



Solving the Epidemic of Preventable Pedestrian Deaths

The decades-long neglect of pedestrian safety in the design and use of American streets is exacting a heavy toll on our lives. In the last decade, from 2000 through 2009, more than **47,700** pedestrians were killed in the United States, the equivalent of a jumbo jet full of passengers crashing roughly every month. On top of that, more than 688,000 pedestrians were injured over the decade, a number equivalent to a pedestrian being struck by a car or truck every 7 minutes.

Despite the magnitude of these avoidable tragedies, little public attention – and even less in public resources – has been committed to reducing pedestrian deaths and injuries in the United States. On the contrary, transportation agencies typically prioritize speeding traffic over the safety of people on foot or other vulnerable road users.

Nationwide, pedestrians account for nearly 12 percent of total traffic deaths. But state departments of transportation have largely ignored pedestrian safety from a budgetary perspective, allocating only about 1.5 percent of available federal funds to projects that retrofit dangerous roads or create safe alternatives.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Scott Crawford

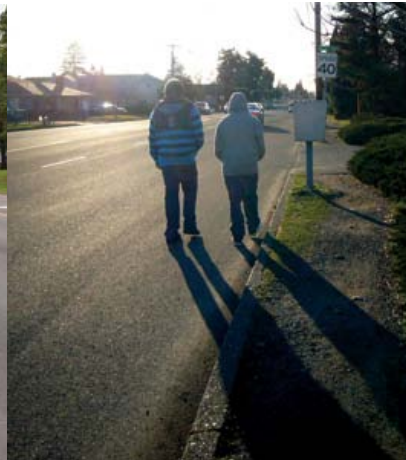


Photo courtesy of April Bertelson,
Portland Pedestrian Coordinator

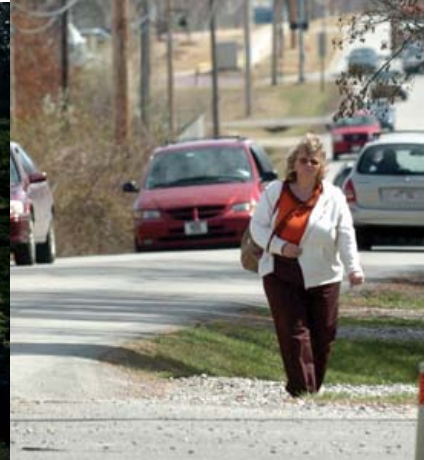


Photo by Stephen Davis, T4America

The roads have gotten somewhat safer, but pedestrian fatalities have fallen at only **half** the rate of motorist fatalities, dropping by just over 14 percent during the period, compared to 27 percent for motor vehicle fatalities. In many places, including **15** of the country's largest metro areas, pedestrian fatalities *have actually increased*, even as overall traffic deaths fell.

Children, older adults, and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in this figure, but people of all ages and all walks of life have been struck down in the simple act of walking. These deaths typically are labeled “accidents,” and attributed to error on the part of motorist or pedestrian. In fact, however, the majority of these deaths share a common thread: **they occurred along “arterial” roadways that were dangerous by design, streets engineered for speeding traffic with little or no provision for people on foot, in wheelchairs or on bicycles.**

There is a growing recognition that Americans must increase physical activity, including walking or bicycling, if we are to nudge the needle on ballooning health care costs, reducing obesity and overweight, cardiovascular and other chronic illnesses linked to a lack of exercise. Over the last decade, a growing number of communities have gotten the message, and begun to retrofit their more dangerous roadways to be safer for people on foot, on bicycles and in cars.

Still, most Americans continue to live in places where walking is risky business for their health and safety, where roads are designed solely to move speeding traffic and where pedestrians are viewed as an obstacle.

This has left us with a dilemma: Public health officials encourage Americans of all ages to walk and bike more to stem the costly and deadly obesity epidemic – yet many of our streets are simply not safe. **Americans get to pick their poison:** less exercise and poor health, or walking on roads where more than 47,000 people have died in the last ten years.

Why pedestrian safety is in the federal interest

For decades, federal dollars have been invested in thousands of miles of state and local highways. Pedestrian safety is often perceived as a strictly local issue, **but 67 percent of all 47,000+ pedestrian fatalities from 2000 to 2009 occurred on federal-aid roadways** — major roads eligible to receive federal funding for construction and improvements with federal guidelines or oversight for design.

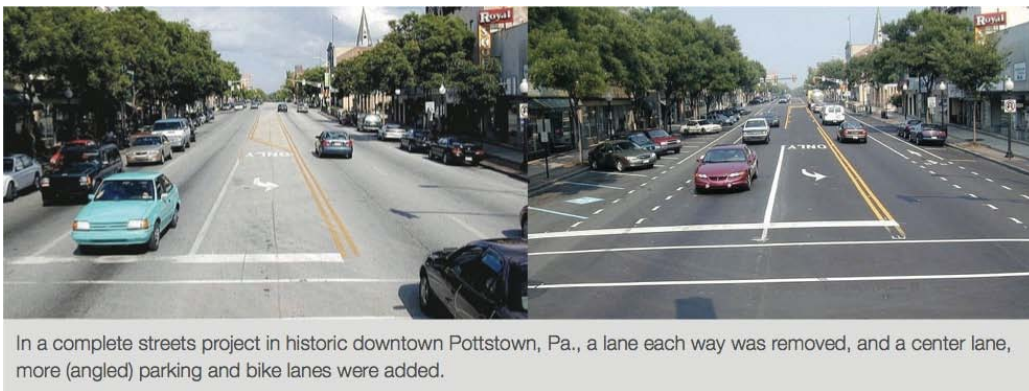
Taxpayer money that goes to the federal government and is distributed to the states for transportation should be used to build streets, roads and highways that are safe for all users. With millions of Americans walking along and crossing these federally funded roads each day, the billions in federal dollars spent on them each year must result in safer conditions for pedestrians.

Fortunately, improving the pedestrian environment requires a relatively small public investment, one greatly outweighed by the cost savings that would result from reducing traffic-related fatalities and improving health. Congress has an opportunity to help communities fix past mistakes and make our streets safer – not just for people on foot, but for everyone who uses them.

We recommend that the next federal transportation spending bill include the following provisions:

Retain dedicated federal funding for the safety of people on foot or on bicycle. Congress is currently contemplating elimination of dedicated funding for Transportation Enhancements and the Safe Routes to School program, the two largest funding sources for bike and pedestrian facilities. Without these committed funding streams, states will likely reduce spending for safety features like sidewalks, crosswalks and trails.

Adopt a national complete streets policy. Ensure that all federally funded road projects take into account the needs of all users of the transportation system, including pedestrians, bicyclists and public transportation users, as well as children, older adults, and individuals with disabilities.



Fill in the gaps. Beyond making new and refurbished roads safer for pedestrians, we need to create complete networks of sidewalks, bicycle paths and trails so that residents can travel safely throughout an area. To this end, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has gathered testimony from 53 communities outlining how they could fill in strategic gaps to make walking and bicycling to routine destinations more safe and convenient with small targeted federal grants.

Commit a fair share for safety. In 2008, only two states spent any of their Highway Safety funding to improve infrastructure for bicycling and walking. Yet, pedestrians and bicyclists make up 14 percent of all traffic-related fatalities. Federal, state and local governments should set safety goals that not only reduce fatalities overall, but also reduce fatalities for individual modes, with separate safety goals for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcyclists and motorists.

Hold states accountable for creating communities that are safe for walking. Congress must hold states accountable to ensure that transportation funds are spent wisely, by ensuring that:

- New streets are built to be safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation users, and motorists alike;
- The most dangerous roads are retrofitted for safety; and,
- Federal safety dollars result in lives saved and a more active population.



Photo by Stephen Davis, T4America



Photo courtesy of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership



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Most Dangerous Metro Areas

1. Orlando-Kissimmee, FL
2. Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL
3. Jacksonville, FL
4. Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL
5. Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA
6. Las Vegas-Paradise, NV
7. Memphis, TN-MS-AR
8. Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ
9. Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX
10. Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX

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