

4.2 Defining Critical Bicycle Transportation Links

The Regional Bicycle Transportation Network proposed in this Study is not designed to be an all-inclusive bicycle transportation system. The regional system will only maximize its potential if it is built out as planned, and if the local bicycle infrastructure provides strong and seamless connections to the regional network.

There are several types of barriers that can disrupt the connectivity of the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network and isolate communities and key destinations. The links to overcome these barriers are referred to as *Critical Bicycle Transportation Links* for this Study. Defining these critical links may help to facilitate the assessment of project proposals seeking regional funding through the regional solicitation process as directed by the Transportation Advisory Board.

Through the Study process the following definition was developed to provide solid direction for communities to identify and address system gaps where project solutions could be characterized as critical linkages.

Critical Bicycle Transportation Links

Perform one or more of the following functions:

- ▶ Serve to close a gap in the regional network
- ▶ Improve continuity and connections between jurisdictions (on or off-network)
- ▶ Remove a physical barrier (on or off-network)

Serve to close a gap in the regional network.

This Study includes a regional network of bikeway corridors and alignments that are proposed for inclusion in the TPP. Gaps in the existing regional network could be addressed in two ways:

- ▶ Improving bikeability within a Regional Bicycle Transportation Network corridor

to better serve all bicycling skill and the wide variety of experience levels within the corridor.

- ▶ Building a short (up to a 1/4-mile) but critical local link to or within a major regional destination, or to a major transit-oriented development on the regional transit system, or to a large transit center.

Improve continuity and connections between jurisdictions.

To some extent, each local government in the Twin Cities has employed their own approach to the provision of bicycle infrastructure. In some cases, a bikeway may extend to one city's border, and not carry through into the next city or county. Creating a more consistent, continuous and connected set of bicycle facilities will improve access to, and the overall bikeability of, the regional network.

Removing a physical barrier.

Crossing major physical barriers are a significant challenge in providing bicycle infrastructure. These barriers can be both natural and man-made such as major railway corridors, rivers and waterways, freeways and multi-lane arterials.

Projects that remove or provide more bikeable options around physical barriers can arise in a number of ways. Planning work may underscore the need for a bikeway to cross a major barrier. Additionally, other infrastructure projects such as roadway bridges over rivers or freeways can provide opportunities to create bicycle connections across one or several barriers, particularly in instances where there is not a useful parallel alternative within a reasonable biking distance.

By their nature, projects to remove physical barriers can prove costly, and opportunities to enhance such connections may be opportunity driven with respect to major highway improvement projects. Given the significant expense of building connections like

bridges or underpasses and their anticipated long design lives, it is advantageous to consider the inclusion of bicycle infrastructure in all projects that improve options to cross or get around these physical barriers, even if the full potential of the bicycle connection is not evident at the time of construction.