

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

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# 1.1 WHAT IS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?

More than half of all trips in the United States are within a 20-minute bike ride or less, and more than one in four trips are within a 20-minute walk or less, according to the 2017 National Household Travel Survey.<sup>1</sup> Even so, the majority of these short trips are taken by automobile.

Across rural, suburban and urban America, there are opportunities to shift short trips from driving to walking and biking by creating safe active transportation networks. In the process, this mode shift can create remarkable economic returns and improve the quality of lives.

Mode shift leads to fewer motor vehicles on clogged roads, as well as less air and climate pollution, while also creating a transportation environment that favors physical activity.

The Laredo & Webb County Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (LW-CAMPO) planning region includes all of Laredo City and a portion of unincorporated Webb County.

## 1.1 WHAT IS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?

**Active transportation is a means of getting around that is achieved through human-powered mobility.**

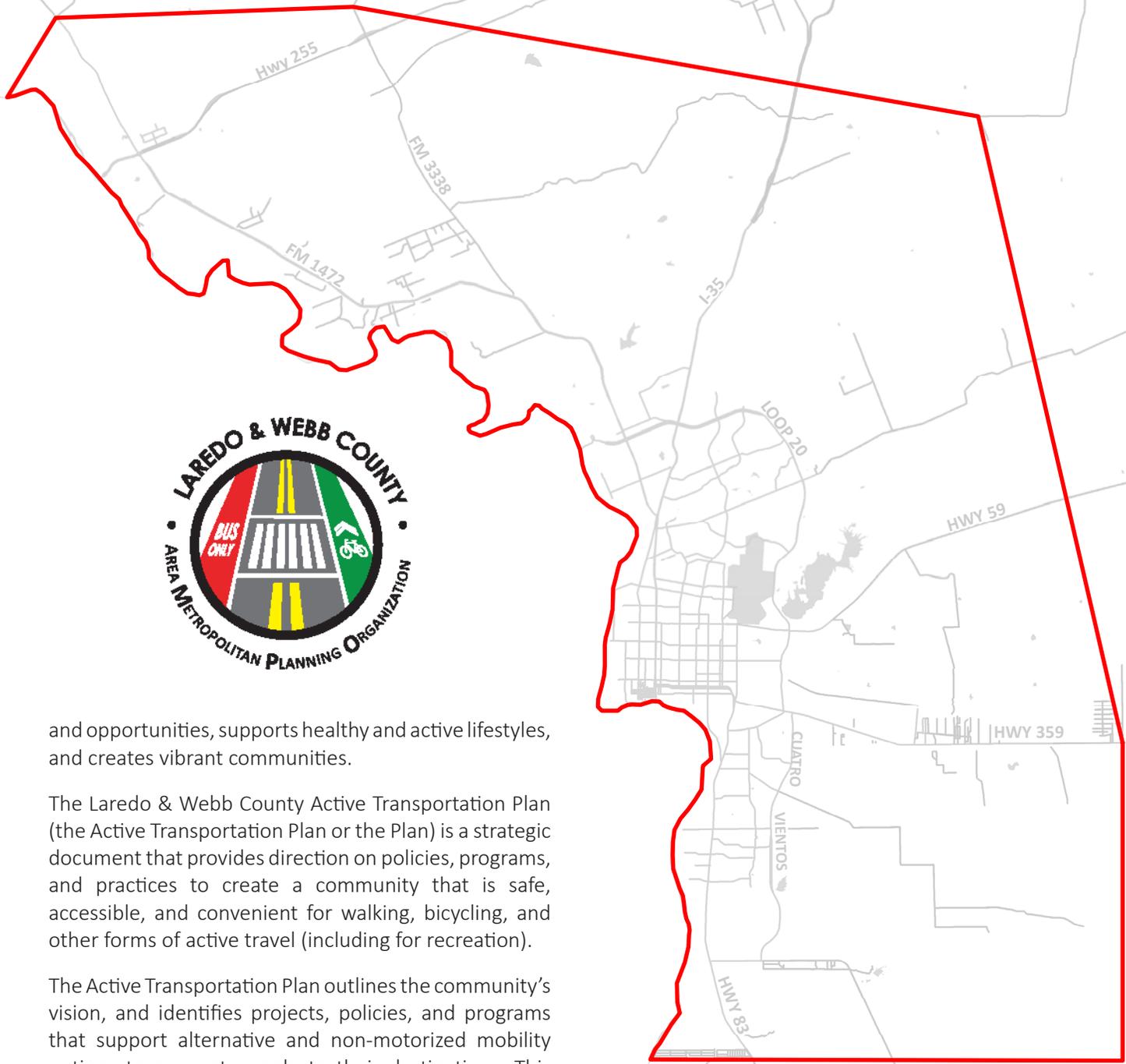
This includes walking, cycling and using transit, as well as the needs of wheelchair users and other types of non-motorized mobility devices.

Active transportation is an important element of Laredo’s mobility network, since it not only increases transportation choices but also supports healthy, active living. Active transportation improves access to jobs



STREET TRANSFORMATION PROPOSED IN THE 2017 VIVA LAREDO COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

# LW-CAMPO BOUNDARIES



and opportunities, supports healthy and active lifestyles, and creates vibrant communities.

The Laredo & Webb County Active Transportation Plan (the Active Transportation Plan or the Plan) is a strategic document that provides direction on policies, programs, and practices to create a community that is safe, accessible, and convenient for walking, bicycling, and other forms of active travel (including for recreation).

The Active Transportation Plan outlines the community's vision, and identifies projects, policies, and programs that support alternative and non-motorized mobility options to connect people to their destinations. This Plan shall serve to enhance sustainable mobility, while improving the quality of life for Laredo and Webb County residents for generations to come.

# 1.2 BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

## 1.2 BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Active transportation has many benefits which can improve quality of life in a community. Increasingly, communities across the nation are recognizing these benefits and are taking important steps to promote walking and bicycling as a mode of travel.

A shift towards active lifestyles and increasing demands for sustainable modes of transportation presents a need for a useful and accessible walking and cycling network in the City. In support of a multi-modal transportation system, LW-CAMPO has generated the Active Transportation Plan. The Plan recognizes the need to design a transportation network that incorporates all modes of travel, ages, and abilities. LW-CAMPO is working to create a connected transportation network for pedestrians and bicyclists that will allow for additional means of connectivity.

The Active Transportation Plan focuses on opportunities for increased walking, bicycling, and other active modes of transport in short-trip opportunity areas. By fostering the development of safe, comfortable, connected, and accessible walking and biking networks, this plan directly supports ensuring mobility equity for older adults and people with disabilities. The Active Transportation Plan also supports the City of Laredo’s economic development goals of increasing mixed-use development, improving the balance of jobs and housing, and attracting higher wage jobs.

Future plans laid out by the City, County, MPO, and others in the area call for an expansion of the transportation network for pedestrians and cyclists. Following these plans will benefit the region’s health, equity, economy, and mobility in several ways:

- Connected, attractive sidewalks and well-defined bike routes support healthy and active lifestyles.



### Affordability

Closer access to work, restaurants, and groceries can save you hundreds of dollars per month in gas money.

### Accessibility

Grabbing a coffee or running an errand is just a short walk away. A shorter commute and proximity to all the necessities also gives you more free time.

### Health

Walking helps reduce obesity and blood pressure. Walking results!

### Environment

Biking and walking helps lower gas emissions and pollution levels.

### Social

Walkable communities provide opportunities to be social, including more bar and dining options and local, community events.

## 1.2 BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

- Complete networks connect people to the places they need to go: jobs, schools, stores, parks, medical services, and more.
- Well-designed and inviting streets support a vibrant economy and help everyone thrive: residents, visitors, and businesses.

### 1.2.1 HEALTH BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Active transportation offers various health benefits by providing residents an opportunity to be more active, less stressed, and more engaged with their neighbors. This not only leads to longer lives, but increases the quality of life for residents.

In Webb County, physical inactivity is a growing issue. In 2020, the rate of physical inactivity increased to 29%. Physical inactivity has led to an obesity rate of 38% in the region. Lack of physical activity is a major factor contributing to poor health. Providing opportunities for active transportation such as bicycling and walking allows residents to incorporate physical activity into daily trips, such as going to school, work, and running errands.<sup>2</sup> Walking and bicycling are associated with improved heart health and lower levels of obesity, diabetes, and cancer.<sup>3</sup>

Compared to rural residents, those who live in urban areas are 21% more likely to have anxiety disorders, 39% more likely to have mood disorders, and are also more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and struggle with anger management.<sup>4</sup> Physical activity and spending time outdoors have been shown to reduce stress, lower anxiety, and decrease mental health issues. Benefits of physical activity include weight control, and a reduction of the risks for cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and some cancers.

Physical activity also helps build muscle and strengthen bones, while mental benefits include an improvement in mental health and mood. Providing a safe, comfortable, accessible, and equitable active transportation network for residents will make walking, bicycling, and other



outdoor activities easier, giving residents a healthy outlet for their stress and anxiety.

Using active transportation provides people with more opportunity to be immersed in green space, which has positive impacts for an individual's mental health. Green space most strongly protects against mood disorders, depression, neurotic behavior, and stress-related issues, signaling that psychological restoration may be the strongest protective mechanism that green space offers.<sup>5</sup> Individuals have less mental distress, less anxiety and depression, greater wellbeing and healthier cortisol profiles when living in urban areas with more green space compared with less green space.

In the digital age, people are more connected across the globe but often feel less connected in their own neighborhoods. Compared to driving alone in vehicles-walking, bicycling, and using transit provide residents more opportunities to engage with one another. This encourages more connected communities where residents are more involved and feel a stronger sense of belonging.

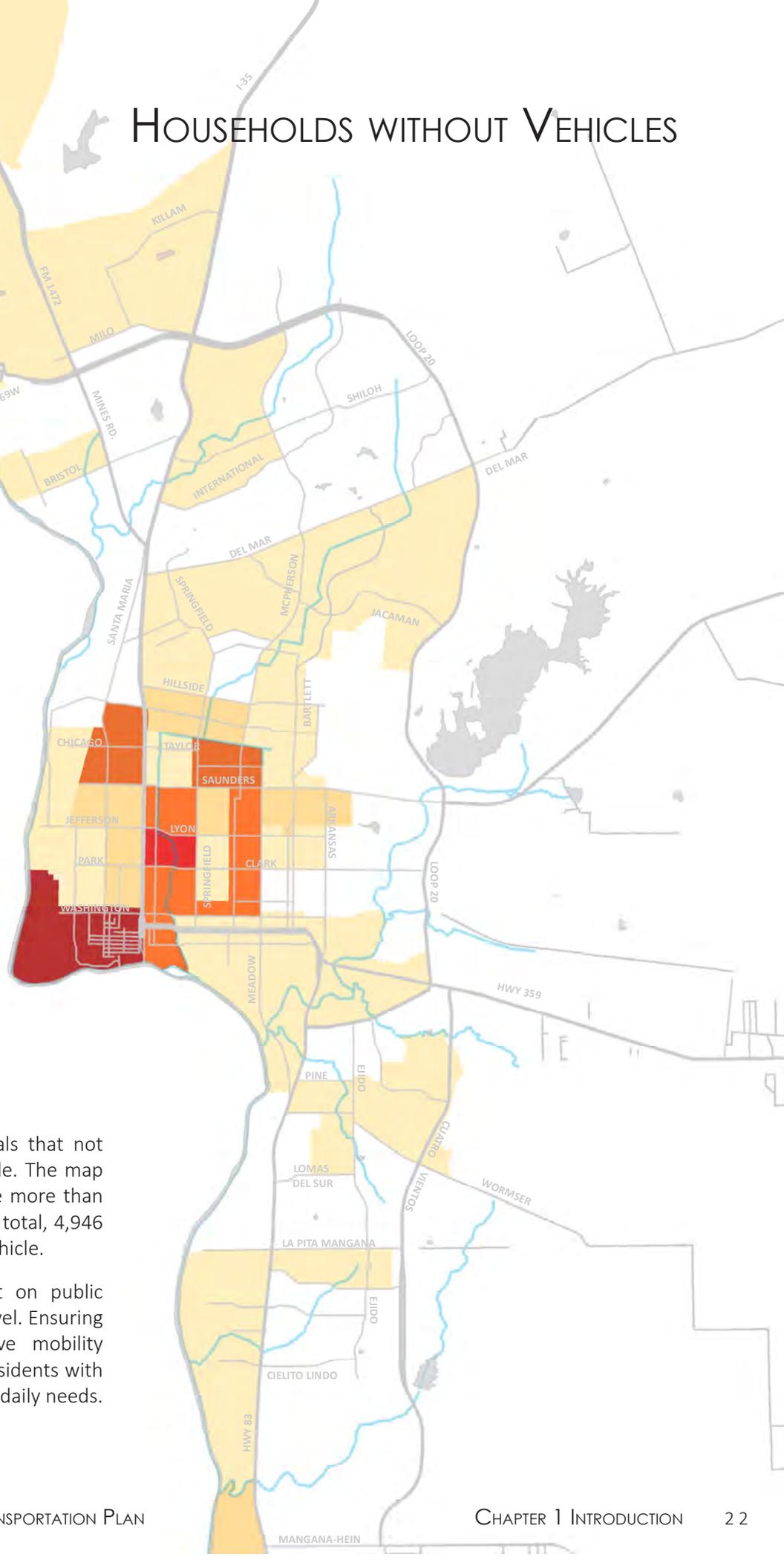
# HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT VEHICLES



## ACCESS TO VEHICLES

The data shown in this map reveals that not all residents have access to a vehicle. The map displays the census tracts that have more than 50 households without a vehicle. In total, 4,946 households in the region have no vehicle.

These areas are more dependent on public transit and alternative modes of travel. Ensuring that safe and efficient alternative mobility options are available can provide residents with needed access to opportunities and daily needs.



# 1.2 BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

## 1.2.2 EQUITY & ACCESS BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is an important part of meeting everyday needs, but inequities in our communities and transportation systems create barriers that make it time consuming, challenging, and dangerous for vulnerable populations to access basic needs.<sup>6</sup> Active transportation provides both individual and societal benefits.<sup>7</sup> It is essential to ensure that the region’s active transportation network is socially and spatially equitable. The network should serve all people regardless of race, age, gender, ability, needs, or socioeconomic status. Additionally, the network needs to be spatially equitable and ensure access throughout the region, especially in underserved neighborhoods and high-poverty areas. Ensuring access to jobs, healthcare, schools, and other opportunities is a necessary element in facilitating upward socioeconomic mobility.

Access to goods, services, and opportunities is an integral part of a City’s quality of life. Equality is about providing individuals with equal access to goods, services, and opportunities, regardless of needs or socioeconomic status. Equity goes a step further to ensure people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged

are provided the adequate resources needed to benefit equally from active transportation improvements. Equity must be a priority throughout the planning process and an integral part of decision-making when it comes to investing in active transportation facilities.

In the U.S., one-third of all Americans cannot drive because they’re too old, too young, too poor or have a disability.<sup>8</sup> Active transportation networks connect more people—particularly children, seniors, those with disabilities, and those without economic means—to destinations and opportunities in their communities. From elementary-age students to teens and preteens, the ability to walk or bike to school can provide a healthier means of transportation. For seniors, being able to walk or bike to a destination can help maintain a sense of independence and also keep them healthy through physical activity, while allowing them the opportunity to age in place.

In a car-dependent community, those with disabilities or from low-income households are at a disadvantage. Designing our community in a way that considers additional modes of transportation is more inclusive. For example, designing complete streets which allow residents to walk or bike to work, with sidewalks



EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION ACCOMODATES ALL USERS

# 1.2 BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

accessible to wheelchairs and the visually impaired, ensures fewer residents are left out. In short, active transportation provides a safe means of connectivity and independence for everyone to access destinations, regardless of their age, ability, or income.

According to a report by Safe Routes to Schools, people who walk and bike in low-income communities and communities of color experience higher injury and fatality rates when compared to the general population.<sup>9</sup> Laredo is no exception; a disproportionate share of pedestrian and bicycle crashes resulting in injuries or fatalities are located in lower income areas.

## 1.2.3 ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Investments in active transportation can have significant benefits for businesses, commercial districts, homeowners, and customers. Walkability is associated with higher home values, bike share attracts customers to local businesses, trail users spend money on equipment, apparel, and food, and major employers are seeking to locate in walkable and bikeable cities. Requiring less car parking and increasing bike parking can help reduce parking costs for developers and individuals.<sup>10</sup>

Walkable communities that more easily connect residents to jobs can help improve upward economic mobility.<sup>11</sup> Improving conditions for walking and biking can also have positive effects on local economies by providing opportunities to reduce household transportation costs, increase access to jobs, and increase property values. According to a recent survey, 60% of adults in the U.S. favor walkable mixed-use neighborhoods, and almost two thirds of adults between 18 and 35 years of age report a desire to drive less if alternative transportation options were available.<sup>12</sup> In addition, bicycle infrastructure investments produce positive outcomes for communities regardless of differences in geographic factors such as climate, topography, and size.<sup>13</sup>

A study in New Jersey found that active transportation related activities contributed an estimated \$497 million to the state’s economy in a one-year period.<sup>14</sup> Expenditures on transportation account for 15.9% of annual average household expenditure in the United States. When combining housing and transportation costs, this makes up almost half (48.7%) of total household costs.<sup>15</sup> Walking and bicycling are inexpensive travel modes that help people save on transportation costs.

A 2017 analysis of consumer spending compared expenditure patterns between California, New York, and Texas; the analysis shows transportation expenditures in Texas account for 20% as a share of total household expenditures, which is higher than both California (15%) and New York (14%), and higher than the national expenditure share (16%).<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, increased walking and biking, for both travel and recreation, are among the most effective ways to address America’s crisis of physical inactivity. This crisis is a major factor in high and rising rates of chronic diseases that cost the U.S. healthcare system trillions of dollars each year, with many of those costs falling to



ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

## 1.2 BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION



CONVENT STREET PAINTED BICYCLE LANE IN DOWNTOWN LAREDO

taxpayers. This indicates active transportation provides residents the option to reduce their transportation costs by utilizing walking, biking, and transit networks throughout the region.

### 1.2.4 TRAFFIC BENEFITS OF ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Transit, bicycling, and walking can provide a healthy alternative to driving and reduce the number of vehicles on the road. However, safe and adequate facilities must be present for bicycling and walking to be a viable travel option. Such facilities include wide sidewalks, protected bicycle lanes, accessible bus stops, and visible signage. The development of a safe and accessible active transportation network can reduce pedestrian and cyclist accidents and fatalities. Off-street routes, buffered sidewalks, and protected bike lanes provide an alternative and safer commute for non-vehicular traffic and reduces conflict points with vehicles that pose a risk for pedestrians and cyclists.

Increased rates of bicycling and walking reduce traffic congestion, improve safety, calm traffic, and preserve road infrastructure. Travel characteristics indicate many trips are short and can be replaced with walking and bicycling. According to a recent study, 40% of trips are less than 2 miles.<sup>17</sup> Enhanced transportation choices improves mobility options for those who are not able to drive.

Planning for transportation infrastructure, such as bikeways and sidewalks, with all users in mind, can improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and wheelchair users. Well-designed active transportation infrastructure and facilities also encourages more people to use active modes of transport. Better infrastructure and more people using active transportation can make traveling safer for everyone.



# 1.3 ABOUT THE PLAN

## 1.3.2 PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the Active Transportation Plan occurred over a 10 month timeframe. The Plan was developed through extensive research, analysis of the existing network and conditions, public input, and a carefully designed methodology. Over 20 existing plans and studies were consulted in the development of the Plan. The public input collected in previous planning efforts such as the Viva Laredo Comprehensive Plan and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan helped build a framework for the Active Transportation Plan.

### PUBLIC INPUT & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Involving the public in the planning process of the Active Transportation Plan encourages more people in the community to support and promote the Plan’s recommendations. Ideas were generated by the public through six Planning Night events. Over 1,900 residents participated in a survey published in both English and Spanish. The survey demonstrated more people would ride a bicycle if safe and protected bikeways were available. During the process, stakeholders were engaged through a series of presentations and were asked to provide feedback regarding the proposed recommendations and bicycle network routes. Additional information about the public input process and a summary of survey results is detailed in Chapter 3 of the Plan.

### DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

Data was gathered from various existing datasets and the public survey. Existing data on local geography, traffic patterns, economic indicators, and socioeconomic conditions were analyzed. Additionally, the current transportation network was carefully analyzed to better understand the existing conditions related to bikeways, sidewalks, transit, and micromobility. The detailed analysis informed the development of the proposed bicycle network and recommendations. The data analysis findings are detailed in Chapter 2.



IMAGINE YOUR CITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY



FEEDBACK GATHERED ON EXISTING CONDITIONS

# 1.4 VISION & GOALS

## 1.4.1 VISION OF THE PLAN

The purpose of the Active Transportation Plan is to create and develop connectivity between bicycle, pedestrian, and transit networks that will provide safe, accessible, and alternate modes of transportation for the future of Laredo and Webb County citizens.

Implementing the goals from both the Viva Laredo Comprehensive Plan (Viva Laredo) and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) will provide the necessary tools to achieve the success of this Plan. Applying the goals of connectivity, health, access, safety, and equity will generate a better tomorrow for the region.

The Active Transportation Plan aims to create a regionally connected bicycle and pedestrian system that provides a safe, comfortable, accessible, and equitable network of trails, sidewalks, and on-street bicycle facilities for people of all ages and abilities that encourages a healthy lifestyle, economic development, and increases community awareness and funding for alternative modes of transportation.

Developing a connected transportation system offers a seamless bikeway network for people of all ages and abilities. It is able to create eco-tourism routes that connect people to the local geography and historic-tourism routes that connect people to the roots of the City. Not only does it provide alternative routes, but it increases transit ridership and serves as a two-way communication forum between the community, the MPO, and its transportation partners. The Active Transportation Plan allows LW-CAMPO to develop principles and criteria for network alternatives, as well as an implementation and funding plan.

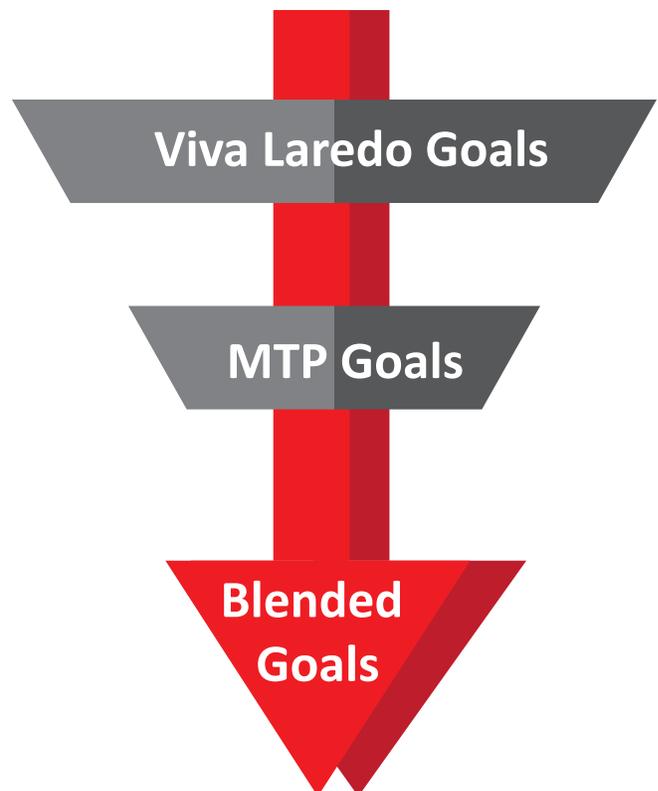
## 1.4.2 GOALS OF THE PLAN

The Active Transportation Plan aligns with the Viva Laredo Comprehensive Master Plan and its directives to design for and encourage sustainable and active transportation, and will support other ongoing

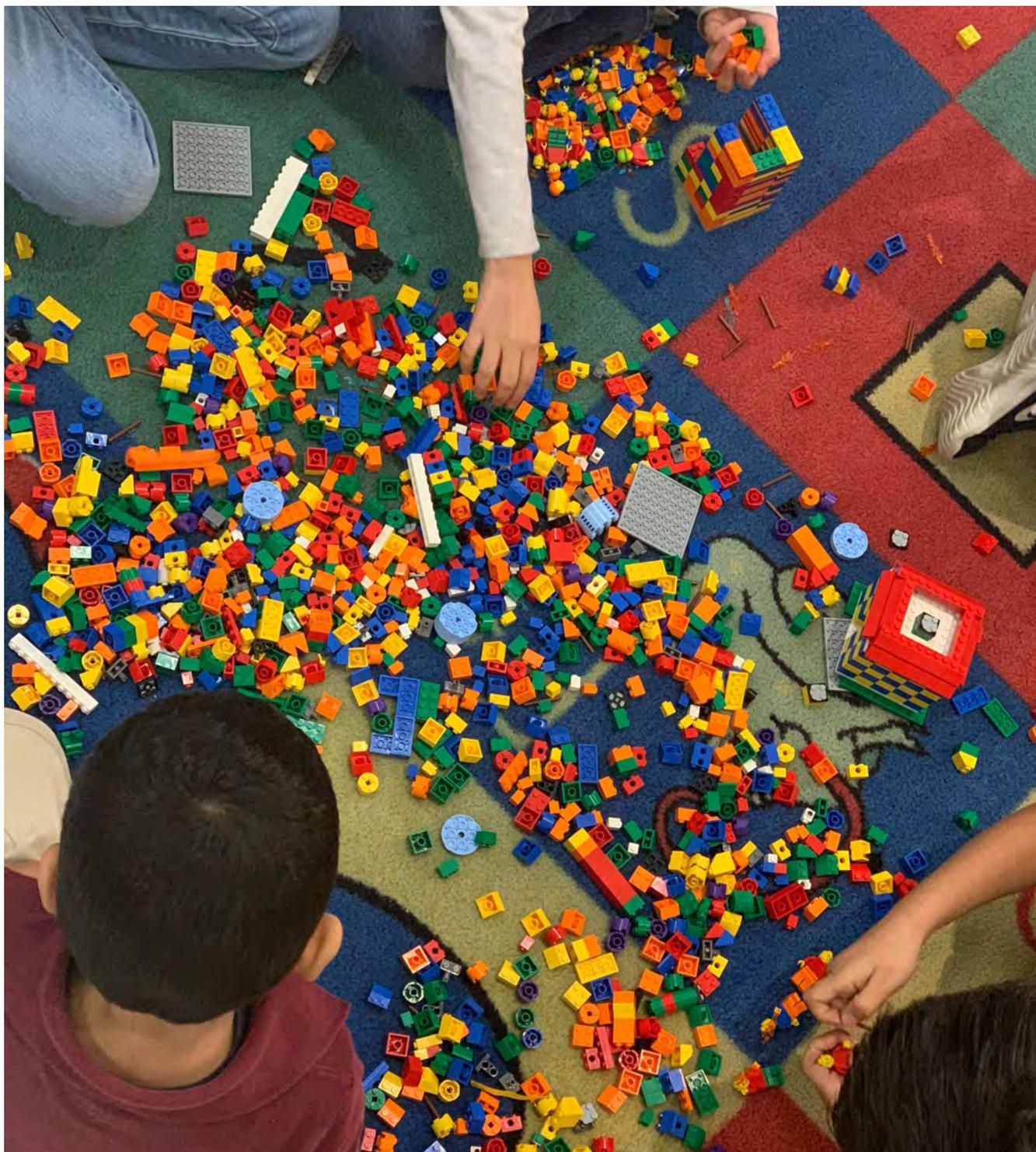
transportation and land use planning initiatives in Laredo.

The Plan reduces the need for individual auto use while providing a variety of travel choices for achieving a safe, accessible, and sustainable network that connects people with each other and where they want to go. The Active Transportation Plan will be safe, be equitable, be reliable, provide travel choices, provide support for clean air and climate commitment, as well as educate residents with overarching goals of making walking and biking a viable and enjoyable way to get around town and creating safer streets for everyone.

The following list of goals provides an in-depth detail from both the Viva Laredo and the MTP.



## 1.4 VISION & GOALS



A SCENE FROM ONE OF THE 2020 PLANNING NIGHTS

# 1.4 VISION & GOALS

Viva Laredo's Overall Goal:

- Create a multimodal transportation network throughout Laredo that provides access to opportunity, improves public health, reduces carbon emissions, and provides civic recreational opportunities while efficiently moving pedestrians, cyclists, transit, motor vehicles, cargo, and freight.

Detailed List of Viva Laredo's Goals:

- Goal 4.1: Create a coordinated, efficient, and more affordable multimodal transportation system that supports, complements, and meets the needs of different types of places throughout the City. Land use patterns and connections among different land uses are key elements defining the form and character of places. (Connectivity)
- Goal 4.2: Laredo's thoroughfares will form a well-connected network of complete streets that support driving, walking, bicycling, and public transit. (Safety/Complete Streets)
- Goal 4.3: The City will improve its thoroughfares over time as opportunities are found to increase transit service and improve connectivity, walkability, bike-ability, and economic benefits to surrounding areas. (Connectivity)
- Goal 4.4: Reduce service disparities and achieve equitable access to all types of facilities and transportation modes. (Equity & Accessibility)
- Goal 4.6: Enhance and connect the bike and pedestrian circulation system throughout Laredo. (Connectivity)
- Goal 4.7: Vigorously expand bicycle facilities throughout Laredo to create a full network of connected, safe, and attractive bikeways and supporting facilities for both transportation and recreation. (Connectivity)
- Goal 4.9: Ensure safety for users of all transportation modes, with attention to the most vulnerable users, including people with disabilities, those using mobility devices, the young, and the elderly. (Safety/Health)

- Goal 4.12: Improve the region's air quality through more sustainable and energy-efficient transportation and land use practices. (Health)
- Goal 4.14: Make a Metro Transit Master Plan and turn it into the most used Citywide transit system in Texas. (Connectivity)

Detailed List of MTP Goals:

- Goal 1: Provide a transportation network that is safe for all modes and users. (Connectivity)
- Goal 4: Foster continued economic vitality by providing an effective and efficient freight network and supporting access to jobs and major destinations in the region. (Equity)
- Goal 5: Develop an integrated and connected transportation network that encourages vibrant, affordable, and equitable communities (Connectivity)

**Blended Goals between Viva Laredo & MTP:**

- **Goal 1: The City will improve its thoroughfares using best practices to create a connected network of complete streets that increase transit service and improve connectivity, walkability, bike-ability, and economic benefits to surrounding areas. (Safety/Complete Streets)**
- **Goal 2: Enhance and connect the bike and pedestrian circulation system throughout Laredo to reduce service disparities and achieve equitable access to all types of facilities and transportation modes. (Equity & Accessibility)**
- **Goal 3: Expand bicycle facilities throughout Laredo to create a full network of connected, safe, and attractive bikeways and supporting facilities for both transportation and recreation. (Connectivity)**
- **Goal 4: Increase Metro Transit efficiency to create the most utilized Citywide transit system in the state and reduce service disparities, and provide clear connectivity to other transportation modes. (Equity, Accessibility, & Connectivity)**

# BRANDON LOPEZ & ISAIA ZAVALA



Brandon Lopez and Isaia Zavala are both high school students. They used to bike recreationally, but recently switched to skateboarding. They enjoy skateboarding as a way to de-stress and have fun. They normally skate around their neighborhood, however, at times Mr. Lopez does skate at the McPherson Skatepark. They would prefer to have smoother roads to prevent falls.

When told about the plans to better connect the region with active transportation routes, Brandon stated, "This would be great for our area; we're closed off because there's so many busy roads. It's really hard for people to walk and bike around here."



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