

Morgantown Pedestrian Safety Board Meeting Minutes
Public Safety Building – Training Room 1
4:30 – 5:30 PM
March 12, 2018

The Morgantown Pedestrian Safety Board's mission is to promote a walkable environment throughout the City by developing safe, attractive, and accessible walkways that connect neighborhoods and destinations.

4:30 pm Call meeting to order

I. Introductions:

Members (Quorum Present): Matt Cross, Jessica Bladow, Jimmie Simmons, George Lilley, Dan Shook, Jen MacDonald, Penny Kostka, and Stan Cohen

Ex-officio: Jing Zhang, Frank Gmeindl, Bill Austin, Ella Belling, Bill Kaweckki, Don Williams, Captain Matt McCabe, Maria Smith, and Jenny Selin

Guest: William Blosser, Styphen Woerner, Emily Myers, Don Spencer, Heather Britton, Sam Berhanu, Yohanna Berhanu, Rebecca Berhanu, Syihan Mohamad, and Paul Brake

Absent: Bill Reger-Nash, Gypsie Denzine, Jan Derry, Janet Fraser, Kim Hartsell, Alex Stockdale

II. Approval of December 11, 2017, January 8, 2018, and February 12, 2018 Meeting Minutes. Motion by George Lilley second by Penny Kostka Passed by (unanimous voice vote).

III. Officer's Reports

- Matt Cross
 - Attended meeting with WVU to increase pedestrian safety
 - Invited WVU media students to come out and improve education on crossings esp. with PSAs (Public Safety Announcements)
 - LPI: Lead Pedestrian Interval – crossing suggestion

IV. Action Item Follow-up

V. New Business

- MPO Pedestrian Safety Plan Update – Bill Austin
 - MPO and the Morgantown Pedestrian Safety Board working to update the Pedestrian Plan to improve safety throughout the local area
 - The MPO will take an inventory of the sidewalk conditions in the city
 - Penny asked if they will also check the lighting condition; Bill said yes there is a box to check for lighting on the inventory sheet
 - The MPO will collect data at intersections for pedestrian counts; there are 40 locations proposed now which are both highly traveled areas and areas with high incidents/concerns.

- Stan asked what would be counted and mentioned that jaywalking is a primary concern
- Stephen asked if counts would be day time or night time.
 - Bill Austin said it's hard to see people at night; so, the counts will be primarily in the daytime.
- Emily asked if MPO was looking at cars running red lights in addition to jaywalking
- Matt mentioned the efforts of Amy Boggs and Christiaan Abildso who are working on figuring out how to quantify near misses of pedestrian incidents to determine the leading causes (i.e. distractions, running stop signs, running red lights, etc.)
- Camera counting in WV legislation is viewed as a violation of privacy – Don Williams says that it is primarily a culture issue in WV as well
 - Jenny asked if there are cameras that help with traffic control
 - Don Williams said they're not cameras; they're motion sensors; they are measuring queue length; not red light running. He further mentioned that red light running is the most fatality inducing, and suggested that it should be a priority for WV legislators. He then mentioned that traffic design can't just focus on pedestrians because it's a system. If you slow it down too much, you might have more car crashes. For example, if you slowed Patteson Drive, you may have increased traffic through Suncrest. He emphasized the importance of looking at the system holistically. Finally, he said that he feels for the Berhanu Family and mentioned that his daughter is also a student at WVU and uses the same crosswalk.
 - Sam Berhanu said you have to look at the data
 - Bill Austin mentioned a modeling system to view the traffic effect when traffic lights are modified
 - Syihan Mohamad asked if there is data for that particular intersection
 - Don Williams said that pedestrian incidents are becoming a national issue and further stated that there has been a lot of research into conditions surrounding pedestrian incidents. He then mentioned that Morgantown is 5th worst in the State (Huntington & Charleston have worse traffic death rates).
 - Matt stated that the Patteson intersection is very new and could have been designed better. Matt put a PSA together because the concurrent crossing system is not familiar to locals.
 - Rebecca Berhanu said that the overhead lights were not working that night her sister got killed. She further mentioned that Leah was wearing white shirt

and was not texting. However, despite this, the driver still couldn't see her sister.

- Don Williams stated that the DOH (Department of Highways) has experts that are trained in developing traffic signal systems and further mentioned that he has a master's in Traffic Engineering. His biggest concern is open crossings: when people don't use the crosswalks and are instead crossing between crosswalks. He then mentioned that there is a lighting project on Patteson coming from the Coliseum to University Ave which is to be let out in April. Next, he explained that Morgantown has monetary competition from other cities in WV and that the DOH tries to be objective when determining how to share the budget fairly across the state. He then brought up the issue of road conditions and mentioned that sometimes they are not able to pave roads because they do not have enough money to fix the sidewalks at the same time. He stated that he lives in Morgantown himself and is therefore invested in improving the local infrastructure. He is interested in developing a set of tools that can be used to improve local infrastructure, such as installing thermoplastic lines.
- Next Don Williams mentioned the pedestrian bridge near Grumbein's island (which is on University outside of the Mountainlair). He explained that the pedestrian bridge in this area is not as widely used as designers anticipated because it is not the most convenient for pedestrians (which tend to take the path of least resistance). He then stated that this is an example of how pedestrian bridges are only used in mass if they are well placed.
 - Stan says there are hundreds of students that cross on that pedestrian bridge, even if it is not all of the students crossing there.
- Don Williams then mentioned that he has been considering adding signs to encourage pedestrians to use crosswalks and not jaywalk.
 - Matt said that one of the reasons for danger at the Patteson intersection (Matt lives 0.5 miles from here) are that vehicles on Patteson get frustrated that they get stopped here more frequently now (since they didn't used to have to stop here when there was no traffic light)
 - Rebecca said that she appreciated the value that Don Williams has added to the conversation. She then stated that with her sister's incident; the driver killed her sister. She went on to mention that there are a lot of areas that feel unsafe and asked if there

could be a pause between the light turning red and the pedestrians getting the right of way to cross.

- There was discussion about the WV DOH partnering with the City of Morgantown
- Don Williams mentioned that the WV DOH is going to have project on 705 in the near future. He then mentioned that the DOH does not have the money/budget to fix both the sidewalks and roadway. Due to this predicament, the DOH is looking for low hanging fruit to still make pedestrian improvements but also stay within the allocated budget.
 - Matt – discussed using SPOT devices which are pedestrian activated switches (flashing LEDs on a timer).
 - Bill Austin mentioned that what Matt is referring to was similar to something in engineering manuals called a Hawk beacon (High-Intensity Activated crossWalk beacon) which is allowable in some states, but not in others.
 - It was mentioned that the WV DOH is not currently using these HAWK beacons; however, they may consider using them at some point in the future.
- Don Williams mentioned that texting and driving is statistically more dangerous than drunk driving.
 - Captain McCabe mentioned that he took a drive with Don Williams to perform a field view of local intersections of high concern. Captain McCabe then discussed the difficulty of enforcing the law for texting and driving because it is legal to use your GPS while driving which makes it harder for law enforcement to cite drivers for texting and driving. Captain McCabe then mentioned that since he's been in his position with the police, this is the most he's seen Morgantown officials come together to figure out a solution that will work for everyone. As a Dad, he mentioned that his daughter is probably going to go to WVU too; so, he's invested in getting this intersection improved for pedestrian safety from a personal standpoint as well. He said that these local pedestrian incidents (both the one on Patteson with Leah Berhanu and the one on Mon. Blvd) are driving a passion in multiple people and striking home for many as well. He suggested that

fixing the signaling in some areas will make a big difference. He then proposed that he could participate in WVU student orientation to help improve the education about travel safety for the new comers.

- Rebecca then asked what we could do about the legal ramifications of vehicle-pedestrian incidents. She noted that it was an underlying assumption that if you are a pedestrian that gets hit by a car that the injured pedestrian could collect a lot of money. However, as she is finding out, this is not the case and further that pedestrians never expect that they will be the ones to get hit.
- Matt then stated that it was inexcusable that the overhead lights were out that night.
- Penny mentioned how ironic it is that the MPO isn't conducting their pedestrian counts at night because you can't see people, which is an underlying issue for any pedestrian who needs to walk after dusk or before dawn in the first place.
- Don Williams mentioned that he sees great opportunity here in this moment because there is significant momentum and hope to develop a change in culture around how we view pedestrians.
 - Sam Berhanu mentioned that there are a lot of variables to consider for improving pedestrian infrastructure, such as the roads, lighting, signaling, and culture. He mentioned that he would like to minimize the social cost of feeling unsafe and suggested that not having enough funding is merely an excuse.
 - Don Williams responded stating that when he was head of research for DOH he began to recognize the true difficulty that lies behind all budget decisions because trying to figure out how to spread the money fairly across the state is not a simple matter. He then mentioned that shoulder washouts are the #1 cause of death in the state of West Virginia which can usually be fixed with a mere load of gravel.
 - Yohanna Berhanu asked to whom she and others should petition to focus on safety.
 - Don Williams responded saying that it would cost at least \$100 million to make all these ideas come to fruition. He then said

that as the ideas progress into plans, we can all come together to make improvements. He further mentioned that the crash rate at Marshall is far higher than WVU's.

- Matt says that WVU needs to step up their involvement and communication with the community and Syihan Mohamad agreed. Matt then stated that most fatalities are due to human error.
- George asked Matt to summarize the next steps
 - Matt said that there will be a meeting between WVU, the MPO, Christiaan Abildso, and Paul Brake after the University's Spring Break to discuss steps forward.
- Matt said that there is a slight hold on progressing the Pedestrian Plan to bring in an advisor to provide more professional assessments.
 - Bill Austin said that the MPO will be performing data collection and then is planning on bringing in a consultant to help develop more clear solutions.
- Matt mentioned that Bill Reger-Nash has been communicating with Mark Fenton who may potentially be coming to Morgantown to provide some additional consultation.
- Don Spencer suggested that someone put these ideas together in a package for a Pedestrian Safety Act to present to the WV legislature and prepare the way for the next legislative session.
- Jenny then asked if Morgantown can be a model for the state; a city in which to experiment and determine the best practices for pedestrians before implementing across the state. She suggested that this might do the state an educational favor for developing good habits in the college students as well.
- It was mentioned that the DOH is trying to bring in a quarter million to do research to get some statistics to put all these solutions together into an actionable plan.
 - It was then mentioned that the whole community ought to be involved in the planning process for a solution and was further mentioned that the outside consultant will probably be coming to town sometime in the Fall.
- Bill Austin mentioned that the MPO is taking a long view and aiming for pedestrian safety throughout the whole community.

VI. Old Business

VII. Upcoming Events

VIII. Ex-Officio Reports

- **WV DOH Don Williams:**
- **MPO Bill Austin:**
- **City Engineer Damien Davis:**
- **City Council Jenny Selin:**
- **Police Captain McCabe:**
- **WVU Kim Hartsell:**
- **Rail Trail Ella Belling:**
- **Mountain Line Maria Smith:**
- **Traffic Commission Matt Cross:** Spoke at a meeting this past Wednesday

IX. Action Items

Next meeting: April 9, 2018, Training Room 1, Public Safety Building, 4:30 – 5:30 pm.