

## About the Southwest Michigan Bikeway (KATS “Map 7”)

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As currently planned, the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** could ultimately connect some 30 townships, villages, cities, unincorporated communities and institutions of higher learning in a well-signed network of bike routes spanning the entire KATS metropolitan planning organization. It has the potential to extend much further.

The **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** offers a relatively low-cost (est. \$400-\$2,000 per centerline mile) opportunity to boost our intermodal transportation system, economic development, livability, healthy lifestyles, tourism and reputation, among many other benefits. It recognizes the growing popularity of bicycling across the nation. Perhaps most of all, it will help increase the awareness of bicyclists and motorists that, when they are on those roads, they are following connections that are *most* preferred among the many alternative ways to get to and from those communities.

Mapping the on-road bike routes took hundreds and hundreds of hours of time generously contributed by many elected officials, planners, engineers and other stakeholders. Bike routes use a wayfinding approach that seems to have a track record for safety comparable in many ways to bike lanes, although authorities we have studied to date are careful not to make cause-effect claims in that regard.

The route planning effort kicked off in a public meeting on October 25, 2012 at the Kalamazoo County Road Commission (as RCKC was then known). Managing Director Joanna Johnson outlined considerations for bike route mapping to a room packed with civic and business leaders, engineers and planners, community promoters and bicycling stakeholders. Those considerations, coupled with other authoritative sources such as the Michigan Department of Transportation have since guided our efforts.

Between 2012 and 2016 close to 400 route alternatives were narrowed down in accordance with prevailing authorities and some 20 factors, safety being foremost among them. Of the feasible ways to and from point A and point B, less than one in four was “*most preferred*.” The bike routes were vetted by KATS staff, recommended for adoption by its Technical Committee and adopted on April 26, 2016 by its Policy Committee as “Map 7” on page 148 of the KATS 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

The collaborative, systematic mapping process and the names of the individuals who directly contributed to the development of the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** over a three year period are presented in the detailed appendices of [KATS 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan](#).

Upon its adoption--responding to interest surveys--elected officials and planners from townships, villages, cities and agencies worked collegially with bicyclists and other key stakeholders to explore steps to implement this regional vision of connectivity. In our area, bike routes that span multiple jurisdictions did not exist. Succinct, easy to follow guidelines for how to cooperate, fund, sign them appropriately, estimate budgets, explain their benefits, and many other details, did not exist either.

That pioneering group--now the Kalamazoo Region Bike Route Committee or KRBRC--has met regularly since April 2016 to figure out how to go about implementing the segments of the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** that pass through, begin and end in their jurisdictions. Meeting on a regular basis, KRBRC's purpose was to uncover, share and offer helpful recommendations that interested jurisdictions and agencies can use to install this precedent-setting wayfinding network as they see best.

Enough progress has been made so that the goal to implement “Map 7,” the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway**, is now formally supported and encouraged by resolutions adopted by many of KRBRC's participants. On January 23, 2018 the Road Commission of Kalamazoo County adopted a Sign Policy that paves the way for installing and maintaining the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** signs on roads under its jurisdiction. As with any complex effort, more work remains on the details, but the vision is clear.

Even now, the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** is something we can all point to and be proud of. Its scope is big. The tremendous level of intergovernmental and inter-agency support and encouragement for the effort shows that the heart of this community and its willingness to collaborate are even bigger.