

INTRODUCTION

The River Falls Bike and Pedestrian Plan outlines the current conditions for bicycling and walking in the city and recommends ways to improve the experience of moving around the city outside of a vehicle. The plan is informed by the Bike and Pedestrian Steering Committee, City staff, and the public, and was developed in coordination with the Comprehensive Plan and Outdoor Recreation Plan.

The plan begins with the vision and goals that will guide the improvement of walking and biking in River Falls, followed by a summary of the community context and public input that shaped the plan. The plan includes infrastructure recommendations (physical changes to streets, trails, and bridges) as well as policy and program recommendations. The plan closes with a summary of next steps, including quick wins, more complex but high-benefit improvements, and major high-benefit projects. Appendix A provides more detail on infrastructure project recommendations. Appendix B details the analysis of existing transportation infrastructure, demographics, and local destinations. Appendix C provides more information on existing plans, programs, and policies.

Key Terms

Walking: Walking is an inclusive term that includes both ambulatory and non-ambulatory modes. Walking encompasses all forms of mobility devices, including using a wheelchair, cane, walker, or other mobility device that allows the user to travel at human speed.

Active Transportation: Human-powered modes of transportation, primarily walking and bicycling



VISION AND GOALS

The vision, guiding principles, objectives, and performance measures, which were developed in collaboration with the Bike and Pedestrian Steering Committee and reviewed by community members, aim to provide a template that can shape future policy-making and transportation system investments. By establishing a desired future for walking and biking throughout the region (the vision), and by relating fundamental values around walking and biking (goals) to more specific desired outcomes (objectives) and metrics by which to evaluate progress toward those outcomes (performance measures), this section of the plan provides a comprehensive framework for change.

Vision

Walking and biking are comfortable modes of transportation that connect people of all ages and abilities to one another and to everyday destinations via safe, accessible infrastructure.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Accessibility: Policy and infrastructure support the needs of people who choose not to drive, who cannot drive, or who have barriers to accessing essential destinations using the existing car-oriented transportation system.

- The stated needs and priorities of the entire community, including people with low incomes, people who are unable or choose not to drive, people with disabilities, people of color, children, and older adults, shape investments and policy changes.
- Projects and policies that make active transportation more appealing and convenient than driving are prioritized.

Connectivity: People can quickly access everyday destinations via walking and bicycling on accessible, pleasant, unpolluted facilities.

- Gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle networks are reduced, especially along key corridors and along routes that serve equity priority populations and areas of high population density.
- Infrastructure connects key origins and destinations such as schools, groceries, the university, and medical facilities with a focus on accessibility for all.
- Infill development is prioritized.
- Higher density development in locations that are walkable and bikeable is encouraged.

Health and Safety: Transportation systems proactively promote the comprehensive health and well-being of all community members through active transportation facilities that connect users to key destinations.

- Projects and policies that center active transportation safety are implemented and focus on reducing vehicle speeds, reducing the right-of-way allocated to vehicles, and prioritizing safety in design and maintenance investments and policies.
- Fatal and serious injury crashes involving people walking and bicycling are eliminated.

- Individual and community health effects are included when evaluating and prioritizing all transportation investments and policy changes.

Sustainability: Transportation systems are designed for the long run, taking into account the primary environmental, financial, and social benefits.

- The major social, economic, and environmental costs and benefits of transportation projects are considered in decision-making.
- Environmentally sustainable design elements are considered for integration into maintenance and construction projects.
- Education around the sustainable benefits of active transportation is provided to community members.
- Community members are educated about the costs of auto-centric transportation systems.

Economic Vitality: Active transportation and trail systems foster tourism and economic development.

- Pedestrian and bike infrastructure facilitates trips to and within major business areas in the city, increasing traffic to businesses while reducing congestion and pollution.
- Trail connections are planned from a regional recreation perspective, helping to link River Falls to nearby communities and destinations.
- Trail connections help to drive tourism, support local businesses, and create jobs through business investment in the city.



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Performance measures help to evaluate the impact of policies and investments (outcome evaluation), and they also help to describe how policies and investments are being implemented and to identify opportunities to improve or revise existing approaches (process evaluation). Because measuring outcomes can be difficult in terms of logistics, costs, and the time required to see measurable changes, process evaluation is a critical piece of a robust evaluation approach. Data for process performance measures (Table 1) should be collected, evaluated, and used to inform changes on an ongoing basis. Data for outcome performance measures (Table 2) can be collected less frequently, since significant changes on these measures will likely take more time and greater data volumes to detect.



Table 1. Process Performance Measures

Performance Measure	Baseline	Target	Rationale	Corresponding Goal(s)
Percent of arterial roads under City jurisdiction with bicycle facilities	0% (2020 Bicycle Friendly Community report card)	33%	33% is the benchmark for Bicycle Friendly Community Bronze status. All facilities should be separated from traffic and designed to serve riders of all ages and abilities. Note: S. Wasson Lane is classified as a minor arterial and contains a paved trail.	Connectivity, safety, accessibility
Density of low-stress crossings of roads with three or more travel and turn lanes (Main Street, Cascade Avenue, Cemetery Road)	<1 per mile	4 per mile	More frequent crossings reduce out-of-direction travel time and encourage use of active modes.	Connectivity, safety, accessibility
Density of trees along new or repaved sidewalks, bikeways, and roads	135 trees per mile	Maintain	Trees provide shade, reduce building heating and cooling costs, improve air quality, manage stormwater, limit noise pollution, provide habitat, and beautify streets. Approximately 135 matured trees per mile produces full tree canopy cover.	Sustainability
Miles of sidewalk gaps	60–70 miles of gaps	4.6 miles of sidewalk infill (all high-priority gaps)	Sidewalk gaps deter people walking and impact accessibility for people with disabilities.	Connectivity, safety, accessibility

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Performance Measure	Baseline	Target	Rationale	Corresponding Goal(s)
Public space dedicated to vehicle storage	City-sponsored parking on both sides of most roadways and in several parking lots, free of charge to users	Decrease	Public space dedicated to vehicle storage subsidizes driving, increases impermeable surface cover contributing to water quality issues and the urban heat island effect, and consumes valuable space that could be dedicated to meet other public needs (e.g., space for outdoor dining, sidewalk sales, recreation, pollinator gardens, public art, and bicycle facilities). Turning some of the paved areas over to more active, productive uses can make River Falls an even more appealing place to visit and live.	Accessibility, sustainability
Miles of at-grade City-owned roadways with two or more travel lanes per direction	1/10 mile (on Main Street near Cascade Avenue)	0 miles	Multilane roadways are barriers to walking and biking, and require more costly infrastructure to allow for low-stress crossings. Wider roadways also contribute to stormwater concerns, create induced demand, and are more expensive to maintain. As River Falls grows in population, strategies other than roadway widening should be implemented to meet increased demand.	Safety, sustainability
Percentage of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure miles that are accessible and safe to use within 24 hours of a snow event*	100%	100%	Reliable and fast winter maintenance ensures walking and biking are year-round accessible modes of transportation for all pedestrians and bicyclists. Maintain high level of winter maintenance.	Connectivity, safety, accessibility

Performance Measure	Baseline	Target	Rationale	Corresponding Goal(s)
Percent of high-priority bicycle and pedestrian projects completed	N/A	60% of high-benefit projects from 2022 Plan	Implementation of projects is a measure of the degree to which the Bike and Pedestrian Plan results in change.	Connectivity

*This does not include trails used exclusively for recreation, e.g., those in Whitetail Ridge, but does include trails used for transportation.

Table 2. Outcome Performance Measures

Performance Measure	Baseline	Target	Rationale	Corresponding Goal(s)
Percent of commuters who primarily walk or bike	11% (2019 ACS 5-year estimate)	15%	Converting car trips to active transportation trips reduces air, noise, and water pollution and improves health outcomes.	Economic Vitality, Sustainability
Percent of trips to and from school made by walking or biking	36.5% (2019 – Replica)	40%	As recently as the 1970s, nearly half of all students in the U.S. walked or biked to school—not including taking the school bus—and nearly 90% of those within a mile of their school walked or biked to school.	Accessibility, Connectivity
Percent of all trips within River Falls made by walking or biking	39% (2019 – Replica)	45%	Converting car trips to active transportation trips reduces air, noise, and water pollution and improves health outcomes.	Sustainability
Number of pedestrians and bicyclists crashes with vehicles that result in death or serious injury	3 pedestrians (2017–21)	0 (2022–2027)	Aligns with WisDOT commitment to end traffic fatalities and serious injuries.	Health & Safety

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

This section summarizes the analyses of community context that informed this plan, including analysis of existing transportation infrastructure, demographics, and local destinations as well as previous planning efforts. Analyses of Level of Traffic Stress, demand, equity, and crash conditions highlight existing issues and areas of greatest need for biking and walking infrastructure around the city. Overall, these analyses identify where people live and the destinations around River Falls that people want and need to connect to. The equity analysis provides additional depth by identifying where people live who may face additional socioeconomic barriers to transportation access. Each analysis approach is explained in more detail in Appendix B: Existing Conditions.

Together with input from on-the-ground and online engagement, the analyses described below guide the Bike and Pedestrian Plan recommendations.

PREVIOUS PLANS

The project team reviewed the following plans:

- St. Croix County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2017)
- UWRF Campus Master Plan (2011)
- Sterling Ponds Park Plan (2020)
- Campus Corridor Concept (2020)
- Kinnickinnic River Corridor Plan (2018)
- South Main Street Corridor Study (2016)
- Sidewalk Infill Report (2016)



- Hoffman Park Master Plan and Glen Park Master Plan (2015)
- Safe Routes to School (2008)
- Comprehensive Plan (2005)
- River Falls Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (1995)

See Appendix C: Plan, Program and Policy Evaluation for a summary of each plan.

Recommendations from previous plans are carried forward into the infrastructure recommendations and program and policy recommendations. In alignment with previous plans, the Bike and Pedestrian Plan recommendations considered:

- Growth areas in the four districts identified in the Campus Corridor Plan: Broadway, West Cascade, Central Cascade, and East Cascade Districts
- Growth areas identified in South Main Street Study—specifically focused on areas with projected traffic increases, focus on accommodating new growth with a robust walking and biking network, especially connecting to campus and residential areas
- Connecting gaps in the existing sidewalk, bikeway, and trail networks between parks (including the Kinnickinnic River corridor), neighborhoods, and downtown
- Safe crossings of major roadway barriers, such as Main Street and Cascade Avenue

LEVEL OF TRAFFIC STRESS

The Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (BLTS) and Pedestrian Level of Traffic Stress (PLTS) analyses estimate the level of comfort for people biking or walking on a given roadway segment. BLTS and PLTS help to identify where “gaps” or deficiencies in a network exist, and provide a measure of how likely people with a range of abilities and comfort levels are to ride on each segment. See page 2 in Appendix B: Existing Conditions for details on the analysis methodology.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 identify the roadways with the highest and lowest levels of stress across River Falls. There are similarly high levels of BLTS and PLTS on the higher volume roadways on the edges of town, including State Highway 65, Powell Avenue, West Division Street/County Road M, East Cascade Avenue, and County Trunk Highway FF.

The two analyses result in different stress levels, however, down Main Street and throughout the urban and rural neighborhood roadways. The BLTS identifies more of Main Street as high stress for people biking, likely due to high traffic volumes and the lack of dedicated facilities through downtown River Falls. The results also show most neighborhood roadways as the lowest stress level, likely due to low traffic volumes. Meanwhile the PLTS highlights sections of Main Street as medium or low stress, likely due to sidewalk width and buffer space. More neighborhood streets are considered medium-low stress rather than the lowest stress levels, likely because of missing sidewalk facilities.

Note: the BLTS and PLTS analyses use Open Street Map data as the base of the analyses. There may be discrepancies between City roadway centerline data and Open Street Map data. The analyses are intended to provide a high-level understanding of traffic stress, and were used in combination with other analyses, public input, and agency staff local knowledge in the development of network recommendations.



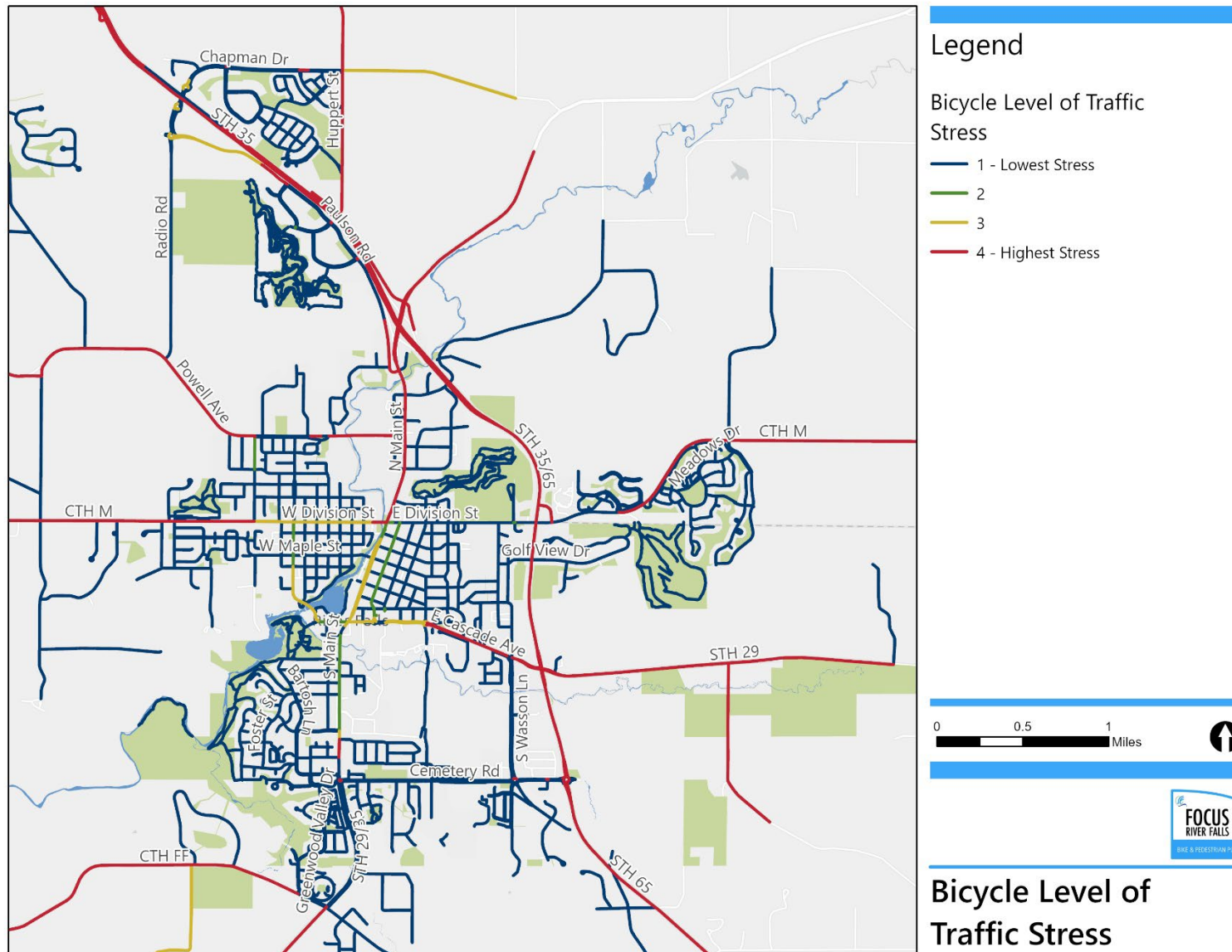


Figure 1. Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress

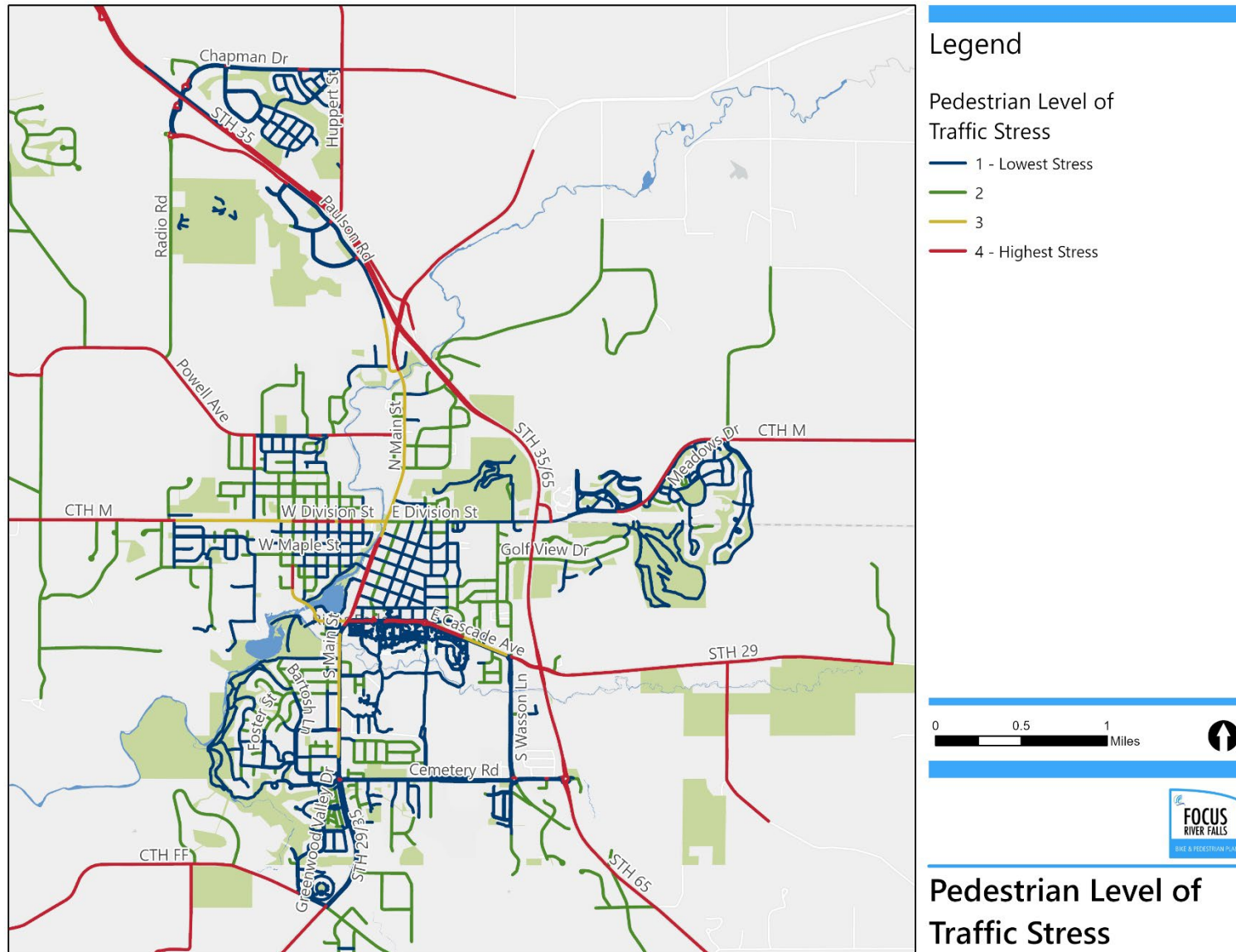


Figure 2. Pedestrian Level of Traffic Stress

DEMAND ANALYSIS

Counts of people walking and biking typically do not reflect demand for walking and biking due to the lack of adequate facilities to support active transportation. A lack of people walking and biking does not necessarily indicate a lack of demand, so evaluation of concentrated activity locations is used to understand where people want to walk and bike.

The composite Live Work Play analysis combines five factors (where people live, work, play, shop, and learn) to determine areas where demand for walking and biking is likely to be high (see Figure 3). Demand is most highly concentrated in the southern portion of the city, around University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UWRF), downtown, and the southwest neighborhoods. See page 6 in Appendix B: Existing Conditions for details on the Demand Analysis methodology.

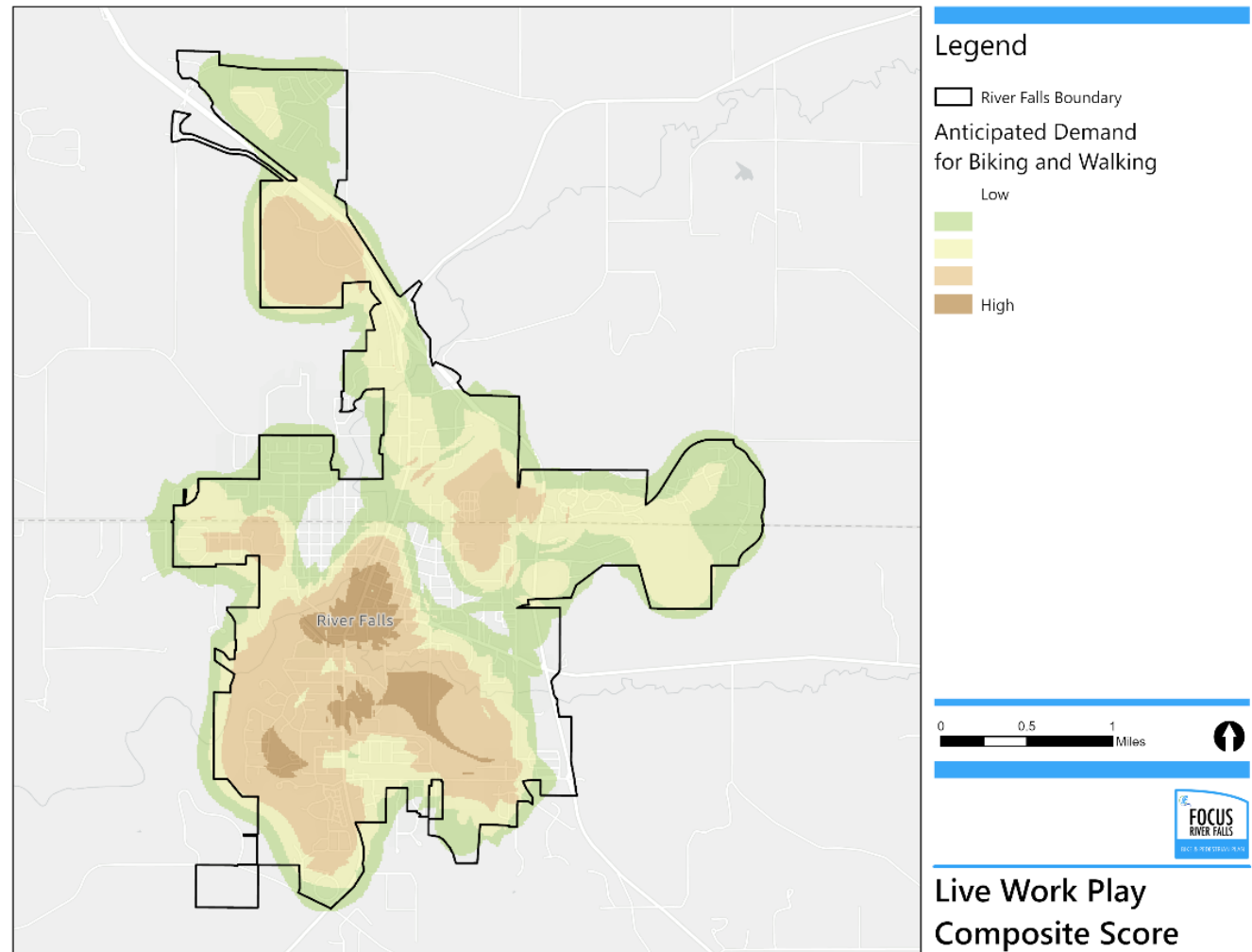


Figure 3. Composite Demand for Biking and Walking

EQUITY ANALYSIS

An equity analysis examined where people who face a disproportionate transportation burden live around River Falls. Many people who face a disproportionate transportation burden are likely to live in multifamily and student housing. In River Falls, this type of housing is mostly located in the area around UWRF, especially near S Wasson Lane and S Main Street.

See page 13 in Appendix B: Existing Conditions for details on the equity analysis.

CRASH ANALYSIS

Crash data from 2017 to 2021 (provided by Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT)) is mapped in Figure 4 and Figure 5. Data is displayed by mode (bicycle and pedestrian) as well as severity.

Bicycle and pedestrian crashes predominantly occurred along Main Street and Cascade Avenue. The most severe crashes (non-incapacitating injury for people biking and incapacitating injury for people walking) happened on Main Street. These areas have significant bicycle and pedestrian activity, as they are adjacent to commercial areas and UWRF; however, their auto-centric design poses a risk to people walking and biking in the corridor.



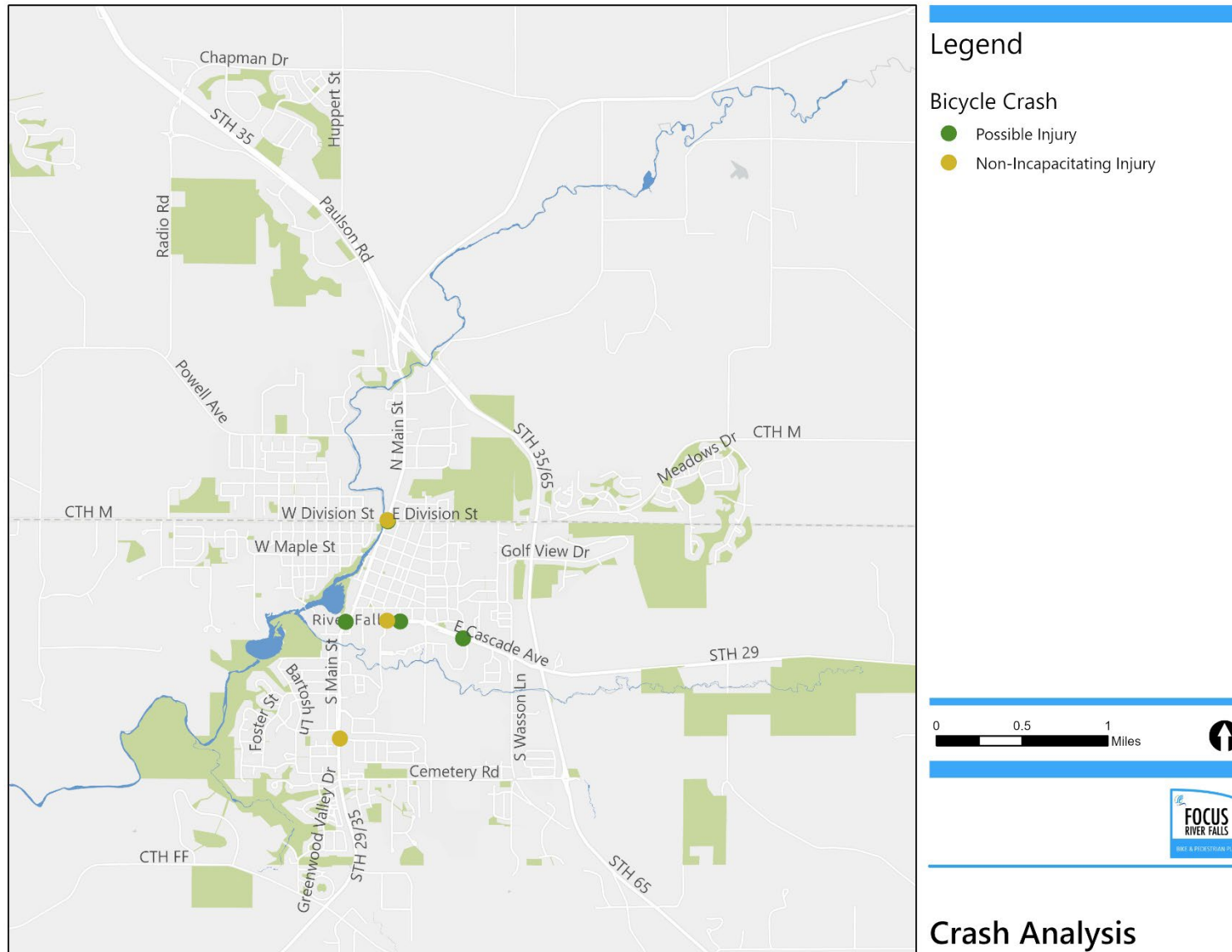


Figure 4. Bicycle Crashes in River Falls (Data Source: WisDOT, 2017–2021)

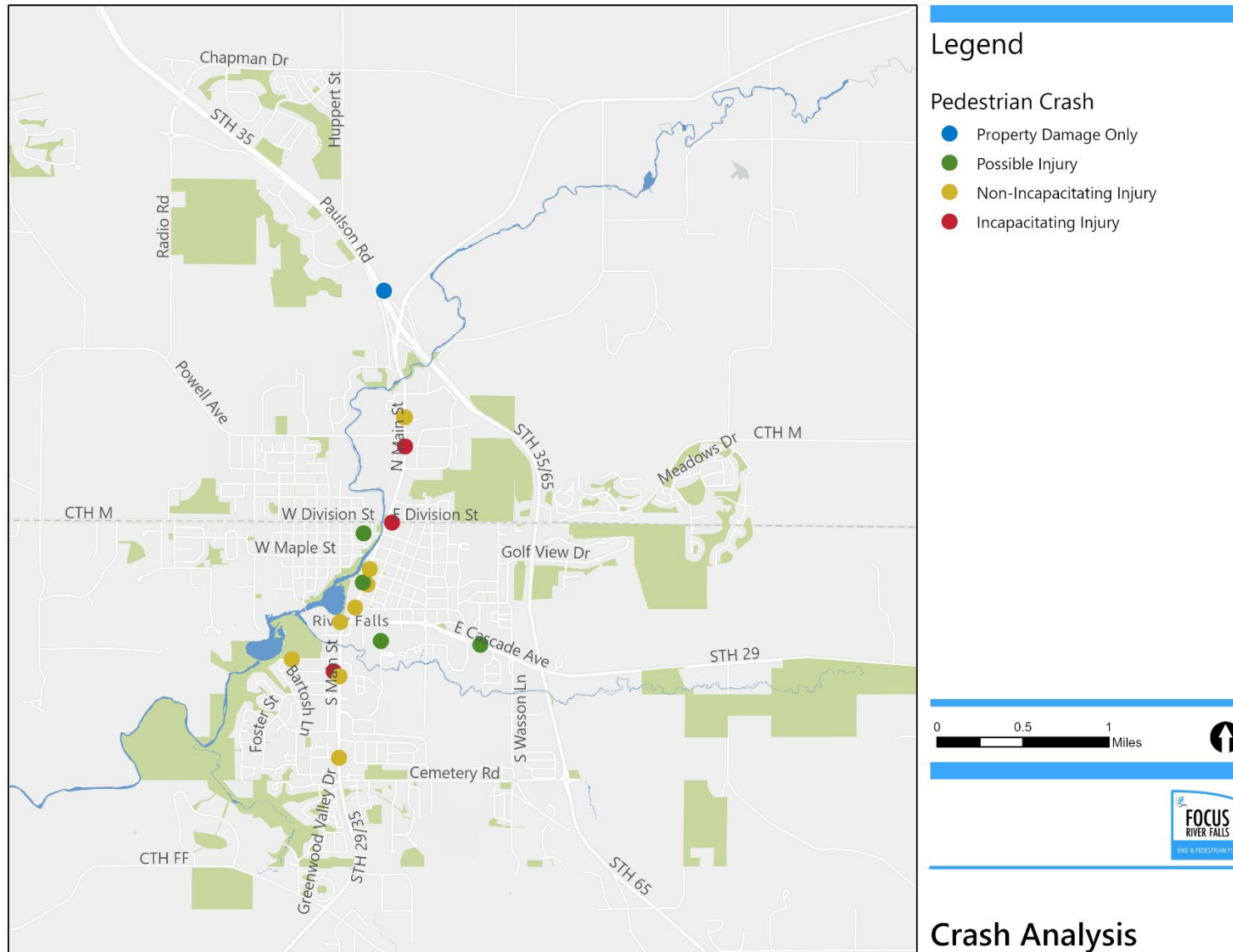


Figure 5. Pedestrian Crashes in River Falls (Data Source: WisDOT, 2017–2021)