

To: City of Iowa City

From: Wonderful Westside Neighborhood Association

Date: 5/23/2024

Subject: Traffic Safety in the Wonderful Westside Neighborhood

Introduction

The Wonderful Westside Neighborhood in Iowa City is bounded by Melrose Avenue to the north, Mormon Trek Boulevard to the east, and Westwinds Drive on the west and south border. The neighborhood encompasses Pheasant Ridge apartments. The neighborhood is one of the most diverse in Iowa City, home to many immigrant families, Black and African American residents, students, renters, owners, and more. Additionally, the neighborhood has a high proportion of children.

The Wonderful Westside Neighborhood Association was established in 2022, which connects and empowers residents to reach common goals. Early neighborhood association meetings focused on visioning and neighborhood priorities. Traffic safety emerged as one of the primary concerns among many residents, particularly due to the large number of children living in the neighborhood. In collaboration with the University of Iowa, residents and students worked to address these concerns. One strategy involved an evaluation of traffic safety through observations of vehicle and pedestrian behavior and an assessment of the built environment. This memo shares outcomes from the study. Findings validate concerns among parents and neighborhood leaders, showing potentially dangerous safety behaviors and demonstrating a need to improve pedestrian safety infrastructure. We seek assistance from the City of Iowa City to make improvements on public sidewalks and roadways to improve traffic safety.

Summary of Findings

The traffic study revealed traffic-related safety concerns, especially during peak traffic hours. This is largely a result of the use of Westwinds Drive, a neighborhood road, as a cut-through street during high traffic periods nearby on Melrose Avenue and Mormon Trek Boulevard. With a high number of vehicles passing through and with a substantial number of vehicles speeding, this creates safety risks for residents of the neighborhood.

Additionally, pedestrian activity combined with the neighborhood's topography and existing pedestrian infrastructure increases the risk of hazards. In these peak hours, large numbers of children are around and crossing neighborhood streets. With minimal pedestrian infrastructure, road crossings did not generally occur at designated points, and with high volumes of vehicles cutting through, in addition to the lack of visibility because of the neighborhood's topography, current roadway conditions pose potential risks to residents, especially children.

Study Methodology

Traffic observations were conducted by a team of four University of Iowa students working in collaboration with the Wonderful Westside Neighborhood over a four-week time frame. Following discussions with the residents of the neighborhood and learning about key intersections, the team decided which locations to observe. The study included six traffic counts at three key intersections during morning, after-school, and evening peaks. Here is a detailed breakdown of the methodology:

- 1. Data Collection Schedule:**
 - a. Morning Peak (7-9 AM): At the intersection of Westwinds Drive and Roberts Road, we recorded traffic during the morning rush.
 - b. After School Peak (3-5 PM): Observations were made at the intersection of Roberts Road and Bartelt Road when school was dismissed.
 - c. Evening Peak (5-7 PM): We returned to the intersection of Westwinds Drive and Roberts Road to capture the evening commute.
- 2. Counting Process:** Each observer was assigned a specific time frame to complete the data collection. During the time frame, the observer counted vehicles, noted pedestrian movements, and identified instances of speeding.
- 3. Duration:** For each peak time the counts were conducted over a continuous two-hour period to ensure consistency and accuracy.
- 4. Speed Monitoring:** Assessment of speeding was through visual judgement as speed monitoring equipment was not available.
- 5. Pedestrian Behavior:** Special attention was given to pedestrian activity, particularly children crossing the roads, to assess the risk factors involved.
- 6. Built Environment:** The team made observations of the physical infrastructure, to assess what areas are lacking in contribution to pedestrian safety.

Findings

- 1. Observations indicate a high volume of vehicle traffic and pedestrian movement, especially during the times children are likely to be crossing the streets. The two intersections observed have a high volume of pedestrian traffic, particularly that of school-age children, due to the proximity to West High School and bus stops near the intersections that were observed for the study.**

The intersection of Westwinds Drive and Roberts Road was observed to have a significantly higher average of vehicles passing through per hour in comparison to the intersection of Bartelt Road and Roberts Road, while the latter saw a significantly higher average of pedestrians crossing through the intersection. However, with an Iowa City bus stop along with a school bus stop and an informal path to West High School, Westwinds Drive was observed to have frequent pedestrian crossings as well.

With a lack of pedestrian infrastructure, children and high school students were frequently seen running across Westwinds Drive, often to get to the bus stop. The primary bus stop in the neighborhood is near the Bartelt Road and Roberts Road intersection, which resulted in a high volume of children running across the road in all directions when dropped off after school. There were two primary waves of school buses dropping off children, with then general pedestrian activity before and after these times as well, with children being a large proportion of the crossings here.

Also, the timing of one 7–9 am and one 5-7 pm observation period resulted in less pedestrian traffic, potentially skewing the data lower. During a 7-9 am observation, there was heavy snow, and many children were dropped off by their parents at the bus stop. A 5-7 pm observation was conducted during Eid-al-Fitr, so many families were observed leaving the neighborhood before the observation period, resulting in less pedestrians than in other observation periods.

Intersection	Observation Time	# of Observations	Average Vehicles per Hour	Estimated # of Speeders per Hour	Average # Pedestrians per Hour
Westwinds Drive & Roberts Road	7 am – 9 am	6	88	7	20
Westwinds Drive & Roberts Road	5 pm – 7 pm	4	96	8	13
Roberts Road & Bartelt Road	3 pm – 5 pm	6	61	< 1	46

Table 1: Results of Traffic Study

2. The intersection of Westwinds Drive and Roberts Road saw a frequent number of vehicles speeding, while Bartelt and Roberts Road was observed to have minimal speeding.

Table 1 presents the average number of speeders per hour, in which Westwinds Drive saw an average of 7 vehicles speeding per hour from 7 am- 9 am, and 8 speeders on average per hour from 5 pm – 7 pm.

The observed speeding was exclusively from cars heading north and southbound on Westwinds Drive, with a total of 13 vehicles within the observation periods speeding excessively, which was based on visual observation of how fast a vehicle was going above the posted 25 MPH limit. For example, an SUV was observed going at least 35 MPH and had to break swiftly due to a car going the speed limit turning left onto Roberts Road. We did not observe any incident that resulted in a crash or a direct danger to pedestrians during our

observation period, but like the example above, there were a few incidents that came close to occurring due to excessive speeds on the road.

To further highlight this, two children were walking down the sidewalk dribbling a soccer ball, which then rolled onto Westwinds Drive. The children ran and retrieved the ball, and seconds later a vehicle drove through at an observed 35 MPH or higher speed, which was noted as being a close call.

Higher averages of speeding on Westwinds Drive specifically, combined with high levels of children crossing the roadway gave way to potentially dangerous scenarios for pedestrian safety.

3. We observed inadequate pedestrian infrastructure throughout the neighborhood. There are currently no marked crosswalks in the neighborhood which, when considering the high pedestrian crossing volume in the neighborhood, limits safe crossing options.

This provides explanation to the observed trends of children running across roadways, as there are limited designated crossing points. The crossing points that do exist have inconsistencies. For example, there were multiple sidewalks throughout the neighborhood that lead to the street, such as one nearby to the playground. However, these sidewalks were often lacking curb cuts, or had a curb cut on one side of the road but not the other, which resulted in unclear pedestrian crossing points. In addition to this, there are few pedestrian ramps, apart from two placed on either side of Roberts Road in the intersection with Westwinds Drive. The inclusion of curb cuts with pedestrian ramps would help ensure ADA accessibility, while simultaneously providing noticeable locations for pedestrians to cross the road safely in the neighborhood. With current inconsistencies of curb cuts and pedestrian ramps throughout the neighborhood though, pedestrian infrastructure is not at a level that ensures accessible and safe crossing of roadways.

4. The layout of the neighborhood, with its steep grades and lack of signage, creates blind spots and lack of attention from drivers which increase the risk for potential conflicts.

Due to the topography of the neighborhood, multiple sections of roadways with steep grades limit visibility, including segments of Westwinds Drive and Roberts Road. Signage encouraging safe driving could help to mitigate potential risks. 25 MPH signs are present throughout the neighborhood, but there are no signs such as a “No Thru Traffic” or pedestrian crossing signs that would help reduce risk. Although physical elements such as hilly and curved roads cannot be mended, including signs that warn drivers to be cautious could help limit the risks associated with the neighborhood's physical layout.

Recommendations:

Two maps are attached to help illustrate the areas of concern and opportunities for improvement, also described below:

1. **Crosswalk Improvements:** A mix of raised and normal crosswalks should be implemented throughout to provide designated safe crossing areas for residents, while also serving as a traffic-calming measure.
 - a. In the intersection of Westwinds Drive and Roberts Road, raised crosswalks should be installed, one on each side of Roberts Road crossing Westwinds Drive, and across Roberts Road. These will help control the excessive speeding on Westwinds Drive, while providing safe crossing, especially when considering the volume of children crossing at this point.
 - b. Crosswalks should also be added adjacent to the playground, to provide a safe crossing point for children, along with one crossing the intersection of Bartelt and Roberts Road for a similar purpose.
 - c. A crosswalk should be added crossing Roberts Road in front of the Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center, as this is an area of high pedestrian traffic. Sidewalk connections may also be necessary. Ideally, this crosswalk would be wide, and have creative placemaking elements and reflectiveness.
2. **Enhanced Signage:** Increasing the number and visibility of signs can help alert drivers of pedestrian crossings, enforce speed limits, and improve intersections.
 - a. “No Thru Traffic” signs placed at the North and South entrances to the neighborhood on Westwinds Drive to discourage through-traffic.
 - b. “Slow - Children At Play” signs should also be added at the various entrances to the neighborhood, to help make drivers aware of the presence of children in the neighborhood.
 - c. Changing the “Yield” sign on Robert Road where it meets Westwinds Drive to a “Stop” sign would reduce the risk of vehicle and pedestrian conflicts at that intersection.
 - d. “No Parking Between Signs” signs should be placed around designated areas for pedestrians to cross, such as existing sidewalks leading towards the street. In particular, these signs should be placed near the sidewalk that meets the middle of Bartelt Road near the playground, where currently children have been observed darting between parked vehicles to cross the street. The signage would help increase visibility of children for drivers.
 - e. Additionally, pedestrian crossing signs should be placed near crosswalks to keep drivers alert, and to allow for safe crossings.

- 3. Pedestrian Infrastructure Improvement:** Currently, pedestrian infrastructure is lacking throughout the neighborhood, with inconsistent curb cuts and pedestrian ramps present. Increasing the accessibility of sidewalks throughout the neighborhood by introducing curb cuts, in addition to pedestrian ramps would provide more access to sidewalk crossings, through ADA accessibility, while also creating clearer crossing areas with defined curb cuts at designated crossing zones.
- 4.** Combined with painted crosswalks, sidewalk improvements would help provide safer pedestrian infrastructure overall and reduce the potential for vehicle and pedestrian conflicts.

Conclusion

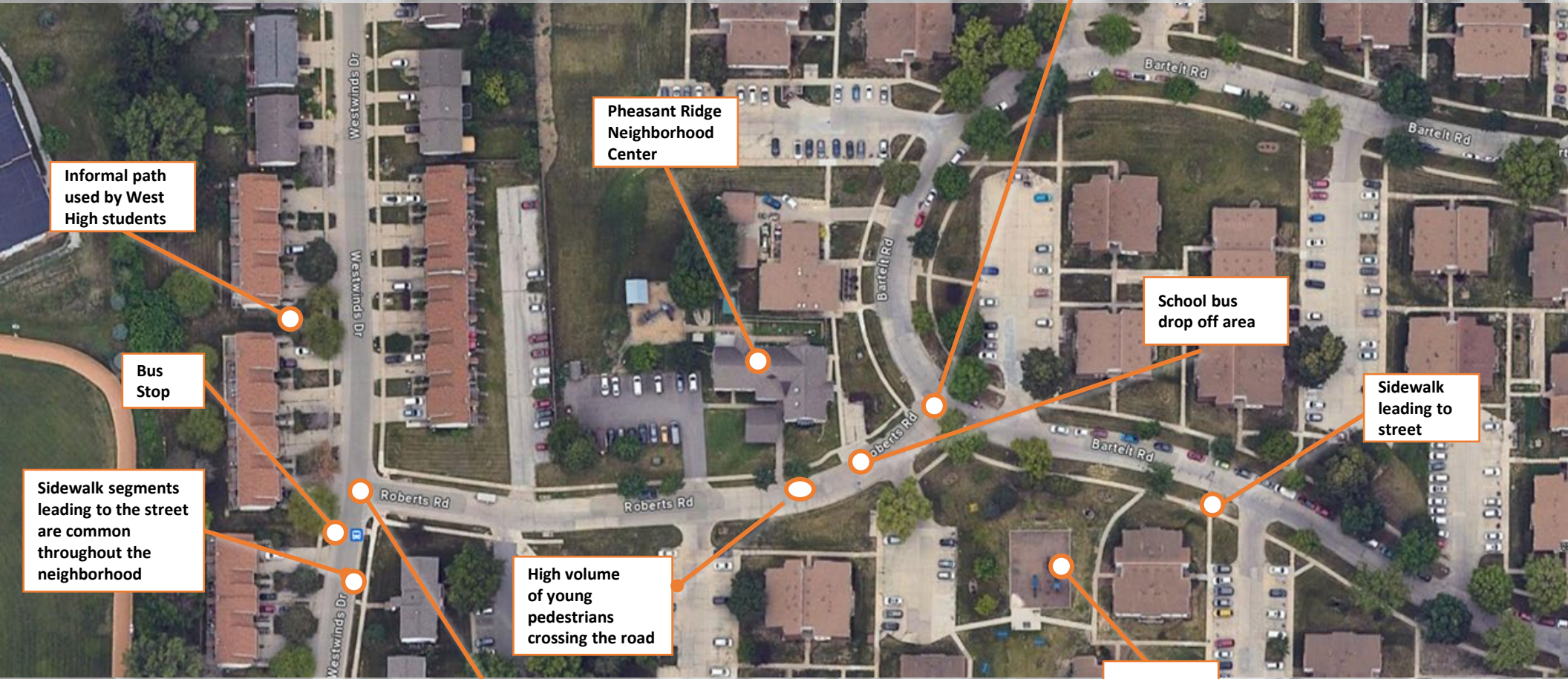
The traffic study demonstrates the need for immediate action to address the safety concerns in the Wonderful Westside Neighborhood. Traffic safety improvements on the public sidewalks and roadways requires collaboration with the City of Iowa City. We believe that the proposed measures will significantly contribute to creating a safer environment for neighborhood families and visitors.

Correspondence

Questions and correspondence can be directed to representatives of the Wonderful Westside Neighborhood Association by email: mohamed.joreya@kirkwood.edu, saraharoun1975@gmail.com, and travis-kraus@uiowa.edu.

Intersection: Roberts Road and Bartelt Road

- › Observations made from 3 pm – 5 pm
- › No crosswalks
- › Primary school bus drop off point
- › Large volume of pedestrians
- › Unsafe crossings by a large number of young pedestrians



Pheasant Ridge Neighborhood Center

Informal path used by West High students

Bus Stop

Sidewalk segments leading to the street are common throughout the neighborhood

High volume of young pedestrians crossing the road

Playground

School bus drop off area

Sidewalk leading to street

Intersection: Westwinds Drive and Roberts Road

- › Observations made at 7-9am and 5-7pm
- › High volume of traffic and pedestrians
- › Unsafe crossing behaviors by young pedestrians
- › Common speeding violations on Westwinds Dr.
- › No crosswalks

"No Thru Traffic" sign



Raised crosswalks and pedestrian signage, including Stop sign on Roberts Road heading west.



"No Parking Between Signs" sign placed near the sidewalk leading towards the street.



"Slow Children At Play" sign at all entrances to the neighborhood.



Address inconsistent curb cuts at driveways to ensure ADA accessibility



Crosswalks. This likely requires sidewalk improvements on the southside of Roberts Rd. Ideally this busy spot would feature a wide crossing with creative placemaking elements and reflective crosswalks.



"No Thru Traffic" sign



Crosswalks

