

Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Audits

Executive Summary Report

The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) and AARP began a relationship in August 2006 when AARP Executive Board Member, Dr. George Rowan spoke at ITE's Annual Meeting and Exhibit in Milwaukee, WI, USA. Dr. Rowan's address to the ITE audience focused on elevating the importance of incorporating older driver and pedestrian safety needs into the traffic and transportation planning processes and the criticality of addressing the mobility and safety needs of seniors in their communities. Subsequent to his address, ITE and AARP agreed to develop a relationship that would synergize and elevate specific goals within the respective organizations.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

1. Increasing the level of awareness for transportation planning/engineering professionals in addressing older persons' mobility issues and challenges.
2. Assisting AARP members in making a case to their local transportation professionals and policymakers when identifying their transportation needs through involvement and advocacy.
3. Establishing relationships between AARP volunteers and ITE professionals—who can provide technical information needed to make community pedestrian and transportation improvements.

DEMOGRAPHY OF THE UNITED STATES

In 2005, 12 percent of the U.S. population was 65 or older. The U.S. Census estimates that by 2025 the number of seniors will increase by 79 percent and an estimated 18 percent of the population (62 million people) will be 65 or older. Many of those over age 65 will be very advanced in age—over age 80–85. In 26 states, more than 20 percent—one in five residents—will be over the age of 65. By 2030, one in eight of those over 65 will also be over 85 (NHSTA 2005). The population 65 and over will increase from 35 million in 2000 to 71.5 million in 2030 (an increase to approximately 20 percent of the population) (Administration on Aging 2005).

AUDIT LOCATIONS

The ITE/AARP team conducted audits in the following jurisdictions:

- Pittsburgh, PA, USA (three intersections)
- Cambridge, MA, USA (five intersections)
- Phoenix, AZ, USA (four locations)
- Tucson, AZ, USA (four locations)

LESSONS LEARNED

1. During the course of the pedestrian audits ITE professionals and AARP volunteers were able to forge relationships that did not previously exist. The ITE transportation professionals learned that many older adult senior volunteers were highly educated and talented retirees

who lived in their respective communities many years. Each individual wanted to remain in their neighborhood and to participate in the pedestrian audits as a way to have a greater voice in making their community, neighborhood and local streets more livable and safe for all users of the roadway.

2. Principles that the AARP volunteers learned from the ITE professionals include:
 - a. Who to contact for help to solve a transportation/pedestrian problem.
 - b. The complexity of the governmental decision-making structure.
 - c. The ITE family of transportation professionals who are willing to help AARP volunteers to identify appropriate individuals in their communities.
 - d. In many cases, there is no need to start with a city council member or mayor in order to solve a pedestrian issue. The AARP volunteer can first meet with the ITE volunteer one-on-one to identify a problem and discuss potential solutions.
 - e. There is no “one-size fits all” in each jurisdiction regarding whom to contact to solve a pedestrian issue. Sometimes it is the Director of Public Works, a mayor, or the Director of Traffic Engineering. If one correct person can quickly be found within a bureaucracy this can save a person much time.
 - f. Gaining an understanding of what to look for during a field investigation from multiple points of view, including: technical, administrative, legal, regulatory and behavioral issues related to pedestrian safety.
 - g. Gaining an understanding of what to look for during a field investigation related to the overall transportation environment. Most people don’t really notice all the components of an intersection. The 45-minute to one-hour classroom module provides the AARP volunteer with an assessment of “What do you see from an all-user perspective?” “What do you see from an environmental perspective in relation to sidewalks, traffic infrastructure and environment and comfort?”
 - h. The “classroom” session before going out into the field is important. Individuals are able to obtain a sense of what they will be looking for prior to conducting the field investigation.

3. Several overall principles that the ITE transportation professionals learned from the AARP volunteers include:
 - a. There are more pedestrians with functional challenges than transportation professionals might have first believed. These functional challenges have implications for pedestrian signal timing duration; accessible sidewalks and curb ramps; accessible pedestrian signals and pushbuttons; sidewalk design; and other engineering and operational features.
 - b. Plans are made for safer routes to schools (SR2S). Plans also need to be formulated for safer routes for older adults and that is not all that differs from SR2S. Livable communities for older adults and safe and accessible roads within communities are needed.
 - c. Many high-impact pedestrian improvements needed by older adults/all users to make a difference are low-cost and can be implemented quickly. Sometimes an improvement may be as simple as painting stripes in a crosswalk to make it more noticeable.
 - d. Quality of life in a neighborhood means:
 - “I can get across the street.” (signal timing)
 - “Sidewalks are continuous in my neighborhood.”
 - There are curb ramps on all quadrants of an intersection for wheel chair use.
 - The speed of the traffic is in line with the context of the land uses in the neighborhood.
 - Walking routes do not contain trash, graffiti, poor pavement surfaces, overgrown foliage, snow and ice, or other impediments to safety and comfort.

4. The ITE team would like to better understand how—and in what circumstances and capacities—seniors may be utilized for technical road safety audits being conducted by local and state agencies.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall the goals, an assessment of accessibility, mobility, safety and livability/sustainability in the audit have been realized. The ITE professionals and AARP volunteers were able to forge relationships that did not previously exist. The ITE transportation professionals learned that many senior volunteers were highly talented and motivated retirees who lived in their communities many years. Their desire is to remain in their neighborhoods. They participated in the pedestrian audits as a way to potentially have a greater voice in making their communities, neighborhoods, and local streets more livable and safe for all users of the roadway and pedestrian environment.

NEXT STEPS

Even before the pilots were concluded AARP chapters, ITE transportation professionals and community groups were engaging in additional Pedestrian Mobility and Transportation Audits. Two examples include Van Buren, AR and Westchester County, NY.

Van Buren, AR

Two dozen members of the Fort Smith chapter of AARP planned to conduct a survey of pedestrian safety and comfort in a 10-block area encompassing Old Town Van Buren’s historic downtown

Westchester County, NY

On June 8, 2008, Westchester County evaluated pedestrian safety at 12 intersections, in nine municipalities, with 150 volunteers. A pilot “walkability” survey was conducted in order to show how intersections could be improved to give older adults and all users more latitude to move from corner to corner. Pedestrian behavior was examined, including intersection crossing time, whether walk signals operated and how cars behaved. The results were provided to the local governments and the county will help look for funding to make any changes.

ACTION:

AARP and ITE will continue to assess the most appropriate methods to bring the Pedestrian Mobility and Safety Audits to all AARP State Offices that are interested in conducting one. One possible method is to construct a template for others to follow, including a train-the-trainers series through the use of Web seminars and regional and local conferences.