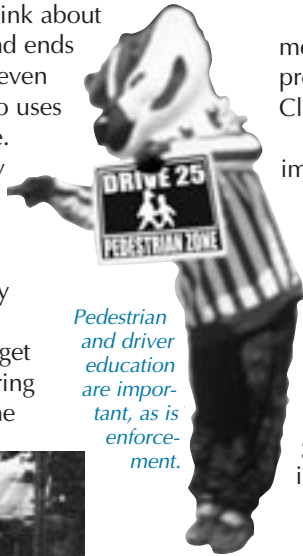


# How are your pedestrian facilities?

When you stop to think about it, every trip starts and ends as a pedestrian trip, even when the person also uses a car, bus, or bicycle. Walking is especially important among children ages 5-14, and adults over 45.

Is your community serving pedestrians effectively? You can get some help in answering that question from the



*Pedestrian and driver education are important, as is enforcement.*



Wisconsin State Pedestrian Policy Plan, which will be ready for distribution in late summer. This plan summarizes current pedestrian conditions, concerns and programs in the state based on research and extensive public comment. The plan offers goals, objectives and actions to realize its vision: "to establish pedestrian travel as a viable, convenient and safe transportation choice throughout Wisconsin."

"Some people say that their town or suburb has no need for sidewalks because they don't see many people walking now when there aren't many sidewalks," says Tom Huber, statewide pedestrian and bicycle coordinator at WisDOT. "If you apply that thinking to building streets and highways, you won't see many cars where there is no road." Good pedestrian facilities are also good economics for tourism and commercial businesses.

It is important to consider pedestrian needs at every level of community and road development, Huber says, including land use plans, commercial and residential developments, new road construction, and reviews of existing roads and neighborhoods.

Don't forget to insist that contractors meet pedestrian needs during construction projects. Simply putting up a "Sidewalk Closed" sign is not enough.

Education and enforcement are also important.

Sometimes it can be a challenge to consider pedestrian issues, including the requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act. One good place to start is with the Pedestrian Road Show program. (See article in *Crossroads*, Summer 2000.) WisDOT is also developing a "Best Practices" guidebook for communities to be ready in early spring 2002.



The current sidewalk policy has been in place since 1984, but has been a controversial issue since the 1960s.

Amundson plans to work with local neighborhood associations who have expressed an interest in sponsoring a Pedestrian Road Show. The intent will be to rebuild grassroots understanding and support for pedestrian facilities.

"When I see the number of people walking and using the facilities we've built in similar neighborhoods over the past 15 years, it's a shame we're not continuing to build on our previous efforts," he says.

The City of Brookfield, by contrast, has built about 65% of the pedestrian and bike facilities identified in its 1986 plan.

## Politics and retrofits

Few topics can bring as much citizen protest as proposing to install curb, gutter, and sidewalks in residential areas long since accustomed to not having them.

"Cost is not the only issue, just one of the many reasons why property owners don't want sidewalk built," says Brian Amundson, Director of Public Works for the City of Eau Claire. "They say: we've never had it and we don't need it. There are no pedestrians here. We don't want to shovel it. I'm going to lose part of my front yard. You'll take out mature trees. We'll lose the character of the neighborhood. There's no demonstrated safety problem."

In April, Eau Claire's newly elected City Council reversed a decision approved just two months earlier by the previous Council, deciding not to build sidewalks in several existing residential areas as part of planned street reconstruction projects.

Mayor Kathryn Bloomberg said in a letter to WisDOT that surveys of her citizens show 80% approval for pedestrian facilities. She also noted that opposition has waned as the inclusion of walkways has become more routine.

"The people who objected when the sidewalks were first proposed, admit now that they're surprised by how many people really use them after they are built," says Tom Grisa, Brookfield's Director of Public Works. "In many cases, the people objecting are the sidewalks' highest users." In addition to having the political will, two elements are critical to improving pedestrian facilities Grisa notes: having a plan, and having a person on staff who is committed to making it happen.

*For information on the Pedestrian Road Show contact Tom Huber, WisDOT, 608/267-7757. The draft Pedestrian Plan is on the web: <http://www.dot.state.wi.us> under Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation, as are other useful pedestrian links.*