

MEMO FROM THE MAYOR

SUBJECT: TIME FOR A COMPLETE STREETS POLICY, Part II

At a Glance:

- We err to think activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations, thus encouraging personal movement, only work in cities like Boise or Meridian.
- Fact—activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations play an important role in smaller communities like Emmett, helping to make keep ours unique.
- Emmett is blessed with a larger senior population than the average; hence, walkable neighborhoods allow seniors to independently access their important facilities, such as restaurants, health-care, and places holding their social and recreational activities.

What's the big deal about active-friendly routes?

A Complete Streets Policy dovetails perfectly with Emmett's 2020-enacted Pedestrian & Bicycle Master Pathways Plan. Consider the first purpose and goal of our Master Plan: an intent to “[d]evelop an aesthetically pleasing and safe pathway system that links important community destinations such as parks, schools, neighborhoods, Emmett's Historic District, Commercial District, the Gem Island Sports Complex, the Payette River, and other Gem County pathways.”

We see, then, the City of Emmett has a firm grasp of what activity-friendly routes should be for purposes of a Complete Streets Policy. Activity-friendly routes, as the title implies, comprise those routes designed to connect in such a way that allows pedestrians to safely and easily walk, or bike, or to move actively using an assistive device to reach key locations. They connect us safely to our homes, workplaces, parks, food stores, restaurants, schools and other community places, such as city hall, the courthouse, the senior center, and my favorite, Downtown—with apologies to Petula Clark, of course. (Nevertheless, when it comes to female British vocalists with hits in the US during the 60's, and even into the 80's with the Pet Shop Boys, who beats Dusty Springfield? Correct. Nobody!)

We intend this strategy to create or enhance access to places for physical activity. Moreover, our whole approach will encompass providing information to encourage their use, such as street signs to show the distance along a particular route, say from the main city park to the Gem Sports Complex. One overarching strategy in all of this amounts to encouraging our youth to increase their physical activity before, during and after school. How great would it be if every

student who lived within a mile of his or her school felt the need to walk or bike to and from that school? Consider the traffic mitigation benefit around the Middle and High Schools.

Too hard to be activity-friendly?

With a footprint of approximately 2.6 square miles and, to the annoyance of many, narrow streets designed in the late 1800s, Emmett is in the catbird's seat when it comes to developing personal-activity modes of transportation. We have the advantage over larger municipalities, say Boise and Meridian, that have been designing their streets and highways since the 1950s to accommodate more motorized traffic at higher speeds, thus making motor vehicles the main focus over those who prefer personal movement or activity as the main mode of transportation "in town".

To make it happen, the city will strive to create a network of sidewalks and bikeways throughout Emmett, not simply selecting an individual street or intersection from time to time. By focusing on complete networks, activity-friendly routes for everyday destinations will help to fill gaps in our transportation network for people walking, biking, and moving with assistive devices.

For example, in places we lack convenient, clearly-marked crosswalks to reach key destinations, our Pathways Master Plan gives us the direction to correct those kinds of oversights. Purpose and Goal 4, for example, states we will "[u]se this Plan as the basis for prioritizing pedestrians and bicycle infrastructure improvements and expansions, including being used as a tool in seeking funding." Goodness sakes, if "Daycare" can be infrastructure to the folks in Washington, D.C., shouldn't clearly-marked crosswalk also meet the definition? Indeed, we will explore every possibility of enhancing our street and sidewalk funding during the pending round of CARES Act funding to cover our systemic gaping holes.

What's the end game?

To many, the most exciting purpose and goal of our Pathways Master Plan is found at number 3: "Establish the Payette River corridor as a greenway for recreation, water rehabilitation projects, community open space, flood control and habitat preservation." Remarkably, Emmett passed its first sidewalk ordinance in 1893. Since that time, for almost 130 years, we have failed to figure out how to establish a continuous multi-use path along the Payette River, easily our most beautiful natural asset. How beneficial would it be, for example, if we figure out how to connect the main city park with a path along the river?

In less than a decade, we can expect twenty per cent of our population to be over 65-years of age. Surveys show no less than eighty per cent want to "age in place". Seniors desire to remain

in their current communities. This underscores the importance of developing, building and enhancing activity-friendly routes to support this overwhelming desire of our seniors.

As a community, we have a moral obligation to support seniors with a walkable and bikeable community—not simply to enhance their independence, but to encourage their physical movement, as well. This way, we do our part in providing them opportunities for better sleep, reducing their risk of falling, better joint mobility, more years of an active life-style, delaying cognitive decline, reducing social isolation, and, perhaps most importantly, reducing depression. Afterall, some day in the distant future, your mayor will be a senior, too!