



REIMAGINING TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

ULI NORTHWEST ARKANSAS URBAN THINKERS CAMPUS, 2024: PLACE SUMMIT

***A VISION OF THE FUTURE FOR MOBILITY, EQUITY, AND PUBLIC SPACE
IN NORTHWEST ARKANSAS AND BEYOND***

A New Vision for Mobility and Public Space

The 2024 Place Summit in Bentonville brought together planners, advocates, engineers, artists, and local leaders to chart a new course for Northwest Arkansas: from automobile dependence toward a people-centered mobility system. Rooted in the PLACE Principles, the Summit defined a path where transportation, climate, and community intersect to support equity, safety, and joy in how people move and live.

Against the backdrop of widening arterials and rapid growth, participants called for a paradigm shift. Streets are not just conduits for cars, they are the primary public spaces where culture, health, and democracy meet. The message was clear: Northwest Arkansas can lead the nation in building walkable, climate-ready, and equitable transportation systems that serve life, not just movement.

***Northwest Arkansas
can lead the nation
in redefining
mobility for the
21st century.***

Core Themes

- 1. People Over Cars:** Every dollar and design decision should center people's safety and well-being, not vehicle throughput. Prioritize pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders in every project. Redefine success by human outcomes, including safety, connection, and vitality, not vehicle speed.
- 2. Design Before Engineering:** Urban designers should set the framework for public space, defining form, beauty, and function, before engineers translate that vision into specifications. Design first, engineer second.
- 3. Safety and Health as Success Metrics:** Adopt Vision Zero policies, and track performance using mode shift, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and community satisfaction indicators, rather than congestion or speed.
- 4. Regional Collaboration:** Build alignment between cities, agencies, CBOs, and the private sector in order to scale innovation and deliver solutions that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- 5. Climate-Ready Infrastructure:** Every trail, sidewalk, transit line, and street retrofit must double as ecological infrastructure, including stormwater facilities, trees, and greenery, to restore balance to the local biosphere.
- 6. Equity and Justice:** Prioritize those most burdened by current systems, including low-income residents, youth, elders, and those without cars, as co-designers of solutions.



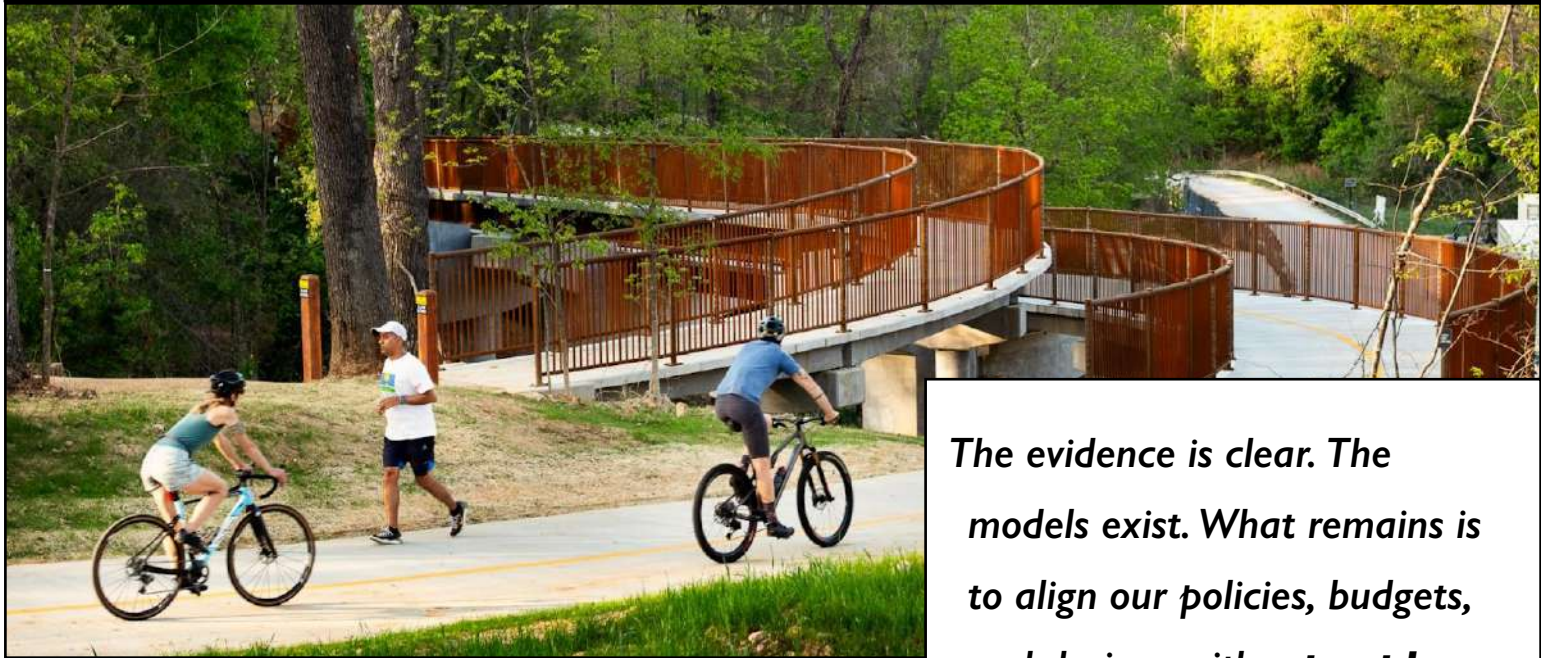
The 2024 PLACE Summit in Bentonville convened national experts, regional planners, and community leaders to chart a people-first mobility future for Northwest Arkansas (NWA). Participants united around one central premise: **transportation is not just about movement, but about life.**

Today, NWA stands at a crossroads. Rapid population growth and economic success have brought prosperity but also sprawl, auto-dependence, and social inequities. The region's next chapter requires rebalancing investments toward safety, walkability, equity, and joy in the public realm.

Key Recommendations		
Recommendation	Immediate Action	1 -5 Year Shift
Prioritize People Over Automobiles	Adopt a Prime Directive that places human life and safety first in all street-design decisions.	Embed the Prime Directive in all municipal design guidelines; allocate a minimum of 20% of new-development budgets to people-first streets.
State Policy Reform	Update standards to allow context-sensitive, multimodal street design.	Pass a state ordinance that permits narrower lanes, bike lanes, transit priority, and performance-based fire-access.
Street Network Equity Audits	Conduct an audit of connectivity, access, and safety using PLACE metrics and health-data overlays.	Use audit findings to re-route or upgrade streets that lack safe connectivity; publish equity-gap maps.
Vision Zero Metrics	Launch a Vision Zero dashboard that tracks mode shift, emissions, and equitable access.	Set targets (e.g., 30% mode shift, 20% emissions cut) and hold annual public reviews.
Foster Collaborative Action	Create multi-sector teams (city, MPO, fire, CBO, private) that co-design and fund projects.	Institutionalize community-leadership oversight of regional mobility initiatives.
Placemaking Instead of Passing Lanes	Convert excess asphalt on major arterials into plazas, trees, and local destinations.	Pilot "road diets" on commercial corridors; evaluate traffic-calming impacts.
Plazas Instead of Signals	Replace signalized intersections with plaza-style squares or "square-about's."	Pilot plaza intersections in downtown cores; refine design standards over 2-3years.
Safe Streets for All	Reform fire-access and design standards to support walkability and network redundancy.	Integrate performance-based fire-access in new ordinances; maintain safety while enabling slower-traffic streets.
Connected Sidewalks & Trails	Build continuous, shaded, accessible pedestrian and bicycle networks linking key destinations.	Expand trail-greenway network to cover every neighbourhood by 2035; ensure ADA compliance.
Electrify Transit	Accelerate fleet transition to electric buses and expand service tied to street-design, not just funding.	Commit to a fully electric bus fleet on the main corridor by 2026; link e-BRT stations to mobility hubs.
Curb Zone Management	Allocate curb space to walking, transit, micromobility, and reinvest revenue in public space.	Implement curb-pricing/permit systems; fund sidewalk, parklet, and bike-parking upgrades.
SuperCorridor Public Infrastructure Collaborative	Repurpose rail corridors for freight, transit, trails, broadband, and clean energy.	Create a multi-state public-infrastructure entity to manage and finance SuperCorridor assets.

Who Needs to Do What Now

Actor	Immediate Actions	Systemic Shifts (1–5 Years)
City Governments	Adopt Vision Zero with clear metrics and budgets; standardize sidewalk, crosswalk, and intersection upgrades.	Embed “15-minute neighborhood” and Safe Routes to School principles into all Comprehensive Plans.
Regional Planning Agencies (NWARPC, Trailblazers, etc.)	Develop shared grant templates and mobility equity mapping tools.	Publish a NWA Complete Streets and Intersections Design Guide, modeled on Dutch best practices.
Fire Departments & Public Safety	Pilot narrower street widths and performance-based fire access standards.	Reform IFC/NFPA interpretations to allow people-centered streets while maintaining safety.
Developers & Design Professionals	Apply the PLACE Principles in every subdivision and site plan; connect projects to trails and sidewalks.	Transition from “parking-first” to “place-first” design; dedicate a % of development budgets to public realm improvements.
State DOT & Legislators	Update engineering standards to allow context-sensitive, multimodal design flexibility.	Institutionalize multimodal metrics in funding formulas; incentivize complete networks.
Community-Based Organizations	Lead engagement and storytelling on mobility equity.	Co-manage Mobility Equity Fund grants; steward local tactical urbanism pilots.
Residents & Advocates	Organize block-level traffic calming projects, tactical plazas, and slow-street events.	Support ballot measures or bond programs that invest in transit and safe mobility.



Acknowledgment of Summit Speakers

Alison Sant, Wesley Marshall, Patricia Tice, Chris Allen, JP Shaffer, Mike Lydon, Todd Litman, Norman Garrick, Tim Conklin, Julie Kelso, Ryan Hale, Nick Falbo, Paxton Roberts, Porter Crumpton, Fabian Fritsch, John McCurdy, Scott Brody, Tim Reavis, Matt Lambert, Bruce Donnelly, and many others contributed insights, models, and strategies that shaped this report.

*The evidence is clear. The models exist. What remains is to align our policies, budgets, and designs with a **people-first vision for mobility.***



Recommendations for Northwest Arkansas

Recommendation	Immediate Action	I -5 Year Shift
Shared Regional Terminology	Standardize the design language for sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes across the region.	Publish a regional lexicon and enforce its use in all municipal and state-level design documents.
Equitable Active Transportation	Connect schools, jobs, and housing with complete sidewalk and trail networks.	Map equity-gap corridors; prioritize new sidewalk/ trail construction in low-income neighbourhoods.
Enforceable Vision Zero Policies	Create measurable, community-led safety standards that are codified in local ordinances.	Implement a Vision Zero dashboard and hold annual public safety audits.
Mobility Equity Fund	Resource community-based organisations to co-design and implement projects.	Institutionalize a dedicated fund for community-led mobility pilots that serve high-needs residents.
Grant Collaboration	Build regional grant-writing tools for local partners to tap state & federal funds.	Create a toolkit and host quarterly grant-writing workshops.
Safe Routes & 15-Minute Neighborhoods	Integrate safe-routes programming and 15-minute-neighbourhood concepts into all comprehensive plans and zoning updates.	Use design guidelines to lock in 15-minute access to key services in every district by 2030.
Regional Design Guide	A <i>NWA Complete Streets & Intersections Guide</i> modeled on Dutch best practices.	Publish the guide, adopt it in all city design manuals, and conduct design-review training.

PLACE Principles in Action

PLACE Initiative's nine guiding principles—supporting residents, fostering stewardship, building resilient infrastructure, connecting communities, and reducing hazard risks—anchor this work. They remind us that public space is living infrastructure and that culture is essential to community resilience.

Applied to transportation, these principles mean:

- Designing streets as habitats for human and ecological life,
- Treating culture as essential infrastructure, and
- Measuring success by health, safety, and joy, not just flow.

Call to Action

PLACE Initiative and ULI Northwest Arkansas invite all partners, public, private, and civic, to join in building a regional mobility system that embodies safety, equity, and joy. Northwest Arkansas can lead the nation in redefining what mobility means for the 21st century. The path forward is clear:

- **Stop expanding arterials. Start connecting communities with trails, local links, and reclaimed streets.**
- **Invest in people-powered infrastructure.**
- **Measure success by connection, not congestion.**

The tools, data, and models already exist. What's needed now is alignment, courage, and creativity to make this shift real. The 2024 PLACE Summit in Bentonville convened national experts, regional planners, and community leaders to chart a people-first mobility future for Northwest Arkansas. Participants united around one central premise: **transportation is not just about movement, but about life.**

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