

NORTH DAKOTA CLIMATE INITIATIVE – SECTOR STORY 7

North Dakota Communities are Investing in “Active Transportation”

Most North Dakotans use personal vehicles for daily transportation, especially in rural communities with limited access to public transportation.

During conversations hosted by the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (NDDEQ) to inform a first-of-its-kind sustainability plan aimed at identifying ways North Dakota can become more environmentally sustainable while supporting economic growth and prosperity, participants expressed interest in making it easier for commuters to walk or bike to work. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 87% of workers use a car, truck or van to get to work. Of those, 10% carpool, and less than 1% take public transportation. Currently, only 3% of workers aged 16 or older walk, and less than 1% bike. While North Dakotans are interested in utilizing sustainable ways to commute, the issue is accessibility.

Participants responding to a survey conducted by the NDDEQ shared key barriers to walking or biking to work. These included the lack of a clear route from their homes to common destinations like work or the grocery store. Destinations often lack places to lock up or store a bike. Many bikers share the roadway with cars without clear, safe biking lanes. Another barrier is a lack of dedicated resources to construct safe walking and biking paths and maintain them.

While residents continue to ask for more sustainable transportation options, North Dakota holds success stories. In 2015, the League of American Bicyclists recognized Bismarck as a Bicycle Friendly Community. The city received this designation due to the Metropolitan Planning Organization’s efforts to plan and provide safe and reliable transportation infrastructure for all residents, whether they walk, bike, drive, or use transit. They created safe spaces for “active transportation,” a term for commuters walking, biking, skating, etc.

Minot followed Bismarck’s example in 2020 when it kicked off plans to increase transit accessibility and reduce reliance on private vehicles. The city reevaluated its street style to make urban areas more accessible for active transportation. Minot has continued to expand access to active transportation and invest in trails that bridge the gap between commuting and outdoor recreation. An example is the Minot Outdoor Recreational Trail located in the recreation area just west of the city. The trail first opened in 2022 and is

easily accessed by Minot residents. Initially 1.75 miles of paved recreational pathways, the trail has continued to expand as Minot looks for more ways to support sustainable and active transportation.

When communities come together to identify, define and execute initiatives that best serve the greater good, success often follows. Like Bismarck and Minot, Grand Forks also has found collaboration is key to success. The Grand Forks Blue Zones Project began as a partnership between the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (ND DHHS) (at the time, the Department of Health) and Altru Health System, but it has expanded to include dozens of partners.

Building on this foundation, Grand Forks has brought together numerous businesses and organizations to transform the city into a “Blue Zone”, a geographic area where people live measurably better and longer lives by transforming environments to make it easier for people to make healthy choices where they live, work, learn and play. The [Blue Zones Project®](#) is engaging residents from across Grand Forks - from worksites and schools to restaurants and grocery stores – empowering them to make small changes that reap huge health benefits for the greater community. To increase residents’ physical activity, the Blue Zones Project has worked to make the city more walkable and create opportunities for people to choose active transportation.

To learn more about how residents can get involved in sustainability and help improve their local communities, please visit the [North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality](#) website.

Bike-friendly roads and byways can be accessed across the state with resources such as [Bikemap.net](#), [Bike Walk North Dakota](#) and [North Dakota Parks & Recreation](#).

To learn more about Blue Zones Projects, please visit: [Blue Zones Project – Grand Forks](#).

To read other stories, visit <https://deq.nd.gov/sustainability/>