

Local Government Policies as Potential Facilitators of the Active Living Orientation of Communities

Emily Thrun, MUPP, Jamie F. Chriqui, PhD, MHS, Sandy Slater, PhD, MS, Dianne Barker, MHS, Frank J. Chaloupka, PhD

bridging the gap

Research Informing Policies & Practices for Healthy Youth

METHODS

Background

Characteristics of the built environment have been shown to both facilitate or inhibit physical activity. The Task Force on Community Preventive Services recommends community and street-scale urban design and land use policies as strategies to promote physical activity.

Study Purpose

- 1) To present two reliable and valid policy evaluation tools that can be used for evaluating local government policies and plans related to the built environment.
- 2) To describe the prevalence of active living-oriented requirements included in the policies and plans.

Policy Instrument Development

Two policy assessment instruments (one for zoning and other policies; one for plans) were developed to evaluate the nature and extent to which zoning and plans specifically facilitate walking, biking, and active/passive recreation.

- The BTG-COMP Built Environment Policy Assessment Tool
- The BTG-COMP Built Environment Master Plan Assessment Tool

A pilot study was conducted in 2009 to assess the reliability of the instruments for 53 counties and municipalities surrounding 15 secondary schools nationwide.

Policy Collection and Coding

Policies and plans were collected in 2010 (via the Internet with telephone follow-up) from 132 counties and 228 municipalities surrounding 154 secondary schools nationwide. Policies and plans were reviewed and double-coded by two Master's level researchers to identify requirements for provisions that would facilitate physical activity using detailed coding protocols developed following the pilot study.

Analysis

Analysis of the data was conducted using STATA v. 11. The results only included data for jurisdictions in the study that had zoning regulations, a unified development code, or subdivision regulations (N=197 municipalities and 95 counties).

The analysis was based on provisions required for anywhere in the community (i.e., regardless of which zone(s) or district(s) or plan element(s) where the provision would be required).

INSTRUMENTS

Zoning/Policy Audit Form

Plan Audit Form

Overall Pilot Reliability Results:

Zoning form:

Proportion of agreement: 96%
Inter-rater reliability (kappa): 91%

Master Plan form:

Proportion of agreement: 92%
Inter-rater reliability (kappa): 84%

Definitions

- **Pedestrian-oriented marker:** Any type of walking or bicycling provision mentioned in a code or plan that is oriented to active living such as trails, sidewalks, crosswalks, paths, bicycle lanes, bicycle networks, bike parking, or phrases including the word "pedestrian".
- **Active recreation marker:** Any type of recreation provision mentioned in a code or plan that is oriented toward recreation activities such as sport programs, constructed recreation facilities, playgrounds, athletic facilities, or sport fields.
- **Open space marker:** Any type of recreation provision mentioned in a code or plan that is oriented toward recreational activities that generally do not require a developed site such as nature preserves, open space, or generic parks. Open space markers are places not necessarily designed specifically for physical activity.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Active Living Oriented Zoning Requirements

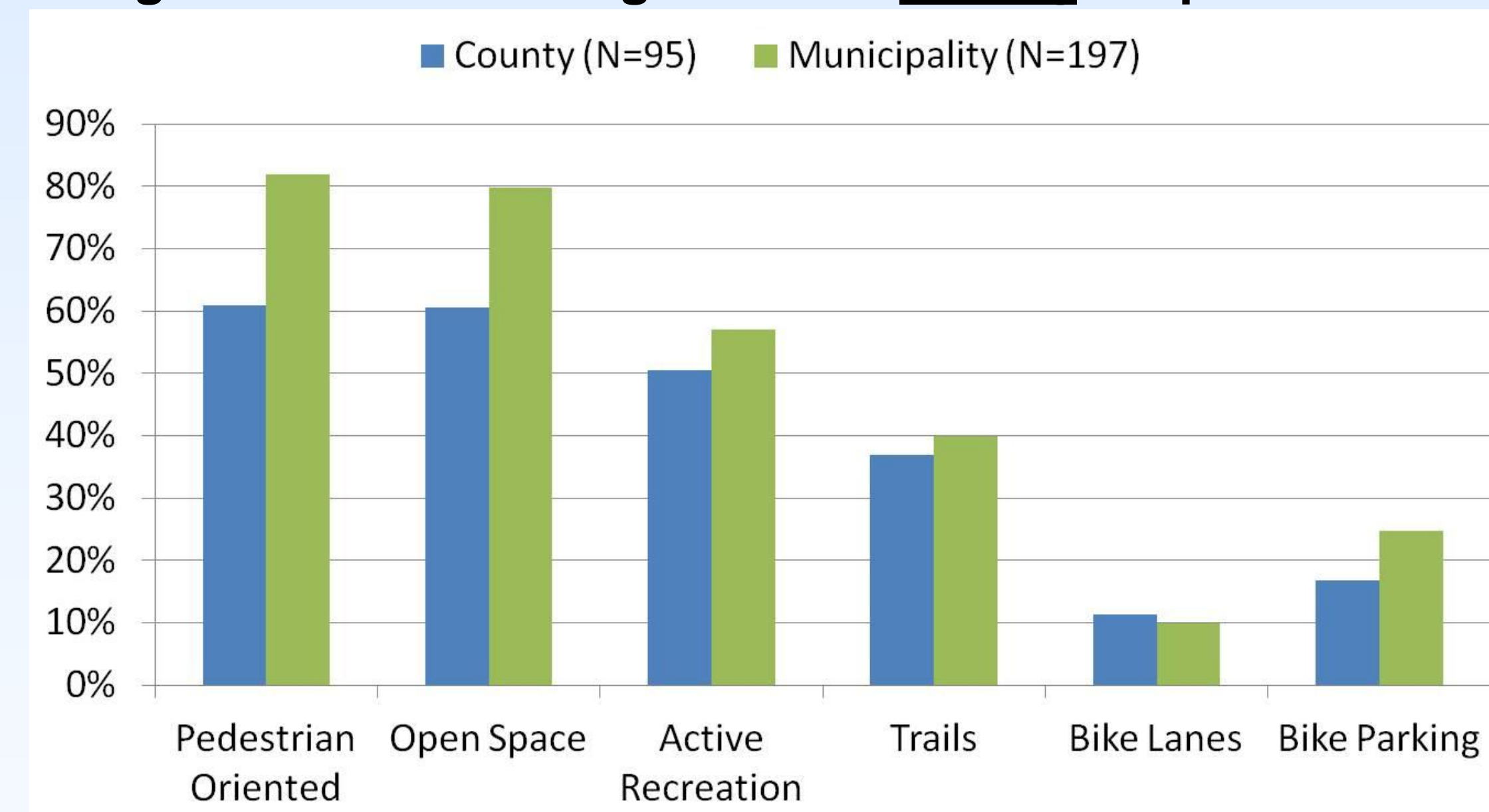


Figure 2. Active Living Oriented Plan Requirements

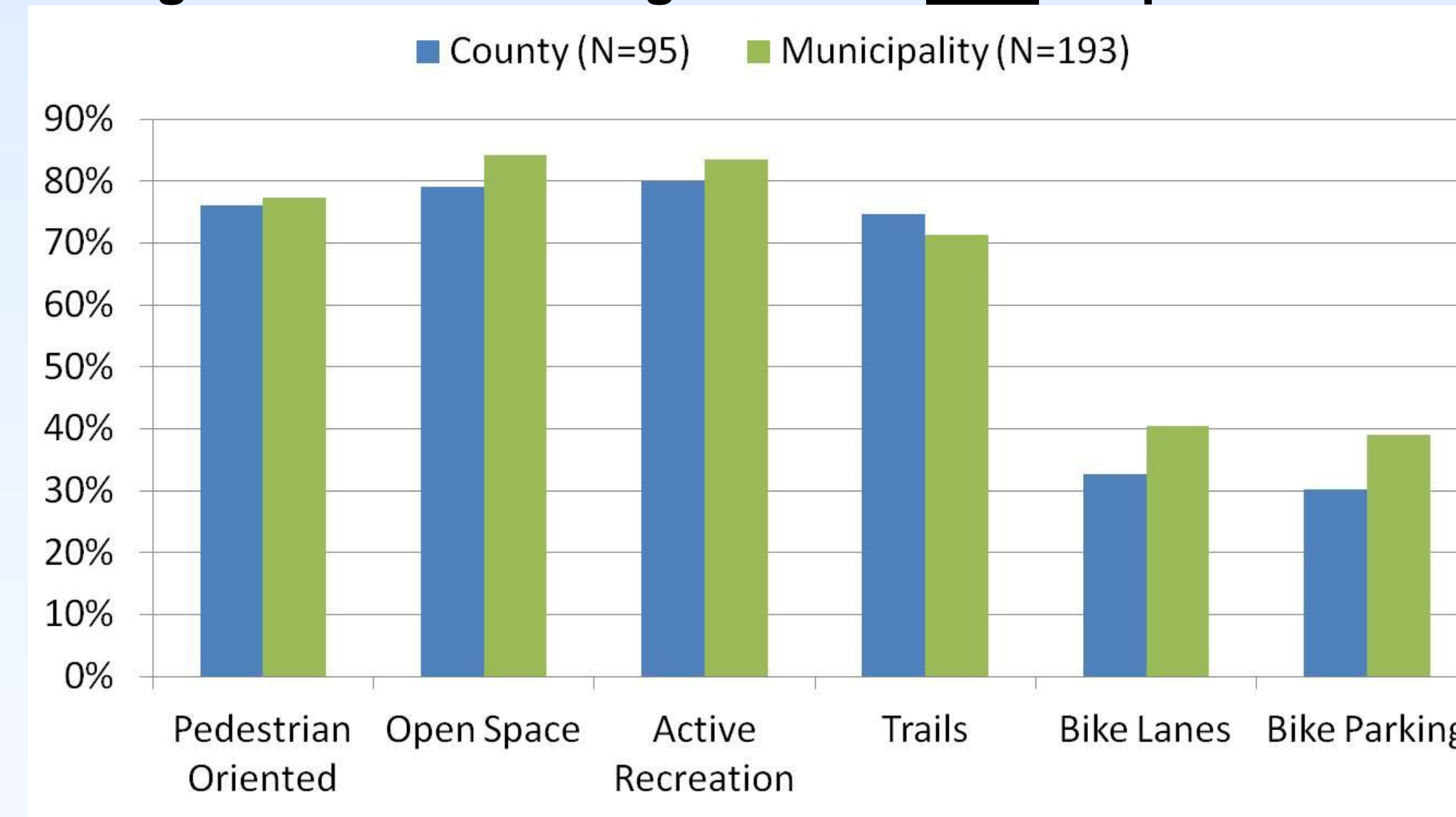
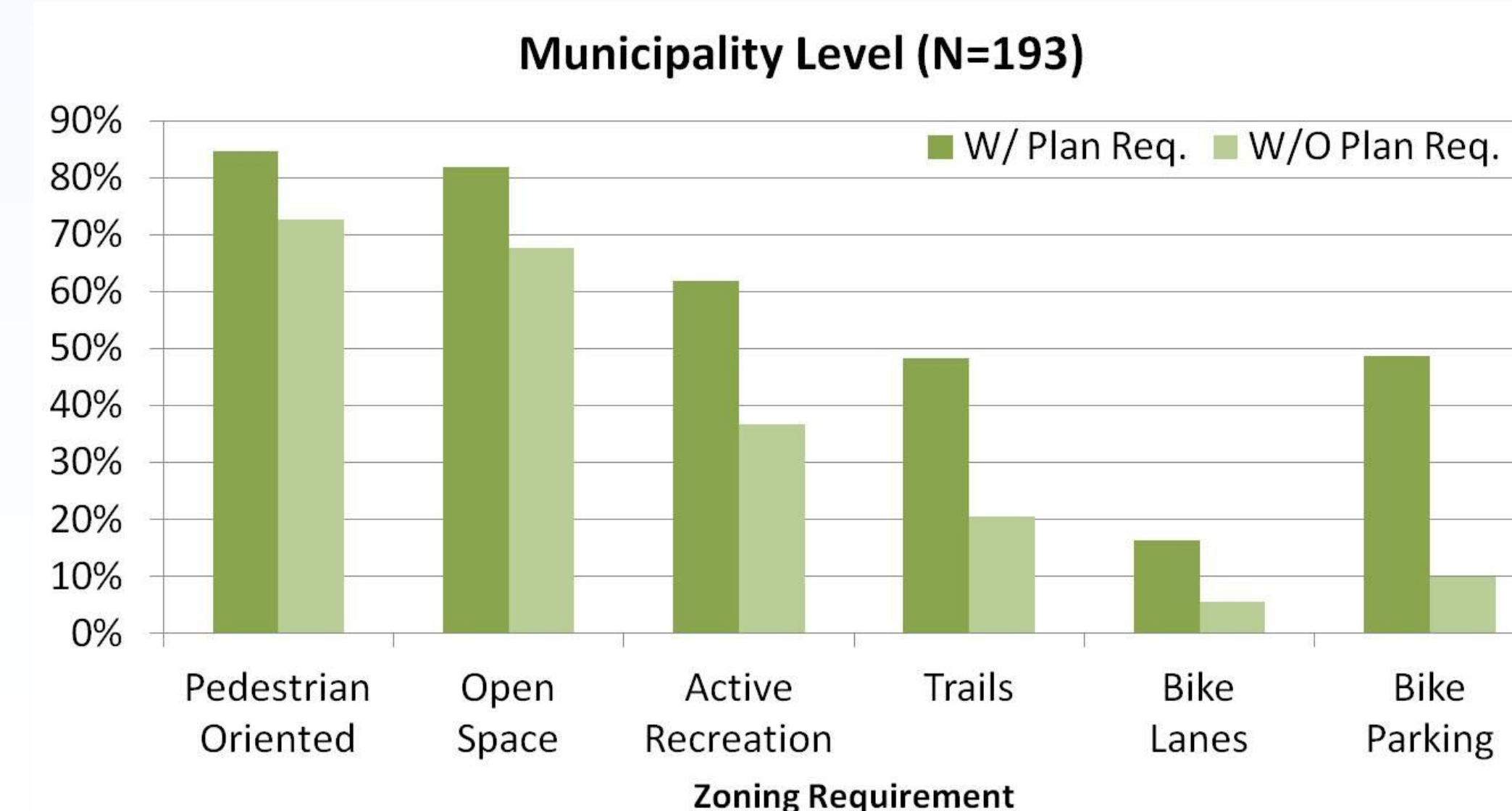
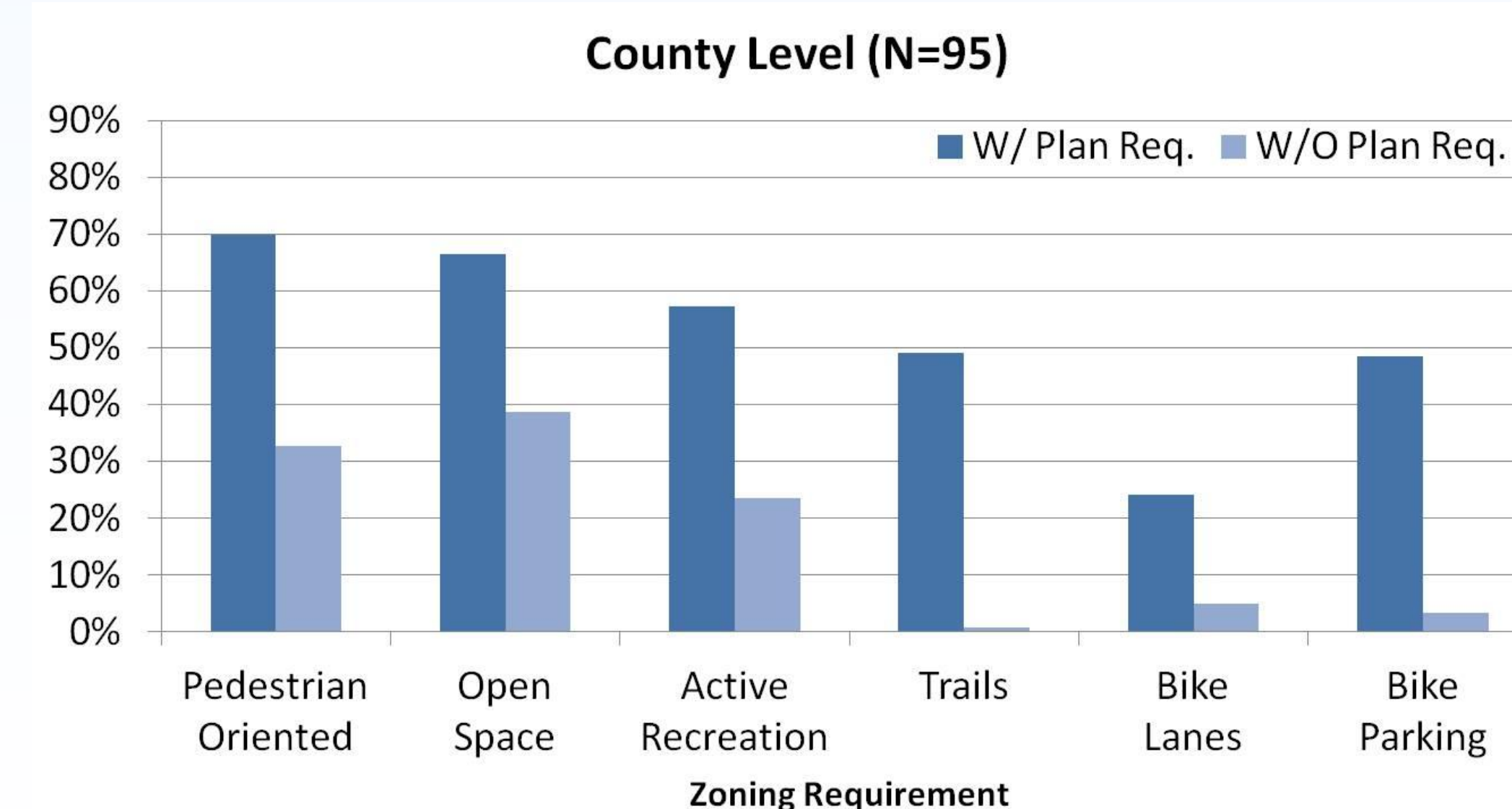


Figure 3: Zoning Requirements by Master Plan Requirements



SUMMARY

Zoning/Land Use Requirements (see Figure 1):

- More common at the municipal level than the county level
- Most likely to require pedestrian-oriented infrastructure, open space, and active recreation areas.
- Least likely to require bike lanes.

Plan Requirements (see Figure 2):

- Not much variation by jurisdiction.
- Most likely to require pedestrian-oriented infrastructure, open space, active recreation areas, and trails.
- Bike lane requirements more commonly addressed than in zoning/land use regulations.

Relationship Between Plan Requirements and Zoning Requirements (see Figure 3):

- Plan requirements are more likely to be implemented through zoning at the municipal level.
- Active living-oriented planning requirements do tend to be implemented through the zoning code.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to create reliable tools to evaluate the extent to which policies facilitate or inhibit active living.

Local governments can:

- Modify/create plans to address future development that promotes physical activity and can be implemented through changes to zoning/land use laws.
- Modify zoning/land use laws to include requirements for structural improvements to increase opportunities for physical activity.

ABOUT BRIDGING THE GAP

Bridging the Gap is a nationally recognized research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation dedicated to improving the understanding of how policies and environmental factors influence diet, physical activity and obesity among youth, as well as youth tobacco use. Bridging the Gap is a joint project of the University of Illinois at Chicago's Institute for Health Research and Policy and the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. For more information, visit www.bridgingthegapresearch.org

CONTACTS FOR MORE INFO

Emily Thrun: ethrun2@uic.edu
Jamie Chriqui: jchriqui@uic.edu