

COLLABORATING TO IMPROVE SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY TO BUS STOPS: BETTER DATA,
SIDEWALKS AND AMENITIES

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This presentation includes an overview of two relevant projects conducted within the New River Valley in southwestern Virginia. The first project was a regional GIS transit database to collect transit route and bus stop data from several agencies, so that data are available in a single location online. A GIS data portal was developed in support of transit planning efforts, and as an integrated information sharing resource for transit systems in the region. Transit route and stop data was gathered from public service providers and then made available through the New River Valley (NRV) Regional Transit GIS Portal with web map, FTP site link for data downloads, and resources. In addition to providing a single location for regional transit data, the project served as a catalyst for additional interactions with transit providers, and has helped increase communication and collaboration among stakeholders. Lessons from project included the value gained by fostering relationships among transit agencies, the importance of face-to-face meetings, as well as a need for standards to assist in efficient data use and sharing, and data maintenance. This presentation focuses on lessons applicable to other regions, including the partnering with multiple stakeholders to create and support the Portal. As an additional benefit, the project served as an applied learning experience for student interns, who completed the majority of the work on the project.

The second project was a consultant-led study aimed to improve the safety and accessibility to bus stops within the Town of Blacksburg, VA. The project identified candidate bus stops and then prioritized them for improvement as high, medium, and low priority stops. Specific improvements were then provided for the high priority stops including cost. Besides improving safety and accessibility, the goal was to support increasing ridership on transit, while supporting a more walkable, connected system, in alignment with other Town improvement planning efforts.

How these projects were conducted, along with lessons applicable to other regions will be described. The challenge of balancing planning efforts with day-to-day constraints will also be discussed. Additionally the need for education will be discussed, knowing that designing great tools and solutions are just the first step. On-going dissemination and discussion is needed to allow great plans to be realized.