

# COMMUNITY FOCUS REPORT

## 2021 UPDATE

A series of white papers on the report's 11 primary topics will be published on a rolling basis ahead of the 2021 edition. For news, podcasts and more information, visit [springfieldcommunityfocus.org](https://springfieldcommunityfocus.org).



## ***TRANSPORTATION***

With priorities on safety and accessibility, transit programs balance new and traditional ways to move.

## 2021 UPDATE: **TRANSPORTATION**

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**BLUE RIBBONS** Multimodalism · Collaboration, engagement and advocacy · Improving existing roadways



**RED FLAGS** Traffic safety · Consistent funding · Public transit

# Multimodal focus broadens transit options

Since the last Community Focus Report, the transportation system in Springfield has continued to work toward better integration between vehicular traffic and people who walk and bicycle. We reaped the benefits of this combination as everyone stepped outdoors in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much of the planning happens through the Ozarks Transportation Organization, the federally designated metropolitan planning organization that serves as a forum for cooperative transportation decision-making by state and local governments, as well as regional transportation and planning agencies for the Springfield urbanized area. MPOs are charged with maintaining and conducting a “continuing, cooperative and comprehensive” regional transportation planning and project programming process for a given study area, defined as the area projected to become urbanized within the next 20 years.

The OTO includes local elected and appointed officials from Christian and Greene counties, as well as the cities of Battlefield, Nixa, Ozark, Republic, Springfield, Strafford and Willard. It also includes technical staff members from the Missouri Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration,

Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Aviation Administration. Staff members from local governments and area transportation agencies serve on OTO’s Technical Planning Committee, which provides technical review, comments and recommendations on draft plans, programs, studies and issues. The OTO study area has a population of more than 340,000 covering 428 square miles. By the year 2045, the population of Christian and Greene counties is expected to be almost 490,000, growing by more than 100,000 people in that time frame.

## BLUE RIBBONS

During the past two years, Springfield has seen great strides in **multimodalism**, the effort to get different modes of transportation to complement one another.

In 2018, Springfield was selected to participate in the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors Walkability Action Institute. The result of this multi-day training in Decatur, Georgia, was a walkability guide, finalized in spring 2019 and adopted by Springfield City Council on June 3, 2019.

This document created guidelines for development of the Forward SGF city planning effort and funding for walkability projects in the city’s Capital Improvements Program:

- **Priorities:** Increase awareness of the value and characteristics of walkability to establish the Springfield community as a regional leader in implementing principles of walkability.
- **Infrastructure:** Construct, enhance and maintain sidewalks, multiuse

## Area covered by the Ozarks Transportation Organization



## COVID-19 IMPACT

COVID-19 had as dramatic an impact on transportation as other sectors of daily life.

- After the stay-at-home order in March 2020, traffic volumes in Springfield were down more than 40% and did not return to “normal” until July of that year.
- The Missouri Department of Transportation and the Highway Patrol saw an increase in speeding and crashes.
- MoDOT maintenance crews were forced to modify shifts and procedures to ensure health and safety when filling potholes, mowing, and repairing roads and equipment.
- The state also offered free, temporary permits for heavy vehicles up to 100,000 pounds to keep freight moving.
- CU Transit was affected by COVID-19 with ridership at only 21% of the average from the previous year. The City Utilities transit division was able to maintain operation of the farebox and use of the front door on its buses by adding temporary barriers in the bus’s operator (driver) area. The temporary barriers were featured by the Federal Transit Administration

on its social media pages as a best practice and early response to COVID.

- The pandemic also created funding instability. Springfield had to adjust its citywide budget for the potential impact to sales tax related to the 2020 lockdown, and MoDOT and the Ozarks Transportation Organization delayed their transportation improvement programs.
- MoDOT received reduced funding from fuel taxes due to reduced traffic but, surprisingly, received an increase in funding from sales tax and registration fees because of increased vehicle sales.
- Residents sought refuge on area trails. According to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, people of all ages are using greenway trails more than ever as they strive to maintain their mental and physical health: “Dramatic increases in visitation are being recorded across the United States; an analysis of 31 trail counters for the week of March 16–22 by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy found a nationwide trail usage increase of nearly 200% from that same week in 2019.”



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sidepaths, bicycle facilities, transit facilities, trails and linear parks in conjunction with planning for adjacent land uses, utility infrastructure, and overall community growth and development.

- **Equity:** Advocate for the development of public and private infrastructure projects that help to expand the walkable network, increasing connectivity and access for users of all types, without displacing current residents.
- **Policy:** Consider alignment of local, regional and statewide policies that can have a positive impact on creating a culture of walkability.

In November 2019, the City of Springfield was awarded a \$21 million grant through the U.S. Department of Transportation's BUILD Grants program. This funding is for the Grant Avenue Parkway project, which will create a three-mile off-street pedestrian and bicycle pathway along Grant Avenue between Sunshine

Street and College Street, including bridge enhancements, utility upgrades, fiber connectivity, and additional crossing and intersection improvements. This project connects the Wonders of Wildlife to downtown Springfield, linking parks and recreation amenities, neighborhoods and schools along the way, while filling a vital gap in the Ozark Greenways trail network. This project will provide a design template that can be used elsewhere throughout Springfield for future projects. The city has developed a draft plan for the corridor and construction will take place over the next few years.

Following an assessment of sidewalks and curb ramps in the public right-of-way, the City of Springfield in 2019 developed a Public Rights of Way ADA Transition Plan, which identified barriers to accessibility along the city's 640 miles of sidewalk and for 10,297 curb ramps. While this plan is estimated to cost \$30 million and take until 2036 to implement, its

creation is the culmination of a multi-year effort to quantify the compliance needs of Springfield's sidewalks and curb ramps.

Mayor Ken McClure signed a proclamation on July 26, 2020, declaring Disability Awareness Day in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The city installed relevant signage to raise the visibility of street crossings for people with disabilities.

The pedestrian-awareness programs, Mr. Walker and SGF Yields (see "Success Story"), were identified in the 2019 Community Focus Report as Blue Ribbons. The efforts of this program continue to expand through a series of City Code amendments adopted in November 2020.

These changes now require drivers to yield the right-of-way to pedestrians approaching or waiting within three feet of crosswalks without signals. Previous

### SUCCESS STORY



**S**GF Yields is Springfield's answer to the increase of pedestrian fatalities across the nation and on our local streets: The latest Governor's Highway Safety report estimates that pedestrian fatalities have risen by 53% from 2009 to 2018, while all other traffic fatalities have increased by only 2%.

The pedestrian safety program, designed to educate the public about right-of-way laws, helps change local attitudes among pedestrians and drivers, so that Springfield can become a safer, more pedestrian-friendly community. The Department of Public Works and the Springfield Police Department work together on the program, which uses engineering, education and enforcement, public art, and techniques such as social norming and positive mental association.

Studies confirm the program's success. At the beginning of the program during the summer of 2017, 25% of drivers would yield to a pedestrian in a crosswalk; today, compliance has risen to more than 40%.

The program is built around "Mr. Walker," a neon-yellow statue of the familiar-looking pedestrian icon on walk lights and crosswalk

signs. More than 20 statues have been placed strategically across town.

Mr. Walker quickly became popular with the public and functions as the city's "spokesperson" that brings safety messages via public service announcements, flyers and social clips.

Mr. Walker has two main messages: "Drivers, yield to pedestrians. Pedestrians, use crosswalks." Another important part of the campaign is the heart-shaped "crosswalk ahead" signs. The look-alike signs intuitively communicate an attitude of caring, even yielding. Drivers that have noticed the heart-shaped signs tend to remember the message when they later come across the standard traffic signs, an example of positive mental association.

In its second year, SGF Yields added traffic safety education for elementary school children, and has added informational flyers with need-to-know traffic rules to adults. The quarterly compliance studies have led to multiple crosswalk enhancements, such as in-road signs and rectangular rapid flashing beacons. Moving forward, SGF Yields is adding education-based crosswalk enforcement, which is expected to increase driver crosswalk compliance further.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF SPRINGFIELD

A program to alert motorists to be mindful of marked crosswalks is intended to make Springfield more accommodating to pedestrians.



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city code regulations reflected the state law, which only required a vehicle to yield once the pedestrian was in the roadway. An amendment also provided bicyclists the same rights as pedestrians if dismounted while approaching, entering and crossing. In 2020, the Springfield Police Department received a grant to conduct crosswalk enforcement checks, focusing on education and best practices.

Over several calls for projects, the Ozarks Transportation Organization awarded more than \$4 million in funding during 2019 for sidewalks, trails, and trail planning services. This funding was a significant step toward implementing the OTO Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Investment Study. The goal is to connect the trail system within Springfield to the communities around the city, developing one large trail system throughout the region.

With the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, trail usage dramatically increased. The pandemic highlighted the importance of outdoor space throughout a community. Nearly four miles of trail were added to the region in 2020, with one mile added in Springfield. Highlights include the Fulbright Spring Greenway trail built between Lost Hill Park and Truman School, the Mount Vernon Bridge over Jordan Creek making room for future trail under Mount Vernon Street, and Jordan Creek Trail through West Meadows, as well as a half-mile section of sidepath along the newly widened Fremont Avenue between Sunset Street and Battlefield Road.

In July 2019, City Utilities was awarded nearly \$1.5 million for two battery electric buses, charging stations and workforce development to be delivered in summer 2021.

Better Block SGF, modeled after the Better Block Foundation in Dallas, Texas, looks to empower individuals to reimagine the built environment to build a better city, one block at a time. We Create 2020 challenged six teams to engage the community and creatively reimagine public transit through the design of a better bus stop. On March 7, 2020, members of the community were invited to see the designs and vote on a

favorite. Throughout 2020, Better Block SGF showed how on-street parking can be transformed into greenspace. They helped Druff's restaurant on Park Central East put together a temporary outdoor seating space as a creative way to provide outdoor seating during the pandemic. In September, they hosted Park(ing) Day in downtown Springfield, which was tied to a worldwide event turning parking spaces into public spaces for the whole community.

Through the **collaboration and public-engagement** efforts of Forward SGF, thousands of citizens have participated in opportunities to provide input on transportation and other community initiatives. Forward SGF tools also have been put to use for projects such as the Grant Avenue Parkway and the subarea plans for Commercial Street and downtown Springfield. These tools include online surveys, prioritization of goals, an online tool to map priorities, and interactive polling during public meetings. Though COVID has prevented in-person meetings, virtual engagements have also been successful.

Advocacy for the outdoors has also increased, with renewed emphasis on integrating trails with the urban environment. Upcoming projects, such as Renew Jordan Creek, seek to improve the floodplain and floodway of Jordan Creek, while improving quality of place and enhancing pedestrian access and greenway connectivity.

Even while improving the multi-modal aspects of the community's transportation system, **several major projects have helped improve the existing roadway network.**

The most significant project to have taken place recently is the rebuild of U.S. 65, which replaced pavement dating back to the 1970s. The project, which concluded in 2019, was innovative in that sections of the highway were shut down completely to allow for faster, safer pavement replacement.

Missouri placed a substantial focus on bridges in 2019 and 2020, as the General Assembly and the governor made \$50 million available to replace 45 bridges. The Missouri Department of Transportation

### LEGISLATIVE IMPACT



tems of legislative interest in the transportation sector include several safety-related items and one for funding.

- In 2020, Gov. Mike Parson signed into law the option for motorcyclists to ride without a helmet, which offers less protection in the event of accidents. Reversing this change would help achieve Missouri's strategic highway safety plan, Show-Me Zero, for eliminating fatalities and serious injuries on Missouri roadways.
- Missouri is one of two states—the other is Montana—without a law prohibiting everyone from texting and driving. The state's current ban only applies to drivers under the age of 21. Efforts to extend the ban to all ages stalled during the 2021 legislative session.
- There have been multiple efforts over the years to increase Missouri's fuel tax. The current effort, SB 262, was signed by the governor in June 2021. This provides for a 2.5-cent increase annually for five years, increasing the fuel tax to 29.5 cents from 17. Collection will start in October 2021. Unique in this bill is the availability of a rebate program, in which drivers would be required to apply to the Department of Revenue once a year for a refund on the increased tax. Due to the rebate, this bill is not subject to the Hancock Amendment and will not need to go to the voters.

received an \$81.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation for bridge work on Interstate 70—a grant that triggered bonding in the amount of \$301 million to repair or replace another 215 bridges around the state.

Most bridges in the Springfield area are in fair or better condition and, as a result, will not be directly impacted by this funding. However, it has made additional funding available for high-priority local transportation projects that would have been dedicated to these bridges.

The OTO tracks bridge and pavement conditions within its boundary, which is larger than Springfield itself, including the larger urbanized area. Bridge condition ratings are calculated by taking the lowest sub-rating of the super-structure, sub-structure and deck. Ratings range from 3 to 9. At a bridge rating of 3, bridges are closed to the public. A bridge rating of 5 is considered "fair," with all primary structural elements as sound, though they may have minor section

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loss, cracking, spalling or scour. A bridge rating of 9 is “excellent.” In 2020, of the 343 bridges in the OTO region, 321 scored “fair” or better.

RED FLAGS

**Traffic safety** continues to be a Red Flag for the region. Springfield tracks and reports crashes based on severity and vehicular type, and while 2019 seemed to be on par with prior years regarding injury and fatal crashes, 2020 was significantly worse. Transportation experts believe that reduced traffic and increased speeds due to the pandemic contributed to the increased severity of crashes. A number of fatal motorcycle crashes occurred in 2020. Though Missouri’s helmet law has been repealed, almost all motorcycle fatalities within the City of Springfield had helmets that appeared to meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety standards.

Though the state and region have been successful in attracting funding for specific improvements, **funding** as a whole continues to be inadequate to cover all of the area’s transportation infrastructure needs. Although Springfield voters renewed the city’s ½-cent transportation sales tax in 2019 for the seventh time and with a 20-year sunset, more than \$5 million—more than 40%—of the revenue for the first five years is dedicated to major street resurfacing and rehabilitation.

Until the recent passage of SB 262 (see “Legislative Impact” sidebar), MoDOT’s fuel-tax rate of 17-cents per gallon had not increased since 1996 and was among the lowest in the nation. Increased fuel mileage of vehicles has also cut into how much the fuel tax raises. Recent efforts to increase the Missouri gas tax will work toward addressing an increasing maintenance deficit; however, these continued maintenance needs mean fewer funds will be available for high priority projects or for supporting the workforce who

helps deliver those projects. The federal gas tax has also not increased since 1993, and the Highway Trust Fund relies on federal general fund transfers to remain solvent. This funding uncertainty makes it more difficult to plan for future transportation improvements. Forward SGF and other community-engagement opportunities have shown that there is an increased desire for transportation improvements such as bicycle and pedestrian facilities, trails, and aesthetically pleasing projects. These priorities will have to be weighed with other needed transportation improvements for available funding resources.

**Transit** is also a recurring Red Flag. When compared to peer cities, CU Transit, the public transportation division of City Utilities, provides more comprehensive service in hours of service and coverage, but it is not convenient when compared to other forms of travel.

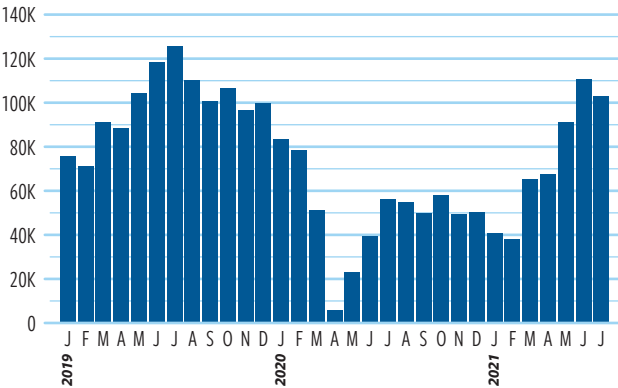
The average commute time, using any mode, for all workers who reside within the Springfield city limits is 18 minutes. The average commute time in the urbanized area is just over 22 minutes. While bus passengers can commute to some job locations in Springfield in less than 20 minutes, most take from 30 minutes to an hour. In the long term, further coordination of housing and employment locations with transit routes could improve that convenience factor.

Still unknown is the full impact of ridesharing services and scooter or bike-share services on transit and transportation in general. These can supplement travel by bus but are more expensive.

*The Transportation 2021 Update was produced by Natasha Longpine of Ozarks Transportation Organizations with input from: Mary Kromrey, Mandy Buttgen-Quinn, Matt Crawford, Derrick Estell, David Hutchison, Addison Jones, Justin Lockhart, John Montgomery and Rusty Worley.*

KEY METRICS

Total Passengers at Springfield-Branson National Airport



SOURCE: SPRINGFIELD-BRANSON NATIONAL AIRPORT

**Average Commute Time for Springfield Residents, 2019**

**18.2 minutes**

Up from 17.7 minutes in 2018

SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

**Bridges in the Ozarks Transportation Organization Boundary, 2019**

**334**

Total

**321**

Bridges rated “fair” or better, indicating all primary structural elements are sound

SOURCE: OTO

**City Utilities Bus Ridership, 2020**

**816,390**

Down from 1,192,893 in 2019

SOURCE: CITY UTILITIES

Total Accidents Involving Bicyclists & Pedestrians		
	2019	2020
Pedestrians	133	134
Bicyclists	93	77
Total	226	211
Fatal Accidents		
	2019	2020
Pedestrians	4	6
Bicyclists	1	0
Total	5	6

SOURCE: OTO