

City of Keene
New Hampshire

ROADWAY SAFETY PLAN COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 25, 2024

4:00 PM

**2nd Floor Conference Room,
City Hall**

Members Present:

J.B. Mack, Chair
Councilor Laura Tobin, Vice Chair
Elizabeth Dragon, City Manager
Frank Linnenbringer
Fred Roberge (remote)
William Lambert
Debbie Bowie
Ockle Johnson

Staff Present:

Don Lussier, City Engineer
Brett Rusnock, Project Manager

Members Not Present:

Autumn DelaCroix
Erin Roark

1) Call to Order

Chair Mack called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM.

2) Roll Call

Roll call ensued.

Project consultants were present: Frank Koczalka (VHB), Sammy Snider (VHB), Eric Tang (VHB, remote), Michelle Marshall (FHWA, remote), Phil Goff (VHB, remote).

3) Approval of Minutes – February 26, 2024

A motion by Mr. Roberge to adopt the February 26, 2024 minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Lambert.

Revision: line 230, should say “South Lincoln Street.”

A motion by Mr. Linnenbringer to amend the motion to add the correction to the minutes was duly seconded by Mr. Lambert. The motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

The amended motion to adopt the February 26, 2024 minutes as corrected carried unanimously on a roll call vote. Mr. Johnson abstained.

4) RSPC Round Robin Discussion

Mr. Koczalka explained that the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) participated in an exercise to list their top three locations of roadway safety concerns—vehicle, bike, and pedestrian—in the City. He asked the Committee to share their top three locations for comparison to the TAC and community survey responses:

Mr. Lambert:

1. Washington Street leaving Keene, particularly at night.
 - a. The pedestrian crossing in this area is not well lit.
2. Upper Washington Street, the intersection (at Concord Road) just before the turn for Rt-9.

Mr. Johnson:

1. Crossing Main Street to/from Keene State College (KSC), despite work to improve the pedestrian crossings there.
2. Biking on Main Street downtown.
3. Biking around Central Square.

Ms. Bowie:

1. Downtown in general, both driving and walking.
 - a. Most drivers stop for pedestrians, but it is not guaranteed.
2. Crossing Main Street to/from KSC.
3. West Street:
 - a. People go through the red light from West Street into downtown.
 - b. Drivers do not always stop for pedestrians walking across West Street near the signalized intersections.

City Manager:

1. West Street:
 - a. It is getting more difficult to make a left turn onto West Street during certain times of day, which could be worsened once the new carwash opens.
 - b. There was a brief discussion of whether pedestrians use crosswalks on West Street. The City Manager thought the crosswalks are used regularly, because it is too dangerous to cross otherwise. Ms. Bowie added that closer to Hannaford, pedestrians and cyclists do not use the crosswalks; more crosswalks might be needed in this area.
2. Central Square:
 - a. The traffic pattern around Central Square is confusing.
3. Main Street, particularly with two vehicle lanes in each direction.
 - a. Creates a danger for pedestrians trying to cross multiple lanes of traffic.

Chair Mack:

1. West Street, between Island Street and the shopping plazas:
 - a. This area is extremely dangerous for walkers and bikers, with infrequent crosswalks.
2. Intersection of West Street/Ashuelot Street/Gilbo Avenue:
 - a. A curve here makes it hard for drivers going east on West Street to see if there is a vehicle coming off Ashuelot Street. This could be dangerous for pedestrians.
3. Sidewalks between School Street and Colorado Street:
 - a. There is a danger for pedestrians, particularly in the winter, when the City struggles to keep those sidewalks plowed.
4. Lower Winchester Street:
 - a. Sidewalk and biking safety are issues between the roundabout and the Swanzey town line. Hopefully, the upcoming redesign will help.
5. Lower Main Street:
 - a. Particular danger due to the four lanes of vehicle traffic.
6. Pearl Street and Cheshire Rail Trail crossing:
 - a. Vegetation is overgrown and it is a dangerous crossing.

Vice Chair Tobin:

1. Central Square:
 - a. Confusion for drivers due to unclear signs and arrows, which leads to difficulty and danger for pedestrians.
 - b. There is confusion about the painted bike lane, which many vehicle drivers think are for them to use to keep bikes out of their way.
2. West Street:
 - a. Between Main Street and School Street (but could extend to Island Street).
 - i. As an example, Vice Chair Tobin crossed back-and-forth a few times:
 1. Some drivers did not stop for her to cross until she stepped into the crosswalk. Some stopped and yelled at her to get out of the way.
 2. She tried crossing with and without the flashing beacon (on the east side of the Library), and noted that only some drivers stopped. This is problematic because drivers think that someone who pushed the cross button might have crossed already, so the drivers do not think they need to stop.
 - ii. It is challenging for pedestrians to cross West Street to-and-from Ashuelot River Park.
3. Cypress Street toward the Monadnock Food Co-Op.
 - a. There is a blind spot for pedestrians where there is no sidewalk.

Mr. Linnenbringer:

1. NH Rt-10, just below the roundabout:

- a. Very problematic sight lines.
 - b. Challenges making a left off Kit Street, where there is a lot of traffic from Filtrene, Service Credit Union, and Best Western. With the slip lane, there is a steady flow of traffic from the roundabout.
 - i. The Lower Winchester Street project will extend a median from the roundabout through this corridor, so these left turns will no longer be possible.
2. Pedestrians on bikes after dark without reflectors or lighter clothing.
- a. There are incidents of bikes crossing into vehicle traffic. Vehicle drivers cannot share the road if they cannot see a cyclist.

Mr. Roberge:

1. Intersections on Rt-101:
 - a. While roundabouts had slowed traffic some, people speed on Rt-101 and many are aggressive.
 - b. Mr. Lussier and Chair Mack were serving on a committee assessing upgrades for Rt-101 toward Marlborough, where there is an extremely small shoulder used for walking and biking, despite the roadway not having been designed for those uses.

Chair Mack recognized Paul Bilgen of 391 Court Street, who is an active pedestrian in the City. During certain times of day, the crosswalk at Prospect Street is unusable, particularly at night. During his three years living on Court Street, Mr. Bilgen had observed more people speeding heading north. He said that raised and lit crosswalks could help to slow traffic in this area, at which point pedestrians may no longer be scared to use those crosswalks. He also mentioned challenges with the roundabout at Main/Marlboro/Winchester Streets, where people cross from the inside of the roundabout to the outer lane on Main Street. Mr. Johnson agreed and mentioned the challenges of driving south on Main Street, around the roundabout, and to the Post Office because of the second lane of traffic and the slip lane at the roundabout. There is limited distance for drivers to make this maneuver before coming upon the pedestrian crosswalk.

Ms. Bowie questioned whether better road markings at crosswalks and roundabouts could help. Mr. Bilgen added that there could be better signage at roundabouts, as many people—particularly visitors from other states—do not know how to use them.

Next, the consultants led the Committee through reviewing and comparing the Committee's roadway priority areas to those listed in the public survey and other public outreach. The consultants used graphics to help visualize the comparison. The consultants were tasked with analyzing all of this data and anecdotes to seek the common trends in public feedback. Mr. Goff demonstrated the commonalities between the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), the Roadway Safety Plan Committee, and public responses. The TAC was particularly focused on some intersections on the outskirts of Keene, while concerns mentioned about pedestrians/bikes were focused primarily on West and Main Streets. Traffic concerns were predominantly on Winchester Street (including the roundabout) and Central Square.

5) **Project Survey**

The consultants discussed some of the public survey data. Mr. Goff noted that there was some frustration with the public survey, so it was not well received by some. The consultants apologized for these challenges. Despite these issues, approximately 900 comments were made on the online map portion of the survey. As of this date, 480 individuals had completed the survey. Mr. Goff showed areas on the map where there were the most comments from the public survey, overlaid with crash locations (data since 2013, minus one missing year) and types (from minor injury to fatality) to show direct correlations. Hotspots were visible, like Bradco Street, where people cannot comfortably walk/drive/bike; however, there was no crash data at this location. They also considered distinctions between comments on the survey and where the respondents live (by ward). While there were specific concerns in each ward, residents of all five wards were most concerned about the heart of downtown and West Street.

It was announced that the survey would remain open an additional 1–1.5 weeks after this meeting.

Vice Chair Tobin discussed the challenges members of the public faced in trying to complete this survey. She had to try three or four times, which took a few hours. While she tried to explain how to take the survey to many community members, most got frustrated and quit before completing it. This felt significant to the Vice Chair. She imagined that people who have a short fuse when driving would also likely have limited patience trying to complete this survey, and she thought those were some of the most important people to hear from. When she looked a few days prior, she saw 40 comments about difficulty taking the survey. She hoped the consultants could also gather and consider those comments. Mr. Lussier said they had gathered all narrative comments submitted, and he had responded to some comments directly through the form on the website. Vice Chair Tobin mentioned that many struggled to access the survey from the link on the Facebook page, so they talked about their concerns directly in the Facebook comments; Mr. Lussier and Mr. Rusnock would discuss how to capture those comments. Mr. Rusnock added that he collected many unofficial survey responses from the online form and Facebook. He also forwarded comments to the consultants when someone called him because they were unable to complete the survey online. While this was not a perfect process, the consultants and City staff felt that valuable insights were gained from the survey and other responses. In the future, Mr. Lussier thought it would be important for City staff to review this process to mitigate these concerns in the future.

Overall, despite the challenges, all of the layered data pointed to common priority areas of concern: Main, West, and Winchester Streets.

Mr. Linnenbringer added that Steering Committee members could attend the upcoming stakeholder meetings to listen, and if they cannot, he asked that City staff share the important takeaways from those meetings.

Mr. Rusnock said the initial plan was to close the survey on April 1, with a press release the week in advance so remaining members of the public could contribute. To date, there were approximately 500 responses, and they were trickling down.

Mr. Linnenbringer said that at some point, he hoped to hear responses from those who do not live in Keene for comparison. Ms. Bowie agreed that it was important to account for those visiting Keene or KSC students, for example. When her family or friends visit, Ms. Bowie warns them about slowing down at crosswalks and bike lanes. Mr. Goff noted that 22% of survey responses to date were from non-residents. Mr. Lambert mentioned hearing complaints from people who avoid Keene because of roundabouts. Mr. Lussier did not believe anyone preferred sitting at traffic signals.

6) Data Collection/Analysis (2014–2022)

A) Crash Locations

Next, Mr. Tang reviewed crash and census data and how this data will inform the City's future priorities and treatments. Financially, this project was not about rebuilding all of the City's intersections, but to apply treatments to key intersections, ensuring the greatest return on investment. From a Safe Systems perspective, all data would be considered with a particular focus on severe crashes, which if reduced would result in a greater likelihood of survival from serious injury. Because there was not a large enough sample size of severe crashes, the consultants looked at minor injuries as well. Reducing the likelihood of severe crashes increases the likelihood of survival; even one fatality is too many.

Mr. Tang showed a map of the City overlaid with the various levels of crashes. This allows for visualizing correlations between crash factors and identifying key corridors for improvements. The map was also overlaid with census tracts to represent disadvantaged or underserved populations. A part of the Federal funding for this project requires prioritizing investments in these underserved areas. The US Department of Transportation (DOT) combined several indicators (e.g., socioeconomic factors, environmental factors, health outcomes, crash severity) to arrive at a baseline percentile score. US DOT wants to see more investment of Federal funds in census tracts that are in the top 1/3 of disadvantage in the nation. Mr. Tang mentioned that grants in this domain are competitive. However, he said there are ways to prioritize the City's projects and work with agencies in NH to attain State funds. With 22% of survey respondents not being Keene residents, he thought there were opportunities for regional public campaigns on roadway safety.

Mr. Tang and Mr. Snider focused their data analysis on the minor injury crashes, clustering them on a map to determine where in the City they are most concentrated. As expected, many crashes were clustered on Main Street and Winchester Street. This is logical as they are the most traveled routes in the City. There is a severity scale for crashes: KABCO (the consultants shared an informal mnemonic: Killed/Ambulatory/Bloodied/Could (have been), and Other (or no injury). Mr. Tang used a concentrated heat map to show how it could be adjusted to more clearly show key corridors for the various crash types. He mentioned that crashes must be reported to be used in this

data, and many minor crashes are not reported. Potential characteristics among all KAB crashes can help to identify additional locations that do not have crashes yet, but might be other opportunities to invest.

B) High-Injury Network (HIN)

Mr. Tang continued the presentation, discussing the KAB high injury networks (HIN), which are roadways where fatal, serious, or minor injuries occurred. Fatal (K) and serious (A) injuries are weighted heavily, while minor injuries (B) have a slightly lower weight. Fifteen roadway segments in the City were ranked from the most severe to lowest. Any road segment needs at least three KAB injuries to be considered on the HIN. This is another way of clustering the data. If a small percentage of the City's roadways have a large (or majority) share of KAB crashes, these roadways could be prioritized for improvements. This is due to limited Federal and local funds available to make improvements. Additionally, Mr. Snider said those roadways need a minimum length of 1,000 feet to be considered. Mr. Tang added that not every single linear foot of roadway might be dangerous; they seek complete, 1,000-foot segments so funding can be pursued for those corridors.

Chair Mack recognized Mr. Bilgen, who asked whether the frequency of actions would be considered too. Mr. Tang replied that there was 10 years of accident data, and a part of this exercise was averaging those years while accounting for the numerous factors impacting that data. He recalled that one of those 10 years of data was removed because there was no information. The Covid pandemic was also evident in the data as vehicular travel was less then. Also, for example, a roadway segment might have zero crashes and thus appear as though nothing is wrong, while research could show that installation of lighted crosswalks a few years prior proved to be a successful countermeasure. The Committee commented on parts of the map where there were recent successful countermeasures.

Mr. Lambert asked about the roads listed for disadvantaged populations. Everything he saw was bordered by Main, Washington, or Marlboro Streets to the west, and all the way to the town line with Marlborough. He said most of this was conservation land. Mr. Lussier said that shape on the map was the census tract set by the US Census Bureau. While there was a lot of vacant land in that area, it is the neighborhood east of Main Street that the socioeconomic data reflects.

The KAB HIN was overlaid to visualize the correlation between HIN corridors and the highly traveled roads in Keene.

C) Potential Countermeasures

Next, Mr. Snider discussed potential countermeasures, which would also be a focus in future meetings. These countermeasures were from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This toolkit includes low-cost countermeasures for aspects like high visibility crosswalks or pedestrian

areas. For example, Mr. Tang said raised crosswalks are a countermeasure for crosswalk visibility enhancements.

D) Equity

Mr. Snider said the consultants had also considered equity in their analyses. For example, different improvements could be considered for different census tracts (e.g., high disability rate, fewer cars owned, or a higher over age 65 population). This analysis was based on the 2020 census data.

E) KA/KAB Cross Matrix

Mr. Tang said it is important to understand the factors that lead to a crash. Some of this information is available from the NH DOT Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), which includes emphasis areas that are of concern. These emphasis areas—intersections, roadway departures, distracted driving, impaired driving, speeding, occupant protection, older drivers, younger drivers, motorcycle/mopeds, and bikes/pedestrians—can be used to create a KA/KAB cross matrix of 561 serious and minor injury crashes in Keene. For example, of the 390 intersections, 6% of them were involved in a roadway departure. In this matrix, the categories shaded closer to a red color indicated a strong correlation, and therefore potential opportunities for mitigation. For example, a lot of crashes were at intersections, a clear conflict point. Also, 27% of roadway departures involved distracted driving. This was another example of why the consultants considered the A and B crashes because there were so few K incidents. There have to be enough crashes to glean a stronger correlation.

Vice Chair Tobin asked whether “distracted driving” was about distractions inside (e.g., cell phone) or outside (e.g., the number of lights on Main Street) of the car. Mr. Tang said it was about distraction inside the vehicle, though there was agreement that sometimes this is based on the interpretation of the responding Police Officer.

Chair Mack asked how the consultants would consider improvements the City had already implemented when assessing the matrix. Mr. Tang said that it will consider dates in which countermeasures were implemented and compare that to the crash data. Mr. Linnenbringer mentioned that this can be a confusing topic. However, this matrix will allow for addressing more than one issue at a time; speeding and distracted driving can be addressed at a problematic intersection at the same time, for example. These emphasis areas are not mutually exclusive.

7) Stakeholder Engagement

A) Schedule & Location for Stakeholder Meetings

It was noted that the consultants had already met with the City’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee. They were working with the City to schedule the remaining stakeholder engagement in April. They welcomed suggestions from the Committee of other stakeholders to engage.

Mr. Lussier will keep the Committee informed as stakeholder engagement and other parts of the project are scheduled; Committee members are welcome to attend and listen. Given the discussion of vulnerable demographics, Chair Mack wondered if having west, downtown, and east Keene meetings should be reassessed. Mr. Lussier said the intent of the neighborhood meetings was not to pit sides against each other, but to provide convenient venues throughout the City. One would occur in the Blastos Room at Keene Ice, another at the West Keene Fire Station, and the third location was yet to be determined. Residents from anywhere in Keene can attend the events at any of these locations. Mr. Roberge asked for advance notice of when these meetings will occur.

When talking about demographics with less transportation access, Vice Chair Tobin wanted to ensure they would be informed of stakeholder meetings and have nearby options. Mr. Roberge suggested that the City should liaise with public transit to coordinate a special route to anyone disadvantaged to participate. Mr. Lussier said there was on-call public transit for those with mobility concerns. Mr. Lussier would look into the rules for requesting a ride for this purpose. Vice Chair Tobin said that it would be essential to ensure these stakeholder meetings are within the hours that public transit operates.

Chair Mack recognized Mr. Bilgen, who asked how the recommendations from this Committee would align with the downtown reconstruction project, given that this effort was to make serious accidents unacceptable. He did not see how the results of this Steering Committee would align with the City Council's recommendations for the downtown project. A lengthy discussion ensued. Mr. Lussier did not agree that these two projects were unaligned; he thought they would move in parallel, as the downtown project is intended to improve safety. This Steering Committee is focused on improving safety for roadway users throughout the City, while the downtown consultants (Stantec) were looking at roadway safety downtown more specifically. Mr. Bilgen felt he learned during this meeting that the intensity of accidents in Keene are located where Stantec is redesigning the downtown. Mr. Bilgen asked who would have the ultimate authority over those design decisions. Mr. Lussier stated that the City Council ultimately decides what will happen with the downtown redesign. That said, he thought Stantec understood the downtown safety concerns and was working on designs to mitigate those. Mr. Bilgen was concerned that Stantec never stated—as explicitly as this Committee—that deaths and serious injuries will be unacceptable in the redesigned downtown. While perhaps not stated as explicitly, Mr. Lussier said the grant application submitted in February 2024 was extensively focused on safety as one of the primary benefits of the downtown project. He did not think Stantec would risk their engineering reputation on an unsafe project.

The City Manager added that Stantec had proposed things that would make downtown safer, but certain aspects were not accepted by the City Council. Stantec was working with the same crash data that this Committee was. In the end, the downtown redesign will be decided by the City Council. Chair Mack added that this roadway safety project will end in July 2024, while the downtown project would continue long after that. This Roadway Safety Plan Committee will make recommendations to the City Council that will hopefully influence their decisions throughout the City. The City Manager added that the Roadway Safety Plan Committee will make

recommendations for the City's roadways that could help the City access grants for the downtown project. The City Manager said that while some design details had already been chosen by the City Council, decisions remained for things like final sidewalk and crosswalk treatments. This study will inform the ultimate downtown redesign. Vice Chair Tobin offered to speak with Mr. Bilgen more about his concerns after the meeting.

Regarding the downtown project, Mr. Roberge asked whether the public transit system route (including the locations of bus stops) can be evaluated for safety or improvements. When VHB worked on another safety plan in the past, Mr. Tang did something similar by overlaying the transit network against crash data as another way to prioritize information and suggest potential treatments for easier bus stop access. Mr. Roberge hoped to see recommendations for safety of the existing stops as well as any possible improvements. Mr. Linnenbringer added that this analysis should include the ability to get to the bus stops as well.

Ms. Marshall asked how the downtown project was funded. Mr. Lussier said it was funded 100% locally, but there was hope for grants.

8) New Business

A) Eligibility of Trail Projects for SS4A Implementation Grant Funding

Mr. Lussier recalled this question at the previous meeting. Mr. Tang said that trails are eligible, but the Committee should discuss the nuances of that eligibility in more detail at the next meeting.

9) Discussion Items

None.

10) Next Meeting: Monday, April 22, 2024

It was stated that one part of this project is goal setting. The Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) has a stated goal for 50% reduction in fatalities and serious injuries by 2035. In advance of the next meeting, the Roadway Safety Plan Committee members were asked to create lists of their goals for the City based on the SHSP (link to be emailed). The goals should be aggressive and ambitious, but something the City could reasonably work toward.

This project has a [webpage](#) on the City website with further details.

For the next meeting, Vice Chair Tobin asked for information on how frequently crosswalks should be painted and best practices. Mr. Lambert mentioned some challenges, and the City Manager said it also depends on how high the volume is. When the paint is worn out, the Vice Chair said that a pedestrian might be able to see the crosswalk markings, but a driver might not.

11) Adjournment

There being no further business, Chair Mack adjourned the meeting at 5:46 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Katie Kibler, Minute Taker
April 1, 2024

Reviewed and edited by,
Brett Rusnock, Infrastructure Project Manager and J. B. Mack, Chair of the Roadway Safety Plan
Committee