Source: Getty Images

Tennessee's Approach to Transportation Safety Planning

Project Background

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Offices of Safety and Planning, in coordination with FHWA Division Offices and several Departments of Transportation (DOT), conducted a series of workshops to assist state DOTs, regional planning organizations, and local representatives in integrating safety into the transportation planning process. The purpose of these events was to discuss the basic elements of transportation planning and strategies to integrate safety into this process; learn about national and state-specific tools and resources; share practices and identify challenges; and identify key takeaways (strategies) that organizations could use to make improvements and help achieve a zero deaths goal. The effort involved a pre-workshop webinar to identify each state's safety planning priorities, workshops, follow-up technical assistance webinars, and finally a peer exchange with all the participating states to share successful practices among the states and broaden collaboration.

In Tennessee, the Department of Transportation (TDOT) was joined by nearly 50 safety stakeholders from the DOT, the state highway safety office, and regional planning organizations at a workshop in February 2020 to learn how to improve safety through Tennessee's transportation planning process. The effort, sponsored by FHWA and hosted by the FHWA Tennessee Division Office, involved a pre-workshop webinar, an in-person workshop, and a follow-up technical assistance webinar.

Tennessee's Transportation Safety Planning Highlights

The Transportation Safety Planning Workshop helped focus attention on the safety planning work that is already happening in Tennessee. This gave participants information about tools being successfully implemented in their state, including the following:

TENNESSEE HIGHWAY SAFETY OFFICE
helping you ARRIVE

Source: Tennessee Highway Safety Office

- There are available safety data resources at www.tntrafficsafety.org including crash data dashboards, daily fatality reports, fatal crash locations, trend analysis, and statistics by county. Tennessee's Integrated Traffic Analysis Network (TITAN) includes specific data on crashes including location, environment, roadway, factors, severity, and demographics.
- A new software, TITAN 2.0, is being used to improve data quality including determining if police departments are having issues with road names or location data, resulting in a loss of data. All crash reports must now be submitted electronically as required by a law passed in January of 2015. Officer training on reporting crashes has improved the crash data.
- An interactive bicycle and pedestrian crash web portal was created by the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) that details all bicycle and pedestrian crashes, provides heat maps, and includes information on crash factors. This helps inform when and where safety projects are undertaken. The Pedestrian Road Safety Initiative also uses Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funds for pedestrian safety projects.
- The scoring of transportation projects by the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency (RPA) uses crash analysis to develop scores for prioritizing and selecting projects. The effort also includes countermeasures to address Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) safety emphasis areas including where improvements are needed to address bicycle and pedestrian crashes.

Tennessee's Notable Practices in Transportation Safety Planning

Prioritizing Pedestrian Safety

TDOT recognized that it needed an approach to improve safety and access for people walking, biking, and taking transit. One of its first actions was to publish a new Multimodal Project Scoping Manual to help decide priorities and ways to include Complete Street elements on projects. TDOT also recognized that just repaving a road could be a missed opportunity and urged improving conditions for people walking and biking be part of resurfacing projects. The Department also created tools to prioritize pedestrian needs through a Pedestrian Safety Corridor that helps with evaluating and prioritizing projects. The evaluation and prioritization are based on the frequency of pedestrian and bicycle crashes, equity in terms of the location in relation to populations that may have difficulty accessing resources, demand in areas with the potential for higher pedestrian activity, and an evaluation of the road's existing physical and operational characteristics.

Communicating the Safety Story

WalknBike Nashville engaged in an active public engagement process to obtain participation and feedback on improvements for walking and bicycling in the city that were included in the WalknBike Plan. The public engagement, which occurred over several months, resulted in the creation of a project website: WalknBike Nashville; two open house events; and two surveys that were conducted in the spring and summer. Some unique techniques to communicate safety included the use of interactive maps to see where crashes and near misses were occurring; a Mayor's Transit Triathlon; pop-up events across Davidson County; a social media campaign; and numerous community meetings. The goals for the WalknBike plan were to improve access and equity, network connectivity, and safety. The implementation of Vision Zero to reduce traffic crashes in Nashville was also a result of the plan.

Safety Planning, Implementation, and Awareness

The City of Memphis addressed safety through the implementation of a Pedestrian and School Safety Action Plan that focused on increasing awareness about the safety of children walking to and from school. In addition to increasing pedestrian safety in and around schools, the plan also addressed pedestrian safety in areas close to parks, community centers, and libraries. The development of the plan was conducted by a Transportation Advisory Committee made up of stakeholders and key groups from throughout the city who provided direction and feedback during the planning process. The project team also conducted stakeholder interviews to identify key issues and needs that were incorporated into the plan. The plan utilized a transparent, data-driven prioritization methodology to identify the sidewalks and pedestrian crossings serving schools.

Next Steps for Transportation Safety Planning in Tennessee

Participants in the Tennessee workshop identified several opportunities to pursue in the future. Following is a list of high-level next steps the state is planning on conducting as they work toward greater safety integration into the transportation planning process.

- **Engagement:** Engage safety experts or individuals with planning process knowledge and improve partnerships among government agencies, law enforcement, engineers, planners, etc., on safety planning initiatives.
- **Data:** Develop a data warehouse and a standardized method of processing data and disseminate/share the information with stakeholders.
- **Training:** Provide training on identifying safety issues and needs, network screening and analysis, the project prioritization process, and creating quality crash maps.
- **Project Prioritization:** Develop a template or standardized approach to identify crash locations and incorporate results into project prioritization process and a track, evaluate, and review safety criteria for project prioritization methodologies.