

Report Summary: Mean Streets 2004

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In December 2004 the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) released the fifth edition of its biannual pedestrian safety report titled *Mean Streets 2004: How Far Have We Come? Pedestrian Safety 1994-2003*. STPP is a Washington D.C. based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization (advocacy group) that defines itself as “a diverse, nationwide coalition working to ensure safer communities and smarter transportation choices that enhance the economy, improve public health, promote social equity, and protect the environment.” For the past ten years the STPP has been analyzing pedestrian fatality data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) maintained by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). In 1996 STPP published its first *Mean Streets* report based on data from 1986 through 1995. The report has since been released every two years for benchmarking pedestrian safety performance at the national, state and metropolitan levels.

Given the fact that changes in absolute numbers of fatalities has limited value for measuring and evaluating pedestrian safety performance and real exposure hazards at the metropolitan level, STPP developed the Pedestrian Danger Index (PDI). The PDI is defined as “a measure of the average yearly pedestrian fatalities per capita, adjusted for the number of walkers.” The number of walkers is derived from 2000 Decennial Census Journey-to-Work data—based on the share of the population that walks to work. *Mean Streets 2004* acknowledges that this Census data only provides information regarding the mode people most often use to travel to and from work. Better measures of risk exposure would include data on the frequency of all types of trips on foot such as to the store, school, and intermodal journeys that involve walking (e.g. walking to and from transit hubs). Unfortunately, no comprehensive source of national data exists that provides such details on metro area travel characteristics. Nevertheless, the Census Bureau’s Journey-to-Work data remains useful for purposes of comparative analysis and calculating baseline performance trends in metropolitan areas. PDI is utilized in the report as an indicator of where it is most dangerous to “step out your door and walk” in terms of where there is the greatest risk of death (per capita pedestrian fatalities relative to the amount of walking for the metro area). More rigorous measures of risk exposure would also include analysis of pedestrian injuries as well as fatalities, but injury data is less accurate and often underreported.

Like previous reports, *Mean Streets 2004* is focused on evaluating national pedestrian safety trends and comparing data between states and the 50 largest metro areas. Birmingham’s metropolitan statistical area (MSA) ranks 56th in size compared to other MSAs defined by population figures from the most recent 2000 Census. Therefore, additional analysis of the data that STPP compiled was required to evaluate Birmingham’s performance relative to similar sized metropolitan areas. *Mean Streets 2004* and all data associated with the report can be downloaded on STPP’s website: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

The following **key findings** were compiled from *Mean Streets 2004* and other relevant transportation data:

Birmingham MSA:

- According to U.S. Census 2000 data, metropolitan Birmingham ranks 266th out the nation's 280 MSAs in terms of the percentage of the population that walks to work at 1.21%.¹
- The region ranks 271st in terms of the percentage of the population that bikes and/or walks to work (combined = 1.27%), which is lower than any other metropolitan area with a population of 500,000 or more.²
- Based on traffic fatality data from 2002 and 2003, the Birmingham MSA has the 6th highest Pedestrian Danger Index (PDI) of 110.0 compared to PDIs from 26 similar sized metro areas having populations of 750,000 to 1,500,000.³
- 22 pedestrians were killed in Jefferson and Shelby Counties (19 and 3 respectively) during 2002 and 2003. Pedestrian fatalities in 2002 and 2003 accounted for 11 percent of all traffic related deaths in Jefferson County and 6.1 percent in Shelby County (10% when aggregated for the two-county region).⁴
- 118 pedestrians were killed in Jefferson and Shelby Counties (107 and 11 respectively) during the ten year period from 1994 through 2003. Pedestrian fatalities accounted for 11.4% of all traffic related deaths in Jefferson County and 4.5 percent in Shelby County (10% when aggregated for the two-county region).⁵

State of Alabama:

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Alabama is one of only four states having obesity prevalence rates greater than 25 percent, and only one of three states having diabetes prevalence rates greater than 10 percent. While regular exercise is a key mechanism for prevention and management of these conditions, in 2003 only 40 percent of Alabama's population met the recommended guidelines for moderate daily physical activity (compared to an all time national low of 47% nationally).⁶
- U.S. Census 2000 data indicates that Alabamians make only 1.3% of all commutes on foot compared to 2.9 percent nationally.⁷
- The *National Household Travel Survey 2001* conducted by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) indicates that Alabamians spend an average of 71 minutes in a vehicle per day compared to a national average of 66 minutes.⁸
- 57% of all trips made in Alabama that are under a half mile are made in a vehicle.⁹ (*Note: Half mile trips are generally considered "walkable" distances. Such short trips can feasibly be made on foot when safe and convenient walking conditions exist.)
- While 6.2 percent of all traffic fatalities in Alabama were pedestrians in 2002 and 2003, less than one percent (0.8%) of all federal transportation funds invested throughout the State of Alabama in fiscal years 1998 through 2003 were utilized for non-motorized transportation facilities and improvements.¹⁰

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. Census 2000. Summary File 3: Means of Transportation to Work for Workers 16 Years and Over; p. 30

² *ibid*

³ Surface Transportation Policy Project. Mean Streets 2004: How Far Have We Come? Pedestrian Safety 1994-2003. State Fact Sheets: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

⁴ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Fatality Analysis Reporting System: <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Division of Adult and Community Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Online Prevalence Data, 1995-2003.

⁷ Surface Transportation Policy Project. *Americans' Attitudes Toward Walking and Creating Better Walking Communities*; Belden Russonello & Stewart Research and Communications; April 2003

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration Databases, FY 1998 – 2001

United States:

- A total of 51,989 pedestrians were killed in the U.S. between 1994 and 2003. While the raw numbers have declined by 12.8 percent during this ten year period, the rates of walking have decreased even more. A comparison of 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census Bureau commuter data reveals a 24.9 percent decline in the number of Americans walking to work (4.5 million vs. 3.8 million).¹¹
- Walking is the most dangerous mode of travel per mile with only 8.6 percent of all trips made on foot while 11.4 percent of all traffic deaths are pedestrians.¹²
- The 2001 fatality rate measured in persons killed per 1000 million miles traveled is 0.75 for public transit riders, 1.3 for drivers and their passengers, 7.3 for passengers of commercial airlines¹³, and an alarming 20.1 for pedestrians.¹⁴
- Although 11.4 percent of all traffic deaths are pedestrians, less than one percent (0.9%) of all federal transportation funds is invested in provisions for safer walking environments. No state spends more than 2.5 percent of their total transportation dollars on sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic calming, multi-use trails, or safety programs.¹⁵
- In 2003 alone, 4,827 Americans (more than 450 children under age 16) died while crossing streets, walking to schools, accessing transit, running errands, and other common daily routines. NHTSA estimates that 70,000 more were injured in 2003 with a pedestrian being killed or injured every 7 minutes.¹⁶
- Almost ten percent of all pedestrian deaths are children. Pedestrian injury is the third leading cause of injury-related death among children ages 5 to 14.¹⁷ Treating child pedestrian injuries (including fatal injuries) has an annual cost of \$7.2 billion.¹⁸
- While childhood obesity rates are skyrocketing in the U.S., a recent national survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control found that 40 percent of parents cited traffic as a major barrier to allowing children to walk to school.¹⁹
- The National Safe Kids Campaign analyzed 9,000 “walkability” audits conducted across the country during Walk Our Kids to School Day events. Survey results indicated that 60 percent of parents and children encountered one or more serious hazards along their routes to school such as lack of sidewalks, crosswalks, wide roads, speeding traffic, etc.²⁰
- Caucasians comprise 81 percent of the total U.S. population and comprise 75 percent of all the pedestrian deaths for which race is known. While making up just 13 percent of the population, African-Americans make up 19 percent of pedestrian fatalities. Latinos represent 13.5 percent of the population, but comprise 16 percent of pedestrian deaths. The link between pedestrian deaths and ethnicity is likely due to the fact that Latinos, and African-Americans are less likely to own a car and more likely to walk and/or take public transportation, which results in greater exposure to pedestrian risk factors.²¹
- Despite the fact that raw pedestrian fatalities fell between 1994 and 2003, STTP’s PDI indicates that America’s streets are getting “meaner” with national PDI growing from 54.8 during the 1994-1995 period to 57.5 in the 2002-2003 period.²²

¹¹ Surface Transportation Policy Project. *Mean Streets 2004: How Far Have We Come? Pedestrian Safety 1994-2003. Executive Summary.* p 5 - 10: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

¹² *ibid*

¹³ As noted in *Mean Streets 2004* : “This figure is unusually high because it includes airline passengers who died during the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Fatality rates in previous and more recent years range from 0 to 1.2.”

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ National SAFE KIDS Campaign. *Report to the Nation on Child Pedestrian Safety.* October 2002.

¹⁸ National SAFE KIDS Campaign. *Pedestrian Injury Fact Sheet.* 2004.

¹⁹ Centers for Disease Control and prevention, “Barriers to Children Walking and Biking to School – United States, 1999,” *MMWR Weekly* 51(32);701-7045, August 16, 2002

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Surface Transportation Policy Project. *Mean Streets 2004: How Far Have We Come? Pedestrian Safety 1994-2003. The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Pedestrian Fatalities.* p 20 - 21: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

²² Surface Transportation Policy Project. *Mean Streets 2004: How Far Have We Come? Pedestrian Safety 1994-2003. Introduction.* p 11- 12: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

Mean Streets 2004 provides the following **key recommendations**²³:

- Develop pedestrian action plans that target investments into traffic calming, sidewalk and intersection improvements, and multimodal street designs that also accommodate pedestrians and public transportation.
- Adopt “fix-it-first” policies that emphasize investing in the improvement and maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure before building new facilities.
- Safe Routes to School programs that focus on the health and safety needs of children provide a logical first step toward a broader commitment of safe routes to transit, parks, libraries, senior centers, and other public destinations.
- Ensure a “fair share” commitment of transportation funds for bicycle and pedestrian safety needs.
- “Complete the streets” with transportation investments that create an inviting and safe pedestrian realm. Projects should be subject to performance standards that ensure the appropriate accommodations for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit access.
- Implement design standards and land use policies that foster the development of walkable communities.
- Tame motor vehicle traffic by enforcing speeding laws and employing new enforcement technologies such as photo speed enforcement and red-light cameras.
- Encourage walking in creative ways that promote the benefits to public health, economic development, and transportation systems.

A Model for Improvement: Salt Lake City, Utah:

Although *Mean Streets 2004* reports that 30 of the nation’s 50 largest metropolitan areas developed “meaner” street environments for pedestrians, 20 metro areas have improved pedestrian safety during the last decade. These metro areas have reduced fatalities relative to the rate of walking. The Salt Lake City-Ogden MSA tops the list with a 44.2% decrease in PDI²⁴. The City of Salt Lake City reduced pedestrian related crashes by 31% between 2000 and 2003. As of November 2004, the City was on track for an additional reduction in pedestrian incidences.

In mid-2000, Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson proactively responded to his own personal near auto-ped incident and to the negative findings in the *Mean Streets 2000* report by creating a Pedestrian Safety Committee comprised of city staff from multiple divisions. Members are charged with identifying problems, researching information, and developing solutions. The committee continues to work with the central goal of reducing pedestrian related incidences in Salt Lake City.

Since its formation in July of 2000 the committee has been guiding and implementing the following highly **successful and cost-effective pedestrian safety programs and projects**²⁵:

- Educational brochures were printed and distributed to the public (e.g. *How Pedestrian Signals Work*, *Pedestrian Laws*, *Crosswalk Flags* describing the Adopt-A-Crosswalk Program, etc.)

²³ Surface Transportation Policy Project. *Mean Streets 2004: How Far Have We Come? Pedestrian Safety 1994-2003. Executive Summary.* p 5 - 10: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

²⁴ Surface Transportation Policy Project. *Mean Streets 2004: How Far Have We Come? Pedestrian Safety 1994-2003. The Trend in Pedestrian Safety in America’s Metro Areas.* p 20 - 21: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=235>

²⁵ Salt Lake City. *Salt Lake City Pedestrian Safety Program Pedestrian Safety Measures:* <http://www.sl.gov.com/transportation/PedestrianTraffic/default.htm>

- After conducting extensive research of existing pedestrian safety related ordinances and model codes utilized in other cities, Salt Lake City revised its ordinances to conform to the Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).
- Penalties for pedestrian related traffic violations were also restructured and increased.
- Enforcement activities are targeted at motorists and pedestrians who violate the laws.
- Low cost crosswalk flags were installed at select crosswalks to increase pedestrian and crosswalk visibility.
- Policies and practices were modified for timing pedestrian WALK and DON'T WALK phases to allow additional WALK time at many signalized crosswalks without adding time to traffic signal cycles.
- Since the 2002 Winter Olympics, Salt Lake City has installed over 1000 countdown timers and now requires installation of these devices at all new or upgraded traffic signals. More are planned for installation with the ultimate goal of converting all pedestrian signals to this newer and ever-increasingly popular technology.
- Pedestrian-actuated overhead flashing lights and in-roadway crosswalk lights have been installed at select intersections. The first overhead device was unveiled by the mayor as part of a media event and public awareness campaign for pedestrian safety.
- Twelve-inch pavement markings with the word "LOOK" have been etched at select crosswalks. The letter Os look like eyeballs and serve as visual cues to pedestrians entering crosswalks. Initially the pavement markings were installed downtown before the Winter Olympics. The primary intent was to provide directional guidance to foreign pedestrians from countries that drive on the opposite side of the street. Public acceptance of the markings has resulted in citywide plans to etch all elementary school crosswalks.
- During 2002 and 2003, travel lane approaches to 47 non-signalized midblock crosswalks on multi-lane collector and arterial roadways were marked with an advance pavement marking pattern consisting of rectangular, white bars aligned to form a triangle. These unique markings provide visual cues to motorists when approaching the crosswalks.

For more information on the Pedestrian Safety in Salt Lake City visit:
<http://www.slcgov.com/transportation/PedestrianTraffic/default.htm>