

*Get Connected –
Promoting Non-Motorized Transportation in Sheboygan County*

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One of the questions we hear most in the nonmotorized program is “Why do we need sidewalks?” The short answer is that they provide a separated and safe place to walk in the public right-of-way versus walking on a roadway. In fact, according to a study by the UNC Highway Safety Research Center conducted for the Federal Highway Administration, the likelihood of a site with a paved sidewalk being a crash site is 88.2 percent lower than a site without a sidewalk after accounting for traffic volume and speed limits. The safety factors alone should convince folks that sidewalks are necessary in a developed environment.

However, sometimes, the bottom line is the only item that receives anyone’s attention. As a taxpayer in a developed area a sidewalk is much cheaper than the alternative, school busing. Federal law states that children within two miles of their school need to be bused if a “safe route to school” does not exist. This includes children that might be able to look out their back patio and see the school. There are some areas in Sheboygan County, primarily newly subdivided areas, that fit this example.

A quick, non-scientific comparison of Sheboygan area costs for sidewalks versus the cost for busing shows the following costs.

The cost for a sidewalk for a typical Sheboygan home (90 feet of sidewalk frontage) is about **\$1,800**. Sidewalks commonly last 25 years or longer.

The Sheboygan Area School District’s cost for busing is about \$1,200,000 per year, or about 4.7% of the total tax levy for the school district. For an average priced Sheboygan area home, the school district tax is about \$1,700 per year. The portion of this amount designated for busing is $\$1,700 \times 4.7\% = \80.00 per year. Over a 25 year period this amount will be roughly $\$80.00 \times 25 = \mathbf{\$2,000}$.

Thus, over 25 years assuming NO tax increases and NO busing cost increases (i.e., fuel, insurance, etc.), sidewalks are still cheaper by roughly \$200. This also does not include the costs of bus replacement, improved air quality, interest one would gain on their savings, sidewalks lasting longer than 25 years, and the costs of sprawl (i.e., new schools typically do not serve neighborhoods so distances to/from school are growing).

Understandably, some children live in rural areas where sidewalks are not feasible and will still need to be bused, and the above comparison does not account for that fact. But, given the rising costs of fuel one has to conclude that even with subtracting students who will always need to be bused, costs will be offset, preserving the sidewalk as the cheaper alternative. The comparison also does not account for shoveling snow. However, one must be apt to argue that benefits outweigh the physical costs of shoveling, and if shoveling is that big of deal, one could take their savings from not paying for busing and pay someone else to shovel.