

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

Inter-office Communication

DATE: 12/28/2023

TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: From the Director, Department of Transportation providing an informational report regarding the Complete Communities Transportation Planning Project.

FILE TYPE: Informational Report

BACKGROUND

In January 2022, the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) submitted a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant application to address reckless driving and its impact on pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders in Milwaukee County. On July 26, 2022, the County was awarded \$235,000, 80% of which (\$188,000) is composed of federal funding, meaning \$47,000 is composed of local match. In March 2022 meeting, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors approved application for and acceptance of this funding (File No. 22-374).

The consultant team has been busy analyzing data to understand crash trends in Milwaukee County. Initial analysis findings have been presented to the Safety Working Group, comprised of industry and local governmental officials, along with the Public Advisory Committee, comprised of advocates and community leaders. These groups are helping to add local context to the data analysis and provide their own unique insights. This analysis will help us understand some of the underlying issues toward a recent increase in motor vehicle crashes in Milwaukee County.

Crash Trends: Nearly 30 years of crash data in Milwaukee County show that tremendous progress has been made toward reducing fatal and serious injury crashes. However, that progress has stalled in recent years. Since around 2014, fatal crashes have been increasing and increased sharply over the pandemic years. In the 3-year period from 2000-2002, Milwaukee County's crash fatality rate was 4.7 per 100,000 people, much lower than the U.S. average of 14.9 per 100,000 people. However today, as national fatal crash rates have decreased to around 11.3 per 100,000 in the years 2017-19, Milwaukee County's rate has increased to about 7.3 fatalities per 100,000 in the same period.

Crash Disparities: The impact of motor vehicle crashes is not felt evenly throughout the County. There is a significant geographic and demographic disparity in crashes. Using the High Vulnerability Census Tracts identified by the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services, the consultant team found that while **High Vulnerability Census tracts have only 27% of the County's local roadway miles, they are around 52% of the County's fatal and serious injury crashes**. In other words, these streets are generally 1.9 times more likely to see a crash than the Countywide average. Furthermore, data on fatal crashes show that Black or African American Milwaukee County residents, while only accounting for 26% of Milwaukee County's population, were victims 56% of its fatal crashes.

A series of public engagement meetings throughout this summer, branded as the “Safe Streets Roadshow”, were scheduled in all 19 municipalities and were promoted using a variety of mediums. Through multiple press releases, emails to elected officials and stakeholders, organic social media, a project website <http://county.milwaukee.gov/CompleteCommunities> and extensive coverage from Milwaukee’s NBC affiliate, TMJ4 News and its “Project: Drive Safer” story series, and coverage from other local news stations WISN 12, FOX 6 and CBS 58, Milwaukee County residents were informed in English and Spanish about this unprecedented effort to bring all 19 municipalities and their residents to the table to share how street safety concerns and reckless driving impacts their lives. Completing the “Safe Streets Roadshow” towards the end of August, MCDOT hosted all of its scheduled meetings and can report the following:

- 1) 620 in-person attendees
- 2) Almost 1,000 pieces of digital, written and place-based feedback have been received
- 3) Several of the high-level takeaways include:
 - a. **Education and Policy:** Many residents believe that shifting the culture away from car-dominance can help normalize safer, alternative modes of transportation such as walking, biking, and taking transit. Marketing campaigns and targeted safety lessons for driver education students can also have a positive impact on reckless driving.
 - b. **Observed Behaviors and Locations:** Meeting participants mentioned specific locations that feel hazardous for people inside and outside a vehicle. The top corridors of concern include Capitol Drive, Fond du Lac Avenue, Lake Drive, Layton Boulevard (S 27th Street), and North Avenue, among others.
 - c. **Infrastructure and Interventions:** Most of the locations that residents called out as unsafe include streets or highways that are very wide, allowing for high-speed traffic and other dangerous driving behaviors. There is a community-driven interest across the County in improving road infrastructure and adopting physical interventions, such as lane reductions and protected bike lanes on wider streets along with speed humps and traffic circles on smaller streets, to create safer and more accessible transportation options.
 - d. **Personal Travel Habits:** There is a growing recognition of the benefits of public transportation and the need for infrastructure improvements to support alternative modes of travel. Many residents choose active modes of travel, such as walking or biking, only when they are convenient and safe. Even when choosing to drive, Milwaukee County residents often take different routes to avoid dangerous roads, or take other precautions such as waiting longer at intersections or adopting more defensive driving behaviors.

The Phase 1 engagement and analysis will culminate in a Transportation Safety Assessment for Milwaukee County which will include a deeper recap of our Safe Streets Roadshow public engagement meetings, synthesis of public feedback from those meetings, and a detailed analysis of the last five years of countywide crash data.

Phase 2 of this project will begin in early 2024 with the development of a countywide Safe Streets Action Plan and an Action Plan for each participating municipality. The engagement and analysis findings from Phase 1 will lay the groundwork for these action plans in Phase 2.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity.
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities.
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

RECOMMENDATION

The Department of Transportation recommends that the County Board receive this item and place it on file.

FISCAL EFFECT

There is no fiscal effect.

TERMS (If applicable)

N/A

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation
Jeff Sponcia, Transportation Program Planning Manager, Department of Transportation

PREPARED BY:

Aaron Gatdula, Senior Associate, MUSE Community + Design
Jeff Sponcia, Transportation Program Planning Manager, Department of Transportation

APPROVED BY:



Donna Brown-Martin
Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

ATTACHMENTS:

PowerPoint

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk