

SHAW MIDDLE SCHOOL WALKABILITY ASSESSMENT

Project Summary

This collaborative project focused on connections between physical activity, education, health and public infrastructure in the area around Shaw Middle School in northeast Spokane.

Starting with an inventory of existing infrastructure for walking and bicycling, the project engaged the local community through a health impact assessment (HIA) evaluating walkability gaps and challenges. The project then identified locations for improvements using the Pedestrian Accessibility Measure (PAM) developed by Toole Design, followed by project selection and planning by partner organizations.

Supported by a Walkability Action Institute grant procured by the Spokane Regional Transportation Council through the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, the project launched in spring of 2019 and completed the assessment in spring of 2020.



Photo: Shaw Middle School Opening. Source: Spokesman-Review

Project Partners



KEY FINDINGS

Existing Conditions

- High concentration of community resources
- Barriers posed by Crestline Street and Wellesley Avenue

Recommendations

- Crossing improvement at Cook and Wellesley
Funded
- Garland Avenue walk and bike improvements
Funded
- Neighborhood Greenway on Cook from Illinois Ave to Francis Ave.
- Crossing improvement at neighborhood streets along Crestline Street

Forecasted Benefits

- Increased walkability radius for safe walking and bicycling to Shaw Middle School
- Improved safety for students walking to school, the library and the community center

For more information:

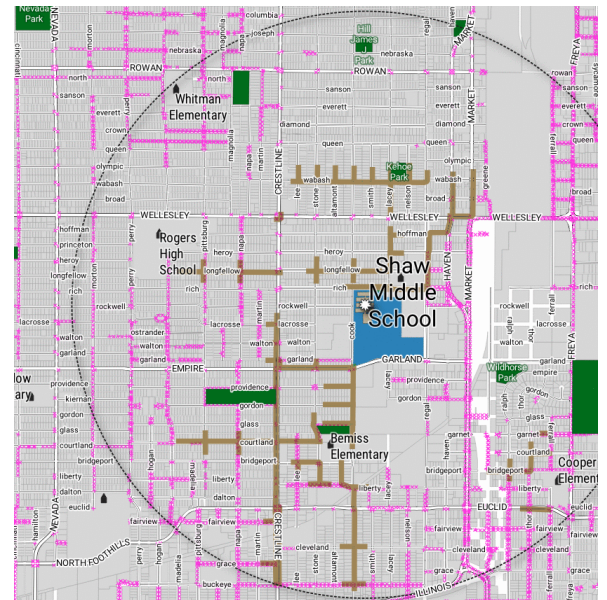
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I. Existing Conditions

The existing conditions in the 1-mile radius around Shaw Middle School, and adjoining community destinations, consisted primarily of low-volume and low-speed local neighborhood streets bisected by higher-volume and high-speed arterial and collector streets.

The nearby local streets largely included sidewalks with curb ramps, often bordered by planted park strips and street trees. Walkability barriers on local streets consisted primarily of one to two-block gaps in sidewalks and street paving. In general, these neighborhood streets provided high-quality walking routes for students, employees and community members accessing destinations around Shaw Middle School including the Hillyard Public Library, the Northeast Community Center, Newtech Skill Center, Regal Elementary, and the local United States Postal Service Office.

Arterial and collector streets such as Crestline Street, Wellesley Avenue, Market Street, and Garland/Empire Avenue posed major barriers to walking and bicycling, creating safety risks that interrupted the low-speed neighborhood street network.



Map: Shaw Middle School Walking Radius and existing safe walking routes (pink) and recommended Safe Routes to School Routes (brown).

II. Health Impact Assessment

The Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) led a Health Impact Assessment (HIS) to help decision makers understand the health implications of walkability investments in the area around Shaw Middle School. The HIS followed a systematic process to synthesize quantitative data, best available evidence, and input from stakeholders to assess the potential direct and indirect health impacts of potential investments. This process helps decision makers by providing actionable recommendations to minimize negative health effects and maximize benefits.

The process included extensive public participation with students at Shaw Middle School as well as with community engaged by The Zone Project and at the Northeast Community Center. The process included qualitative data gathering including walkability assessments conducted through walking tours with stakeholders around the local neighborhood. These tours engaged community representatives to map challenges to safe walking as well as opportunities for safety improvements.



Graphic: Health Impact Assessment Steps

III. Pedestrian Accessibility Measure

To help assess the potential walkability benefits of various accessibility improvements, the City of Spokane hired Toole Design to conduct a modeling analysis of walking access and barriers in the neighborhood. Toole Design developed the Pedestrian Accessibility Measure (PAM) to carry out this assessment using geographic information systems.

To conduct this analysis, Toole Design documented existing street and sidewalk conditions including:

- Presence or absence of sidewalks,
- Presence or absence of safe crossings,
- Motor vehicle speeds,
- Motor vehicle volumes, and
- Number of travel lanes.

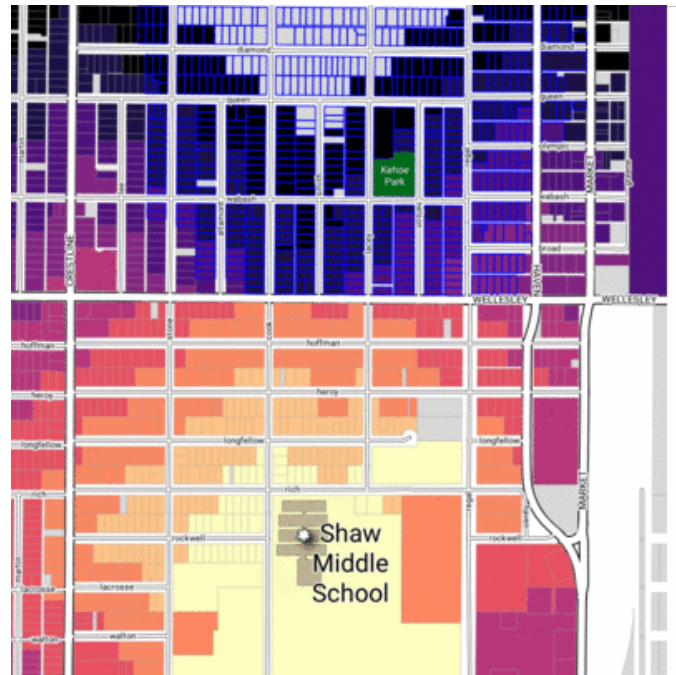
The analysis determined the area that could be covered safely by different types of people walking for a given distance. The assessment compared the walking area covered by three different populations: school aged youth, healthy adults, and aged or disabled populations. Baseline walkshed charts were first produced for existing conditions, as shown to in the top graphic to the right for healthy adults.

The assessment then ran the model with a series of adjustments to the baseline conditions. Adjustments focused on intersection crossing improvements to remove walking barriers, and then compared the area made available for safe walking for each population.

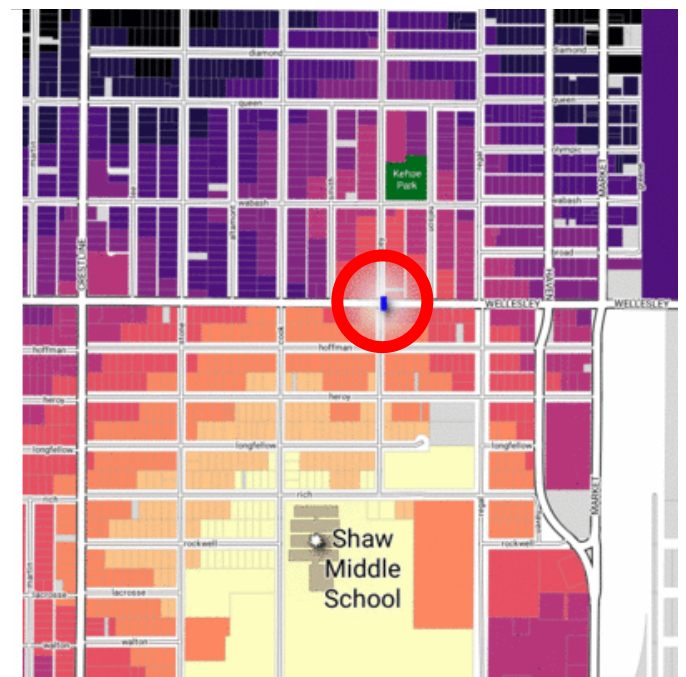
In summary, the process:

- 1) Identified barriers limiting walking accessibility,
- 2) Developed walk access profiles for barrier removal scenarios, and
- 3) Identified key locations for removing barriers or connecting across gaps in the walking network.

This process identified crossing improvements along Wellesley Avenue and Crestline Street as critical investments for improving safe walking access for all populations accessing Shaw Middle School and adjacent community services.



Graphic: Pedestrian Accessibility – Existing Conditions



Graphic: Pedestrian Accessibility with a crossing improvement at Wellesley Avenue and Lacey Street

IV. Infrastructure Recommendations

Based on high-priority locations identified through the Health Impact Assessment qualitative community engagement events and through the Pedestrian Accessibility Measure quantitative assessment, key locations and project types were identified for safety investments. These locations were discussed with Spokane Public Schools and City of Spokane staff to refine a list of projects with high potential for funding and grant support.

These projects are now in various stages of planning, funding and design. Funded projects include: redesigning and reconstruction Cook Street adjacent to Shaw Middle School to calm traffic and improve safety for students and community members accessing nearby resources, building a shared-use pathway along Garland Avenue from Market Street to Cook Street to connect the Children of the Sun Trail to neighborhood destinations, and improving the crossing of Cook Street at Wellesley Avenue for people walking and bicycling. Newly planned projects resulting from this study focus on establishing Neighborhood Greenway for safe walking and bicycling along Cook Street from Illinois Avenue on the south to Francis Avenue, as well as improving pedestrian crossings on Crestline Street between Garland Avenue and Wellesley Avenue.

V. Next Steps

Incorporating recommendations and information from this assessment, Spokane Public Schools and the City of Spokane determined strategies for planning, funding, designing and constructing the identified improvements for walking and bicycling.

As other middle schools undergo redevelopment and reconstruction, lessons from this project informed assessment and planning strategies for similar walking and accessibility improvements in adjoining neighborhoods. Project partners will continue using the methods and processes established by this project to inform future improvements as public schools continue to redevelop throughout Spokane. These planning strategies will support improved health outcomes by improving safe walking routes in neighborhoods throughout Spokane.



Graphic: Example improvement concept at Cook Street and Wellesley Avenue



Graphic: Cook Street Traffic Calming

Outcomes

This project:

- Identified existing barriers and opportunities.
- Mapped high priority location for addressing gaps.
- Supported planning, funding and design of projects to address key locations.