



# Peninsula Township Non-Motorized Plan Focus Group Findings

May 8, 2025

This document summarizes the findings of six focus groups held between March and May 2025 as part of Peninsula Township's Non-Motorized Transportation Plan development. Each section includes a summary of meeting discussion points and activities, as well as detailed notes gathered during the session. A final synthesis identifies common themes, concerns, and visions expressed by participants of the six sessions.

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## LAND CONSERVANCY – MARCH 5, 2025

**AGENDA:** The Land Conservancy Focus Group discussed land currently conserved by the township, including how it was protected, the conservation process, and what types of projects, if any, can be built on it. Legal limitations were reviewed, and potential compatible uses and community priorities were considered for future decision-making.

### FINDINGS:

#### Conservation Easement Characteristics

- Older easements are fairly uniform; newer ones are more tailored to site conditions.
- Most prioritize agricultural use and limit activities that reduce farmland viability.
- Private trails are often allowed; public trails require explicit easement language.
- Passive recreation is typically limited to the landowner.

#### Non-Motorized Planning & Right-of-Way (ROW)

- Public survey results show strong support for trail and sidewalk improvements.
- While trails are generally not allowed on PDR land, road ROWs may offer alternatives.



- ROWs often span 60–80 feet, enabling trails alongside roads.
- Land Conservancy easements are usually subordinate to ROWs, allowing potential trail development.
- Future PDR applications could include negotiated trail easements.

#### Agrotourism & Public Access

- Some commercial uses are allowed if tied to agriculture or conservation (e.g., farm stands, parking).
- Public access remains sensitive—many landowners oppose unauthorized use.
- Mapping informal trail use may help identify appropriate locations for formal trails.

#### Key Trail Connectivity Projects

1. Mapleton Loop
  - A long-envisioned loop connecting parks, lakes, and neighborhoods—avoiding major roads.
  - Concerns include spray drift, crop impacts, and ROW limitations.
2. Library–School Trail (“Library Loop”)
  - A feasible model using neighborhood roads and ROWs to connect key community assets.
3. Utility Easements
  - Offer another route for trails; require maintenance agreements with utility providers.

#### Easement Amendments & Trail Integration

- Only 1–2 easement amendments occur annually, typically to enhance conservation outcomes.
- New PDR applications present opportunities to include trail provisions early in the process.
- The Land Conservancy will alert McKenna when new applications so planning efforts can be coordinated.

### **NON-MOTORIZED COMMITTEE – MARCH 5, 2025**

**AGENDA:** Discussion at the Non-Motorized Focus Group focused on desired destinations, vision for the future of the non-motorized network, and desired development priorities for the Peninsula.

#### **FINDINGS:**

##### Overview & Public Interest

- Roughly half the peninsula’s population lives south of Grey Road and tends to travel south into the city.
- East Shore, Peninsula Dr, and Bluff Rd are flat and offer flexible routes with lateral connectors.
- 85% of residents support a non-motorized plan.
- A sidewalk is planned between Milliken and M-37 on Eastern Ave.



### Road Network & Safety

- East Shore Rd is highly trafficked by bikers, walkers, and runners—and may be the most dangerous.
- Peninsula Dr is also unsafe; both are county-designated primary roads.
- Peninsula Dr and Center Rd are top safety concerns—shoulder widening or one-way conversion could help.
- One-way pilot projects on shoreline roads have reduced traffic and improved safety but face county resistance.

### Destinations & Loops

- Mapleton Loop (Andy's Proposal): Would connect ~24 destinations, including restaurants, vineyards, parks, and trails. Trail could be hard-pack or paved for road/casual bikers.
- Key destinations include Haserot Beach, linear view corridors, and Archie Park (a good bypass launch point).
- Southern areas like the college, East Bay Park, and the high school are already staging points for group rides.
- Staging areas at parks could support “park-and-ride” biking.

### Recommendations & Desired Features

- Use public engagement to identify desired destinations and routes—especially beyond the southern end and Mapleton Loop.
- Improve safety education: encourage visible clothing and proactive cyclist behavior.
- Explore expanding BATA bus service (currently looping twice daily to Bowers Harbor) to support recreation.
- Develop a non-motorized separated trail network like the Leland Trail.
- Map current use patterns and informal trails; explore potential for formalization.
- Prioritize both trail development and traffic calming on roads; consider shared-space designs.
- Address varying user needs: local residents, road cyclists, and tourists.
- Coordinate closely with the road commission to elevate the township's priorities and influence upcoming decisions—especially with the 2026 ballot question on the horizon.



## LARGE LANDOWNERS – MARCH 5, 2025

**AGENDA:** The Large Landowner discussion focused on the interactions between Peninsula Township’s farmers and various other groups in the Township including residents, construction and landscaping workers, non-motorized users and tourists.

### FINDINGS:

#### General Context

- Easement holders differ by region: American Farmland Trust holds most on the north end; the Land Conservancy is more active on the south end.
- Non-motorized traffic on the peninsula is largely recreational, not destination-based.
- Agricultural operations are impacted by delays caused by recreational traffic:
  - Fuel and time costs add up.
  - Spraying schedules are adjusted to avoid exposure to pedestrians and cyclists.
  - Early-morning recreation can still conflict with farm equipment movement.
  - Heavy machinery cannot stop quickly, increasing risks.

#### Road Safety & Congestion Issues

- Roads like Bluff Rd and Peninsula Dr have numerous blind hills and corners, posing risks for all users.
- Photo-op stops often lack adequate shoulders, forcing vehicles into the road and endangering cyclists.
- Center Rd near Council Oak is especially congested and hazardous.
- Residents avoid backing out of driveways on busy roads and instead park on shoulders—especially for construction and landscaping access—which compounds safety issues.
- Peak season (July–October) sees severe congestion from farm equipment, tour buses, trucks, walkers, cyclists, and a surge in construction (20% of parcels have pulled building permits in 2 years).

#### Challenges with Separated Paths Near Farms

- GAP certification (Good Agricultural Practices) requires farmers to limit public access and manage sanitation—compromised by litter, dogs, and even wildlife.
- Fruit picking by the public is dangerous due to pesticide use and contamination risks.
- Safe public trails need to stay at the perimeter of private farmland and not cross into it.

#### Community Recommendations

- Old Mission Point Park: Improve visibility, manage overgrowth, and consider formalizing informal trails (but assess erosion risks). Horseback riding is common.
- Recreation Shift: Move users from roads into parks where possible.
- Highway Clean-Up: Trash is a problem on Center Rd despite Adopt-a-Highway efforts—consider adding receptacles and enforcement.



- Protect PDR Trust: Avoid pushing for easement amendments that might reduce public confidence.
- Traffic Separation & Road Design: Expand shoulders (especially on Center Rd), study traffic volumes, and continue efforts to separate modes for safety.

## **REGIONAL EXPERTS – APRIL 1, 2025.**

**AGENDA:** This Regional Experts Focus Group gathered together experts from various regional agencies including the Department of Natural Resources, Traverse City, Grand Traverse County, The Groundwork Center, Traverse City Trails, and others.

### **FINDINGS:**

Strengths include scenic view corridors, lack of through traffic, and strong public support for walking and biking. The township's small, connected community, along with the presence of M-37 and a growing, affluent population, support collaboration and potential investment.

Weaknesses center on limited funding, right-of-way, and infrastructure. The peninsula's geography and road network pose challenges, as do speeding, lack of signals, and conflicts between different non-motorized users. Opportunities lie in integrating local and regional plans, pursuing federal and philanthropic funding, supporting agritourism, and improving education and messaging around non-motorized travel. New technologies like e-bikes also offer cost-effective options.

Threats include community opposition to traffic changes, ingrained car-centric habits, increasing vehicle traffic and size, distracted driving, and reduced political support for non-motorized funding.

## **NON-MOTORIZED USERS – APRIL 16, 2025**

**AGENDA:** The Non-Motorized User Focus Group meeting consisted of frequent cyclers, runners, and other non-motorized users of Peninsula Township's mobility network. Attendees participated in a Fix, Keep, Aspire activity.

### **FINDINGS:**

**Fix:** Participants emphasized the need to improve connectivity between the Traverse City Trail Network and Old Mission Peninsula (OMP), resolve water access and parking issues near the East Bay boat launch, and address unsafe vehicle behavior and congestion along East Shore Drive, Center Road, and key intersections. They called for a safe north-south non-motorized route from 8th Street to M-37 near 80, and better traffic calming in busy areas.

**Keep:** Residents want to preserve the Peninsula loop routes for cyclists, scenic character of roads like Bluff and East Shore Drive, access to schools, and the area's natural beauty, including mature trees and viewsheds. The importance of parkland and agricultural heritage was also highlighted.

**Aspire:** Future goals include expanding TART Trail connectivity to key destinations throughout OMP, increasing non-motorized infrastructure like protected bike lanes along M-37, and aligning planning among agencies. Participants supported a shift toward a more bike-friendly culture and emphasized the importance of safe, separated pathways and smaller-scale local connections.



## **SOUTH END RESIDENTS – MAY 1, 2025**

**AGENDA:** This meeting discussed land currently conserved by the township, including how it was protected, the conservation process, and what types of projects, if any, can be built on it. Legal limitations were reviewed, and potential compatible uses and community priorities were considered for future decision-making.

### **FINDINGS:**

**Fix:** Key concerns include speeding on small roads like East Shore, Bluff, and Center, the need for wider and safer shoulders, and better pedestrian infrastructure—especially on Peninsula Drive. Participants also emphasized the need for more signage, safety education for both visitors and locals, and improvements to specific intersections. There was interest in exploring new exit routes from the Peninsula to relieve congestion and enhance safety for all, including children and seniors.

**Keep:** Residents value the Peninsula’s scenic views, mature trees, boat launch access, private property rights, and the area’s overall rural character.

**Aspire:** Aspirations include converting some roads (Park, Bluff, East Shore) to one-ways, creating a non-motorized path along the entire Peninsula, improving water access, and implementing tax or toll systems to help fund infrastructure by capturing revenue from tourism.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Throughout the focus group process, several consistent themes and priorities emerged across stakeholder groups. While perspectives varied between landowners, users, residents, and experts, there was significant alignment around the need for improvements in safety and connectivity across the Peninsula.

### **Connectivity is a Priority**

- Widespread support exists for a trail system that improves access across the Peninsula and connects to regional networks (e.g., TART Trail, Traverse City trail system).
- Both local loops (like the Mapleton Loop) and north-south corridors (e.g., from 8th Street to the tip of the peninsula) were repeatedly discussed.
- Users and regional experts emphasized filling the gaps in existing trail infrastructure, especially near schools, parks, and commercial nodes.

### **Road Safety Concerns Are Ubiquitous**

- Nearly all groups cited traffic speeds, blind curves, narrow or absent shoulders, and conflict between road users as major issues — particularly on East Shore Drive, Peninsula Drive, and Center Road.
- Intersection safety at locations like Center & 7 Hills and Bowers Harbor Drive came up multiple times.
- Educational campaigns around driver awareness and non-motorized road sharing were supported, especially for tourists unfamiliar with the roads.



### Preservation and Character Matter Deeply

- Participants across all focus groups consistently emphasized the importance of preserving:
  - Rural character
  - Viewsheds
  - Tree canopy
  - Agricultural land
- There is strong desire for any infrastructure to be sensitive to the landscape and low-impact in design — for example, using landscaping buffers and avoiding overbuilt features.

### Land Use and Agricultural Conflicts Must Be Managed

- Large landowners and land conservancy stakeholders expressed concern about:
  - Impacts on GAP certification
  - Trespassing and trash from public trail users
  - Spray drift and operational conflicts with farming
- Trails were seen as more feasible within public ROWs or as part of new PDR easements where language could be negotiated from the outset.

### Creative Solutions Were Proposed

- One-way road pilot projects to allow for shared non-motorized lanes
- Staging areas at parks for bike “park and ride”
- Tourism-related funding mechanisms, such as tolling or special assessments
- Education campaigns to improve pedestrian and cyclist visibility
- Improved intergovernmental coordination (e.g., MDOT, Road Commission, Township, etc.)