

# Completing Rural Streets

**Active transportation policy, planning and infrastructure for healthier communities**

Ray Sharp  
Western Upper Peninsula Health Department  
rsharp@wuphd.org

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**Context:**  
Houghton, Michigan  
Population  
City – 10,000  
County – 36,000



Home of Michigan Tech University & "Birthplace of Professional Hockey"

Like many rural areas: Limited funding and resources, declining population and tax base, aging population, high rates of chronic disease and obesity, and a 20<sup>th</sup> century transportation system designed for the automobile.

Unlike some rural areas: 300 inches of snow per year, the most east of the Rockies, is an additional challenge for active transportation.

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## Active Transportation: How and Why

- Make healthy lifestyle choices, including daily physical activity, a safe, convenient and a normal part of everyday life.
- Complete Streets is a policy and planning process ensuring that roadways accommodate the needs of all users, all ages and abilities, including pedestrians, cyclists and transit users.
- Non-motorized transportation network plans create a vision and commit resources based on community needs.
- Policy, systems and environmental (PSE) changes are "stickier" (more effective and sustainable) than simply repeating health promotion programs that have not had any long-term impact on childhood obesity and diabetes.

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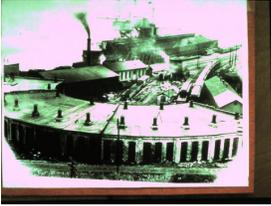
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## Before Houghton became a healthy community and a bike-friendly city

“Rust Belt”



“Snow Belt”



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## Process for Progress

- Baseline Assessment
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Locally Tailored/Targeted Surveys
- Walking/Biking Audits (Engage City Officials)
- Planning (Evaluation, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and of course, Engineering)
- Policy
- Built Environment
- Document and Celebrate Successes
- Repeat the Cycle

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### Start with shared vision

Houghton's waterfront was littered with the remnants of its industrial past.

In 1972, Houghton wrote its master plan, with a *vision for converting the lake shore into public parkland.*



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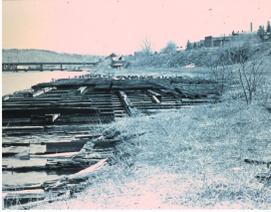
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**Learn from the successes** and mistakes of similar communities and projects



At one time, Michigan Tech students were warned to stay away from the shore because it was too dangerous.



In the 1970s, the city planning commission visited Traverse City and other shoreline communities to learn from their experiences. They decided to make public access their priority.

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**The work you do today** can have far-reaching consequences



For 30 years, the city and university have been purchasing and repurposing the old industrial shoreline sites for public access, building non-motorized paths, parks, playgrounds, pavilions, marinas, beaches, classrooms and a public library.

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In 2002, Houghton developed and adopted its walkability/pedestrian plan.

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**Find a core group of supporters who share your vision** and then involve more stakeholders in planning



In 2006, **citizens formed a bike committee** with city backing. The Houghton Bike Task Force developed an on-line survey. **384 bike commuters** responded with information about their summer and winter bike routes and suggestions for improvements.




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In 2007, Houghton completed and adopted its Bike Plan





**All Season Bike Commuting**  
 Line width is proportional to the number of commuters on the network at various times of the day.  
 Photo: Houghton-Miligan 27 June 2008

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**Coalition Building, Encouragement and Engineering 2008-09**

- Bike Task Force expanded to include the city manager, police chief, city councilors, planning commissioners, cyclists, university staff and students, public health, regional planner, businesses.
- Houghton and Hancock celebrate Bike to Work Day in 2009, and Calumet and Laurium join in 2010.
- MDOT and city complete downtown streetscape and pedestrian crossing projects.





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## 2011– Safe Routes to School

The Houghton Middle School Safe Routes Team developed a plan for 3 improved crosswalks, and sidewalks on key feeder roads, with participation from students, community members and city police and engineers. Recommendations were incorporated into the city master plan and non-motorized transportation plan.




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## 2012 – Houghton-Hancock Bike/Pedestrian Survey and MDOT Planning

Hancock formed a bike/pedestrian committee similar to Houghton's, the two sister cities conducted a joint survey with 800 respondents, maps were created with estimated bike usage by season, and a joint committee was consulted with by MDOT for roadway designs on M-26.




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## 2013 – More Planning, More Recognition

The Houghton Bike and Pedestrian committee used survey and crash data, sidewalk inventories and Safe Routes to School plans, and existing bike and pedestrian plans to create a Non-motorized transportation Plan that was adopted by the Planning Commission and City Council. And Houghton gained the Silver Level for Bike Friendly Community.

**CITY OF HOUGHTON  
NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION PLAN  
2013**

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**2014**

**Safe Routes to School  
Houghton Elementary**

**Bike to Work Day  
Walk and Roll to School Day**



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**More than just health promotion**

- Remember PSE (Policy-System-Environmental change) and the 5E's (Evaluation & Planning, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement and Engineering)
- PSE interventions are 'stickier'
- When we work with schools and communities to make walking a safe and convenient choice, people will make lifestyle changes and chronic disease risk will be reduced
- When you talk to community leaders, describe community health in broad terms, including economic vitality and quality of life, to increase support from business and government stakeholders

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