs around Lake Okeechobee, connecting many small communities including Okeechobee, Buckhead Ridge, Lakeport, and Clewiston among others.

Figure 3: A portion of the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail (LOST).

LOST reportedly attracts bicyclists from around the state and from the broader United States. In fact, guides are said to use the trail as part of an experience that they are offering.

Recently, a roundabout, albeit unpopular with the locals, was built at the intersection of SE 18th Terrace and US-441; the roundabout included several short, well-defined pedestrian crossings (#2 in Figure 6). Portions of US-441 have a bicycle lane (Figure 4), although it terminates at a bridge (see center photo on the bottom on the back cover).

Figure 4: A portion of US-441 with a bicycle lane.

Parallel to SE 18th Terrace is an asphalt multi-use pathway (#3 in Figure 6). The pathway terminates on SE 18th Terrace after it crosses SE 32nd Street (Charles Harvey Highway) (#4 in Figure 6), where it heads west to connect to the City of Okeechobee, providing access to grocery stores and other amenities to those living within the unincorporated Taylor Creek residential area. The multi-use pathway (#5 in Figure 6) passes a dairy (Figure 5), eventually transitioning into a sidewalk just west of crossing with SE 26th Drive.

Figure 5: A dairy located along the multi-use pathway.

Okeechobee Battlefield State Park defines a place for the Battle of Okeechobee, which occurred on December 25, 1837, a pivotal point in the Seminole Wars. A reenactment of the Seminole War is held every February. Some walking trails are available, although there is a warning for alligators (#6 in Figure 6).

Near a recreational vehicle park is an access point to LOST (#7 in Figure 6). The asphalt trail continues far to the west of the unincorporated Taylor Creek (#8 in Figure 6).

BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE MAP

Figure 6: Taylor Creek Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Map.

SUPPORTING PROGRAMS FOR BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

None of the following supporting programs that were found in other case study communities were found in Taylor Creek while on-site or documented in reports (Table 3). This could be due, in part, to Taylor Creek's status as an unincorporated area. However, programs that teach people how to bicycle are offered in the City of Okeechobee.

Table 3: Bicycle and pedestrian supporting programs in case study communities.

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

PARTNERSHIPS TO PLAN & IMPLEMENT BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Taylor Creek is largely defined by the City of Okeechobee and decisions made by Okeechobee County. The bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure built is a reflection of the cooperation of these entities. In addition, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure built by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) would influence what may be present in the unincorporated area. FDOT just recently rehabilitated the SE 18th Terrace and US-441 intersection and replaced it with a roundabout; sidewalks were part of this newly constructed intersection (see #2 Figure 6).

FUNDING FOR BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Funding for infrastructure built within the unincorporated area of Taylor Creek would come from Okeechobee County. Okeechobee County funded the installation of the multi-use pathway parallel to the Charles Harvey Highway.

LESSONS LEARNED

Even in an unincorporated area like Taylor Creek, there is a need for bicycling and walking, as demonstrated by the numerous individuals seen making use of these modes (see the back cover).

THE FUTURE OF BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

At present, there are not any expected infrastructure modifications in the unincorporated Taylor Creek area. Some have talked about the potential benefit that sidewalks or some similar provision to the two-lane roadways along the canals that would provide space to those walking or bicycling; however, there does not seem to be such a plan in the near future. There is an interest to create more connectivity for the trail that runs around Lake Okeechobee, with a desire to create a full loop. In addition, Okeechobee County is considering repaving the multi-use trail parallel to Charles Harvey Highway or replacing the asphalt multi-use trail with concrete.

KEY POINTS

While the unincorporated Taylor Creek does not have much bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure, with the Lake Okeechobee Scenic Trail and the multi-use pathway long SE 32nd Street (Charles Harvey Highway), there is great use of both of these facilities. Therefore, it is important that even in unincorporated areas when governance is at the county level that considerations should be made to provide walking and bicycling connections between residential and key destinations.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO APPLY IN OTHER SMALL COMMUNITIES

Separated multi-use trails were frequented by many. Where possible, providing these higher-level of facilities for important connections can enable more people to safely walk and bike.

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