Summary
It is important for people to feel safe and comfortable when they choose to bike or walk for transportation or their health. Nelsonville is becoming a safer community for all forms of transportation, through a collaboration between the City of Nelsonville and the Athens County Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program. In addition to the installation of bike infrastructure, a committee is being created to help continue Active Transportation and Complete Streets projects in the future.

Challenge
Lack of transportation continues to be a significant problem for people living in Athens County. According to the 2016 Athens County Community Health Assessment, 9.1 percent of households in Athens County are without a vehicle, compared to the state percentage of 8.4 percent. The City of Nelsonville does not have public transportation and has one of the highest percentages of “zero car households” in Athens County. Limited transportation options inhibit access to jobs, education, health care, human services, and community connectivity. With a rural geography and high rate of poverty, Athens County residents often face isolation when safe, affordable transportation options are not available. Providing more opportunities for biking, walking and transit would relieve the financial burden of owning a car and help increase everyday physical activity opportunities.

Solution
In order to provide more accessible transportation opportunities, partners came together to collect data, provide education and pass city policy. The Buckeye Hills Regional Transportation Planning Organization conducted traffic counts in Nelsonville to identify roads that support safe and comfortable biking. City decision makers and community members participated in on-road educational bike rides developed by Yay Bikes! called How We Roll. These educational rides cultivated new perspectives on how it feels to be a bicyclist traveling on main roads, a better understanding of state laws, and how to be a safe and predictable bicyclist. Finally, with the support of the Nelsonville Streets Committee, the City Council passed a Complete Streets Policy in October 2017, making it city policy that all road users be considered in the planning, design and construction of roadways.
Results

As a result of this work there have been many short and long-term results. Based on the data collected, a plan was initiated for bike “sharrows” to be painted in downtown historic Nelsonville to direct and encourage riders to utilize low-stress routes and to alert drivers to their presence. “Bike May Use Full Lane” signs will be installed on Canal Street to remind all road users of the state law that bicyclists may occupy the travel lane. As a result of the Complete Streets Policy, a Bicycle/Complete Streets Advisory Committee will be created to develop a Bicycle Master Plan for the city. This plan will be implemented over time to improve connectivity for people biking in Nelsonville. The committee will also work on other activities such as bike counts and bike friendly business initiatives to monitor and promote active transportation. By making Active Transportation a priority through city policy, Nelsonville will increase access to resources throughout the community, build economic stability, and improve the health of all residents.

Sustaining Success

With the leadership of the advisory committee, infrastructure changes, improved signage and community education are expected to occur throughout the next several years. The committee will serve as an active forum for the community to be involved in Active Transportation and Complete Streets activities. The advisory committee will actively share information to community members, local businesses and workplaces. Having a Complete Streets Policy ensures that future infrastructure plans will always show designs can enable safe access for all users. Each transportation project will help make the city’s streets safer for drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and abilities.

“The How We Roll ride was very informative and helpful in seeing where we can make Nelsonville more bike/pedestrian friendly. I will be heading up a committee for the City of Nelsonville to make sure we move forward with these projects.”

— Linda Watkins,
Nelsonville City Council Member

Your Involvement is Key

1. Participate in a How We Roll ride to feel more comfortable riding on the streets and learning the rules of the road.
2. Replace a normal car trip with a bike or walking trip!
3. Be an advocate for Active Transportation!
4. Join the Athens County CHC Coalition to learn more about Active Transportation and how to help with local projects.

References

‘Athens County Coordinated Transportation Plan, 2018

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