

NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION

Non-motorized transportation is defined as any transportation other than by use of a motor vehicle including cars, buses, rideshares and motorcycles. In addition, “Active Transportation” or “Human Powered Transportation” is a method of travel that includes walking, bicycling and wheelchair travel as well as less common methods of transportation such as skateboards, scooters or buggies. Facilities serving these users include those built exclusively for non-motorized use such as sidewalks, trails, and shared use paths as well as on-road accommodations such as bicycle lanes, crosswalks and sharrows. Walking and bicycling serve as intermediate steps in the transit network since a person needs to walk or bicycle between the bus stop and the origin/destination. Non-motorized forms of transportation like walking and bicycling are commonly accessible, environmentally friendly and affordable options for transportation among many of Berks County’s population and therefore hold an important role in the County’s overall transportation system.

Berks County has a diverse mix of urban landscapes and rural villages, new development and historical areas, public transit and country roads, active recreation and laid-back trails. While these qualities make the County a desirable place to live, work and play, they also create challenges to safely and efficiently travel throughout the County without a motor vehicle. Berks County has extensive trail and sidewalk networks, but connectivity from one community to the other can often be lacking.

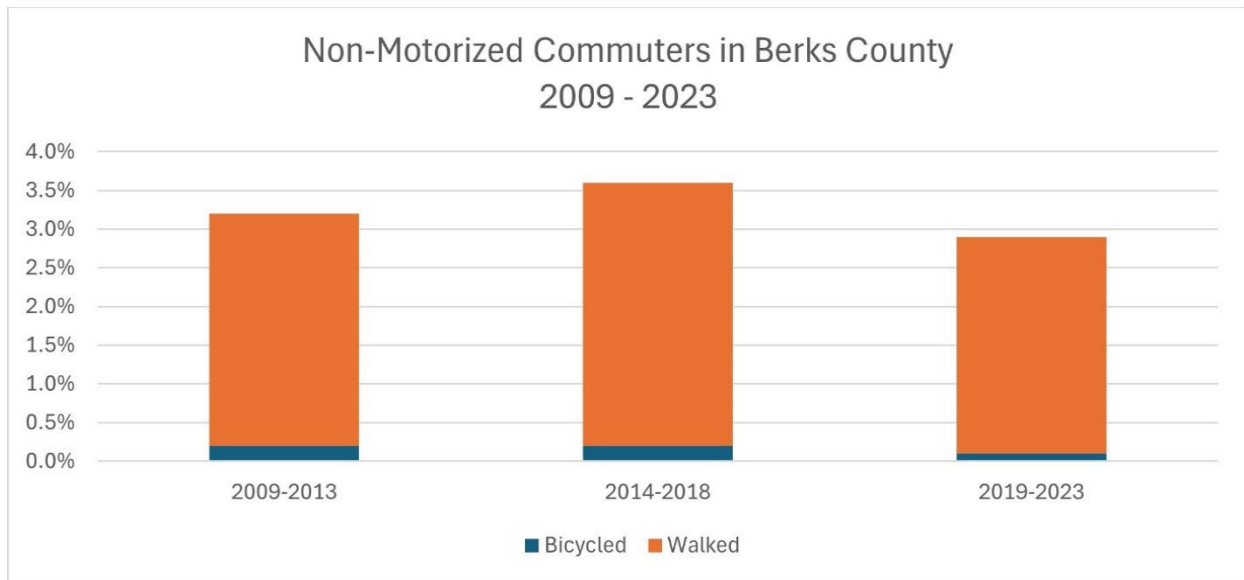
Additionally, Berks County has a unique group of non-motorized travelers that includes an estimated 150 traditional Mennonite households concentrated mostly in the Fleetwood/Kutztown area. Many of these households do not use cars, relying instead on horse and buggy, bicycling and walking as their methods of transportation. Particularly in and around the Fleetwood/Kutztown area, horse-drawn buggies or farm equipment often travel on both rural, sometimes narrow roads and regional, higher-speed roadways alongside cars and trucks as they commute to retail centers, places of worship, schools or between farm fields.

Crashes Involving Horse and Buggy in Berks County						
Type	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Crashes	0	0	1	2	1	4
Injuries	0	0	3	4	1	8
Fatalities	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: PennDOT PCIT, 2020-2024

Non-motorized Transportation as a Means of Commuting

Census data shows that non-motorized transportation is not a common means of getting to and from work in Berks County. Arguably, much of the County’s transportation infrastructure is designed to accommodate motor vehicles, complicating travel by walking or bicycling in many areas. Of note in the chart below is the increase in non-motorized travel between the 2009-2013 period and the 2014-2018 period, then a sharp decrease in the 2019-2023 period. It needs to be noted that the 2019-2023 period includes the effects of COVID 19 (2020) on both commuting and data collection, so those figures should be examined with caution.



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, Table S0801: 2009-2013, 2014-2018, 2019-2023

Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Planning

RATS has adopted a regional *Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan*. This plan, adopted in July 2020, and again in March 2022 with mapping amendments, evaluated the status of bicycle and pedestrian planning in Berks County based on level of service, demand and interest, and existing policy. The plan provides goals, recommendations, and implementation strategies along with a prioritized project listing. This plan is both a policy and project-based plan and supplements the LRTP. The plan recommends overarching county-wide concepts such as sidewalk and curb ramp installation and maintenance, preservation and expansion of the Schuylkill River Trail, Union Canal Towpath and other bicycle and pedestrian networks, expansion of non-motorized access to transit stops, schools, recreation areas and other popular destinations, and improved safety and security of all bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. The plan emphasizes intergovernmental cooperation to achieve these goals. The plan also contains a listing of recommended projects throughout the County's five planning regions based on three different surveys that gathered desired improvements from the public, the County's municipalities, and local non-profit groups involved in related transportation efforts. A link to the current *Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan* can be found here: <https://www.berkspa.gov/departments/planning-commission/transportation-reading-mpo/plans-and-programs/bicycle-and-pedestrian-planning>

Bicycles

There are several active groups and organizations that support and coordinate biking in Berks County. The Berks County Bicycle Club was founded in 1973. This club has created an online ride map database available to all looking for biking opportunities in Berks County and hosts events such as the annual Shoo-Fly Classic, a ride through the Oley Valley, and 'Cranksgiving', where participants ride to selected grocery stores and purchase food for donation during the Thanksgiving season.

Berks Area Mountain Biking Association (BAMBA), another bicycling advocacy group, was established in 2012 as the Berks County chapter of International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA). Today, BAMBA is an independent IMBA affiliate. According to their website, BAMBA "is a non-profit educational trail association whose mission is to create, enhance and preserve great trail experiences for mountain bikers in Berks County, Pennsylvania."

Reading and the surrounding area attained national designation as a "Bronze Level Riding Center" by the International Mountain Bicycling Association in 2015 for its 125 miles of mountain biking trails. With the help of BAMBA, the biking community is pursuing an upgrade for Berks County trails to "Silver Level Riding Center". In 2015 the League of American Bicyclists designated Reading City as a Bronze-level Bicycle Friendly City. That designation was

effective for five years after which a new application needed to be submitted but was not.


Smoothly paved shoulders adjacent to travel lanes can significantly improve operating conditions for bicyclists and horse and buggies. The 2012 American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities states “...adding or improving paved shoulders can be the best way to accommodate bicyclists in rural areas and also benefit motor vehicle traffic.” RATS will continue efforts to accommodate non-motorized travel with additional emphasis on providing and maintain road shoulders in appropriate corridors.

Bike Share is a cooperative effort that places publicly available bicycles in locations where users can obtain one, use it as their needs dictate, and return it for others to use. These bicycles are serviced by a vendor; sponsorship can be either public or private; and typically rented for minimal costs via cellphone application. Current systems in Berks County are available in the Wyomissing / West Reading area (WyoWays, sponsored by Wyomissing Borough) and at Tower Health – Reading Hospital and Medical Center (for Tower Health employees). In Hamburg Borough, the Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area manages a system called Bike Schuylkill, while outside of Berks in Pottstown their system is known as Bike Pottstown. Both systems generate access between the Schuylkill River Trail and the related boroughs. Through CommutePA, a group of transportation-minded organizations in the nine-county southcentral PA region meet quarterly to promote bike sharing and the expansion of services.

Micromobility

Bike Share is one segment of the evolving field of Micromobility. Defined by the FHWA as “Any small, low-speed, human or electric-powered transportation device, including bicycles, scooters, electric-assist bicycles (e-bikes), electric scooters (e-scooters), and other small, lightweight, wheeled conveyances”, the proliferation of these devices have made wheeled transportation readily available to segments of the population that may not have ready-access to a motor vehicle or public transportation. The availability of bike- and e-scooter share systems has been growing throughout the nation. One concern is that this growth is also introducing more vulnerable road users (VRU’s) onto the roadway system and with it the potential for more VRU-related crashes. It should be noted that Pennsylvania law has not yet made scooters of any type legal for use on public roadways in the Commonwealth.

Sidewalks and Pedestrians

Map  shows that approximately 1,319 miles of sidewalks in Berks County are limited principally to the boroughs, the City of Reading, and some more urbanized townships. Sidewalks offer a mode of transportation to segments of the population who are less likely to own a vehicle and rely on walking or public transit as their primary mode of transportation. The presence of adequate sidewalks encourages those who use walking as a secondary means of transportation for health or environmental benefits as well. By encouraging the addition of safe, maintained, and well-placed sidewalks, the County hopes to add more non-motorized users to this critical part of the transportation infrastructure.

Many existing subdivisions and others that have been under development over the last 20 to 25 years in Berks County have had sidewalks incorporated with infrastructure construction. However, these sidewalks seldom connect to anything outside of the neighborhood. In addition to residential areas, several commercial developments in the region have sidewalks in place but there is little to no connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods. Connecting these commercial developments to the County’s housing subdivisions as well as schools, recreation areas and employment centers is a priority identified in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan referenced above.

One area where sidewalk connectivity suffers is on bridges. When PennDOT repairs or replaces state-owned bridges, sidewalks are added only if the municipality executes a Sidewalk Maintenance Agreement with the Department. PennDOT does not maintain sidewalks; that is the municipality’s or property owner’s responsibility. Without municipal support of sidewalks on bridges, pedestrian connectivity suffers, and safety issues have the potential to increase especially among the very young, the elderly, and those with limited mobility. Municipalities are strongly encouraged to work with PennDOT during the PennDOT Connects process and execute the necessary maintenance agreements to ensure that sidewalks are placed onto new bridges and connectivity is maintained or improved.

Trails & Greenways

Berks County has over 524 miles of extensive trail system ranging from paved multipurpose trails to more rugged trails suitable for hiking or mountain biking. Many trails are often connected to or parts of greenways - corridors of open space that can be a small park in a borough or the city to large areas of forest in the townships. The Schuylkill River Trail (SRT), when completed, will span approximately 124 miles from Philadelphia to Schuylkill County. The largest segments of uncompleted trail are in Berks County where the trail is located on local roads. The SRT serves as the backbone of the offroad network in Berks and is used for both recreation and commuting.

The Union Canal Bicycle & Walking Trail is a 4.5-mile-long crushed stone path that follows the Tulpehocken Creek between Stonecliffe Recreation Area and Reber's Bridge Road. Designated as a National Recreation Trail, the Union Canal Trail provides a link to multiple Berks County parks including Stonecliffe Recreation Area, the Berks Leisure Area, Red Bridge Park, Gring's Mill Recreation Area, and the Berks County Heritage Center. At Stonecliffe Recreation Area, the Union Canal Trail connects to the [Schuylkill River Trail](#) and at Reber's Bridge Road, a 1.8 mile connector trail links the Union Canal path to the [Blue Marsh Lake Trail System](#).

Vulnerable Road Users and Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety

The safety of non-motorized individuals is of great concern since they are the most vulnerable road users as they are not protected by a surrounding vehicle and with it, its safety features. As shown in the Vulnerable Road Users (VRU) chart located on Page 91, the number of crashes and persons involved in VRU crashes has increased between 2020 and 2024, but fatal crashes have remained relatively flat in that same period. It is important to educate all age groups on safe bicycle and pedestrian practices along with promoting the enforcement of the laws pertaining to motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians to make safety a top priority in Berks County. Please see the Safety section of this plan for data related to pedestrian and bicycle crashes.

A VRU may be walking, biking, rolling, or using a mobility device such as a wheelchair. VRUs are particularly susceptible to being killed or injured in a crash, and they account for a growing share of all transportation fatalities, both in Pennsylvania and throughout the U.S. In 2024, PennDOT issued [Pennsylvania: A VRU Safety Assessment Report](#) which was a comprehensive statewide examination aimed at understanding the transportation safety challenges faced by VRUs. This report, an addendum to Pennsylvania's [2022 Strategic Highway Safety Plan](#), undertook a quantitative analysis of VRU crashes and associated data. By incorporating an approach to identify areas with a history of VRU crashes along with an analysis of demographic data, the report provides an analysis of high-risk areas as well as a toolkit of extensive systemic and spot-specific infrastructure enhancements and non-infrastructure program approaches to bicycle and pedestrian safety. The toolkit equips PennDOT with a range of solutions to bolster pedestrian and bicyclist safety across diverse settings throughout Pennsylvania including here in Berks County.

Complete Streets

Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, building, operating, and maintaining streets that enables safe access for all users including those traveling by active transportation. The design of Complete Streets considers people and place and varies by user need, but safety for all users is always the priority. Some elements of a Complete Street could include sidewalks, bike lanes, curb extensions, and median islands. These elements of a streetscape are especially important for older adults, children, adolescents, those with disabilities and people living in low-income communities as these people are less likely to own a car or drive. Ensuring Complete Streets integration into future projects can be done through the adoption and enforcement of Complete Streets policies. The City of Reading is the only Berks County community to incorporate Complete Streets policies into their plans and programs.

In August of 2015, Mayor Vaughn Spencer of Reading announced Reading's new status as a Complete Streets Community. Complete Streets create multi-modal transportation networks that have been designed for all users, regardless of age and abilities. These users include pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit vehicles. At the time of its unveiling, the Smart Growth America's National Complete Streets Coalition rated the City's policy as the best in the nation, achieving a perfect score of 100. Although supported by successive mayoral administrations, the Policy

has not been formally adopted by City Council or implemented in any real fashion. Current City leaders are beginning to implement portions of the Complete Streets Policy by pursuing the completion and implementation of an Active Transportation Plan, adopting traffic calming measures, and implementing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in various portions of the City. While no other municipalities in Berks County have adopted Complete Streets or other similar policies, many are becoming more aware of the need for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

Increasing Safe and Accessible Transportation Options (ISATO)

On November 15, 2021, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (Public Law 117-58), also known as the “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law” (BIL), was signed into law. Section 11206 of the BIL, entitled Increasing Safe and Accessible Transportation Options (ISATO), requires certain funds to be used on Complete Streets and similar planning activities as part of the transportation planning processes. RATS staff has been working with Berks County municipalities involved in the Berks County Joint Local Planning Program to identify and prioritize potential projects for local implementation. These lists are incorporated into joint comprehensive plans. A methodology was devised for prioritizing these projects. Some plans also contain representations of potential projects including Complete Streets concepts as a way for local officials to visualize desired outcomes. Berks County Planning Commission staff are presently working these elements into the first round of three (3) Joint Local Comprehensive Plans, with more joint plans under consideration in upcoming years. The three current joint planning efforts include the Draft Eastern Berks Joint Comprehensive Plan (District & Rockland townships and Tipton Borough); the SEAD Joint Comprehensive Plan (St. Lawrence Borough, Exeter, Amity, and Douglass townships); and the Fleetwood/Maidencreek/Richmond Joint Comprehensive Plan. These three plans alone encompass ten (10) municipalities. As more joint plans are created/updated, staff plans in incorporating ISATO concepts into them as well.