Improving Health in Northwest Roanoke: Walking & Biking on the Lick Run Greenway

The Lick Run Greenway offers a car-free route through northwest Roanoke, yet few residents of the neighborhoods beside it use it. With support from the Virginia Walkability Action Institute (VWAI), the Roanoke team set out to learn why. Early conversations showed that the team first needed to build trust and help residents see the greenway as a neighborhood asset. Engagement and programming then focused on barriers to using the greenway, the neighborhood's relationship to it amid new development, and the active transportation improvements residents need.

Team:

This work was led by Tom Carr of PedalSafe-ROA, in collaboration with Strong Towns, and Roanoke Parks and Recreation. The Roanoke Transportation Department, Lick Run Urban Farm, Main Street Partners, The Hope Center, Humble Hustle, and Carilion Community Health also supported and participated in the project.

Goals and Vision:

- Conduct two community walk audits along 10th and the 11th streets
- Conduct trail counts on the Lick Run Greenway to assess baseline use
- Learn what would encourage residents to walk, bike, roll, use transit, or enjoy the Lick Run Greenway more often
- Build stronger connections between the neighborhood and active transportation

Participants analyzing roadway conditions during a walk audit
Source: PedalSafe ROA

Background:

Most households along the 10th St. And 11th St. northwest corridors are lower-income, Black/African American renters, many led by single parents and living in older homes. Residents are also disproportionately impacted by

preventable conditions, such as high blood pressure (U.S. Census, 2026). Major roads built for car travel cut through the northwest neighborhoods, limiting safe options for physical activity and getting around. The Lick Run Greenway, a paved trail with a 4.1 mile section from downtown to Valley View Mall, and a 0.5-mile section at Countryside Park, provides a trail for pedestrians and bikers to get around away from car traffic. However, it is underutilized, and residents report that it doesn't address their needs.

This project sought to better understand barriers to using the greenway and raising awareness of it as a neighborhood amenity that connects to key destinations. The project team conducted community engagement events for residents living near the Lick Run Greenway in Roanoke's Melrose Rugby neighborhood. Through surveying, focus groups, and intercept surveys, the team asked residents what would make them more likely to use the trail. The team also activated parts of the trail with programming, including an Easter Egg Hunt and a Bike Rodeo, which offered activities and giveaways to generate excitement about the greenway as a destination.

Reaching residents from the neighborhoods surrounding the greenway remained challenging. Intercept surveys showed that only a small number of people encountered using the

Young people being fitted for their new bicycles. Source: PedalSafe ROA

Helmet and Bike Giveaway at Brown Robertson Park Source: PedalSafe ROA

greenway were from the surrounding neighborhood. This taught the team an important lesson: meaningful community engagement takes time. It requires finding neighborhood champions, using accessible and relevant language, and providing activities or incentives that encourage participation.

The team is presenting a report on the VWAI project to City Council, neighborhood groups, and local advocates to continue momentum for the project. Additionally, Roanoke's recently awarded Safe Streets for All grant will build on the relationships, data, and lessons learned from the VWAI project to inform proposals for streetscape improvements on 11th Street.

Outcomes and Impact:

- Facilitated four community walk audits and recorded a lack of ADA compliant ramps, discontinuous sidewalks, and short pedestrian crossing times
- Conducted two Saturday morning intercept surveys and counted 28 users, compared to ~1,600 at Roanoke River Greenway, confirming that the Lick Run Greenway is underused
- Participated in over 15 community events and hosted two focus groups with five participants, to connect with residents and gather feedback
- Introduced roughly 100 people to the Lick Run Greenway through an Easter Egg Hunt and Bike Rodeo events
- Built relationships with neighborhood residents and partners that lay the groundwork for continued engagement
- Learned that staying flexible and letting community input shape how resources are used is essential to meaningful engagement
- Presented findings and learnings to city leadership and community stakeholders for continued momentum