

# WATERTOWN-JEFFERSON COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY STUDY

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**Barton  
& Loguidice**



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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

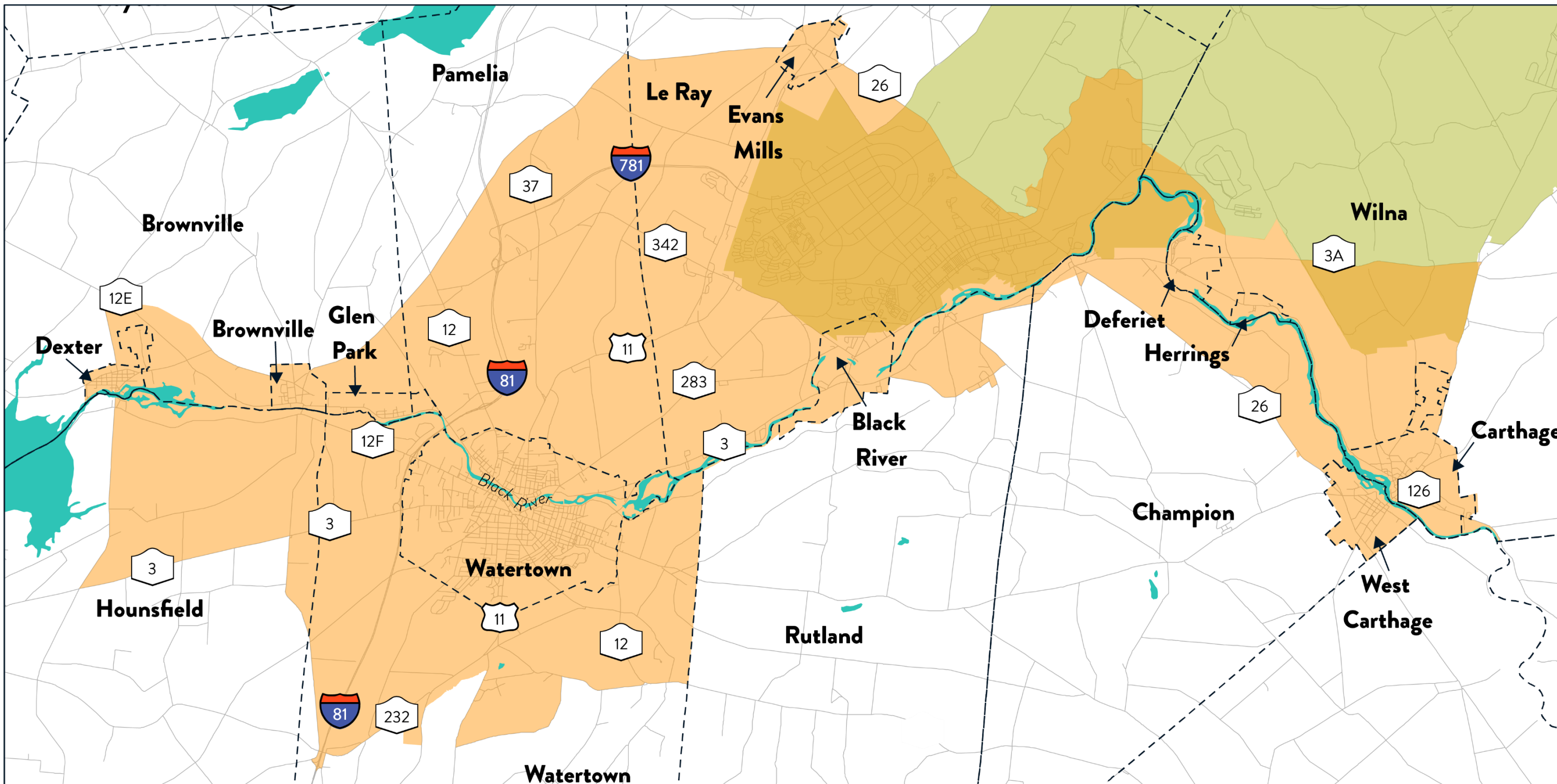
## 1.1. Introduction

The transportation issues that communities face today are very different from those of the 20th century. In addition to ensuring the flow of vehicles and creating safe, efficient roads, communities have recognized the value of promoting non-vehicular travel, such as walking and biking. The emphasis on vehicular transportation planning in past decades has resulted in the degradation of comfortable and accessible pedestrian and bicyclist networks. These networks help to promote healthy living, economic development, and environmental benefits. Therefore, the Watertown-Jefferson County Transportation Council (WJCTC) has undertaken a bicycle and pedestrian connectivity study to identify gaps in these non-motorist networks, and to provide context-sensitive solutions for future investment that will enhance connectivity and accessibility for transportation users of all types. The City of Watertown and surrounding communities that comprise the planning area have many existing pedestrian and bicyclist amenities that are identified in this study and will be built upon in the future to create a cohesive and comprehensive transportation network. This network will promote the region's unique and scenic natural resources while allowing residents and visitors to access key economic activity centers without needing to rely on access to a vehicle.

In addition to the area-wide analysis of pedestrian and bicyclist connectivity, this study evaluates the potential future extension of the Black River Trail from its eastern terminus, just south of NYS Route 3 in the Village of Black River, to Fort Drum. This connection will promote crucial access to goods and services in the City of Watertown as well as recreational opportunities for Fort Drum's growing population. This Plan shows WJCTC's commitment to accommodating active transportation by providing a community-based, data-driven framework for guiding future decisions and investment regarding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The Plan contains recommendations regarding both on- and off-road improvements that will improve the safety and ease of moving around the area by walking or biking. This plan will aid the City of Watertown and surrounding area in becoming a more walkable and bike-friendly community, and enhance the perception of the area as an attractive, vibrant community that is a great place to live, work and play.

## 1.2. What is the Watertown-Jefferson County Transportation Council?

WJCTC was established in 2014 as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Watertown Urbanized Area. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) requires that every urbanized area in the Country that exceeds 50,000 in population has an MPO to represent the area and receive federal highway and transit funds to carry out the metropolitan planning process. WJCTC is responsible for facilitating a regional transportation planning and programming process that is continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive for all area projects and activities eligible for funding through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA). WJCTC develops and maintains both a Regional Transportation Plan and a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the area's federal aid eligible highway and public transit facilities. This study was identified as a priority within the current TIP and the MPO's 2021-2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).



- Municipal Boundaries
- WJCTC MPO Boundary
- Water Bodies
- Fort Drum Installation Area

WJCTC  
NEW YORK STATE Department of Transportation  
HIGHLAND PLANNING

0 2.5 5 Miles

# Map 1.1: WJCTC Planning Area

### 1.3. Vision Statement & Goals

By undertaking this study, WJCTC has developed a long-term plan for the creation of a robust non-motorist transportation network. The envisioned improvements contained within this study will happen incrementally over time, as political will and funding allows. Given this, it is important for the MPO to have a clear vision for the future. This will ensure that each individual project and program that is undertaken over time is aligned with the ultimate goals of fostering an environment and an economy that is accessible to all. The vision for the future of the WJCTC planning area as it pertains to bicycle and pedestrian connectivity is as follows:

**“WJCTC will promote a connective, accessible, and safe pedestrian and bicyclist networks in which people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds can easily travel to and from the region’s key destinations without relying on personal motorized vehicles. This will help foster a growing community of pedestrians and bicyclists that will contribute to and enjoy the benefits of a vibrant, active community that supports healthy living, increased economic activity, and the ability to age in place.”**

In order to achieve this, the following goals were identified that support the ideals & values contained within the vision:

 <p><b>1. Support current and future residents’ ability to age in place.</b></p>	 <p><b>2. Promote the area’s natural beauty and recreational opportunities.</b></p>
 <p><b>3. Work towards building a more sustainable future.</b></p>	 <p><b>4. Foster community and economic development across the region.</b></p>
 <p><b>5. Improve the comfort and safety of non-motorist travel.</b></p>	 <p><b>6. Encourage active transportation and healthy lifestyle choices.</b></p>
 <p><b>7. Champion accessibility and equity for all transportation users.</b></p>	 <p><b>8. Create a vibrant and inviting community with a unique sense of place.</b></p>

## 1.4. Benefits of Active Transportation

This study aims to increase the viability of biking and walking as transportation and recreation options for residents and visitors of Watertown and the surrounding MPO area. The Plan has a forward-thinking approach, considering not only the needs of residents and visitors of today, but more importantly the necessary improvements for the active transportation needs of future residents and visitors. The rise in active transportation users comes from a need to develop alternative travel options from the privately-owned vehicle (POV). This is partly due to rising costs of fuel prices, environmental issues, as well as human health concerns related to inactivity. This plan will help ensure that the MPO is making sustainable choices in regards to its transportation system, and will help catalyze systematic change that will enhance the long-term economic, environmental, health, and social benefits of active transportation.

Transportation accounts for nearly 30% of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States (EPA, 2017). Although this percentage has declined moderately over the past decade, POVs remain the dominant form of transportation in the United States. However, biking and walking are alternative transportation options that provide a cost effective, sustainable, and healthy way of going about daily activities. Promoting and enhancing these options helps contribute to the MPO's triple bottom line, with societal, environmental, and economic benefits.

### 1.4.1. Environmental Benefits



In addition to being beneficial for humans, active transportation is also beneficial for the environment in which we live. Increased active transportation for daily activities translates into less automobile trips, which reduces the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the transportation sector. Reduced automobile trips also help improve local air quality and reduce congestion.

### 1.4.2. Economic Benefits



There are also economic benefits to promoting active transportation. Individuals who walk or bike to commute or perform daily errands reduce their cost of ownership of a vehicle, including fuel costs, maintenance, and car insurance. In addition, such individuals are also improving their health; reducing the need for expensive health care costs for health issues related to inactivity.

An environment more amenable to bicycling and walking will also increase access to retail, service, and entertainment destinations such as Downtown Watertown. If residents and visitors can easily walk or bike along these corridors, they will be more likely to stay and patronize more of the businesses than they would have had they parked their car, walked directly into a business, and got back into their cars immediately after. In addition, the number of people biking can be a good indicator of a community's livability and desirability, attracting new residents, businesses, and visitors that will help stimulate the regional economy. By encouraging active transportation, the MPO's economy would capture these potential savings and keep visitors and residents centrally located, resulting in increased community investment.

### 1.4.3. Public Health & Societal Benefits



The benefits for people can be divided into two general categories: health benefits and social benefits. Health benefits are some of the most obvious benefits of active transportation, as it involves people undertaking physical activity to get to their destinations. However, the importance of these benefits cannot be understated. Heart disease, respiratory disease, and diabetes are some of the leading causes of death in the United States; all of which are heavily influenced by the amount of physical activity an individual undertakes (CDC, 2017; 2019).

Shifts in technology over the past two centuries have allowed for Americans to become increasingly sedentary. For instance, the rise of the automobile allowed decision-makers in American cities to create low-density development that resulted in many trips being infeasible via foot or bike, and as a result many American do not get daily physical activity as a result of going about daily tasks. Center for Disease Control research shows that incorporating exercise into daily activity is an effective way of reaching the recommended weekly level of physical activity (CDC, 2018).

Therefore, by improving the built environment to facilitate walking and biking, the MPO is promoting increased physical health by providing opportunities for residents and visitors to reduce sedentary behavior and live a healthier lifestyle.

The benefits of active transportation from a societal point-of-view are numerous. An estimated 9% of Americans do not own a vehicle (US Census Bureau). These individuals must rely on alternative modes of transportation, such as walking, biking, and transit. By investing in infrastructure to help facilitate these modes of transportation, the MPO is increasing non-car owners' mobility and access to employment and services.

Increasing active transportation facilities in the MPO will also help increase safety on the roadways, as all users will have increased dedicated space, thus reducing the potential for collisions between walkers and drivers, as an example.

In addition, increased levels of active transportation also can help reduce stress levels. Research shows that both being outdoors and performing physical activity can help reduce stress by reducing levels of the body's stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, while stimulating endorphins (Harvard Health, 2018; Harvard Health, 2018).

Lastly, active transportation can help increase levels of social capital. Social capital can be defined as "social networks and interactions that inspire trust and reciprocity among citizens" (Leyden, 2003). By spending time in the public sphere, moving along at a much slower pace than one would in a private vehicle, there is an increased potential for social interaction, fostering community cohesion. Active transportation reduces isolation, which in turn fosters social capital, which creates a more welcoming, attractive environment to live in.