

THE BENCHMARKING PROJECT

‘Does It Work?’

*State Department of Transportation
Project Assessment*

Bill Wilkinson and Bob Chauncey

National Center for Bicycling & Walking
1506 21st Street NW, Washington, DC 20036
www.bikewalk.org

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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR BICYCLING & WALKING

The National Center for Bicycling & Walking (NCBW) is a national, nonprofit organization established in 1977. Our mission is to make communities bicycle-friendly and walkable. In 2001, the NCBW was awarded a multi-year grant by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to provide technical assistance to communities, advocates, and professionals working to create more activity-friendly communities. This project is called the Active Living Resource Center (ALRC). Other ALRC activities include: a comprehensive web site providing technical assistance to create active communities, public agency policy analysis, the biennial Pro Walk/Pro Bike conference, Walkable Community Workshops and other training services, and our bi-weekly newsletter, *CenterLines*.

And, as it has done for more than 25 years, the NCBW continues to offer consulting on long-range planning, policy development, public involvement, route selection, planning and design guidelines for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, training programs for public health and transportation professionals, economic development and tourism planning and analysis, and organizing and managing workshops and conferences.

Finally, the NCBW works with local, state, and national bicycle, pedestrian, and transportation professionals and advocates to improve government policies, programs, and practices to better support bicycle-friendly and walkable communities.

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PREFACE

There is a simple logic to it all:

The public health people look at the data and tell us that our sedentary ways are making us sick (well, they actually put it a bit more elegantly, but that's the bottom line), and they conclude that we have got to be active, every one of us, every day.

Then, they look around and conclude that the best way for most of us to be active is to walk or bicycle.

Virtually all bicycling and most walking takes place in public space, along the streets and highways, and in park and recreation areas.

Not all of these areas are now well-suited for bicycling and walking.

This situation will only improve with the full, active participation of the various public agencies responsible for these areas (and the other elements of our community such as schools, planning, safety, etc.) to remove the barriers and expand the opportunities to walk and bicycle.

One of the most critical elements of community design as it affects bicycling and walking is the system of streets and highways, so we've got to have the transportation and public works agencies fully onboard "with the program."

What do they need to do? For a start, they need to develop and implement good bicycle and pedestrian plans, they need to provide good accommodations for bicycling and walking, and they need to be pro-active in facilitating kids walking and bicycling to school.

THE BENCHMARKING PROJECT

The National Center for Bicycling & Walking has developed *The Benchmarking Project* to profile and assess the plans, policies, program activities, and projects of various agencies and levels of government as they relate to bicycling and walking. The objectives for this project are to help define the kinds of plans, policies, and programs needed to foster the development of bicycle-friendly and walkable communities (the benchmarks); to document the current practices of public agencies with respect to these benchmarks (status); to assess actual performance; and to assist both advocates and the agencies themselves to focus attention on steps needed to improve the outcomes. This report and program – *Does It Work?* – is the third in the series. Future studies will focus on local agencies, other state agencies, and other program areas of the State DOTs.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2003, the National Center for Bicycling & Walking (NCBW) issued the first report in our Benchmarking Project, titled, *Are We There Yet?* It documented the current bicycle and pedestrian-related plans and policies of State departments of transportation (DOT), and compared them to various benchmarks taken from Federal and national guidelines. The goal of **The Benchmarking Project** is to ensure that the plans, policies, and performance of public agencies accommodate and encourage bicycling and walking.

The information we reported for each State DOT was provided by the agency itself. Since we published the report, we have received comments from people in many different states raising questions about their State DOT's policies and practices: they suggest that a gap exists – at least in some states – between stated policy and outcomes. They argue that some recent State DOT highway projects do not include adequate (if any) accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians, despite the State DOT having stated that their policy is to do so.

It is time to look at specific projects and assess if bicyclists and pedestrians have been accommodated, and, if not, why not. There is a need to know where and to what extent bicycles and pedestrians are not yet being accommodated. With this information in hand, the focus can move to understanding if this is the case, why it happened and to determine what to do differently to ensure, instead, that the desired outcomes are achieved: *appropriate accommodations for bicycling and walking are included in all State DOT highway projects.*

Does It Work? State DOT Project Assessment, is intended to provide state residents – and State DOTs – a process and tools with which to assess what an agency has actually done to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists in recent state highway projects. The process involves a series of steps or activities to identify and select projects, to conduct a post-construction review and assessment, to meet with appropriate State DOT staff to review the findings, and to identify and implement actions to improve performance, as needed. The objective is to improve both the policies and practices of the State DOTs to better accommodate people who choose to bicycle or walk.

The NCBW is encouraging advocates and agency professionals in each state to form a “assessment team” to organize and conduct the project assessments, and to then meet with their State DOT officials to review their findings. Together, and only together, we can create active communities where everyone can walk and/or bicycle.

Good luck to all, and please let us know, *does it work?*

ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment process consists of the following steps:

- 1) Bike-ped advocates, State DOT bike-ped coordinators, members of the general public, senior citizen groups, public health officials, educators, representatives from law enforcement, and other community members interested in walking and bicycling will create statewide assessment teams.
- 2) Team leaders will contact us with the names of the team organizers. This will help prevent different teams from forming within a state.
- 3) Assessment teams will request the list of State DOT projects completed over the previous calendar or fiscal year. Teams will need to seek advice from their State DOT bike-ped coordinator on what specific information to request, and from whom to request it. In most cases, the State DOT bike-ped coordinator can obtain this information directly.
- 4) After receiving this list, teams will select a sample of projects to assess. Teams should keep in mind that some State DOTs are responsible for most road miles in their state, while other State DOTs are responsible only for major highways. This means that some assessment teams can sample projects from quiet two-lane residential streets to busy limited access highways, while other teams will have a more restricted range of road projects to assess. In selecting a sample of projects, teams should consider reviewing both new and reconstruction projects on as broad a range of roads as possible; from simple re-striping projects to major road realignments; and in urban, suburban, and rural areas. We suggest teams assess no fewer than 10 projects. The number of projects assessed will depend on team size, the geographic distance from team members to project sites, the time constraints of members, and similar variables.

- 5) Once teams have identified the projects they will assess, they will request some basic information about each project from the bike-ped coordinator. (Use the Project Data Sheet below.)

- 6) Using the assessment checklist, teams will then assess these projects for the adequacy of the bike-ped accommodations. (See Notes On Conducting Field Assessments below.) On those projects without bike-ped accommodations, teams will assess the rationale for excluding them. We recommend using the USDOT design guidance on this issue [see: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/Design.htm>].
To paraphrase, bike-ped accommodations will be included in all projects, unless: bicyclists and/or pedestrians are not permitted on the roadway, there is a clear absence of need, or the cost of providing bike-ped accommodations would clearly be prohibitive.

- 7) Teams will share these assessments with State DOT representatives, address any concerns together, and agree on future actions to continue to improve bike-ped accommodations.

- 8) Teams may then forward a summary of their efforts to the NCBW for posting on our web site. This summary will include:
 - The completed checklists;
 - Overall team perceptions of the adequacy of bike-ped accommodations;
 - In the absence of bike-ped accommodations in sampled projects, an assessment of the rationale for excluding them; and
 - An outline of future actions to be taken to continue to improve the support offered to bicycling and walking.

NOTES ON CONDUCTING THE FIELD ASSESSMENT

- ✓ We designed this checklist to provide a quick and simple way for members of the general public to assess the basic characteristics of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.
- ✓ We recommend teams of two reviewers complete the checklist together. This should improve the objectivity of responses.
- ✓ We recommend reviewers discuss all items receiving a “no” response with their State DOT bike-ped coordinator, and other State DOT staff as necessary.
- ✓ It is important that evaluators walk the entire length of the pedestrian accommodation, and bike the entire length of the bicycle accommodation, if possible. Much is missed by trying to conduct these evaluations from the perspective of a motor vehicle driver or passenger.
- ✓ Note that all questions refer to the entire length of the project. For example, a sidewalk that is 5’ in some areas, but less than that in others would require an entry in the “comments” section for question 2 under “Pedestrian Accommodation”, noting the variability of sidewalk width.
- ✓ The last three questions in each accommodation category call for subjective responses by the assessors. This provides additional opportunities for assessors and State DOT staff to discuss the characteristics of these accommodations.
- ✓ We leave it to the assessors and the State DOT staff to determine whether any given accommodation should be considered satisfactory. We would suggest, however, that multiple “no” responses indicates the presence of significant concerns that need to be addressed before the accommodation can be considered safe and convenient for its potential users.

Project Datasheet

Location:

Name or number of road: _____

Names or numbers of boundary roads: _____

Project information to be obtained from your State DOT bike-ped coordinator before visiting the site:

1. Type of project:

Road, new _____

Road, resurfacing _____

Bridge _____

Road, rebuild _____

Intersection _____

Other _____

2. The State DOT has classified the road as:

Arterial _____

Collector _____

Local _____

Urban/Suburban _____

Rural _____

3. What is the average daily traffic count? _____

4. What is the posted speed limit? _____

If multiple speed limits, note boundaries of each: _____

5. How many lanes are in each direction? _____

6. How wide are the lanes? _____

If two or more lanes in each direction, how wide are the **inside** lanes? _____

If two or more lanes in each direction, how wide are the **outside** lanes? _____

7. Have bicycle accommodations been included in this project? If no, why not?

8. Have pedestrian accommodations been included in this project? If no, why not?

Pedestrian Accommodation Checklist

Project: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Names of assessors: _____

1. Are there sidewalks:

On both sides of the road? _____ On one side of the road? _____
There are no sidewalks. _____ Does not apply _____

Comments: _____

2. Are the sidewalks:

5' wide or wider? _____
Less than 5' wide? _____
Does not apply _____

Comments: _____

3. Are the sidewalks free from poles, shrubbery, signs or other impediments?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

4. Are the sidewalks in this project connected with existing sidewalks?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

5. Are the sidewalks continuous throughout the project length?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

6. Are there marked crosswalks at most schools, parks, shopping areas, and other likely destinations?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

7. For crosswalks spanning 4 or more lanes (including turning lanes), have the crossing distances been minimized by curb “bulb-outs” (wider curbs) or safety zones at the middle of the crossing?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

8. Are pedestrian crossing signals provided at each crosswalk?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

9. Are streetlights present at most crosswalks?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

10. Are the intersections free from obstructions that block pedestrians’ views when trying to cross, such as parked cars, trees, or shrubbery?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

11. Have the sidewalks and crosswalks been designed to address the basic needs of physically handicapped users in the following areas:

a. Is there at least 1 curb cut per corner at intersections?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

b. Are the curb cuts flush with the street surface (1/4” tolerance)?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

c. If pedestrian pushbuttons are present at signaled crossings, are they accessible (3.5’ – 4’ high)?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

12. Are there signs warning drivers of the presence of pedestrians?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

13. Are there features not previously addressed that, in your opinion, should be improved?

Yes _____ No _____
If yes, what are they? _____

14. Are there features not previously addressed that, in your opinion, should be copied in other pedestrian facilities?

Yes _____ No _____
If yes, what are they? _____

15. Are there any other comments or concerns you care to add? _____

Bicycle Accommodation Checklist

Project: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Names of assessors: _____

1a. Is there is a **marked** bike lane?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

If yes, is it:

5' wide or wider, excluding the gutter pan? _____

Less than 5' wide, excluding the gutter pan? _____

Does not apply _____

Comments _____

1b. Is there is an **unmarked** bike lane (wide shoulder delineated by a stripe)?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

If yes, is it:

5' wide or wider, excluding the gutter pan? _____

Less than 5' wide, excluding the gutter pan? _____

Does not apply _____

Comments _____

1c. Is there is a **wide curb lane only** (no striping to separate lane from shoulder)?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____

If there is a wide curb lane only, please answer question (a) or (b), as appropriate. Note: You should already have received this information from your State DOT. See question 6 under "Project information".

- (a) **If the road has two or more lanes in each direction**, is the outside lane 5' wide or wider than the inside lane, excluding the gutter pan? _____
Less than 5' wider than the inside lane, excluding the gutter pan? _____
Does not apply _____
Comments _____

(b) **If the road has only one lane in each direction**, is each lane

Less than 10' wide? _____ 10' to 12' wide? _____
12' to 15' wide? _____ More than 15' wide? _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

2. Is the presence of parked cars reduce the width of the marked or unmarked bike lane to less than 5' wide?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

3. Are there rumble strips in the unmarked bike lane, wide curb lane, or shoulder that discourage bicycle use?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

4. Are there signs warning drivers of the presence of bicyclists?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

5. Are bicycle-safe grates used in the accommodation?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

6. Are manhole covers flush with the road surface?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

7. Is the road surface smooth to the edge of the roadway or shoulder?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

8a. If the bike accommodation crosses railroad tracks, are the tracks perpendicular, or close to perpendicular, to the bike accommodation?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

8b. Is the crossing flush with the road surface?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

9. If the road project continues onto a bridge, does the bike accommodation end or become narrower over the bridge?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

10. Is the bike accommodation connected with other bike accommodations (bike lanes, trails, trail heads/parking areas)?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ Comments _____

11. Are there features not previously addressed that, in your opinion, should be improved?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ If yes, what are they? _____

12. Are there features not previously addressed that, in your opinion, should be copied in other bike facilities?

Yes _____ No _____
Does not apply _____ If yes, what are they? _____

13. Are there any other comments or concerns you care to add? _____

