



Safety BPAC Subcommittee
June 17, 2020 9:30am to 10:30am
Online Meeting

Attendees:

State

Jennifer Buison, NJ Transit
William A. Feeney, NJ Transit
Will Yarzab, NJTPA
Aashna Jain, VTC
Deja Dennis, VTC
James Sinclair, VTC
Jiajia Jiayu Zhou, VTC
Lisa Cintron, VTC
Maxim Gladkiy, VTC

Non-Profit

Arnold Anderson, NJBWC

Private

Matt Carmody, AKRF

Summary:

Meeting began with introductions, and the floor was opened to update the group on occurrences or lingering tasks since the last meeting in December.

First Order:

The group responded to feedback about BPAC engagement and how it could be improved, as well as opportunities to expand the scope and membership of the Safety Subcommittee.

Second Order:

Subcommittee Chair Jennifer Buison shifted the focus to the pandemic and its impact on bicycle and pedestrian safety, as well as ongoing developments in research and safety recommendations. The group decided to develop a document compiling safety-related information for the DOT and anyone else in need of basic safety advice.

Third Order:

The group discussed potential municipal guideline development and inviting a respected researcher to the team.



Long Notes:

Jennifer Buison acknowledged member feedback from BPAC focus group discussions about making future sessions more engaging, including the proposal to combine BPAC with other bicycle and pedestrian groups, especially given that several BPAC members are also involved with other organizations. She enquired about the group's thoughts on what Safety should look like and encompass in the future, and if they would like it to cover a topic that is not yet included, for instance, public health.

Andy Anderson agreed that an all-encompassing bicycle and pedestrian group containing more specific subgroups would be useful, and suggested that this group should include public health, and driver, pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

Andy raised the issue of several BPAC members being unable to advocate or lobby for legislations, as well as BPAC itself (as an NJDOT advisory group) being unable to lobby or take political positions. He proposed a separate subcommittee that can support lobbyists who have a voice in legislation. Jennifer agreed that this is necessary but was unsure if BPAC could accommodate these functions. While the Legislative group is an advocacy platform, she was unsure about whether they would be more effective working independently or through BPAC.

Transitioning the focus to Safety, Jennifer asked who the group could invite as a public health expert to which Will Yarzab advised on contacting the State Department of Health and Division of Highway Traffic Safety, as they could be helpful for conversations on congestion effects and other health impacts. Lisa Cintron added that Yvonne Mikalopas, a new executive council member who will be introduced today is from the Department of Health. Jennifer said that she will reach out to her to introduce the Safety Subcommittee and extend an invitation; in case she is unavailable, Andy suggested asking if she would want to assign someone else to the group.

William Feeney inquired more on the topic of BPAC's not being engaging enough, and Jennifer explained that attendance at BPAC has declined over the years, members have left to join other groups and that BPAC is not as useful to the Department of Transportation as they would like to be. Lisa added that BPAC has been losing steam because of these reasons, and has also lost some of its former proactivity. Examples of these similar other groups include Safe Routes to School, Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety Coalition and Pedestrian Injury Prevention Partnership.

Andy mentioned that a benefit of BPAC's size was being able to connect with people facing similar issues statewide. He stated that it is important to persuade smaller groups whose mission statements and objectives align with and would add to BPAC. He then asked whether Rutgers' commuter groups should be engaged in future conversations, citing Montclair State University's student-run commuter program and platform for discussing issues (e.g., safe parking). Jennifer agreed that Rutgers' commuters should indeed be included.



Aashna Jain mentioned including personal safety and CPTED within the subcommittee's scope, and Will added that NJTPA is currently working on CPTED training with a few communities, including Newark and Paterson.

Jennifer proposed assembling a running list of state bicycle and pedestrian groups, and asked if anyone had other ideas for engaging with existing groups or developing future groups.

The conversation progressed to COVID-19, and Jennifer talked about gathering information about safety and risks of exposure for bicyclists and pedestrians during the pandemic, especially compared with the risks faced by motorists and public transit users. While there is currently no peer-reviewed research, she referenced Vox articles discussing a Dutch city that debunked the myth that walking or bicycling increased risk of exposure. Another article stated that the better air circulation outside reduced risk of transmission. Although the World Health Organization (WHO) is currently conducting research on these topics, nothing has been peer-reviewed. This raised the question of whether guidance and safety recommendations should be provided based on the materials available. Andy confirmed that due to the constant changes and updates in research and information, the only things we currently know are that risk of exposure is lower in outdoor spaces, and that the best safety practices are mask-wearing and social distancing. He added that the safety implications of an individual/family ride versus other group rides are very different. Jennifer responded that any guidance available would be helpful, and suggested developing a document compiling information for the DOT and anyone else in need of basic safety advice.

William suggested creating guidelines for municipalities on creating safer environments; Jennifer agreed, recommending that these guidelines could mention the documented rise in speeding due to less automobile traffic, which could help bicyclist and pedestrian awareness on the road. Andy discussed how factors such as absent sidewalks, a need for social distancing, exercising and poor bicyclist/pedestrian visibility had all contributed to an increase in crashes during the stay-at-home order. He further highlighted how designated walking/biking areas and information on what bicyclists/pedestrians should wear to maintain visibility could improve roadway safety and reduce crashes. Will confirmed the importance of this message, mentioning a South Orange meeting he and Lisa Lee from EZ Ride attended on bicycle and pedestrian safety. The meeting reviewed details such as helmet safety and which side of the street to walk on in the absence of a sidewalk.

Jennifer summarized these topics into categories - infrastructural practices and tactical training for road users – and added that the Safety Subcommittee should do both.

Lastly, Will brought up his recent interview by Dr. Kelcie Ralph, an assistant professor of transportation planning from Rutgers University who has extensive experience in bicycle and pedestrian safety. He suggested reaching out to her to participate in the group to which Jennifer asserted that she will extend an invitation.



Meeting closed.