



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Practical Road Safety Assessments Provide Path to Safety for Bicyclists, Pedestrians and Transit Riders

By Pat Weaver



PRSA Team via M. Bechtel, FTA

PRSA team members record observations about pedestrian safety at a bus stop in Kansas City.

“**S**haring the road” takes on new meaning when expanding the application of a Road Safety Assessment (RSA) process beyond safe travel of automobiles on our roadways. Understanding the interaction between cars, bikes, walkers and transit riders on the roadway was brought to life in recent initiatives forwarded by USDOT Secretary Foxx for *Safer People, Safer Streets*.

This US Department of Transportation (DOT) initiative’s goal is to reduce the growing number of pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and fatalities through a comprehensive approach that addresses infrastructure safety, education, vehicle safety, and data collection. Each of the states is involved, including Kansas and Missouri. As part of Secretary Foxx’s initiative, road safety assessments (RSAs) focusing on pedestrian, bicyclist and transit

user’s safety were conducted by DOT field offices in every state and the US territories; to date, 52 so far. The purpose of these RSAs was to identify ways to improve safety across all modes.

I was privileged to serve on two teams in our area, and had the chance to observe firsthand how to incorporate bike-ped-transit elements into a road safety assessment process.

At first glance it might appear that RSAs focusing on all the modes might not apply to counties and smaller communities. And as a transit manager, you might think that neither bicycle nor pedestrian issues are all that relevant to your operations. However, even in rural communities transit riders are almost always pedestrians first—and the ability to get to your bus safely is of critical importance—whether they’re traveling to a bus stop on a fixed route system or just getting from their front door to your bus at the curb. There are many lessons learned that apply to all communities and transit systems, regardless of size.

This article provides a recap of the road safety assessments conducted in Kansas and Missouri—one in Lawrence, Ks., and the second in Kansas City, Mo. I’ll share some of the results, how these lessons might be applied to smaller communities, and some of the resources available to champion similar efforts in your community.

USDOT leads the way

Emphasis on inclusion of bicycle, pedestrian and transit elements in the transportation network has steadily increased. The most recent example is that of the *Safer People, Safer Streets* initiative which began in 2014 as a way to recognize and address the rising numbers of pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and fatalities related to collisions with motor vehicles. The goal of the initiative is to protect people on foot and bicycle by fostering a safe environment with good multimodal integration so that even more Americans will feel comfortable enough to take advantage of walking and biking.

As part *Safer People, Safer Streets*, several administrations within USDOT were directed to help identify at least one site in each state as a target for a Road Safety Assessment focusing on bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users. A representative of one

Whether in urban or rural environments, transit riders are almost always pedestrians first, and getting to your transit vehicle safely is of critical importance to them.

of three administrations (Federal Highway, Federal Transit or National Highway Traffic Safety) led the RSA team and compiled the reports for submission to the Secretary.

This initiative continues as part of Secretary Foxx's *Mayor's Challenge for Safer People, Safer Streets* for which individual cities can still sign up to participate. Wichita has expressed interest in conducting a multimodal assessment, according to Mark Bechtel, team leader for Planning and Program Development, FTA Region VII Office, and leader of the Missouri RSA conducted as part of this initiative in Spring 2015 (Rodriguez, 2015). And several smaller communities in Kansas are considering RSAs or other efforts to support safe walking and biking as part of a grant program led by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (See sidebar at right).

Practical RSAs

The Practical RSA (PRSA) approach was used for the assessments conducted in Lawrence and Kansas City. PRSAs generally are used by KDOT's Bureau of Local Projects for safety projects, following a simplified process for assessment. The PRSA does not attempt to gather extensive data other than what is readily available, and has a simplified report format to document findings.

The primary intent is to identify measures, depending on available resources, that reduce the potential for fatal or severe injury crashes in the corridor. A PRSA does not necessarily lead

KDHE Rural Grants to Support Healthy Community Design

Six rural counties are moving forward with projects to improve walking and biking in their communities, thanks to a grant administered by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The grant program supports objectives developed in the *Healthy Kansans 2020 Framework* (State of Kansas, 2014).

Strategies for the counties participating in 2015-2016 (**Cowley, Dickinson, Edwards, Franklin, Mitchell and Thomas**) include developing bicycle/pedestrian advisory committees, creating Complete Streets policies, conducting walk audits to improve pedestrian safety, developing Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plans, developing a message for local elected officials, and more. The KU Transportation Center will be involved in assisting these communities with outreach and technical services as they move forward over the next few months.

As your community moves forward with establishing pedestrian/bicycle advisory committees, consider becoming involved to provide input on access to transit services. As a transit agency, you can address issues on your own property, your agency probably lacks the authority to address similar issues on property not owned by your agency. A crucial step in providing pedestrian safety and access is to build partnerships with the other organizations and government agencies—including those responsible for road design and traffic safety (Federal Highway Administration, 2008).

For more information on communities participating in these healthy community initiatives, contact Jennifer Church at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment at (785) 296-6801.

to the development of a safety project, but to the identification of low-cost solutions that may be implemented by maintenance forces. Moderate- and higher-cost solutions are also identified for consideration by an agency for its planning and project development process (Harris, 2013).

A multimodal PRSA is one in which all modes are taken into consideration: drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders. A multimodal approach benefits from having representatives across disciplines (roads and bridges, transit agencies, planning, public administrators, elected officials, law enforcement, bike/ped and transit advocacy groups, advisory committees, and more).

As a transit manager alone, you have very little ability to influence where sidewalks are placed or improved. However, as part of a community team, you can help target those areas in

Resources on Road Safety Assessment

- **FTA Bicycles and Transit website.** http://www.fta.dot.gov/13747_14399.html
- **US DOT RSA website.** <http://www.transportation.gov/policy-initiatives/ped-bike-safety/road-safety-assessments>
- **Mayors' Challenge Sign-Up.** U.S. Department of Transportation. <http://www.transportation.gov/mayors-challenge>
- **Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Transit, City Of Lawrence, Kansas, 19th Street from Iowa to Barker Practical Road Safety Assessment.** March 26, 2015.



PRSA Team via M. Bechtel, FTA

A sidewalk gap exists at this bus stop, forcing a pedestrian out alongside the street.

which sidewalks or other improvements would most improve mobility in your community.

Beyond the different representatives in your city or county, it can be important to include representatives across jurisdictional boundaries: city, county, regional, Tribal, State, and Federal, depending on the type of assessment being conducted. Resources may be available beyond your own agency or local government that can help make improvements a reality.

Multimodal RSAs in Kansas and Missouri: The results

The observations documented for each of the targeted PRSAs in Kansas and Missouri provided suggestions, not mandates, for changes that could be made. The overall goal was to identify a variety of measures that could be taken, as resources are available, to make improvements to enhance the safety of the respective corridors.

In Lawrence, the PRSA examined a 2.5 mile segment of 19th Street, along the south side of the University of Kansas, which, at the time, was part of a studied corridor for a proposed transit transfer center. In Kansas City, the site was a 2-mile segment of Prospect Avenue along a proposed bus rapid transit (BRT) alignment, as well as near several elementary schools with active or proposed Safe Routes to Schools projects.

Three teams were formed at each site for bicycling, walking, and transit use, to collect data on conflicts, discontinuous segments, accessibility, and user comfort.

Each team assigned to a mode used that method of travel (walked, biked, or rode the bus) while completing a checklist at intervals along each corridor. Suggestions were developed in each of the final reports, organized as low-cost, medium-cost and high-cost. For example, low cost suggestions were the

addition of shared lane markings, upgrading crosswalk markings, and establishing a bike boulevard along a path parallel to the study area. Examples of moderate-cost solutions include adding pedestrian-actuated signals and adding sidewalks to complete disconnected segments. Higher-cost alternatives generally were for lane reconstruction to add bicycle and/or pedestrian facilities.

While these two PRSAs were conducted in more-urban areas with fixed route transit, the lessons learned can certainly apply in smaller communities. There was evidence, even in these urban areas, of transit riders being forced out into the street to get to the bus stop, or standing in a field to wait for a bus with no shelter, regardless of the weather. Having others experience these conditions (other than the riders) is pretty powerful in recognizing the extent of the challenges.

What's next?

The 52 RSAs completed around the country are being compiled in a final report, according to Edwin Rodriguez, transportation management specialist for the FTA Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation (Complete Trip, 2015). In addition to the final report, work is just beginning on a *Bicycle-Pedestrian Safety Guidebook*, being developed by FTA's Office of Research, Demonstration and Innovation. Completion is anticipated for Fall 2016, said Rodriguez.

RSA resources for rural and small communities in Kansas

Are you interested in learning more about implementing an RSA in your community to address improvements for transit, walking and biking as part of the transportation network? If so, there are many informational and technical assistance resources available to help you.

One place to start is the USDOT's *Safer People, Safer Streets: Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Initiative* (<https://www.transportation.gov/policy-initiatives/ped-bike-safety/safer-people-safer-streets-pedestrian-and-bicycle-safety>).

Within the state, Kansas LTAP provides RSA technical assistance to implement an RSA in rural and small communities. Just call Mehrdad Givechi at (785) 864-2593 to request assistance or email mgivechi@ku.edu.

See the list on page 1 of this article for links to even more resources.

Conclusion

The multimodal RSAs championed by USDOT provided a unique opportunity for representatives of various disciplines and organizations to work together who may not have had thought to consult with one another. The 52 sites for which RSAs were conducted provided a unique perspective on traffic safety, considering walking, bicycling and riding the bus on our roadways. In addition to the multimodal approach, these RSAs also brought together representatives of organizations all concerned with traffic safety in some form, but who rarely work together.

As FTA's Mark Bechtel said, "The Regional NHSTA Office is located in the same building as ours, but until the RSA I didn't know anyone in that office. After the RSA, I now recognize them in the hallway and will be more likely to think of ways to collaborate in the future."

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