PATHS Short Story

Fairfax, VA Road Safety Assessment (RSA)

RSA Background Information

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) partnered to provide pedestrian-focused Road Safety Assessment (RSA) for Virginia communities. For Fairfax, the corridor of focus was the north-south area of Backlick Road/Amherst Avenue, from Braddock Road to Calamo Street. It ranks in the top 1% statewide for pedestrian crash risk factors in VDOT's Pedestrian Safety Action Plan (PSAP). VDOT based this analysis on a combination of pedestrian-involved crashes (2014-2018), roadway characteristics, sociodemographic information, and proximity to places where people walk.

The collaboration between VDOT and VDH created the Walkability Action Institute (VWAI) and Prioritizing Active Transportation, Health, and Safety in Virginia (PATHS), two efforts that seek to improve pedestrian safety and walkability in the commonwealth. An initial review of roadways with pedestrian safety issues identified numerous corridors for pedestrian RSAs. Both VDOT and VDH are prepared to support participating Virginia communities through a structured and facilitated review of a roadway corridor within their community to improve pedestrian and community safety.

What is an RSA?

A pedestrian RSA is a multidisciplinary review of a roadway that focuses on safety, health equity, and walkability to identify needs and projects that can improve walkability and safety for people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds. The RSA process involves gathering data prior to the RSA, a day-long meeting with the RSA team, walking the corridor and collecting observations, and analyzing the findings to create an action plan of recommendations.

Figure 1. Members of the RSA Team walking the corridor.

Team Members

The Fairfax team consisted of individuals from the the Fairfax County Health Department, Department of Planning and Development, Fairfax County Department of Transportation, Fairfax County Police Department, the Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Department of Health, staff from the Franconia District, and a resident of Springfield.

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For more information on Fairfax's RSA Short Story, please contact:
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PATHS is part of the cooperative partnership between the Virginia Department of Transportation and Virginia Department of Health that grew out of a grant to develop a State engagement model for active communities.

Prior Concerns on the Corridor

The corridors reviewed along Backlick Road and Amherst Avenue have not been previously studied with a focus on walkability and pedestrian safety. There are numerous community destinations along this corridor, including schools, churches, commercial uses, housing, and employment. Transit use along the corridor is higher than the county average, which corresponds to the area's lower than average vehicle ownership and proximity to a regional transit hub. The area also has below average levels of income, education, and English proficiency. VDOT owns and maintains this corridor, as they do most roads throughout the county, except for those features outside of the curb line. Lastly, this corridor is the only non-access controlled connection over or under I-495 in Springfield.

Figure 2. Area for sidewalk improvement.

Outcomes

At the end of the RSA process, the RSA team provided recommendations that each jurisdiction could then implement. For Fairfax, recommendations included the following:

- Sidewalk maintenance, improvements, and expanding the sidewalk width.
- Enhanced crossing improvements including Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHB), midblock crossings, and additional signals.
- Relocation of transit stops to encourage crossings near controlled intersections.
- Signal modifications including Leading Pedestrian Intervals (LPIs) and pedestrian recall.
- Improved lighting.
- Lane reduction.
- Future speed study on the corridor to identify speed management strategies.

VDOT later evaluated the RSA's findings and incorporated several near-term improvement recommendations into scheduled Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program (VHSIP) projects along Backlick Road. These included refreshing and updating pavement markings, installing pedestrian pushbuttons, updating pedestrian crossing times, and providing additional signage treatments, among other improvements.

Figure 3. Area for crosswalk improvement.

Resources

1. PATHS *Priortizing Active Transportation, Health, and Safety*
2. VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH *Local Communities*
3. SMART SCALE
4. VDOT *Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program (VHSIP)*
5. PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ACTION PLAN