



STATEMENT OF
DEBORAH A. HUBSMITH
DIRECTOR
SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING ON
“Opportunities to Improve Transportation Safety”

APRIL 14, 2010

Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee:

I’m honored to have the opportunity to present today before the Committee to discuss improving transportation safety.

I have worked in the field of non-motorized transportation for 13 years, and for the past five years, I have served as Director of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, a network of nearly 500 organizations, government agencies, professional groups and schools that are seeking to make it safer and easier for children and families to walk and bicycle to schools. We work collaboratively with many health organizations including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Kaiser Permanente, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to increase physical activity, reduce childhood obesity, and advance traffic safety.

My testimony focuses on the risks that pedestrians and bicyclists face today and what we can do to improve safety for these important and common modes of transportation throughout America, providing benefits to rural, urban and suburban areas. Bicycling and walking already play an important role in our transportation system, and have the potential to play a bigger role in reducing congestion, decreasing air pollution and offering cost effective transportation choices if we can improve safety.

Introduction:

Currently, 12 percent of trips in the United States are already made by walking and bicycling, and the use of these modes of transportation in America is on the rise, increasing 25 percent since 2001.¹ For many Americans, walking and bicycling is a necessity, as one-third of Americans don't own cars, including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals.²

These high numbers of walking and bicycling exist in America despite the fact that nearly 80 percent of federal transportation funding is spent on highways, 20 percent is spent on public transit, and only 1.2 percent is spent on walking and bicycling.³

Americans do want more transportation options. In a recent poll conducted by Transportation for America, 59 percent of Americans stated that they would choose to reduce road congestion by adding more transportation options to communities, including walking, bicycling and public transportation. The poll results also indicate that a majority of voters would like to spend less time in their cars, but 73 percent said they had no other choice but to drive.⁴

Walking and bicycling are already serious and common modes of transportation in the United States, and Americans want to walk and bicycle more often.

The Problem:

Unfortunately, a major factor limiting the number of people who walk or bicycle in America is safety. Americans have good reasons to be concerned.

According to the most recent data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), more than 5,000 pedestrians and bicyclists were killed on U.S. roads in 2008, and more than 120,000 were injured.⁵ This is the equivalent of a jumbo jet going down roughly every month, yet it receives nothing like the kind of attention that would surely follow such a disaster. In fact, on a per-mile basis, walking in unsafe conditions is ten times as dangerous as driving.⁶

Here is just one example of the type of tragedies that are taking place all over America. In December 2009, three girls aged 12, 14 and 16 were killed trying to cross a street in their neighborhood in Terrell, Texas. The street in question, the newly constructed State Route 34, slices through a community filled with residential neighborhoods and local shopping opportunities, yet fails to include crosswalks, crossing signals, or adequate lighting. An editorial in the *Dallas Morning News* cited the extremely high speed limit, lack of safe pedestrian infrastructure, and the design of roads that cater solely to cars as key contributors to the girls' deaths.

In 2007, an estimated 14,000 children ages 14 and under were injured while walking, and nearly 11,000 children were injured while bicycling. Thirty percent of traffic deaths for children ages 0-14 happen when children are walking and bicycling and are struck by a car (approximately 650 deaths per year). This is the third leading cause of death by unintentional injury for children under the age of 15; the first two leading causes of death are also related to motor vehicle use.⁷

Bicycling and pedestrian injuries and deaths affect low income and minority populations disproportionately. The death rate (ratio of fatalities to total population) is 70 percent higher for black pedestrians and 62 percent higher for Hispanic pedestrians than it is for white pedestrians. The same is true for cyclists with the death rate for black cyclists 30 percent higher and the death rate for Hispanic cyclists 23 percent higher than for white cyclists.⁸ These populations also have lower car ownership rates: while 7 percent of white households do not own a car, 24 percent of black households and 17 percent of Hispanic households do not own a car.⁹ When we do not adequately address bicycle and pedestrian safety, we exacerbate inequality in our transportation system.

Pedestrian and bicycle safety issues are not limited to urban and suburban areas. In fact, while 20 percent of the population lives in rural America, 28 percent of pedestrian fatalities occur in rural areas. Crashes involving pedestrians in rural areas are more likely to result in fatalities or serious injuries due to the prevalence of high-speed roads without safe crossings, sidewalks, shoulders, or street lights.¹⁰

Fatalities and injuries resulting from a lack of pedestrian and bicycle safety in America affect all of us. Even if someone chooses to drive for all or most of their trips, they eventually have to cross a street or walk down a street, and are exposed to traffic dangers.

The problem of pedestrian and bicycle safety is rooted in how we allocate transportation dollars at the national level, and exacerbated because the design of streets and roads at the state and local level has largely ignored human factors, including considerations for how pedestrians and bicyclists can cross the street and safely travel to destinations like schools, shopping centers, and work places.

Nationwide, just 1.2 percent of funds authorized under the federal transportation law, SAFETEA-LU, have been allocated for projects to improve the safety of walking and bicycling,¹¹ even though pedestrians and bicyclists comprise 13 percent of all traffic deaths¹² and 12 percent of total trips.¹³

When we look at the allocation of federal safety dollars, pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements are treated even more inequitably. Examining the FY2008 data from the Federal Highway Administration's Financial Management Information System shows that just 0.1

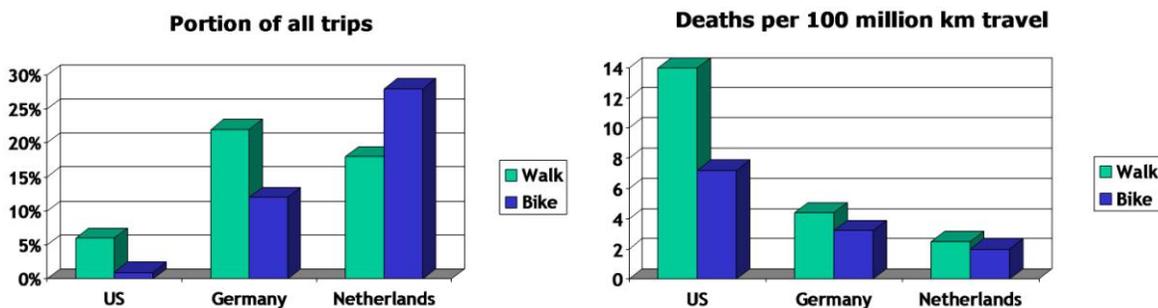
percent of Highway Safety Improvement (HSIP) funds were used for pedestrian and bicycle safety. Across both HSIP and section 402 safety funds, just 0.6 percent of federal safety funds were allocated to non-motorized transportation safety, despite the fact that these modes represent 13 percent of traffic fatalities.

I would also like to touch on the important linkages between the safety of walking and bicycling and health. When we discuss safety, we are talking about preventing injuries, loss of lives, and financial costs due to traffic collisions. But, U.S. transportation policies have other direct impacts on health. Traffic pollution causes asthma and can cause lung development problems in children. Safety concerns are also a significant barrier to increasing rates of walking and bicycling, meaning that Americans are missing an important opportunity to be more physically active. Sedentary lifestyles contribute to an estimated 255,000 preventable deaths per year,¹⁴ and obesity has accounted for one-third of health care cost increases in recent years.¹⁵ Obesity-related diseases account for nearly 10 percent of all U.S. medical spending—an estimated \$147 billion a year.¹⁶

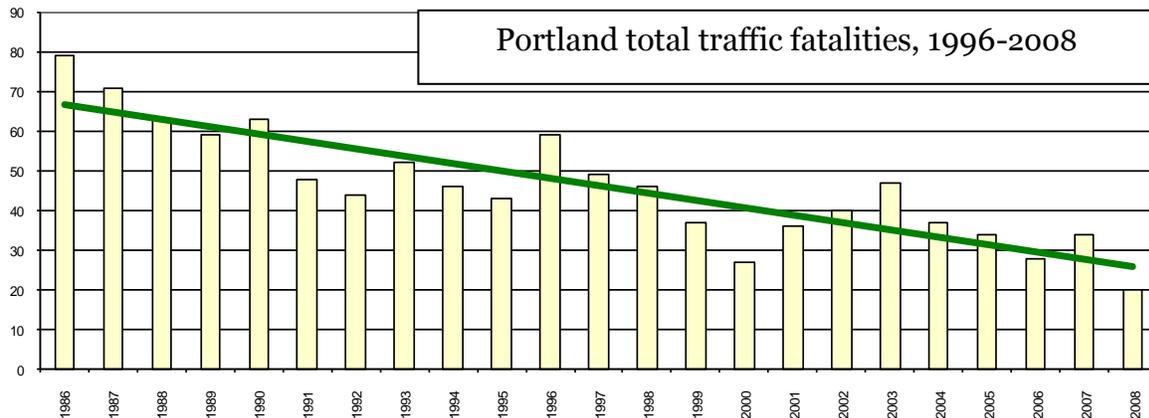
Solutions:

There is great opportunity to increase walking and bicycling in America. Forty percent of U.S. trips are two miles or less in length and the average bike trip is a little over two miles.¹⁷

Despite this fact, mode shares for walking and bicycling in the U.S. pale in comparison to other countries. A study comparing the U.S. with Germany and the Netherlands found that pedestrian and bicycle death rates are two to six times higher in the U.S. European data also shows that countries with higher levels of walking and bicycling have lower levels of traffic deaths, a phenomenon often called “safety in numbers.”¹⁸



We’re seeing similar safety trends in U.S. cities that have invested in safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. For example, in Portland, Oregon, traffic fatalities per 100,000 miles traveled are declining six times faster than the rest of the U.S., and their data shows that conditions that improve multi-modal transportation also improve safety for everyone, including drivers. Key tactics include speed reduction, better compliance with traffic rules, and better organization of modes.¹⁹



In Minneapolis, Minnesota, one of the four sites implementing the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program (section 1807 of SAFETEA-LU), the city has increased bikeway miles by 50 percent, which contributed to a 50 percent increase in bicycle commuters. Even though there are more bicyclists on streets, the number of bicycle crashes has declined by 20 percent. These changes are also improving traffic safety for drivers, as all traffic crashes within the city are in decline.

Safe Routes to School efforts have also been successful at improving bicycle and pedestrian safety and changing the habits of an entire generation. In Miami-Dade County, Florida, all school children are taught pedestrian safety through the WalkSafe™ program. Since its launch in 2001, there has been a 43 percent decrease in the total number of children ages 0-14 hit by cars. In Maine, more than 80,000 fourth and fifth-graders have learned critical bicycle safety skills through their Bicycle Safety Education Program since the year 2000. The number of bicycle crashes for children ages 10-14 has dropped by 51 percent since the program has been in existence.²⁰

Complete Streets policies also contribute to improving safety through implementation of comprehensive traffic safety improvements. Complete streets are designed, built, and operated for the safety of everyone using them, including people of all ages and abilities, whether walking, bicycling, taking the bus or driving.

Safe Routes to School, Complete Streets, and pedestrian and bicycle improvements rely on the wealth of studies that clearly document how low-cost investments in pedestrian and bicycle safety can have dramatic impacts on saving lives and reducing the severity and frequency of crashes:

- A safety analysis by the California Department of Transportation estimated that the safety benefit of Safe Routes to School was up to a 49 percent decrease in child pedestrian and bicycle collision rates.²¹
- Traffic calming improvements can reduce pedestrian-vehicle crashes by up to 25 percent.²²

- Pedestrians are more than twice as likely to be struck by a vehicle in locations without sidewalks.²³
- Refuge islands in crosswalks can reduce the likelihood of pedestrian-vehicle crashes by 66 percent.²⁴
- Increasing street lighting can reduce pedestrian-vehicle crashes by 59 percent.²⁵
- Teaching children bicycle and pedestrian safety can improve children’s knowledge of safety when walking and crossing roads.²⁶
- Enforcing speed limits in school zones can reduce the risk of death significantly: a pedestrian hit by a vehicle traveling 20 miles per hour (mph) has a 95 percent of surviving; at 30 mph the chance of survival is 55 percent, and at 40 mph the chance of survival decreases to only 15 percent.²⁷

Over the years, we have learned what works for improving pedestrian and bicycle safety in America. Now it is time to utilize that knowledge to save lives and reduce injuries.

Recommendations:

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership appreciates the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee as you draft the next transportation bill. Given the challenges America faces in improving safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, we respectfully request that your Committee include the following provisions:

- 1) Increase Funding for Safe Routes to School and Pedestrian/Bicycle Transportation: We support S. 1156, the Safe Routes to School Program Reauthorization Act, and urge the Environment and Public Works Committee to incorporate the recommendations from this bipartisan bill into your Committee’s transportation legislation. We also support increased funding for Transportation Enhancements and Active Transportation Networks, and we encourage the Committee to require states to allocate a greater share of their transportation dollars to reduce disparities and inequities in injuries and fatalities across all modes of transportation.
- 2) Support Complete Streets: We recommend that the Committee include the provisions in S. 584, the Complete Streets Act, in your transportation bill. We support a “fix it for all” policy when repairing and retrofitting infrastructure.
- 3) Create Safety Benchmarks: We encourage the Committee to include mode-specific and geographic-specific benchmarks for transportation safety in the next transportation bill that will:
 - Reduce fatalities across modes, for motorists, motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicyclists;
 - Reduce crashes for all communities including urban, suburban and rural areas; and

- Reduce crashes of all severities, including the more common non-fatal crashes that also play a major role in traffic congestion, time delays, and air pollution.
- 4) Collect Additional Data: We encourage the Committee to include additional funding for pedestrian and bicycle research in the next transportation bill, and to require State Departments of Transportation to collect data on pedestrian and bicycle safety, collisions, use and facilities for all projects, including Safe Routes to School.
 - 5) Support Innovative Designs: We encourage the Committee to require the US DOT to codify pedestrian and bicycle design innovations in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. In 2009, the Federal Highway Administration, the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials, and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program sponsored an international tour of five countries and 11 cities to conduct a Scan of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety and Mobility. Recommendations from the final report for this Scan should be incorporated into U.S. design standards, as research has shown that these designs improve safety.

Conclusion:

Authorization of the surface transportation bill is an immense opportunity to forge a policy response to improve safety, and to invest in a healthy, sustainable, and equitable transportation system. The law could give all Americans clean, affordable, and safe options for transportation.

A cornerstone to developing livability and sustainability in America will be creating safe communities where people can walk and bicycle. An important indicator of a livable, safe community is whether our children can safely walk or bicycle to schools. Numerous polls and surveys point to the fact that people want to ride bicycles and walk more often, but they are afraid to do so without safer places to ride and walk.

A focus on pedestrian and bicycle safety will also boost the economy – studies show increases in property values near trails, and people shop locally when there are facilities connecting homes with stores, which supports revitalizing local communities.²⁸ In addition, while it is currently unnecessarily dangerous for pedestrians to walk, health experts are making the case that it can be just as deadly not to walk or bicycle. Active transportation is critical to increasing levels of healthy physical activity and reducing obesity and heart disease.

I look forward to working with the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to develop a transportation agenda that will create a safe and healthy America.

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- ¹ 2009 National Household Travel Survey.
- ² "Dangerous by Design," Transportation for America. October 2009.
<http://t4america.org/resources/dangerousbydesign/>
- ³ "Bicycling and Walking in the United States: 2010 Benchmarking Report," Alliance for Biking and Walking, February 2010. <http://www.peoplepoweredmovement.org/site/index.php/site/memberservices/C529#findings>
- ⁴ Poll on public attitudes on transportation conducted by the Democratic polling firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and the Republican polling firm of Public Opinion Strategies (POS) for Transportation for America. 800 telephone interviews were conducted from February 27 - March 2, 2010. The margin of sampling error for the full national sample is +/- 3.8%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be larger.
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<http://t4america.org/resources/dangerousbydesign/>
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- ⁹ N. McGuckin and N. Srinivasan. "Journey to Work Trends: In the United States and its Major Cities 1960-2000." Federal Highway Administration. 2003. <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ctpp/jtw/>. (Accessed 4/23/09)
- ¹⁰ FHWA-SA-04-008 Technical Report, *Pedestrian Safety on Rural Highways*, September 2004,
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- ¹² "Bicycling and Walking in the United States: 2010 Benchmarking Report," Alliance for Bicycling and Walking, February 2010. <http://www.peoplepoweredmovement.org/site/index.php/site/memberservices/C529#findings>
- ¹³ 2009 National Household Travel Survey.
- ¹⁴ Transportation Research Board and Institute of Medicine. 2005. *Does the Built Environment Influence Physical Activity? Examining the Evidence—Special Report 282*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- ¹⁵ E. Finkelstein, J. Trogon, J. Cohen, and W. Dietz. "Annual Medical Spending Attributable To Obesity: Payer-And Service-Specific Estimates." *Health Affairs*, 28, no. 5 (2009): w822-w831.
- ¹⁶ E. Finkelstein, J. Trogon, J. Cohen, and W. Dietz. "Annual Medical Spending Attributable To Obesity: Payer-And Service-Specific Estimates." *Health Affairs*, 28, no. 5 (2009): w822-w831.
- ¹⁷ 2009 National Household Travel Survey
- ¹⁸ J. Pucher and L. Dijkstra, "Promoting safe walking and cycling to improve public health: lessons from The Netherlands and Germany." *American Journal of Public Health*, September 2003.
- ¹⁹ Roger Geller, City of Portland, February 16, 2010
- ²⁰ Safe Routes to School National Partnership, "Putting Traffic Safety First - How Safe Routes to School Initiatives Protect Children Walking and Bicycling," http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/media/file/Safety_report_final.pdf
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