

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

As currently planned the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** is envisioned to connect some 30 townships, villages, cities, unincorporated communities and institutions of higher learning spanning the entire KATS metropolitan planning organization in a well-signed transportation/bicycle wayfinding network. From this base it offers potential extensions north, south, east and west.

The **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** offers a relatively low cost (est. \$400-\$2,000 per centerline mile) opportunity to enhance our intermodal transportation system, economic development, livability, healthy lifestyles, tourism and reputation, among many other benefits. Though primarily transportation oriented, it recognizes the growing popularity of bicycling across the nation and puts bicycling amenities within reach of almost any of our communities. Perhaps most importantly, it will help increase the awareness of bicyclists and motorists that, when they are on the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway**, they are following connections that are *most* preferred among the many alternative routes that connect its destinations.

Mapping the routes took hundreds and hundreds of hours of time generously contributed by many elected officials, planners, engineers and key 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.

This unprecedented placemaking effort kicked off in a public meeting on October 25, 2012 hosted by 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 from the Michigan Department of Transportation, guided the effort.

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 many feasible ways between points A and B, less than one in four was “*most* preferred.” The 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 those three years are detailed in the appendices of the [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.

This group--the Kalamazoo Region Bike Route Committee (KRBRC)--has been meeting regularly since April 2016 to figure out how to implement the stretches of the **Southwest Michigan Bikeway** that begin, end and pass through their jurisdictions. KRBRC's purpose has been to uncover and share information and offer recommendations that interested jurisdictions and agencies can use to install this precedent-setting wayfinding network as they see best. Its quarterly meetings are public, and invitations to participate have been announced repeatedly. Our recommendations are publicly available.

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 and policies adopted by many of KRBRC's participants. As with any complex effort, work remains to iron out important details (e.g., on a mutually agreeable collaborative cross-jurisdictional sign design/location guide), 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.