

Sustainability Spotlight:

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What does sustainability mean to you?

When I think of sustainability in my line of work, several terms come to mind, including “environment” and “system preservation.” There are clearly the environmental impacts of our transportation choices, which are principally based on the modes of travel we use. Walking, bicycling, and use of public transit are good, and use of private, often single-occupant vehicles, less so. This is the easy one. I think that a majority of us now accept global warming as science and recognize that use of private vehicles as our primary means of transportation is not sustainable in the long run. Then there is the issue of building transportation infrastructure that is resilient, and maintaining that infrastructure once it’s constructed.

This is what’s known as “system preservation.” It’s a fact that federal/state/local governments are struggling just to maintain the transportation infrastructure that we have, let alone finance new facilities as our communities/populations grow – building infrastructure we cannot afford to maintain is simply not sustainable.

How is sustainability incorporated into your position?

In my position, I’m fortunate to have the opportunity to work on long-range transportation plans which help guide the conversation as to when, where and what blend of transportation infrastructure is necessary. Much of this work depends on public outreach and trying to define exactly what the public’s needs are...then, following up with “right-sized” infrastructure. Because of the financial constraints faced by communities and the increasing demand for transportation choices, “right-sizing” infrastructure has become all-important. In fact, my work relies heavily on data and specialized software to try and predict future traffic volumes. From this, we can evaluate the appropriate design for a new facility, evaluate the most efficient type of intersection control, and even estimate vehicle emission reductions through our efforts!

What actions have you taken to improve sustainability within your position?

Most recently, I have worked with staff to select a consultant to work on a new Bike Master Plan for Iowa City, to be completed in 2017. The hope is that the Master Plan will give us direction on the next steps to take with respect to our on- and off-street bicycle accommodations. Once some of the improvements identified in the plan are implemented, it’s anticipated that Iowa City will receive the first gold-level status bestowed by the League of American Bicyclists in Iowa, and the 25th community to receive the gold award nationally out of more than 800 applicants! In other exciting news, I have been involved in efforts to convert several long-standing four-lane roadways in the City to three-lane facilities with bike lanes. The plan is to convert portions of Mormon Trek Blvd., First Avenue, Clinton Street, and Madison Street in the next several years.

How can sustainability efforts be improved in your position or within our community?

I think we are making great strides with respect to ensuring our local transportation system is sustainable. The most important things our community can do to continue this trend is to adequately fund maintenance of our existing road/bridge/trail infrastructure, adequately fund our public transit systems, and remain vigilant in ensuring that future transportation infrastructure accommodates all modes of travel for all ages and abilities.

For more information about the City of Iowa City’s sustainability efforts, visit www.icgov.org/sustainability, subscribe to our Sustainable Iowa City newsletter at www.icgov.org/e-subscriptions, or follow #SustainableIC on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

