

# Safe Routes to School – White Paper



**To:** Jim Olson, *City of Ashland*

**Cc:** Project Management Team

**From:** Adrian Witte, *Alta Planning + Design*

**Date:** February 4, 2011

**Re:** Task 7.1.N White Paper: "Safe Routes to School" - DRAFT

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## Direction to the Planning Commission and Transportation Commission

Five sets of white papers are being produced to present information on tools, opportunities, and potential strategies that could help Ashland become a nationwide leader as a green transportation community. Each white paper will present general information regarding a topic and then provide ideas on where and how that tool, strategy, and/or policy could be used within Ashland.

You will have the opportunity to review the content of each white paper and share your thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas in a joint Planning Commission/Transportation Commission meeting. Based on discussions at the meeting, the material in the white paper will be: 1) Revised and incorporated into the alternatives analysis for the draft TSP; or 2) Eliminated from consideration and excluded from the alternatives analysis. The overall intent of the white paper series is to explore opportunities and discuss the many possibilities for Ashland.

## Introduction

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program promotes walking and bicycling to school. This results in less traffic around schools and improved health and safety for students and the surrounding communities. The continuing use of these modes into teenage and adult years is one possible legacy of these programs. SRTS works through the integration of the five E's: education, encouragement, engineering, enforcement, and evaluation. These are described below along with examples of each.

It is our understanding that none of the schools in Ashland have complete SRTS plans, although a number have prepared a SRTS Action Plan, which is the first step towards applying for funding through the Oregon Safe Routes to School Program (<http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/saferoutes.shtml>). The Oregon SRTS program "administers federal funds received from the 2005 SAFETEA-LU transportation bill" and although

this bill has not been reauthorized to date, the program is currently operating on a continuing resolution through which funding is available for:

- Infrastructure projects within two miles of the school chosen from a competitive state-wide application process that includes a Notice of Intent / Action Plan, typically due sometime in mid-November and a full application typically due in mid-January. In 2011, approximately \$2.2 million of federal funds were available for “projects that improve safety around Oregon schools”; and
- Non-infrastructure activities (education, encouragement, and enforcement) within two miles of the school.

The City of Ashland has worked with local schools to identify preferred student travel routes for both walking and bicycling. A comparison of these routes to the existing sidewalk network (see Technical Memorandum #3 dated 20<sup>th</sup> September 2010) and the proposed bike and shared-use path network (see the Bicycle Routes and Boulevards Draft White Paper dated 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011) is included in the Engineering section below.

## Education

Educational programs teach students bicycle, pedestrian and traffic safety skills, and teach drivers how to share the road safely. SRTS can provide classroom lessons that educate students about basic safety while inspiring them to experience the benefits of walking and bicycling. Examples of SRTS education programs include:

- **Bike Safety Education:** gives school children the opportunity to learn bike handling, helmet and bike fitting, rules of the road, and safety skills through classroom activities and on-bike experience. Students learn how to be safe, predictable cyclists.
- **Pedal Power:** is an after-school program to expand bike safety skills and get experience riding to favorite neighborhood destinations.
- **Pedestrian Safety Education:** teaches young school children how to safely walk on urban streets, choose appropriate routes for walking, safely cross streets, and respond to unsafe situations.
- **Child Passenger Safety:** this program educates Kindergarten and 1st grade students and parents about the need for children to sit in the back seat and properly use seat belts, car seats, and booster seats when in a motor vehicle. Parents are provided information and coupons for booster and safety seat cost reductions at area seat fitting stations.

## Encouragement

Encouragement programs include special events, clubs, contests and ongoing activities at schools that encourage more walking and bicycling through fun and incentives. Encouragement programs can offer many tools including guidebooks, events, and outreach activities. Examples of SRTS encouragement programs include:

- **Walking School Bus:** where a group of students supervised by adult parents or volunteers who walk, scooter, skateboard, rollerblade, or wheelchair to and from school. The “bus” travels along the same route and participants join in along the way.
- **International or School-Wide Walk + Bike Days:** these are identified days or special events where walking or riding to school is heavily promoted. Promotions such as raffles to win free bikes and other prizes can encourage participation.

## Engineering

Traffic engineering identifies potential solutions to alleviate barriers to walking and bicycling. This includes design, implementation and maintenance of signing, striping, and traffic calming infrastructure improvements near schools. The Portland SRTS program included “a City SR2S traffic engineer working with school teams to identify needed physical improvements, such as: crosswalks, pedestrian refuge islands, curb extensions, signing, and striping to improve traffic operations around the school. These improvements can also provide better connections, reduce vehicle speeds, and improve safety”.

Engineering components of the SRTS plan form the basis for input into network development tasks of the Transportation System Plan.

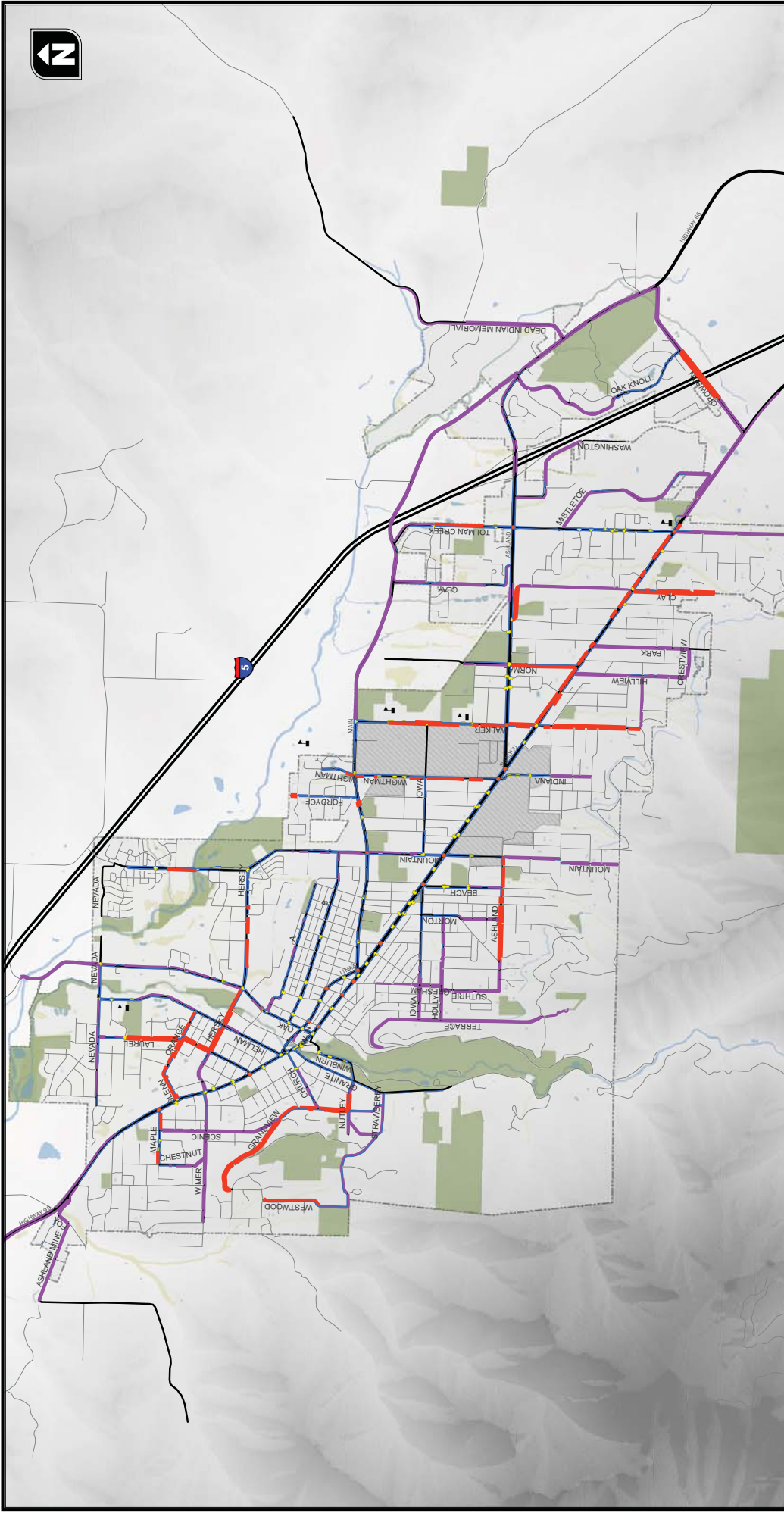
The City of Ashland has worked with local schools to identify preferred student travel routes for both walking and bicycling. These routes are included in **Appendix A** for the Walker Elementary, John Muir Elementary, Ashland Middle, Helman Elementary, and Bellview Elementary schools and the Willow Wind Community Learning Center, and were compared to the existing sidewalk and shared use path network as well as the proposed bike network prepared as part of the Bicycle Routes and Boulevards Draft White Paper (dated 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011).

For walking routes to school, Figure 19 from Technical Memorandum #3 (dated 20<sup>th</sup> September 2010) shows gaps in the existing sidewalk network. Sections that overlap with SRTS routes should be prioritized for implementation as part of the Transportation System Plan. These gaps are shown on **Figure 1**.

Many of the bicycle routes to school utilize low volume traffic streets, shared use paths, and protected arterial crossings to get students to or from school safely. The proposed bike network covers many of the existing gaps in the SRTS routes. However, several bike facility segments were added to the proposed network plan including bicycle boulevards along Laurel Street and Webster Street. An updated Proposed Bikeway Network Plan is included on **Figure 2**.

## Enforcement

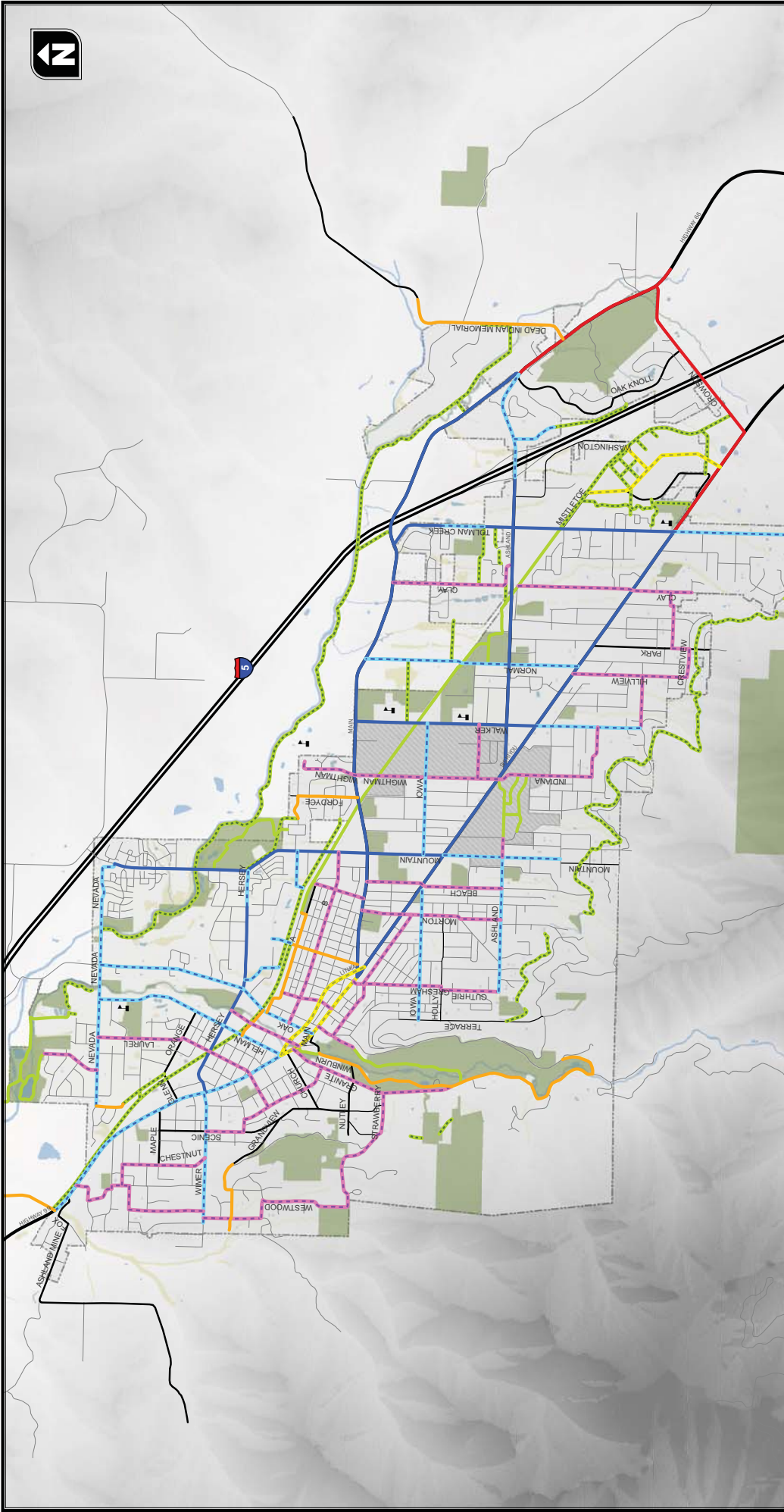
SRTS programs work with local law enforcement agencies to increase traffic enforcement around schools. Enforcement strategies deter unsafe behavior of drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians and help all road users to obey traffic safety laws and to share the road. These usually consist of forming a partnership with Police and school neighborhoods to increase awareness and reduce the frequency of traffic safety problems through areas such as speed reduction and crosswalk enforcement.



**Pedestrian Network Gaps**

**Figure 1**





- On-Street Bikeways**
- Existing Bike Lane
  - Existing Shared Roadway
  - Existing Shoulder Lane
  - Proposed Bike Lane
  - Proposed Protected Bikeway
  - Proposed Bicycle Boulevard
- Off-Street Trails**
- Existing Bike Path/Greenway
  - Proposed Bike Path/Greenway
- Other Features**
- Rivers
  - Parks
  - Wetlands
  - City Limits

## DRAFT - Existing and Proposed Bikeway Network



## Evaluation

SRTS incorporates evaluation of its success to improve the program into the future. Evaluation can include monitoring the effectiveness of SRTS through student and parent surveys, specific counts of how students travel to school, and strategy meetings with stakeholders. As an example, surveys were used to measure the change in travel patterns to school for the Portland Safer Routes to School project and showed a 10% increase in walking and 5% increase in bicycling from fall 2005 to spring 2006.

## Application in Ashland

Complete Safe Routes to School Plans have not been completed for any of the local schools. However, it is understood that “Action Plans” have been prepared for a number of schools as the first step in the application process for Oregon Safe Routes to School funding. The preparation of SRTS Plans or Action Plans should be confirmed with the Ashland School District. The City has worked with local schools to prepare preferred walking and bicycling routes for each school. Many of these routes are consistent with proposed future trail and bikeway network improvements (as identified by this TSP) and there may be an opportunity to apply for SRTS funding to implement some of these projects.

It is recommended that the SRTS Action Plans (or a similar planning study) be conducted for all area schools regardless of whether further funding is desired to baseline existing travel patterns and identify travel to school issues. For those schools with significant infrastructure related issues, application to the next round of Oregon SRTS funding should be considered. Where existing travel patterns are below City and/or school expectations, application for program funding should be considered.

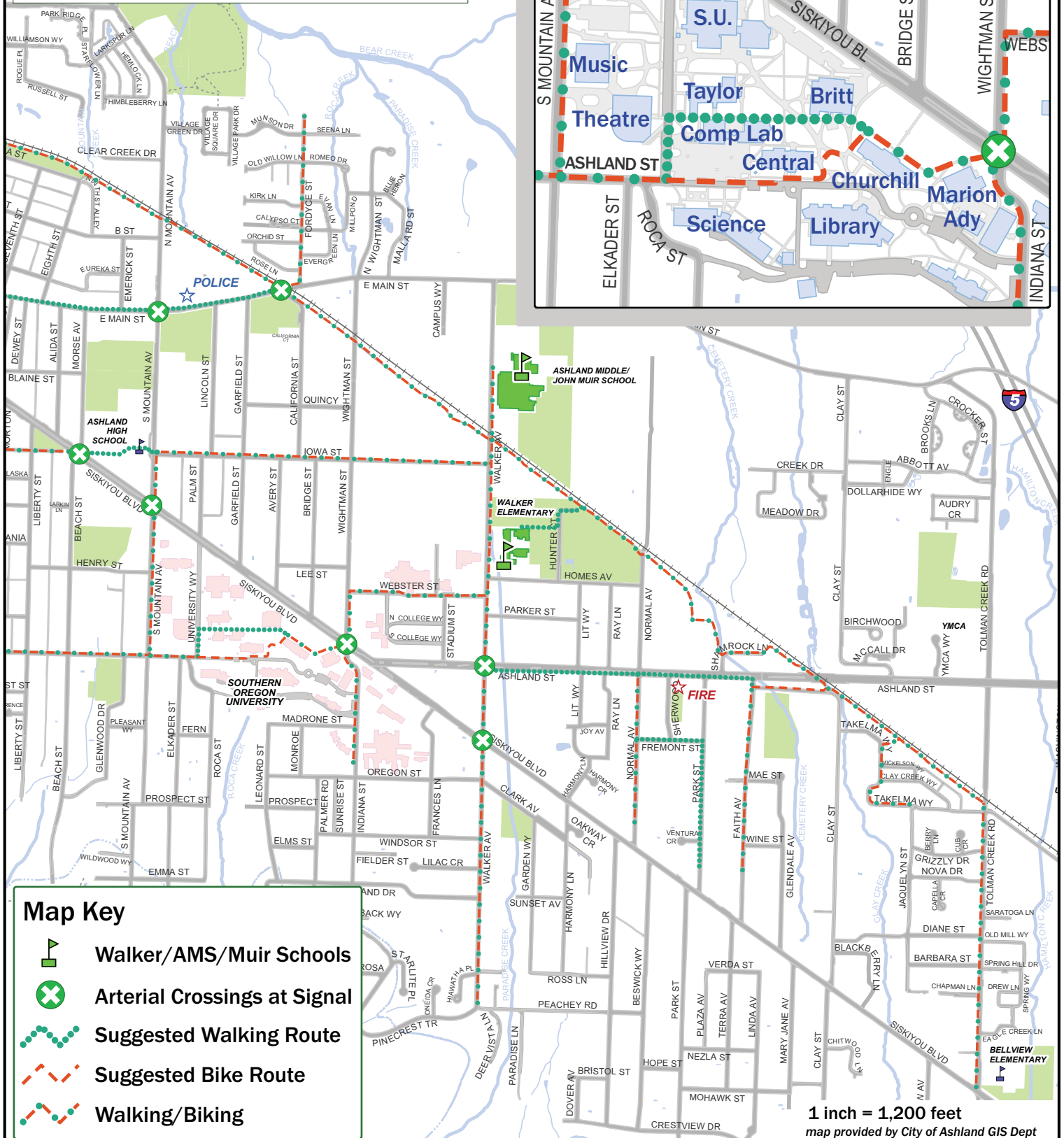
Engineering recommendations can be integrated into the transportation network plan developed as part of this TSP and any programmatic recommendations that require support from the City should be rolled into existing programs or created as new items requiring staff attention and resources.

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**Appendix A**  
**Safe Routes to School Maps**  
**City of Ashland**

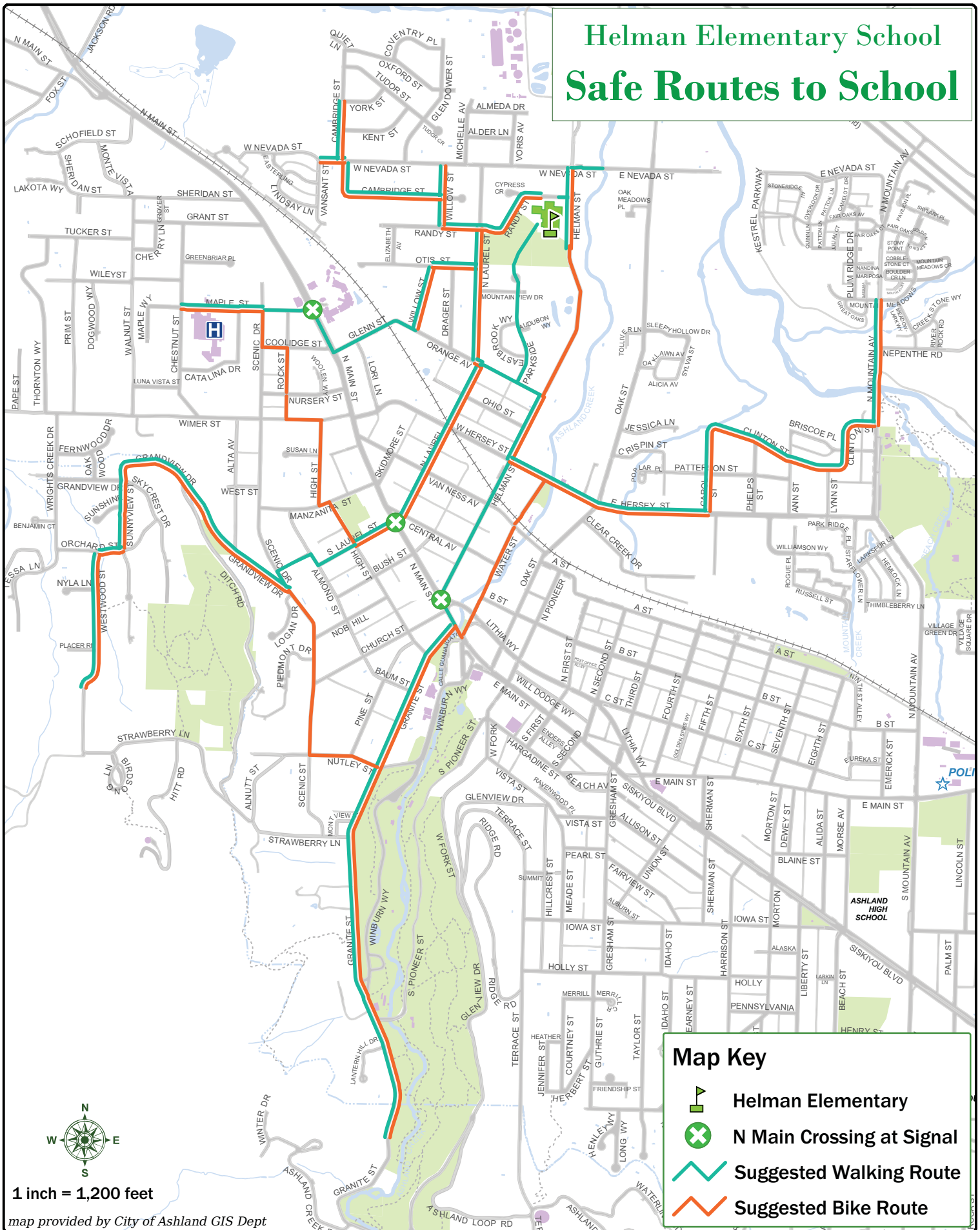
Walker Elementary School  
John Muir School  
Ashland Middle School  
**Safe Routes to School**

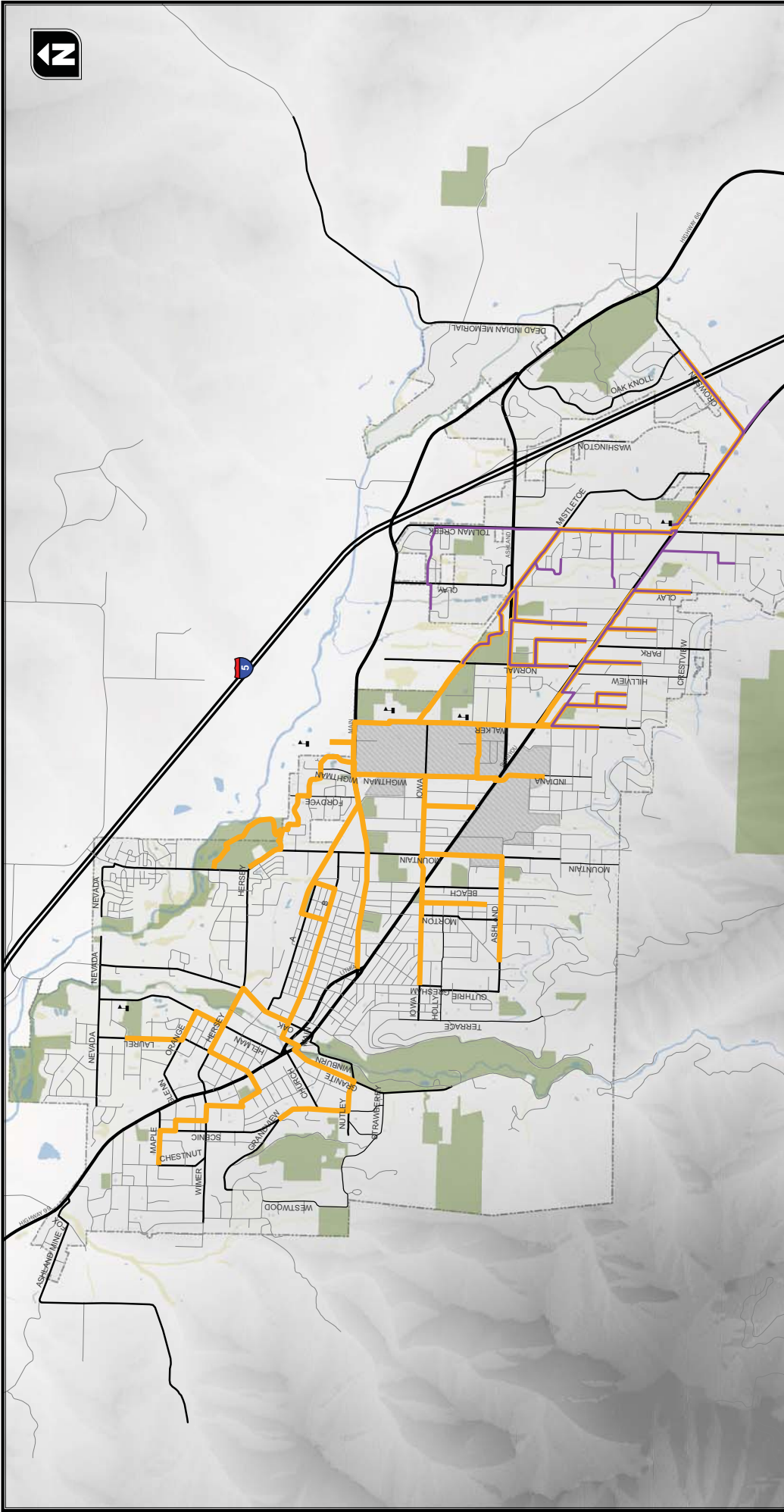
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# Helman Elementary School Safe Routes to School





Legend:

- Bellview Elementary Safe Routes
- Willow Wind Community Learning Center Safe Routes
- Rivers
- Wetlands
- Parks
- City Limits

Based on information prepared by the City of Ashland

## Bellview and Willow Wind Safe Routes to School



Figure