A Federal Agenda for Active Transportation in 2021
More Americans are walking, biking and using trails in 2020 than ever before—bike sales have boomed1 and trail use is up 60% over the same period in 2019,2 accelerating trends that have been building for years. Individuals are increasingly turning to biking and walking as reliable and efficient modes of transportation as well as healthy and accessible recreation. At the same time, bicycle and pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries have been steadily rising for more than a decade.

Active transportation facilities like protected bike lanes, pedestrian malls, multiuse trails and bike sharing stations have demonstrated their value as tools for economic growth, revitalizing main streets and encouraging sustainable development. Building active transportation facilities generates 17 jobs per million dollars spent, a ratio higher than for roads and other transportation projects because the work is more labor intensive. We have an opportunity to put Americans to work building the strategic connections that enable healthy and resource-saving habits.

As more Americans rely on active transportation for essential trips, and communities turn to active transportation as an economic strategy, the nation’s federal policies must reflect these changes and the opportunities they represent while providing for the safety of all Americans as they walk, bike and move. It is time for a transformational investment in connected active transportation infrastructure to sustain and grow the boom in bicycling, walking, and trail use; create good jobs; and meet mobility needs of underserved communities and historically disinvested populations, including Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), low-income communities, people with disabilities, and those who do not drive (among them children and many seniors).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating consequences on our society, but in tough times people take stock of what is truly important to them. For example, ongoing trends in increased bicycling and trail use have accelerated as the nation continues to manage the need to stay mentally and physically well while remaining socially isolated, and to access essential jobs and services despite limited access to equitable and affordable mobility options. Many places moved rapidly to expand options by, for example, restricting motor vehicle access to certain streets to provide safe, socially distanced routes to walk and bike. The pandemic clearly illustrated that the demand for safe spaces to walk, bike and be active outside far exceeds the supply, forcing innovative solutions in the short term while highlighting the pressing need for sustainable long-term strategies.

Climate change also requires immediate and bold leadership, policy and action. Transportation is a leading source of greenhouse gases, producing 28% of total carbon emissions in the United States. Individual car trips generate a majority of transportation emissions, most of which are within a 20-minute bike ride.3 With safe, separated and continuous infrastructure, many short trips can easily be made by bike or on foot. Increasing widespread access to active transportation infrastructure and consumer access to bikes and shared micromobility are parts of a broader, multi-faceted solution to reducing climate emissions.

The reality is, however, that states and localities face budget shortfalls and funding struggles in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and destructive climate events like hurricanes and wildfires. Extending a culture of increased bicycling, walking and being active outdoors can only happen with significant increases in support to states and localities. Transit systems as well face tough decisions as many Americans continue to work from home and limit travel—decisions that will directly affect the potential mobility and economic opportunity for underserved communities. The federal government is a key player in sustaining and growing this boom in active transportation that promises a huge return on investment for individuals, American communities, and the U.S. economy; a substantial mode shift to walking and bicycling could provide an estimated $138 billion per year in economic benefit to the nation.4

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1. People For Bikes Business Intelligence Hub, peopleforbikes.org/business-intelligence-hub.
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The Moving Forward Act (H.R. 2), passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2020, offers a strong baseline for the policies and investments listed below, including ensuring state accountability for reducing bicyclist and pedestrian injuries and deaths. Similarly, the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis’s Climate Action Report supports many important policy advances relating to infrastructure, equity and building for resiliency. Federal policy makers have the opportunity in 2021 to build on these steps and towards transformative investments in active transportation. Key federal actions that move active transportation forward in 2021 include:

**Connectivity**
Invest in connecting existing active transportation facilities into highly functional networks that enable people to safely and conveniently access important destinations such as jobs, schools, transit centers, shops, services, and parks and trails. Congress’ Non-Motorized Pilot Program\(^5\) proved this approach effective in shifting car trips to walking and biking; now hundreds of communities have connectivity plans requiring investment that would create economic vitality, affordable mobility and well-being. We can leverage construction of active transportation facilities, which create more jobs per dollar than any other infrastructure, for needed labor investments.

- Include in an economic stimulus package:
  - An initial $2.5 billion investment in equitable mobility by fully funding continuous low-stress active transportation routes that serve the essential needs of low-income and BIPOC communities and make critical connections to key destinations.
  - Align this investment in equitable mobility with legislation to create a modern Conservation Corps, providing jobs and career training focused on building critical infrastructure in neighborhoods that need it most.

- Include the Connecting America’s Active Transportation System Act (H.R. 5696/S-3391) in the surface transportation reauthorization package and fund it at $500 million per year for all years of the reauthorization. This policy serves all communities while prioritizing resources for underserved communities in the scoring criteria.

**Reauthorization**
Congress should prioritize passing a five-year surface transportation reauthorization bill that includes, in addition to connectivity investment, dramatic funding increases in Transportation Alternatives and the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) to meet growing demand for accessible and connected places to bike and walk. A reauthorization should also include bold bicycle and pedestrian safety provisions and actionable measures to reduce carbon emissions.

- Congress should reauthorize and double current funding levels for the Transportation Alternatives Program to make travel safe and convenient for bicyclists, pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. Policies should be updated to protect the integrity of the program, including preventing transfers out of the program.
- RTP is a vital source to enhance and maintain trails and help boost rural economies. The Federal Highway Administration should release the study of non-highway recreational fuel use that was completed in June of 2020 to inform Congress in setting a new RTP funding level in the reauthorization. A prior fuel study indicates that this user-fee funded program could sustain funding of up to $275 million annually.

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U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Structure
Provide vision and focus to the execution of active transportation programs by establishing an Active Transportation Administration reporting directly to the USDOT Secretary.

Safety
The first priority of the Active Transportation Administration should be to develop a comprehensive plan to quickly and dramatically reduce fatalities and serious injuries among pedestrians and bicyclists, including built environment improvements. The plan should include clear metrics and guidelines to hold states and localities accountable for results.

• Congress and the Active Transportation Administration should enact and uphold across all federal roadway programs the principles of Complete Streets and that pedestrian and bicycle fatalities must be treated as preventable, with a focus on design solutions.

Equitable Planning
Ensure that transportation infrastructure is used to unite Americans and provide equitable opportunities to participate in our economy. Too often, highway projects have cut neighborhoods off from access to jobs and services and undercut community vitality in an effort to encourage and accommodate suburbanization. Transportation planning norms feed this dynamic by systematically disregarding neighborhood-level needs, especially for BIPOC and low-income communities.

• USDOT should revive the Ladders of Opportunity initiative to address the ways that transportation has been used to cut off BIPOC and low-income communities from economic opportunity.

• The federal government should enable communities, in collaboration with community groups with expertise in equity and transportation, to pilot reforms to make transportation planning more inclusive and affirmatively responsive to neighborhood-level needs, such as safe and affordable access to essential jobs and services.

Climate
Our nation needs immediate action and long-term planning to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. Shifting trips to biking and walking should be part of a broad suite of solutions. Any climate focused legislation should include:

• Eligibility and focus on active transportation infrastructure for carbon emission reduction programs as well as incentives to design for climate resiliency.

• Incentives including (1) tax credits for purchasing a bikeshare service membership, bicycle or electric bicycle (or e-bike for short) to be used to replace car trips and increase mobility equity by lowering costs; (2) an increase and expansion of the Bicycle Commuter Benefit to include bikeshare and electric bicycles; and (3) eligibility of bikes and electric bicycles for electric vehicle trade-in programs.

• New standards for data and technology in USDOT programs that can be used for climate resilient transportation planning.

Electric Bicycle Definition and Access
More Americans are relying on electric bicycles for efficient transportation and fun, healthy recreation, especially on our public lands. In 2021, federal agencies should update and maintain consistent electric bicycle definitions and access regulations that include:

• Electric bicycles defined as bicycles, not motor vehicles, with three classes.

• Local land manager discretion to determine access for all or certain classes of electric bicycles.

• Opportunities for public input on electric bicycle access or restrictions.
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Organizations supporting the Federal Agenda for Active Transportation:

- rails-to-trails conservancy
- peopleforbikes
- NRDC
- Transportation for America
- NLC
- American Trails
- REI Co-op
- Trust for America’s Health
- TREK
- AMERICA WALKS
- Smart Growth America
- National Complete Streets Coalition
- LOCUS
- Project for Public Spaces
- APRIL
- National Disability Rights Network
- WTB
- American College of Sports Medicine
- SRAM
- Outdoor Industry Association

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