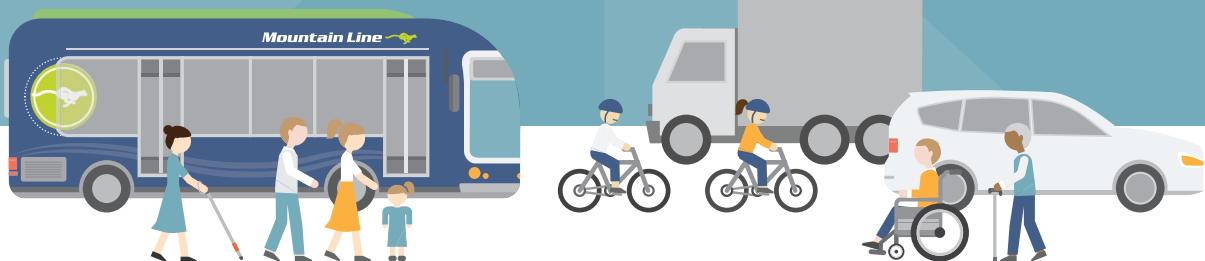




2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan

Existing Conditions Report

JUNE 2020





Envision the Future

The Missoula area is home to more than 82,000 residents spread over 263 square miles. With a thriving downtown, unique residential neighborhoods, a large public research university, and proximity to world-class outdoor recreation, it's no surprise that Missoula is growing quickly.

But as we grow, we need a transportation system that reflects our community's character and supports a region that is more livable, equitable, and sustainable. Missoula Connect, led by the Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), will help us envision that future.

Get to Know the MPO



WHO

The MPO, or Metropolitan Planning Organization, works to plan a safe transportation network for the Missoula area to ensure our home has comprehensive, cooperative, and connected transportation systems.

WHEN

The Missoula MPO was formed nearly 40 years ago, following the 1980 Census. Today the MPO is responsible for long-range planning and programming of federal transportation funds within the Missoula area.

WHY

Once the Missoula Urban Area had more than 50,000 residents, the MPO was created to coordinate the region's shared transportation vision.

Introducing Missoula Connect

One of the Missoula-area's primary planning projects in 2020 is an update to our Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which we're calling Missoula Connect. Missoula Connect is a 30-year plan that looks at all modes of transportation and identifies future priorities for projects and funding. This action plan will help to steer our community toward a healthier, safer, and more sustainable future while preserving and expanding mobility for all Missoulians.

Relying on previous planning work and extensive community outreach, Missoula Connect integrates existing plans and projects to create a sustainable transportation future that improves mobility and access across all modes for all Missoula area residents, workers, and visitors. A strong transportation plan is critical to the success of Missoula's growth policy, and Missoula Connect will knit together our land use and transportation goals. Missoula is on the move and we need to ensure we're not only keeping pace but staying ahead.

WHAT

Because the Missoula Urban Area has more than 50,000 residents, the federal government requires that an organization be established to carry out metropolitan transportation planning.

WHERE

The MPO serves the Missoula Urban Area, which is a larger area than the Missoula city limits but smaller than Missoula County.

HOW

The MPO facilitates collaboration between federal, state, and local government agencies, interested parties, and community members in the planning process. The primary responsibility of the MPO is to create a Long-Range Transportation Plan that prioritizes funding and improvements throughout the Missoula area.

Building on a Solid Foundation

What's been done? A lot of good planning work! Since the 2016 Long Range Transportation Plan, we've adopted a Community Transportation Safety Plan and bicycle and pedestrian master plans. We've also completed the Downtown Master Plan, the Missoula Area Mapping Project, the Housing Policy, and Climate Ready Missoula. And we have the Mullan Area Master Plan underway now.

Together, these efforts have identified important transportation projects and programs and set new goals for our region. The recommendations in these plans now must be prioritized and integrated into Missoula Connect so that we have a single list of projects that we can advance with our region's limited transportation funding. These recent plans—and many more—share common values that will inform our initial work on Missoula Connect.

Common Values from Previous Plans



**Integrated land use
and transportation
planning**



**Community health,
economic development,
and social equity**



**Accessibility,
efficiency, and
connectivity**



**Sustainability and
resilience**



**Safe and secure
transportation options**

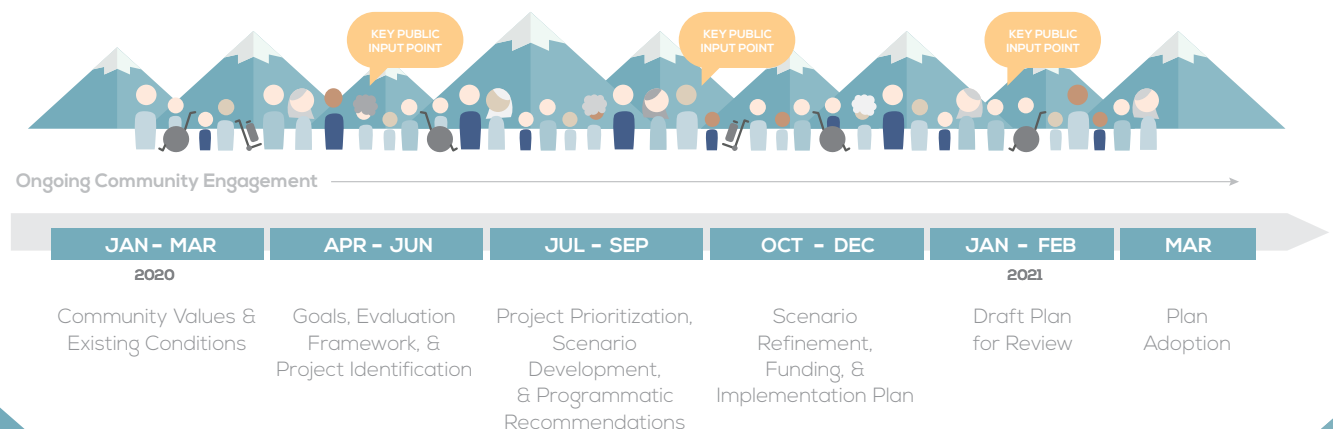
Delivering the Goods

In addition to planning for future transportation projects, the City of Missoula, Missoula County, the MPO, and the Montana Department of Transportation have all been hard at work turning these plans into real projects, some of which have been in the works for 20+ years! A few examples of projects that are about to start construction or that we have recently completed include:

- Russell Street Reconfiguration and Bridge Replacement
- Bitterroot Trail Completion
- Grant Creek/I-90 Intersection Improvements
- South Avenue Improvements: Reserve to 36th Street
- Mary Avenue Roadway Extension and Shared-Use Path
- Higgins Street Bridge Improvements
- Madison Street Bridge Rehabilitation
- BUILD Grant: Mary Jane Boulevard, George Elmer Drive, England Boulevard, and Commuter Trail Connections
- Bicycle Safety Project at Stephens and Orange
- Community Development Block Grant Sidewalk Project
- Orange and Van Buren I-90 Interchange Roundabouts
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Upgrades on Orange, Higgins, and Broadway

Our Work Together

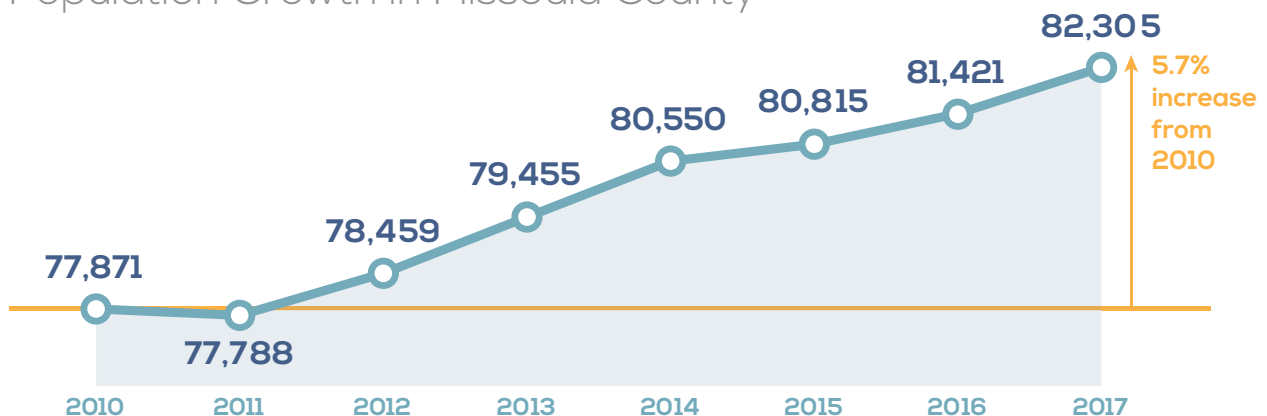
We need your help to ensure that Missoula Connect prioritizes investments that respond to the needs of the community. There will be many opportunities to get involved in our work, and we want to hear from you throughout this process.



A Growing Region

With more people come new opportunities and new challenges. In the last 10 years, the population of the Missoula area grew nearly 6%. As our population grows, demand for transit service and active transportation investments, like trails and sidewalks, is increasing. This means we need to find creative ways to use our existing infrastructure to move more people and goods.

Population Growth in Missoula County



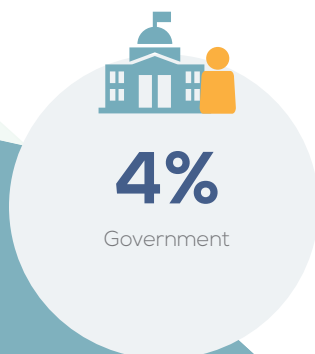
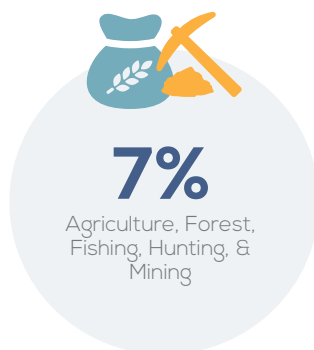
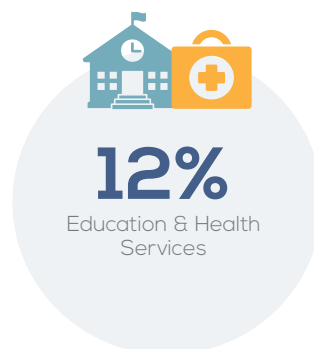
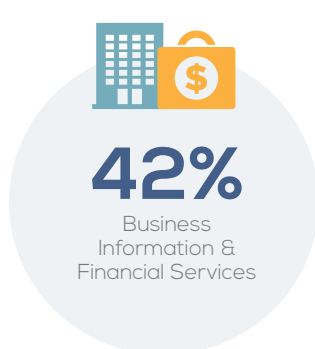
Source: Montana Department of Commerce, Census & Economic Information Center, Total Population by County (2018)


Integrating Land Use & Transportation

The “Our Missoula” City Growth Policy guides growth and development in Missoula. The vision is one of managed growth while meeting the needs of the community’s residents. The policy estimates there will be approximately 6,500 new residential units in the Missoula area in the next 10 years.

To create a long-range transportation plan that works for the region, land use and transportation must be fully integrated. Development should be directed where infrastructure can support it, within walking distance to grocery stores and other basic necessities, near transit, biking, and walking routes, and close to schools and parks.

In recent years, the Missoula area economy has grown increasingly diversified. Education, healthcare, tourism, and professional services have replaced agriculture and resource extraction as the major economic drivers of the region.

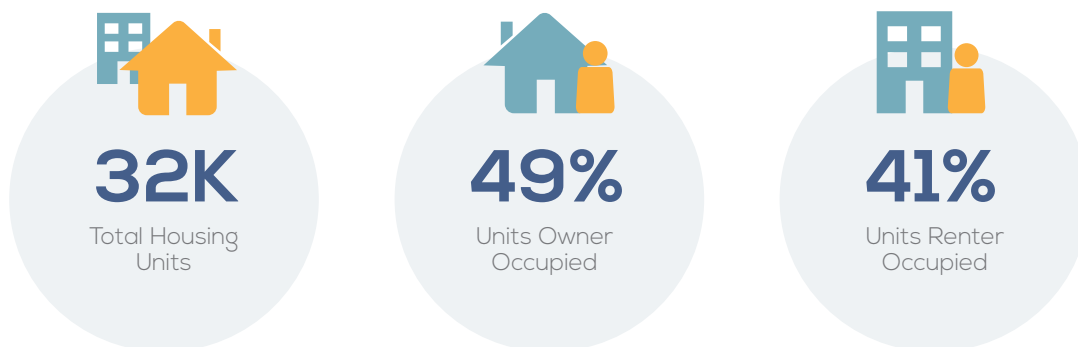


 **45% of all
workers in
Missoula
County earn
less than
\$35,000**

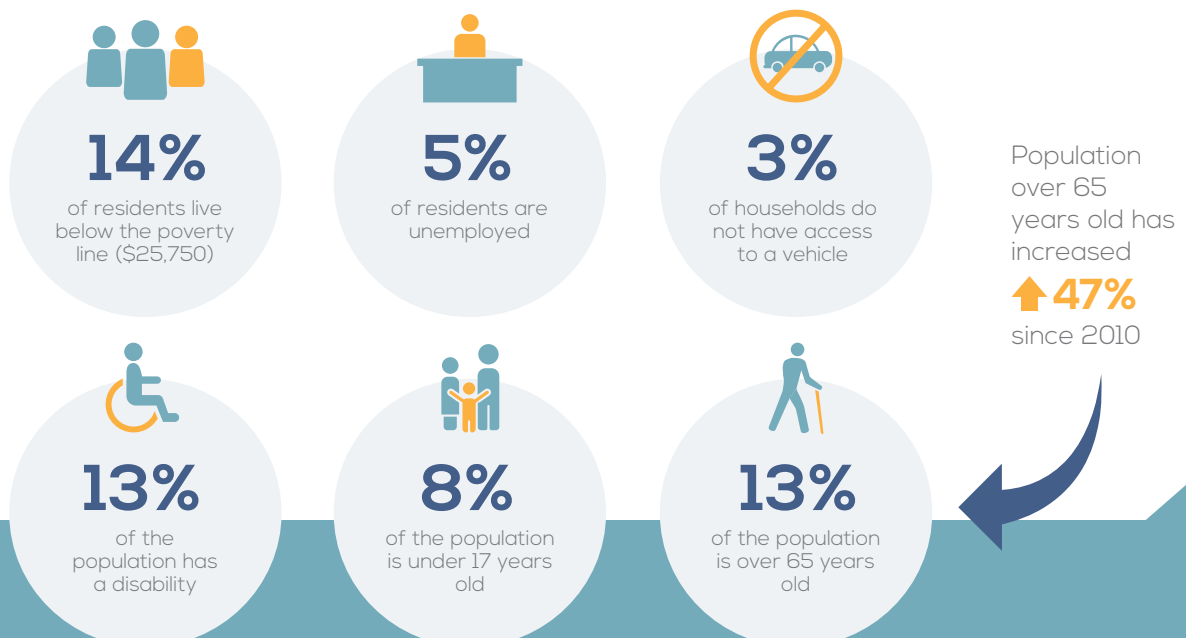
Source: 2013-2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Industry by Occupation for the Civilian Population 16 Years and Older

Challenges of Affordability

Like many desirable metropolitan areas throughout the United States, housing costs in the Missoula region are climbing faster than wages, making it difficult for many residents to find housing they can afford. This reinforces the need for accessible, affordable, and reliable transportation options that connect Missoulians with jobs, schools, services, and recreation.



As we grow, we must ensure that all Missoulians have access to high-quality transportation options that connect us to the places we go. Almost half our residents make less than \$35,000 per year, and 14% of us live below the poverty line. That's a lot higher than the national average of 12%. Providing affordable options—like Mountain Line, which is free to ride—can increase access to jobs, schools, and services for everyone.



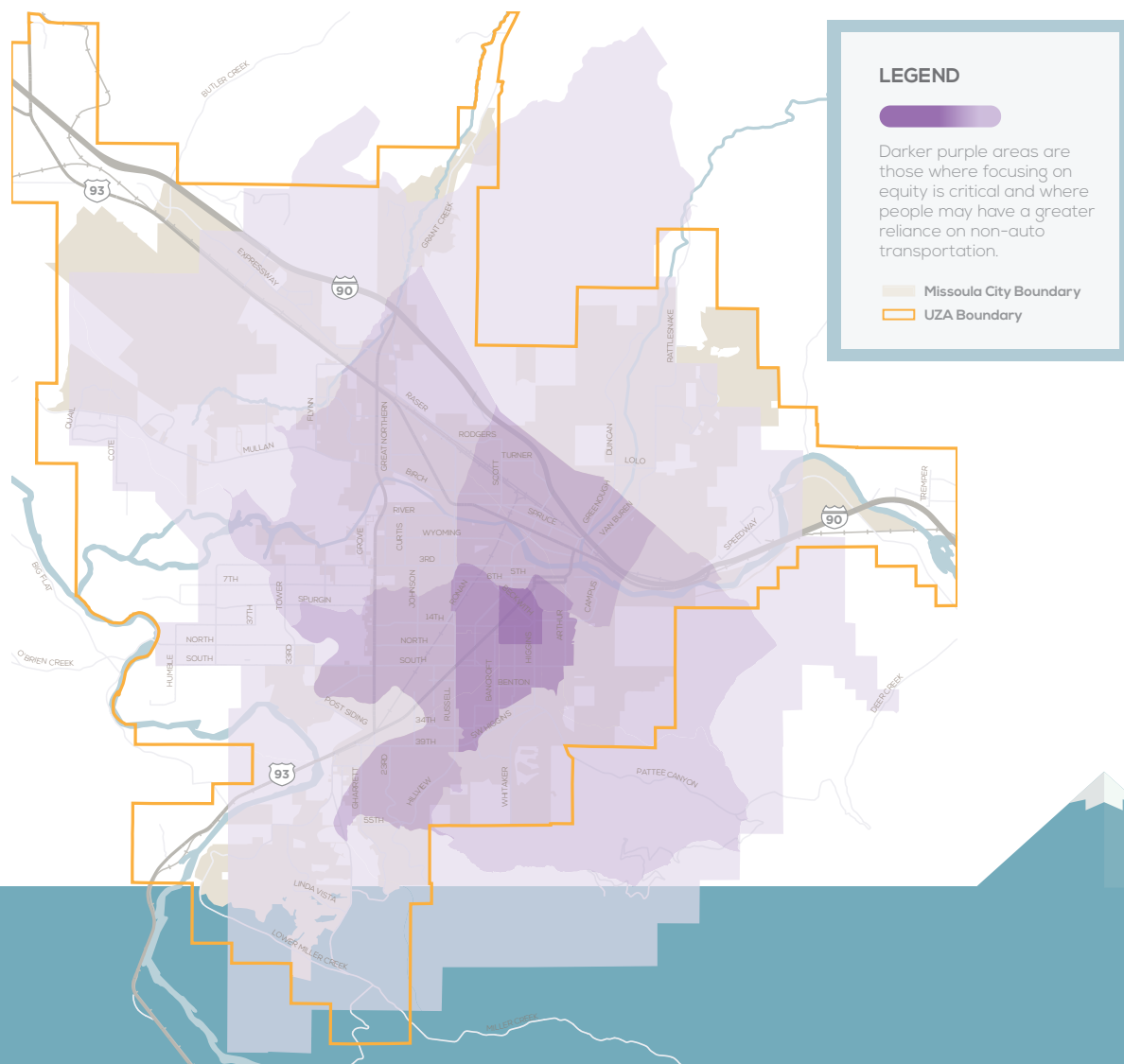
Source: 2013-2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Selected Housing Characteristics

Focusing on Equity

Equity is an important tool for analyzing people's access to transportation and for planning future investments. Planning within an equity framework empowers decision-makers to invest in places where transportation projects and programs can support historically under-represented communities that may have fewer transportation options.

Increasing access to quality transportation options is an important way to promote community health and social equity. Some steps we're taking to better serve historically under-represented communities include providing fare-free public transportation and improving multimodal access to affordable housing, parks, schools, health care facilities, and social services.

Equity Index



Source: 2013-2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Missoula By The Numbers



1

229

bridges

2

27

trains
per day

3

40%

of streets with
sidewalks on
at least one side

4

25K

commercial
trucks
per day

5

49

miles of bike
lanes



6

907K

passengers per year
at Missoula
International Airport

7

2M

daily vehicle miles
traveled (VMT)

8

88%

of residents live within
1/2 mile
of a bus stop

9

16

Mountain Line
and UDASH bus
routes

10

70

miles of
commuter
paths

Moving Missoulians

What does our transportation network look like today? How are Missoulians getting around the region? How do employees commute to or from adjacent counties? How do visitors arriving from the airport reach their hotels?

Well, mostly by driving. Given our relatively low density and large area—and our role as a regional economic, educational, and tourism hub—driving is often the fastest and most convenient way to travel. Additionally, low gas prices, abundant parking, and a strong economy make it easy for people to drive.

However, drive-alone rates among Missoula area residents are less than the state average, while active transportation modes such as biking and walking are well above what we see in the rest of the Montana and across the country.

How We Travel

71.4%

Drive Alone



Source: 2013-2017 ACS 5-Year Estimates



9.2%

Carpool



6.1%

Walk



5.3%

Other (taxi,
telecommute, etc.)



5.3%

Bike



2.7%

Bus

In our 2016 Long-Range Transportation Plan, we set some ambitious mode-share goals to provide people with better travel options and shift some trips away from driving:



Reduce drive-alone commute share to **34% by 2045**



Reduce drive-alone commute trips by **20,000 by 2045**

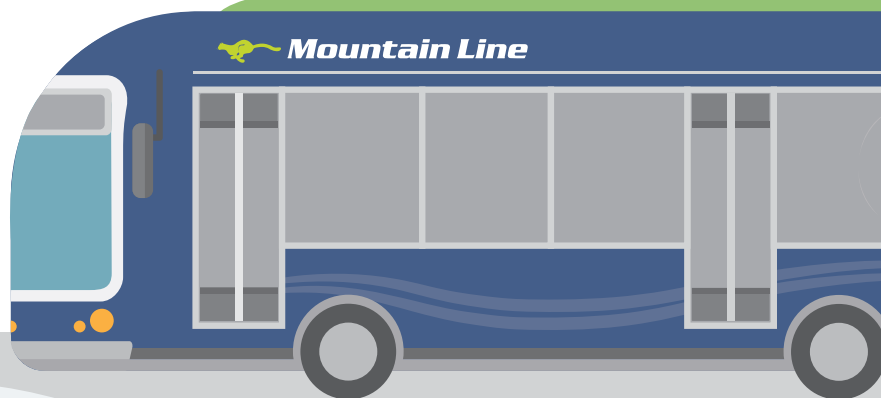


Triple bike and walk shares and **quadruple** transit share by 2045



Achieve a **small increase** in carpool and work from home

Since then, our drive-alone rate has remained fairly constant, and carpool, walk, and telecommute shares have stayed mostly the same. Trips by transit and bicycle have both increased slightly, by about 1%.



Regional Commute Patterns

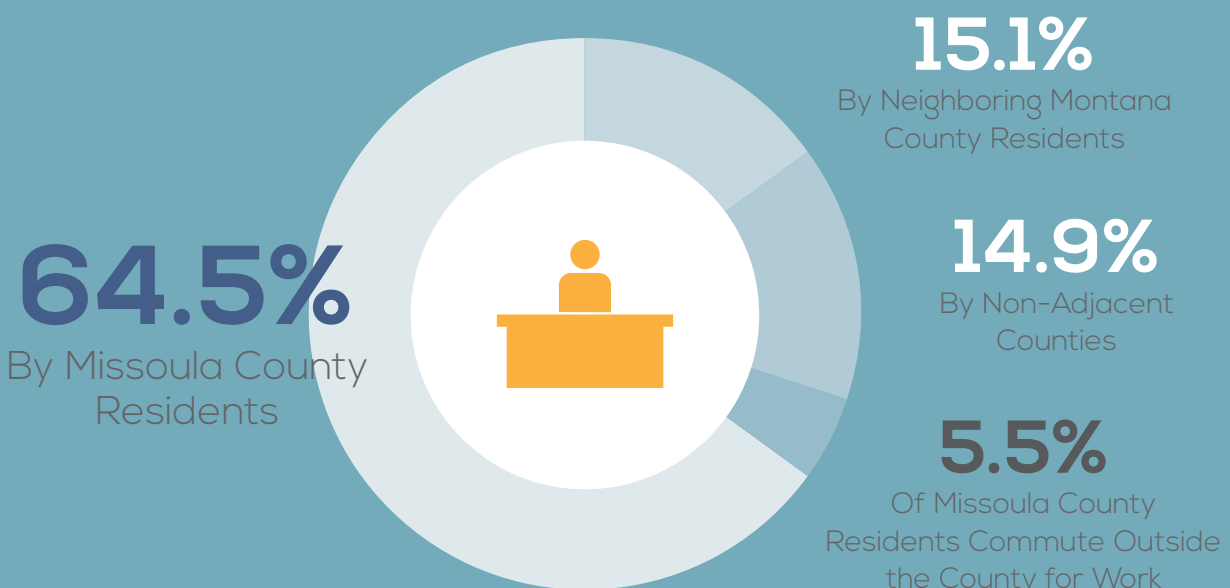
Missoula is the economic heart of our region. Each day, Missoula County welcomes a large number of commuters from neighboring communities in Mineral County, Granite County, Ravalli County, and Lake County. Nearly a third of Missoula County workers commute from another county, and these are typically longer trips than Missoula County residents make to work. In most cases, commuters from adjacent counties have limited options beyond driving.

The 65% of Missoula County workers who live within the county's boundaries enjoy shorter travel times to work than people in many cities and towns across the

nation. Our residents spend an average of 17 minutes traveling to work each day, compared to the national average of 25 minutes.

But for some Missoula County residents, trips to work can still cover many miles—workers from more rural areas have fewer travel modes to choose from than people in more urban parts of the county. Some parts of the county aren't served by Mountain Line, for example, and not everyone is able to make a bike ride to work. In the MPO's 2019 travel survey, nearly 99% of County residents reported driving to work as their typical mode of travel.

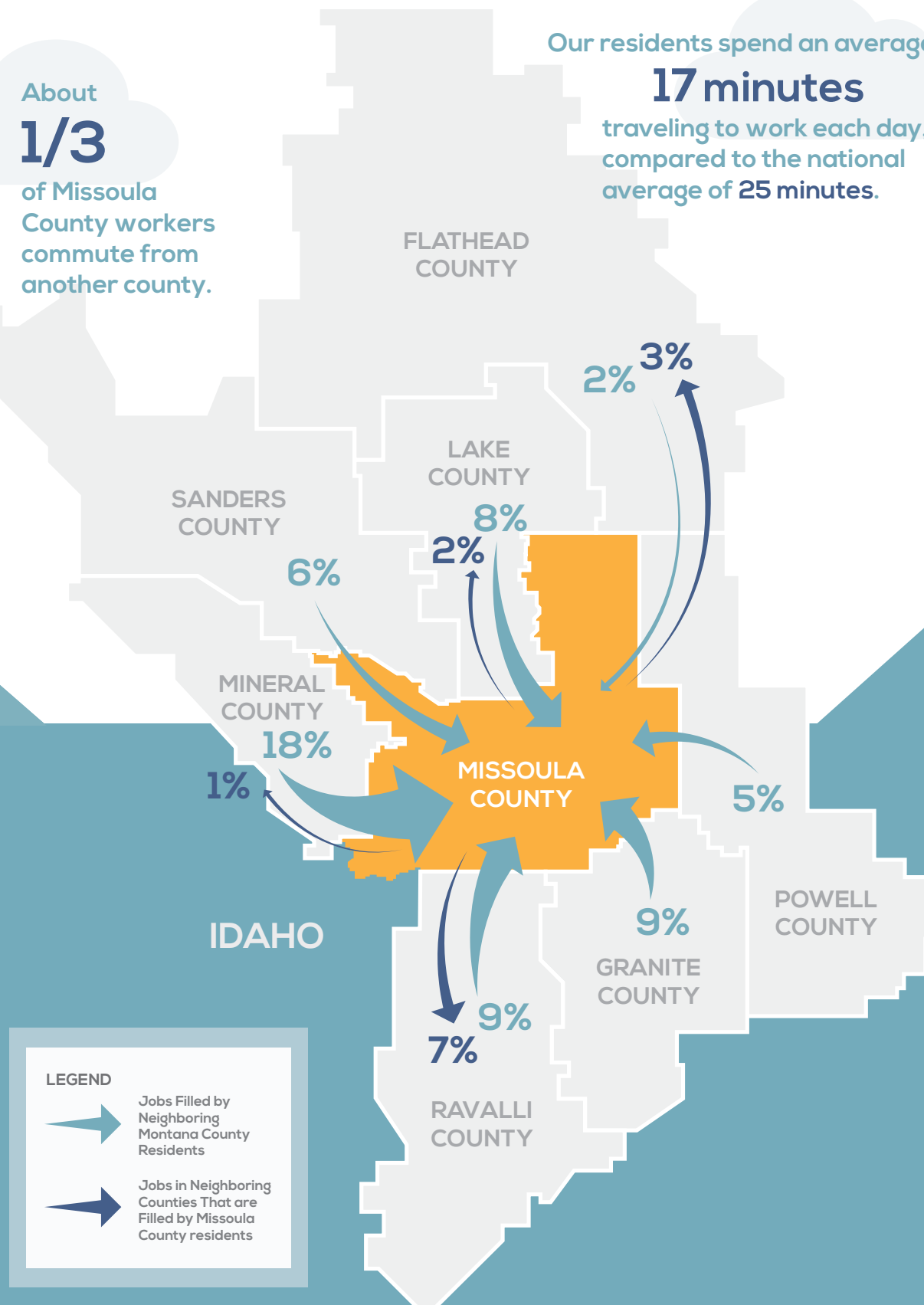
Who Fills the Jobs in Missoula County?



Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), Main (JT00) Montana (2017)

About
1/3
of Missoula
County workers
commute from
another county.

Our residents spend an average of
17 minutes
traveling to work each day,
compared to the national
average of 25 minutes.



Source: U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), Main (JT00) Montana (2017)

Driving in Missoula

Over 70% of trips in the Missoula area are made by people driving alone, and a handful of corridors carry most of our vehicles. The highest concentration of daily auto trips is along the Reserve Street corridor, which sees 40,000 vehicles each day. Other roadways with high traffic volumes include Brooks Street in the Southgate Triangle area, the bridges into downtown, and I-90 between downtown and East Missoula.

As we look for options to make it safer and more convenient for people to travel across the region, we're focusing on multimodal improvements as part of roadway reconstruction. The Russell Street Project is a great example—we've partnered with the Montana Department of Transportation to create complete streets that move even more people and goods efficiently and safely.

In the 2019 Missoula Area Transportation Survey, fewer residents (36%) reported that **traffic congestion had at least a somewhat large impact on them** in 2019 compared with 2015 (46%).

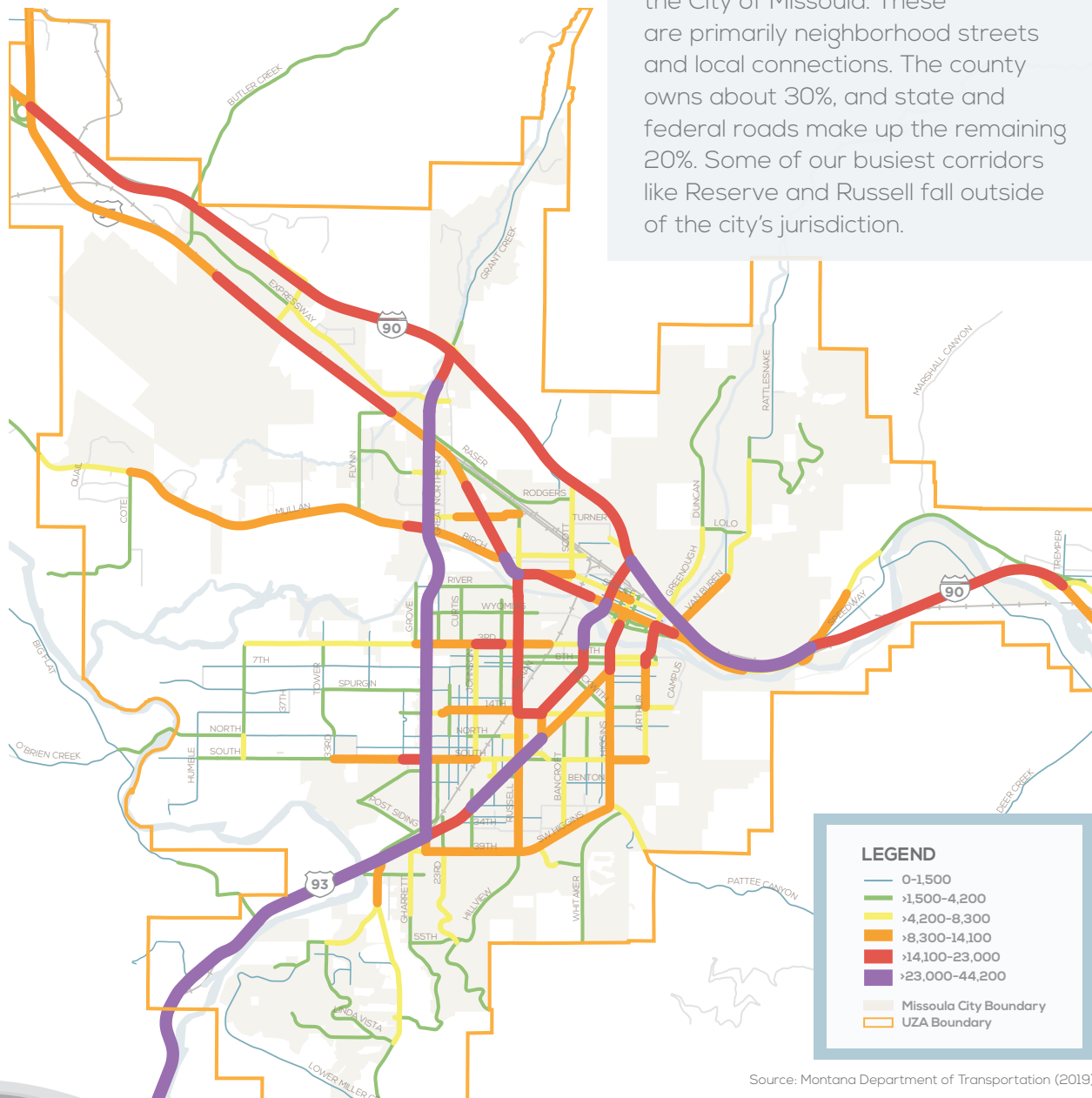


Missoula area residents who reported **longer commute times** also reported that **traffic congestion had a larger impact on them personally**.



Missoula's Busiest Roads

Roughly 50% of roads in the Missoula area are owned by the City of Missoula. These are primarily neighborhood streets and local connections. The county owns about 30%, and state and federal roads make up the remaining 20%. Some of our busiest corridors like Reserve and Russell fall outside of the city's jurisdiction.



Regional Air Quality

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, motor vehicles are the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change in the United States. In the Missoula area, driving is one of the main ways that many of us get around. To mitigate transportation-related climate impacts, we must improve access to and connectivity for more sustainable transportation options such as public transportation, biking, and walking.

Traffic Safety in Missoula

One of our biggest priorities as we plan for the future is keeping people safe on our streets. Between 2013 and 2017 there were nearly 12,000 transportation-related collisions in the Missoula area that impacted people using all modes of travel. These five corridors have the highest rate of collisions:

- ☀ Reserve Street from Broadway Street to Mullan Road
- ☀ Reserve Street from 3rd Street to 39th Street
- ☀ Brooks Street from Reserve Street to Higgins Avenue
- ☀ Russell Street from Broadway Street to South Avenue
- ☀ Broadway Street through downtown

In that same period of time, there were 462 collisions that involved people walking or biking. While a relatively small percentage of the total number of collisions, pedestrians and cyclists are our most vulnerable travelers. They face a high risk of injury or death, particularly when hit by a vehicle traveling at speeds greater than 25 miles per hour.

There were 85 crashes involving people biking and walking in 2018



Vehicle Travel Speeds and Pedestrian Injury



25%

chance of pedestrian fatality or severe injury



50%

chance of pedestrian fatality or severe injury

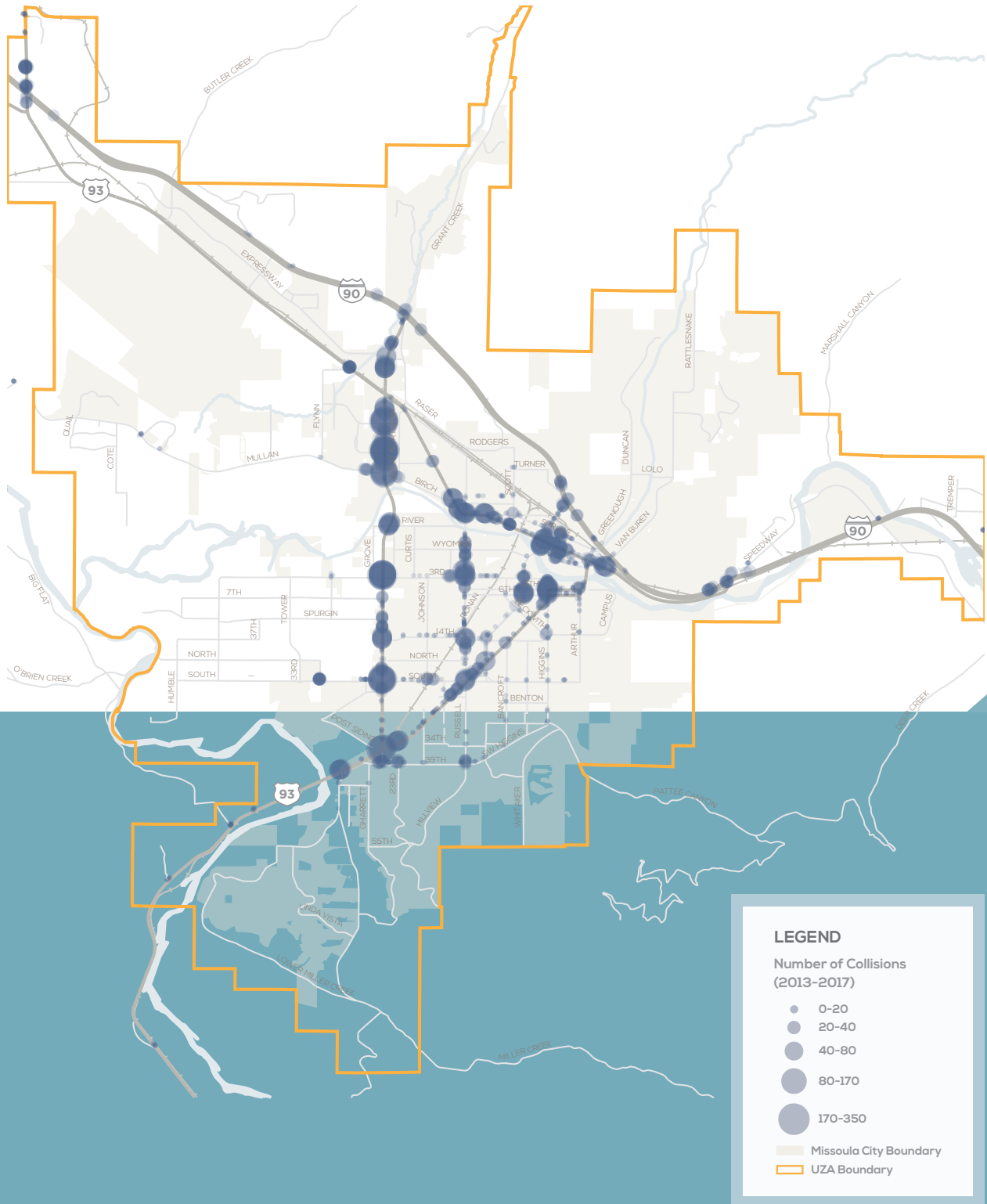


90%

chance of pedestrian fatality or severe injury

Source: Tefft, Brian, 'Impact speed and a pedestrian's risk of severe injury or death' (Accident Prevention Analysis, 2013)

Where Do Collisions Occur?



Source: Missoula MPO 2007-2018 Crash Data, Montana Department of Transportation 2007-2018 Crash Data

Walking in Missoula

Each day, people walk, roll, or use mobility devices like wheelchairs to move around the Missoula region. Whether getting to the bus stop, to their parked car, or around the neighborhood, people should feel safe and comfortable.

Only 40% of Missoula area roads have a sidewalk on even one side of the street. That leaves a considerable percentage of streets without sidewalks, and most of those streets are in residential neighborhoods such as Franklin to the Fort, River Road, Westside, and Northside. And outside of the more urban areas of the region, there are even fewer safe and connected places for people to

walk. While not every road—especially in our more rural areas—needs a sidewalk on both sides of the street, having a dedicated space to walk or roll should be a priority.

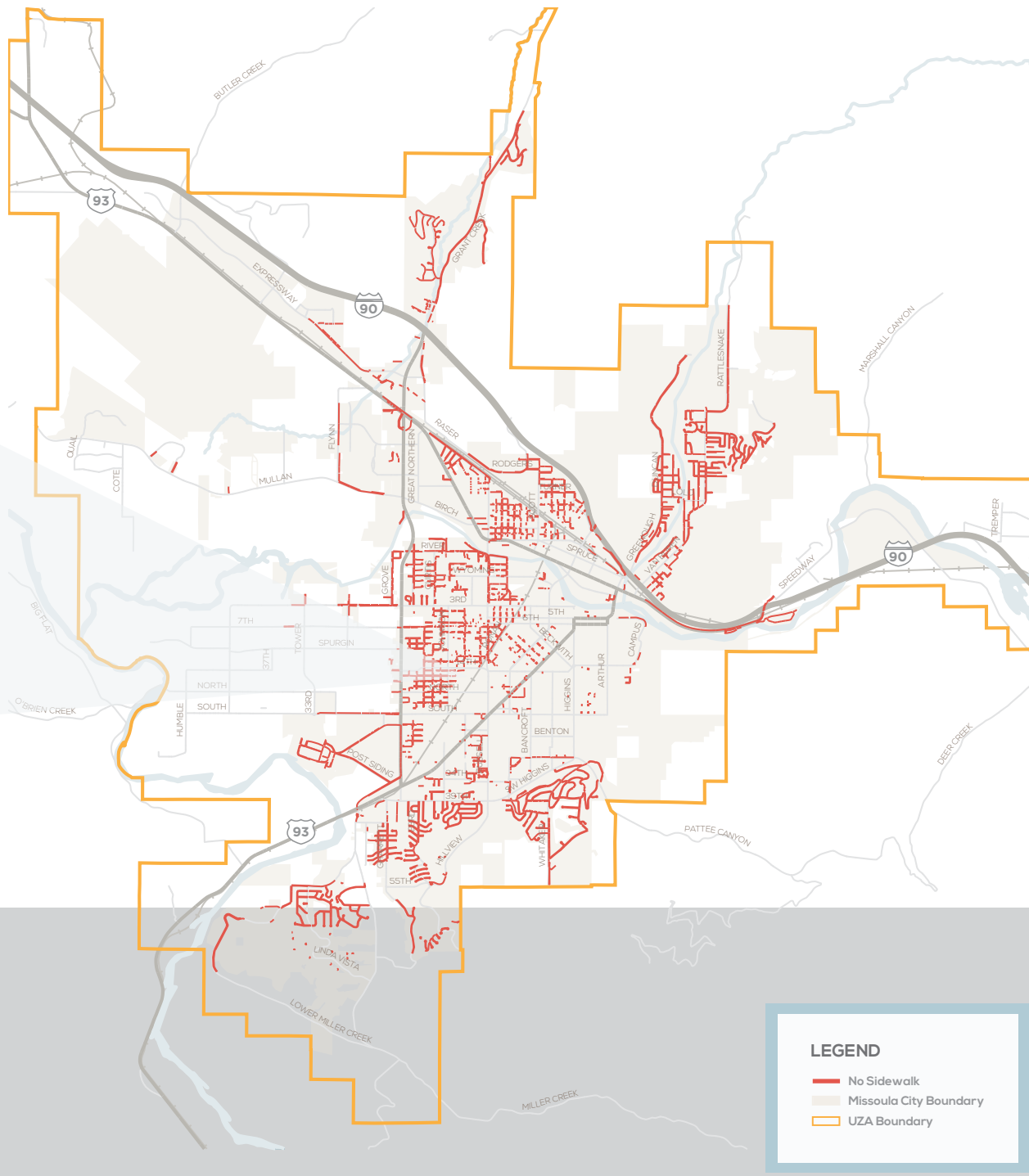
AREAS WITH NO SIDEWALKS

Having a complete network of sidewalks is important, but those sidewalks also have to be maintained and in good condition. For people who use a mobility device or push kids in a stroller, the condition of a sidewalk or path is as important as whether one exists.



Safe crossings are a critical piece of the pedestrian environment. High-visibility crosswalks, along with traffic signs and signals, help to connect our neighborhoods.

Pedestrian Network Gaps in the Region



Source: Missoula MPO 2019 Sidewalk Data

Biking in Missoula

With more than 70 miles of commuter paths, 40 miles of on-street facilities, and a fairly flat urban center, biking is a great way to travel around the Missoula area. And over 5% of Missoula area commuters make their trips to work by bike. This is significantly higher than the national average, which is less than 1% of commuters.

At the same time, there are important opportunities to improve the biking network, especially by focusing on intersections and building out the neighborhood greenway network. The City of Missoula has one protected intersection (at Johnson and South)

for people on bikes, and 29 miles of designated greenways. But to create a network that is safe and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities, continued investment in protected and low-stress facilities is needed.

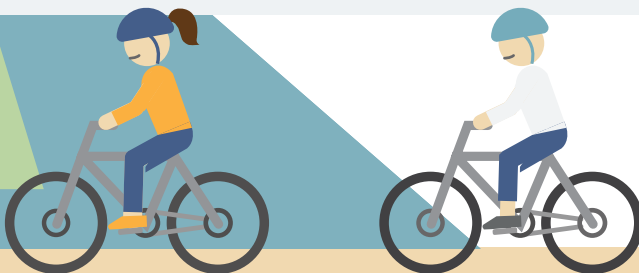
Missoula's 2018 Bicycle and Pedestrian Count Program Report found that non-motorized travel is the heaviest in Downtown Missoula, particularly along Higgins and on the primary commuter paths. People walking and biking cited better street crossings and wider facilities as the most needed active transportation improvements.

What's a greenway?

Neighborhood greenways are residential streets, close to main roads, with relatively low volumes of vehicles and slow speeds. These important connectors are comfortable places to ride for people of all ages and help to increase safety for people who bike and walk.



Missoula has been a **Gold Level Bike Friendly Community** since 2012

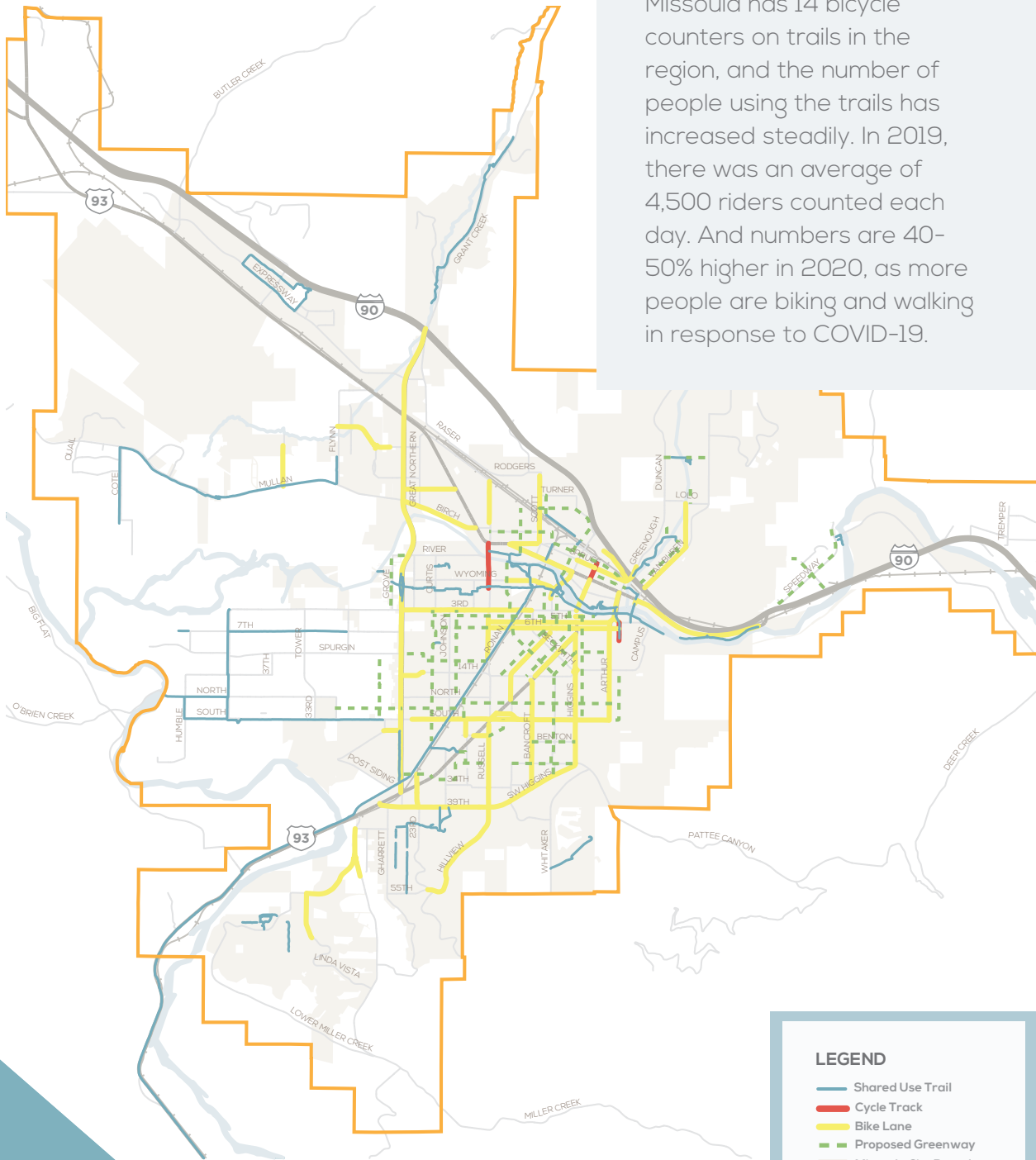


Bike Facilities in the Region



How many people bike?

Missoula has 14 bicycle counters on trails in the region, and the number of people using the trails has increased steadily. In 2019, there was an average of 4,500 riders counted each day. And numbers are 40-50% higher in 2020, as more people are biking and walking in response to COVID-19.



LEGEND

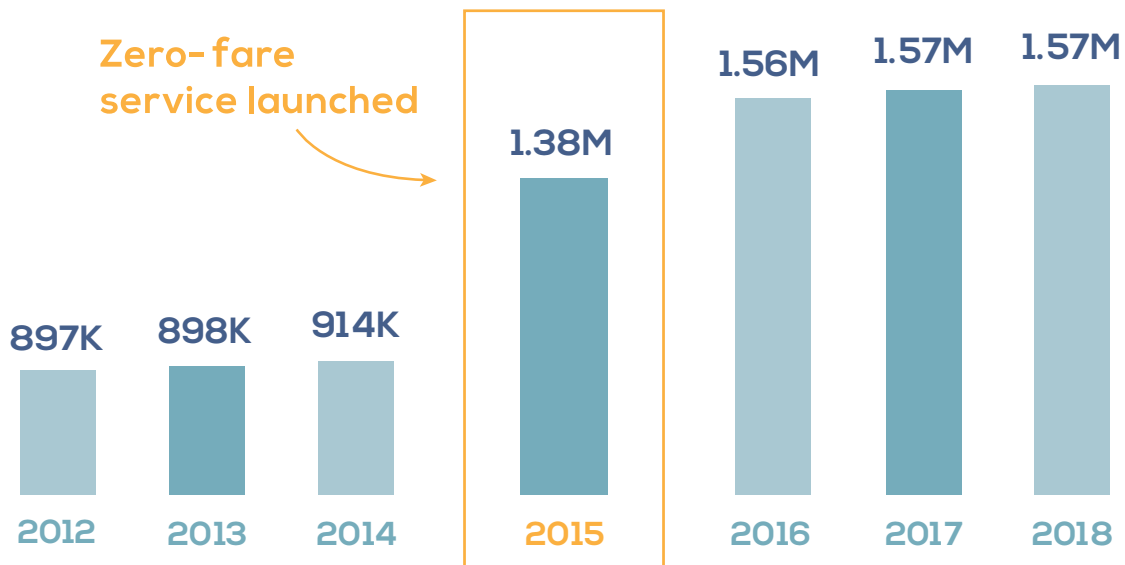
- Shared Use Trail
- Cycle Track
- Bike Lane
- Proposed Greenway
- Missoula City Boundary
- UZA Boundary

Taking the Bus in Missoula

Transit ridership in the Missoula area has nearly doubled since 2012, as Mountain Line launched and then expanded 15-minute frequency BOLT! service and added later evening service. In 2015, Mountain Line implemented zero-fare service, which boosted ridership almost 50% in one year. Since that time, ridership has continued to grow, although less than 3% of Missoula area residents use the bus to get to work.

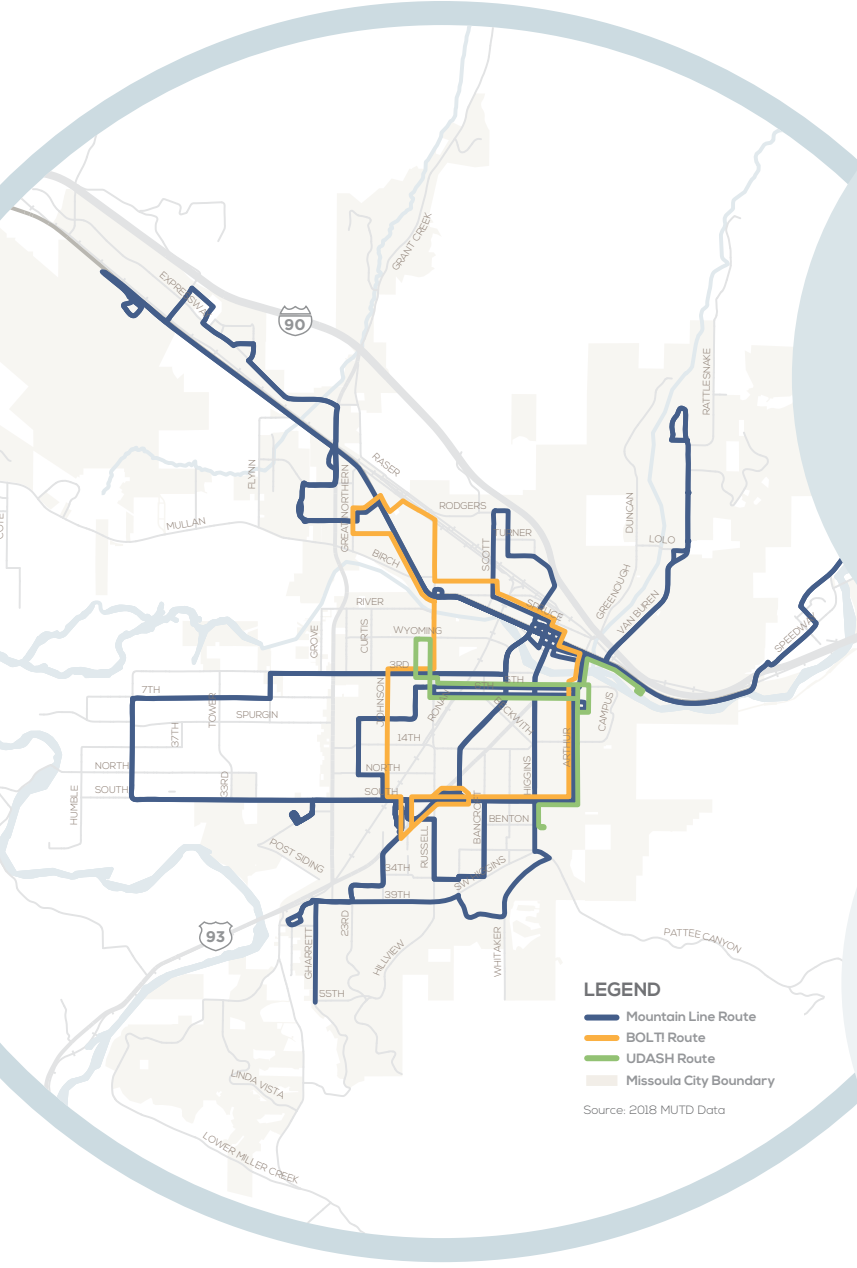
Mountain Line has 12 routes and also offers Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service and a Senior Van. While 88% of Missoula residents live within a half-mile of a bus stop, service hours and the frequency of service can make it challenging for people to ride Mountain Line. There is no service on Sundays, and the last bus generally stops running at 10 PM.

Mountain Line Ridership

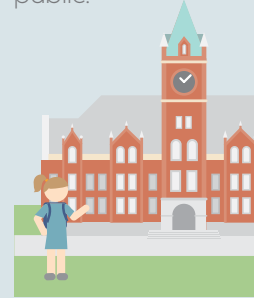


Source: 2018 MUTD





The University of Montana's UDASH service includes four routes, which are also fare-free and open to the public.



There are more than **10,000** college and university students in Missoula.

In February 2020, the Missoula Urban Transportation District–Mountain Line's governing board–adopted a resolution committing the agency to eliminating all tailpipe emissions from its buses by 2035. The agency's new electric buses are an important part of achieving that goal.



Key Findings & Next Steps

So where do we go from here? This report gives us a glimpse into growth and transportation in Missoula today. It reflects previous plans, existing data, and preliminary conversations with Missoula area residents and stakeholders. There's a lot more to learn, but we have some key findings that will help us take the next steps.



Connecting urban and rural

The Missoula region covers 263 square miles. This presents challenges for delivering transportation choices for all residents across a large geography. Many of the people who most need affordable and efficient transportation live far from the downtown core. And the urban parts of our region are fairly disconnected from the rural areas, especially when it comes to biking and walking connections. Missoula Connect can help to knit these areas together, recognizing that tailored solutions will always be needed.



Moving the dial on mode share

Driving is the way that most people get around the Missoula area today. But the region is growing and preferences are changing. Missoulians are asking for safe, efficient, and cost-effective transportation choices to support getting them to the places they need to go. This means creating a more robust transit system. And it means doing more to manage transportation demand, including creating new policies and programs to shift people to non-drive-alone modes. We must be bold to change behavior and meet our ambitious mode share goals.



Integrating land use and transportation

"Our Missoula" sets a vision for growth that focuses inward. And our transportation system is shaped by our land uses. We must continue to focus growth in our core neighborhoods to create complete communities and to ensure that people can make sustainable choices for most trips. We need to concentrate on moving people and our responsibility to manage the 30% of the Missoula area's land that is devoted to that purpose. We're not going to get more space to build roads, so we have to make the best use of the space we have.



"Our Missoula" anticipates **6,500 new housing units** in the area in the next 10 years.



Advancing safe and local networks

Each year, there are more than 2,000 transportation-related collisions in the Missoula area. To keep people safe on our roads, we need to complete and maintain our networks. We also have an opportunity to create local systems—like neighborhood greenways—that focus on low-speed and low-volume streets to enhance safety for people walking and biking. But safety is about more than infrastructure. To create streets that work for people of all ages and abilities, we must be willing to trade speed for saving lives.



There are **29 miles** of designated greenways in the Missoula area.



Preparing for an uncertain future

We are at a pivotal moment in time—we're in the midst of a global pandemic that is reshaping the ways people travel and the places they are allowed to go. And we continue to face the challenges of a rapidly warming climate, new and expanding technologies, and the pressures of development. This is a period of unprecedented change in transportation, presenting incredible opportunities and potential challenges for the Missoula area and our residents, workers, and visitors. These changes have the potential to increase accessibility, but also to increase inequalities.



The ways we move and the ways mobility is provided will be different tomorrow than they are today.



Expanding the pie

There's never enough money to design or build all the projects that are needed in our region. Nor is there enough funding available each year to take care of our transportation system's basic maintenance needs. We can make the dollars we have stretch further by focusing on lower cost and higher impact investments. And we must also seek opportunities to expand the funding sources that are available for transportation projects, by looking beyond the gas tax and considering public-private partnerships.



Failing to maintain our infrastructure is similar to making only the minimum payment on a credit card bill each month—deferring maintenance compounds the problem, just like monthly interest payments!



Leading with values

Missoula's past planning efforts have helped to articulate what matters most to our residents: preserving what's great about this region while leading the way to a more sustainable future. Missoula Connect gives us the opportunity to translate our core values into decision-making tools to prioritize how we use limited resources. If we are guided by our values—which include sustainability; safety; access to jobs, schools, and services; and creating more options for all—we can develop a transportation system that is both resilient and adaptable, one that is ready for whatever the future holds.



Missoula area residents were invited to share the mobility values that matter most to them. Sustainability was the most often selected value, with safety and access to jobs, schools, and services close behind.



Working together

We need your help! To plan and fund the transportation system Missoula wants—both today and in 2050—requires commitment and decisive action. We must be guided by our values, which are key to identifying projects and programs that will help us achieve our goals. There's a lot of good work to build upon, so we're not starting from scratch. Throughout 2020, we'll invite you to share your ideas and priorities with our team. Missoula Connect must reflect what matters to you, and we hope to hear from you regularly.

Join us as
we create
**Missoula
Connect!**



Visit us at our website for more information:
<https://www.missoulampo.com/long-range-transportation-plan>



2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan

