



Testimony of Fred Jones, Councilor, Neptune Beach, Florida
on behalf of Transportation for America

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
“ Every Life Counts: Improving the Safety of our Nation's Roadways”
Tuesday, April 9, 2019

Good morning Chairman, Ranking Member and distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Transportation for America, a national nonprofit dedicated to creating a transportation system that moves people, safely and affordably, to jobs and services by all means of travel with minimal impact to the community and the environment.

My name is Fred Jones. I represent the citizens of Neptune Beach, Florida as Vice-Mayor on the City Council, and I also work as a transportation planner for Michael Baker International. Additionally, I serve on the advisory board of the National Complete Streets Coalition. Neptune Beach is a small, quiet coastal community nestled on the northeast coast of Florida between Atlantic Beach and Jacksonville Beach. While there are many wonderful things about my community – the beaches, our vibrant town center, the high quality of life, to name a few – we, unfortunately, are also part of the sixth most dangerous metropolitan area in our country in which to walk or bike. The state of Florida, which is the most dangerous state in the Union for bicyclists and pedestrians, is also home to the #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #8 and #9 most dangerous cities. And these numbers are going in the wrong direction, in Florida and across the nation.

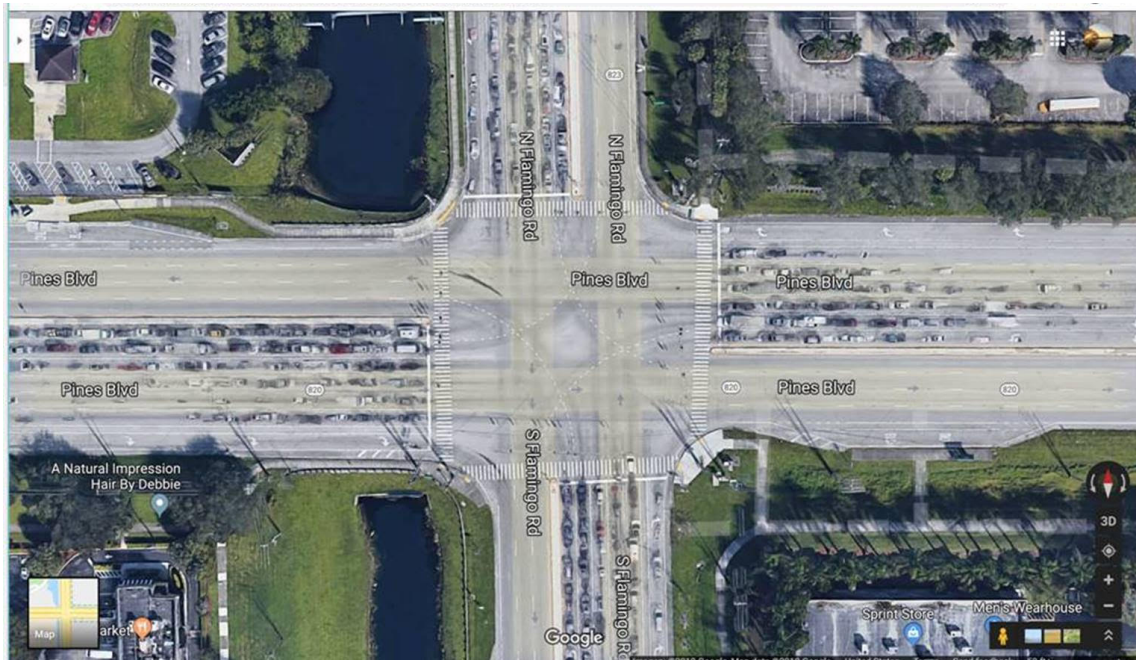
Over the past 10 years, 5433 people in the state of Florida, including 419 people in the Jacksonville, were struck and killed trying to walk or bike to work, school, running errands or going to a friend’s house. These are the streets that I walk, bike and drive on. It is important that we recognize that these roadways are not dangerous by accident: they are dangerous by design.¹

Some of the problem is that many people do not understand how small changes in roadway design and development patterns affect safety. Wider lanes and broader streets with buildings set back from the road signal to the driver that speed is allowed and encouraged – no matter what your posted speed limit is. In fact, often roadways are designed for traffic speeds 10-15 miles per hour faster than the posted speed. When we talk about roadway design, it’s important to emphasize

¹ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

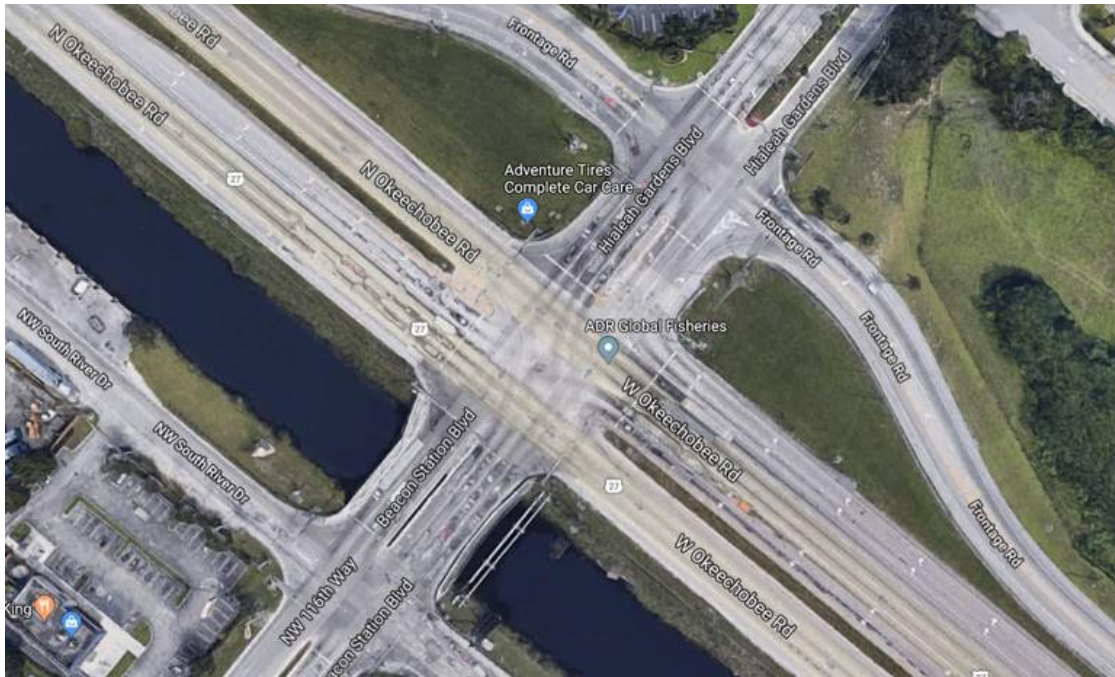
context. We are not talking about limited access freeways but, rather, the misapplication of limited access freeway engineering and design solutions and parameters to local roadways.

While transportation agencies claim that this is done for “safety reasons,” the underlying message is that they expect drivers to speed and want to clear space for those speeding drivers to make mistakes and correct them without crashing. This accommodation to drivers, in the name of “safety”, creates more danger to those outside of the car because the driver naturally interprets these roadway design cues to go at the higher design speed, inducing the speeding behavior that the design engineers are trying to head off. And we know that speed leads to mistakes and more deadly crashes, especially for those that don’t have thousands of pounds of steel and aluminum surrounding them.



N. Flamingo and Pines Boulevard in the Miami area, a typical example of a major intersection in Florida.

These issues – along with un-signalized crossings, long blocks and multiple driveways – create inherently dangerous conditions for people who walk or bike. All of these designs are put in place for the convenience of drivers and to move vehicles at a high rate of speed, which is the real underlying priority of our national transportation program, whether that was our intention or not. But most of all they all put people outside of a car in jeopardy.



Arterial roadways (not limited access highways) in Miami areas. N. Okeechobee Road and Hialeah Gardens Boulevard is one of the most dangerous intersections in Florida today.

What is particularly frustrating to me is the acceptance of this level of danger and loss of human life. It is not a problem that we don't know how to solve. This isn't a problem that we are powerless to address. We have a cure. But for whatever reasons, just don't want to use it.

Two cities that have adopted one major cure, known as Vision Zero, have seen traffic fatalities fall significantly. Vision Zero emphasizes matching speeds of roadways based on the surrounding context. In other words, in populated areas, drivers should have an expectation that they will move slower than in the wide-open countryside or on limited access highways. The results speak for themselves: in New York City fatalities are down 28 percent since 2014. San Francisco is down 41 percent. If you just look at pedestrians, the decrease is 46 percent in New York City and 34 percent in San Francisco. Fortunately, several local cities in my home state have also begun to join this movement, including Tampa, Orlando, West Palm Beach and Miami.

Despite knowing how to fix the problems, many of our transportation agencies are often concerned about the ramifications – often political – of making safety their top priority. To make space for people outside of a car, we sometimes have to take space from the cars. Even where doing so would create very minor delays – as in seconds – for drivers, it is enough to throw the option out. This resistance to



change can be found at all levels – from local public works agencies to Congress and from broad policy to bureaucratic procedure and culture.

I want to preface that there are many states and communities, and particularly the Florida DOT, that should be applauded for adopting robust complete street policies and initiatives to change this paradigm. However, there is a major disconnect or cultural barrier that exists between the policy framework around safety and complete streets and the actual implementation of innovative design solutions and projects that would provide better outcomes. Our success requires moving beyond a feel-good policy discussion to meaningful culture change, political will and leadership, and shifting priorities away from speed and capacity at all costs.

I'm going to next provide a few examples and illustrations of the difficulties in building safer roads for all. In terms of procedure, every road project is designed around a standard that most people have never heard of, called Level of Service. This is a measure of how quickly cars can move and how easily they can maneuver through a roadway with little congestion or delay. A wide-open street with free flowing traffic on is considered LOS-A. Congested, stop and go traffic is LOS-F. As a result, your most economically productive corridors are considered failures in the transportation world, while those that are underutilized get an A. What is the equivalent safety standard that we use to design roads, you may ask? We don't have one. We respond to clusters of crashes, we don't design to avoid them.

In terms of culture, you can find the focus on traffic speeds over safety everywhere. Highway engineers have historically been trained to build highways to maximize capacity, speed and vehicle throughput. This ideal has in turn been misapplied to all roadways, from highways to arterial roads to local, neighborhood streets. DOTs sometimes don't believe that the federal government will permit them to implement a design that would slow traffic. Or they will claim that they aren't allowed to use funding that way. Whether that is true or not (and in spite of several directives from (FHWA) Administration saying it isn't true), they regularly blame the federal government for tying their hands. The excuse for failing to design a roadway for all users varies based on the type of road.

On a state road in my metro area, the local DOT district safety office previously recommended a road diet or lane elimination to reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians and improve overall safety. There was some pushback, so the DOT immediately conceded and raised the forecasted traffic volumes and misapplied other traffic analyses to make a great project that would have provided a sense of arrival on a college campus look infeasible. Two things to take from this story. One, traffic projections and analyses are often over-estimated and DOTs have a lot of

discretion on how they are established. Computer models used to generate such analyses are only as good as their inputs, and there's nothing easier than tweaking such inputs to get desired outputs. Two, if there is traffic that might be impacted by accommodating pedestrians or cyclists, even if it is minor, it is often considered too much.

If traffic volumes are not high enough to justify refusing to build a complete street, DOTs often will often provide other reasons for not changing the roadway such as claiming that the road is a parallel reliever to an Interstate or highway and that giving up space to pedestrians would impact drivers if a problem on the highway requires traffic to move to that roadway. On one street near downtown Jacksonville, traffic is not the problem. You could roll a bowling ball down the road at nearly any time of day and not hit anything. In this case, the local agency said they couldn't give up a lane because even though the road is well below capacity, it is an evacuation route. There was also a recent instance, when planning for an innovative, autonomous transit service was only supported with the condition that no state roads could be considered for lane elimination. So instead of repurposing a portion of the roadway to support enhanced cycling and walking and transit, things that the local community desire, they insisted that it be left alone – and empty.

It isn't just happening in Florida. It is happening in all of our states. For example, Beach Park, Illinois, has been trying to get better pedestrian protection along a state route that has seen four pedestrian fatalities over the last 15 months. In the most recent crash, the driver said he could not see the victim, but Illinois DOT has been slow to respond to the community's call for visibility improvements. The response has been so slow and lack-luster that the city is considering making the improvements on their own and paying penalties for failing to get the required permits.²

In terms of broad policy, Congress communicates federal priorities to the state departments of transportation (DOTs) and for metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) through spending. While we spend over \$40 billion in federal funds per year in the highway program, less than \$1 billion of that is reserved for the Transportation Alternatives program, which is targeted to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and only \$2.3 billion is dedicated to safety improvements.

Even in the messaging from Washington, DC, the convenience for drivers is primary. If you go to this committee's website, the issue profiled is the cost of congestion. And I get it: congestion is annoying and inconvenient. I don't like to sit

² <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/lake-county-news-sun/news/ct-lns-beach-park-pedestrian-fatals-st-0111-20170110-story.html>

in it either. But the cost cited on your website for congestion is roughly equivalent to the cost of the \$37,133 lives lost on our roadways in 2017, a cost of \$356,476,800,000.³ That doesn't include the cost associated with those injured on our roads, which number in the *millions* of people each year. Yet safety spending is a small fraction compared to all the money we spend to address congestion.



Bill Deatherage, of the Kentucky Council of the Blind, walking along Louisville, KY's Brownsboro Road before and after sidewalk construction. Photo by Anne M. McMahon.

In 2012, Congress required DOTs and MPOs to set performance targets in federal priority areas. Several of those targets are safety related, including overall fatalities and serious injuries as well as non-motorized fatalities and serious injuries (i.e., bicyclists and pedestrians).

While this approach is referred to as "performance management" in the law, it is really simply performance tracking. Instead of setting targets and orienting spending around those targets, the program allows states to set priorities and report the safety results. If those targets are ambitious, wonderful. But Congress allows them to be negative too. As a result, in 2017, eighteen states set performance targets to kill more bicyclists and pedestrians on their roadways.

You can find this information if you know where to go deep on the FHWA's webpage to find them. There you must dig through 55 reports that are 60-70 pages each to find this information to compare across states. That's better than the repair

³ Based on the [2016 Revised Value of a Statistical Life Guidance](#) set by the US Department of Transportation of \$9.6 million per life.

and other targets, which aren't available on FHWA's site at all. This is *seven years* after Congress required performance tracking. That is what passes for accountability in the federal transportation program.

I have heard many people claim that the focus on congestion mitigation is important for the economy. As a local elected official, I can promise you that an empty roadway, while uncongested, is hardly an example of a healthy economy. Corridors that are full of cars and people are usually our highest performing economic centers.

The National Complete Street Coalition analyzed 37 Complete Streets projects in across the nation and found that employment levels rose after Complete Streets projects—in some cases, significantly. Communities reported increased net new businesses after Complete Streets improvements, suggesting that Complete Streets projects made the street more desirable for businesses. In eight of the ten communities with available data, property values increased after the Complete Streets improvements.⁴

In fact, Redfin found, based on more than 1 million homes sold between January 2014 and April 2016, that one walk-score point can increase the price of a home by an average of \$3,250, or 0.9 percent. While the majority of home buyers were looking for homes in walkable neighborhoods, Redfin found that they make up just 2% of active listings.⁵ As we all know, when something is in high demand and low supply, it can push the price of that item substantially upward. As a result, walkable neighborhoods can become very expensive and are often out of reach for those that are most reliant on walking and transit for their daily activities. And the cost premium created by this low supply is created by restrictions in development and housing policy, but also by transportation programs. Much like the cost of diamonds is elevated by restricting supply, government is increasing the cost of walkable neighborhoods by blocking the market response to the ever-increasing demand for them. A design that would save thousands of lives every year.

Some fear that making space for people walking and biking requires something to be taken from drivers. But when we build roads to move everyone, everyone does better. In Grandview, Missouri, a project was implemented to reinvigorate Main Street by improving the pedestrian accommodations along several blocks. The result was an increase in all modes: pedestrians by 900 percent, bicyclists by 40 percent and automobiles by 20 percent, although it remained uncongested. There

⁴ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/evaluating-complete-streets-projects-a-guide-for-practitioners/>

⁵ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/how-walk-score-boosts-your-homes-value-2016-08-11>

were also 90 percent fewer crashes after the changes. The city's investment of \$5 million has led to a return of \$375 million. This amounts to approximately 1.5 times of the cities entire assessed property evaluation.⁶



In Charlotte, North Carolina, the state DOT redesigned East Boulevard from five-lanes to three, adding new sidewalks and bike lanes back in 2006. As a result, they saw a dramatic reduction in crashes, more efficient traffic operations, a drop in speeding, and a 47 percent increase in non-residential property values that raised annual tax revenues by \$530,000.⁷



In my home state of Florida, we know how to do this right when we want to. In Orlando, Florida DOT redesigned Edgewater Drive by taking a travel lane and reconfiguring the road to make space for pedestrians and bicyclists. Total collisions dropped by 40 percent, injury rates decline 71 percent, pedestrian counts increased by 23 percent and bicycling increased by 30 percent traffic dropped 12 percent before returning to original levels. Additionally, the corridor has gained 77

⁶ <http://www.marc.org/Government/GTI/Academy-for-Sustainable-Communities/Sustainable-Success-Stories-Honorees/2016/Grandview-Gateway>

⁷ <https://www.completestreetsnc.org/project-examples/ex-eastblvdroaddiet/>

new businesses and 560 jobs, while the value of property along the corridor rose 80 percent.⁸



Yet these projects are the exception. Engineers actually have to get special approval to implement them, a process that can take more than a year. Why wouldn't we want this to be the rule?

As we consider the next six years of our national surface transportation spending, Congress should update the program to better protect all users. Congress should strengthen existing Complete Streets language to require states and metropolitan regions to plan, design, fund, and maintain safer streets. Congress should fund more Complete Streets projects. And Congress should create real accountability for roadway safety. States should not be allowed negative safety targets. If they are expecting more deaths then investments or changes need to be made to their programs.

For years, we have heard about the need for more money. But it's really not about the amount, but rather how it's being prioritized and spent. Shouldn't we ensure that federal funding goes to projects that improve safety, improve traffic operations and create the communities that people want? Every single dollar spent to resurface roadways could include a redesign that saves lives. But when a resurfacing project is developed, stakeholders and the community that might want Complete Streets are told that DOT will have to "study the matter" and then by the time the design concept is reviewed by the traffic division, the project is at 60 percent development and the DOT says they are too far into the process to

⁸ Edgewater Drive Fact Sheet:

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=2ahUKEwjgq_2w2rnhAhVDnOAKHZ1cDGUQFjABegQIAhAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Famericas.uli.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2Fsites%2F2%2FULTI-Documents%2FEdgewater-Drive-Orlando-FL.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0iqKJs_cXyNniFKC6_V8gN

consider the change. We are choosing bureaucratic, status quo procedure over human life.

Florida DOT, particularly in resurfacing projects, claim they have little flexibility in federal funding rules to support enhancements outside of their right of way jurisdiction. And often this may be a sidewalk or transit stop outside of their right of way jurisdiction. This results in safety and complete street gaps whereby a sidewalk or resurfacing project avoids needed improvements on private or other agency property that would result in a safe, seamless project. We are choosing to leave this part of the transportation system out and it is killing people.

After a road is built or resurfaced, we are told there is no money for retrofits. Even when there is, it is a fraction of the funding they are using to create the problem. It is like building an addition on your house while ignoring a gas leak.

Moreover, as we enter this reauthorization, I look to you all on this committee to set clear goals about what we, the American people, will get for the investment. There is a lot of talk on Capital Hill about raising taxes and putting more funding into the surface transportation program to stabilize it over the long run.

As we bring up reauthorization, Congress should lead a discussion about what we plan to achieve, not just about what you are going to spend. We need to set specific, measurable goals and hold decision-makers accountable for reaching them. There should be rewards for doing well and penalties for failure. And above all, this program should be oriented to create a safer transportation system for all users. Doing so will save lives while creating the economically vibrant, livable communities that Americans want.

Thank you very much for inviting me to testify today. I look forward to working with you to do more for safety in the coming reauthorization bill.