

# Charles County's Walking Action Plan

## Walk Charles County

### **OVERVIEW**

#### **According to the Initiative for Bicycle and Pedestrian Innovation;**

*“Walking is the most basic form of all transportation modes and part of nearly every trip we make. Planning for pedestrians, including people who travel with the aid of wheelchairs or other mobility devices, is essential. Bicycling also holds tremendous potential to increase mobility options for the relatively short trips that make up the majority of our daily travel. In addition to increasing mobility options, walking and bicycling generate a range of health, safety, economic development, and environmental benefits.*

*Some of the benefits of walking and bicycling accrue directly to the individuals who choose to walk or bike. Walking or bicycling for transportation and recreation:*

- *Improves personal health*
- *Increases mobility and access, particularly for youth, older adults, the financially constrained*
- *Saves money on transportation*
- *Increases opportunities for social interactions*
- *Provides enjoyment*

*At the community level, enabling people to substitute active transportation trips for automobile trips has the potential to convey multiple public benefits such as:*

- *Increased transportation options*
- *Improved safety for all road users*
- *Reduced traffic congestion*
- *Improved access to public transit*
- *Decreased air, water, and noise pollution*
- *Support of climate change emission reduction goals*
- *Stimulation of the local economy*
- *Increased opportunities for tourism*
- *Revitalization of urban areas*
- *Decreased road maintenance costs*
- *Avoidance of the high costs of roadway and/or transit capacity expansions”*<sup>1</sup>

### **BACKGROUND**

Charles County is a largely rural jurisdiction located approximately 23 miles south of Washington, D.C. It is one of five Maryland counties, which are part of the Washington, DC-MD-VA metropolitan area. At 458 square miles, Charles County is the eighth largest of Maryland's twenty-four counties and accounts for about 5 percent of Maryland's total landmass. The northern part of the county is the “development district” where commercial, residential, and business growth is focused. The major communities of Charles County are La

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<sup>1</sup> Creating Walkable + Bikeable Communities; a user guide to developing pedestrian and bicycle master plans

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Plata, the county seat; Port Tobacco, Indian Head, and St Charles; and the main commercial cluster of Hughesville-Waldorf-White Plains. Approximately 60 percent of county's residents live in the greater Waldorf-La Plata area. Charles County has experienced rapid growth since 1970, expanding its population from 47,678 to 159,700 in 2017.

As the population of the county changes, the diversity of the county also increases. The African American population has experienced the greatest increase. In 2000, African Americans made up 26% of the total Charles County population; by 2017, they comprise 48.1% of the total county population. As of 2017, minorities make up roughly 58.5% of the Charles County population. The Hispanic community has also seen increases over the past few years. They now comprise 5.8% of the total county population. This is the one of the highest percentages among the 24 Maryland jurisdictions. Charles County also has one of the largest American Indian/Native American populations in the state of Maryland at 0.8% of the total county population.

The 2017 Charles County gender breakdown is approximately 50/50. Males make up 48.2% of the population, and females make up 51.8% of the county population.

The age breakdown of the Charles County population shows a young population between the ages of 18-44 years (34.8%). The juvenile population (under 17 years) makes up 24.2% of the Charles County population. The 65+ age group has increased from 9% in 2010 to 12% in 2017. The age group 45-64 years has also seen increases from 27% in 2013 to 29% in 2017.

The percent change in the population growth for Charles County has been slightly greater than the change seen in the Maryland population growth. This growth has created transportation issues for the County, in particular for the "development district" in the northern part of the county where many residents commute to Washington D.C. to work. The average work commute time for a Charles County resident is 42.9 minutes which is higher than the Maryland average of 32.4 minutes (Source US Census Bureau's 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates). Public transportation consists of commuter buses for out-of-county travel and the county-run Van Go bus service for in-county transportation.

The 2017 Charles County pedestrian injury rate on public roads was 26.9 per 100,000. Maintaining pedestrian safety is a key element in preventing motor vehicle injuries and fatalities. Children are especially at risk for pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

### **GOAL**

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Enhance the built environment with objectives and strategies targeting high risk populations.

### STRATEGIES

- Collect data on the number of pedestrian/bicycle accidents and their location
- Assess the County's plan for future improvements near high-traffic pedestrian areas
- Assess parks/walking areas to review their amenities and to assure they fit our criteria for safe and accessible for wheelchair and stroller use
- Assess intersections for safety
- Create a list of problem areas (no crosswalks, no barriers between walking path and traffic)
- Make recommendations for corrective measures to intersections/walking areas/parks to improve safety
- Assess VanGo stops and the proximity of parks and walking paths
- Receive walk audit training
- Conduct walk audits- A simple and systematic way to assess a community's walkability. Completing walking audits are beneficial for the following reasons:<sup>2</sup>
  - They assist in identifying routes that are functioning well and those that need improvement.
  - They allow you to describe problem areas using photos, checklists, maps or reports.
  - There is a record of the environmental condition you are auditing, and have you the ability to track changes over time.

### MEDIA

- Maintain Walk Charles County Facebook Page which will highlight community walking/running/biking groups, community 5Ks/walks, Parks, State Parks, events that involve movement, and education
- Submit press release to newspaper
- Education campaign to "walking schools" reminding parents of the benefits of walking to and from school. Provide tips on creating a waking bus or bicycle train.
- Promote Walk Maryland Day

### EDUCATION/COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Create a Walk Charles County Walking Guide to include; ways to walk/bike as a form of transportation, tips for safety while walking, benefits of walking, physical activity and walking buddies, importance of getting doctor approval prior to starting, tips on proper clothing
- Print Move Your Way posters and provide each elementary school with one

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<sup>2</sup> Safe Routes to Parks: Improving Access to Parks Through Walkability, National Recreation and Park Association and Safe Routes to Parks

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- Create a map of the top Charles County parks and walking areas highlighting their amenities
- Create a list of existing walking groups in Charles County

### **BARRIERS/CHALLENGES**

A major barrier to increasing walkability and pedestrian/bicyclist safety is the counties lack sidewalks and crosswalks. These issues must be addressed and accounted for when developing a walking action plan. The plan must take into account persons of all abilities and ages.

Charles County is a bedroom community. 65% of the Charles County work force leaves the county each day to work in the Washington DC/Baltimore Metropolitan Area. The average work commute time for a Charles County resident is 42.9 minutes which is higher than the Maryland average of 32.4 minutes (Source US Census Bureau's 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimates).

### **SUSTAINABILITY**

The proposed strategies of the Charles County walking action plan aim to build county capacity to educate the public on the benefits and accessibility of walking in their community and to highlight how changes to the build environment can increase the walkability of the community for all populations. The changes made and programs developed through this action plan can be maintained and expanded upon in future years.

### **TIMELINE**

Strategy	Completion Date	Partner Responsible
<b>GENERAL</b>		
Collect data on number of pedestrian/bicycle accidents and their location	9/1/19	Charles County Sheriff's Office
Assess the County's plan for future improvements near high-traffic pedestrian areas	9/1/19	Charles County Government and CCDOH
Assess all parks/walking areas that the team selects to review their amenities and to assure they fit our criteria for "safe and accessible (wheelchair and stroller)"	In Process	Work Group
Assess intersections for safety	7/1/20	Charles County Growth and Planning
Create a list of problem areas (no crosswalks, no barriers	10/1/19	Work Group

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between walking path and traffic)		
Make recommendations for corrective measures to intersections/walking areas/parks to improve safety	7/1/20	Work Group
<b>Media</b>		
Assess VanGo stops and the proximity of parks and walking paths	7/1/19	CCDOH and VanGo
Maintain Walk Charles County Facebook Page which will highlight community walking/running/biking groups, community 5Ks/walks, Parks, State Parks, events that involve movement, and education	Ongoing	CCDOH
Submit press release to newspaper	7/1/19	CCDOH
Education campaign to "walking schools" reminding parents of the benefits of walking to and from school. Provide tips on creating a waking bus or bicycle train	7/1/20	Work Group
Promote Walk Maryland Day	By 10/1/19	CCDOH
<b>EDUCATION/COMMUNITY OUTREACH</b>		
Create a Walk Charles County Walking Guide to include; ways to walk/bike as a form of transportation, tips for safety while walking, benefits of walking, physical activity and walking buddies, importance of getting doctor approval prior to starting, tips on proper clothing	7/1/20	CCDOH and Work Group
Print Move Your Way posters and provide each elementary school with one	9/1/19	CCDOH
**Create a map of the top Charles County parks and	7/1/20	Work Group

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walking areas highlighting their amenities		
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**KEY PARTNERS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Conjour, Jessica	Coordinator of Food Supplement Nutrition Education (FSNE) and Maryland's SNAP-Ed Program	University of Maryland Extension
Deal, Angela, CHES	Community Health Educator-Chronic Disease Prevention and Management Programs	Charles County Department of Health
Drummond, Tim	Park Services Administrator	Department of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism
Evans, Sgt. Kyle	Safety	Charles County Sheriff's Office
Gooding, Kelly, MPH	Program Coordinator-Administrative Care Coordination Unit and Co-Chair of Access to Care Coalition, Transportation group	Charles County Department of Health
Hannah, Mary, RN	Manager, Population Health Management Chair, Access to Care Coalition	University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center
Jones, Robert	Recreation Services Administrator	Department of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism
Jones, Sonie	Director of Health Services	LifeStyles of Maryland
Klick, MaryBeth	Program Coordinator-Tobacco Cessation and Prevention	Charles County Department of Health
Ledford, Jennifer, RN	Case Manager-Cancer Screening Programs	Charles County Department of Health
Loux, Brian	Cardiac Rehab Program Coordinator	University of Maryland Charles Regional Medical Center
Mahoney, Wanda	Outreach	Charles County Department of Health
Miner, Michelle	Assistant Town Manager	Town of LaPlata
Shanks, Debi	Physical Fitness Coordinator	Charles County Senior Centers
Starn, Amber, MPH	Epidemiologist	Charles County Department of Health
Waltz, Alex	Planner II	Charles County Planning and Growth Management