

Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership

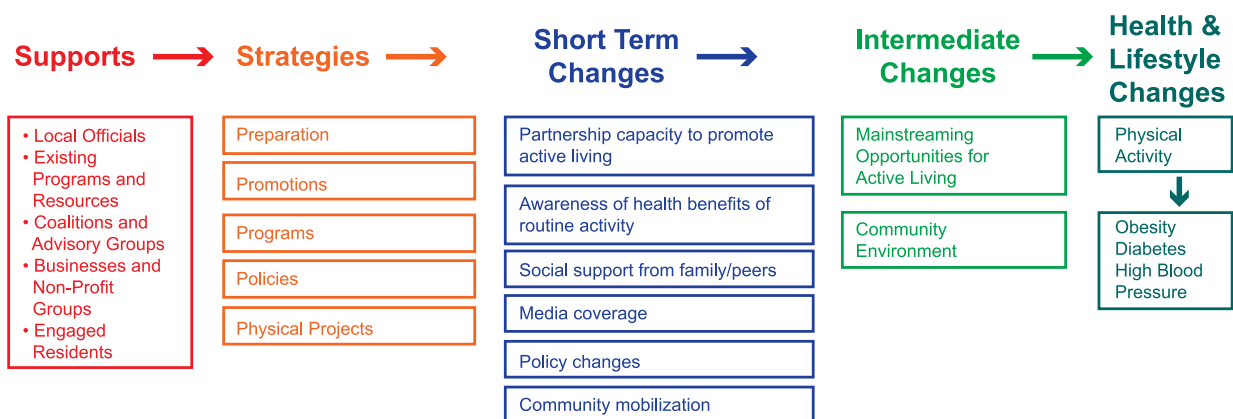
Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Berkeley, Charleston, and
Dorchester Counties, South Carolina | 2003-2008

In September 2008, a historically conservative Charleston newspaper published an editorial calling attention to the city planners' omission of bike lanes in a plan to renovate a downtown park. This action was just one example of a groundswell of support for active living that was building in the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester metropolitan region of South Carolina. This shift in culture was due, in part, to the efforts of the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester Council of Governments and its partners to develop, promote, and implement a plan to create an accessible, interconnected, bicycle and pedestrian network in the Lowcountry region of South Carolina. "Active living" is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of activity each day. In November 2003, the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester Council of Governments and its partners received a five-year, \$200,000 grant as part of the Active Living by Design national program (www.activelivingbydesign.org) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. By advocating for changes in policy and community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the Active Living by Design initiative intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.¹

"What [the partnership] was trying to do is get a culture change of planners and even elected officials to try to realize that [active living] is important for livable communities." -Partner

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model provided five active living strategies to influence community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5Ps represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate, and long-term community changes. This inclusive model provided a unique organizing framework that the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester Council Council of Governments utilized to better integrate its efforts to bring about the transformation of the Lowcountry region into one where active living is the norm.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model



¹ The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria's evaluation efforts.

According to staff and partners, the immediate impact of Active Living by Design (ALbD) on the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester tri-county region was tremendous. The funding, resources, and technical support provided through the grant initiative aided in the development of public and private collaborations that did not exist previously. Partners hoped that these new ties would continue to grow. Over the course of the grant, partners noticed an increase in the number of people walking and biking in the region. This change has continued to be seen as the policies and physical projects implemented by the Council of Governments and its partners have led to increasingly accessible and active living-friendly communities.

“I think its accomplishment was putting people together over the years that work together to continue to make things happen... I really believe it’s the people that have each other, and we’re continuing to get action as we go on...” -Staff

Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties, South Carolina

The Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester Council of Governments (Council of Governments) designed its ALbD project to influence the tri-county Charleston-North Charleston Metropolitan Statistical Area, which includes Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties. In 2000, the population of the region reached nearly 550,000 people, 65% Caucasian and 31% African American. South Carolina consistently ranks poorly for a number of chronic diseases (e.g., stroke, cardiovascular disease) and healthy lifestyle behaviors (e.g., physical activity) and has high rates of pedestrian injury. While survey results show that South Carolina’s worse-than-national-average statistics tend to be consistent across income and race categories, African Americans remain much more likely to be overweight, have hypertension, and suffer from preventable chronic diseases than their Caucasian counterparts. Prior to the ALbD grant, the region also presented a number of other barriers to active living, including limited federal transportation fund allocations, inadequate mass transit infrastructure, and a tendency toward suburban sprawl. The region covered a variety of geographical features, including peninsulas, islands, and rivers, which tend to both complicate and simplify active living planning.

Diligently working on planning and transportation issues in this expanding region was the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester Council of Governments Metropolitan Planning Organization. Focused on policy, land use, transportation, and air quality, staff members in this regional governmental department strove toward better planning to accommodate cars, bicycles, and pedestrians. In conjunction with other community and regional partners and through the support of Active Living by Design, the Council of Governments achieved many successes in changing policies to promote active living and improve the health of area residents.

The Council of Governments recognized a unique opportunity to create lasting change in the region by capitalizing on a state requirement that county, city, and town governments create new comprehensive plans every ten years. As a revision cycle ensued, the Council of Governments and its Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership combined policies and physical projects with promotions and programs to develop and build support for comprehensive plans to create an accessible, interconnected, regional bicycle and pedestrian network and to encourage the use and expansion of such facilities. All efforts are described in this report.

Preparation

Partnership

The seed for active living in the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester region was planted over two decades ago when the Medical University of South Carolina’s Community Outreach Program initiated a day-long seminar about community development, led by the Planning Director of the Council of Governments. When the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation announced the ALbD initiative, the Planning Director recognized an opportunity to collaborate with other organizations and advocacy groups to expand on previous efforts to build an active living-friendly community.

The Council of Governments served as the lead agency for the Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership project. This metropolitan planning organization provided regional and transportation planning in a three-county region. The Council of Governments was advised by two boards of 50 people each and a staff of 17. The Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership was a loose collaborative led by a core group of partners responsible for implementing the strategies laid out in the Regional Bike and Pedestrian Action Plan, developed with consultant Jennifer Tulle during the first year of the ALbD grant.

The partnership hit an early bump when it decided to reconsider its original core group of partners during the first few months of the grant. In an effort to reorganize, a kick-off event was held to determine the interest level and potential commitment of newly-identified and existing partners, including private consultants, police, planners, government agencies, health care providers, and other community members. During the event, the lead agency staff discussed the scope of work and possible activities. A second meeting was held to discuss the purpose of the project and action steps.

To keep partners engaged, the lead agency employed several strategies, including working closely with partners and community members to write comprehensive plans, inviting speakers and offering trainings from organizations such as Rails to Trails and the League of American Bicyclists, and providing monetary support to partners for resources and events. Partners also pooled their resources to support the goals of the initiative. For example, partner Eat Smart Lose More paid for Safe Routes to Schools training through one of its grants.

The Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership maximized its potential influence in the region through a number of strategies and activities.

- Partners connected with representatives from independent, but related, initiatives to advance similar goals.
- Individual partner agencies and organizations took the lead in conducting several physical projects and programs.
- Partners used their resources to gather data to measure changes in physical activity behaviors due to physical changes in the community.
- Partners made efforts to attract new organizations to the partnership.
- Partners were willing to fundraise and write grants to generate support to continue active living promotional and advocacy efforts.

Staff, partners, and community members identified a number of strengths of the Lowcountry Active Living Partnership:

- Because the partnership was led by a regional governmental body, the staff and partners knew where to find public and private funding to implement programs and projects.
- The partnership benefited from having developed a Long Range Transportation Plan, which contributed to the knowledge of how to change policy and which policies to change.
- The characteristics of the individuals and agencies involved in the partnership contributed to its strengths. For example, the partnership had individuals viewed as sources of authority (e.g., health care providers), individuals who enjoyed writing grant proposals, individuals who served as connectors to agencies with similar goals, individuals with a passion for advocacy, and employees willing to try to change the culture of their workplaces.
- Close relationships between individual partners, health-focused organizations and advocacy organizations outside of the partnership created opportunities to expand the project.
- The partnership recognized that friction was an inherent part of creating change related to bicycle and pedestrian issues and encouraged open dialogue throughout the change process.

“I think that friction, that’s one thing I’ve learned, that friction is really important. When I go to a meeting... and there isn’t a little bit of friction, it’s because people are not telling the truth. They’re not...I don’t want to hear later on that you have these feelings about this. So it’s, I think friction, I really think it’s a good thing.” -Staff

Staff, partners, and community members also noted a number of challenges to working as a partnership:

- Staff turnover and leadership transitions at a new non-profit organization led to strained relationships. As a result, the Council of Governments hesitated to work with other non-profit organizations.
- Because many of the partnership members were associated with local or regional governments, they had to be careful to consider conflicts of interest (e.g., speaking about issues at community meetings).
- The partnership found it difficult to maintain the consistent support of pedestrian advocates.
- The slow change process was discouraging to partnership members.
- Staff worried that the partnership’s mission became lost in that of the lead agency. In retrospect, more frequent and regular meetings might have led to a more formal partnership structure and a clearer delineation between the lead agency and the ALbD grant initiative.

“I think one of the things I have learned from this whole active living thing is... It’s hard to be a visionary; it’s hard to be a pilot program. There are a lot of things I absolutely would have done differently if I did it again. I think probably I would have insisted on having more meetings, quarterly meetings...” -Staff

Several organizations and individuals joined the partnership over the course of ALbD project. Partners are listed by sector as follows:

Members of the Lowcountry Connections partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat Smart, Lose More • Medical University of South Carolina Safe Kids Organization • Roper-St. Francis Healthcare • South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citadel • College of Charleston
Parks & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Angels • Park Conservancy • South Carolina Coastal Conservation League
Urban Design, Planning & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Berkeley/ Charleston/ Dorchester Council of Governments* • Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA) • Federal Highways Agency • South Carolina Department of Transportation • Tri-County Link Rural Bus System
Community Leaders, Policy- & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elected Officials
Other Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charleston Moves • East Coast Greenway Alliance • Friends of the West Ashley Greenway • League of American Bicyclists • MyBikeLaw.com (formerly South Carolina Bike Law) • Palmetto Cycling Coalition • Summerville Bicycle/ Pedestrian Coalition
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape Architects
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

*Organizations that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

Leadership and Champions

As lead agency, the Council of Governments provided a strong background in land use, air and water quality, and transportation; however, this organization's strength was its focus on policies. The Council of Governments Planning Director served as the Project Director for the ALbD grant. A staff planner was responsible for conducting much of the work associated with the grant. In addition, other partners contributed work hours to the project.

Community partners indicated that several individuals acted as champions in the promotion of active living and bicycle/pedestrian facilities in the tri-county region. One individual, who advocated for active living prior to the ALbD project, contributed greatly to include bicycle and pedestrian access in plans to reconstruct the Arthur Ravenel, Jr. Bridge, a structure connecting two communities in the region. Even when this individual's direct participation was limited, he ensured that advocacy efforts continued.

"I think one thing that [partner] does is that he keeps making sure stuff is going on around him. So, maybe he's not in charge... anymore, but he's the guy making sure that Charleston Moves is still there even. He's not doing the footwork, but he's supporting the guys who are." -Partner

Another individual described by partners as a champion was a staff member at the Council of Governments. Partners noted that this individual was a visionary who worked to put the right people in the right place at the right time. She subtly planted seeds and connected people.

"She just starts a little snowball going and finds a few ways to make things happen and... she's the visionary... she's the oil. And then she puts [partner] where he needs to be and [partner] where he needs to be and [partner] where he needs to be ..." -Partner

Funding and Resources

Staff and partners reached out to a number of local, state, and national funders to expand the resources available to support the work of the Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership. For example, staff held phone conferences with a bike/pedestrian design team from the South Carolina Department of Health & Environmental Control to discuss sources and contacts for health data and funding opportunities.

During the five-year grant, the partnership received monetary and in-kind support from a number of sources:

- Alcoa
- Bikes Belong Coalition
- Charleston County transportation sales tax revenue
- Community Development Block Grants
- Environmental Protection Agency Smart Growth grant
- Federal Transportation Enhancement grant
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- National Scenic Byways Program of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Special Opportunities grant
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
- South Carolina Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School grant
- South Carolina Forestry Commission
- South Carolina Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Grant

According to partners, obtaining funding at the end of the grant period was difficult due to the national economic recession and the fact that the project area covered so many jurisdictions. Despite this, one individual remained optimistic that obtaining support and resources would not be an issue.

“I don’t worry about the money... The last thing I worry about is finding the money... If you have the idea, the money will follow.” -Staff

Community Supports and Challenges

The tri-county project area benefited from existing and new networks of strong, vocal neighborhood associations and community organizations representing a range of socioeconomic levels. For example, when partners advocated for bicycle/pedestrian facilities on the Arthur Ravenel, Jr. Bridge prior to the ALbD grant, they received support from the community. Interested residents involved in bicycling and running clubs, in the health community, and others who wanted to increase active living in the city attended community meetings. Community members wore t-shirts, placed bumper stickers on their cars, and sent in letters to the mayor to push for facilities on the new bridge. A community youth advocacy group—Earth Force Kids—came out in support of putting bicycle/pedestrian facilities on the proposed Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge. They attended public regional transportation meetings and spoke in favor of putting in bicycle/pedestrian facilities on the new bridge. As a result of working diligently on this issue, the group received an Earth Force national award. Such demonstrations prior to the ALbD grant served as an impetus for advocacy and support during the grant period.

The Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership found many of the elected officials in the tri-county region to be supportive of infrastructure and policy changes to increase active living. Over the course of the grant, local politicians become increasingly aware of community support and advocacy for bicycle and pedestrian amenities. Politicians began to seek out bicycle and running clubs to gain support during elections.

The greatest support for changes to the policy and built environment came from the Mayor of the City of Charleston. Partners stated that the mayor made himself regularly available to neighborhood associations to hear any concerns. In addition, the mayor was a pedestrian and acted as a great pedestrian advocate. He took several actions that made Charleston a more bicycle/pedestrian-friendly city, including supporting the creation of a bicycle/pedestrian trail around the circumference of the city.

“I think we’ve been lucky here in Charleston to have a really good mayor that really supports new ideas. Even though he’s been here a long time, he’s probably nationwide one of the mayors that just will take a new idea and take off with it. So, I mean, that is probably the number one thing that really helps Charleston is a mayor that really will listen and has the experience to get things done politically.” -Partner

“I think we’ve been lucky in the city to have staff in the last eight or so years that have really pushed for better planning, planning practices, better transportation planning. We still have a ways to go, I think, as far as the city overall, but the mayor’s been really supportive with the planning staff and new ideas...” -Partner

Staff and partners noted a number of other strengths of the community that aided the partnership in its work:

- Community advocates were willing and able to speak out when partners employed by government agencies could not.
- Academic institutions in the tri-county region were willing to be involved in the partnership’s activities.
- The physical landscape and layout of the City of Charleston allowed it to be a model for bicycle/pedestrian friendliness.
- During the grant period, the City of Charleston received a non-attainment designation for certain Environmental Protection Agency air quality standards, which partners hoped would serve as a catalyst for alternative transportation modes.

“[Community advocates] have a very important role because they can say things that [government employees] can’t say... We call our advocates because they can do things as advocates that we can’t do...” -Staff

Although several characteristics of the tri-county region helped the Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership promote active living, the partnership also faced challenges. The history of the Berkeley/Charleston/Dorchester tri-county region was riddled with issues related to race/ethnicity, economic class, and segregation, some of which influenced attitudes toward active living. Public transportation has always had a racial context in Charleston. Bus routes were historically designed for domestic laborers, running from lower income neighborhoods to the more affluent communities where the workers were employed. Likewise, commuters tended to use the bus system for transportation related to employment rather than recreation. The existing transit system suffered from frequent route changes and poor signage.



Local and state public agencies tended to subscribe to a culture that accommodated motor vehicles as the main mode of transportation. For example, South Carolina had one bicycle coordinator for the entire state. The partnership recognized a need to encourage government agencies and staff to develop policies and dedicate funding to support alternative transportation in order to improve active living, a challenge further compounded by budget cuts and economic strife. Partners and staff disagreed about whether or not Charleston and the larger tri-county region could support a larger, more expansive mass transit system.

During the ALbD grant period, South Carolina and its cities faced financial difficulties due to the downturn of the national economy. The state cut budgets for public schools and universities, many residents lost their homes to foreclosure, and the unemployment rate increased. In addition, the region’s population makeup showed signs of change. There was an uptick in younger individuals and families and a growing Latino residential population. Paired with the expanding population were concerns about mass transit needs and air quality.

Several other factors in the tri-county region hindered active living efforts:

- Because of the challenges faced by many public schools in the area, parents often elected to send their children to schools too far away from home to walk or bike.
- Staff and partners noted a general lack of knowledge among pedestrian and bicycle commuters that caused them to practice unsafe transportation behaviors (e.g., cycling opposite to the flow of traffic, not wearing a helmet).
- A lack of a bicycle helmet law made it difficult to promote and enforce helmet usage.
- Law enforcement officers lacked education on bicycle and pedestrian laws.
- Motor vehicle drivers had a tendency to overlook crosswalks, which indicated a need to improve pedestrian visibility and traffic calming devices.
- City and county transportation staff were not always supportive of alternative modes of transportation, such as walking and biking.
- While local governments approved physical improvements promoted by the partnership, completion was stalled at times.

Partners and staff provided a number of suggestions for overcoming such challenges:

- Identify a political champion for active living.
- Push for policy changes and physical improvements from the federal government, while working on local support.
- Find an advocacy group working on active living to increase support.
- Identify people who can dedicate their time solely or mostly to active living.
- Remain neutral and retain a good relationship with elected officials.

Community Assessment

The Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership conducted a number of assessment activities in order to better determine its work plan activities. Partners believed that the more information that the partnership and the community gathered, the more proof they had of the need for change.

In September 2004, the Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership completed a Pedestrian and Bicyclist Level of Service Assessment, an inventory of the existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities as well as other facilities related to active living in the region. The following February, the partnership asked older adult residents to complete a walkability survey. After analyzing the data from the inventory and survey, partners finalized a draft report of the bicyclist and pedestrian level of service in the region as well as a bicyclist level of service map.

Partners also utilized a number of assessment methods to obtain input on the public's views about zoning and other policies, concerns in the community, transportation needs, and preferences for the placement of roads and bikeways in the region. The partnership administered a number of surveys and led public discussions. After gathering data, partners met with planners and representatives to make suggestions, correct existing maps and data, and generate reports and plans.

In August 2007, the partnership collaborated with an environmental sociologist at the College of Charleston to conduct a health survey of users on the new bicycle/pedestrian pathway on the Arthur Ravenel, Jr. Bridge. Students from the college administered the survey onsite to 393 bicyclists and pedestrians that lived within 20 miles of the peninsula, even capturing the experience of one wheelchair user. In exchange for filling out the survey, people were given water bottles as incentives. Staff and partners noted the following findings:

- Of the 476 people approached, 17% could be considered tourists.
- Of 393 people eligible for the survey, 67% said their activity level increased since the building of the bridge.
- The bridge had become a destination. People were driving to the bridge and parking to walk or cycle on it.
- People sought out the bridge because it was the only place in the city to get a hill workout.
- Most people did not self-identify as cyclists.
- 85.4% of non-whites and 64% of whites reported increasing their activity levels after the bridge was built.
- Of the sample of 393, 10% were commuters. Ninety-percent of the commuters reported increased activity levels since the building of the bridge.

“So [the survey results] go along with what the literature is saying: that you can really increase people’s health in terms of activity levels by making the environment a place where you can passively get exercise out of going to work or going to get your groceries in short distances.” -Partner

The environmental sociologist from College of Charleston also conducted 45 interviews with non-choice and choice commuters recruited by word-of-mouth and through fliers. The study found that choice commuters (i.e., those who opt to use non-motorized or mass-transit modes of travel) valued having a choice between walking, biking, and using public transit but recognized that driving a motor vehicle was sometimes a necessity. Choice commuters worried about being viewed as weird or strange by fellow citizens.

“[Choice commuters] get on their bike and they go to work or they get on their bike and go get a loaf of bread but they don’t, they’re not part of bike clubs or you know they don’t do triathlons. Really, they would say over and over again, ‘I’m just a regular person’. And I think that one of the reasons that they kept saying that is there is so much animosity culturally in the South against bike riders... What people in the study would say is that I cannot tell you how many times somebody yelled out the window get on the sidewalk, with their bike, you know get on the sidewalk, and they’re like ‘I don’t belong on the sidewalk I belong on the road.’” -Partner

The Council of Governments and its governmental partners conducted several feasibility studies. One feasibility study explored options for the East Coast Greenway trail routing. A plan was later approved by the Council of Governments as part of the regional transportation plan and slotted for implementation. A second study looked at the consequences of converting Coming Street into a two-way arterial that would accommodate both bicycles and cars.

The Charleston partnership also engaged in mapping as a method to evaluate the health of the community and condition of the social and physical environment. City engineers worked with Arc-GIS mapping software to determine accessibility for disabled people at public transit stops. Bicycle and pedestrian accidents were also geo-coded to provide more detail for maps. An inventory of existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities and other facilities relevant to active living in the region, including parks and recreational centers, was completed in order to perform an analysis of needed facilities for active living.

Policies and Physical Projects

The Council of Governments and its ALbD partners worked with a number of communities in the tri-county region to assist in planning, reviewing, drafting, and rewriting neighborhood, city, and town plans.

They also worked with other governmental agencies to change policies in the region related to active living. Policy influences and physical projects, related partner, staff, and community implementation activities, and associated outcomes are described as follows:

► *Regional Policies and Physical Projects*

Regional Long Range Transportation Plan

- The Council of Governments participated in a series of conferences and meetings with the South Carolina Department of Transportation and other regional planning bodies to address how to encourage communities to link and provide transit on a regional basis.
- Through working groups and action plans, the 2030 Regional Long Range Transportation Plan was drafted and submitted for approval to the regional transportation board.
- The plan was approved and allocated \$30 million over 21 years to new Complete Streets activities, including retrofitting existing streets and intersections to ensure bicycle/pedestrian/transit friendliness as well as context sensitivity.
- The plan resulted in the first official Complete Streets Design Advisory Committee charged with reviewing Department of Transportation projects to ensure bicycle/pedestrian/transit concerns are addressed.
- In August 2007, the partners took measures to hire a consultant to develop a regional plan that would include a health component.

Charleston County Comprehensive Plan

- The Council of Governments was involved in shaping the Charleston County Comprehensive Plan to include attention to the connectivity of sidewalks and to prioritize the construction of new sidewalks to ensure complete coverage in the city and suburban areas.
- The partnership also recommended an increase in the allocation of funding designated for retrofitting bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Dorchester County

- The Council of Governments served as the consultant for the Dorchester County Comprehensive Plan, which included a transportation element with bike/pedestrian improvements detailed.

State Bicycle Law

- With the help of the partnership, the state passed a new bicycle law that required a safe passage distance to be allowed for bicyclists on roadways.
- The law included an anti-harassment provision prohibiting the malicious harassment and taunting of bicyclists or throwing any object at them.

Planning Tools

- The Council of Governments worked with the partnership to update the Travel Demand Model, a planning tool that helped determine accessibility and location of bus stops, provision of furniture around bus stops and other factors that contribute to walkability, to include all modes of transportation (mass transit, pedestrian, bicycle).

Other Efforts

- The Regional Rural Transportation Plan was approved and included chapters on rural mass transit and improving bicycle/pedestrian facilities in rural areas.
- ALbD funds supported Toole Design consultants' Regional Bike and Pedestrian Action Plan, which provided a blueprint for the region, recommending policies and programs that included the promotion of Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets, and community interventions with identified roles for government, health, and advocacy partners.
- The Council of Government's Policy Committee adopted a 2007-2012 Transportation Improvement Program, which included a county sales tax to fund bike/pedestrian retrofitting and expansion.
- The Council of Governments reached an agreement with the South Carolina Department of Transportation that an annual transportation enhancement allocation would continue to be made at the regional and local levels.
- The Council of Governments and other partners advocated for bike and pedestrian facilities throughout the region, taking action and meeting with stakeholders on several occasions.
- Partners in the regional municipalities took action to increase safety for pedestrians.
- The Council of Governments provided input to a developer of the East Edisto Tract, a 75,000-acre parcel of Westvaco Timberland, with plans to connect their trail system to the regional greenways.
- The Council of Governments helped to staff a state committee charged with completing a trail designation and signage plan.
- The Council of Governments coordinated with the Magnolia Project design team to review transportation and land use for a large former industrial area in the region.
- The Council of Governments worked to align the regional and state transportation policies, specifically including bicycle and pedestrian accessibility.

“So now we can figure out which bus stops are accessible, where they are and what furniture is there. And, of course, all of it fits back together with walking out of your neighborhood, having a pedestrian facility to the bus stop, and air quality... It's fun to talk to citizens cause they're like, 'That all fits together,' and I'm like, 'Yes, it does.'” -Partner

► **Policies and Physical Projects in the City of Charleston**

City of Charleston Bike/Ped Committee

- The mayor appointed members to the Bike/Ped Committee with approval of the City Council. Members represented the five distinct geographic areas of the city.
- The committee gave recommendations to the mayor's office and other governmental agencies and reviewed existing policies to provide comments about what was needed to create better community design for bicycle and pedestrian activities.

West Ashley Greenway

- The partnership and community members advocated for the development of the West Ashley Greenway, a 10-mile trail segment that ran through several neighborhoods in Charleston.
- Requested amenities included a bicycle/pedestrian bridge crossing the Ashley River to connect this greenway to other paths, paving or surfacing the West Ashley Greenway, pocket parks and community gardens along the length of the trail.
- The Council of Governments successfully applied to the East Coast Greenway Alliance for formal designation of the West Ashley Greenway as part of the East Coast Greenway, a proposed continuous, traffic-free path linking East Coast cities from Maine to Florida.
- Partners collaborated with the East Coast Greenway Alliance to meet with representatives from local, regional, and state organizations to advocate increasing connectivity to existing paths and trails in the city and county to this greenway.



Arthur Ravenel, Jr. Bridge

- Through 10 years of advocacy and partnership with bicycling clubs, walking clubs, the Sierra Club, and the Earth Force Kids, those in support of active living were able to garner the support of politicians to ensure that a pedestrian path became a part of the design of the bridge.
- The City of Charleston made plans to create a waterfront park on its side of the bridge that would act as a new access point and remove the issue of parked cars.



East Bay Street Multi-Use Trail

- The Council of Governments completed an application on behalf of the City of Charleston for the Bikes Belong grant.
- In May 2007, the City of Charleston received the \$10,000 Bikes Belong grant and planned to designate it for the East Bay Street Multi-Use Trail.

Other efforts in the City of Charleston

- Plans were made to replace all old pedestrian signals in Charleston with LED countdown signals. These lights would also be recalibrated to give pedestrians more time to cross streets safely.
- Consultants from the Rails to Trails Conservancy met with community leaders and advocates to assist with developing a plan to work with railroad companies to convert unused tracks to trails.
- The Council of Governments partnered with the City of Charleston to study two residential master plans for a 900-acre site on James Island to determine potential effects on environmentally-sensitive areas. The resulting report included recommendations for compact, mixed-use design and walkability.

“The Greenway has so much potential beyond being simply a Greenway. And I mean kind of the way I’m envisioning it is it’s a Greenway with a series of nodes along it. One might be, we’re talking about the possibility of a community garden...umm and you know we’ve talked about little kind of pocket parks along the way, you know if nothing else we’re just going to put places to stop and rest and chill out. And I see those nodes about every mile.” -Partner

► **Policies and Physical Projects in the City of Summerville**

City of Summerville Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee

- The Council of Governments recommended an ordinance to the city of Summerville that would establish a Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee to act as an advisory group to the city government.
- In 2006, the Council of Governments worked with Summerville to create a timeline for creating the committee and to draft an ordinance.
- In mid-2007, a seven-person committee formed, including key stakeholders such as town planners, a town engineer, bicycle advocates, and community residents.
- The committee generated ideas and recommendations and then passed them along to other subcommittees with decision-making authority.
- At the end of the ALbD grant, the committee supported the development of a bicycle/pedestrian master plan for Summerville and a rails-to-trails project to connect Summerville with Charleston.

Other efforts in the City of Summerville

- Partners worked with Summerville to include a bicycle/pedestrian action plan as part of the Summerville Transportation Improvement Plan to include more restriping and bicycle/pedestrian access.
- The plan called for many of the pedestrian crossings in Summerville to be repainted and be marked with yellow signs reading “Stop for pedestrians, it’s the law.”

“[The planners and the engineers] care what [infrastructure projects] cost. That’s their jobs as representatives of the tax payers. The engineer also brings professional knowledge to various ideas that we have and how to work through various agencies and what particular agencies will be most helpful to get a project taken care of. The town planner is also helpful. She knows how to run a meeting, which is great, cause I don’t. But she also is very helpful working through the various steps to get ideas backed. She understands the structure of it; she understands where it fits in the city government. And she’s becoming more enthusiastic over time.” -Partner

► **Policies and Physical Projects in Hollywood**

- The Council of Governments worked with the Town of Hollywood to review and update several town policies, which were later approved by the Planning Commission and adopted by the Town Council.
- Subdivision regulations were rewritten to require connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods and to allow “New Urbanist” street design elements (e.g., human scale, connected, walkable).
- The Town Center Zoning District was revised to require compact, mixed-use, street-oriented development.
- The Town Council and the Planning Commission approved a housing strategy, drafted by the partnership, that required a mixture of housing types, price points, and accessory dwelling units.
- The Council of Governments prepared and presented an overlay zoning district for Highways 165 and 162 with the goals of maintaining the rural character of the major highway corridors, using site design, access management, and buffering.

► ***Policies and Physical Projects in Lincolnton***

- Partners worked with the Town of Lincolnton, a majority African American community, to provide planning, zoning, and land development review support.
- Lincolnton updated its comprehensive plan to reflect a commitment to compact, mixed-use design and transportation choices.
- Partners assisted Lincolnton in seeking funding for efforts to retrofit the core of the community with pedestrian facilities.

► ***Other Policies and Physical Projects***

- To address safety concerns (high traffic volume and speeds) in the rural, African American Phillips community, the Council of Governments, with guidance from community members, developed the South Carolina Highway 41 Improvement Plan. This plan included turn lanes, planted verges, a median and sidewalks on both sides of the street, and a patterned crosswalk.
- For the City of Hanahan, the Council of Governments was contracted to rewrite zoning and subdivision regulations, collaborate with business owners and merchants to prepare plans and designs for downtown, and complete land use and master transportation plans.
- In Liberty Hill (founded in 1871 as the state's first freeman's community), the Council of Governments completed a study of barriers to active living, made functional, regulatory, and aesthetic redevelopment recommendations, and prepared a master plan and funding strategies that considered connectivity in the context of future land use, opportunities for redevelopment, guidance for urban design, and enhancements to the local transportation network.
- For the Highway 52/78 Sidewalk Completion Project, the Council of Governments coordinated with the South Carolina Department of Transportation and the Cities of North Charleston and Goose Creek to identify funding to complete a sidewalk connecting the two cities and a regional park.
- Council of Governments staff, along with developers and planners from Berkeley County and the City of Charleston received funding to explore low-impact development strategies to reduce storm water run-off and non-point-source pollution in urban redevelopment settings.
- Signs were placed at crosswalks to increase driver awareness of child pedestrians and school crossings.
- With assistance and partial funding from the partnership, community residents living near the West Ashley Greenway formed their own group, Friends of the West Ashley Greenway, to promote the extension of the greenway to the East Coast Greenway.

Strengths and Challenges

Staff, partners, and community members noted a number of strengths related to developing and implementing policy and physical project strategies:

- Successes helped the Council of Governments leverage funding and increase buy-in to implement similar strategies in other communities.
- A growing population of younger residents and families seeking walkable and bikeable neighborhoods contributed to a push for changes in policies and physical environments to promote active transportation.
- As residents learned about planning and experienced the positive benefits of active transportation-related infrastructure improvements, they became less wary of efforts to reduce urban and suburban sprawl.
- There was a belief that the current economic downturn would have a positive effect on the future of development planning in the region.
- Using community feedback in the physical project planning process resulted in better projects.
- Partnership staff members who also have ties to governmental agencies were important because not only did these individuals work directly to improve physical activity in Charleston, but they also tried to change the culture of these agencies and of elected officials to one in which active living became an important component of communities.

“I firmly believe that when we come out of this recession, development is not going to be the way development was before the recession. I think you’re going to see a lot more urban infill and suburban redevelopment because development cost is going to be less. The infrastructure is already there.” -Partner

“[The neighborhood councils] have a big voice, and the mayor takes their opinions very highly because they’re the ones that live there... So they’re very helpful providing us with comments and suggestions... Instead of having tons of residents asking for different things, somebody comes to us and says, ‘We’d like to see something in our neighborhood.’ ‘Well, return it to your neighborhood president.’ Then the neighborhood president meets with the neighborhood and figures out what’s best for the neighborhood. Then the neighborhood becomes a whole to our department of the city. So it provides one voice instead of many voices. So it makes it a better process even though it may take a little longer.” -Partner

Staff, partners, and community members described a number of challenges to developing and implementing policy and physical project strategies:

- Committee members were frustrated when their recommendations appeared to be ignored by government officials.
- Many community members lacked an understanding of the complex bureaucratic process of changing policies.
- Occasionally, committee meetings were scheduled at night, when representatives from key government agencies were unable to attend.
- At times, transportation agencies deferred to Euclidean zoning in community design and construction, keeping residential and commercial areas separated from each other instead of moving towards a mixed-use design. Therefore, they required additional guidance and support in order to accommodate bicycle, pedestrian, and transit needs.
- Sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, new lights, and bike lanes were expensive, therefore, budget constraints limited the ability of the Council of Governments and its partners to meet its goals.
- Some government officials and staff opposed active transportation-related efforts. For example, a fire marshal opposed narrow streets because of worries that they would restrict emergency access.
- The path on the Arthur Ravenel, Jr. Bridge became a destination, but the communities on either side of the path had not yet created pedestrian or bicycle connections in their communities, therefore, residents drove to the bridge and parked, creating traffic hazards.
- Because many of the streets in the region were owned and maintained by the state government, the transportation agency needed to relinquish control of these streets to the county or city in order for physical improvements to be made.
- Many physical infrastructure amenities were originally created to accommodate horse and carriage, making it difficult to retrofit existing infrastructure.
- Business owners and merchants were concerned that bike lanes would decrease the amount of parking in front of businesses, further complicating an existing parking shortage.
- Partners worried about the types of materials with which the city would pave greenways. The city previously surfaced a bike path with substandard materials, which led the path to deteriorate rapidly.
- Some community members remained resistant to the idea of bicyclists and pedestrians in general.

“It’s hard and go back and renovate infrastructure. It’s a lot easier to have it done right the first time. So, we’re in the position of having to go back and put in sidewalks, having to put in bike paths, which is very expensive and our sidewalk infrastructure is full of gaps, really. We have a ton of sidewalks that go nowhere. So our objective over the next ten years is to try and fill in as many of those gaps as possible.” -Partner

“And there are a few traffic engineers that have had their epiphany and they’re converted. Most of the them are old school, by the book... Give them 14-foot-wide lanes and 36-foot curb radii and their happy as they can be.” -Partner

“The biggest problem is that those people don’t like cyclists... [Residents] think [public parks and paths are] their backyard, and they don’t want [bicyclists and pedestrians] in their backyard.” -Staff

Promotions and Programs

Programmatic and promotional strategies, related partner, staff, and community implementation activities, and associated outcomes are described as follows:

▶ *League of American Cyclists Licensed Certified Instructive Training*

- League of American Cyclists' Licensed Certified Instructive (LCI) training was set up as a type of "train the trainers" program for the region.
- Seventeen participants, including four police officers, were trained in September 2007. Partners held Bicycle Friendly community workshops with elected officials and other individuals and distributed bicycle lights as an extension of the program.
- At the end of the grant period, the Council of Governments intended to set up bike safety classes led by those initially trained in bicycle safety.
- As a result of the initial success of this program, the partnership wrote LCI training as a requirement into the Safe Routes to School Grant.

▶ *Walk and Bike to School Day*

- In June 2005, the partnership met with the Medical University of South Carolina's Safe Kids program to discuss the possibility of implementing Walk and Bike to School Day in three schools.
- Press releases were sent to the local news outlets concerning this event and it was featured on the evening television news and in several local papers.
- The partnership hosted a Walk to School Day at Dunston Elementary with 75 participants and a Bike to School Day at Rollins Middle School with 50 participants.
- This led to a Walk to School Month event the following year with three participating schools: Dunston, Summerville, and Windsor Elementary Schools. Rollins Middle School also held a Bike to School Day.

▶ *Safe Routes to School*

- During the third year of the ALbD grant, with support from the Council of Governments, many schools in the region received federal funding to establish a Safe Routes to School program.
- The ALbD Project Director became one of 10 individuals in the state to become a federally-certified Safe Routes to School trainer and attended three days of training with Mark Fenton and other experts.
- A Safe Routes to School public service announcement was drafted and broadcast on the local Fox television station in 2007.
- At the end of the grant, pilot schools were selected and ready to move forward as soon as funding was received, following approval by the Department of Transportation.

▶ *Lowcountry in Motion*

- The partnership received a Special Opportunities grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to support a campaign, entitled "Lowcountry in Motion," to expand its efforts to create bicycle and pedestrian-friendly communities through events, media coverage, and bicycle/pedestrian clubs.
- A draft of the Pedestrian/Bicycle Level of Service Map was completed and reviewed by community members.
- Five-hundred public service announcements were released on a local radio station to promote bicycle/pedestrian safety.
- Bike to Work Day in the city of Charleston and Summerville and Ride of Silence were promoted to encourage bicycle safety and awareness in these two localities.

► **Workshops, Conferences, Presentations, and Community Meetings**

- The Council of Governments and its partners held numerous presentations, community forums, and charrettes during the ALBD grant to garner community input.
- Early in 2004, the partnership participated as a speaker in the 3rd Annual New Partners for Smart Growth Conference.
- In 2004, the partnership held a three-day workshop to discuss necessary implementation steps for increasing bikability and walkability in other communities. The following year, the partnership held a two-day conference.
- The partnership held an educational session with students from the Medical University during which a physician from the CDC talked about the importance of improving the built environment to impact community health.

► **Walking Program**

- Partners initiated a small pedestrian safety program in schools for students and parents. Presentations in schools taught children and parents about safety while walking.
- Brochures and posters were distributed at schools and other specific buildings around the city. Flyers were given each year at the First Day Festival for children.

► **Bike Rodeos**

- The first Bike Rodeo was held at Windsor Hill Elementary as a part of Cycle Fest. Ninety participants received bike safety training.
- In July 2006, the Council of Governments received the Alcoa grant to complete Bike Rodeos in three to six schools and a Bike Rodeo Coordinator was hired.
- Five days of bike-safety education were completed at Bike Rodeos in five schools in December 2006. Over 600 students were trained in bike safety.
- During the rodeos, participants were fitted for bicycle helmets, received safety training, and learned how to do basic bike maintenance.
- The partnership provided the Goose Creek Gazette information on the Bike Rodeos for their weekly newspaper. Additional press was received from other local media.

► **Media-based Efforts**

- In the first year of the grant, a newsletter distributed to partners and other interested parties provided information on healthy activities in the community and stressed the importance of good health through active living, and informed partners and other interested individuals of the program's progress and upcoming events.
- In 2006, the partnership created a website designed to disseminate information on regional activities.
- The Lowcountry Connections partnership and its efforts were featured in several media outlets, including an interview in Self Magazine and an editorial in the Charleston Post and Courier.
- The partnership also put advertisements in the local newspapers about community forums, charrettes, presentations, and workshops as well as using the media to encourage elected officials and government agencies to support physical improvements that would increase physical activity.



“We have a very good relationship with our media folks. They have been very accommodating... We have always had a good relationship with the press. They always, they don’t want you telling anybody else, you know, so they get the story out. And, they loved that story about the doing the study on the bridge, the health impact study. You never know what it is going to hit them...” -Staff

► **Other Promotions and Programs**

- The partnership sponsored an annual Bike Month for the cities of Charleston and Summerville in which participants received shirts and water bottles and were provided an opportunity to be fitted for a free helmet.
- After being awarded a Smart Growth grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to address environmental health threats to older adults, the partnership held workshops for seniors in three counties in which they discussed how to improve the community with more bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The workshops received attention from television and radio.
- Over the course of the ALbD grant period, the partnership distributed several promotional materials, including bumper stickers and postcards that could be sent to the city or county mayors to ask for support.
- The partnership also provided funding to enable organizations to buy materials, such as banners, helmets, and t-shirts, to promote active living.

Strengths and Challenges

Staff, partners, and community members noted several strengths that reinforced their efforts to develop and implement programmatic and promotional strategies:

- The partnership had a great relationship with reporters and others that work for the media in the region.
- The partnership found that the League of American Cyclists Licensed Certified Instructive Training empowered law enforcement officers to become more active in bicycle/pedestrian issues both within the community and among their colleagues.

Staff, partners, and community members noted several challenges to developing and implementing programmatic and promotional strategies:

- Staff found it difficult to re-educate residents practicing unsafe bicycling behaviors (e.g., riding against traffic) and counteract the negative attitudes instigated by these behaviors.
- The partnership was frustrated by the South Carolina Department of Transportation's slow approval process for Safe Routes to School programming.
- The League of American Cyclists Licensed Certified Instructive Training program required participants to commit a full weekend of in-class and road participation to complete the training, which was difficult for participants.

Sustainability

“The first thing from day one should’ve been, how are you going to be sustainable?” -Staff

The Council of Governments and its partners discussed several strategies for sustaining the active living efforts underway in the tri-county region. First, the partnership expressed interest in establishing an active living research center in Charleston. Staff and partners believed the region was ideal for active living research. While the economic downturn and complex start-up and administrative processes required the partnership to put the project on hold, the partnership continued to discuss the possibility.

“I think Charleston would be a very good place for [an active living research center] because we’re... the fact that Charleston is in some ways not a great place to walk and bike and has had limitations. We have paths that start and end. We have missing sidewalks. We have difficulty getting on and off the peninsula. We have a culture that is not pro bike and pro walking. So, we could have a good laboratory for looking at what kind of impact can you have.” -Partner

In 2006, the Council of Governments’ Unified Planning Work Program, a federal requirement to designate funds for planning activities, was written and approved. This act provided additional funding to support ALbD activities. Staff and partners engaged in other measures to ensure sustainability, including building a statewide network, collaborating with others working toward similar goals, and partnering with other organizations targeting policy change.

At the end of the ALbD funding period, the Council of Governments received an 18-month sustainability grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to support the partnership’s efforts to revise county, city, and town comprehensive plans to encourage land use and transportation policies that promote active living principles. In addition, the partnership hired expert consultants to engage the community in developing a Regional Land Use and Transportation Blueprint Plan that specifically promoted active living and improved design implementation strategies to improve the built environment for connectivity. The Council of Governments also received grant funding to hire a mobility manager for a year to work on issues concerning ride shares, public transit, ability to travel throughout the city for different populations, and air quality issues related to public transit.

Acknowledgements

This evaluation and report were developed under the leadership of Laura Brennan, PhD, MPH, Principal Investigator, Transtria LLC, and Ross Brownson, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator, Washington University Institute for Public Health. Support for this evaluation was provided by a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (#57649). Transtria LLC led the evaluation and dissemination activities from November 2006 to December 2009. For more information about the evaluation and dissemination methods, activities or results, please contact Laura Brennan (laura@transtria.com).

Our team is grateful for the collaboration and support from the staff at the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments and the Lowcountry Connections Active Living Partnership South Carolina.

With special thanks to the many individuals who have contributed to these efforts from Transtria LLC (Anna Alexandrov; Joanna Bender; Shruthi Bhatt; Yolanda Campbell; Julie Claus, MPH; Kathryn Coniglio, MPH; Kate Dickman; Kate Donaldson, MPH; Melissa Hall, MPH; Courtney Jones, MPH; Shannon Keating; Allison Kemner, MPH; Benjamin Krause; Amy Krieg; Lisa Meng; Lauren Middendorff; Luke Odom; Regina Quadir, MPH; Laura Runnels, MPH; Elsa Taricone, MPH; Cindy Thomas, MPH; Sarah Weiner), Saint Louis University School of Public Health (Elizabeth Baker, PhD, MPH), Active Living By Design (Rich Bell, MCP; Phil Bors, MPH; Mark Dessauer, MA; Joanne Lee, LDN, RD, MPH; Mary Beth Powell, MPH; Sarah Strunk, MHA; Risa Wilkerson, MA), National Park Service (Helen Mahan), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Laura Leviton, PhD; Jamie Bussel, MPH), University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health (Kelly Evenson, PhD), University of California at Davis (Susan Handy, PhD), Wholonomy Consulting (Katherine Kraft, PhD), San Diego State University and Active Living Research (James Sallis, PhD), and Innovative Graphic Services (Joseph Karolczak).