

Active Transportation in Billings Area Schools: A report on the current practices and policies

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Prepared for:

Billings Public
Schools and City of
Billings



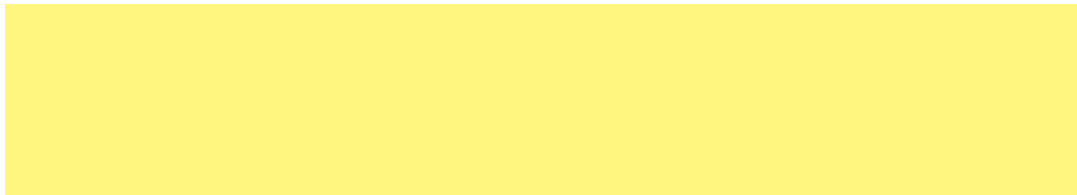


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Introduction

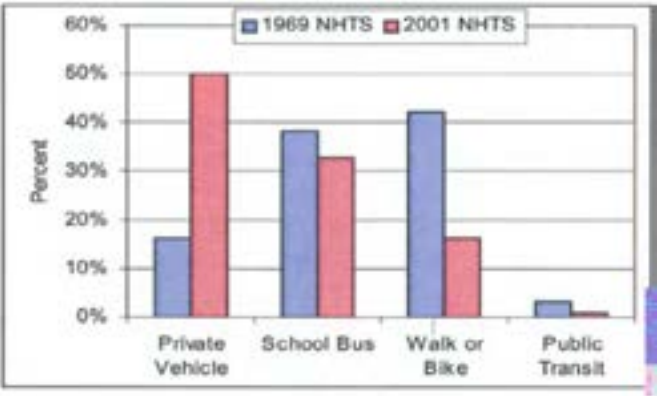
Less than 50 years ago, nearly half of all school aged children walked or rode a bicycle to school. Today, only 13 percent either walk or ride a bicycle to school. According to the Billings Safe Routes to School study, 28.50 percent of children kindergarten through 6th grade walk to school and 2.10 percent ride a bicycle. Parents driving their children to school is still the most popular mode choice. Many parents express concern about safety and speed of traffic when considering letting their child walk or ride a bicycle to school. According to the National Center for Safe Routes to School report, “How Children Get to School: School Travel Patterns From 1969 to 2009,” “distance between home and school was strongly associated with how children get to and from school. The percentage of children who walked to and from school is greater among those who live closer to school.”

Active transportation has not only declined as a means to and from school but has also declined as a form of commuting to work and running errands. Active transportation has a number of social, physical, and environmental benefits. Walking and riding your bike helps alleviate traffic and pollution. These forms of transportation also help build a better community, promote healthy lifestyles, save money, and especially for kids, build a sense of independence. The policies and plans outlined in this report highlight the efforts the City of Billings has made and continues to make in active transportation.

“distance between home and school was strongly associated with how children get to and from school”

- National Center for Safe Routes to School report. March 2012

Mode of Arrival to School by Students Ages 6-12



Source: NHTS Data Series, 1969 and 2001



Yellowstone County and City of Billings 2008 Growth Policy

The purpose of the Yellowstone County and City of Billings 2008 Growth Policy is to guide local officials and community members in making decisions that will positively affect the future of the community. Alternate travel modes are supported in the City of Billings as well as Yellowstone County. The City operated Metropolitan Transit System provides service on 18 fixed routes Monday through Friday and 9 fixed routes on Saturday. Prior to 2006, sidewalks were not always required to be constructed at the time of subdivision. In 2006, the subdivision regulations were amended to require boulevard sidewalks in all new subdivisions.

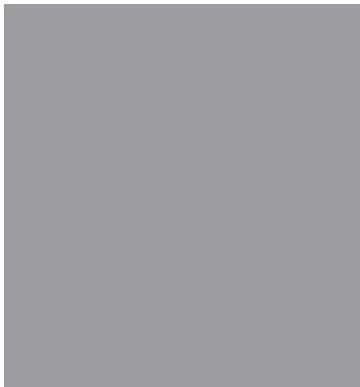
Complete Streets Policy

Billings has a Complete Streets Policy that was passed by City Council in August 2011. The Complete Streets Policy ensures all roadway users, including bicyclists and pedestrians, are considered during the planning and design of roadway projects. An up-to-date inventory of all sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian enhancements is currently under development for Billings.

Billings Helmet Policy

The City of Billings enacted a mandatory helmet ordinance in 2001 for the safety of bicycle riders under the age of 16, but this ordinance is rarely enforced. Mandatory helmet laws have contributed to significant drops in children cycling to school after the introduction of the helmet laws and reductions in the overall number of bicyclists.¹ According to the 2014 PRC Community Health Needs Assessment Report for Yellowstone County, 38.5 percent of children ages 5-17 reported always wearing a helmet while riding a bicycle.

¹Montana Bicycle Safety Study, 2002



Mandatory helmet laws have contributed to significant drops in children cycling to school after the introduction of the helmet laws and reductions in the overall number of bicyclists.

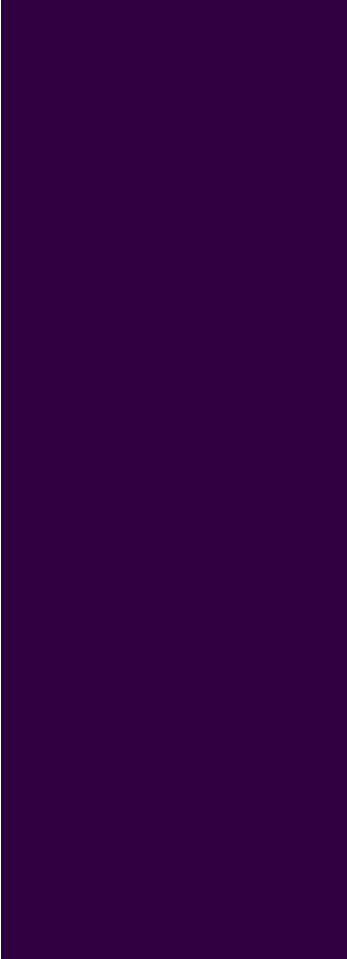
- Montana Bicycle Safety Study, 2002

2011 Billings Area Bikeway and Trail Master Plan

Vision: “Billings will have one of the most comprehensive bicycle and trail networks in the State of Montana and will be rated a Gold Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists by the year 2020.”

Goals and Objectives:

1. Safety and accessibility
 - Improve and prioritize bicycle and pedestrian accommodations within the Billings Urban Area.
2. Implementation
 - Adopt local government policies, processes and standards that encourage and enhance walking, bicycling and other trail related activities in the Billings area.
3. Evaluation
 - Monitor the implementation of the Billings Area Bikeway and Trail Master Plan
4. Transit Integration
 - Integrate bicycling and walking into the MET transit system
5. Maintenance
 - Ensure citywide bicycle and trail facilities are clean, safe and accessible.
6. Education and Encouragement Programs
 - Implement comprehensive education and encouragement programs targeted at all populations
7. Enforcement
 - Increase enforcement on City/County streets, trails, and bikeways
8. Health and wellness
 - Promote healthy lifestyles and safe trail/bikeway facilities.





2014 Billings Long Range Transportation Plan

The Billings Urban Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is a framework to guide the development and implementation of multimodal transportation system projects for the Billings Urban Area.

Goals of the LRTP:

1. To develop a transportation system that is safe, efficient, and effective
2. To optimize, preserve, and enhance the existing transportation system
3. To identify and prioritize projects that mitigate deficiencies, maximize the use of existing facilities, and balance anticipated needs with available funding
4. To develop a transportation system that protects the natural environment and promotes a healthy, sustainable community
5. To create a transportation system that supports the practical and efficient use of all modes of transportation
6. To develop a transportation system that supports the existing local economy and connects Billings to local, regional, and national commerce

Public feedback during development of the 2014 LRTP identified elements relating to pedestrians, bicycles, transit, safety, and intersections to be among the most important issues. Bicycle related issues received the most comments with general themes being to improve bike connectivity in downtown, complete the trail system, and provide facilities on 6th Avenue North.

Common themes related to safety were providing intersection control upgrades in several locations and identifying areas with sidewalk gaps. Identifying areas with sidewalk gaps was the main concern relating to pedestrians. The most common themes relating to public transit gathered from the public feedback were to add more covered bus stops and benches, provide service to Lockwood and the airport, and promote ridership with colleges, hospitals, and downtown businesses.



Safe Routes to School Study Phase I and Phase II

The Safe Routes to School Study Phase I and Phase II (SRTS) evaluates non-motorized travel to and from the 22 existing elementary schools in Billings. The Phase I study began in the fall of 2009 and included Arrowhead, Beartooth, Bench, Bitterroot, Boulder, Eagle Cliffs, Meadowlark, Newman, Poly Drive, Ponderosa, and Washington Elementary Schools. The remaining 11 elementary schools were evaluated in the second phase of the SRTS study, which began in the fall of 2010. The Phase 2 study included Alkali Creek, Big Sky, Broadwater, Burlington, Central Heights, Highland, McKinley, Miles Avenue, Orchard, Rose Park, and Sandstone Elementary Schools. The study focuses primarily on engineering improvements but discusses the five E's for SRTS efforts: Engineering, Enforcement, Encouragement, Education, and Evaluation. Some of the proposed engineering improvements include installing sidewalks with curb extensions, repainting crosswalks, and moving bus and parent drop off zones.

Two Goals Identified:

1. Enhance the safety for students traveling to and from school
2. Increase the number of students walking or bicycling to school





Elementary School Policies Regarding Bicycling

There are 22 elementary schools in Billings. Most of them have regulations regarding bicycling to and from school. The majority of the elementary schools with policies regarding bicycling to school either do not allow kindergarteners or first graders to bicycle to school or require them to be accompanied by an adult if they are going to ride their bicycle to school. All 22 elementary schools have best walking route maps for their area. These maps were created as part of the SRTS study.

Rules about bicycling at all School District 2 elementary schools:

1. Ride on the right hand side of the street
2. Only one child to a bike
3. Ride in a single file line
4. Dismount when crossing the street
5. Walk bikes on the school grounds and the sidewalk adjacent to school grounds
6. Park and lock bikes in bike rack
7. Always wear a helmet

Broadwater Elementary:

- 2nd-6th grade may ride a bike to school
- K-1st may ride if accompanied by an adult/parent
- A parent note AND helmet is required every year to ride a bike to school

Highland Elementary

- Discourages K-1st graders from riding bikes to school but does not prohibit it

Arrowhead Elementary

- Any student may ride a bike to school but rollerblades, skateboards, and scooters are prohibited

Newman Elementary

- K-1st graders are not allowed to ride a bike to school
- 

Elementary School Policies Regarding Bicycling *Continued*

Ponderosa Elementary

- K-1st graders are not allowed to ride a bike to school
- Helmets are encouraged but not required

Big Sky Elementary

- K-1st graders should be escorted by an adult/parent if they want to ride a bike to school
- 2nd-6th may ride unaccompanied

Poly Drive Elementary

- K-1st graders discouraged from riding bike to school unsupervised

Boulder Elementary

- K-1st strongly recommended to not ride bikes to school

McKinley Elementary

- No age limit stated in parent handbook for riding bike to school
- The school does not support nor discourage the notion of using scooters, roller blades, or skateboards as means of transportation. This is a parental decision

Bench Elementary

- Only 2nd-6th graders are allowed to ride their bikes to school
- K-1st graders are not allowed to ride “wheel” transportation to school

- If a student consistently doesn’t wear his/her helmet they will not be allowed to ride a bike, roller blade, skate board etc to school

Rose Park Elementary

- 1st-6th graders may ride bikes to school. Kindergarteners are not allowed to ride a bike to school

Sandstone Elementary

- No age limit specified for riding in handbook. All students riding a bike to school must wear a helmet and have a bike lock
- Students must walk their bikes while on school grounds

Burlington Elementary

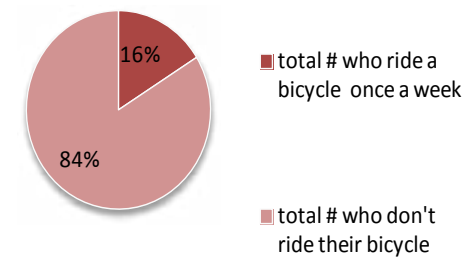
- 2nd-6th grade may ride their bikes to school
- Helmets are strongly recommended



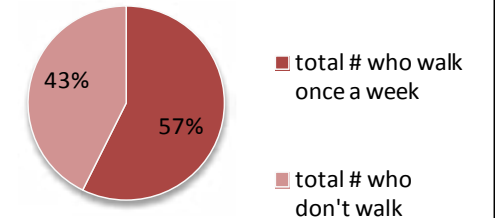
Conclusion

It's easy to see why active transportation is important. What is harder to understand are the factors that limit the number of people who walk or ride a bicycle to school or work. Some of these factors are lack of adequate infrastructure like sidewalks or bike lanes, living too far away, or the inconvenience of walking or riding a bike. Our survey results indicate school aged children like and want to be able to walk or ride a bicycle to school. Providing bus service is costly and this should be taken into account when considering closing neighborhood schools or when siting a location for a new school. All of these limiting factors can be remedied and it starts with educating the public, especially school aged children, and advocating for active transportation.

% of Students Surveyed at Broadwater, Washington, and Ponderosa



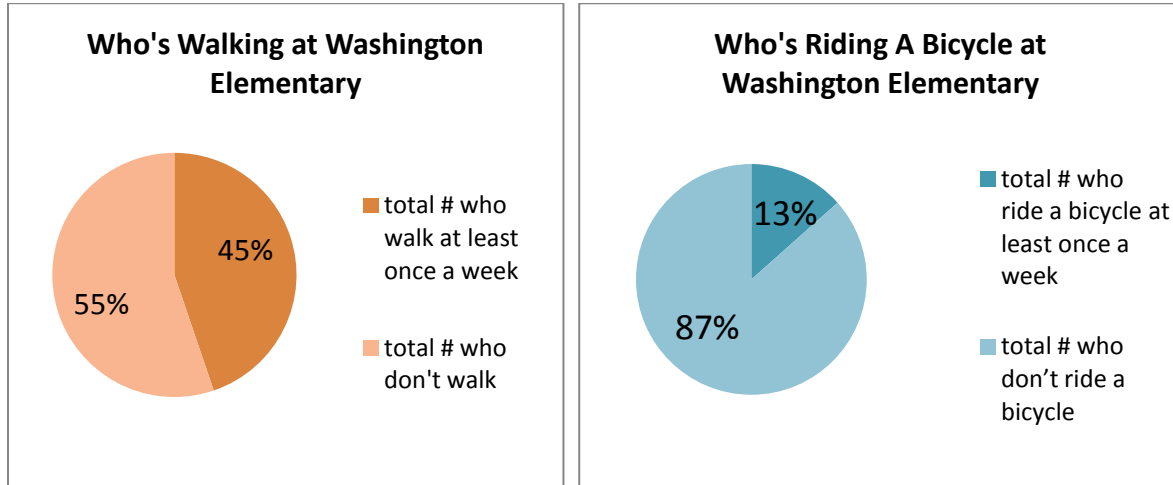
% of Students Surveyed at Broadwater, Washington, and Ponderosa



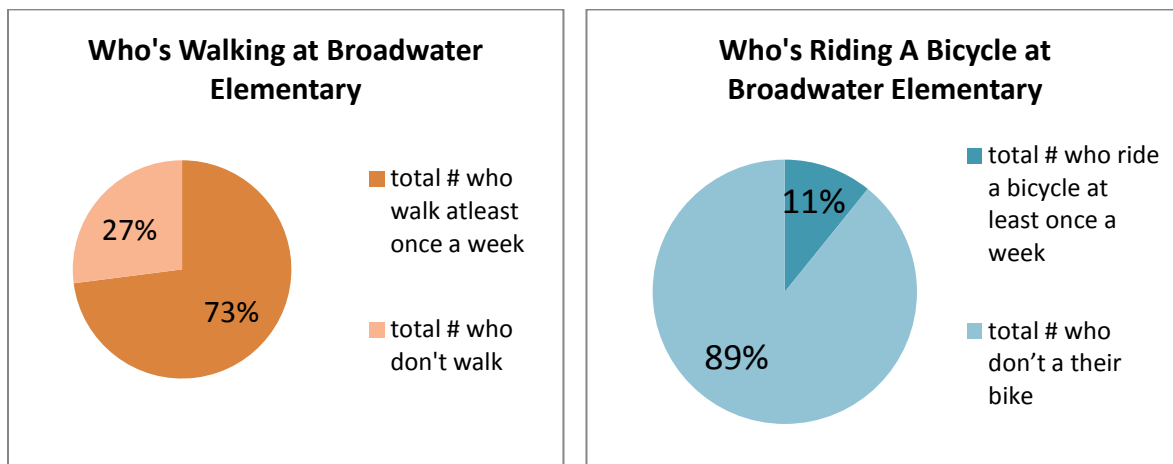
Item A

In Class Safety Survey Results

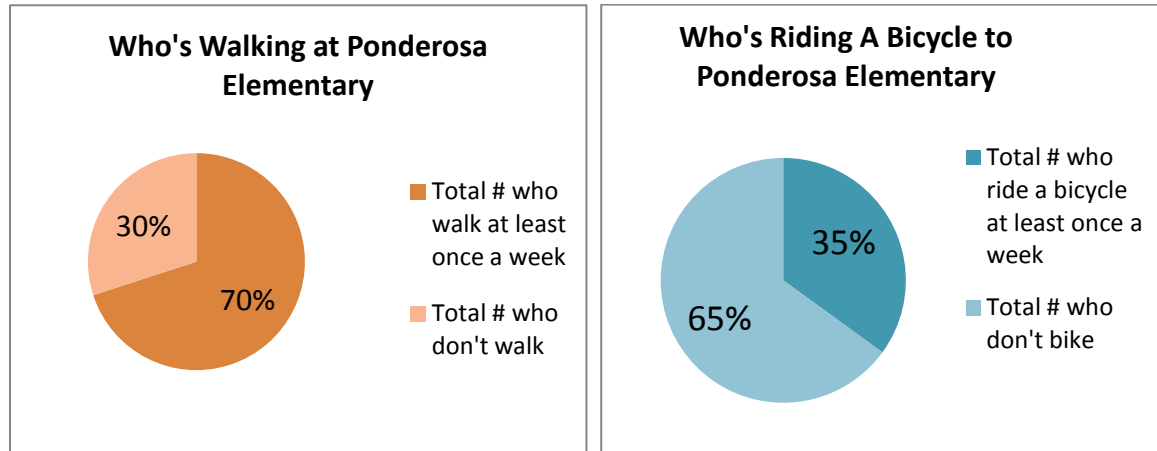
Washington Elementary School: 67, 3rd-5th grade students surveyed



Broadwater Elementary School: 37, 4th and 5th grade students surveyed



Ponderosa Elementary School: 20, 1st-6th grade students surveyed



In-class Safety Survey

Question	Yes	No
How many of you walk to school at least once a week?		
How many of you ride your bike to school at least once a week?		
If you ride your bike to school, do you wear your helmet?		
Do you own a bike lock?		
If you ride your bike, do you have a light on the front for riding at night?		
Would you like to see bicycle education activities at your school?		

Item B

Traffic Safety Certified Teachers

Source: *Journeys From Home Montana*

Teacher Name	School	Date Certified	Contact
Alexis Buss	Bitterroot	8/16/2011	bussa@billingsschools.org
Jeff Goudy	McKinley	8/16/2011	goudyj@billingsschools.org
Josh Miller	Washington	8/16/2011	millerj@billingsschools.org
Justin King	Broadwater	8/16/2011	kingj@billingsschools.org
Marti Edgmond	Meadowlark	8/16/2011	edgmondm@billingsschools.org
Molly Reas	Poly Drive	8/16/2011	reasm@billingsschools.org
Erin Stockton*	Highland	4/16/2012	stocktone@billingsschools.org
Crystal McCamis	Burlington	4/16/2012	mccamisc@billingsschools.org
Jenny Trollope	Eagle Cliffs	4/16/2012	trollopej@billingsschools.org
Heather Elkin	Newman	4/16/2012	elkinh@billingsschools.org
Keenan Pfeifle	Beartooth	4/16/2012	pfeiflek@billingsschools.org
Mark Verlanic	Boulder	4/16/2012	verlanicm@billingsschools.org
Paulette Gershmel	Central Heights	4/16/2012	gershmelp@billingsschools.org
Scott Johnson	Bench	4/16/2012	johnsons@billingsschools.org
Tammy Sutliff-Frimodig	Big Sky	4/16/2012	frimodigt@billingsschools.org
Todd Bertsch	Sandstone	4/16/2012	bertscht@billingsschools.org
Tonia Moore	Ponderosa	4/16/2012	mooret@billingsschools.org
Trisha Harper	Alkali Creek	4/16/2012	harpert@billingsschools.org
Tonia Moore	Miles Avenue		mooret@billingsschools.org
Lisa Forney	Rose Park		forneyl@billingsschools.org
Jacob Pertuit	Arrowhead		pertuitj@billingsschools.org
Jason Amundsen	Orchard		amundsenj@billingsschools.org

*Current interim school contact for Allan Ness – nessa@billingsschools.org

Item C

Modes of Travel in School District 2 Elementary Schools

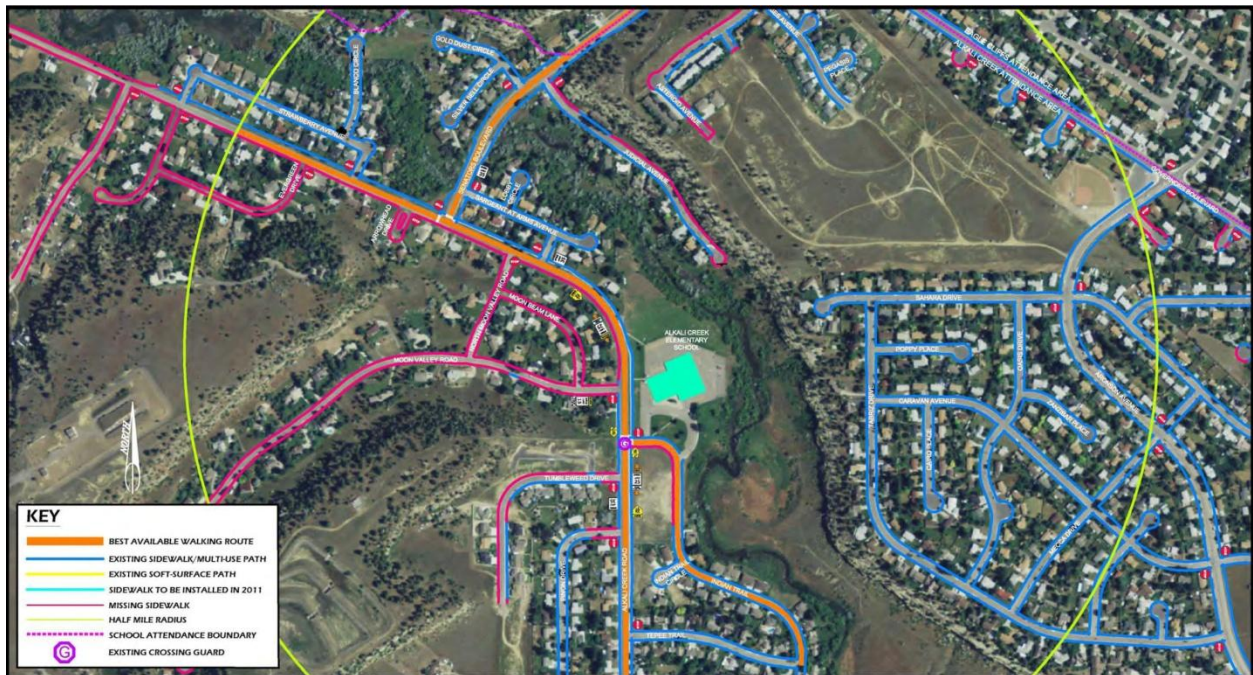
Source: Billings Long Range Transportation Plan

School	Walk	Bike	Bus	Vehicle	Carpool	Daycare Van
Phase I Schools						
Arrowhead	22%	5%	24%	40%	6%	3%
Beartooth	No Data Available					
Bench	10%	0%	44%	31%	2%	13%
Bitterroot	15%	4%	5%	49%	12%	15%
Boulder	29%	0%	8%	48%	8%	7%
Eagle Cliffs	15%	4%	28%	40%	9%	4%
Meadowlark	34%	0%	3%	42%	7%	14%
Newman	24%	0%	32%	29%	2%	13%
Poly Drive	43%	4%	2%	40%	7%	4%
Ponderosa	24%	1%	38%	29%	1%	7%
Washington	35%	3%	5%	36%	4%	17%
Phase II Schools						
Alkali	13%	2%	36%	34%	5%	10%
Big Sky	28%	4%	0%	48%	8%	12%
Broadwater	33%	3%	0%	49%	7%	8%
Burlington	38%	0%	13%	35%	6%	8%
Central Heights	24%	3%	40%	20%	2%	11%
Highland	37%	9%	1%	37%	9%	7%
Mckinley	24%	0%	39%	32%	2%	3%
Miles Avenue	40%	0%	12%	34%	6%	8%
Orchard	35%	1%	0%	38%	7%	19%
Rose Park	50%	1%	0%	32%	5%	12%
Sandstone	26%	1%	2%	56%	8%	7%
Average	28.50%	2.10%	15.80%	38%	5.90%	9.70%

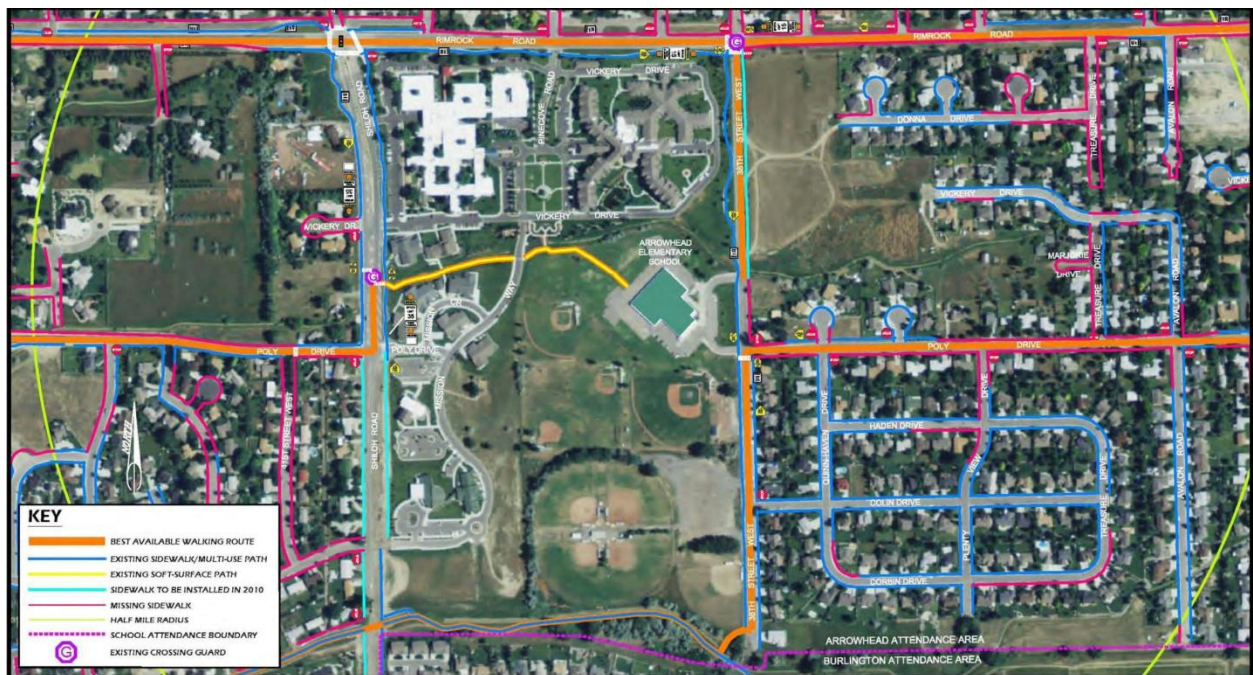
Item D

Source: Billings Safe Routes to School Study

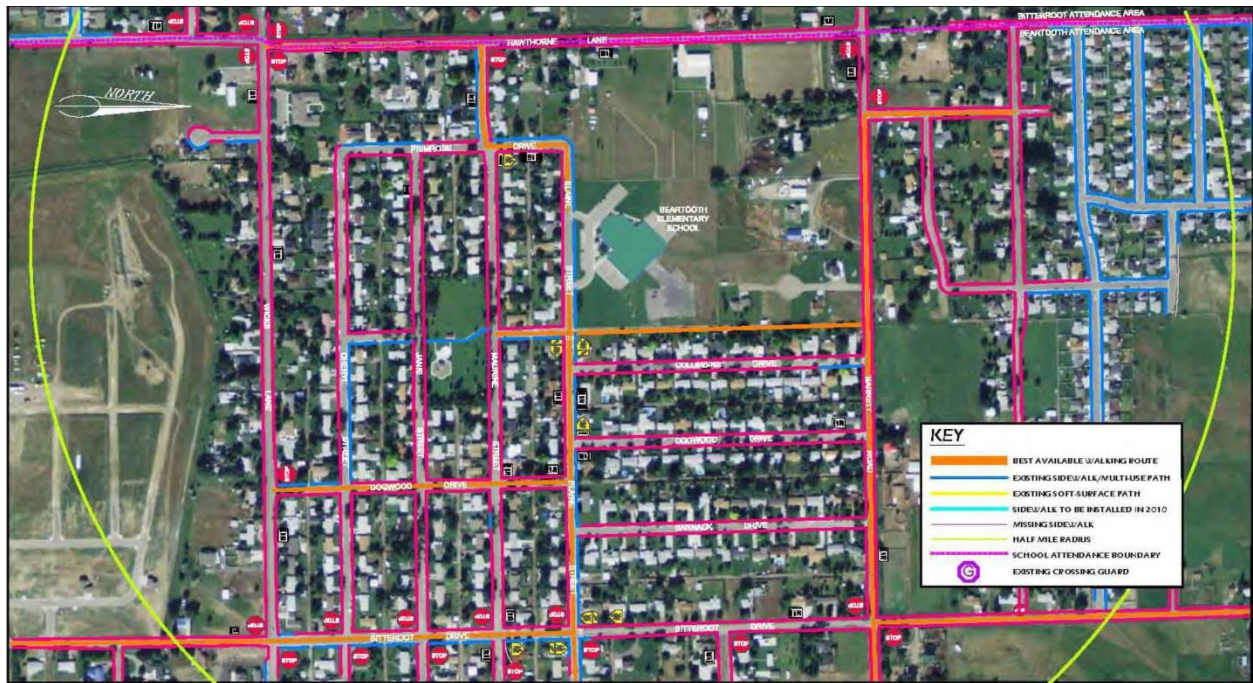
Alkali Creek Elementary School



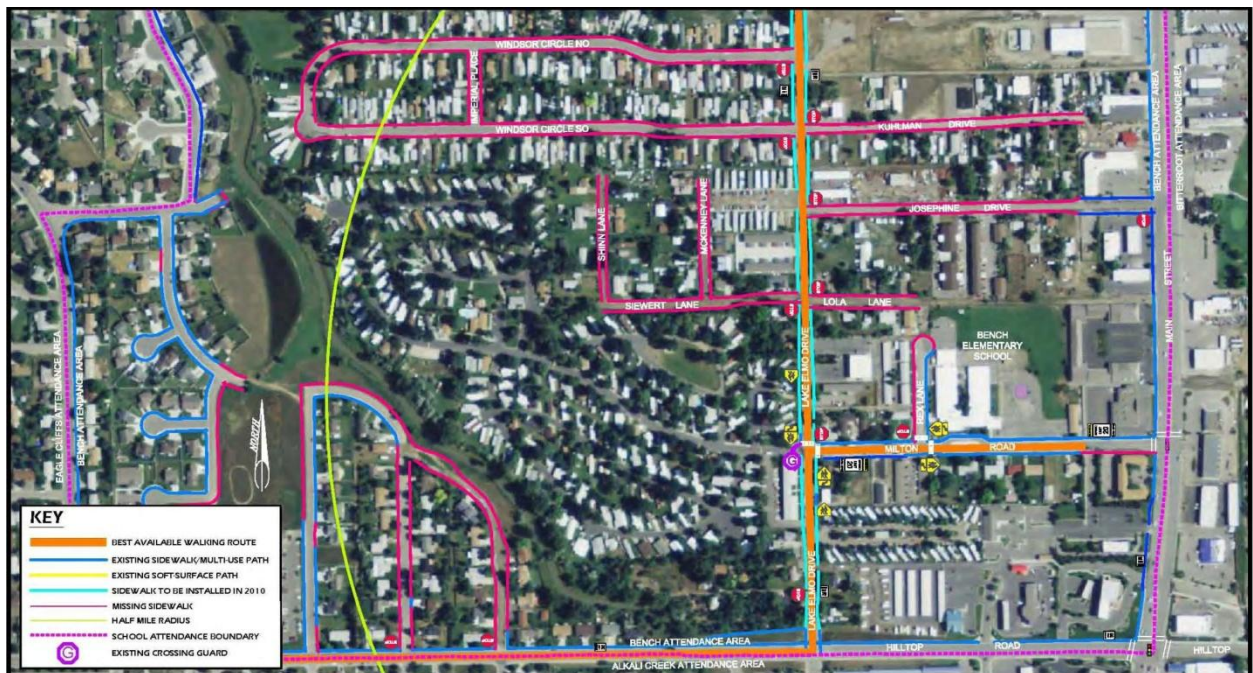
Arrowhead Elementary School



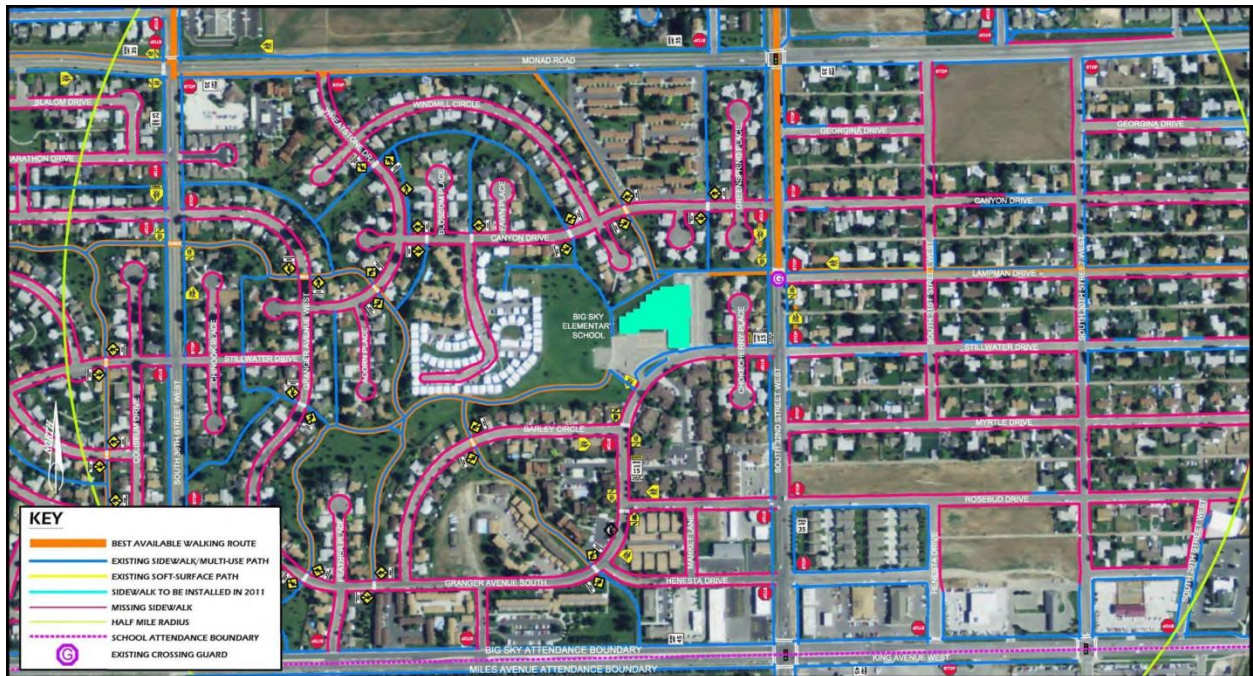
Beartooth Elementary School



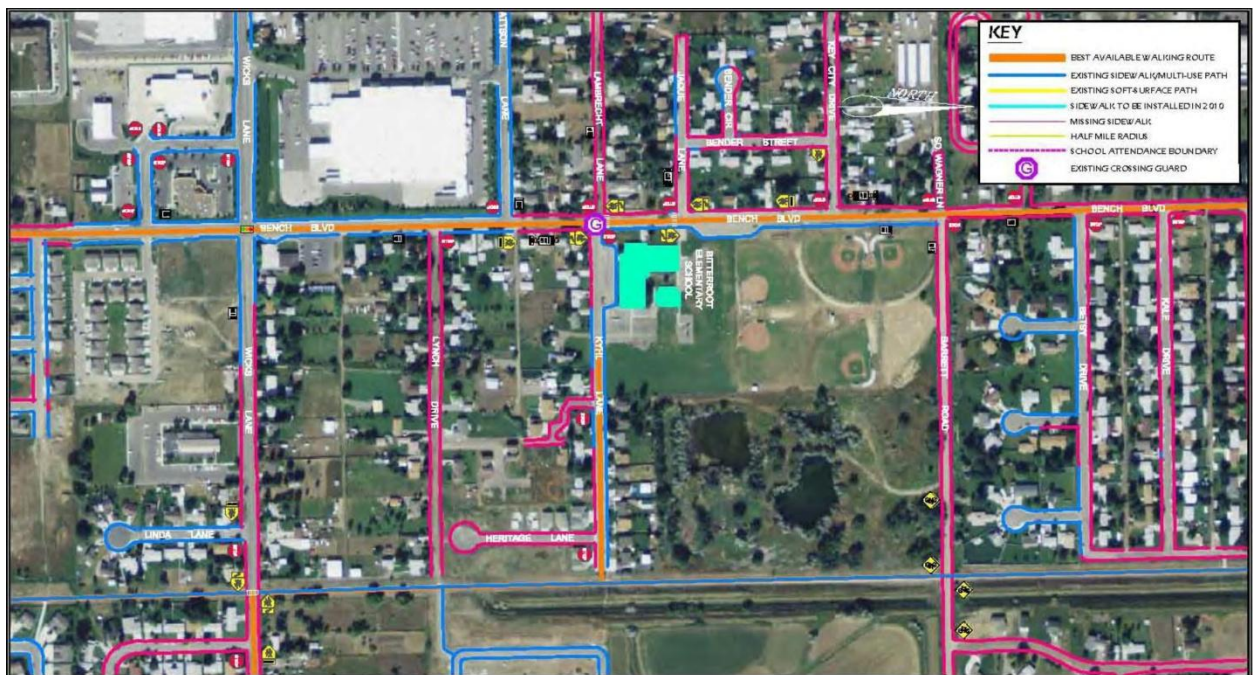
Bench Elementary School



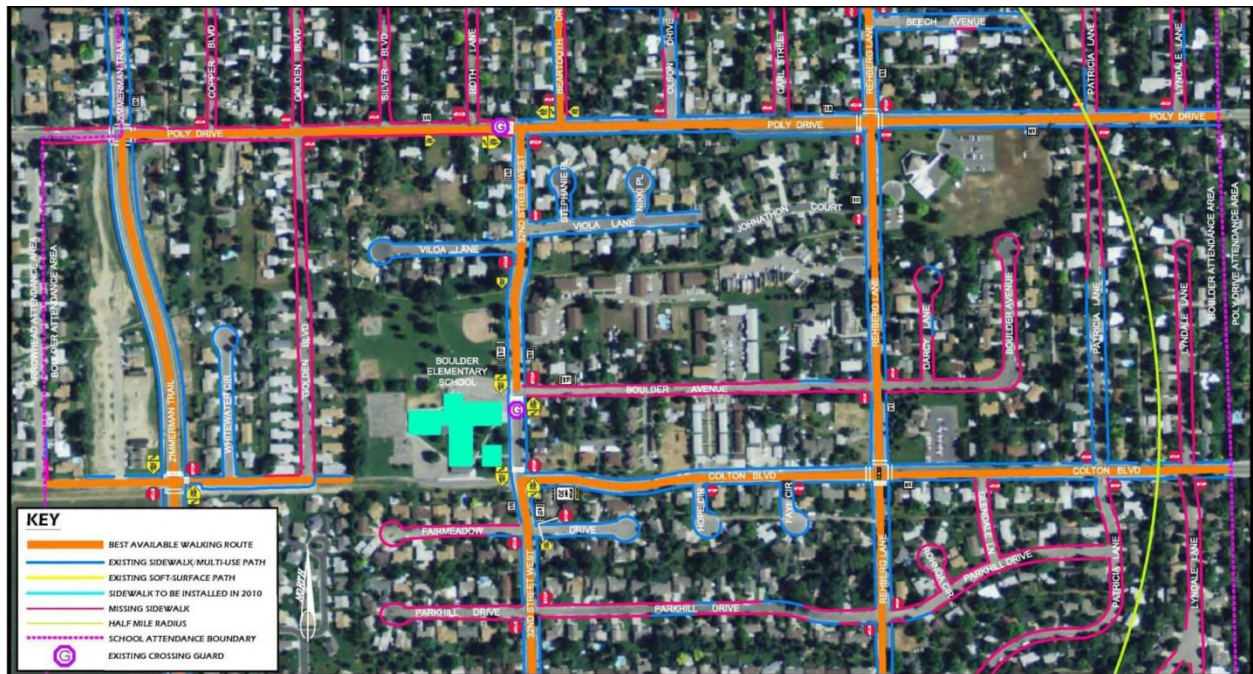
Big Sky Elementary School



Bitterroot Elementary School



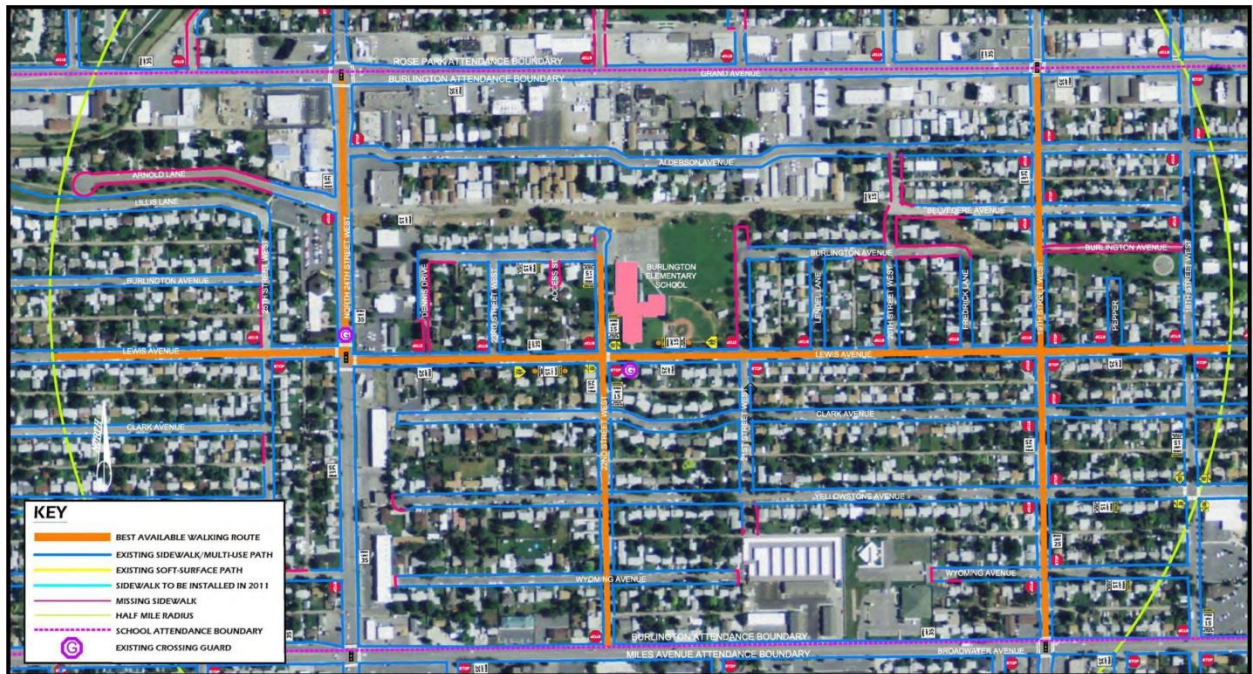
Boulder Elementary School



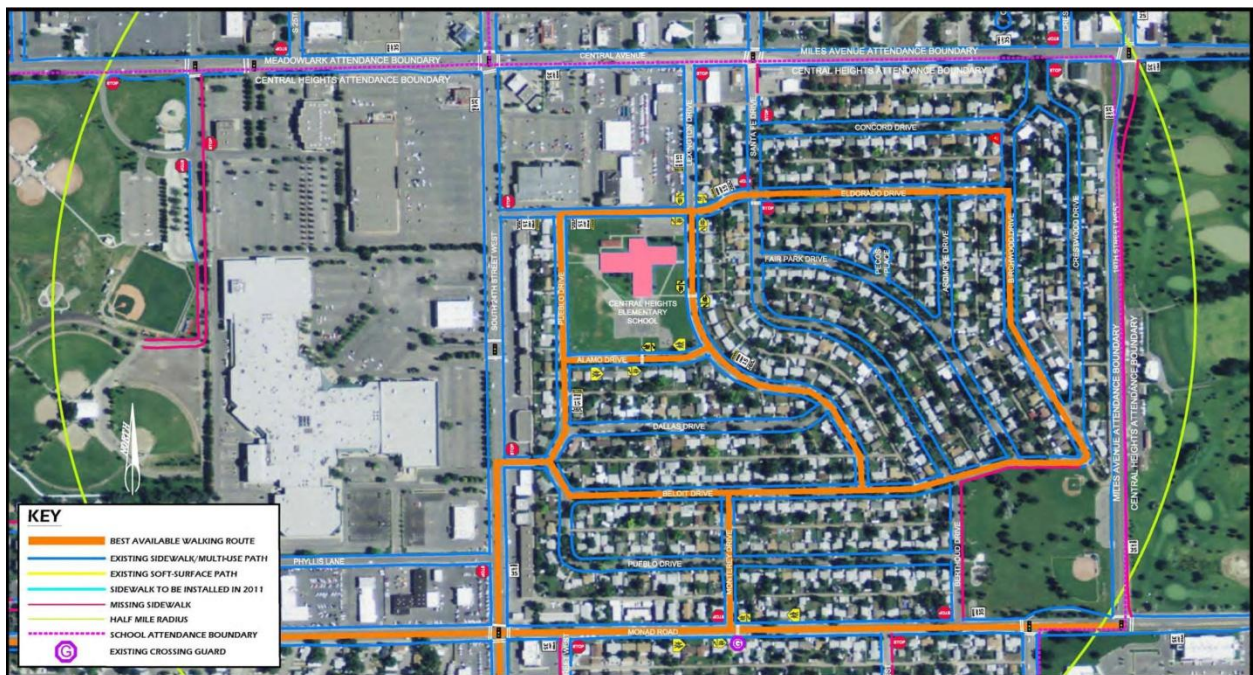
Broadwater Elementary School



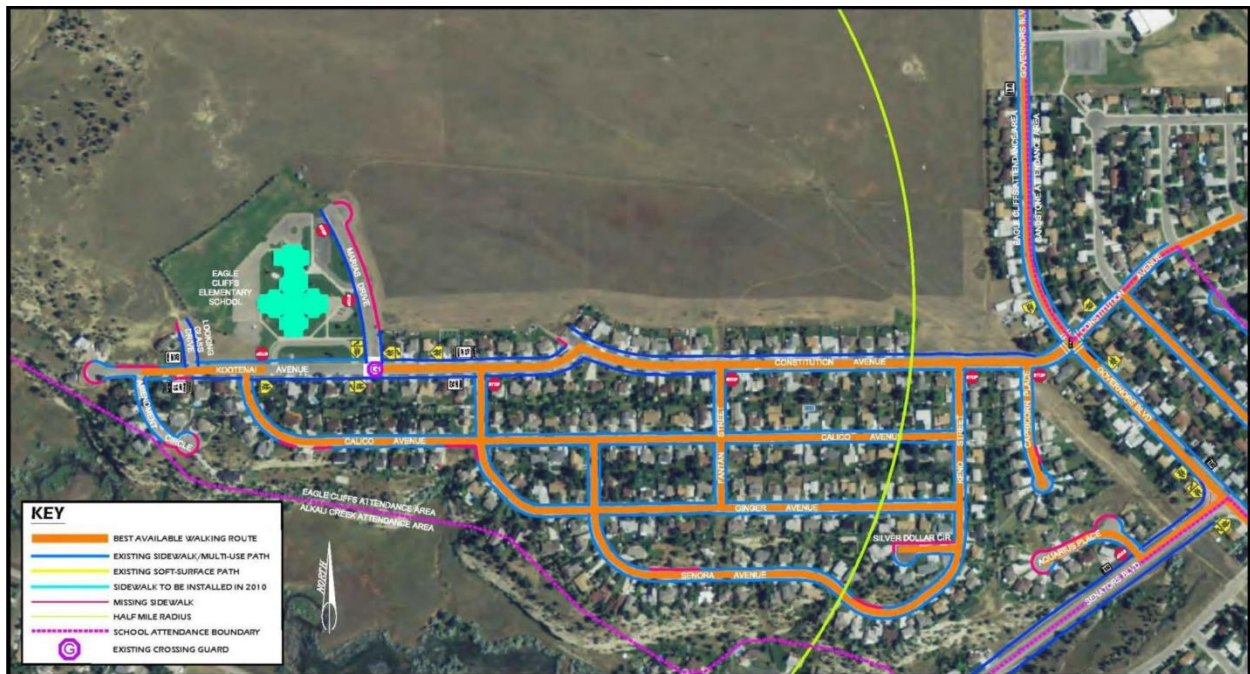
Burlington Elementary School



Central Heights Elementary School



Eagle Cliffs Elementary School



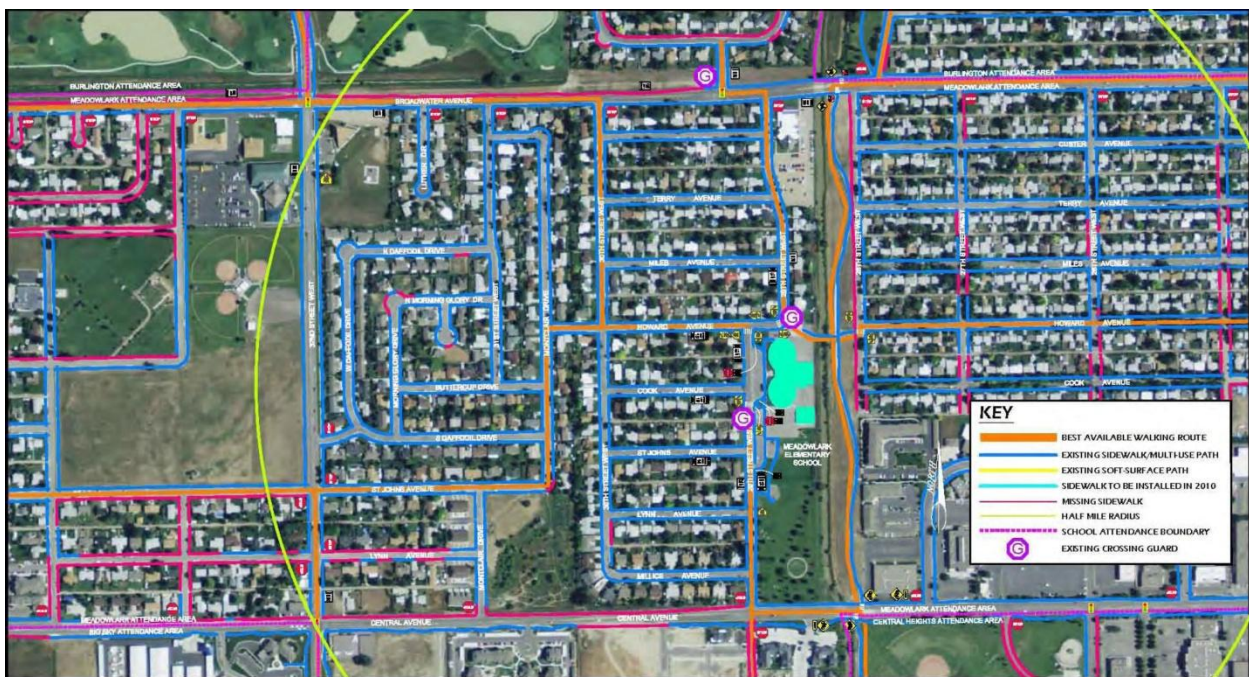
Highland Elementary School



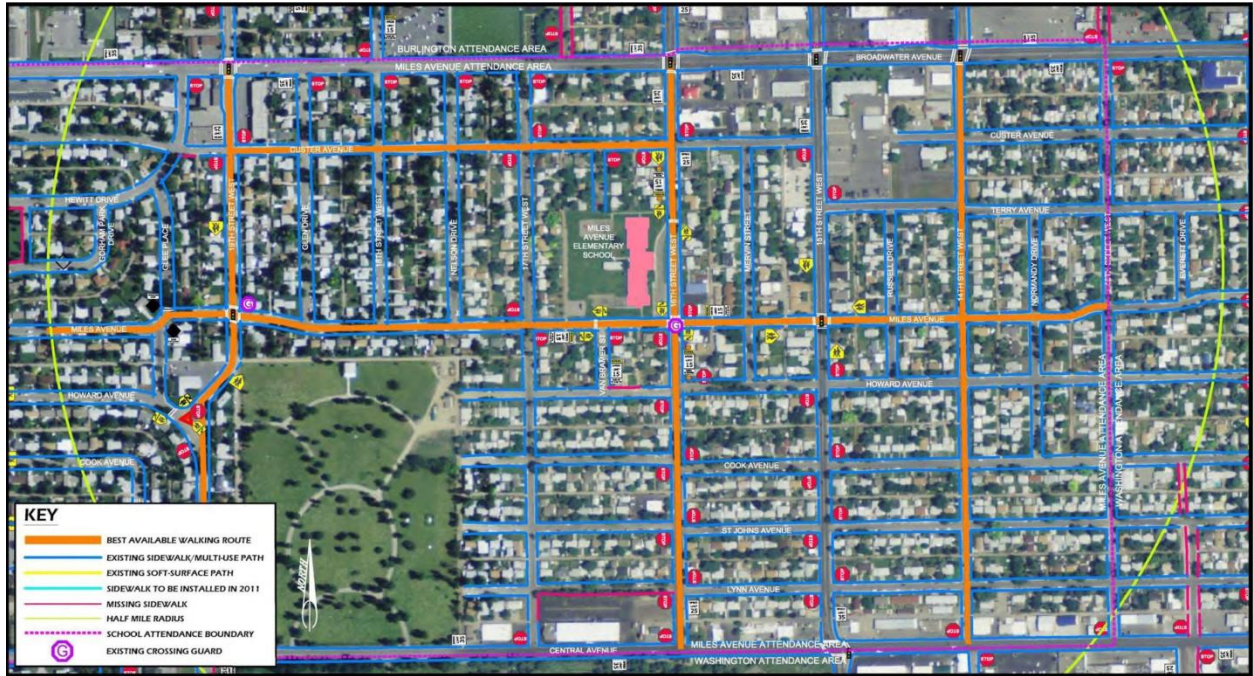
McKinley Elementary School



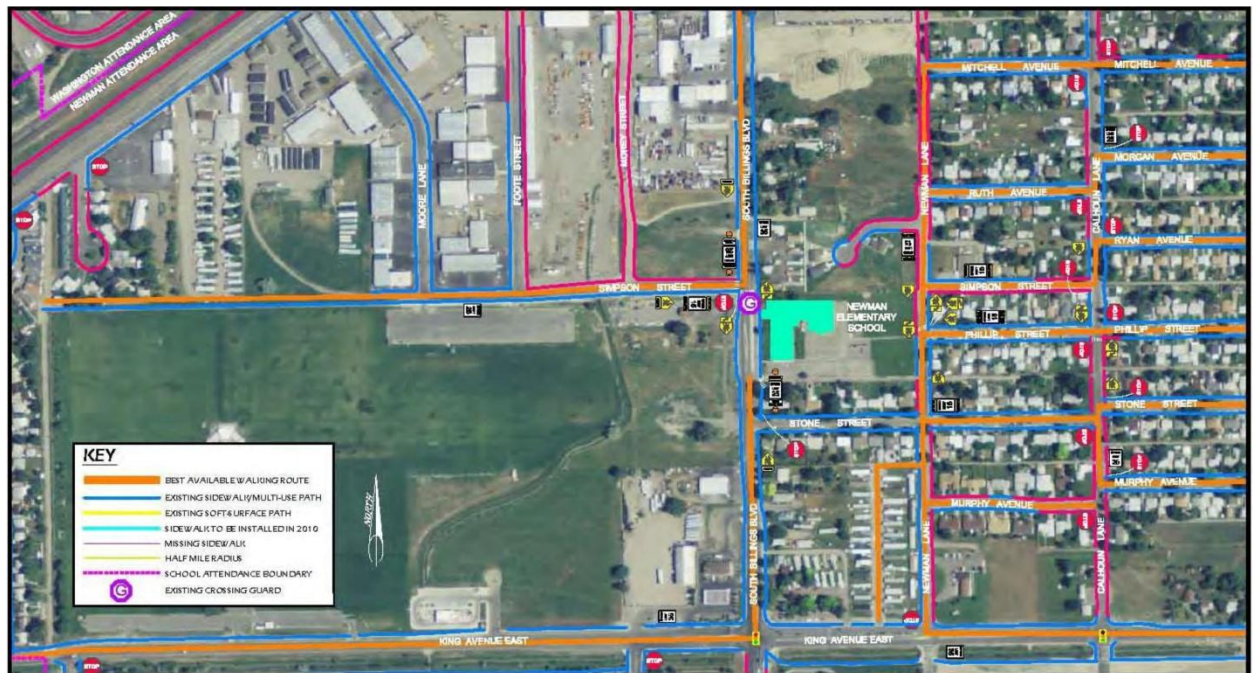
Meadowlark Elementary School



Miles Avenue Elementary School



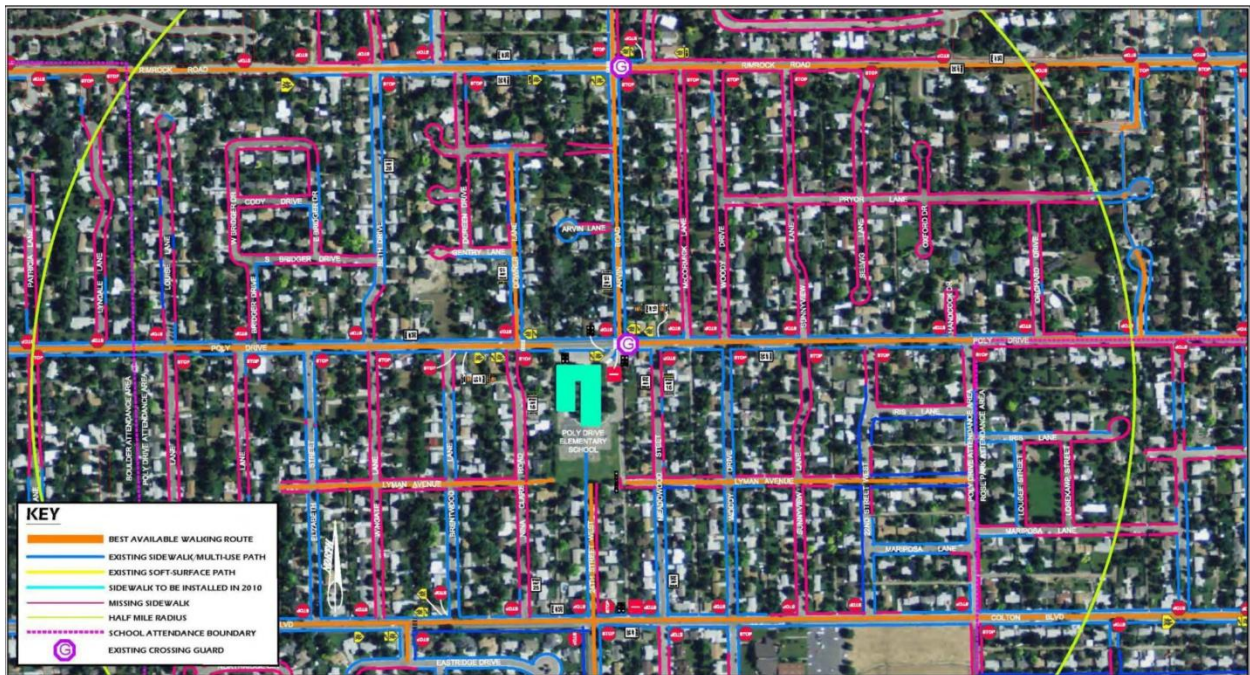
Newman Elementary School



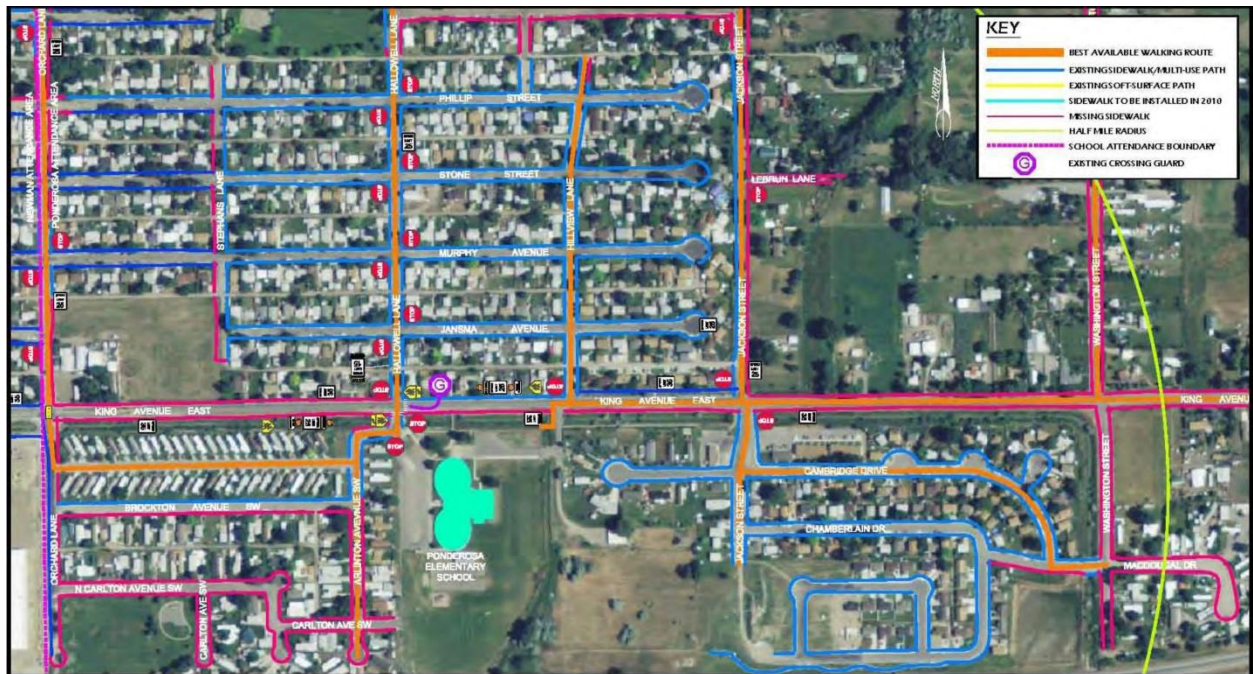
Orchard Elementary School



Poly Drive Elementary School



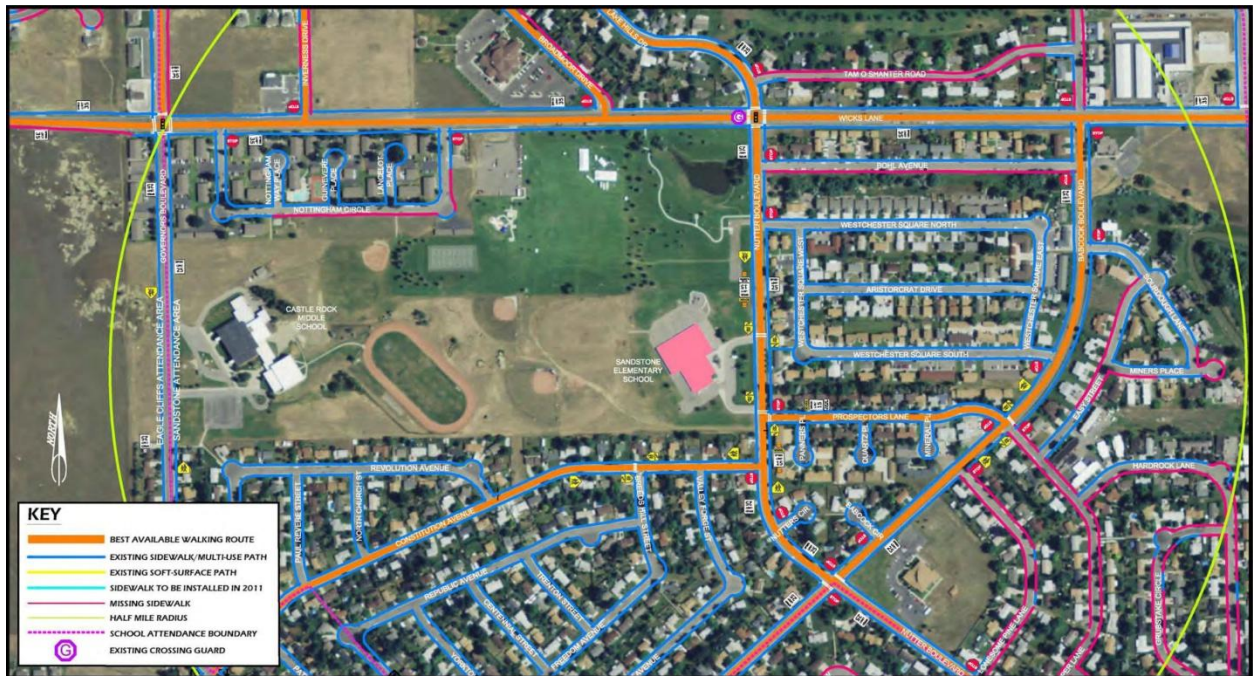
Ponderosa Elementary School



Rose Park Elementary School



Sandstone Elementary School



Washington Elementary School

