

# MILBRIDGE DOWNTOWN WALKABILITY AUDIT

Prepared by Washington County Council of Governments, June 2009

## Introduction

The following report inventories existing pedestrian infrastructure in downtown Milbridge, identifies safety concerns and other barriers to pedestrian mobility, and makes several basic recommendations for overcoming these challenges. The project was coordinated by the Washington County Council of Governments and funded by the Maine Department of Transportation.

## Summary of Recommendations

- Maintain sidewalks through winter – by clearing snow and ice
- Make short-term repair of erosion problems and eventually reconstruct Main St. sidewalk from Wyman Rd. to High St.
- Extend sidewalk on Bridge St.
- Extend sidewalk on Main St.
- Construct paved shoulders along Cottage St.
- Construct sidewalk on School St.
- Repaint all crosswalks
- Add crosswalk at Pharmacy
- Add crosswalk across Main St., connecting Bayside Market at Sunrise Opportunities
- Add crosswalk across High St. at Joshy's Place
- Continue to improve and expand Sudsbury Walking Trail and Riverside Park

## Background

Milbridge is a service center community with a compact cluster of downtown business, housing, educational and cultural facilities. Its compact design and existing pedestrian infrastructure already facilitate pedestrian travel throughout part of the downtown. Several pedestrian-related infrastructure recommendations from Milbridge's 1996 Comprehensive Plan have been implemented—the construction of several new sidewalks, the extension of Riverside Park, and the recent reconstruction of the Route 1A bridge. By overcoming a few remaining challenges to pedestrian mobility, Milbridge can realize the full value of recent investments as a truly pedestrian friendly community.

## Methodology

In the fall of 2008, meetings were conducted with stakeholders including representatives from municipal government, the elementary school, a local walking group, Narraguagus Bay Health Care, the Women's Health Resource Center, West Manor Apartments and Sunrise Opportunities. These interviews helped identify origins and destinations of travel, popular travel routes and key barriers to pedestrian mobility within the community.

By looking broadly at where people live, recreate, work and buy goods and services, it was possible to focus attention on locations and routes of travel that are integral to improved "walkability". This led to a detailed analysis of existing pedestrian infrastructure throughout Milbridge—field work was conducted with cameras, printed maps and a global positioning unit. New spatial data was developed to highlight barriers to pedestrian mobility and pedestrian safety concerns.

Three maps (Appendices A-C) are referred to within this report to help visualize the challenges and opportunities for Milbridge's pedestrian network. These maps illustrate such things as origins and destinations of travel, sidewalk conditions and crosswalk locations. A chart (Appendix D) summarizes the sidewalk and crosswalk conditions. Finally, a photo inventory of existing pedestrian facilities (Appendix E) provides further detail on key impediments to a pedestrian friendly community.

### **Origins and Destinations**

Origins and destinations of pedestrian traffic were identified through stakeholder interviews. In-town origins included the Saybrook Apartments, Narraguagus Bay Health Care Facility, Sunrise Opportunities Residence and Apartments, West Manor Apartments, and three popular in-town parking areas. Other origins include residential neighborhoods which are dispersed fairly evenly in and on the outskirts of the downtown area.

Popular destinations include several restaurants, two banks, the Milbridge Theatre, the Bayside Market, two churches, the Health Clinic, the pharmacy, the elementary school, the baseball field, the Town Office, the Post Office and Kelco.

People typically decide to drive rather than walk when the distance to their destination is greater than ¼ mile. By placing a ¼ mile circle around popular destinations, Appendix A - Map of Origins and Destinations illustrates that opportunities to walk from mapped origins and other residential neighborhoods to work, school, service providers and recreational centers abound within the ¼ mile range. When the range is extended to ½ mile, the walkable area includes a greater number of residences on Route 1, Route 1A and the Wyman Rd. and puts the marina within a walkable distance to downtown destinations.

### **Existing Pedestrian Conditions**

Pedestrian facilities in Milbridge include roadway shoulders, sidewalks, crosswalks, otherwise pedestrian friendly neighborhood streets and short trails. The age, condition and accessibility of the pedestrian facilities vary considerably.

#### Shoulders

For the most part, Route 1 has well-constructed, wide shoulders on both sides of the road, although they do narrow significantly on the north side from High St. down to and around the corner at Wyman Rd. The shoulders on Bridge St. are narrow, creating unsafe conditions for pedestrians as they travel to and from the new Route 1A bridge. Other in-town streets have less traffic and pedestrian conditions are generally good despite a lack of paved shoulders. One identified need for paved shoulders was Cottage St., which connects the Milbridge Elementary School to Main St. and most downtown destinations.

#### Sidewalks

It is important to consider the state of Milbridge's sidewalks in relation to safety and accessibility. The following conditions create unsafe conditions for all pedestrians and are of particular concern with regard to people with disabilities who travel in wheel chairs:

1. Gaps where sidewalks are severely damaged or end abruptly, forcing pedestrians into the street.
2. Pavement that is too sloped, damaged, or narrow for people to navigate safely.

3. Pavement cuts that cause drop-offs or step-ups that are hard for walkers and impossible for people traveling in wheelchairs to navigate.
4. Poor surface conditions caused by weather or leftover debris, such as gravel, sand or leaves, at the end of fall or winter.
5. Sidewalks that are blocked by fixtures, like utility poles or signage, overgrown or improperly positioned vegetation, or violations of city parking ordinances that prohibit cars from obstructing sidewalks.

On the west side of Main St., sidewalks run from the Neighborhood Café to High Street. At Elm St., sidewalks transition from concrete to blacktop and narrow. The sidewalks get increasingly uneven, narrow and suffer from erosion problems as you travel toward Washington St. In general, poor surface conditions caused by weather and debris also become more problematic on the south end of Main St., beginning at Elm St. Grasses and other vegetation are overgrown near the corner at Wyman Rd. and up the hill to Washington St., having the effect of narrowing the sidewalk area. Traffic moves faster on this section of Main St. and pedestrians are especially vulnerable as traffic approaches from behind traveling south on Route 1. The worst sections are washouts at stream at Wyman Rd. and erosion problems beyond Washington St. where the sidewalk is narrow and built up 1-1½ ft. above the road.

On east side of Main St., the sidewalk begins at Bridge St. and eventually “dead ends” in front of a residence, leaving pedestrians stranded across from Union Trust parking lot. This is a dangerous section to attempt to cross the road as the street is busy and cars are steadily entering and exiting the Bayside Market parking lot. Extending this section of sidewalk would be especially beneficial for residents at Sunrise Opportunities, who currently have to walk along the shoulder or attempt to cross the street in front of the Bayside Market to access the town’s sidewalks.

On Bridge St., a short stretch of sidewalk runs on the east side from Main St. to School St. Several stakeholders identified Bridge St. as a priority for additional sidewalks that could connect Main St. all the way to the new Route 1A bridge and Riverside Park. School St. and Cottage St. were also identified as priority areas for additional sidewalks.

Appendix B, Map of Sidewalk Conditions, identifies the location of existing sidewalks and rates their overall condition in accordance with the following established MDOT classification system, in effect providing the big picture of how the conditions discussed earlier affect existing sidewalk infrastructure.

<p><u>DOT Conditions Classification System</u></p> <p>A - Relatively new facility, with lifetime expected in excess of 20 yrs with proper maintenance</p> <p>B - Older facility, well cared for, with lifetime expected to be in excess of 10 yrs</p> <p>C - Older facility, may not be in the best shape and may need improvements within 5 yrs</p> <p>D - Old facility that needs considerable maintenance and/or significant renovation within 2 years</p> <p>F - Very old facility that has outlived its usefulness or is in severe disrepair. The facility or equipment is unsafe or unusable and should be attended to very soon. Replacement may or may not be necessary (based on need assessment)</p>
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In summary, many of Milbridge’s roads are pedestrian friendly despite the fact that they do not have sidewalks. This is because the volume of traffic is low and the general condition of the roads is fair

to good for pedestrian travel. However, Bridge St., School St., Cottage St. and an extension on the west side of Main St. were identified as priority areas to consider new sidewalk construction. And Main St., from Wyman Rd. to High St. was identified as the area of existing sidewalks in the greatest need for repair. The clearing of snow and ice should also be addressed.

### Crosswalks

Crosswalks create safety concerns and barriers to pedestrian mobility when they are poorly marked, positioned in dangerous intersections, or obstructed by such things as drainage grates or the lack of curb cuts.

Appendix C, Map of Crosswalks, indicates the location of crosswalks in downtown Milbridge. These crosswalks are extremely faded and, in most cases, almost impossible to see from a driver's perspective. The only exception is the crosswalk connecting Kelco to an employee parking lot. Kelco has taken the initiative to keep this crosswalk maintained privately.

The crosswalk across Main St. at Bridge St. is positioned dangerously. Parked cars often block visibility at this intersection. The situation could be improved by repainting and adding signage to alert drivers. Banning parking from a larger buffer zone around the crosswalk would also be beneficial

Additionally, drivers sometimes park on the wrong side of Main St. (facing oncoming traffic). This creates a hazard for pedestrians crossing the street— as cars pull out from unexpected positions.

Additional crosswalks were recommended at the 1) Pharmacy; 2) across Main St. at the Bayside Market; and 3) across High Street at Joshy's Place.

### Trails

The town's trail system completes the picture. The Alfred & Cynthia Sudsbury Walking Trail begins behind the Town Hall and could provide a nice connection from the Town Hall/Post Office area to Bridge Street. However, the trail needs to be defined and improved near Bridge St. In addition, a short mowed trail connecting Water St. and School St. receives frequent use.