

APRIL 2019



ROSS TOWNSHIP **BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN**



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AUTHORITY OF ALLEGHENY COUNTY IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
AND THE RICHARD KING MELLON FOUNDATION.

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INTRODUCTION

In March 2017, Ross Township began its first comprehensive planning effort in the bicycle and pedestrian realm. This report documents the process and results of that planning effort and illustrates what steps the Township will need to take to implement these ideas.

This is a plan for all residents of Ross Township. The plan proposes infrastructure amenities that will enable Ross residents to walk and bike more safely to their homes, their jobs, their favorite parks, and their daily destinations. The intent of this plan is not to marginalize drivers, but to bring new transportation options to all.

Ross Township is part of a national trend of suburban communities calling for more walking and biking opportunities. The Township's Comprehensive Plan sets the goal of creating a multi-modal transportation system - something that residents requested several times through the comprehensive planning process. The comprehensive plan offers several action items that approach bicycle and pedestrian planning from a policy perspective. This plan supports the

Comprehensive Plan by offering implementable actions at a finer grain of detail.

This plan is a result of public input. This process is fully documented in this report. Ross residents worked together, listened to each other's concerns, and mapped out existing safe routes, unsafe routes, and desired destinations within and around the Township. These were assessed for feasibility and incorporated into a proposed network of routes. This network was further refined after a second public meeting.

The final proposed network is a collection of possibilities to be executed over time by the Township. This plan took the "make no small plans" approach and included as many options as possible. As these options are examined at the planning and engineering level, they may change from the concept presented here. Some routes may manifest that are not a part of this proposed network. The proposed network is a feasible reality, but there will be many opportunities moving forward for more community engagement, advocacy, and input.

FUNDING

Most funding streams will require a comprehensive, community supported plan. The Ross Township Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan will serve as this comprehensive plan when the Township seeks grants for bicycle and pedestrian improvements. While there are many moving parts on the path to implementation, this section should serve as a guide.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Following project prioritization, the Department of Public Works and the Department of Parks and Recreation should expect to devote staff time to implementing this plan. Public Works should reference the plan for all roadway improvements and incorporate the plan when completing overlapping projects. Staff from both departments should write proposals for competitive grants from the County, State, and Federal government in their respective fields of transportation and recreation. In addition to staff time, the Township must consider other costs for grant applications. Most grants require a match and some require the match to be earmarked prior to applying for the grant. The Township should include costs for construction in its Capital Improvements Plan for significant projects.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Allegheny County will be a crucial partner moving forward with the plan. Since the creation of the county-wide alternative transportation plan, Active Allegheny (2010), the County has offered the Active Allegheny Grant Program (AAGP) which provides financial assistance to municipalities for transportation planning and design that increase residents' opportunities for physical activity. This plan was funded by the AAGP and will make the Township more competitive for future AAGP funding. Most, if not all, projects in the plan are eligible for AAGP funds. The County should also have a role in the planning and coordination of multi-jurisdictional projects.

STATE AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

PennDOT has jurisdiction over many of Ross's major streets. These streets, such as McKnight Road and Perry Highway, extend far beyond Township lines and carry high volumes of traffic. PennDOT has control over its own roads and requires coordination for any projects related to these roads. This plan will help PennDOT planners incorporate Township desires into their roadway plans. Timing for implementation of this plan on PennDOT-owned roads will mostly occur on the schedule of PennDOT projects.

For state and federal funding opportunities, the Township should work with the Metropolitan Planning Organization; the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC). SPC oversees the allocation and obligation of state and federal transportation funds for the region. The Township should work to have SPC include major projects from this plan into the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRP) and the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). An LRP is a collection of significant regional transportation projects and the TIP is the plan that funds those projects.





PUBLIC PROCESS

PUBLIC MEETING 1

On November 5, 2017, Ross Township held the initial public meeting for the plan. Fifteen Ross residents participated in the activities of this meeting.

Following a brief overview of the project, attendees were invited to participate in three different stations where they could give their input on walking and biking in Ross. The stations included a visual preference survey; a strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities analysis; and a mapping exercise. The residents distributed themselves among the stations and could leave or join any station at will. Exhibits from the three stations are included in the Appendix.

VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

The visual preference survey (VPS) was designed to gain insights on participants' desired form and design of walking and biking infrastructure. The survey consisted of a series of photographs of different forms of infrastructure including: a trail, a two-way separated bike lane, a buffered bike lane, a bike lane with no physical buffer, a street with sharrows,

a quiet neighborhood street, a safe crossing, and a sidewalk. Each photo had four voting options including: comfortable enough for my children and me; comfortable enough for myself; uncomfortable for me, but I could manage, and; too uncomfortable for me. Participants were given stickers for voting.

Results of the VPS show a strong preference for physically separated walking and biking infrastructure. Trails, two-way separated bike lanes, and separated bike lanes had wide margins between "comfortable enough for my children and me" and "too uncomfortable for me." Bike lanes and sharrows had narrower margins, but skewed to the favorable side. Safe crossings and sidewalks also scored much more favorably than not. No category was universally disliked.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

The strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities (SWO) analysis was designed to capture the opinions of participants in their purest form. The SWO analysis allowed participants to provide as many comments as they wished among three categories: the strengths of



Community participants at the first public meeting

the Township, the weaknesses of its walking and biking infrastructure, and the opportunities the Township has to improve them. Participants wrote their thoughts on to sticky notes before placing them on the appropriate board.

In the strengths category, Ross' wide variety of shopping and recreation amenities and its proximity to Downtown Pittsburgh were the most discussed strengths. The second most-discussed strength was the strength of neighborhood communities within the Township.

For weaknesses, the major concern was connectivity, with comments identifying a lack of ability to move

between neighborhoods by foot and bike. Safety was another major concern with many residents citing unsafe conditions throughout the Township for cyclists and pedestrians. Many residents brought up the need for increased education and law enforcement - both in favor of cyclists and against them.

The opportunities board had the most comments, showing that participants had their own ideas about how to capitalize on strengths and minimize weaknesses. Most participants saw an opportunity in creating a more complete sidewalk network by connecting neighborhoods to major commercial



Sample of the Visual Preference Survey completed at the first public meeting

areas and recreation amenities. Other residents saw opportunities in increased education and law enforcement through stricter repercussions for speeding and/or aggressive motorists. Some participants believed that more restrictions should be placed on cyclists.

MAPPING EXERCISE

The mapping exercise was designed to get geographical input from participants. The activity split walking and biking into two separate maps and allowed participants to trace streets with coded highlighters. The participants identified barriers to walking and biking, preferred routes for walking and biking, and desired destinations to be reached by foot or bike.

The results of this exercise revealed the limited options available to Ross Township cyclists and pedestrians. On the pedestrian map, most routes were highlighted as barriers with participants

citing a lack of sidewalks and fast-moving traffic as the reason for the designation. A stretch of Perry Highway through the Perrysville commercial district was the only street designated as a preferred route, with all other preferred routes being off-street trails. In addition to being identified as a barrier, McKnight Road also had several intersections marked as unsafe, primarily due to bus stops being located at difficult crossings. Destinations on the pedestrian map were mainly commercial areas, but included schools and parks as well.

The cyclist map highlighted Babcock Boulevard as a somewhat safe route, giving it a dotted line under the preferred category. Participants indicated that some people consider the route safe as-is, and with improvements this route could be considered safe to a wider audience. The participants noted the barriers that present themselves for Pittsburgh-bound cyclists. Taking Babcock Boulevard to reach

Millvale through Shaler, a series of narrow bridges force cyclists into traffic due to narrow or non-existent road shoulders. For cyclists attempting to reach the East Street bike lane to Pittsburgh, Peoples Road and Perry Highway act as barriers both in terms of topography and in vehicle speed.

PUBLIC MEETING 2

On February 24, 2018, Ross Township held a second public meeting to reveal the draft proposed network of bicycle and pedestrian routes. This network combined the selected routes from the first meeting with routes added on unused Township-owned rights-of-way (paper streets). The attendees, roughly a dozen in number, reviewed each of the proposed routes and provide comments.

Much of this conversation focused on Babcock Boulevard which was designated to have bicycle lanes in the draft proposed network. Babcock is the resident-preferred bicycle route due to its steady slope and connectivity through the Township. However, the road has many constraints that will have to be addressed in order to be able to move forward. The primary concern was the presence of street-fronting parking lots. Many of these parking lots were created when residential homes converted into commercial businesses.



Officer Imekus maps out his bicycle patrol

The Township concluded the meeting with a listing of next steps for the plan. Public input would be incorporated for the final draft network, which would then be presented to the Planning Commission before finally going through the Township Board of Supervisors.

ONLINE SURVEY

After the February public meeting, the project team refined the draft proposed network based on public input. The project team posted this network and a draft of this plan as an attachment to a public survey. The survey gauged public opinion on increasing walking and cycling amenities in the Township and

offered Ross residents the opportunity to prioritize proposed walking and cycling projects. The survey was successful in gathering input and collected nearly 200 responses within a five-week period.

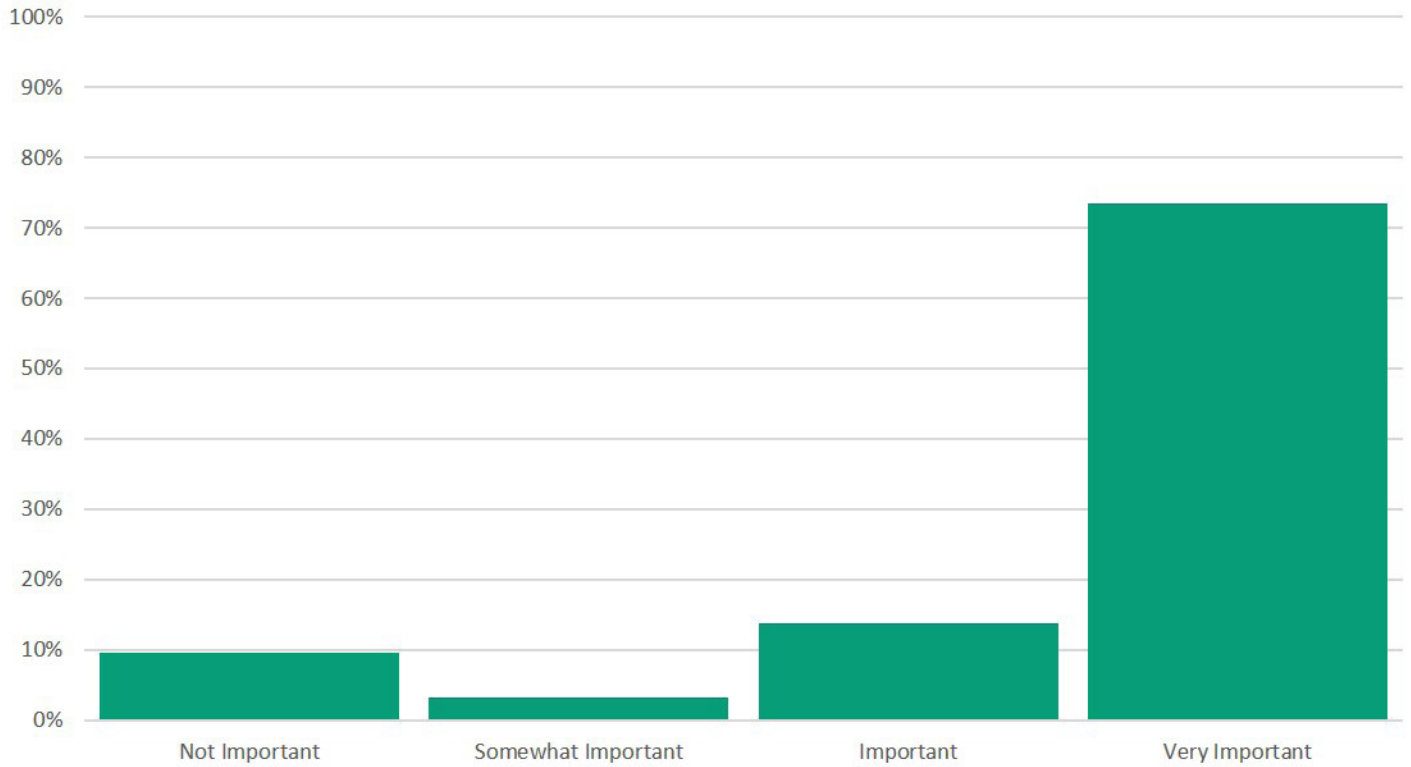
The results of the survey show a strong desire for increased walking and cycling amenities, with a preference for a broader pedestrian network. Most responders agreed that they would walk much more than they do today if the draft network was fully implemented. Though more responders said a fully developed cycling network would not affect their current cycling habits, the majority of responders said it would positively impact the amount they cycle.

In terms of prioritization, responders were asked to pick their top five projects. When tallied, the top five most-selected projects were:

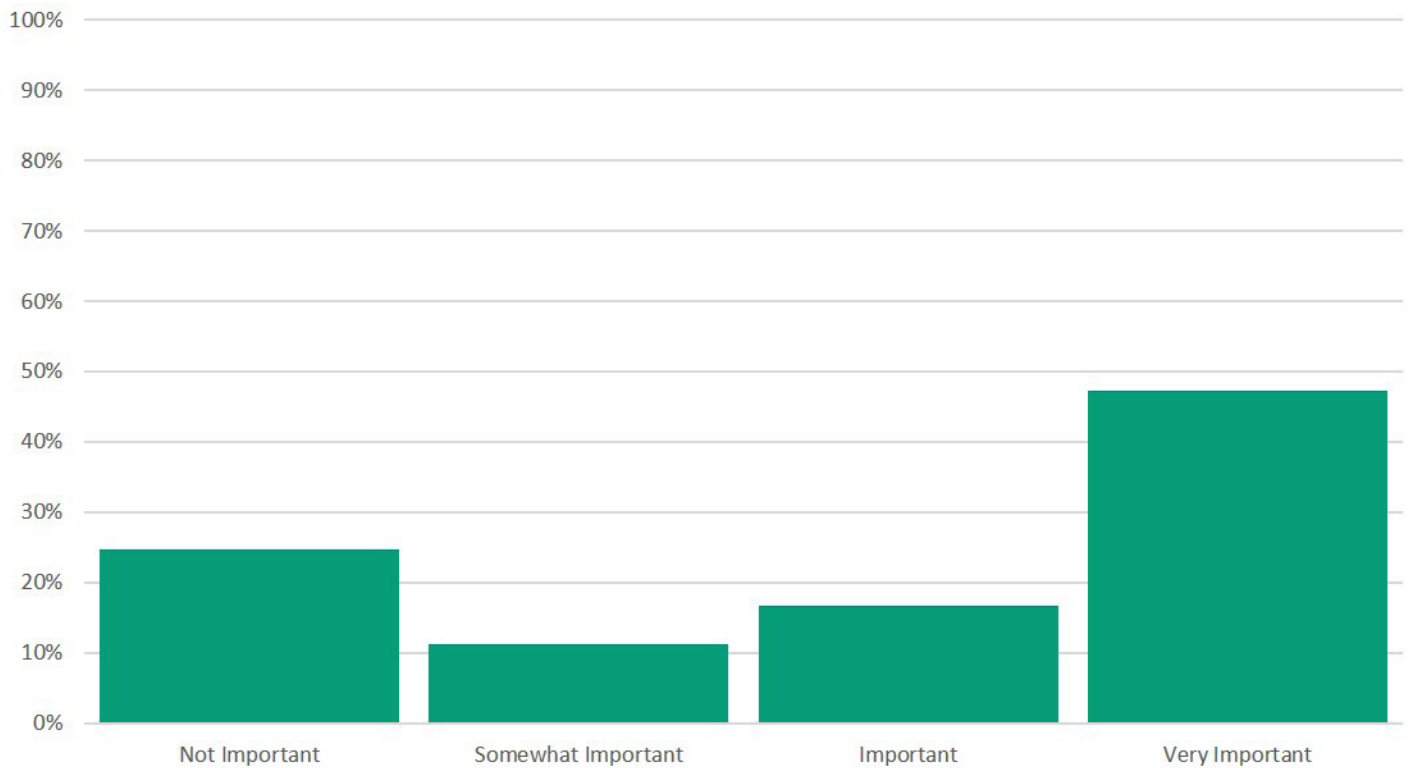
1. McKnight Pedestrian Network
2. McKnight to Babcock Connector
3. Babcock Bike Lanes
4. Siebert Sidewalks
5. Three Degree/Babcock Sidewalks

Included in the top five are the most expensive and difficult projects in the entire proposed network. Some of these, such as the McKnight Pedestrian Network, may have scored high due to their status as a connecting spine route. Full results of the survey in chart form can be found on the following pages.

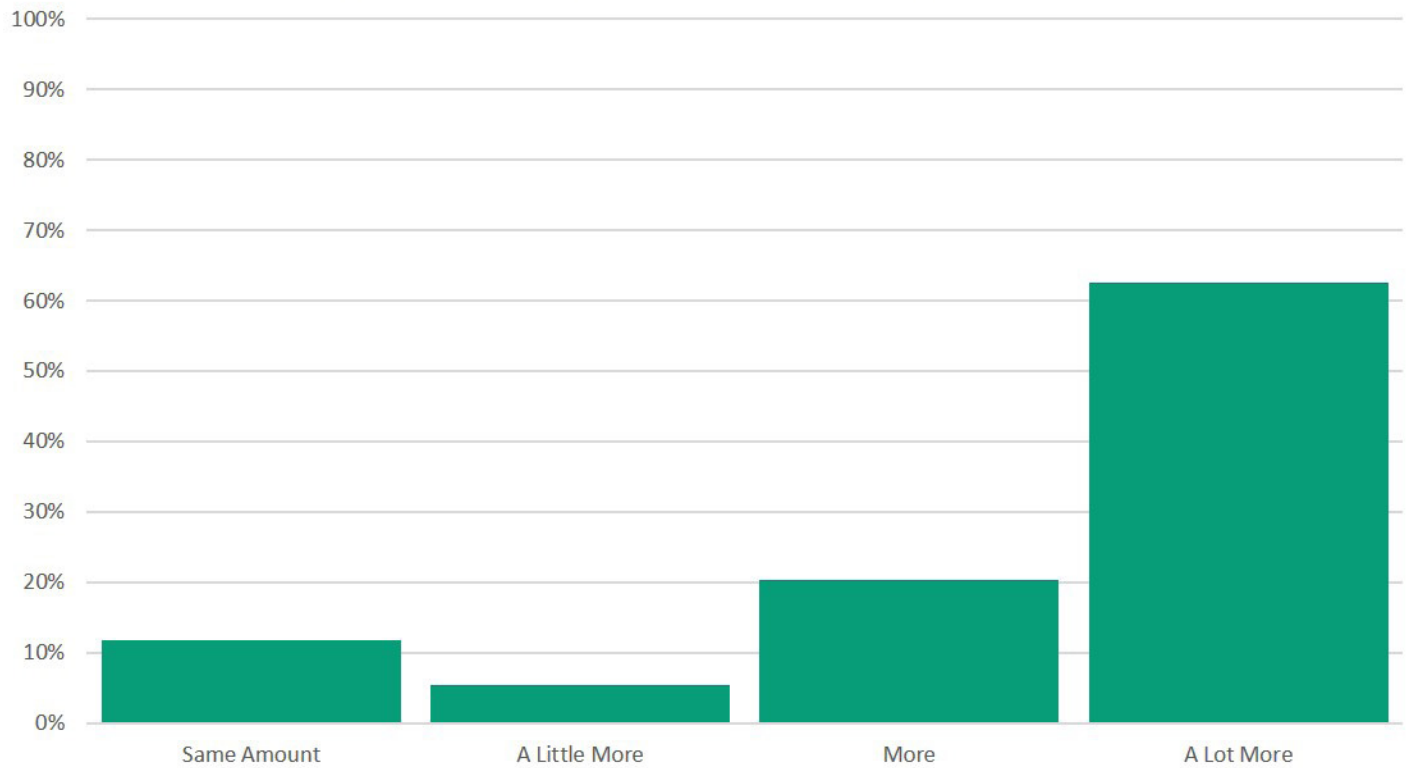
How important is an increase in sidewalks and trails for walking?



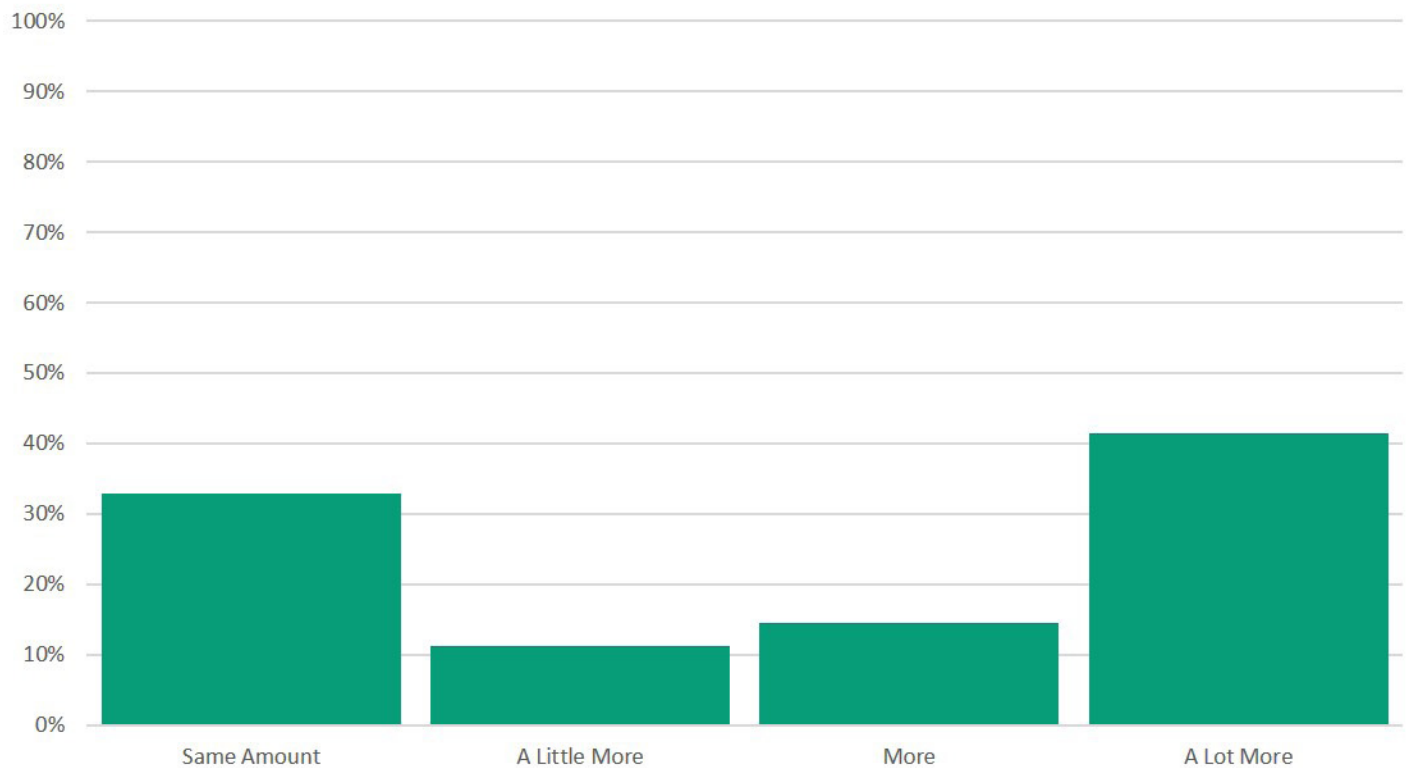
How important is an increase in lanes and trails for biking?



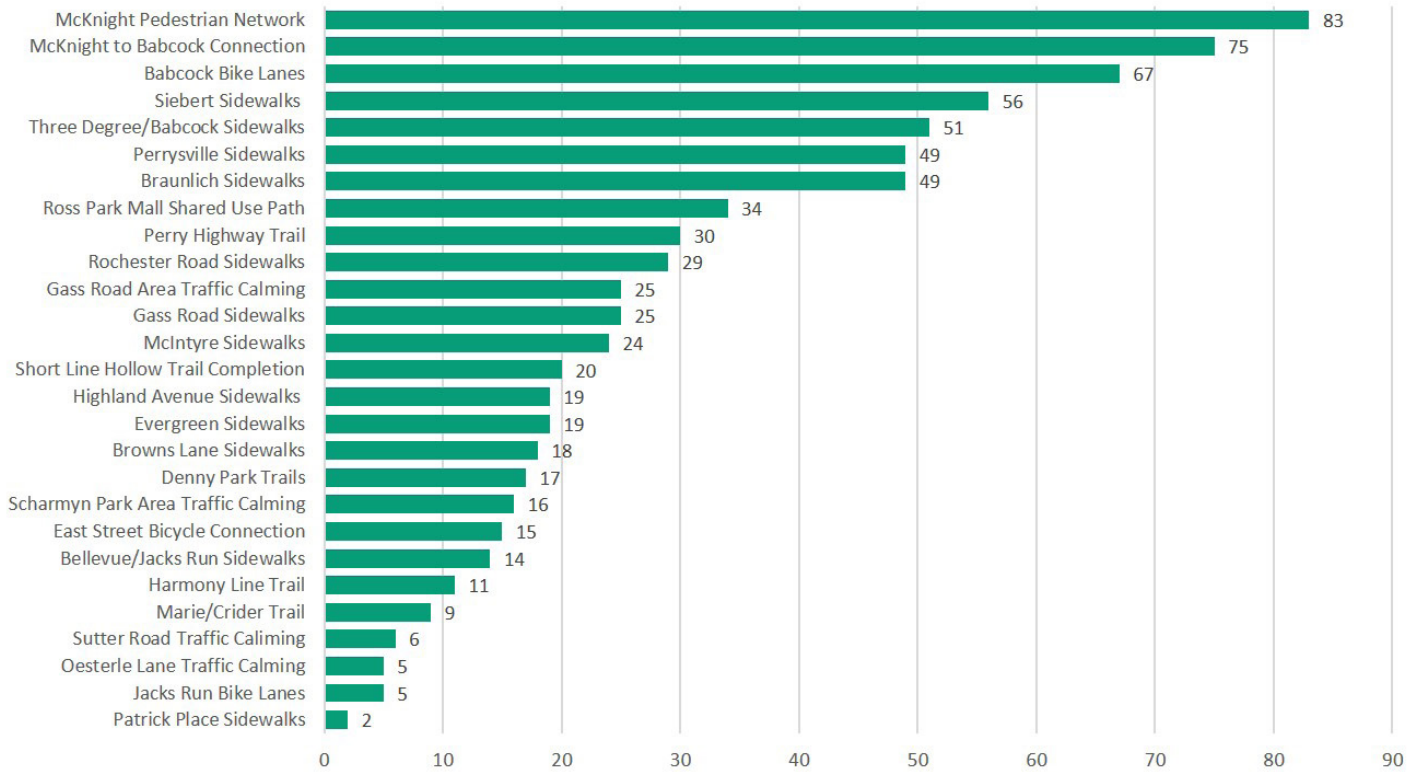
If this plan were fully implemented, would you walk more?



If this plan were fully implemented, would you bike more?



Which projects should be a top priority?





PROPOSED NETWORK

The proposed network (shown overall on the Exhibit following this page and in detail on four subsequent Exhibits) provides access to much of the Township and primarily serves to connect neighborhoods to key destinations. In total, the proposed improvements cover nearly 33 lane miles of the Township with about fourteen miles of pedestrian improvements, about thirteen miles of multi-use improvements, and about six miles of bicycle improvements. The project numbers correspond with the table on page 20.

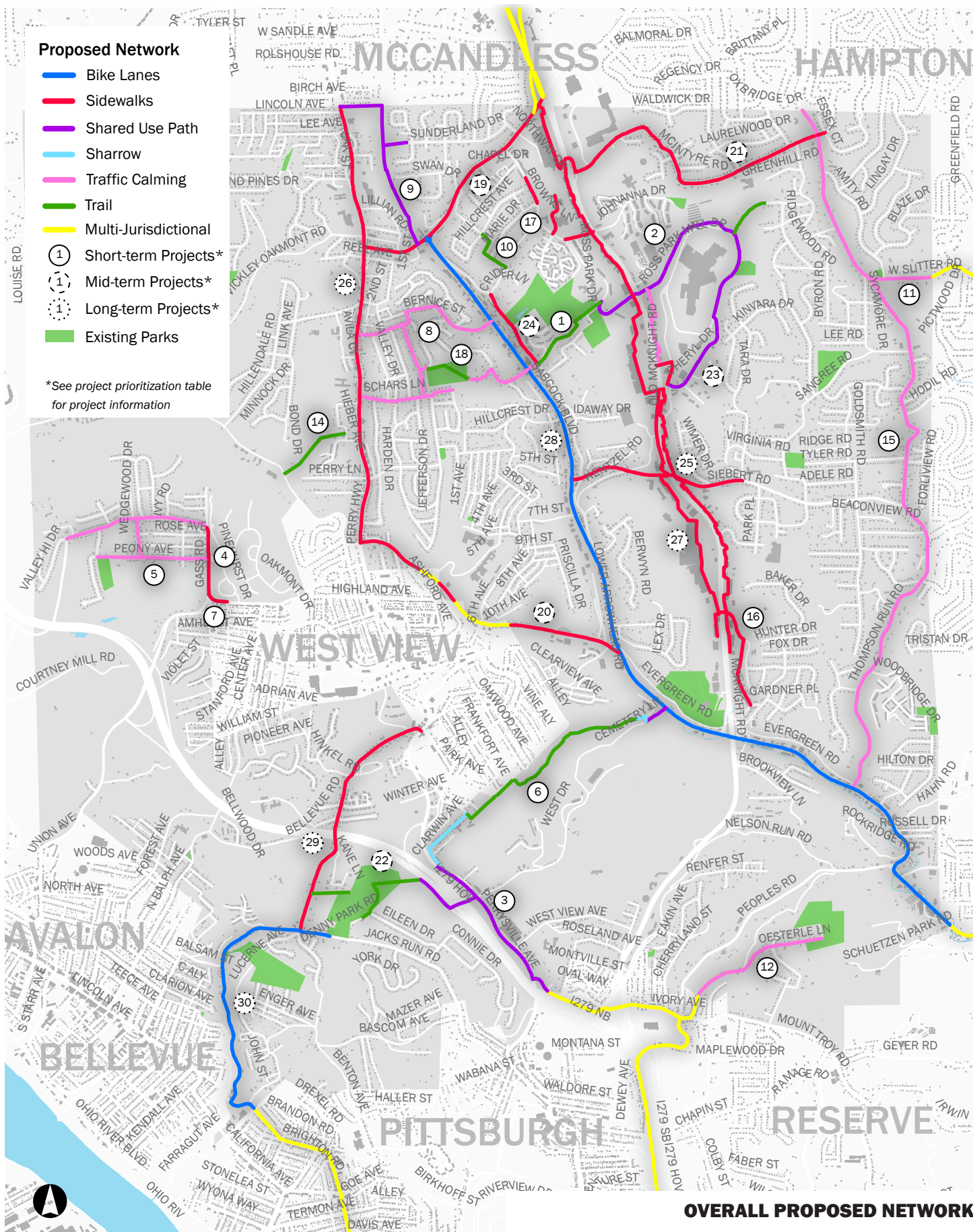
This plan divides the improvements into 36 projects based on the roads they occupy. It is likely that some of these projects may be phased or combined with other road improvements. While many of these projects, such as sidewalk projects, are ready for preliminary engineering, some will require additional engineering studies to move forward.. A small number of projects including Babcock Boulevard bike lanes and the McKnight Road Pedestrian Network will require intensive, ground-level planning before the route can be engineered. Some projects will require collaboration with neighboring jurisdictions to further connect Ross to the regional bicycle and pedestrian network.

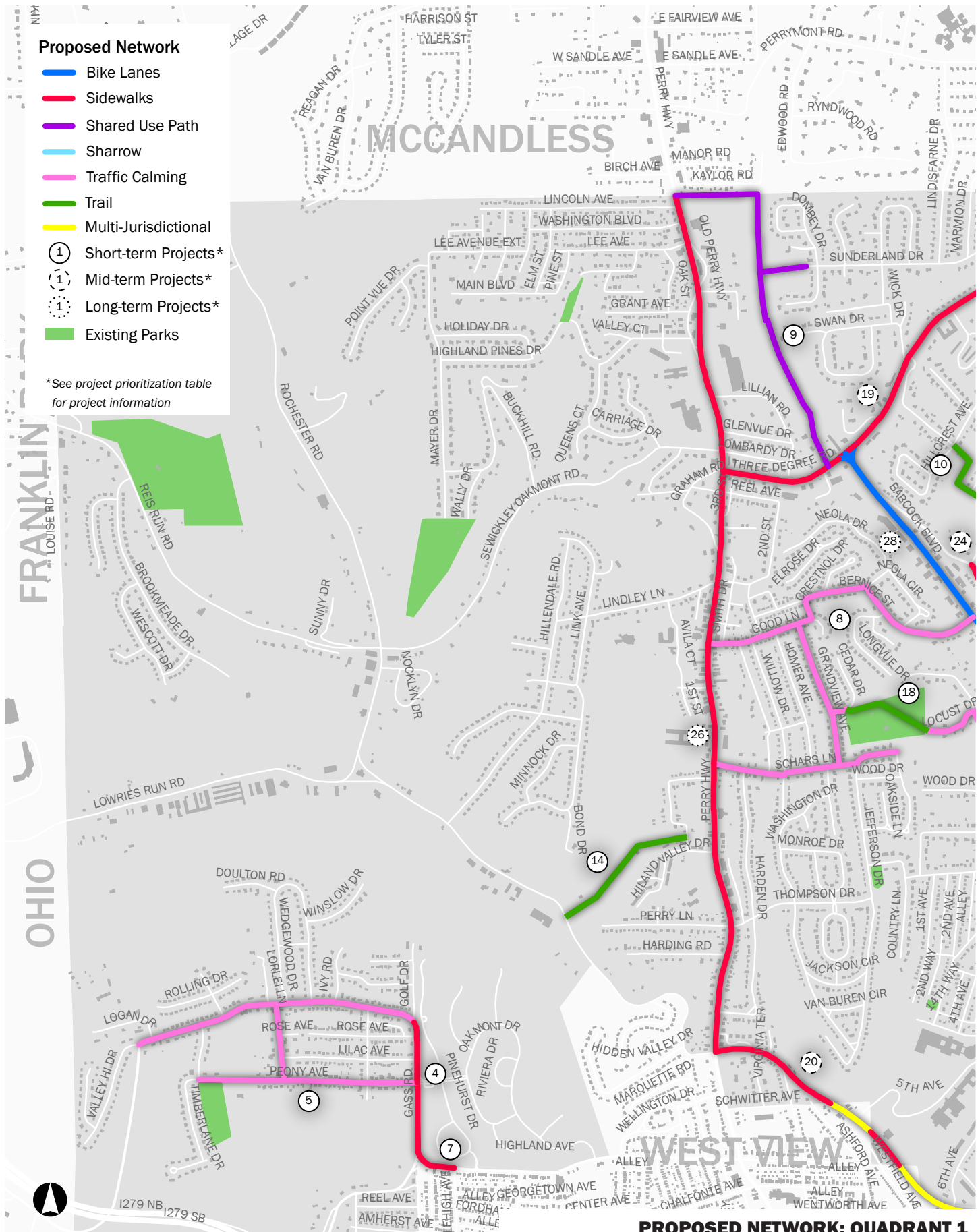
MCKNIGHT ROAD

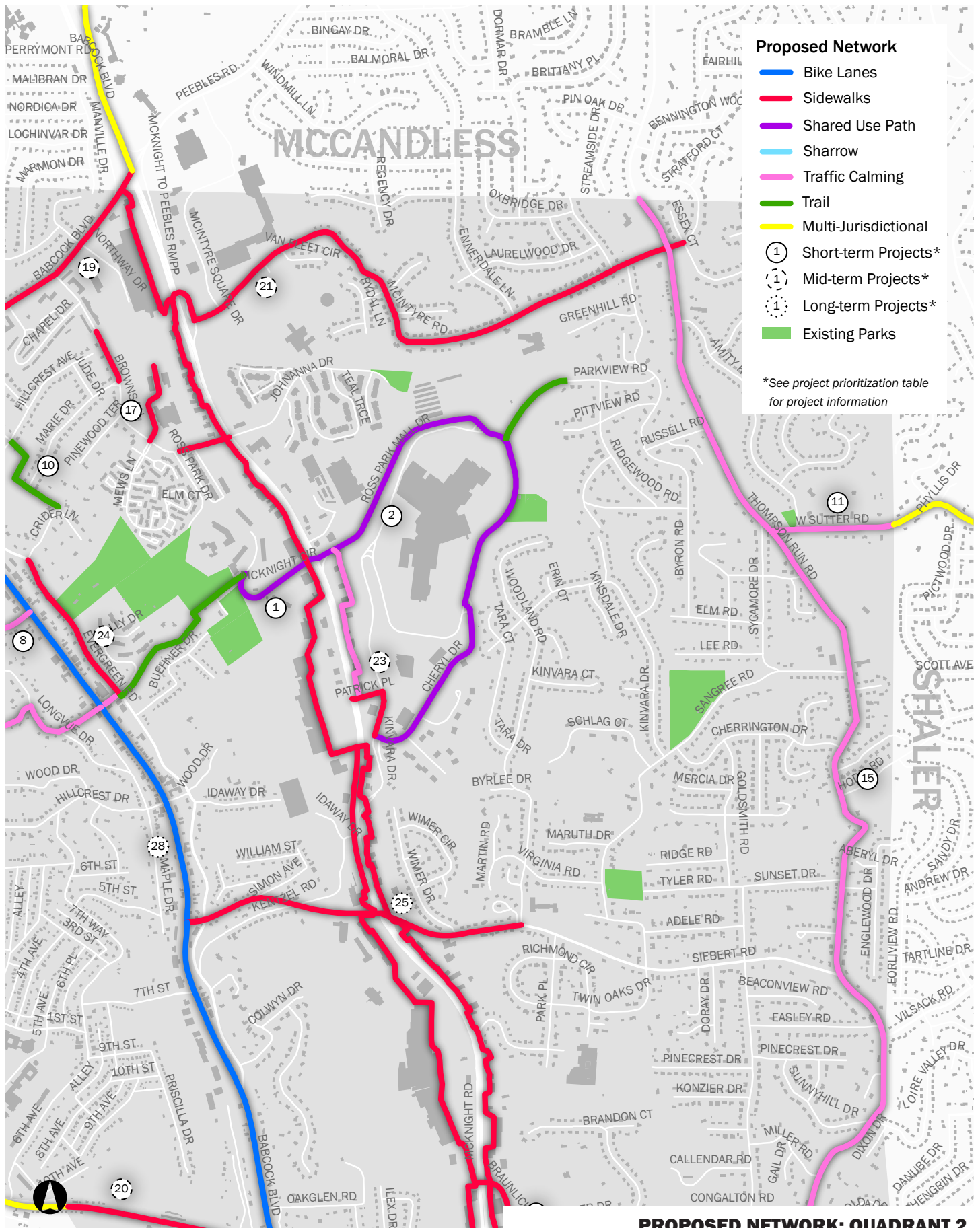
McKnight Road is the most significant north/south route in Ross Township and is under PennDOT's purview. All development along this road is automobile-oriented. McKnight is also nearly built out, leaving little land for pedestrian amenities. This plan proposes that the Township take a deeper look on how to safely connect the businesses along McKnight via a set back pedestrian network. This will require an additional planning study in order to determine this route.

BABCOCK BOULEVARD

Being one of the few "flat" roadways in Ross Township, Babcock has been a favorite for cyclists as the Township's main cycling route. While some of Babcock is wide enough to accommodate bicycle lanes without widening, there are many choke points resulting from parking lots along the roadway and steep hills and embankments that may prevent roadway widening. For this reason, Babcock should also undergo its own planning study in the future to more accurately determine the feasibility and costs of any widening needed to develop it as a comprehensive bicycle corridor. Babcock Boulevard is under the County's purview.

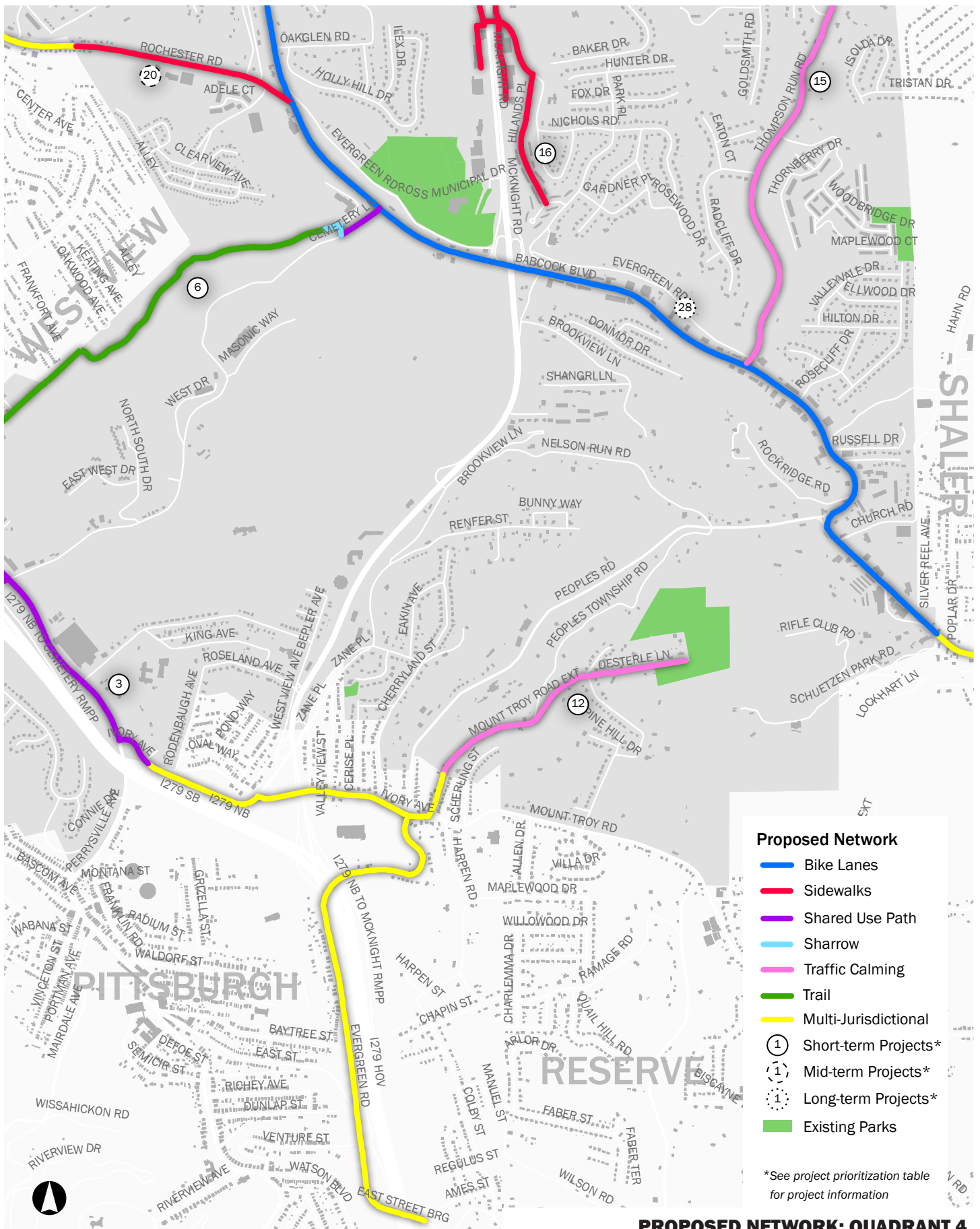




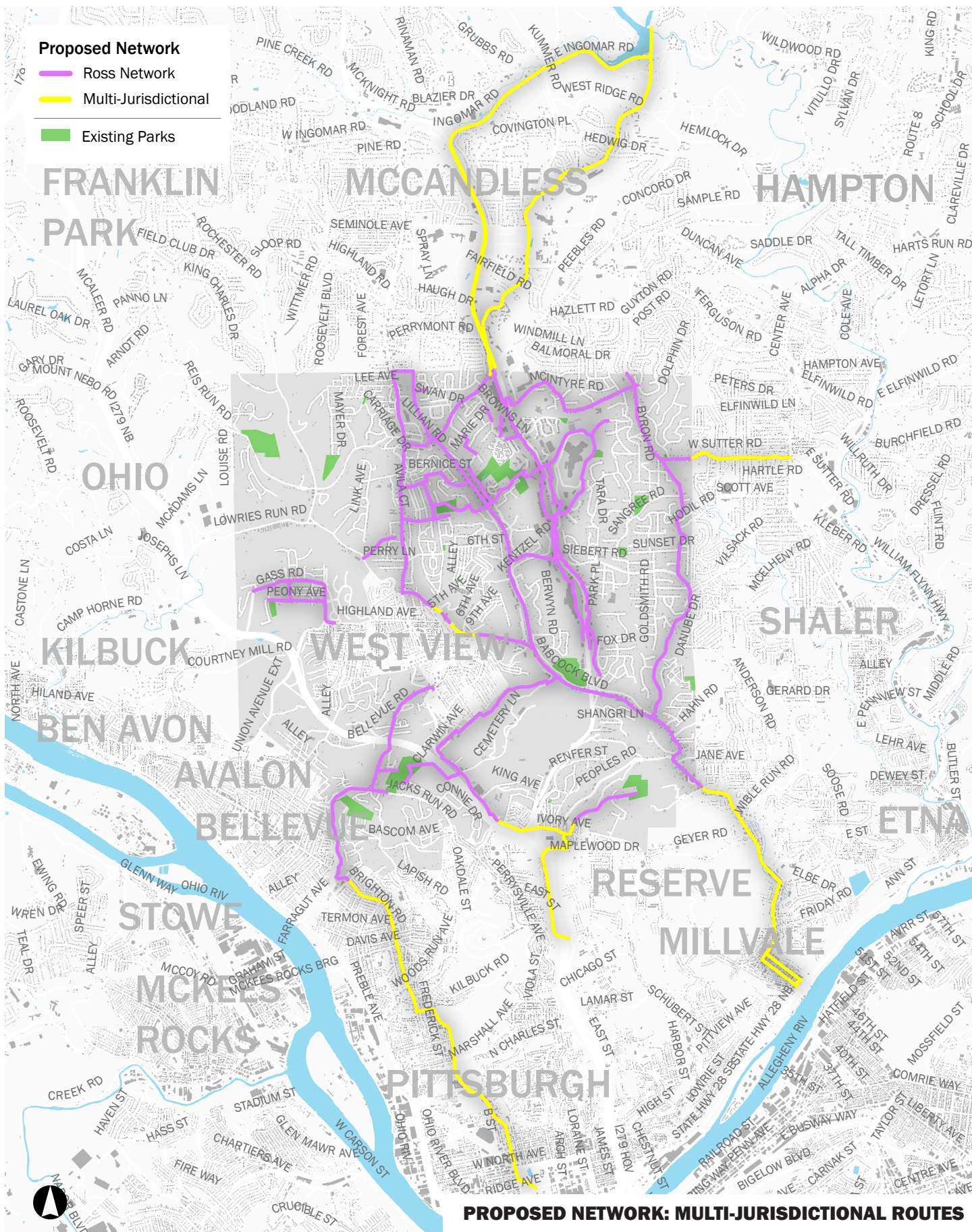


PROPOSED NETWORK: QUADRANT 2





PROPOSED NETWORK: QUADRANT 4



PROPOSED NETWORK: MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL ROUTES



IMPLEMENTATION

IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

For Ross's bicycle and pedestrian future, the implementation cycle begins with a comprehensive concept—accomplished in this plan. For more complex projects like Babcock Boulevard's bicycle lanes, projects will move to the planning phase, where the community and the Township will refine the alignment before moving to the engineering phase. For simple projects, like filling a gap between sidewalks, projects can bypass planning and start at the engineering phase. After the projects are engineered, they will move into the construction phase of implementation. The Township should expect to be active in monitoring the projects post construction- the final phase- to assess the impacts these projects make on transportation.

PRIORITIZATION

This plan includes preliminary project prioritization. Setting priorities is essential to completing the bicycle and pedestrian network. The following prioritization table provides an organized approach to phasing and funding individual projects. For the Ross Township Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, projects

are arranged first by costs, then engineering difficulty, and then public desire. Costs are simplified as low (under \$500,000), mid (\$500,000 – 1,000,000), and high (over \$1,000,000). Engineering difficulties are simplified into low, mid, and high categories as well—indicating the level of challenge a project will encounter in terms of right-of-way, geographical, and existing infrastructure limitations.

Costs, engineering challenges, and public interest combined categorize the projects into short-term, mid-term, and long-term phases. Short-term projects are generally ready for engineering and construction. Mid-term projects require further engineering study and potentially require minor planning study. Long-term projects require further planning and engineering study.

The top five highest-ranking projects as determined by the survey are noted in the prioritization table. Most of these projects fall in the long-term. Because of public interest in these projects, they could potentially be broken into smaller phases.

PROJECT PRIORITIZATION TABLE

Short-Term

No.	Project	Type	Cost	Difficulty
1	McKnight-Babcock Connector	Shared Use Path/Trail	Low	Low
2	Ross Park Mall Shared Use Path	Shared Use Path	Low	Low
3	Perry Highway Trail	Shared Use Path	Low	Low
4	Gass Road Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Low	Low
5	Gass Road Traffic Calming	Traffic Calming	Low	Low
6	Short Line Hollow Completion	Trail/Shared Use Path/ Sharrow	Low	Low
7	Highland Ave Sidewalks	Multi-Jurisdictional	Low	Low
8	Scharmyn Park Traffic Calming	Traffic Calming	Low	Low
9	Harmony Line Trail	Shared Use Trail	Low	Low
10	Marie-Crider Trail	Trail	Low	Low
11	Sutter Rd Traffic Calming	Traffic Calming	Low	Low
12	Oesterle Park Traffic Calming	Traffic Calming	Low	Low
13	Ross Park Mall Trail	Trail	Low	Low
14	Rochester to Perry Trail	Trail	Low	Low
15	Thompson Run Traffic Calming	Traffic Calming	Low	Low
16	Braunlich Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Low	Moderate
17	Brown's Lane Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Low	Moderate
18	Scharmyn Park Trail	Trail	Low	Moderate

Mid-Term

No.	Project	Type	Cost	Difficulty
19	Three Degree/Babcock Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Moderate	Low
20	Rochester Road Sidewalks	Sidewalks/Multi-Jurisdictional	Moderate	Low
21	McIntyre Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Moderate	Low
22	Denny Park Trails	Shared Use Path/Trail	Moderate	Low
23	Patrick Place Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Moderate	Low
24	Evergreen Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Moderate	Moderate

Long

No.	Project	Type	Cost	Difficulty
25	Siebert Sidewalks	Sidewalks	High	Low
26	Perrysville Sidewalks	Sidewalks	High	Low
27	McKnight Pedestrian Network	Traffic Calming	High	High
28	Babcock Bike Lanes	Bike Lane	High	High
29	Bellevue/Jacks Run Sidewalks	Sidewalks	High	High
30	Jacks Run Bike Lanes	Bike Lane	High	High

 Top five most-selected projects from public survey



APPENDIX

STRENGTHS

WHAT ARE THE BEST THINGS ABOUT WALKING AND BIKING IN ROSS TOWNSHIP? WHAT MAKES THEM IMPORTANT?



WEAKNESSES

WHAT SHOULD BE IMPROVED? WHAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED?



OPPORTUNITIES

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MAKE WALKING AND BIKING IN ROSS TOWNSHIP BETTER?



Walking and Biking Facility Preferences



Place a sticker next to the rating that describes your comfort level for each facility type

Ratings:



comfortable enough for my children and me



comfortable enough for myself



uncomfortable for me, but I could manage



too uncomfortable for me





