



Taking steps for pedestrian safety

Walking promotes health and fitness, enhances community liveability, and helps reduce pollution. Schools, seniors' organizations, health departments, and neighborhood groups are all putting renewed emphasis on walking. But pedestrians must negotiate

a world dominated by motorists, and walking can be hazardous. Over 1,600 pedestrians are injured and 60 killed each year in Wisconsin.

As a local official you can do a variety of things to help make walking easier and safer in your community. To help you help your local pedestrians, this issue of Crossroads reports on projects in communities around the state—simple sidewalk improvements, walkability assessments, education/enforcement programs, and more.



Local officials can make walking safer and easier for communities.

Walking assessments: taking a ped's-eye view

A wide variety of conditions you'd never notice from your vehicle can make walking easier or harder for pedestrians, as Gary Kennedy learned on a recent walking assessment in the City of Manitowoc.

"I realized that there are safety issues out there for pedestrians that you just don't see until you walk those areas," says Kennedy, who is the Manitowoc County Highway Commissioner. "For example, going over the Highway 10 bridge in Manitowoc, you felt unsafe because there is no barrier between the traffic and the pedestrian." Kennedy was participating

in a Walking Workshop last April, led by facilitator Kit Keller.

"Walking Workshops provide a focused opportunity for elected officials, staff, civic groups, schools, seniors, and others to come together and look at their community with fresh eyes, on foot," says Keller, a former elected official who now works with Wisconsin Walks, a statewide pedestrian advocacy organization. She has recently led workshops in Horicon, Wautoma, Rib Mountain, Ashwaubenon, and Allouez, along with Manitowoc.

More than 40 participants came to the Manitowoc workshop from city and county agencies and interested community groups. The County Health Department organized the session in cooperation with the Safe Communities Coalition. It was supported by a grant from WisDOT's Bureau of Transportation Safety (see related story page 5).

After introductory presentations, they walked three locations in Manitowoc, assessing pedestrian conditions using a

"Walkability Checklist." Reporting their results, the group then developed short-term, medium range, and long-term goals.

"By the time we met again a month later, we'd accomplished all of our short-term goals," says Ann Schneider-Allen, Manitowoc Co. Health Dept. Health Educator. At the second session the group developed an action plan, reviewing goals and forming subcommittees to work on them. For example:

The education subcommittee will provide pedestrian safety information to driver's education instructors and student drivers. The Health Department is giving away reflective sashes to help pedestrians be more visible at night. The City Traffic Engineer recently adjusted the traffic signal at a downtown intersection so pedestrian wait times are shorter during the busy lunch hour. A *Walk Our Children to School* event is planned for 2004.

Long-term goals include making all sidewalks five feet wide, changing utility placements, redesigning an intersection near the community's new Mariner Trail bike/pedestrian path along Lake Michigan, and building a separate foot bridge to get pedestrians off the Highway 10 bridge.

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Pedestrian safety planning grants

Photo: Don Burden, from PHIC Information Library, www.pedbikeimages.org



WisDOT's Bureau of Transportation Safety (BOTS) has funds for small pedestrian safety planning contracts. "The goal is to help communities evaluate and plan for improving pedestrian safety," says Joanne Pruitt-Thunder, Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Program Manager. The funds helped support Walking Workshops in six communities this year. The money comes from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Two types of contracts are available: Transportation Safety and Safe Routes to Schools. This year's Transportation Safety grants, up to \$2000 each, will be targeted primarily to communities or coalitions with 10,000 people or more, Pruitt-Thunder says. If there is a Safe Communities Coalition, it must have identified pedestrian safety as a goal for the year. Proposals are invited immediately. Funds will be available as early as October 1st and must be spent within the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004. BOTS has a Request

for Proposals form that gives details on criteria and how to apply.

"Anyone concerned about transportation safety issues is can initiate the process, working with a unit of government," says Pruitt-Thunder. "That may be the mayor, county executive, health department, law enforcement, school administration." The contract must be issued to a governmental unit and requires a 25% match. Evaluation, expense and match reports are required at the end.

Safe Routes to Schools contracts are designed to get children to school safely on their own power, rather than by bus or car. They are generally planning contracts, made with school districts, law enforcement, traffic engineering units, or others, that involve studying primary routes to school.

"By end of the funding year they must show that they have planned for and provided at least one safe walking or bicycling route for each child living within two miles of the school, and farther for older students," says Pruitt-Thunder. The process helps bring together community resources to focus on and evaluate these routes, and document the need for other projects such as design, engineering, enforcement, or education. Past Safe Routes to School contracts have been up to \$4000.

For applications and detailed information contact your DOT Regional Program Manager, or Joanne Pruitt-Thunder, 608/267-3154. joanne.pruitt-thunder@dot.state.wi.us

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Many other communities are also making strides on pedestrian safety. For example, in 2002 the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission used a BOTS grant to sponsor pedestrian safety workshops with nine communities in the area. The cities of Marshfield and Cedarburg also have strong programs.

Any community can work with the WisDOT Bureau of Transportation Safety (BOTS) to request funding for a workshop, according to Keller. In addition to the audit, a Walking Workshop includes local presenters reporting on sidewalk policy, maintenance policies, costs, walking for health, and number of people walking, plus an action planning stage.

"It's important to have an on-going policy

effort that looks comprehensively at walking and can take the emotion and hostility out of the planning process," Keller notes. "You do that through sustained, focused committee work that involves citizens, staff, and elected officials and makes regular reports to the public."

*For more information on **Walking Workshops** and for information on other community pedestrian safety projects, contact Kit Keller at 262/375-6180 or info@wisconsinwalks.org. For information on the **Manitowoc County program**, contact Ann Schneider-Allen at 920/683-4155 or annallen@co.manitowoc.wi.us. See Resources on page 6 for information on Detectable Warning Curb Ramps, and for a URL to the Walkability Checklist.*

Pavement condition reports due in December

Local road agencies must report their pavement condition ratings to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) by December 15, 2003. The information is entered into a statewide database called the Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR). WISLR is designed to assist local governments and WisDOT in better managing local roadways.

Rating pavements every two years gives local communities a useful tool for evaluating their road system's condition, and planning maintenance and repairs. The objective data helps them explain needs and budgets to citizens and elected officials.

Most communities will use the PASER rating system to evaluate their pavement conditions. Manuals are available free to help you rate concrete, asphalt, gravel, sealcoat, and unimproved pavements. The manuals have photos and text describing the rating system and its use, show types of pavement distress, and give examples of each rating.

Some agencies began collecting and recording their 2003 pavement ratings this summer. About 300 have already requested current electronic spreadsheets, says Kelly Schieldt, Wisconsin Statewide Local Roads Coordinator. WisDOT can accept pavement rating submittals via electronic spreadsheets, downloads from PASERWARE 3.0, or paper reports.

"We strongly encourage local municipalities to submit their data electronically, either on spreadsheet or through PASERWARE 3.0," says Schieldt. "That allows us to load the information into the database quickly, making it available sooner." Once WisDOT processes the rating data, users will be able to view the data online, print maps and request reports.

PASERWARE users need to use Version 3.0, which will be distributed soon. The program is being revised to use the "On/At" system of describing pavement sections. These users could record and submit their ratings on electronic spreadsheets and load it later in PASERWARE 3.0, if they prefer not to wait. (For a description of the "On/At" system see the Spring 2003 **Crossroads** page 3.)

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