

# Summary Report: Belle Isle Multimodal Mobility Study 2024

## Working to Improve Mobility and Safety on Belle Isle

*Changes are coming to Belle Isle to ensure safety and access to the island for all park users.*

Over the past 2.5 years, we've been working on collecting data, learning from park users, and coordinating with Michigan Department of Natural Resources staff, the City of Detroit, as well as project partners Michigan Department of Transportation and the Belle Isle Conservancy, about what can be done to our roads, trails, sidewalks, and parking to make them safe and improve everyone's experience on beautiful Belle Isle. We're excited to share the long-term plan and get started on funding, designing, and building!

On the next several pages, we summarize why we did the study, what we heard and learned, big, and not so big, ideas to improve safety and mobility and wrap up with What's Next.

We developed a multimodal mobility plan to ensure individual projects, investments and partnerships are coordinated and focused on community priorities. The plan works to:

- Improve safety for visitors using all modes of transportation
- Improve the visitor experience
- Provide convenient access to Belle Isle
- Improve accessibility and optimize visitor capacity
- Reduce the need for traffic management by park staff and law enforcement
- Implement improvements in a sustainable manner

We learned a lot by collecting data and surveying and talking to park staff and visitors. Highlights of what we heard and learned include:

- People love Belle Isle!
- The lack of signage and wayfinding adds to confusion and frustration
- The most popular parking areas are at the beach, at Sunset Point, and at the Aquarium/Conservatory
- People are parking in bike lanes, on lawns, and in driveways causing safety and operational issues
- People can not safely walk or bike to and between popular places in the park due to lack of facilities or condition of facilities)
- Current design, width, and layout of the roads encourages speeding
- There is confusion about the pay booths and pass purchases
- Closures (or even potential of closures) and long lines are impacting visitors and vendors
- There is interest in being able to get to the island without a car such as via ferry, bike rentals, an off-island shuttle, and expanded bus service

- The top activities people do on the island are: sit and look at the water, walk, run, bike, visit the museum/conservatory/aquarium/gardens, and cruise in their cars.

We used the findings and input to develop a plan for improvement.

10-year plan to improve safety and mobility on Belle Isle. Work has already begun on some projects while other projects will take time to fund, design, and build. Here is an overview of projects planned in the next 10 years:

- coordinate with the City of Detroit and MDOT to reconfigure Jefferson intersection and improve signal timing
- restripe the MacArthur bridge to provide protected bike lanes and connectivity to the Riverwalk and add wayfinding signage
- include wayfinding signage, re-stripe lanes and staff pay booths to welcome visitors and reduce confusion and traffic backups
- complete the Ralph Wilson Iron Belle Trail around the entire Island
- reduce the size of the paddock parking lot and return to green open space and add parking closer to popular destinations
- narrow the road around the fountain to create more Plaza and pedestrian space. Restripe Fountain Drive to include designated parking spaces for cars, buses and limos. Move parking out of circle around fountain to the sides of Fountain Drive, except for ADA accessible spaces.
- convert Central Avenue for 1.25 miles from the fountain to the woods to a people focused promenade with a gracious space for walkers, bikers, and rollers down the center and one lane of vehicle traffic on each side
- extend the sidewalk network to better connect people to destinations across the island
- build the Vista Road connector and add parking to service popular destinations
- add parking at or near the beach
- add raised pedestrian crossings at several locations around the island
- restripe the perimeter loop road to include one-way vehicular traffic, two-way bike lanes, and on-street parking where able and needed. Restripe the perimeter loop road to slow vehicular speeds and maintain emergency vehicle access
- reduce wide intersections to slow speeds and improve safety for all
- reverse the direction of vehicular traffic on the section of Central Avenue that traverses through the woods to provide an alternative to the loop road and reduce cut through traffic. Include two-way bike lanes and an option to close this section of Central Avenue to vehicles during events and peak times
- Install wayfinding and directional signage across the entire Island to help visitors better understand how to move around the island
- partner with DDOT to expand bus routes and stops around the island, MoGo to expand Bike Share on the island, and others to determine feasibility of a ferry stop at Belle Isle location to be determined
- establish mobility hubs at several locations around the island that include maps, bus stops, MoGo bikes, bike and car parking, and information kiosks

- several of the most popular destinations on Belle Isle are in relatively close proximity to one another. Bike lanes, trails, paths and sidewalks are planned to improve mobility and safety and encourage more walking and biking.

The plan is working to make improvements to mobility and safety on Belle Isle for pedestrians with:

- new sidewalks and pathways to get you to key destinations
- improved street crossings to make navigating the island safer for you
- new wayfinding signage to help you find your destination
- benches and trees along pathways to make walking more comfortable
- convenient transitions to other modes such as car, scooter, bus, etc.
- a completed Ralph Wilson Trail around the entire island

The plan is working to make improvements to mobility and safety on Belle Isle for cyclists with:

- safer two-way protected bike lanes on the bridge
- two-way bike lanes around and across the island
- more MoGo bike stations
- additional bike parking stations and fix-it stations
- improved wayfinding signage to make navigating the island easier

The plan is working to make improvements to mobility and safety on Belle Isle for bus riders with:

- additional bus stops at key destinations
- Mobility hubs at bus stops to give easy access to other modes of transportation like scooters, MoGo bikes, and walking paths
- New wayfinding signage to help find bus stops and destinations
- Improved bus stops with benches and shade
- Access to new sidewalks and safe crosswalks once you arrive on the island

The plan is working to make improvements to mobility and safety on Belle Isle for disabled persons with:

- Access to more sidewalks and pathways
- Barrier-free ramps at all new sidewalks
- Easier access and amenities at bus stops
- Barrier-free parking spaces distributed across the island
- Signalized and raised crosswalks to make the island safer and easier to navigate
- Improved wayfinding signage to make navigating the island easier

The plan is working to make improvements to mobility and safety on Belle Isle for drivers with:

- Streets striped and signed to simplify travel and reduce speed
- While the perimeter loop will remain one-way, streets that cross the island will be two-way, making it easier to get to where you want to go
- Parking will be increased at key destinations
- Simple signage and improved pay booths will streamline the experience entering the island

The 10-year Plan to improve safety and mobility has been divided into 4 main phases and will be implemented dependent on funding availability.

*Phase One estimated at \$2+ million in 2025 includes:*

- Install priority wayfinding signs
- Adjust Jefferson/Grand Blvd signal timing
- Park entry wayfinding and pay booth lane configurations
- Small interventions at wide intersections
- Complete Ralph Wilson Trail around entire island
- Restripe loop road to reduce speeds and add buffered two-way cycle track

*Phase Two estimated at \$3.6+ million in 2026 includes:*

- Additional parking capacity in central park area
- Build Vista Road connector
- Add additional ADA parking spaces
- Reduce paddock and implement event space changes
- Interim improvements to convert Central Avenue to two-way
- Reverse vehicular direction of Central Avenue through the Flatwoods
- Interim pedestrian improvements along Inselruhe between Dossin and Aquarium
- Add raised crosswalks across loop road at Beach and Dossin Museum

*Phase Three estimated at \$13.7+ million from 2027-2029 includes:*

- Passport purchases available at all mobility zones
- Install overhead signs and shift main pay booth west
- Continue to right-size parking areas
- Implement connected and complete sidewalk network
- Reconstruct Inselruhe to include promenade from Dossin to Aquarium
- Establish remainder of full bike network
- Realign Picnic Way from Central Avenue to Riverbank
- Add additional raised crosswalks across loop road
- Create multimodal zones with EV charging stations, kiosks, signs, etc.
- Extend DDOT bus route on the island (City of Detroit)

*Phase Four estimated at \$28+ million from 2030-2035 includes:*

- Reconstruction of Jefferson/Grand Blvd intersection (City of Detroit)
- Restripe MacArthur Bridge
- Reconstruct Central Avenue to include promenade
- Complete Casino access and parking improvements
- Reconfiguration of access around fountain and add green space
- Implement multi-destination ferry access with partnerships and shared capital and operating costs.

## What's Next?

Having a plan and vision is great, but we want to start implementing!

Funding is in place to build the final 3.2 miles of the **Ralph Wilson Iron Belle Trail** around the perimeter of the island as well as **two-way bike lanes within the outer loop road**. This is anticipated to be completed in 2025.

As an interim measure until we can secure funding to design and build the promenade, **Central Avenue has been restriped** to better define drive lanes, two-way bike lanes, on-street parking, and pedestrian crosswalks.

New **wayfinding signs** have been designed and we have funding to begin to install some of the planned signs beginning in 2025. We're seeking funding to install all planned wayfinding signs within the next two years.

The Flatwoods Trail is now open for walking. You can access the 3 miles of trail at multiple trailheads including the Nature Center, Athletic Shelter, Oakway Parking lot, etc.

Funding has been secured for additional parking in the central portion of the island near popular destinations. This new parking will be complete by 2027.

There also is other work happening on Belle Isle! In addition to the work related to the Mobility Study, there are other projects (big and small) that are happening or will happen within the next two years.

\$6M of work has started at the Scott Fountain to replace the structural decking under the main bowl and update mechanical equipment.

Renovating Restrooms continues to be a priority. The Flynn Pavilion restrooms are now open to the public. In 2025/26, restrooms #2 (across from Flynn), #7 (across from aquarium), #8 (at shelter along Riverbank Rd) and the oxbow restroom will be under construction.

The Casino will reopen in 2025 after \$6M in work including a new roof, waterproofing, masonry restoration, elevators, restroom upgrades, new heating/cooling, and accessible ramps to the plaza and porch.

The Conservatory has had \$10M in work done to the glass dome and reopened in December 2024.

A plan is underway to make accessibility improvements in 2025/2026 at both the Aquarium and Conservatory. In 2025, the park will continue to develop exciting outdoor spaces and enhance pedestrian connections to adjacent attractions in this central hub.

A proposal was received for renovating the Belle Isle Boat House and it is currently being reviewed. We hope to know more before the end of 2024.

The elevated walkway in the former zoo area is being evaluated to see if the structural parts are still in good condition and if, with some improvements, we can reopen it as an “elevated nature walk” experience. The study should be completed in 2025.

There is a lot of work yet to be done on Belle Isle and even more things we’ve heard people want to see and do. We want to expand on what we learned during the Mobility Study. We are getting started on developing a Strategic Improvement Plan for Belle Isle that will help us look at all the work that needs to be done in a holistic manner. The primary purpose of the Strategic Plan is to work with the community to prioritize which projects we should focus on first.

Stay tuned...we’ll be reaching out to you again for your help soon!

## Want to Learn More?

The Belle Isle Multimodal Mobility Study recommendations were driven by what we heard and learned via a considerable amount of data collection and conversations with staff and visitors. If you’d like to learn more, the full report can be found at this [link](#). Also feel free to reach out to our staff with comments or questions. 313-821-9844 or email [dnr-prd-belleisle@michigan.gov](mailto:dnr-prd-belleisle@michigan.gov)

We can’t thank everyone enough for your continued support of Belle Isle - we are excited to keep moving forward together!