



Dangerous by Design 2016 Report

Jan. 10, 2017

Statement by BikeWalkLee to the “Dangerous by Design” 2016 report

The “Dangerous by Design” 2016 report, released by Smart Growth America on Jan. 10, 2017, is the fourth edition of the national bi-annual pedestrian safety report which ranks the 104 largest metro areas in the U.S. (as well as all the states) by a Pedestrian Danger Index. [Link to [2016 Dangerous by Design report by Smart Growth America, Jan. 10, 2017.](#)]

This year's report ranks the Cape Coral/Fort Myers metro area (Lee County) as the deadliest metro area in the country for pedestrians. This is a clarion call to action for all Lee County jurisdictions, agencies, stakeholders and citizens.

For more than a decade, Lee County has consistently ranked as one of the most dangerous areas for pedestrians and cyclists both in Florida and nationwide, and Florida has ranked the most dangerous state in the country. This report takes it to the next level by ranking our community as the worst in the country, with Florida continuing as the worst state in the country. It is important to note that this report is a look backwards (2005-2014), assessing pedestrian deaths in those years. It does not take into account recent efforts throughout Lee County to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.

It does, however, provide a clear-cut justification for the many efforts to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety in Lee County over the past seven years, as complete streets policies were adopted throughout the county. Many improvements have been made since the timeframe covered by this report, as detailed in the Lee County Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) response to this report. [Link to [MPO press release and background materials in response to 2016 report.](#)]

The report clearly demonstrates the urgent need for increased public and private investment in pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure to make Lee County roadways safer for all users. The policies are in place, and the plans are ready to go. What is needed now by all municipalities, the county, and the state is implementation -- the investment of adequate funding detailed in these plans. It cannot be business as usual -- safety improvements need to be on the ground as quickly as possible.

The stigma of being ranked and perceived as the most dangerous metro area in the country for pedestrians hurts every jurisdiction and entity in the county. All jurisdictions must be united in their

commitment to make real progress toward safety by the time the next “Dangerous by Design” report is issued in 2019.

A chronic culture of danger for area walkers and bikers threatens not only residents and visitors; it undercuts our economy; threatens our ability to attract and retain businesses, workers, and families to live and work here; undermines our tourism marketing; and underlines a growing safety gap driven by socioeconomic conditions and geographic patterns.

Investments in complete streets and bike/ped strategies not only make our streets safer for all users (including motorists), they make good economic sense. Today, more and more people want to live and work in walkable communities, yet Lee County lags far behind in offering them. We know from research that sidewalks and shared use paths increase the value of homes in those neighborhoods. Bottom line: Investing in creating and maintaining walkable communities is a win/win strategy.

It's also time for Lee County jurisdictions to focus on equity. Our most economically disadvantaged communities are the ones suffering the disproportionate share of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities, yet investments don't match the documented dangers. For example, much work has been done over the past five years with the Tice community with thorough identification of problems and community-supported recommendations to policymakers. However, to date, only small efforts have been taken by policymakers to implement and fund the changes requested by the community and needed to make this vulnerable community safer for walkers and cyclists.

Safety is not only driven by infrastructure and investment, but also by education and enforcement. Of particular concern is the growing epidemic of distracted driving, where technology far outstrips legal protections to keep drivers' focus on the road. We need to change drivers' behavior. Stronger state laws and enforcement are needed to fight distracted driving.

This national report comes at an opportune moment for Lee County. The \$10 million federal investment (TIGER grant) in the Lee MPO's Complete Streets Initiative project has just been completed, with 13 miles of additional walking/ biking infrastructure connected to our existing network. In addition, Cape Coral has just been awarded almost \$6 million in state funds to begin constructing shared use paths and sidewalks on Kismet Parkway. This path will eventually connect with and be part of the statewide trail system.

Now is the time for local jurisdictions to commit funding to build on these substantial federal and state investments in our community. Local jurisdictions need to invest in further improvements that will meet the complete streets goals these projects support -- to reduce bike/ped fatalities and injuries, increase usage of the bike/ped facilities, grow bike tourism, and increase the economic benefits to the community.

We cannot stand still. We either move forward to make our infrastructure safer for bikers and walkers, or accept higher pedestrian and cyclist death rates as more citizens move here, and then suffer a subsequent economic downturn when people begin to realize their quality of life is slipping because

investments have not been made to make our roadways safer for everyone. Now is the time to embrace change by funding a safer future.

We must all work to make our roadways safer, as drivers and pedestrians, officials and advocates. We should not tolerate being dubbed the worst in the country in any criteria – certainly not in something as essential to one’s quality of life as safety.

BikeWalkLee calls on all local jurisdictions, the Lee MPO, Florida Dept. of Transportation, and the Lee Legislative Delegation to act now to make pedestrian and bicyclist safety a top priority and to make the necessary investments to have safety improvements on the ground as soon as possible. The stakes are high and the collective actions by all jurisdictions must be commensurate with the stakes.

BikeWalkLee’s suggested path to success is outlined in the attachment to this statement.



BikeWalkLee's road map to improvement

Metropolitan Planning Organization

- Revisit the 2013 Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Action Plan to make its implementation a priority. Plan an update to reflect new data and strategies, set annual targets for reducing bike/ped fatalities and injuries, and hold all jurisdictions, agencies and organizations accountable for implementation of the plan components they are responsible for.
- Develop and implement a methodology (in collaboration with local jurisdictions, agencies and FDOT) for counting bike/ped usage so all transportation modes are counted -- which is important for planning and budgeting purposes.
- Ensure that safety concerns identified as part of the development of the TIGER-funded wayfinding system are documented, analyzed and prioritized, and then seek to have these priorities reflected in funding decisions and actions at state and local levels, beginning with the upcoming budget.
- Create a full-time position dedicated exclusively to complete streets, bike/ped infrastructure, and safety.
- Work with FDOT to keep the Able Canal bike/ped project on track to get this crucial infrastructure investment that will benefit an under-served community. Support other similar FDOT-funded projects as well.
- In collaboration with FDOT and local jurisdictions, consider innovations that could speed up bike/ped and related safety projects, such as more design build options and putting several projects together for one bid.

All Local Jurisdictions: (suggestions for all jurisdictions, in addition to the area-specific suggestions below)

- The most compelling need is for city councils and the county commission to commit the necessary funds (beginning in the upcoming Y 2017-2018 budget cycle) for implementation of their new/revised Complete Streets and Bike/Ped Master Plans.
- Move safety improvements to front-end of CIP funding plans.
- Provide more flexibility in the planning and budgeting systems so that the complete streets projects and safety improvements can happen more quickly.
- Identify and prioritize funding intersections improvements needed to enhance bike/ped safety. Work collaboratively in the MPO to revise design standards for intersections, develop a policy for pedestrian signal accommodation, and use best practice treatments to improve safety.

- Take action to implement the Complete Streets policies adopted by Lee County (2009), Fort Myers (2011), Bonita (2014), and Cape Coral (2015) that incorporate complete streets principles into the administrative codes, Land Development Codes, and practices of everyday business in the transportation world.
- Strengthen and enforce Land Development Codes to ensure that all developments permitted include bike/ped facilities that are connected to the county's bike/ped network at the time the development is constructed.
- Reflect the complete streets policy perspective that the "roadway" is defined as the entire right-of-way, whether it's on the road, in a bike lane, or a sidewalk or shared use path. Maintenance of these facilities should all be treated the same, as maintenance is important for the safety of all road users.
- Introduce traffic calming strategies that effectively reduce vehicular speeds.
- Fund projects, review policies and revise practices to ensure that infrastructure in those communities disproportionately impacted by unsafe conditions and those in underserved and economically disadvantaged communities are given priority.
- Create a full-time position dedicated exclusively to complete streets, bike/ped infrastructure, and safety.
- Issue an annual report to jurisdiction's citizens about progress towards improving and expanding bike/ped facilities and safety.
- Engage community stakeholders in conversation about what's at stake for larger community in being ranked and perceived as very dangerous place for walkers and cyclists. Solicit support for public and private investments to address safety.

Lee County

- Significantly increase investment in retrofit bike/ped projects identified in the county's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee's approved and prioritized list.
 - Consider funding the top 25 projects on the list in the upcoming FY 2017-2018 budget cycle.
 - Consider changes to budgeting approach in order to construct these bike/ped projects in next two years.

Ensure expenditures for bike/ped projects are consistent with funding levels approved in the budgets to ensure that the approved level of bike/ped infrastructure and safety investments is realized.

 - Annually report to the commission and advisory committees on expenditures vs. budgeted amounts for all bike/ped projects.
 - Make project management of bike/ped projects a higher priority in LeeDOT so that projects are undertaken in the budgeted year and expend funds at the budgeted levels.
 - The unspent budgeted funds for these projects should be retained in the account so that if approved bike/ped projects are delayed, the funds are retained for use exclusively on bike/ped projects.
- Include plans in the upcoming Capital Improvement Plan to move up completion of the Estero Blvd. project in FY 2020-2021. This expedited timeframe is needed to address both the serious bike/ped

safety concerns during construction, and the long-standing safety dangers on the sole road through this popular tourist destination.

- Implement recommendations from the BikeWalkLee/FGCU Walking Audit grant (final report to be issued later this month) along with previous EPA grant/walking audit project and two Heath Impact Assessment reports for the Tice and Dunbar communities safety improvements.
- Ensure that all road projects include context-specific complete streets features that are consistent with the latest best practices.
- Work collaboratively with Bonita in support of the community's vision for Bonita Beach Road as a complete street with neighborhood connectivity.

Cape Coral

- Council needs to commit to major funding to implement the city's new Complete Streets Bike Ped Master Plan.
 - Beginning in the upcoming 2017-18 budget cycle, Council needs to set aside funds to implement the master plan, with specific commitments for next 10 years, and adopt an implementation schedule for all aspects of the master plan.
 - Implement changes in repaving and utility expansion projects to incorporate bike/ped Master Plan provisions.
- In FY 2017-2018 budget, create a standing line item for funding sidewalks and biking facilities with local funds, reflecting provision of bike/ped facilities as a local core service, just like roadways.
- Complete design work and implementation of the pedestrian-friendly downtown redevelopment modifications to SE 47th Terrace in downtown Cape Coral, that will serve as a model and city "signature" project.
- With \$5.6 million grant from the FDOT SUNTrail program, begin the design work and Phase 1 of the Kismet Parkway share use path and sidewalks construction.
- Complete shared use path on Burnt Store Road. Continue collaboration with Lee DOT on completion of Phase 1 of this project.
- Build on the successes of Cape Coral Bike Ped to expand and market the city's 90 mile bike/ped network while identifying gaps and other needs ripe for public/private solutions.
- Continue Cape Coral Police Dept.'s successful bicycle patrols as well as newer programs designed to curtail distracted driving.

Fort Myers

- As the jurisdiction with a disproportionate share of the area's pedestrian fatalities, Fort Myers should make bike/ped safety a higher priority.
- Move forward on long-overdue pedestrian safety improvements on U.S. 41 and Palm Beach Blvd., the most dangerous locations in the city.
- Commit to developing a bike/ped master plan for the city to engage the community in developing a plan that meets its needs
- Communities where disproportionate fatalities are occurring need remedies. Use BWL/FGCU walking audit results from Tice and Dunbar, and make implementation of the report's

recommendations (in areas within the city's jurisdiction) a priority to reduce geographic safety inequity.

Bonita Springs

- Beginning in the upcoming 2017-2018 budget cycle, Council needs to set aside funds to implement its recently completed bike/ped master plan, with specific commitments for next five years, and adopt an implementation schedule for all aspects of the master plan.
- Continue with the council's plan underway to invest the \$2 million available to move forward to construct 2-3 projects this year that will serve as model and city "signature" projects.
- Implement the Bonita Beach Road Visioning study into the Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Code, and Capital Infrastructure Program.
- Build on the soon-to-be-completed downtown redevelopment project to further expand and improve walking and biking facilities on adjoining streets.
- Partner with Estero to move forward on Bonita-initiated proposal to explore the use of the rail corridor for an off-road trail connecting the two jurisdictions.

Estero

- Expedite design model and initiate improvements to Estero Parkway, including traffic calming measures, to make it a complete streets model roadway, and a signature project for the new Village. This project can also serve as model for other coming facilities from the upcoming master plan.
- Explore ways to start the bike/ped master plan development process in advance of the FDOT-budgeted funds beginning in FY 2018. Consider using the FGCU/Estero Infrastructure Report as a baseline, and explore ways to expedite the plan development once the FDOT funds have been received.
- In partnership with Bonita, move forward on proposal to explore the use of the rail corridor for an off-road trail connecting the two jurisdictions, and other potential means of connecting the two jurisdictions.
- Reflect complete streets approach and safety focus in upcoming comprehensive land use plan amendments.
- Stand firm on its Town Center plan for a walkable community.

Sanibel

- Finish the implementation currently underway of the first phase of the city's 2015 Shared Use Path Intersection Study recommendations, approved by Council in January 2016.
- Establish plan and timeline for implementing remaining study recommendations, to be considered as part of the FY 2017-2018 budget process.
- City officials must educate community as soon as possible about path safety improvements and "rules of road" for all road and path users with the new intersection safety treatments, to realize safety benefits of intersection improvements.
- Continue the city's ongoing efforts to implement the planned path system expansions, including the state-funded Bowman's Beach path, and the federally funded Ding Darling extension path.

- Continue ongoing investments in path maintenance and improvements: Widening the heavily used paths and regularly maintaining them in good condition improves the safety for all users.
- Continue the ongoing process of completing implementation of the 2009 Shared Use Path Master Plan and preparing for the Master Plan update, beginning in FY 2018, with MPO awarded funds.

Fort Myers Beach

- Work with Lee County to improve bike/ped safety during the ongoing Estero Blvd. Improvement Project construction.
- Work with Lee County to speed up the timeframe of the Estero Blvd. Improvement project so that it can be completed in FY 2020-21.
- Make development of the MPO-funded bike/ped master plan a priority and use the plan development process as an opportunity to engage the community (starting with the first public workshop on Feb. 15) in ways to improve the safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

Florida Dept. of Transportation (FDOT)

- Deliver on FDOT's Complete Streets Implementation Plan (adopted end 2015) by completing the updates of FDOT's 10 key manuals and guides for designing roads by end of 2017 as planned, and ensuring that the "Green Book" (bible for local engineers) is updated shortly thereafter.
- Provide assistance and tools to local governments, including FDOT's planned Complete Streets Handbook, along with training opportunities for local staff and consultants on the changes in road designs reflected in revised manuals/guides.
- Ensure that a Complete Streets approach and FDOT's revised guidances are reflected in FDOT projects being designed, and in other policy decisions, to the maximum extent possible.
- Revise FDOT maintenance policies so that they reflect a complete streets approach.
- Move forward on completing the Metro Parkway corridor in Fort Myers to add bike/ped facilities to the Fowler Street segment.
- Move forward on FDOT-funded bike/ped projects, such as the Abel Canal trail, the Winkler canal path, the proposed path connecting Cape Coral and Pine Island; and support the MPO's recommended path connecting Bonita and Collier County on Old US 41.
- Expedite FDOT's San Carlos Blvd. improvements project to provide long-awaited safe biking and walking facilities, in tandem with the Estero Blvd. Improvement project.

State legislators

- At a minimum, strengthen Florida's weak texting law to make texting while driving a primary offense in the upcoming session.
- Develop legislation, using best practices from the safest states, to strengthen Florida's lax safety laws to address broader distracted driving dangers.
- Let the red light running camera law remain in place so local governments can use them as an effective enforcement tool to help protect pedestrians.
- Support FDOT's complete streets initiatives with adequate funding.
- Provide full funding for the SUNTrail program in support of the long-term plan for a connected and integrated statewide trail system.

Related Links:

- [2016 Dangerous by Design report by Smart Growth America, Jan. 10, 2017](#)
- [MPO press release and background materials in response to 2016 report](#)
- BWL's statement on 2016 report (This document--to be posted on blog shortly.)
- [BWL's Statement to Lee Legislative Delegation for 2017 Legislative Session](#)
- [BWL's release package on 2014 Dangerous by Design Report \(blog\)](#)
- [BWL's report on 2011 Dangerous by Design Report \(blog\)](#)