



Working together to plan for the future

News Release

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COMPASS to Install Bicycle and Pedestrian Counters

Meridian, ID – The Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) has a new tool in its toolbox. From time to time you have probably seen rubber tubes laying across roads to count the cars that drive over them. However, in the Treasure Valley we haven't had the ability to collect that type of data on bicycle and pedestrian routes...until now.

COMPASS has recently purchased automated bicycle/pedestrian counters to collect data on bicycle and pedestrian use that will help COMPASS, and its member agencies, do a better job of planning for regional and local bicycle and pedestrian needs. The counters will provide information such as the numbers of bicyclists and pedestrians using certain routes, and the days of week and times of day they are using them.

"This information will help us understand not only how many people are using pathways, but also how different pathways are being used," explains COMPASS Assistant Planner Tom Laws. "For example, high usage during 'rush hour' tells us that the route is used by commuters; high use on weekends tells us that the route is being used for recreation."

Bicycle/pedestrian counters will be permanently installed at 12 locations throughout Ada and Canyon Counties. These permanent counters are the first of their kind in Idaho. The locations for the counters were chosen with input from a 40-member Active Transportation Workgroup. The counters will be installed on or near dedicated biking and/or walking paths in both large and small communities. Installation is scheduled to begin August 18, 2015; all 12 permanent counters are scheduled to be installed by mid-September.

In addition to the permanent counters, which will focus on dedicated biking and walking paths, COMPASS has also purchased portable bicycle/pedestrian counters which can be used on trails, roads, and at intersections. These portable counters can capture a lot of information about a small area, then be moved to do the same in a different area. When several portable counters are used together, they can measure all the bicycle and pedestrian movements at an entire intersection at one time.

Together, the data from both types of counters will fill a gap in what is known about bicycle and pedestrian use in the two counties. COMPASS currently has a method to examine the "supply" side of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. "We can map existing bike lanes, paths, and sidewalks, and measure the characteristics that make them more or less appealing for biking and walking," explains Laws. "This new data will help us examine the 'demand' side of the equation. We'll be able to determine if people are using existing sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths, or if they using other routes that we haven't anticipated."

With the new counters, COMPASS will be able to look at the two types of data together to see where improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is needed. The permanent counters will also help track trends over time, to see if and how the numbers of users change by time of day, day of week, and month of year.

"All the data will be used to inform regional and local planning. We have a lot of anecdotal information on bicycle and pedestrian use that we will soon be able to confirm – or deny – with this new data. The more we understand, the better we can plan. The better we plan, the better we can serve Ada and Canyon County residents, which ultimately is what it's all about," summarizes Laws.