



Helping individuals and families improve their circumstances, beautifying and repairing homes, elevating educational performance, making neighborhoods safer, building community and making West Valley City a place where people want to stay and put down roots: the work that My Hometown is doing is truly inspired and will bless lives for years to come.

I am so grateful and excited to watch this program take wings in my community, and to help in my small way as a block captain and as the wife of Bishop Mark Sears of the Jordan View Ward (Chesterfield/Redwood East neighborhood) where My Hometown is now rolling out.

We all know that a tidy yard, a trim storefront, or a new roof is worth investing in if we want a prosperous town. Equally important, but sometimes overlooked, are the ways we move through our city. Our transportation choices have an outsized impact on the shape and strength of our communities. Whether we're hurrying past in a car or chatting with neighbors as we walk by, our choices are shaping our quality of life.

If we want to improve our neighborhoods and build a strong, resilient community, then we must invest in and promote active transportation. My Hometown and West Valley City cannot achieve their goals without investing in the kind of transportation that promotes personal prosperity, pride of place, a strong local economy, and tight-knit neighborhoods.

My Hometown is tackling many urgent problems, and active transportation is a key component of the solutions. **An Active Transportation Initiative directly supports all goals and projects of Operation My Hometown** and is crucial to ensuring their long-term success.

In this proposal I will address why active transportation and walkability are so important and the ways in which they will bless lives and improve our community, and I will propose specific ways in which My Hometown and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—in partnership with West Valley City—can help. I know this will pay dividends to our community for generations to come.

But first, what is active transportation?

Active transportation is simply people-powered transportation. Think walking, bicycles, strollers, scooters—even skateboards and rollerblades. Active transportation is accessible to people of almost all ages and abilities. Active transportation promotes good health and active living. It is also more affordable than any other mode of transportation and allows dollars to be spent on other things besides cars. It puts more eyes on the street, which reduces crime. It directly connects neighbors with neighbors

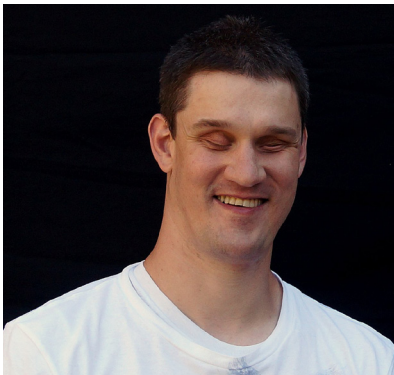
and promotes church and civic engagement. Active transportation promotes local prosperity, local investment, and interconnected communities.

You may sometimes hear planners talk about “walkability” or “mobility.” Walkability is a measure of how accessible a place is by active transportation. If a neighborhood or city is walkable, then of course it is also bikeable, scootable, and skateboard-able.

Why My Hometown should cultivate walkability and active transportation

Not everyone can drive

Josh Jones is one of the greatest assets in our ward. He has served in many capacities, including as a counselor in the Elder’s Quorum presidency, an instructor, and as secretary of various organizations. Josh is a talented singer, a gourmet chef, and a brilliant gospel scholar. One of the only things he cannot



do is drive. He has been blind since birth.

Josh is not the only faithful member of our congregation who is unable to drive.

Countless members of our communities are overlooked in a city designed around cars. Children, the elderly, the disabled, the undocumented, the economically disadvantaged—

they are all children of God whose infinite worth and opportunities should not be dependent on a driver’s license or a functioning automobile. Yet they are largely excluded from society by our assumption that everyone can or should travel by car.

I’m glad some of our leaders understand this issue. I was thrilled to learn that the Midvalley Connector bus rapid transit service (BRT) will have a stop at the Taylorsville Temple.



Image credit: Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

That stop wasn’t a coincidence; I have no doubt that Church area leaders were working behind the scenes with civic authorities to create that BRT stop to give more members access to the blessings of the temple, because **the work of salvation is not just for people who drive.**



A bridge to self-reliance

We sometimes take it for granted, but cars are enormously expensive! There is the purchase price (plus interest if one must finance the vehicle), state inspection and registration, monthly insurance, regular maintenance, occasional repairs, and, of course, filling the tank. It all adds up to a burdensome expense that keeps many people trapped in poverty.

The average Utah household spends over \$1,000 per month every year on car ownership.¹ The average American family works from January 1 until April 13 just to pay for its cars,² and the poorest fifth of American families pour more than 40 percent of their income into owning and maintaining cars.³

The cost of vehicles can be crippling when combined with rising housing costs. In the last five years housing prices along the Wasatch Front have increased over 60% for the median price of a home or condo.⁴ The “drive ‘til you qualify” housing market means that many working families commute farther to work, spending more money on gas and less time with their kids. For many families the expense of cars necessitates both parents working even when they would prefer to have a stay-at-home parent.

For many, trying to reach their financial goals is a vicious cycle—they can’t improve their situation without transportation, but the costs of transportation are debilitating—and one unexpected car repair can spell financial disaster.

Reducing our community’s dependence on cars has the potential to change everything! Where cars cost \$1,000 per month, traveling by bicycle costs only \$390—per year.⁵ A UTA transit pass is only \$1020-\$2040 per year.⁶

By reducing our community transportation costs we are effectively putting money into the pockets of families. Imagine all the ways a family could spend an extra \$1,000 per month: saving for a down payment on a house, getting out of debt, saving for school, paying for childcare, paying for health care or dental care, fixing a roof, starting a business.

These savings are large enough that for some it can make the difference between being able to purchase a home or not, being able to obtain an education or not, being able to start a family or not.

My Family’s Experience

My husband’s path to employment included six years of costly graduate studies. We bought our house when we were poor student newlyweds. For much of our marriage we’ve shared one working vehicle. Some days I ran errands with our double stroller, piling groceries on top of kids wherever they would fit, while Mark took the car to clinic. Some mornings Mark walked to the train station to take TRAX to work or school while I took the car. It required some planning, and was sometimes a minor inconvenience, but it was worth it to us. We were able to pay our mortgage every month and start a family, which we would have been unable to do if we had been paying for two vehicles. **We would have been unable to achieve our dreams of home ownership, a family, and higher education if we had prioritized cars.**

1 West Valley City Active Transportation Plan, August 27, 2020, page 10, https://www.wvc-ut.gov/DocumentCenter/View/15758/WVC_Active_Transportation_Final_Report_090220.

2 Barbara J. Lipman, “A Heavy Load: The Combined Housing and Transportation Costs of Working Families,” 4, <http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/assets/Uploads/pubheavyload1006.pdf>.

3 Charles Montgomery, *Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), 243.

4 Jasen Lee, “Housing affordability in Utah entering ‘perilous territory,’ study says,” *Deseret News*, December 9, 2020, <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2020/12/9/22165836/housing-affordability-in-utah-entering-perilous-territory-study-says>.

5 West Valley City Active Transportation Plan, page 10.

6 UTA, Current Fares, <https://rideuta.com/Fares-And-Passes/Current-Fares>, accessed March 21, 2021.





School drop-off at Redwood Elementary

Now that Mark is in his career, cars still aren't our top priority. Our family car is old, dented, and approaching 300,000 miles, and we're okay with that. We purchased a secondhand cargo bike, which I rely on to get my kids to school and church and to get



groceries. Mark can often be seen riding his long-board to bishopric meeting on Sunday mornings.

With the money we would have spent on cars, we have been able to pay off tens of thousands of dollars of student debt in only a couple years. Likewise, active transportation could be the bridge to self-reliance for many members of our community.

The Rodríguez Family

Mati Rodríguez was my friend in the Parkway Spanish branch. She and her husband were hardworking immigrants who, by living frugally and purchasing

only one vehicle, had been able to achieve the American dream of owning their own home.

When her husband was laid off from his job, Mati and her three boys stayed in West Valley while Brother Rodríguez took temporary work in Oklahoma. This difficult choice was made doubly hard because for the months her husband was away Mati would be without a car. She did, however, have a bicycle.

Mati started biking the 1.3 miles to Rancho Markets to get food for her children, riding home with grocery bags hanging from her handlebars. To get to church and school, Mati and the boys walked. Mati was able to be mostly self-sufficient with her bicycle until her husband found regular employment again. Not only did active transportation enable her to care for her own family, but she was also able to help others. She rode her bicycle to help the missionaries teach and she walked to ministering appointments.

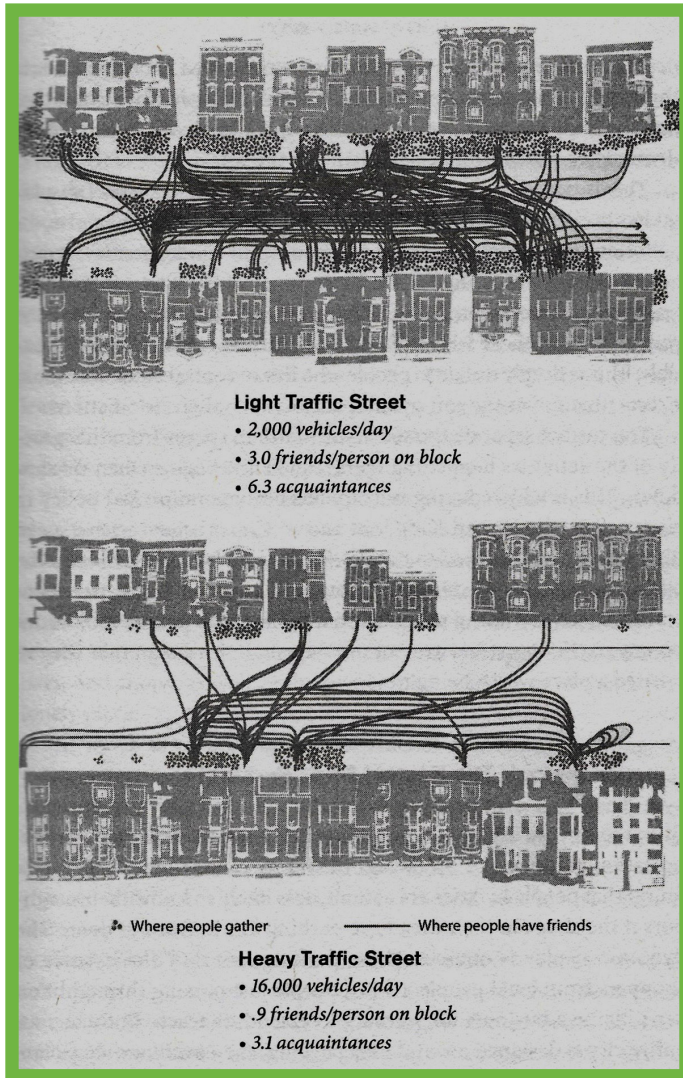
Building community, building the kingdom of God

Walkable cities matter, not just for getting around, but also for our quality of life. Yes, cars are convenient. But that convenience comes at a cost. And one of those costs is social isolation.

Leading public health and planning experts found that each ten additional minutes spent commuting by car every day “cuts involvement in community affairs by ten percent—fewer public meetings attended, fewer committees chaired, fewer petitions signed, fewer church services attended.”⁷ More time *commuting* means less time *communing*: with family, friends, neighbors, and God.

⁷ Howard Frumkin, Lawrence Frank, and Richard Jackson, *Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, Planning, and Building for Healthy Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2004), 172.





How traffic alters the social life of streets

Image credit: Montgomery, *Happy City*, 169

People who live in car-dependent suburbs “are much less trusting of other people than people who live in walkable neighborhoods where housing is mixed with shops, services, and places to work.”⁸ They are less likely to know their neighbors, join churches, or participate in politics. Indeed, “citizens of sprawl are less likely to know the names of their elected representatives than people who live in more connected places.”⁹ And they describe television—not

8 Jeff Speck, *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time* (New York: North Point Press, 2012), 49.

9 Montgomery, *Happy City*, 55.

time with friends and family—as their major form of entertainment.¹⁰

Conversely, those living in more walkable neighborhoods trust their neighbors more, participate in community projects and volunteer more, and gather with friends and neighbors more.¹¹ The effect of cars is so strong that a 2001 study of neighborhoods in Boston and Atlanta found that neighborhood social ties could be predicted simply by counting how many people depend on cars to get around. The less neighbors drove, the more likely they were to be friends with one another.¹²

One famous study showed that on a street with light traffic, the average resident had 3.0 friends and 6.3 acquaintances on the block. On an identical street with heavy traffic, the average resident had only 0.9 friends and 3.1 acquaintances.¹³

Even in car-centric neighborhoods, just slowing down the cars and reducing traffic noise can make a big difference. Traffic noise is proven to make us hold fewer conversations with one another, end conversations sooner, and disagree and argue more. It even makes us less likely to help strangers.¹⁴

In our time in West Valley, so many of my family’s opportunities to serve and minister have been the result of connections made while walking or biking. One less active family, the Granthems, hadn’t been to church in over a decade but began accepting invitations to ward activities after our kids started riding bikes in the street together. Other neighbors, the Díaz family, are staunch Catholics but are eager to serve and volunteer with My Hometown; we became friends with them years ago when we connected on a family walk, and Mrs. Díaz and I comforted and

10 Speck, *Walkable City*, 49.

11 Montgomery, *Happy City*, 55.

12 Montgomery, *Happy City*, 57.

13 Montgomery, *Happy City*, 169.

14 Montgomery, *Happy City*, 168-170.



supported one another when her brother and my brother passed away within a short time of each other. Another family was struggling with their activity in the Church while the husband was working toward getting his blessings restored and the wife was battling postpartum depression; daily walks to the park with our babies became a lifeline for her, as well as for me. These are the kinds of connections that become less likely—if not impossible—when we hurry past in a car.

When I reflect on these sacred experiences, I am reminded of the road to Emmaus where Jesus walked with his disciples. As I had the opportunity to share friendship, sunshine, and truths of the restored gospel with neighbors, I know that the Savior walked with us. I am moved to say, as did Cleopas and the other disciple, “Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?”

***“Did not our heart
burn within us, while
He talked with us
by the way?”***

Luke 24:32



The road to Emmaus

Image credit: Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



Safety for our most vulnerable

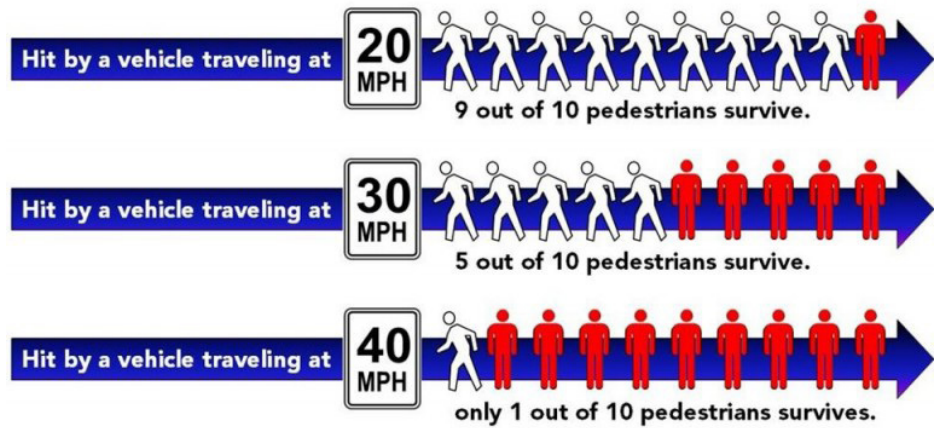
In the Jordan View Ward, our Sunday morning was brightened every week by a gentleman named Jerry Thomas. A veteran who had lost both his legs, Jerry came to church in his motorized wheelchair and always had a friendly handshake and smile for everyone, especially little children. One Sunday Jerry wasn't at church and we were shocked to learn that he had been hit by the driver of a large pickup truck and killed near Redwood Road on his way to buy groceries at Rancho Markets.

Preventable deaths like Jerry's are becoming way too common. **Pedestrian traffic fatalities rose by 53 percent from 2009 to 2018,¹⁵ and cars are the leading cause of death for Americans ages 1 to 34.¹⁶** Experts



¹⁵ Jim Gorzelany, "Study Says SUVs Are More Deadly Than Cars When Striking Pedestrians," *Forbes*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jimgorzelany/2020/06/17/study-says-suvs-are-more-deadly-striking-pedestrians-than-cars/?sh=4f663a7731eb>.

¹⁶ Speck, *Walkable City*, 44.



Driver speed and pedestrian deaths

Image credit: The Urbanist,
<https://www.theurbanist.org/2014/11/11/icymi-new-york-city-implements-vision-zero/>

blame texting and distracted driving, as well as greater numbers of trucks and SUVs on the road.¹⁷ This year SUVs will make up half of all US car sales for the first time,¹⁸ and because of their size, tall hoods, and flat fronts, they are much deadlier to pedestrians than sedans or minivans.¹⁹

If we fail to invest in pedestrian infrastructure, our most vulnerable will pay the price. Pedestrian fatalities are disproportionately children, partly because children are more likely to be pedestrians in the first place, and because our streets are not designed with their needs in mind. But it doesn't have to be this way; bicycling to school or walking to a neighbor's house are not inherently dangerous activities. Many cities are taking steps to make streets safer for *all* users: redesigning streets to calm traffic and reduce illegal speeding, installing protected bike lanes for kids to cycle to school, and adding curb extensions to create safer street crossings.

¹⁷ Joe Lindsey, "The SUVs and Trucks We Love Are Killing People," *Outside*, May 4, 2020, <https://www.outsideonline.com/2411345/suvs-trucks-deadly-cyclist-crashes#close>.

¹⁸ Oliver Milman, "How SUVs Conquered the World—and Ruined the Environment," *Mother Jones*, September 8, 2020, <https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2020/09/how-suvs-conquered-the-world-and-ruined-the-environment/>.

¹⁹ Gorzelany, "Study Says SUVs Are More Deadly."



Improvements don't have to be expensive. There are many effective low-cost, DIY measures which can be implemented as service projects by citizen volunteers in a process known as tactical urbanism. Measures as easy as placing 50-cent plastic cones to protect bike lanes have made a substantial difference in other cities and could make a difference in ours.

Creating jobs and boosting our local economy

Almost 85 percent of the money spent on cars and gas leaves the local economy.²⁰ But when communities invest in active transportation, they reverse that flow and more dollars stay local.

Cities that invest in walkability reap the benefits. In Salt Lake City, businesses along 300 South experienced an 8.79% increase in sales after the construction of fully separated bike lanes.²¹ In Washington, D.C., car registration fell by almost 15,000 vehicles from 2005 to 2009, resulting in as much as \$127,275,000 being retained in the local economy each year.²² The city of Portland, Oregon invested heavily in light rail, streetcars, and bicycle lanes from 1990 to 2007, and by 2008 they were driving 20 percent less and saving \$1.1 billion annually on gasoline. Since Portlanders send less money to foreign auto manufacturers and oil barons in the Middle East, they spend more money locally: Portland enjoys more locally owned restaurants and independent bookstores than almost any other city in the nation.²³

Walkable cities foster small, local businesses, which offer more jobs to the community than big-box stores. The city of Asheville, North Carolina found that their small walkable businesses generated 74

jobs per acre, compared to fewer than 6 jobs per acre generated by businesses like Walmart. This study was expanded to other cities all over the US, and consistently small walkable businesses generated more jobs and ten times the revenue per acre than big-box development.²⁴

Reducing crime and making neighborhoods safer

Promoting active transportation is one of the simplest, most effective ways to reduce crime. A study in Louisville, Kentucky found walkability to be associated with decreased property crime, murders, and violent crime.²⁵ In Rotterdam, the Netherlands, the city undertook an effort to get more people out walking by cleaning streets and reducing traffic speeds. The measures worked: more pedestrians frequented the streets, and drug crime dropped by 30%, burglary by 22%, vandalism by 31%, theft by 11%, and violence by 8%.²⁶

Healthy residents

Pollution from cars shortens the average Utahn's life by two years, causing heart and lung diseases (congestive heart failure, heart attack, pneumonia, asthma, etc.) as well as stroke, cancer, autoimmune disease, autism, depression, and even increased rates of miscarriage and stillbirth.²⁷

24 Montgomery, Happy City, 262-263.

25 Richard Florida, "Walkability Is Good for You: A slew of new research links walkable neighborhoods with safer, healthier, more democratic places," December 11, 2014, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-12-11/walkability-is-good-for-you#:~:text=The%20study%20found%20walkability%20to,than%20half%20of%20all%20residents.&text=This%20effect%20was%20even%20greater,of%20minorities%20and%20the%20poor.>

26 Walkonomics, "Improving Street Walkability Reduces Crime," Smart Cities Dive, <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/improving-street-walkability-reduces-crime/37605/>, accessed March 20, 2021.

27 Ben Abbott Lab, "Human Health and Economic Costs of Air Pollution in Utah,"

20 Speck, Walkable City, 29.

21 West Valley City Active Transportation Plan, page 10.

22 Speck, Walkable City, 31.

23 Montgomery, Happy City, 266-267.



Dirty air isn't the only way cars negatively impact our health. With the advent of cars and the resulting sprawl, driving replaced walking for people's everyday commutes. It is not a coincidence that American obesity rose at the same time as dependence on cars. Sedentary lifestyles are a true epidemic in the U.S., causing or exacerbating all kinds of health problems, including heart disease, hypertension, gallstones, osteoarthritis, colorectal cancer, and diabetes, to name a few.²⁸

Studies conducted in Atlanta show that for every additional five minutes residents drove every day, they were 3 percent more likely to be obese. In San Diego, researchers found that "60 percent of residents in a 'low-walkable' neighborhood were overweight, compared to only 35 percent in a 'high-walkable' neighborhood."²⁹ These are careful academic studies that control for age, income, and other factors that correlate with body mass.

Biking or walking for your daily commute is one of the best things you can do to live a healthy, long life. A study that tracked 263,450 people for five years

Brigham Young University, January 23, 2020, <https://pws.byu.edu/ben-abbott-lab/human-health-and-economic-costs-of-air-pollution-in-utah>.

28 Speck, *Walkable City*, 40-41.

29 Speck, *Walkable City*, 41.

found that people who bicycle to work are 40% less likely to die of cancer and 41% less likely to die of *any cause*. People who walked to work were 36% less likely to die of heart disease. This was "an exceptionally well-controlled study" that controlled for sex, age, ethnicity, income, body mass index, smoking, diet, and other illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, and depression.³⁰

QBP, a Minnesota company employing more than 450 people, started a "health reward" program incentivizing their employees to cycle to work. Around a hundred employees enrolled; not only do the cyclists have better health overall, but they also save the company's health insurance provider over \$200,000 in reduced health care claims annually compared to their co-workers. And "while health care costs for American companies rose on average 24.6 percent between 2009 and 2011, QBP's overall health care costs declined 4.4 percent over the same period."³¹

30 Kevin Murnane, "New Research Indicates Cycling to Work Has Extraordinary Health Benefits," *Forbes*, April 25, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevin-murnane/2017/04/25/new-research-indicates-cycling-to-work-has-extraordinary-health-benefits/?sh=338b70db3e62>.

31 Leon Kaye, "How Bicycling Cuts Health Care Costs for Businesses," *Triple Pundit*, Aug 27, 2013, <https://www.triplepundit.com/story/2013/how-bicycling-cuts-health-care-costs-businesses/59121>

West Valley City as an 8 80 City

"We believe that if everything we do in our cities is great for an 8 year old and an 80 year old, then it will be great for all people."³² That is the guiding vision of 8 80 Cities, a non-profit organization that has improved cities all over the world, and whose principles can improve West Valley, too.

Painted bike lanes are great, but if you don't feel

comfortable letting your 8-year-old daughter ride in them, they aren't enough. Likewise, if a crossing signal does not give an 80-year-old grandfather enough time to cross the street then the signal needs reprogramming.

If we build pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure that is useful for all ages, West Valley residents will take to the streets to start walking and biking.

32 8 80 Cities, <https://www.880cities.org/>, accessed March 19, 2021.



In Paris, cycling has exploded: six out of ten users of pop-up bike lanes are new to cycling and didn't start riding bikes until *after* the city created safe cycleways during the pandemic.³³ Many of these new bicyclists are women and families who previously did not feel safe riding in the streets. In other words, "If you build it, they will come."

Sixty percent of people are what planners call "interested but concerned" cyclists: people willing to bicycle if high-quality infrastructure is in place. How many people in West Valley would like to walk and bike more and would do so if the streets felt safer?

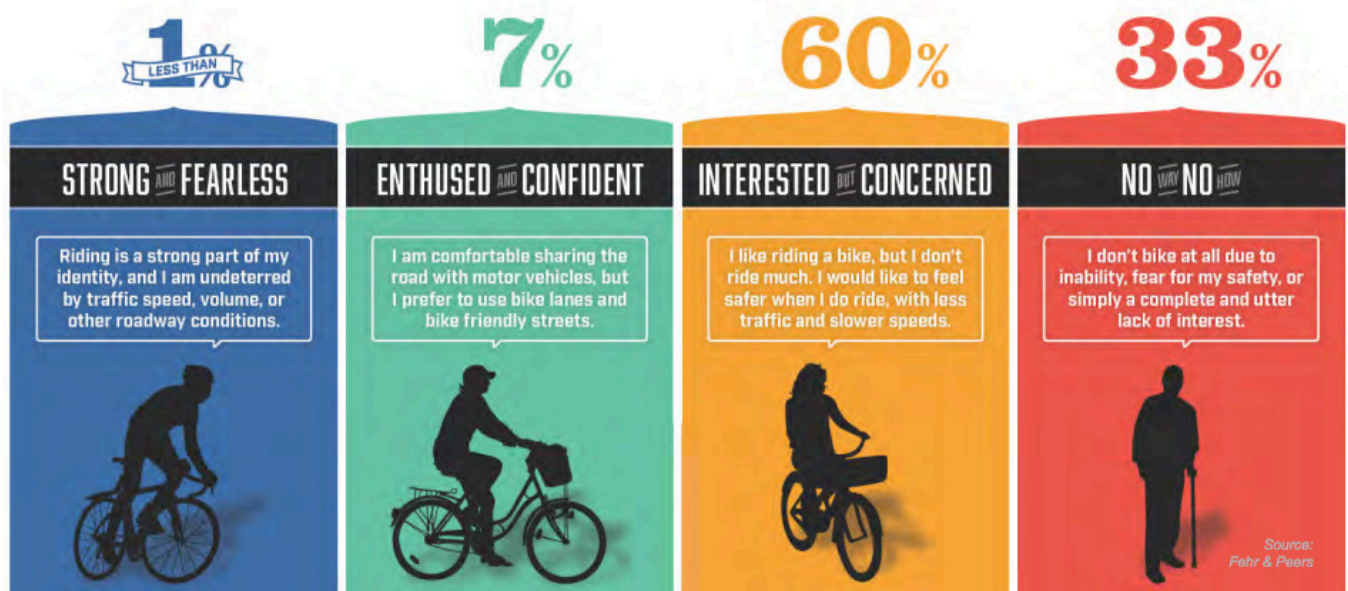
That is why West Valley City's Active Transportation Plan, while an excellent first step, is only the beginning. This plan, created in 2020, provides a centralized, top-down view of improvements. But the goals of My Hometown depend on improvements to active transportation beyond the simple painted lanes in the city's plan. Members need to be their own advocates for bottom-up

change. **My Hometown is uniquely positioned to coordinate advocacy across neighborhoods to accelerate the pace and quality of improvements.**

Small but persistent advocacy can effect great change in our communities. For example, a block from our house is Roots Charter High School. Roots is a farm-based school where students incorporate principles of animal husbandry and agriculture into every subject. Students access the school farm by crossing 2320 South, a residential street where dangerous drivers and illegal speeding frequently put their lives at risk. After getting a crosswalk installed, with the help of neighborhood resident Councilmember Tom Huynh, school administration and local residents also successfully petitioned the city for the installation of speed tables. The speed tables calmed traffic and eliminated *overnight* a dangerous speeding problem that had plagued the street for years.

Street-by-street improvements like this may not be in the Active Transportation Plan, because no one knows your neighborhood better than you do. This is the kind of advocacy My Hometown can organize to create a more walkable West Valley City.

33 Simon MacMichael, "Six in ten users of pop-up bike lanes in Paris are new to cycling, says city's government," February 4, 2021, <https://road.cc/content/news/6-10-users-pop-bike-lanes-paris-new-cycling-280681#:~:text=New%20cyclists%20account%20for%20almost,figures%20from%20the%20city's%20government.>



The four types of cyclists

Image credit: Fehr Peers, "Complete Streets: Low Stress Bicycle Facilities," https://www.sacog.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/cwg_mtg_6_low_stress_bike_facilities_ppt_071317.pdf



How My Hometown can help

As a block captain for My Hometown, I recently went around my neighborhood with service volunteers Mark and Tamara Pope. We delivered “Bags of Love” to more than one hundred homes, and talked with dozens of neighbors, including all the residents of my assigned block. As we talked with residents at their homes, they quickly caught the vision of My Hometown and told us about projects that could be tackled.

Neighbors know their homes and how they need to be repaired and beautified; neighbors also have the local lived experience of their streets. **Block captains should work with neighbors to identify where infrastructure is failing to meet their needs.**

Safe Routes to Church

Under Utah law, every elementary, middle, and junior high school must create a Safe Routes to School Plan. The goal is “to help children get to and from school safely while motivating children to experience the benefits of walking or biking to school.”³⁴ Safe Routes Utah works with school administrators and community councils to map preferred walking routes, request street improvements from the city, distribute information, and educate kids and families on how to walk or bike to school safely.

I propose a similar Safe Routes to Church program as the first step in creating safer, more walkable communities. Each congregation will coordinate with block and neighborhood captains to identify and map safe routes by which all able-bodied individuals can walk or roll to church. Block and neighborhood captains will help to distribute information and

educate neighbors about the Safe Routes to Church plan. Each congregation will also work with block and neighborhood captains to identify areas that need safety improvements.

These maps will reveal places where neighborhoods are disconnected by a busy road or an incomplete sidewalk. They will give us a detailed picture of where we need to focus our efforts. They will also give us a starting point for creating a culture of active transportation in West Valley City.

With the Stansbury neighborhood chapel converted to a Community Resource Center during the week, and other chapels to follow, it is vital that people can access the many resources offered there. Much of our targeted audience—especially children and youth—cannot drive. Safe Routes to Church plans will help them access the resources My Hometown is working so hard to provide.

A Safe Routes to Church plan can also be an important element of emergency preparedness. In the event of an emergency, church meetinghouses are gathering places from which community response will be coordinated. Walking and bicycling are the most resilient forms of transportation, because they do not rely on a fragile supply chain, and sometimes they are the only form of transportation that can get through a disaster area. It is vital that neighbors can access emergency coordination centers on foot, and that they are familiar with how to get there safely.

³⁴ Safe Routes Utah, <https://saferoutes.utah.gov/>, accessed March 10, 2021.



“Slow Sunday”

Once our Safe Routes to Church plans are in place, we can start to enjoy “Slow Sunday.” Just as Fast Sunday is a chance to put off the natural man, abstain from food, and enjoy the innumerable blessings that come from fasting, Slow Sunday would be a chance to abstain from the convenience of our cars and enjoy the innumerable blessings that come from slowing down and walking through our neighborhoods.

By bicycling or walking to church once per month (for example, the third Sunday of each month), we give ourselves extra time to ponder and reflect as we prepare to partake of the sacrament. We can give more attention and appreciation to the beauty of the Earth that was created for us. We can deepen our connection with neighbors and our community and invite all to come unto Christ and worship with us.

Currently, we hurry by in our cars on our way to church and weeknight activities and I can’t help but wonder if the Savior’s words to the early elders of the church apply to us: “It is not needful for this whole company of mine elders to be moving swiftly upon the waters [roads], whilst the inhabitants on either side are perishing in unbelief.”³⁵ What if instead we made time at least once per month to walk to church with our families and greet our neighbors and invite them to worship with us?

Slow Sunday would be an invitation, not an expectation. Walking and bicycling are joyful activities and no one should feel pressured or shamed into participating. If leaders simply extend the invitation each month with a brief explanation of the intent, members will soon discover the blessings firsthand, and they will have the chance to practice their safe route to church at a time when traffic is at a minimum and visibility is good.

Normalizing walking to church can make all the difference for children of less active parents.

As a young woman, my neighborhood chapel was only a mile away, but it was on the other side of two dangerous, high-traffic highways, so most of the ward members drove. My family was inactive and my parents didn’t want to give me rides to youth activities or church services. I felt sheepish asking for rides from my Young Women leaders over and over again, and I felt embarrassed to be seen walking to church alone when everyone else was driving with their families. Often it felt easier to not attend.

Everything changed in eighth grade when my family moved to a compact neighborhood where most ward members walked to church. It was easy for me to get to activities, even on winter nights when it was dark, because there was a safe pedestrian path. I still wished that my family were attending church with me, but I no longer felt self-conscious walking alone, because everyone else was walking to church too. I didn’t need to depend on my parents, my leaders, or anyone else for rides. Active transportation gave me the independence to pursue what I knew was right and grow in the gospel.

Some communities don’t have the same spiritual imperative and yet they take this idea a step further by opening certain streets to only pedestrians and bicyclists on Sundays. This has been successful in cities all over, from Arkansas to Argentina and Nevada to the Netherlands. Perhaps after Slow Sundays proves successful we can work with the city to implement a similar program here.

We may not change our city overnight, but on Sunday mornings, when traffic is at its lowest, we can experience the joys of walkability in West Valley.

³⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 61:3



Bicycle Service Center

The Bicycle Collective is a non-profit organization with branches in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Provo, and St. George. The mission of the Bicycle Collective is “to promote cycling as an effective and sustainable form of transportation and as a cornerstone of a cleaner, healthier, and safer society. The Collective provides refurbished bicycles and educational programs to the community, focusing on children and lower income households.”³⁶

Each branch of the Bicycle Collective is staffed by knowledgeable mechanics. Local residents can use the Collective’s array of tools to maintain and repair their bicycles. The Collective places a strong emphasis on self-reliance and education. Bike mechanics are available to guide and teach, but patrons turn the wrench themselves. The Collective’s mechanics also take used, broken down bikes, refurbish them, and give them to



“Riding a bike is the next best thing to being a babely centaur.”
-The Salt Lake City Bicycle Collective

people in need, who often earn their bikes by working alongside the mechanics in the shop. The Collective serves as a hub for the local bicycling community, offering classes on safe cycling for inexperienced riders, organizing group rides and activities, and hosting youth-focused open shop hours.

My Hometown needs a similar hub for active transportation efforts. **My third proposal for My Hometown’s Active Transportation Initiative is the creation of a bicycle service center at the Community Resource Center.**

Currently the Bicycle Collective does not have the resources to open their own branch location in West Valley. But they do have a strong desire to bring their services closer to people in need, especially to the Hispanic community, who they have struggled to connect with in past years. Likewise, bicycles and active transportation are crucial to the goals of My Hometown, but we may not have the resources to purchase expensive tools and build a bike repair shop from scratch.



³⁶ Bicycle Collective, <https://bicyclecollective.org/>, accessed March 16, 2021.



If My Hometown and the Bicycle Collective work in tandem, both can achieve their mission. If My Hometown were to provide a space and pay Bicycle Collective mechanics for their time, the mechanics could bring their tools and expertise to train My Hometown volunteers in the art of bicycle maintenance while helping local residents repair their bikes. With only a modest investment we can open a weekly bicycle repair clinic.

Essen Skabelund, Volunteer and Program Coordinator of the Salt Lake City Bicycle Collective, says that she loves the concept of a bicycle center in West Valley and that the Bicycle Collective would be happy to collaborate. And Chris Wiltsie, the 1,000 Miles Program Director of Bike Utah, is supportive of the idea because it would fill what he calls “an advocacy dead zone” in West Valley.

This community partnership would be a win-win-win. The Bicycle Collective would be able to reach new areas without the expense of a new facility; My Hometown would be able to help local residents



obtain affordable transportation without purchasing expensive tools and equipment; and West Valley City would have a local nexus around which an active transportation constituency can grow.

Active Transportation Coordinator

Lastly, the scope of these proposals is big enough that it may be helpful to appoint an Active Transportation Coordinator who could serve as a point of contact for block and neighborhood captains as they develop their Safe Routes to Church plans. When neighbors identify a street that needs safety improvements, the AT Coordinator can help them identify creative solutions that fit their local needs and guide them through the process of petitioning the city for action. The coordinator can also attend city council meetings as needed, help get the bicycle service center up and running, and organize activities to help get people walking and biking.

