



Statewide Pedestrian Safety Coalition Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.

Meeting conducted via WebEx

Welcome and Introductions

Ben Ettelman and Mike Manser of TTI welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided instructions on participating via the WebEx chat box and Poll Everywhere. Approximately 93 people attended via WebEx. See Appendix A for attendees.

Update on 2020 Texas Pedestrian Safety Forum

Mike Manser updated the Coalition on the planned 2020 Texas Pedestrian Safety Forum. The COVID-19 pandemic may necessitate changing the 2020 Forum from an all-day, in-person event to a virtual event. A final decision will be made by May or June.

Ben Ettelman asked for attendees' participation in a brainstorming exercise to identify potential Forum topics and speakers. The following suggestions were provided through Poll Everywhere, chat, and over the phone:

- Pedestrian Incidents on Limited Access Facilities - First Responder Safety and Unintended Pedestrians
- Update on TXDOT Road to Zero increased pedestrian safety funding, and some way to push the envelope and allow for constructive brainstorming on how to make that even more effective next year.
- Engineering ethics and safety for all modes
- Diagnosing Pedestrian Problems
- Systemic countermeasure deployment for pedestrian safety
- Safety Research, trends, impacted population
- How will TxDOT roadways better accommodate pedestrians?
- Effects of COVID 19 on count volumes, is it a short- term effect? Or was it nice weather and only a one week or two effect.
- pedestrian access at Railroad crossings, best practices for design and timing. Scooter operation best practices
- Alternative designs for pedestrian and bikes at major diamond intersections
- Open streets/recreation/COVID-19
- Pedestrian related laws for drivers, cyclists, and peds

- Prioritizing sidewalk gaps, ensuring equity
- Perspectives of first responders to ped crashes
- DRSR here at the Municipal Courts Education Center would like to give an hour presentation on DRSR materials and resources.
- Topic: Successfully using Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs). City of Austin using these for all of downtown with great success. Would love to hear them talk about that, plus other examples.
- Latest technologies in transportation signals at intersections with pedestrian safety in mind.
- pedestrian safety technology
- Countermeasure research and best practices
- Pedestrian Safety on Rural communities
- Safe Routes to Parks
- barriers to improvements
- Topics: FHWA guidance on "creative" crosswalk markings, ADA Transition Plans
- Safe Routes to School
- Covid-19 impact on pedestrian injury patterns

Ben Ettelman also asked participants to provide strategies for promoting the Forum to a broader audience. The following suggestions were provided through Poll Everywhere, chat, and over the phone:

- Vision zero stakeholders
- I'm bummed that this will take place during the Walk Bike Places Conferences (hopefully that still happens too)
- Best practices in ped crash data collection/analysis (CRIS, FHWA, counter data, etc.)
- public health departments
- Public Health Network (i.e. EMS, Hospital, Public Health Dept, Universities) Have CE credits available at the conference.
- TexITE Section announcements
- well, but it also raises the profile from a marketing standpoint - when you can say that you host a sellout event, it draws attention
- Through School districts
- I'd hope we have effective outreach to public agency / city / county staff who can actually change things, and also have effective outreach to advocates / practitioners who are deep in how to improve ped safety.
- reach out to external and internal stakeholders
- Vision Zero stakeholder groups
- Linked In & Traffic Safety Coalitions
- Non-profits that can easily share on social media
- for Austin: Pedestrian Advisory Council, Vision Zero Alliance, atxurbanists Facebook group, NextDoor
- Facebook event (so it adds to linked calendars)
- Through the Cities
- MPOs
- SHSP stakeholders
- Use MPOs? they know the local stakeholders

- TEMPO contact list
- Announce via TRB's weekly newsletter

Implications of Railroad Operations on Pedestrian Safety in Texas

Carolyn Cook (Federal Railroad Administration), Jessica Devorsky (Texas Operation Lifesaver) and Jeff Warner (TTI) gave presentations on crashes involving pedestrians and trains, and ongoing efforts to prevent pedestrian crashes, injuries, and fatalities occurring at at-grade crossings. Their presentations are attached. Some notable points made in the presentations:

- Texas has 32% more railroad track than any other state; because of this, the potential exposure for crash conflicts involving pedestrians is higher. Texas has the highest number of grade-crossing collisions in the U.S.
- Pedestrian-train collisions are not reflected in TxDOT's CRIS reports because they do not involve motor vehicles.
- Trespass casualties (involving a pedestrian illegally on railroad tracks) are the largest category of casualty within the rail industry. Harris County is one of the top ten counties in the country for rail trespass casualties. This number includes only accidental injuries and deaths related to rail trespass, not deliberate/suicide casualties.

Question and Answer Session:

The following questions were asked during the Q&A session following the presentation (note: some questions were asked through the chat feature and were answered by presenters after the meeting concluded):

1. Do you happen to have that state-by-state comparison as percentages?
 - a. Jeff W: FRA has several great dashboards.
https://explore.dot.gov/t/FRA/views/Highway-RailCrossingCollisions2009-2019/National?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no
 - b. Trespassing:
<https://explore.dot.gov/t/FRA/views/TrespassandSuicideDashboard/TrespassOverview?iid=1&:isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&:embed=y>
 - c. Jeff W – FRA also has a wealth of available data at
<https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/OfficeofSafety/Default.aspx>
 - d. Carolyn C. – for highway-rail grade crossing state percentages refer to
<https://railroads.dot.gov/accident-and-incident-reporting/highwayrail-grade-crossing-incidents/208-highway-rail-crossings>
 - e. Carolyn C. - for state percentages for trespassing casualties refer to:
<https://railroads.dot.gov/accident-and-incident-reporting/casualty-reporting/207-trespasser-casualties>
2. Has anyone reached out to Jim Hollis at Crash Data, to see what it would take to include it in the CRIS data?

- a. Carolyn C – Yes, good idea; I plan to do this.
3. What is the distraction rate? Can that be determined?
- a. Jeff W – If I understand the question, I don't think we can determine if distraction was a contributing factor in crashes. I know that it is a significant concern for passenger rail agencies. I believe Salt Lake City has a city ordinance that it is an infraction to cross tracks while distracted (headphones in ears, on phone, texting, etc.).
 - b. Carolyn C – not in our data. Would need to be researched but I believe distractions, including walking under the influence of alcohol or drugs, occur in trespassing incidents.
4. What training do the bulls have to coordinate with local HOST (homeless outreach) and local law enforcement?
- a. Carolyn C. – FRA has two law enforcement liaisons we work with, one with Houston Police Dept and one with Oklahoma City Police. They help us in this area. We hope to do this type of outreach in Houston in the summer.
 - b. Jessica D. - TXOL does not have any specific training for homelessness, but it is an issue on our radar. I try to stress the importance pedestrian safety, and help people realize that trains overhang the tracks by three feet on each side.
5. Will it show train schedules for those crossings?
- a. Jeff W – Basically freight trains would not pass a crossing at any dedicated times as they do not operate on a schedule. This could be more predictable for passenger rail systems. Additionally, TTI has implemented a few systems that help detect approaching trains and alert emergency services and the traveling public of the likelihood of a train blocking a set of crossings. There are also some other systems around the U.S. and Canada.
6. Reduce people trying to beat the signals?
- a. Jeff W – People not adhering to the signals is a problem. There has been an effort over the past several years to develop more standardized treatments for pedestrians at grade crossings. FRA has also funded several research studies that investigated treatments that could increase compliance of pedestrians at crossings, most notably a gate arm gate skirt that would deter pedestrians from going under the arm.
 - b. Jessica D - Trying to beat the train is an ongoing issue with vehicles, and we have educational materials around this issue. You can learn more at OLI.org or shoot me an email at txoplifesaver@gmail.com
7. Does anyone have a guess on what % of ped deaths (& perhaps train-ped deaths) are with transients or homeless persons or those with mental health issues &/or suicide? And those %'s within Texas? And within Austin? THANK YOU for any guesses you have!!
- a. Carolyn C. FRA funded a study looking at demographic data for trespass fatalities (2002-2004) by contacting 471 medical examiners/coroners in the U.S. This study was done before railroads were required to separately report suicides to FRA (and it was

determined that 23 percent of the fatalities could be classified as suicides). Gender and racial characteristics are not gathered on FRA Trespass reports however, in this study the average age was 38 years and 87 percent were male. The persons who died were 78 percent White, 16 percent African American, 5 percent native American and one percent Asian. Address information was requested but only provided in half of the responses making it difficult to determine housing characteristics. This initial study is: *Rail Trespasser Fatalities: Demographic and Behavioral Profiles, March 2008*: <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/rail-trespasser-fatalities-developing-demographic-profiles-march-2008>

- b. Carolyn C. - U.S. DOT researchers at the Volpe Center and FRA have identified six key research areas that can provide insight into mitigating and preventing rail suicide. This and more information can be found on FRA's website on the Rail Suicide Prevention Resource Page: <https://railroads.dot.gov/highway-rail-crossing-and-trespasser-programs/trespassing-prevention/rail-suicide-prevention>
8. Is there a more current best practices guide for pedestrian/bike crossings and signals of rail crossings? NCTCOG has been referencing this 2002 document *Rails-with-Trails: Lessons Learned*, United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, August 2002 (FTA-MA-26-0052-04-1) https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/publications/rwt/page00.cfm
 - a. Kevin Kokes (comment on WebEx chat) - the Highway-Rail Crossing Handbook, Third Edition (FHWA and FRA) was released last year. This new edition does include additional treatments for pedestrians on rail crossings. https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/hsip/xings/com_roaduser/fhwasa18040/
 - b. Jeff W – An updated *Rails-with-Trails* report was very recently released <https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/rails-trails-best-practices-and-lessons-learned>
9. Are the crashes shown or compared as a rate? As an example, the Houston region has the same population as the entire state of Massachusetts. The denominator could be the number of trains, track miles, number of crossings, number of pedestrians, and not great but population.
 - a. Jeff W – FRA often reports safety (employees, crashes, grade crossings, etc.) in millions of train-miles, similar to vehicle-miles-travelled. This could be done for transit system statistics also.
 - b. Carolyn C. – FRA does report U.S. incidents by a rate per one Million Train Miles: <https://railroads.dot.gov/safety-data/accident-and-incident-reporting/112-accidentincident-overview>
10. In Texas, the main safety problem is a dominant false narrative that personal vehicle driving is safe and normal and preferable, yielding our heavy subsidy of SOV use and our elevated rates of VMT, which directly cause deaths and serious injuries. So, when we speak about transit and pedestrian deaths, we have to be very careful not to give the false impression that transit is dangerous, or walking is dangerous. pedestrian safety and transit or rail safety pale in comparison to speed and mass of personal vehicles operated by humans is a safety issue in Texas. But there is a media narrative and a general false belief that trains [and also walking] are

dangerous. This influences public debates and actual spending decisions at our MPOs and legislature. How can we have an effective safety messaging around pedestrians, transit, and trains that doesn't produce this unfortunate unintended consequence?

- a. a. Carolyn C. – excellent points for us to keep this in mind and will encourage our safety messages to promote the use of transit and promote the responsibility for personal safety. I have seen some good examples of these dual messages and one of the best was done by Sound Transit.

11. How would you determine the owner of a given stretch of private property occupied by a track? another non-profit I'm with has that question :)

- a. Jeff W – One option could be to find the Emergency Notification Sign (ENS) at the nearest grade crossing. This blue sign located on the warning system post should indicate the responsible railroad.
- b. Carolyn C. – Jeff's suggest is best way to start. Railroad rights-of-way can vary from as little as eight feet from the tracks to 100 feet or more. It can be difficult to determine who owns the property.
- c. Jessica D - The smartphone app that Carolyn Cook pointed out can tell you who owns individual crossings. If there is an issue at a crossing, you can look for the blue&white ENS Sign at each crossing, call the number and give them the number on the crossing and find out that way as well. <https://oli.org/media/find-blue-and-white-ens-sign-psa>

12. My impression was that the City of Houston was working actively to secure Federal Quiet Zone funding to actually fix the design issues with railroad crossings back in Mayor Bill White's administration and that this was effectively done. But it seems like they aren't doing that anymore and when I brought this up with city of Austin, they seemed not pursuing this funding at all. The overall idea is that we know how to make train lines safer for pedestrians and people in vehicles in dense urban areas, but we don't have the private or political will to invest in it. Is that Federal funding bucket less than it used to be? Could it be ramped up (perhaps in a recovery package)?

- a. Answer from Jeff W: I do not believe the federal grade crossing money can be used to develop quiet zones.
- b. Answer from Jeff W: Quiet zones are a community enhancement project not a safety enhancement project.
- c. Answer from Carolyn C. Yes, Jeff is correct. Generally Federal funds designated for safety enhancements can't be used specifically for Quiet Zones which are a quality of life enhancement. It would be permitted to improve a grade crossing as part of a quiet zone project if that crossing was identified for Section 130 funding for safety projects in a state. This has happened a few times. Federal funds would have to be specifically designated for Quiet Zones, but no funding has been appropriated at this time ("ear-marks" not currently done as in the past). All major metro areas in Texas continue to look for ways to fund quiet zones. All have many competing demands for public works funding and quiet zone projects can be expensive.

13. For safety reasons, has the RR considered a fence to prevent pedestrians

- a. Jeff W - Railroads and transit agencies do use fencing where they can, but it is cost prohibitive to have fencing along the entire network. Also, once you have a fence, you have to maintain it. Fencing is generally considered an effective strategy but does not guarantee to block all trespassers. People are good at jumping over or opening holes in fences.
- b. Carolyn C. I agree with Jeff and we are seeing much more fencing. Communities should consider fencing in locations where it is warranted. Railroads cannot be expected to carry the burden of installation and maintenance for fencing but have often partnered with communities on projects. FRA has an October 2015 publication: "High-Security Fencing for Rail Right-of-Way Applications: Current Use and Best Practices":

<https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/high-security-fencing-rail-right-way-applications-current-use-and-best-practices>

14. Is anyone aware of railroads that have successfully allowed for pedestrian easements in the right of way to allow sidewalks separated from the tracks by fencing to allow safe passage of pedestrians who are already there for shortcutting reasons? This would reduce the temptation to walk on or too close to the tracks. DART has allowed some trails in their ROW, but I'm unaware of other agencies.

- a. Jeff W – An updated Rails-with-Trails report was very recently released
<https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/rails-trails-best-practices-and-lessons-learned>.
- b. Carolyn C. Good question. FRA's recent Rails-With Trails update (March 2020) reports on the best practices from the 343 identified Rail-with-Trails projects in the U.S.
- c. Jeff W - Additionally, there may be locations where providing a dedicated pedestrian crossing makes sense. The intent would be to focus pedestrians where you want them to cross so that you can ensure safe passage through providing appropriate

The following resources were shared by presenters and stakeholders:

FRA Trespass Dashboard

<https://explore.dot.gov/t/FRA/views/TrespassandSuicideDashboard/TrespassOverview?iid=1&isGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&embed=y>

FRA Suicides Reported on Railroads

<https://railroads.dot.gov/divisions/highway-rail-crossing-and-trespasser-programs/see-data-new-way-interact-trespassing-and>

FRA Grade Crossing Dashboard

https://explore.dot.gov/t/FRA/views/Highway-RailCrossingCollisions2009-2019/National?iframeSizedToWindow=true&embed=y&showAppBanner=false&:display_count=no&:showVizHome=no

Rail Trespasser Fatalities: Demographic and Behavioral Profiles, March 2008

<https://railroads.dot.gov/elibrary/rail-trespasser-fatalities-developing-demographic-profiles-march-2008>

Find “Rates per Million Train Miles” for incidents:

<https://railroads.dot.gov/safety-data/accident-and-incident-reporting/112-accidentincident-overview>

Pedestrian Safety Updates from Local, Regional, and State Agencies

- Greg Reiningger, San Antonio reported that there were 59 pedestrian fatalities in San Antonio 2019. They are doing a lot of media outreach to local stations, providing information to them about how to advise viewers on improving pedestrian safety.
- Kevin Kokes, NCTCOG reported on a research project through TxDOT’s RTI division, reviewing pedestrian and bicycle crashes in the D/FW metropolitan area.
- Joel Meyer, City of Austin reported a reduction in overall crashes during the past month during the COVID-19 social distancing; however, the frequency of serious crashes has not gone down, possibly because lighter traffic makes higher speeds possible. Also, the city is looking at mid-block bus stops to see if any locations are contributing to dangerous mid-block crossings by pedestrians.

Stakeholder Updates

- Carlee McConnell of Safe Kids Austin reported that they have gotten a grant from Safe Kids Worldwide to make pedestrian safety improvements around a school.
- Jaimie Ailshire (TxDOT) provided an update on the Highway Safety Improvement Plan.
- Steve Ratke (FHWA) reminded the group that FHWA web based training is available at <https://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov/home.aspx> and recorded webinars from the pedestrian bicycle information center are at <http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/>
- Shannon Barkwell, TTI, informed the group that Teens in the Driver Seat will be hosting a Twitter Chat on Thursday, April 9th from 3-4 p.m. CST. The hashtag for the Twitter Chat is #CallingAllRoadUsers.
- Mary Jo Prince of the Brazos Valley Injury Prevention Coalition reported on a Skype interview with KBTX TV3(local CBS affiliate). Anchor Kathleen Witte specifically asked that BVIPC address Pedestrian Safety issues during the COVID-19 crisis because of more people (children & mature citizens) being at home more and doing more playing outside & walking. <https://www.kbtx.com/content/news/The-traffic-risks-that-arise-from-empty-roads-and-many-pedestrians-569356111.html>
- Jay Crossley: The City of Austin Vision Zero program is hiring a communications person: <https://www.austincityjobs.org/postings/83303>.

Prioritization Exercise for FY20/21 Coalition Activities

Mike Manser explained to the group that, due to funding challenge, we need to prioritize Statewide Pedestrian Safety Coalition activities for the 2020/2021 project year. Ben Ettelman asked meeting

attendees to vote via Poll Everywhere, via the WebEx chat box, or by email and rank the following activities in order of priority.

- Annual Pedestrian Safety Forum
- Quarterly Pedestrian Safety Coalition Meetings
- Development of best practices for educating decision makers
- Distribution of pedestrian safety print materials at public events

When responses were tallied (an extra day was provided for people responding by email), the four activities were ranked from 1 to 4 in the same order as listed above (see Figure 1).

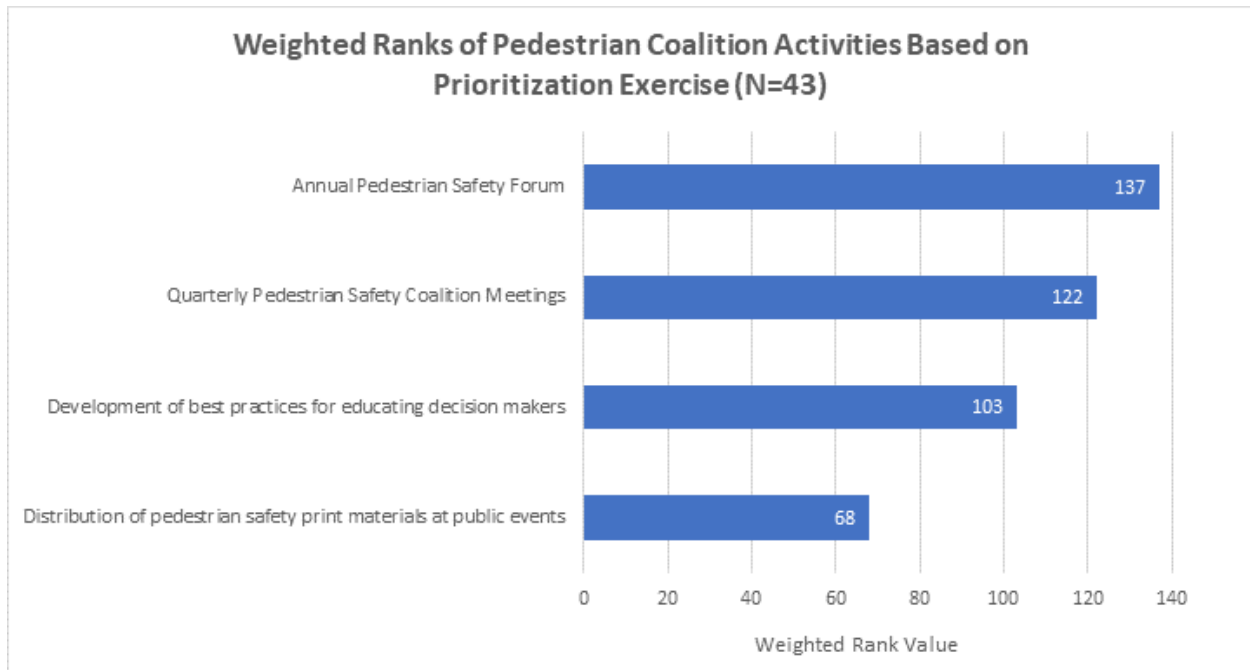


Figure 1. Responses to Prioritization Exercise.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Attendees who introduced themselves on WebEx:

Michael Manser, Senior Research Scientist, TTI

Ben Ettelman, TTI

Laura Higgins TTI

Jaimie Ailshire, TXDOT

Greg Reininger, City of San Antonio

Jeff Warner, TTI

Ed Burgos - TX FHWA

Lauren Grove, City of Houston

Kevin Kokes, North Central TX Council of Govts

Robert White, TxDOT

Taylor Bee with TxDOT

Elizabeth Jones, Dallas District TxDOT

Jeremy Williams, City of Fort Worth Bike/Ped Planner

Lauren Simcic, City of SA

Neal Johnson with TTI

Sue Flores from TxDOT - Austin District

Matt Fall - NCTCOG

Stephen Ratke, FHWA

Shelley Pridgen, TxDOT Research

Jimmy Thompson - TxDOT

Maher Ghanayem, Dallas District, TxDOT

Mary Jo Prince, AgriLife/BVIPC

Gwen Williams with Sherry Matthews Group

Noah Heath TxDOT

Jessica Devorsky Executive Director Texas Operation Lifesaver

Mike G From FRA

Liz De La Garza with DRSR TMCEC here in Austin

Danny Magee, Laredo Traffic Director

Denise Geleitsmann with Austin Public Health

Heyden Black Walker from Walk Austin

Megan Hackworth, TX KidSafe Program (BSWH)

Barbara Russell, TxDOT - Traffic Safety Division

Joey Pawlik with the Alamo Area MPO

Robbi Smith, TxDOT

Ravonne McCray, Mature Driver Program

Olivia Thomas TTI

Julia Davies, Mature Driver Program, Baylor Scott & White

Gabe Tobin from City of Austin.

Timothy Hayes, City of San Antonio

Cindy Kovar AgriLife Extension BVIPC

Robert Steigleder, TxDOT San Antonio

Joel Meyer Vision Zero Austin

Kevin Kroll, NCTCOG

Pete Krause, TxDOT

John Chen, Transportation MS student at UT

James Keener Houston District

Shannon Barkwell TT-YTS

Sonya Landrum w/North Central Texas Council of Governments

Jessica Brunson city of San Antonio

Katy Oestman, MD Anderson Cancer Center

David Zane, Austin Public Health

Becky Byford, Design Division TxDOT

Tia Olarinde TTI

Janet Hoelscher Mature Driver Program

Jay Blazek Crossley, Farm&City / Vision Zero Texas

Kara Kockelman, UT Austin Prof of Transportation Engineering

