

Safe Routes to School Action Plan – Mud Lake, Idaho



Background

The city of Mud Lake, Idaho is a small community in Jefferson County with just over 350 residents in the area. The city is settled only a few short miles from the Mud Lake Wildlife Management area, a home to many waterfowl, raptors, and other forms of wildlife. The city of Mud Lake is developed in a mostly linear pattern east/west along Highway 33 and north/south on North 1100 East, an intersecting section line road. The community is largely an agricultural town serving eastern Idaho and beyond.

Two miles east of Mud Lake is the unincorporated town of Terreton. The schools are both sited in Terreton and serve both communities and the rural areas surrounding the communities. Other important destinations are the city park on the west end of Mud Lake, the Senior Center in the middle of Mud Lake, a church in Terreton east of the school, the market and the fairgrounds (which also house the rodeo grounds) 1 mile east of Terreton, and the lake itself 2 to 3 miles to the north. All except the lake are situated along Idaho State Highway 33 east and west.

The highway is two lanes with a very narrow ($\pm 1'$ wide) shoulder. There are very few sidewalks, none on the highway, and the highway is the only connecting roadway. The speed limit on the highway varies between 55 and 35 mph along the four mile stretch depending on proximity to the towns and other destinations. The significant presence of agriculture in the region means that much of the traffic traveling through Mud Lake is commercial vehicles. Besides the school children there are adults in the community who walk for exercise and at least one devoted bicyclist. Yet due to the limited shoulder, lack of dedicated walking or bicycling space, large vehicle types, and varying speeds, it is dangerous to walk and bike on the highway. Many users, both students and adults use the barrow pit along the highway today, as it is one of the few public rights-of-way. This is of paramount concern for the safety of children who might want to walk and bike and many are not allowed to because of safety concerns.

The school buildings: elementary school, library administration building and high school, are situated in a row along the highway with three access points from the highway. The bus access and turnaround is at the west entrance. A linear parking lot with two rows of parking runs along the front



and to the east of the buildings and there is a sidewalk along the parking lot in front of all three buildings. Additional parking is located to the southeast of the high school near the football field. There is a small bike rack in front of the elementary school.

Recommended Infrastructure Improvements

To address the safety issues of trying to walk or bike along the highway the goal of many area residents is to establish a pathway along the highway from the city of Mud Lake to the fairgrounds and potentially to the lake access. As the highway is the only connecting right-of-way between needed destinations it is the only location for the pathway. The current vision is to locate the path on the south side of the highway where the schools and fairgrounds are located. The city park, senior center, church, market and lake access are to the north and would require carefully planned crossings, with signage, pavement markings or more. The need for these crosswalks cannot be understated as this will require ITD approval and should be constructed in a way that elevates their prominence, this is necessary due to the speed and make up of traveling vehicles and type of users for the crossings.

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1. Construct a pathway enabling safe walking/biking along Highway 33.

Construct a pathway along the side of the highway in the highway right of way where possible. The initial phase should run from the town center in Mud Lake to the school/church in Terreton. Develop plans to extend it to the market/ fairgrounds and finally to the lake in the future. The community must finalize a decision whether to place the path on the north or south side of the highway. There are fewer driveways to cross and many more

destinations (City Hall, City Park, Senior Center, LDS church, market) on north side of highway, however the schools are on the south. After discussions with the community, noting the desire of the school district, we support placing the pathway on the south side of Highway 33.

We recommend the community complete a conditions inventory, including a discussion with property owners along the proposed pathway to determine the barriers/challenges on the south side and find solutions to overcome those challenges. If the barriers cannot be overcome, the team may have to reconsider a north side pathway.

Note: *Some of the most vulnerable users (school students) will have to cross the highway somewhere, whether it is in Mud Lake or at the school, to access the school and pathway. A crossing in town may be more visible and have higher driver awareness. However, a crossing at the school can be designed in such a way to heighten awareness and compliance by drivers.*

2. Short Term Action – We recommend that the community determine the pathway location and build a gravel pathway, potentially using volunteer labor, on the route identified. This pathway would be maintained by city/school/or volunteers. This will provide safer access for pedestrians and bicyclists than current use (highway edge and barrow pit) until the time that funds can be identified to build a more permanent pathway. The path would stretch from Mud Lake to Terreton and link the schools and post office to several businesses and civic sites in Mud Lake. The

Example of highway adjacent pathway



church could be accessed if a crossing is installed. It would also serve to determine whether the alignment works and to build support for funding.

Highway Crossings

3. Regardless of pathway progress improve crossings at key destinations.

The team should not wait for a pathway to be constructed before improving the highway crossings in the area. These highway crossings will need to be planned and implemented with the assistance of ITD to ensure compliance with standards. In response to the nature of state highway vehicle type and speed these crossings may need to be more substantial. The team and ITD should consider such improvements as enhanced pavement markings, improved landings, signage including pedestrian crossing signs, centerline pedestal signs, flashing signs, pedestrian activated signs (such as a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon or RRFB) and electronic speed signs for each of the crossings recommended.

- **City Center** – A high-visibility crossing should be placed in Mud Lake city center to connect both sides of the highway and give residents a place to safely access the destinations in town such as the park, businesses, city hall, and senior center. This crossing will also serve a new highway pathway (gravel or paved) when it is constructed.
- **N 1300 E** – A crossing should be placed at the intersection of N 1300

Example of improved highway crossing



Additional signs and candles can raise driver awareness even more



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East to connect between the LDS Church and Post Office. This would serve to allow users to access the church if a pathway is built on the south side of the highway.

- **N 1400 E** – Another recommended crossing would be between the rodeo grounds and market at N 1400 East. This crossing has high community benefit, particularly when the rodeo grounds are in use and may serve a lake access at some point in the future.

4. School Zone Improvements on Highway 33 near schools –

The transitory nature of vehicles using the highway can translate into motorists unaware of both land uses and speed zones. Heighten awareness of drivers to the presence of students and the schools they attend with additional roadway features in the general area of the campus on Highway 33. We recommend beefing up school zone presence by adding additional signage, flashers (powered by solar panels), and perhaps a speed indicator radar unit.



Examples of highway speed zone treatments



- 5. **If a crossing is needed at the school, heighten driver awareness and compliance with substantial improvements.** Explore installation of a pedestrian activated flasher at crossing, such as a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB). Improve landing areas to be ADA compliant. Add additional treatments to increase visual profile such as reflective

candles, curb ribbons, stop lines and signage. Having a human presence by using a crossing guard is highly advisable.

- 6. **Ask ITD to review school zone, market and town center speed and sign locations.** Today, the speed limit changes from 55 to 45 to 35 and back again along the length of the primary destinations from the market/ fairgrounds to the schools to Mud Lake. The team should request that ITD review these speed zones and particularly that they look for a more consistent speed, that they provide adequate signage in the correct location letting drivers know of the speeds, and ask for consideration for a lower speed in front of the schools and in the town of Mud Lake.



Policy Recommendations

City/County Recommendations

1. **Update the comprehensive plan.** The consultant has provided an electronic version of the existing 1976 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan provides a good basis it should be reviewed and updated with current statistical information and to reflect current community desires and values using a public process.
Note: *A guide to updating a comprehensive plan was provided earlier.*
2. **Implement comprehensive plan goals in general.** The comprehensive plan calls for a compact community to minimize travel distances and reduce the need for extending infrastructure. These goals can continue to serve the community well. An effective action to support that goal is to develop a cooperative agreement with the county to direct development toward town sites and away from agricultural lands.
Note: *The city of Mud Lake likely does not need additional formal ordinances unless growth occurs. If the city council is interested in more formal ordinances or tools models are available in the resource link.*
3. **Amend city and county ordinance to restrict motorized vehicles (excepting wheelchairs and other accessibility vehicles) from using pathways.** Action will require communication with county commissioners to propose ordinance and sheriff's office regarding enforcement.
Note: *Sample ordinance is provided in resources link.*

School District Recommendations

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Regardless of whether a safe pathway can be established to allow students to walk or bike to school many students will continue to be bused. There are many benefits to physical activity and recognizing these in policy will enable the school district to support activities such as a walk at school programs or a bike rodeo.

4. **General board policy** promoting healthy living and regular physical activity.

5. Recognize benefits of physical activity in **wellness policy**.

- Support walking and biking as physical activity.
- Recognize academic benefits for physically active students.

Note: Model policy goals and objectives are provided in resources link.

Joint City/School District Recommendations

6. **Develop policy and process to meet regularly**, collaborate on facility planning and share facilities as a means to make most efficient use of tax dollars.

Non-Infrastructure Recommendations

1. **Utilize conditions inventory to inform pathway discussion and location.** We recommend that the community complete the inventory between Mud Lake and Terreton this year and work to complete other sections in following years as progress is made toward planning the pathway. The inventory should be used to inform planning for the pathway.
2. **Consider regular on-site walking activities** similar to the Pacer program in Menan. Explore the creation of such a program to get students walking as it provides a great opportunity for students to be physically active regardless of barriers to safe active transportation.
3. **Consider holding an annual Bike Rodeo** in partnership with the sheriff's department to teach safe biking skills. Information about organizing a Bike Rodeo is included in resources link.

Students at a Walk at School activity



Resources: Model and sample policies and other tools are available at:
<http://www.idahosmartgrowth.org/index.php/resources/>
– go to Best Practices

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