



CASE STUDY: GREATER WASHINGTON DC REGION Prioritizing Pedestrian Safety Montgomery County, MD

Montgomery County, Maryland has a 14 year history of focusing on pedestrian safety issues, and the implementation of strategies within the last few years is seeing significant results. In 2007 Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett adopted his Pedestrian Safety Initiative: A Strategic Plan which set forth seven objectives focused on targeted areas and which relies on data to determine success. The plan focuses on utilizing the three E's of Pedestrian Safety (Engineering, Education, and Enforcement), including application to their Safe Routes to Schools Program. The results have been impressive: Montgomery County has realized a 72 percent decrease in pedestrian collisions around schools participating in their Safe Routes to Schools program, a 21 percent decrease in the most serious collisions (those resulting in an incapacitating injury or death) and a 45% decrease in pedestrian collisions in the County's High Incidence Areas, where engineering, education, and enforcement resources have been targeted.

Background

In 2007 Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett developed [the Pedestrian Safety Initiative: A Strategic Plan](#) which outlined seven pedestrian safety strategies focused on three components: education, engineering and enforcement. By directing substantial resources to educating motorists and pedestrians; implementing engineering improvements around schools, in neighborhoods with speeding, and in High Incidence Areas (HIAs) where more collisions occur; and making the pedestrian safety enforcement visible and rigorous, the plan set in motion a movement to achieve two goals. The goals are 1) reduce pedestrian-related crashes, injuries, fatalities, and their associated social and economic costs; and 2) ensure that all areas of the County provide safe and convenient travel options for pedestrians.

Implementation & Approach

Montgomery County decided to use a data-driven approach to implementing the strategies set forth in the Initiative. By working collaboratively with CountyStat and the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD), the Department of Transportation was able to identify the location of high-incidence areas (HIAs), as well as key characteristics of the crashes such as time of day, demographics of the parties involved, and who was at fault (driver or pedestrian). The data allowed the County to employ effective strategies to improve pedestrian safety by targeting activities that would reduce the number and severity of pedestrian collisions. Once HIAs were

identified, a Pedestrian Road Safety Audit (PRSA) was conducted at each location to identify safety issues and potential engineering solutions.

Engineering: The County has implemented a wide range of engineering improvements to improve pedestrian safety at HIAs and other areas around the County. Engineering treatments have included: enhanced pedestrian crossings and median treatments, new and widened sidewalk connections, traffic signal modifications and timing adjustments, narrowing of travel lanes with bulb-outs, medians and pedestrian refuge islands, and barriers to prevent pedestrian crossings across high speed multi-lane roadways. In areas where pedestrians did not cross at designated crosswalks MCDOT increased signage to let pedestrians know where to cross and improved the crosswalks with high visibility striping.

Education: In addition to the regional [Street Smart](#) public education campaign, the County has implemented education programs specifically targeted at the HIAs. Early on, the County realized that some of the HIAs had similar characteristics, both in terms of the demographics of the areas as well as the types of crashes that were occurring. Thus, they decided to group the areas according to these similarities. The first group of HIAs included areas with high Latino populations, and also where pedestrians were found to be at fault the majority of the time. Therefore, a bilingual education campaign focused on pedestrian behavior was developed. The campaign included the use of English and Spanish-speaking Safety Promotion Teams who went out into the community to talk with pedestrians about safety and distribute high-visibility items.

The County also chose to implement a campaign at [Montgomery Blair High School](#) in the Four Corners HIA because 39 percent of the crashes in that area involved pedestrians under age 20, and a pedestrian survey revealed that 60 percent of respondents were high-school students. The County formed a working group consisting of Blair High School students, administration and staff, and a Parent Teacher Student Association representative to develop campaign concepts. The working group developed several initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of pedestrian safety, including:

- Best eyes contest: A shot of the winner's eyes were used in an advertisement focused on encouraging pedestrians and drivers to watch out for one another.
- Distribution of SWAG bracelets: Rubber bracelets that called out good (SWAG) pedestrian behavior and bad (FAIL) behavior.
- Text message contest: A contest which asked students to answer questions on pedestrian safety in order to be entered into a drawing for an iPod and/or Chipotle gift cards.

Enforcement: To support and reinforce the engineering and education efforts, the Montgomery County Police Department utilized a targeted enforcement program designed to increase driver and pedestrian compliance and awareness of pedestrian safety laws. In the HIAs, the officers

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targeted and ticketed both drivers and pedestrians who broke the law. Additionally, at crosswalks around the County, officers conducted pedestrian stings. These pedestrian stings consisted of a police decoy in visible clothing crossing the street at the crosswalk. If drivers failed to yield and stop the police officer would then issue a citation. In the first month of these stings, 206 driver citations were issued.

Sustainability

The 2007 Pedestrian Safety Initiative has been a success, but the County realizes there is more work to be done to continue keeping pedestrians safe decreasing the number and severity of pedestrian collisions. Using a data-driven approach enables the County to maximize the benefits of constrained resources – helping to achieve “more bang for the buck.” Key to the County’s success is continuing to develop strong partnerships. The program has dedicated personnel for executing engineering, education, and enforcement activities. For example, hiring a full-time Safe Routes to School coordinator and a full-time Pedestrian Safety Coordinator is a commitment to the continued success of the initiative. Also “train the trainer,” a program developed to train high-school students to teach elementary school kids pedestrian safety, is a way the Coordinator and the County can reduce the strain on County resources and staff. Additionally, the partnerships between the County Police Department and CountyStat can be utilized on an ongoing basis and continue to develop new programs and enforcement tactics.

Next steps

From the development of the Pedestrian Safety Initiative several lessons were learned. These lessons include: The need for close coordination of engineering, education, and enforcement; the need for a tactical toolbox of strategies; and the importance of utilizing economies of scale, partnerships, and medical coverage. The County has also realized the necessity of including the affected groups in the planning and implementation phases. MCPD has learned over the past few years that issuing citations is much more effective than issuing warnings to drivers and pedestrians who break the law. As the Pedestrian Safety Initiative moves forward, the County will use these lessons learned to continue to enhance the program’s effectiveness.

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