

Walkability Workshops: Final Report



A report on the findings of the eight workshops held in the Capitol Region, June 9 through 13, 2003. How easy is it for pedestrians to get around in our towns, do they feel safe, is their journey a pleasant one? What can we do to improve pedestrian safety and convenience, and thereby improve community livability?

WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

CAPITOL REGION WORKSHOP FINDINGS JUNE 9 TO 13, 2003

From June 9 to June 13 of 2003, the Capitol Region was fortunate to host a series of eight Walkability Workshops. The workshops were part of a grant program that was offered competitively and CRCOG was selected as one of nine Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the country to participate. The program was sponsored by the National Center for Bicycling and Walking, through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



The workshops were set up to investigate specific community issues of walkability with the following format: a class room presentation on principles of walkability, a walking audit in the area of concern, a workshop session where small groups of participants came up with their own solutions to the problems, and a presentation of the proposals. All possible stakeholders, including residents, business owners, Town staff, Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) engineers, and regional planning agency staff, were invited to the sessions. Dan Burden and Susan Newberry of Walkable Communities, Inc., nationally known experts on pedestrian issues, led the workshops.



While the specific issues and locations investigated at each workshop varied, there were many universal principles of walkability that were discovered at the workshops. The purpose of this brief memo is to document those findings so that other towns in the Capitol Region can use them, and so that they can be shared with other entities interested in transportation or pedestrian issues.

The Importance of Pedestrians in the Transportation System

On any trip, regardless of mode chosen, every individual is a pedestrian. Even when we drive, some portion of our trip will involve walking. In the past, walking was a more common mode of transportation than it is today. For example, thirty years ago about 66% of American children walked to school, today only about 13% walk. Examination of this statistic can help explain

many of the walkability issues the region faces today. Why do fewer children walk to school today? There are 3 major reasons:

- The built environment (school location) prohibits walking.
- Safe pedestrian facilities are not provided on the school route.
- Parents feel that the walk route is unsafe.

And ironically, the fact that fewer children are walking actually does lead to a less safe condition because more cars are on the road. In fact, research indicates that 20 to 25 % of morning traffic is due to parents driving their children to school. Most children, when asked, will say that they would like to be able to walk to school. Furthermore, health professionals are becoming more aware of the tremendous toll a sedentary lifestyle is taking upon the youth of our communities.

Our Walkable Community Workshops found that if we want more people to walk, we need conditions that encourage walking, that make pedestrians feel safe. By creating more walkable communities we will create communities that are perceived as more livable and communities that can encourage healthier lifestyles.



Workshop Findings

The workshops were conducted in eight communities within the region and the specific issues that were examined are summarized below:

- **Bloomfield** has been examining its Town Center, which consists of several shopping centers, to design a scheme for making it a more traditional town center.
- **Glastonbury** has a local citizens and business group that is very interested in increasing the pedestrian friendliness and accessibility of its town center.
- **Hartford** is just embarking on a neighborhood traffic calming project throughout the City and focused its workshop on a segment of Main Street in the downtown. Main Street has been the topic of a series of lectures held in downtown over the past year.
- **Manchester** is home to a large regional mall and several strip shopping centers. The community is trying to create a more walkable environment in this commercial area.
- **Somers** Town Center is located on a State Highway (Route 190), for which a corridor study has just been completed. That study identified the need for improving pedestrian accessibility on the state highway in the town center.
- **South Windsor** has been struggling over the last several years with how to make its municipal complex the nucleus of a thriving town center. Pedestrian safety and accessibility have been identified as chief issues here.
- **Windsor** has begun the development of a plan for the Poquonock section of town, which is located along a state highway, near the region's airport. The Town would like to be able to incorporate pedestrian access improvements in its plan.



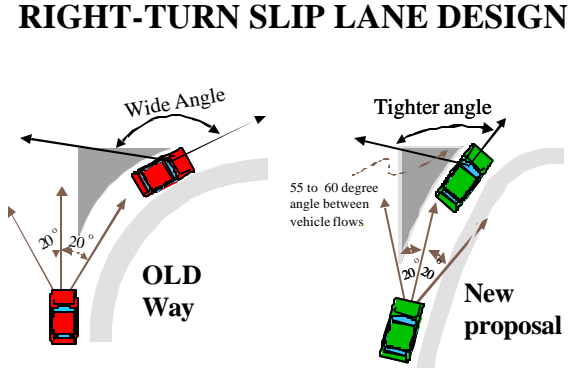
- The Bishops Corner area of **West Hartford** has a shopping center located in each quadrant of the intersection of Main Street and Route 44. The town would like to design a more pedestrian friendly intersection and enhance the walk access within and between the commercial areas.




While the workshop sites differed, several universal principles of walkability were outlined in the workshops. Many of these listed below will seem simplistic and quite obvious, but they are listed so that we do not lose sight of the basics:

- High traffic speeds make pedestrian crossings difficult, unsafe, and unpleasant.
- Long pedestrian crossings are less safe than short crossings.
- Pedestrian access that requires crossing a sea of parking is unpleasant and inherently unsafe.
- Pedestrian crossing signals that require extraordinarily long waits are seldom respected.
- Land use and the built environment largely influence how walkable a community is. Modern zoning requirements tend to result in built environments that discourage walking.
- Providing a separate facility for pedestrians (a sidewalk) leads to a safer and more pleasant condition for walking.
- Facilities for pedestrians need to be designed with all users (elderly, handicapped, and children) in mind.
- Street plantings make a street environment more attractive and comfortable for pedestrians.
- A finely grained network of streets is important in both village centers and town centers to insure that no single road has to become so wide that it is no longer pedestrian friendly. That is, the denser the street grid system and the more options that traffic has, the more attractive individual streets will be for pedestrians.







The walking audits discovered many hazards for pedestrians that are likely to be found in many communities in the region. The following table lists the hazards and potential solutions for each:

PEDESTRIAN PERIL	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
<p>Crosswalks that are not marked on all legs of an intersection.</p>	<p>In heavily populated areas or areas with a population concentration, it should be expected that pedestrians will want to cross all legs of an intersection.</p> 
<p>Signal heads are not visible to pedestrians, so the pedestrians cannot tell when it is safe to cross.</p>	<p>Modify signal head placement so pedestrians and motorists can see them.</p>
 <p>Intersections with islands that separate right turning traffic from through traffic are designed for high speeds.</p>	<p>Utilize the new Australian or urban design, which encourage slower speeds and provide a refuge island for pedestrians.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RIGHT-TURN SLIP LANE DESIGN</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">High speed, low visibility of pedestrians, a real head turner</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Vehicle speeds 14 to 18 mph, good visibility of pedestrians</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Source: Michael Wallwork, PE, Alternate Street Design, P.A.</p>

PEDESTRIAN PERIL	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
 <p>State highways are typically designed for high speeds and as a result, few cars slow down to the posted speed limit in town and village centers.</p>	<p>Use design features that will slow traffic: short oval medians, median islands, modified intersections, gateway treatments.</p>
 <p>Sidewalks are discontinuous and too narrow.</p> <p>Obstructions in the sidewalk: overgrown hedges, utility poles.</p>	<p>Provide sidewalks and linkages between adjacent land uses that accommodate a minimum of 5 feet of clear width. In most cases, sidewalks should be provided on both sides of a street. Towns should consider developing a sidewalk plan. (It should be noted that many towns and many citizens are concerned about the installation of sidewalks, particularly who will pay to install them and who will maintain them. These concerns will be addressed in the Capitol Region Pedestrian Plan).</p>
<p>The pedestrian phase of most signals in the region is exclusive, stopping all vehicular traffic for the pedestrian phase.</p>	<p>Evaluate whether any of the pedestrian movements can be concurrent with a vehicular green indication. In many cases the pedestrian signal can be concurrent with the green light</p>
<p>Push buttons for pedestrian signals are located off of the sidewalk so that individuals in wheel chairs would have difficulty reaching them.</p>	<p>Place the push buttons adjacent to and reachable from the sidewalk.</p> 

PEDESTRIAN PERIL	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
<p>Developments are built primarily with auto access in mind and force pedestrians to walk across parking to access the front door.</p>	<p>Consider placing new buildings closer to the street with parking behind. Provide landscaped walkways across parking lots.</p>
<p>Little respect for the need to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks. In general, motorists yield to pedestrians only when signs that inform the motorist they are to yield to pedestrians are posted.</p>	<p>An educational and enforcement campaign could help improve motorist behavior at crosswalks.</p>
<p>Side streets that intersect at angles other than 90 degrees. This creates a longer area for the pedestrian to cross and causes traffic into and out of the side street to travel at higher speeds.</p>	<p>Intersections can be rebuilt so that the legs are perpendicular.</p>
<div> </div> <p>Walking paths and bike paths that are not visible to the street and feel unsafe.</p>	<p>Relocate paths as necessary.</p>
<p>Roads are wider than necessary, leading to excessive speeds.</p>	<p>Consider a “road diet”, narrowing the road and providing turn lanes at intersections. Pavement restriping or installing bumpouts are a couple of considerations.</p>

PEDESTRIAN PERIL		POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS	
	<p>Excessive numbers of and widths of driveways, especially at gas stations.</p>	<p>Establish an access management plan. Where possible, link parking lots to allow for fewer entrances and exits, and minimize driveway widths.</p>	
<p>Small pockets between buildings that could provide a hiding place create a feeling of danger.</p>		<p>Place statuary or plantings in these locations.</p>	
	<p>Mid block crossings that are used regularly by pedestrians but not marked.</p>	<p>Consider marking heavily used mid block crossings.</p>	
<p>Traffic signal design does not take all pedestrians into account.</p>		<p>Audible signals should be provided for the blind. These do not need to blare; there are several types of audible signals available.</p>	

PEDESTRIAN PERIL	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
<p>Many signals do not allow enough time for elderly pedestrians, handicapped individuals or children to cross the street</p>	<p>Where there are a large number of elderly, handicapped, or young children expected at a signal, use a crossing speed of 3 ft per second.</p>  A photograph showing a person in a wheelchair crossing a street at a crosswalk. The person is wearing a red and white striped shirt. In the background, there are several cars, including a dark sedan and a green van, stopped at the intersection. The scene is outdoors with trees and a sidewalk visible.

Where do We Go From Here?

The communities that participated in the Walkability Workshops have identified specific areas to investigate to create a more walkable environment. In addition, CRCOG is developing a Pedestrian Plan for the region, which will identify actions to be taken to make walking in the Capitol Region safer. Several items can, however, be investigated further, without waiting for the Pedestrian Plan to be completed.

Design Action Items

Design philosophies are continually changing based on user needs. Pedestrian accident statistics are becoming more alarming and there is a need to incorporate more sensitive design alternatives. The Connecticut Department of Transportation has taken this design sensitivity to heart by committing that the philosophy of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) be used on all projects. CSS is a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to highway design, construction, and maintenance involving all stakeholders at the earliest phases of a project. The CSS approach seeks to insure that transportation projects are in harmony with communities and attempts to preserve our environmental, scenic, aesthetic, and historic resources while maintaining safety and mobility. Workshops by the department have been on going.

In an effort to carry this CSS one step further it might be useful to have additional workshops specifically addressing traffic calming concepts such as roundabouts, channelized islands and back-in angle parking. These and other traffic calming techniques were introduced in the workshops and, while there was interest expressed in the ideas, there was some concern on the part of town design professionals: will these work for us? Will we diminish traffic carrying capacity too much? It would be useful to have workshops in the region that would investigate more thoroughly the design and performance of a number of these techniques, including, roundabouts, oval medians, refuge islands, channelized islands, on street parking (including angle and reverse in angle parking). At the same time, it would be helpful to have region wide 'case studies' of traffic calming tools and their measured effectiveness.

If a Town is interested in trying a traffic calming technique that is new to the region, CRCOG should help to facilitate the test by providing research findings and serving as a liaison with ConnDOT.

Towns should be aware that sidewalks are desirable in most all cases and that the minimum sidewalk width should be 5 feet. Sidewalks should be provided on both sides of the street in most cases.

When designing traffic signals, Towns should consider pedestrians as an integral part of the design process. Excessive crossing distances, or excessive waits for the pedestrian phase should be avoided. Construction inspection should include checking to be certain pedestrians can see the appropriate signal heads.

Where there is evidence of frequent mid block pedestrian crossings, designers should try to make this crossing safer. Sometimes, however, pedestrians cross mid block because the nearest corner crossing is inconvenient or perceived as being less safe by pedestrians. So whenever mid block

crossings are observed, the closest legal crossings should be examined also, to insure that they meet pedestrians needs safely and conveniently.

Planning Action Items

Plans of Conservation and Development are being prepared in at least two of the Towns where workshops were conducted. The timing of these workshops offers an opportunity to integrate workshop ideas into the Plans of Conservation and Development. Any other towns within the region that are working on plans may want to consider adding pedestrian elements.

Consideration should be given to pedestrian friendly designs in the development of zoning regulations and ordinances. Access control is extremely important. Walkability is enhanced when developments are not separated from the roadway and sidewalk by a sea of parking. Consideration should be given to providing parking behind buildings. In addition, enhancements to building facades such as incorporating canopies or outdoor seating areas can vastly improve the pedestrian environment.

The density of the street grid has a large influence on the walkability of a community. In locations where there is a healthy grid system, vehicles have several roads to choose from and traffic is distributed throughout the grid. Where a street grid is not provided, one or two streets will end up carrying the majority of the traffic; they will have to be built with many lanes to carry the traffic; and they will become hazardous for pedestrians. Wherever possible, planners should attempt to create a grid system or enhance the existing grid system.

Towns might consider developing sidewalk plans which would identify pedestrian destinations and linkages and deficiencies in the current sidewalk system.

Education Action Items

Even with the safest designs in place, pedestrian accidents are still likely to occur if the public is not properly following safety rules. Many people do not understand the meaning of the messages on a pedestrian walk signal and many motorists do not understand their duty to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks and to watch for pedestrians before turning. The CRCOG Pedestrian Plan is expected to have a large component dealing with safety education and enforcement, but until that document is complete, Towns may want to examine the pedestrian safety instruction that they provide through their schools and driver education programs. In addition, they may want to use newsletters or other regular communications with residents to explain the proper way to cross a street and to remind motor vehicle operators of their obligation relative to pedestrians.

Safe Routes to Schools

Safe Routes to Schools is a program that began in Britain and has been implemented in many towns and regions in this country. Safe Routes to Schools is a community approach to

- encourage more people to walk and cycle to school safely
- improve road safety and reduce child casualties
- improve children's health and development
- reduce traffic congestion and pollution



Developing and implementing a Safe Routes to School (SR2S) program integrates health, fitness, traffic relief, environmental awareness, and safety under one program. It is an opportunity for the community as a whole (citizens, government, school officials) to work together to create a healthy lifestyle for children and a safer, cleaner environment for everyone. A Safe Routes to School Overview can be found at:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/safe/routeshtml/overview.html#3>

New federal legislation that was introduced in the summer of 2003 has the potential for making \$250 million available annually nationwide for Safe Routes to Schools capital improvements. With the possibility of this new funding source looming, it makes sense for towns to begin to assess the pedestrian safety needs of their schools.

Conclusions

The Walkability Workshops were useful in identifying ways in which the region can become more pedestrian friendly. Development of a Pedestrian Plan for the Capitol Region will further develop the ideas presented in the workshops. In the meantime, however, CRCOG and its member towns can take steps in the areas of Design, Planning, Education and Safe Routes to Schools to improve pedestrian safety.

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