

# Meridian

## Pathways Master Plan



## 2. EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Needs Overview

This section provides an overview of user needs identified for the City's pathways system. The existing pathways system currently attracts a variety of users, including walkers, runners, roller-bladers, and recreational and casual bicyclists. Each of these user groups has different needs - bicyclists and roller-bladers prefer smoother, hard surfaced pathways, while hikers and runners may prefer a more natural soft surface environment. This will affect planning and design of the pathway system. In addition to meeting the needs of different user groups, the pathways must appeal to people of all ages - over 30% of residents are either under the age of 17 or over the age of 65. The pathway system should be designed to accommodate this variety of uses and people.

### Recreational Needs

Recreational use generally falls into one of three categories: exercise, trips to non-work destinations (such as shopping or libraries), and sightseeing. Recreational users have varied needs, since they have a broad range of skill and fitness levels, from a bicycle racer who does long rides each weekend, to a family with young children who occasionally want to ride a couple miles down a quiet pathway, to a weekend roller-blader out for some fun and exercise. Needs and patterns for recreational pathway users include:

- Recreational users range from adults to children to senior citizens with a wide variety of abilities and interests.
- Directness of the route is typically less important than the quality of the pathway experience. Visual interest, shade, protection from weather, moderate gradients, and other "comfort" features are also very important.
- People exercising or touring often prefer a loop route rather than having to retrace their route.

Having recreational amenities and features along the route, such as drinking fountains, shaded areas, picnic tables, interpretive signs, and scenic vistas, is important for all users. Recreational destinations such as parks and schools are also important, as they provide a place to stop, rest, and walk around.

### Utilitarian Needs

Transportation trips are those that are primarily utilitarian in nature, including trips for reaching school and work commute, shopping, friends, and even to a recreational destination. There are over 25 schools

and numerous parks and recreational facilities as possible destinations within the city of Meridian. People making utilitarian trips, whether in a car, on foot, or on a bicycle, share common attributes in the facilities they seek to use. For potential pathway users, these attributes include:

- Trip lengths that range from a few blocks to five or more miles.
- Direct routes.
- Travel periods that often coincide with peak traffic volumes and congestion, increasing the exposure to potential conflicts with vehicles.
- Places to rest, drink, and store their travel gear at their destination.
- Major concerns about issues such as changes in weather, traveling in darkness, and personal safety and security.
- Intersections with no stop signs or signal controls.
- Routes where they are required to stop as few times as possible, thereby minimizing delay.
- Links to bicycle and pedestrian system to make necessary pathway connections.

### **Connecting Facilities**

In order to maximize the number of pathway users, connections to the pathways must be maximized and integrated into the planning process.

Within the city, more extensive signage, as well as stronger links between various neighborhoods and the pathways system, is needed to allow pathway users to access the system directly from their homes, rather than driving to a trailhead or other access point.

In the city, the pathways system will eventually connect to a number of existing and proposed region-wide pathways. The Treasure Valley Rail-with-Trail is the major regional pathway connector, providing linkages between Nampa, Meridian, and Boise. On the eastern edge of Meridian, the pathways system connects to proposed pathways within the City of Boise. Along the western edge, the pathways system will connect to proposed pathways in Nampa along the Rawson Canal. On the northern edge, pathways will provide connections to Eagle Island and the regional Boise Greenbelt.

## **Summary of Existing Conditions**

The City of Meridian currently has nearly 12 miles of paved pathways. However, all the pathways within the City of Meridian are discontinuous, making it more difficult for residents to utilize and access the full pathway system. Many of the existing parks have internal park circulation pathways that are or will be connected to the larger pathway network, providing excellent destinations and resting points along the pathway network.

The City of Meridian is platted on a square-mile grid distinguished by major collector/minor arterial roads every mile. Many of these roads carry heavy traffic volumes at traffic speeds of 35 mph and above,



making non-signalized at-grade crossings difficult. In addition, Interstate 84 bisects the north and south portions of the city, limiting the number of pathway connections that can be made across the freeway.

The existing City of Meridian pathway system is a tremendous resource. In the future, the City needs to focus on filling in the existing gaps within the built out portion of the city, while residential development implements the pathways plan in the undeveloped portions of Meridian.

### Existing Pathways System

The City of Meridian Pathway Plan is mainly concerned with the off-street pathways network. On-street connections between parks, pathways, schools, community centers and other desirable locations are the responsibility of the Ada County Highway District.

As noted above, the City of Meridian currently has a number of partially completed pathways that will eventually provide connections to Boise, Nampa, Eagle, and Kuna. Portions of existing pathways include: Bud Porter Memorial Pathway (part of Five Mile Creek Pathway), the Meridian Loop, the Ridenbaugh Canal Pathway, the Ten Mile Creek Pathway, and others. Micro pathways provide linkages to schools and parks, as well as the larger primary pathway system. Paved pathways are also found throughout many of the City of Meridian's parks, providing internal circulation and connections. Some of these parks include:



- Settlers Park
- Bear Creek Park
- Champion Park
- Fuller Park
- Tully Park
- Heroes Park
- Seasons Park
- Kiwanis Park

There are many opportunities for pathway development within Meridian. While the number of constraints is small, the issues surrounding them are not. The constraints to pathway implementation will be challenging to overcome. This section discusses the opportunities and constraints in Meridian in both generalized and specific terms. Generalized opportunities and constraints consist of larger, non-site specific characteristics of the surrounding community, like the rich history of Meridian, educational opportunities, and demographic changes. Pathway specific opportunities and constraints can often be pinpointed to a location(s) in or around a pathway corridor, like public ownership of a parcel of land, a narrow canal bank, or steep slopes.



## General Opportunities and Constraints

### Population Growth

The population of Meridian has increased significantly over the past 15 years. The City of Meridian is the fastest growing city in the fastest growing county in Idaho since 1994, with the population nearly tripling between 1990 and 2000.

**Table 2-1: Population Growth: Meridian and Ada County 1990-2005**

Population	1990	2000	June 2006 (est.)
Meridian	9,596	34,919	66,565
Ada County	205,775	300,904	383,341

This explosive growth has started to stress the existing roadway system, resulting in increased traffic, congestion, and hazardous conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, particularly children. This study effort is an excellent opportunity to further develop a comprehensive pathway network.

### Demographics

In addition to the recreational benefits of a pathway system, there are three groups of people who benefit enormously from the transportation opportunities a pathway would provide: children, the elderly, and those without vehicles who depend on public forms of transportation. Because children and many elderly people cannot drive, they are largely dependent on themselves and others to transport them. In 2000, nearly thirty percent (27.3%) of the population of Meridian consisted of children under the age of 17, with 11% of those being under the age of 5. An additional 6.4% of the population consists of people over the age of 65. An opportunity exists to meet the recreational and transportation needs of a large portion of the population who get around on foot, bicycle, motorized and non-motorized mobility device, and skateboard with a comprehensive pathway system.



### Development

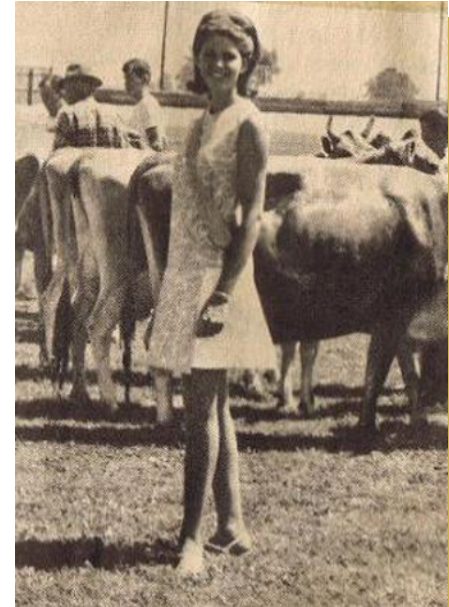
In many cities, population growth can be a constraint to pathway development as larger parcels of land in the community are subdivided for new housing. However, developers and planners in Meridian have done a very good job of following the 2003 plan and making sure that



pathway connections are being made. Some opportunities have been lost, and new development can reduce the number of opportunities that Meridian has for gaining easements along the creeks for a pathway. New development can also put additional pressure on the existing transportation system and the creek corridors, exacerbating some of the problems the pathway system hopes to negate.

### History

Agriculture and commerce are a central component of Meridian's history. Established in 1893, Meridian was incorporated as a village in 1903 with a population of approximately 200, and a bustling business center. The first creamery was built in 1897. Other dairy-related businesses followed and Meridian soon established itself as a dairy center for the state. This part of the community's history is still celebrated annually during Meridian Dairy Days, which is celebrated in June. Dairy Days has been observed in one form or another since 1929.



Many of the early settlers planted large fruit orchards, and through the 1940's, Meridian was the home of a large fruit growing, packing, and shipping industry. Local apiaries were among the largest in the nation, as bees were necessary to the fruit growing industry. These and other early industries gave way in time to businesses connected with the timber and housing industries.

There are a number of opportunities to incorporate these and other historical elements into and along the pathway system.

### **Pathway Specific Opportunities and Constraints**

#### Pathway Types

Meridian currently has two basic types of pathways.

1. A separated, off-street corridor with a dedicated pathway right-of-way. The Bud Porter Pathway, as well as several segments of pathway that have been built by developers that parallel a creek, best represents this pathway type.
2. A wide (10-12 feet) side path that parallels the road. The pathway is separated from the road with a curb and planting strip, like a sidewalk. This type of pathway is typical in the newer residential developments.





The two pathway types provide a very different user experience. Where pathways parallel a road, users probably are not aware they are utilizing the city's pathway system, as signing, striping, and other unifying features of a comprehensive pathway system are absent.

### Desirable Destinations

#### **City of Meridian Parks and Recreation**

The existing and planned parks within the city of Meridian serve as the "pearls" in a comprehensive recreation system that is served by the "string" of pathways connecting the park system. With the primary purpose of the pathway system being recreational, the Meridian park system serves as obvious destinations and provides locations for trailheads and other amenities for pathway users. In addition to the parks and open spaces are other recreational destinations such as the water park.



#### **Downtown / Civic Core / Commercial Areas**

The downtown, civic core, and other commercial areas are important destinations, with activities such as the farmers market drawing people from all over town. While the primary goal of the pathway network is to provide recreational opportunities, there will be pathways that will serve as excellent transportation corridors as well, providing alternative transportation options to downtown workers. In addition, pathways that connect to the proposed rail-with-trail will provide excellent opportunities for regional connections.



#### **Schools**

The Meridian School District is the largest in the state, both in geographical size and student population. There are nineteen schools within the Meridian Area of Impact, serving students K-12, and a comprehensive pathway system that connects the schools and neighborhoods provides both an excellent transportation corridor as well as recreational opportunities for jogging, walking, biking, skating, or in-line skating.



#### **Residential Areas**

Meridian has traditional suburban neighborhood development, with neighborhood streets connecting directly to major arterials, which can make it difficult for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel quickly and safely to their destinations. A comprehensive pathway system provides both recreational opportunities for members of the whole



family, but also provides safe travel corridors for all residents, particularly children.

### Pathway Fragmentation

The City of Meridian has the beginnings of an excellent pathway system that can provide recreational options and transportation alternatives to residents and visitors alike. However, one of the major barriers to using the current pathway system is the fragmentation of the pathway system itself. The longest continuous piece of pathway is the Bud Porter Pathway, at just over one mile long. Connecting the pathway system to provide a truly great experience is necessary.

### Environmental Conditions

There are opportunities to improve the environmental conditions of the creeks and drainage corridors through pathway development by developing some of the pathway corridors as greenways. Specific opportunities include:

- Removing non-native plants
- Re-establishing native tree and plant populations
- Stabilizing the creek banks and reducing erosion
- Removing trash, unnecessary riprap, and garden debris
- Improving water quality
- Planting appropriate vegetation adjacent to the pathways to prevent reoccurring maintenance difficulties caused by tree roots, etc.



### Accessible Corridors

#### **Irrigation Canals**

There are numerous irrigation canals and ditches that cross through the City of Meridian that provide excellent pathway opportunities. A number of these canals are already utilized as pathway corridors, and working with the irrigation districts to provide pathways along the many of the remaining canals and ditches will be critical. Issues that need to be addressed include:

- Locating pathways along the irrigation canals so that it does not interfere with irrigation district maintenance people or vehicles
- Address property ownership issues where the irrigation district is operating under an easement from the adjacent homeowners association (HOA) for access to the canal
- Locating pathways along the irrigation canals to ensure the safety of pathway users



- Establishing maintenance and vegetation guidelines, such as appropriate landscaping

### Utility Corridors

There is an existing gas pipeline with a 60-80'-foot right-of-way that crosses through the southern part of the city. This type of utility corridor provides an excellent opportunity for locating a pathway to connect up to South Meridian.

### Railroad Corridor

The existing railroad corridor is identified on previous maps as a potential pathway corridor. The railroad corridor is owned by Union Pacific (UP) and leased to Idaho Northern for use as a freight connection to the UP mainline in Nampa. Service includes two to three trains daily that travel 20-25 mph through the city with active spur lines as well. The railway generally has a 200-foot easement. There have been discussions regarding the purchase of the rail right-of-way for passenger transit service. However, there is no firm schedule or funding plan to acquire the corridor. The rail corridor provides an excellent opportunity to establish a regionally significant pathway connecting Meridian east to Boise and west to Nampa. The numerous crossings of major roadways are a major challenge in implementing this pathway.



### Signage/Pathway Orientation

Directional signing will be useful for pathway users and motorists alike. For motorists, a sign reading “Pathway Xing” along with a Meridian pathway emblem or logo helps both warn and promote use of the pathway system itself. For pathway users, directional signs and street names at crossings help direct people to their destinations.



The City currently uses no consistent signage or pathway identification system to provide mileage or directional information to pathway users. Some pathways have directional signage. However, many of them lack distinct signage, creating confusion and a lack of recognition among pathway users. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3: Design Guidelines.





### Pathway/Roadway Crossings

Like most pathways in built urban areas, Meridian pathways must cross roadways at certain points. While at-grade crossings create a potentially high level of conflict between pathway users and motorists, well-designed crossings have not historically posed a safety problem, as evidenced by the thousands of successful trails and pathways around the United States with at-grade crossings.

The current practice in Meridian is an unmarked, unsignalized crossing, at which a pathway user would wait for a gap in traffic to cross. The lack of markings or signals at most crossings can be very intimidating for pathway users, and may be challenging enough to suppress potential pathway usage. However, in most cases, pathway crossings can be properly designed at-grade to a reasonable degree of safety and meet existing traffic and safety standards. One notable exception to this will be any separated bicycle and pedestrian overcrossings of I-84.

Road/pathway crossings within Meridian are further complicated by the fact that the City of Meridian does not own any of the roads within the city limits. The Ada County Highway District (ACHD) currently owns all roads within the city, and further discussions of road/pathway discussions will have to include the county.

Pathway-roadway crossings should comply with the Association of American State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Guide for the Development of Bikeway Facilities, Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), and Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3: Design Guidelines.



