



# Securing a Walkable Future:

## Williamsburg County Uses WAI Training to Transform Rural Infrastructure in Lane, SC

Williamsburg County, South Carolina represents the infrastructure challenges facing many rural communities across the South. The county's small municipalities have grappled with aging infrastructure designed primarily for automobiles, deteriorating sidewalks, and gaps created by utility construction that prioritized underground work over pedestrian access.

The Town of Lane, population 530, exemplifies these challenges. With crumbling 1970s sidewalks and dangerous traffic conditions, residents found themselves having to 'walk in the flow of cars'. The situation particularly affected wheelchair users, seniors, and children, many of whom had stopped walking for safety reasons.

Health data revealed the urgency of addressing these infrastructure gaps. Approximately 25% of Lane residents live with diabetes and over 50% have hypertension. Lane also recorded the highest share of households without vehicle access in Williamsburg County, making walking essential transportation for accessing work, services, and community connections.

### FROM COUNTY TEAM TO COMMUNITY ACTION

In 2023, a four-person team representing Williamsburg County attended the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors' (NACDD) Active People, Healthy Nation<sup>SM</sup> Hybrid Walkability Action Institute (WAI)/Walkability Virtual Academy (WVA) – a virtual adaptation of the WAI.

The team included Mayor Charlie Fulton from the Town of Lane, Community Engagement Manager/ Senior Health Educator Regina Nesmith-Dimery from the South Carolina Department of Public Health, a planning board representative, and a local trails advocate.



The WAI experience provided the Williamsburg County team with practical tools and strategic connections that directly enabled their subsequent success:

**Walk Audits:** Street assessments revealed broken curbs, missing crossings, and damaged sidewalks. For Mayor Fulton, walking his community for the first time in 20 years was eye-opening, showing problems he had "never noticed from a car."

**PhotoVoice:** Documenting conditions and presenting findings developed skills crucial for securing funding and building community support.

**Networking:** Connections with other rural communities provided strategies and revealed funding opportunities the team didn't know existed.



**The WAI brings together cross-disciplinary teams representing public health, planning, transportation, elected officials, and other disciplines to participate in an intensive, applied-learning course on improving walkability with a focus on community and transportation design.**

## LESSONS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Lane's experience within the broader Williamsburg County effort demonstrates several key strategies for rural communities:

- **Make the Most of Small Investments:** The \$6,000 traffic calming device created evidence and enthusiasm that convinced SCDOT to waive the local TAP match requirement, enabling competition for major federal funding.
- **Document Community Needs:** PhotoVoice images and street-level demonstrations transformed abstract infrastructure concepts into concrete priorities for decision-makers and residents.
- **Coordinate Cross-Sector Participation:** Having mayor, public health staff, and regional planners attend WAI together enabled rapid application development, moving from concept to award in six months.
- **Frame as Economic Development:** Aligning walkability improvements with recreation, tourism, and business development broadened support beyond health considerations.
- **Use Regional Resources:** County-level partnerships provided technical assistance and grant-writing capabilities that individual municipalities might lack.

## BUILDING MOMENTUM THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

The team's implementation strategy emphasized building momentum through strategic partnerships and step-by-step progress:

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) provided crucial support for Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grant development, eager to demonstrate rural walkability success. The regional Council of Governments contributed grant writing expertise, while the county coalition facilitated ongoing resource coordination and community engagement.

Listening sessions revealed strong community support for walkability improvements. An initial \$6,000 mini-grant from state walkability leader and project partner Wholespire enabled purchase of a radar speed-feedback sign and traffic cones for demonstrations, immediately slowing traffic and generating data for larger applications.

## UNPRECEDENTED FUNDING SUCCESS

The WAI experience directly enabled Lane to secure major infrastructure funding that transformed the community's possibilities. Most significantly, the team secured a **\$1.4 million TAP grant in October 2023** for a one-mile multi-use path, with construction scheduled to begin in November 2025. SCDOT waived the typically required local match, recognizing Lane's potential as a rural walkability demonstration project.

Building on this major success, the team secured additional funding including a \$25,000 rural prosperity grant for farmer's market development that will serve as a future trailhead, \$5,000 for community garden expansion with raised beds and ADA-compliant paths tied into the walking network, and the initial \$6,000 Wholespire mini-grant for the traffic calming device that helped prove the concept.

## INFRASTRUCTURE TRANSFORMATION AHEAD

Beginning November 2025, Lane will implement a one-mile multi-use path serving as the community's primary pedestrian infrastructure. The path will connect key destinations including town hall, post office, recreation center, community garden, and future library/museum in the historic rail depot.

Infrastructure improvements will include ADA compliant features, safety lighting, proper drainage solutions, and marked crosswalks prioritizing pedestrian safety. The walkability initiative has also sparked more community improvement planning, including conversion of an abandoned train depot into a library and museum and establishment of a weekly farmer's market.

## EFFECTS ACROSS THE REGION

Lane's success has generated statewide attention, with SCDOT using the project as a model for effective TAP implementation in small rural communities. Other Williamsburg County municipalities have begun exploring similar initiatives through the county coalition's knowledgesharing network.

With construction beginning in November 2025, Lane is positioned to become a demonstration site for rural walkability development, proving that strategic training, community engagement, and partnership development can secure resources needed to build healthier, more connected communities.



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