

Pedestrian safety improvements a joint effort



Village of Waterford's walk-to-school projects get everyone involved.

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CRASH STATISTICS reported by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation indicate that since 1990, there has been a 44 percent decrease in injuries to pedestrians. Pedestrian deaths have declined steadily over the past 20 years.

Despite these lower numbers, the fact remains that in 2009, a pedestrian was injured or killed every 7.2 hours in Wisconsin. That statistic suggests the need for continued efforts that combine engineering, education, enforcement and emergency response to improve pedestrian safety.

Safer walk to school

Children account for as many as half of all pedestrian injuries when they do occur, often in neighborhoods or school zones where excessive speed or driver inattention is a factor. Local governments that receive funds through the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grants program administered by WisDOT offer good examples of how any community in Wisconsin can make local streets and intersections safer for all pedestrians.

Although the next round of SRTS grants is more than a year away, Safe Routes programs completed or underway in locations around the state demonstrate strategies local agencies are following to improve the safety of walking and bicycling routes to and from area schools. Common to all these projects is that they depend on a coalition of groups working together and local leadership to make things happen.

Awareness prompts change

Two La Crosse County communities with ongoing pedestrian safety initiatives secured grants in the 2010-2011 cycle to augment their efforts. The Village of West Salem has an enrollment of approximately 1700 students traveling to and from a campus with elementary, middle and high school facilities.

State Highway 16 runs northwest of the campus, a road that about half the student body crosses en route to school and home.

Momentum for improving traffic controls and signage in the area came from a local bicycle/pedestrian committee led by community members and representatives from the schools. The group contacted Virginia Loehr, SRTS Coordinator with the County Health Department, for her help preparing a Safe Route's proposal. West Salem received \$93,725 last fall toward infrastructure improvements and \$24,850 to support non-infrastructure activities. The infrastructure improvements they outlined include:

- Place Yield to Pedestrian stanchions in busy crosswalks.
- Install School Crossing set to flash on a timer in three locations.
- Install flashing STOP sign at busy 4-way controlled intersection.
- Install ADA-compliant curb ramps at various locations.

Among non-infrastructure programs the committee backed was sponsorship of a Walking School Bus once a week. A health-related aspect of SRTS, the "bus" involves one or two adults walking a route to school and picking up a procession of students along the way heading in the same direction. West Salem plans to install special signs along the Walking School Bus route to alert both drivers and sidewalk users. The elementary school also has a dedicated SRTS liaison who monitors safety issues and stays in touch with Loehr about other needs.

Awareness of safety issues is where many of these improvements start. That was the case in West Salem, says Loehr. The next step is finding a way to implement those improvements. "Support from all sides and a willingness to listen are making this work."

Signage on a quiet street

Loehr also helped the La Crosse County Town of Campbell develop its Safe Routes proposal. The town is on French Island, a narrow stretch of land that lies between the Mississippi and Black rivers north of the City of La Crosse.

There are no sidewalks and few school zone signs along the quiet straight road that leads to the town's elementary school. Parents and school staff members raised the question of adding improvements at crosswalks that intersect with busier streets and the principal got in touch with Loehr.

She helped organize a committee that included town officials, the chief of police, parents, teachers and school administrators. They drove and walked the route taking notes on problems and solutions, and explored how to align their efforts with pedestrian safety initiatives already in place through the city and county. A consulting firm will help with design of the project.



A Town of Campbell safe routes committee proposed installing more school zone signs and traffic controls along this route to school.

Based on their proposal, the town received \$58,142 through SRTS to assist with these infrastructure improvements:

- Install two sets of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Pedestrian Activated Beacons at two crossing areas along routes to school.
- Install School Crossing signs with AHEAD plaques in advance of the Beacons.
- Install School Zone Speed Limit signs in three locations approaching the school.
- Paint highly visible crosswalks throughout the community.
- Paint shared-lane markings and stripe travel lanes that alert drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians about where they belong on the road.

The town plans to use an additional \$15,000 in non-infrastructure SRTS funding for safety education and enforcement. As in West Salem, a SRTS liaison at the school helps promote the safety message and identify other needs.

Lasting plan for safety

Work that went into studying problem traffic areas and identifying solutions to improve pedestrian safety helped the Village of Waterford secure a grant through the SRTS program in 2008. But it did more than that, says Village Clerk Vikki Zuehlke. The Racine County community continues to use the plan as a template for many initiatives. It is the basis of Waterford's application for Main Street status to support creating a more walkable downtown. Village administrators also hand it to every residential developer with the request that their projects include adequate pedestrian paths.

The taskforce Zuehlke recruited to develop the plan—representatives from parent-teacher organizations, the public works department and law enforcement, local businesses, a bicycle federation, the health department, bus services and other stakeholders—continues to collaborate on safety issues, a commitment she describes as a powerful benefit of the SRTS process.

Waterford based its Safe Routes approach on improvements and activities under five categories:

Engineering Install new signs and beacons around seven schools

Education Disseminate information about safety and enforcement to parents and students

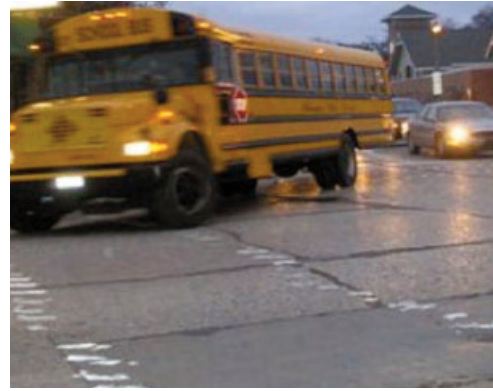
Enforcement Increase police presence during drop-off and pick-up times

Encouragement Expand support for walk- and bike-to-school promotions

Evaluation Measure effectiveness of all efforts for future planning

The taskforce based its recommendations for the engineering solutions on an analysis of the type and location of traffic controls that fit the safety needs of each school. Improvements include new in-road pedestrian signs to slow traffic, florescent green school pedestrian signs to identify school zones and, on a busy roadway near one school, flashing beacon signs.

Zuehlke says getting people with so many different perspectives in on the discussion made the planning process more meaningful for everyone. "Groups represented on the taskforce essentially made an investment in the solutions they came up with and that's helped make issues of pedestrian safety much more visible," she adds.



Busy intersections on school routes are a major focus of local pedestrian and bicycle safety efforts.

Feedback on initial efforts is positive. Schools are adopting and expanding the walking programs, and the presence of increased enforcement is slowing traffic in school zones.

Partners in safety

Most local governments include pedestrian and bicycle safety considerations in their budgets—like sign replacement programs, crosswalks, crossing guards and focused enforcement. With resources so scarce, this is an area where collaborating now with a variety of local organizations and individuals that care about the issue can produce effective partnerships and strengthen future SRTS applications. Local officials who share the search for ideas about dealing with trouble spots and how to implement changes often find an opportunity to build cooperation and facilitate action on important safety initiatives. ■

The Waterford taskforce continues to collaborate on safety issues, a commitment Zuehlke describes as a powerful benefit of the SRTS process.

Resources

www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov/aid/saferoutes.htm

Information on the federally funded, state-administered Safe Routes to School program that promotes safer options for pedestrians and bicyclists.

www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/motorist/crashfacts/docs/pedestrianfacts.pdf

Wisconsin pedestrian traffic safety facts.

http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ Pedestrian and bicycle safety with links to safety plans, research and tools for evaluating safety problems.

www.nhtsa.gov/Pedestrians Pedestrian safety page on National Highway Safety Administration site with information on education, enforcement and outreach.

www.safekids.org/our-work/programs/walk-this-way/ Pedestrian safety program information from Safe Kids initiative, a network of organizations working with health and safety experts, educators, corporations, foundations, governments and volunteers to prevent unintentional childhood injury.

Complying with the MUTCD

Excerpt on "School Speed Limits" from the TIC publication *Signing for Local Roads* (download at <http://tic.engr.wisc.edu/>) reflects the latest rules from the *Wisconsin Supplement to the Manual on Traffic Control Devices*.

Wisconsin Statutes (Section 349.12) set the school speed limits at 15 mph unless modified by the road maintaining authority. Research shows better compliance with limits and less difference in the speeds of road users when the limit is set at 10 mph below the speed limit of the road. Statute allows this approach and WisDOT recommends it. The school speed limit sign, where used, should be a single panel or assembly of signs with the following messages: School sign (S4-3), Speed limit sign (R2-1) and When Children Are Present sign (S4-2). Use an End School Zone sign (S5-2) after a school zone. And because fines are double in school zones per Wisconsin Statute 346.60, install a FINES HIGHER sign (R2-6P) at school zones. The Wisconsin Supplement proposes using the FINES HIGHER sign in lieu of BEGIN HIGHER FINES ZONE or FINES DOUBLE signs.