

FINDINGS FROM PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE SAFETY FOCUS GROUPS AT TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Street Coaching for Pedestrians & Cyclists: Putting Laws Into Practice on University Campuses (2024-TTI-G-1YG-0071)



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Introduction

The United States has seen an astonishing increase in pedestrian deaths between 2010 and 2021 (1). Pedestrian deaths increased by 77 percent, while all other traffic fatalities increased 25 percent (2). The Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA) reported that in 2022, 7508 pedestrians were killed in traffic crashes; This is the largest numbers of pedestrian fatalities in four decades (2). Bicycle-related fatalities are also on the rise. In 2022, an estimated 1073 bicyclists were killed on U.S. roadways, which is an 11 percent increase from 2021 (1). Texas also saw a rise in the number of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities. In Texas, pedestrian and bicyclist deaths accounted for one in five of all traffic fatalities in 2022 (3). There were more than 8,000 pedestrian and bicyclist crashes in 2022, resulting in nearly 1800 suspected serious injuries and over 900 deaths (4).

While fatal and serious crashes involving pedestrians and bicyclists are usually reported, less serious and near miss crashes typically are not. People involved in crashes are less likely to report the incident if the crashes resulted in non-serious injuries (5). Underreported crashes are a barrier to making streets safer for bicyclists and pedestrians. Lack of reporting results in lost data that could be used to inform safety stakeholders about contributing factors that lead to unsafe driving, walking or biking behaviors (5). According to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), there is a significant need to understand the occurrence and factors contributing to all crashes/near misses, including less serious incidences that go unreported, to better tailor messaging, education, and enforcement campaigns (6).

Unique factors experienced on university campuses leads to an elevated risk of injury for vulnerable road users. University campuses are unique communities inside their specific regional areas, where multiple modes of transportation interact continuously (7). Consequently, campuses and surrounding areas are saturated with motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Crash risk increases when pedestrians and bicyclists are placed in conflict with motorists (7). Historically, college students often do not observe traffic rules on campus (8). Further, college-age adults often engage in riskier activities such as walking or biking at night and while intoxicated and using handheld technology leading to distracted walking or biking (8). Taken together, these factors contribute to particularly dangerous circumstances for pedestrians and bicyclists on college campuses (8).

Undoubtedly, pedestrian and bicycle safety is a shared responsibility requiring all road users to remain aware of traffic laws and ordinances. Furthermore, all roadway users must obey traffic laws to protect themselves and the public welfare. Unfortunately, common contributing factors to bicycle and pedestrian traffic crashes involve failure to follow traffic laws, the improper use of facilities, and poorly designed infrastructure (9).

Recently, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) conducted two focus group meetings with stakeholders from Texas Southern University (TSU). The meetings and resulting opinion inventories allowed the TTI team to identify traffic law violation trends associated with pedestrian and bicycle crashes/near misses and unsafe behaviors associated with pedestrian and bicycle crashes/near misses. The findings from these two focus groups were also used to inform educational outreach materials and a pedestrian/bicycle safety plan for the TSU campus.

Methods

The TTI project team developed a single protocol that helped to guide participant discussion and the chronicling of qualitative data across both focus group sessions. The protocol included eleven open ended questions that addressed safety concerns of pedestrians and bicyclists who study and work on the TSU campus. Activities and stakeholder approaches that could improve pedestrian and bicycle safety on TSU's campus were also addressed. The interview questions are attached to the end of this document as **Appendix A – Focus Group Questions.**

Recruitment

The TTI project team identified stakeholders who use TSU or nearby roadway systems. These persons included students, faculty, and staff employees. Potential participants were identified through their affiliations with university offices, schools of study, and student organizations. Contact was made with six university offices and service departments, eight colleges and schools of study, and nineteen student groups and organizations. A total of 280 TSU students, faculty, and staff employees were reached via email and asked to participate in the focus group sessions. See **Appendix B – Stakeholders Contacted and Invited to Participate.**

Participants

To participate in focus group activities, the candidate must have been a current student or employee at TSU. Participants were also required to travel upon the university or nearby roadway system regularly and be at least 18 years of age.

The first focus group meeting was conducted on February 1, 2024, and included four participants: three university staff member and one student. The second focus group meeting was conducted on February 13, 2024, and included five participants: four university staff members and one student.

In addition to the participants, four TTI project team members participated in the two focus group sessions. One TTI project team member led the discussion while others captured notes and provided technical support.

Limitations

It should be acknowledged that there are limitations to our findings based upon the responses that were received from focus group participants. The findings should be considered and interpreted based upon the recruitment approach and limitations which include:

- Participant opinions and experiences may be different from those who elected to not participate.
- Participant opinions and experiences may not reflect or be generalizable to their overall profession.
- Participant opinions and perceived challenges may be unique to their county or region.
- Participants may not respond freely in group settings.

Focus Group Findings

To effectively address pedestrian and bicycle safety issues on the TSU campus, it was important to understand the underlying causes of crashes and near misses. A thorough understanding of the factors that contribute to pedestrian and bicyclist crashes and injuries are necessary for developing and applying

the most effective and appropriate combinations of countermeasures. The following sections support the identified trends and issues on the TSU campus which contribute to pedestrian- and bicycle-involved crashes and near miss crashes.

Campus Environment

University campuses are unique communities inside their specific regional areas, where multiple modes of transportation interact continuously (7). While university campuses often have physical layouts and social environments that encourage walking and bicycling, there are also many students and university employees that commute to campus during the week by vehicle (7). Consequently, campuses and surrounding areas are overloaded with motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. This hectic environment poses safety risks to all road users, especially to pedestrians and bicyclists. Furthermore, the location, layout, and infrastructure of university campuses creates specific safety concerns distinctive to each university.

The location of TSU may pose unique safety concerns for traffic safety. TSU is situated in the heart of America's fourth-largest city, Houston (10). TSU is considered an urban campus, nestled in the historic Third Ward of Houston (10). So, not only is there a high volume of students and employees traveling near TSU's campus, but there is also an abundance of Houston residents and visitors who are using nearby roadways. Of the 101 pedestrian- and bicycle-involved crashes on and near the TSU campus (2018-2022), pedestrians and bicyclists over the age of 50 were most frequently involved in crashes, followed by persons between ages 18 to 22 (11). While some of these crash victims may be university employees or students, it is also possible they are not directly affiliated with the university and part of the larger Houston-Third Ward community. The Third Ward community also has many mixed-use spaces, including residential housing, bars and restaurants, and shopping areas. These mixed-use spaces may also contribute to greater traffic in and around the university. A particular concern noted in the focus groups, was for impaired drivers visiting the bar scene near campus and then using proximate university roadway systems. Focus group participants also mentioned a lack of adequate signage and problematic pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure on the roadways surrounding campus – particularly on Blodgett Street.

TSU is also growing at an exponential rate. The campus facilities have grown from one permanent building and several temporary structures in 1947 to 45 buildings on a campus that sits on 150 acres of land (10). The university's enrollment has grown from 2,303 students to more than 8,400 undergraduate and graduate students from across the world and is one of the nation's largest historically Black universities (10). According to the TSU Board of Regents, it is a priority goal to grow the student population to over 10,000 students by 2025 (10). Currently, TSU is considered a "commuter" school, with only 1800 students who reside on campus. However, there are many residential housing facilities surrounding campus, and many students walk to campus from their off-campus housing. According to the focus group participants, there has been a recent influx of bicycle and pedestrian traffic in and around campus. As the student population continues to grow, it is important to address pedestrian, bicycle, and motorist infrastructure needs.

Specific Problem Areas

The focus group participants identified several problem areas on TSU's campus and proximate roadways. These areas should be targeted for pedestrian and bicycle safety interventions. To better understand the layout of campus, you can view the campus map [here](#).

The City of Houston and TSU have made efforts to increase the bikeability of campus and the surrounding area. The City of Houston added a large bike lane along Blodgett, which borders west campus. However, focus group participants find the new bike lane to be more problematic than helpful. Unfortunately, it was reported that very few bicyclists actually utilize the bike lane. Motorists often park in the bike lane on Blodgett Street, essentially rendering the bike facility unusable for the intended purpose. Furthermore, focus group participants reported there are little to no bike racks on Blodgett Street or TSU’s campus; the participants feel strongly that more bicycle facilities are needed on campus to access buildings and student housing. The bike lane also has caused more traffic congestion in the area by narrowing the traffic lanes for motorists on the busy roadway.

Another common safety concern on TSU’s campus is conflicts between pedestrians and motorists at intersection locations, specifically at open intersections on campus. Focus group participants suggested pedestrian crossing beacons or dynamic signage be implemented at these conflict points to alert drivers to yield to pedestrians. Focus group participants noted this was a concern at the following campus locations:

- East Garage: Cleburne and Sampson; Cleburne and Tierwester
- West Garage: Blodgett and Ennis
- Student Housing: Blodgett and Tierwester

Speeding was another common safety concern for TSU stakeholders. It was reported that motorists speed through the campus entry and exit points – sometimes without looking for pedestrians or bicyclists. A bicyclist or pedestrian is more likely to be killed in a collision with a motor vehicle if the driver is speeding (9). Focus group participants indicated additional signage should be posted to alter drivers to reduce their speed. Additionally, it was noted that bicyclists are also speeding down newly installed bike lanes on Cleburne Street, which is dangerous as well.

Traffic Law Knowledge and Compliance

A recurring theme among the participants was that crashes or near misses involving pedestrians and bicyclists are often due to poor compliance with traffic laws. Common noncompliance described by participants includes motorists and non-motorists failing to yield, and pedestrians and bicyclists failing to follow traffic signs and signals. The crash analysis conducted by TTI, supports the narratives of the focus group participants (see Table 1).

Table 1. Top 3 Contributing Factors for Drivers, Pedestrians, and Bicyclists

Person Type	Crash Type	Severity	Top 1 Contributing Factor	Top 2 Contributing Factor	Top 3 Contributing Factor
Driver	Pedestrian-involved Crashes	All Severity	Failed to Yield the Right of Way - To Pedestrian (n=19)	Other (Explain in Narrative) (n=8)	- Driver Inattention (n=5) - Failed to Drive in Single Lane (n=5)
		KABC	Failed to Yield the Right of Way - To Pedestrian (n=10)	Other (Explain in Narrative) (n=3)	- Driver Inattention (n=3) - Failed to Drive in Single Lane (n=3)

Bicyclist-involved Crashes	All Severity	Driver Inattention (n=4)	Failed to Control Speed (n=3)	- Failed to Yield the Right of Way – Stop Sign (n=3) - Other (Explain in Narrative) (n=3)
	KABC	Other (Explain in Narrative) (n=3)	Driver Inattention (n=2)	Failed to Yield the Right of Way – Stop Sign (n=2)
Pedestrian	All Severity	Pedestrian Failed to Yield the Right of Way to Vehicle (n=22)	Other (Explain in Narrative) (n=9)	Disregard Stop and Go Signal (n=2)
	KABC	Pedestrian Failed to Yield the Right of Way to Vehicle (n=19)	Other (Explain in Narrative) (n=3)	Disregard Stop and Go Signal (n=2)
Bicyclist	All Severity	Other (Explain in Narrative) (n=4)	Failed to Yield the Right of Way – Open Intersection (n=2)	- Failed to Yield the Right of Way – Stop Sign (n=2) - Disregard Stop Sign or Light (n=2) - Changed Lane When Unsafe (n=2)
	KABC	Failed to Yield the Right of Way – Open Intersection (n=2)	Failed to Yield the Right of Way – Stop Sign (n=2)	

According to the crash analysis, pedestrian-involved crashes were more likely to occur at non-intersection locations with no traffic control device, marked lanes, or signal lights; and bicyclist-involved crashes were more likely to occur at intersection-related locations with stop signs (see Table 2). Pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists need to understand who is responsible for yielding at all crossing locations, whether marked or unmarked, intersection or non-intersection. Right of way education was an expressed need by the focus group participants.

Table 2. Comparison of Pedestrians and Bicyclists Involved in the Crashes by Intersection-Relation

Road Location	Pedestrian-involved		Bicyclist-involved		Combined	
	All Severity	KAB	All Severity	KAB	All Severity	KAB
Intersection	5 (7%)	3 (7%)	16 (52%)	10 (62%)	21 (21%)	13 (23%)
Intersection-related	21 (30%)	13 (32%)	10 (32%)	6 (38%)	31 (31%)	19 (33%)
Driveway Access	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Non-Intersection	43 (61%)	25 (61%)	5 (16%)	0 (0%)	48 (48%)	25 (44%)
Total	70	41	31	16	101	57

Inattention by all road users was also mentioned as a contributing factor to crashes and near misses on campus. It was reported that it is common for pedestrians and bicyclists to be using earphones and not paying great attention to their surroundings. Additionally, the TSU campus can be confusing for

unfamiliar students, staff, and visitors to navigate due to the lack of signage and directions to TSU facilities. Inattention and distracted driving are one of the leading causes of pedestrian and bicycle crashes (9).

Poor traffic law compliance is often due to lack traffic law awareness (9). Participants acknowledged that their own awareness of pedestrian and bicycle traffic laws was lacking and that this is likely the case across the TSU community. Non-motorists and motorists alike must comply with all applicable traffic laws on and off university campus. In addition to improving the campus infrastructure (e.g. crosswalks, sidewalks, bike lanes), the campus community needs to be educated on pedestrian and bicycle traffic laws to increase compliance and safety for all road users.

Conclusion

Feedback from the focus groups helped identify the most prominent safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists at TSU and the surrounding Third Ward community. The primary safety concerns identified include lack of traffic law knowledge and compliance, speeding, and inattention by all road users. All these safety concerns increase crash risk involving pedestrians and bicyclists (9).

The role of the campus environment on pedestrian and bicycle safety was also discussed. Participants agreed that there is insufficient infrastructure, including sidewalks/bike lanes and crosswalks, to accommodate the growing number of pedestrians and bicyclists in the area. TSU has begun to address transportation needs of its students and staff through several projects and partnerships, such as adding bike lanes on the streets bordering campus (i.e., Blodgett, Cleburne), and participating in the Third Ward to Main Street Connectivity Project. The Third Ward to Main Street Connectivity Project is a collaborative, transportation initiative to link Houston's Third Ward community with the Main Street Corridor and light rail system (10). The project will focus on improving and expanding transit access between the Corridor and Third Ward neighborhoods and higher education institutions, creating essential east-west, transportation, and pedestrian connections (10). However, with the addition of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, improving safety culture through ongoing education and outreach must regularly be performed to encourage and ensure a safe campus mentality. Pedestrian and bicycle safety information was an expressed need by the focus group participants.

Addressing Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Through Effective Messaging and Education

Information obtained from the focus groups identified possible ways to address pedestrian and bicycle safety on the university's campus through effective messaging and outreach education. According to the focus group participants, there is no traffic safety messaging regularly provided by the university. The focus group participants thought it was important to not only target TSU students and employees, but the greater Third Ward community as well.

Messaging and educational campaigns should focus on consequences for traffic law violations. Non-compliance with traffic laws was identified as a contributing factor for pedestrian and bicycle involved crashes and near misses on campus. Participants were in agreement that messages should include right-of-way rules, avoiding distractions, and speed control. Messaging should be disseminated to the community to reinforce lawful behaviors and to develop the expectation that failure to comply may result in legal consequences (12). Communication and outreach can involve university student organizations, such as student government and Greek life, university social media and messaging systems (email, text), and signage.

According to NHTSA, it is important for universities to target new students and staff unfamiliar with the campus environment (12). NHTSA encourages universities to target new students and staff with educational messages including right-of-way rules and the importance of yielding right-of-way, being visible and predictable at both day and night times and during inclement weather, making eye contact at conflict points, avoiding distractions, and speed control (12). Recommended partnerships include campus public safety offices, student health and wellness programs, city/county public safety agencies, injury prevention agencies, parking and transportation services, transit agencies, and student groups (12). Focus group participants also suggested targeting new students through orientation and required courses.

There were several suggestions from focus group participants on how to effectively disseminate traffic safety messages. First, participants suggested using popular organizations on campus, such as the athletics program (football team, mascot, cheerleaders) and student government, to champion traffic safety on campus. Focus group participants also discussed utilizing professors in classroom setting to disseminate traffic safety information. Participants thought it would be most effective to display informational kiosks or signage at high volume campus areas, such as the student center, school of public affairs, school of business, the law school, library learning center, and the science library. Providing consistent and continuous messaging at high volume locations could help reinforce pedestrian and bicycle safety on campus. Furthermore, to encourage safe bicycling practices on newly installed bike lanes and trails on and around campus, participants suggested a community bike ride using these facilities to encourage bicycling and educate new bicyclists on safety rules.

The participants did agree that it is important to brand messaging specific to the university, such as using the term “TSU Proud” and using the Tiger mascot. Additionally, the focus group participants agreed that gory and funny messaging should be avoided; participants thought pedestrian and bicycle safety messaging should be concise and “to the point”. To appeal to the greater Third Ward community, focus group participants believe messaging about “protecting your community” would be effective. Overall, traffic safety messaging and education should promote a shared responsibility for preventing crashes.

A challenge noted by focus group participants was effectively targeting TSU campus visitors. There is a substantial volume of visitors who come to campus for large university events, such as football games, homecoming, Springfest and graduation. Additionally, there are many visitors traveling in the Third Ward area for shopping, eating, drinking, and other recreational activities. These road users may be unfamiliar with the campus and surrounding areas and may be more likely to violate traffic laws or be distracted. One suggestion for consideration included increased signage at key points around campus to alert visitors to slow down and look for pedestrians and bicyclists. Maps with directions were also suggested to help visitors more easily navigate the area.

Focus group participants feel strongly that education should focus on right-of-way rules, avoiding distracting activities, signaling intent to turn, and reducing speeds. Participants also feel strongly that increased pedestrian and biking facilities and safety treatments (e.g., pedestrian crossing beacons, dynamic signage to “slow down”) need to be installed on campus. Ultimately, improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure coupled with outreach and education can improve traffic safety on TSU’s campus and the surrounding community.

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Appendix A – Focus Group Questions

1. What do you believe are the primary safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists on and around the Texas Southern University campus? (If feasible, split by ped and bike in notes)
 - a. How do think the campus environment impacts these safety concerns?
 - b. How does the campus communicate related to the issue of traffic safety?
2. Based on your experiences, what do you think are the leading causes of crashes on and around the Texas Southern University campus?
 - a. As a driver, have you experienced a crash or almost crashed with a pedestrian or bicyclist on or near Texas Southern University? If so, please describe.
 - b. As a pedestrian and/or cyclist, have you experienced a crash or almost crashed with a pedestrian or bicyclist on or near Texas Southern University? If so, please describe.
3. (Skip Question if No Law Enforcement Officers Present) For our law enforcement officers, what are the top law violations associated with pedestrian/bicyclist crashes and near misses on the Texas Southern University campus.
4. How important do you think knowledge related to state-level pedestrian and bicycle laws are in preventing crashes or near-misses?
5. Based on your experiences, how do large university events impact pedestrian and bicycle safety?
 - a. Are there any special communications promoting traffic safety related to special events at Texas Southern University?
 - b. What approaches would you recommend for improving pedestrian and bicycle safety during these events?
6. A recent crash analysis found that most bicyclist and pedestrian crashes occur on local roads or streets and on roadways with speed limits between 25 to 44 mph. What suggestions do you have for reaching road users that travel on these roads with traffic safety messaging?
 - a. What type of messaging (e.g., gory, funny)?
 - b. What type of dissemination (e.g., social media, campus signs/outreach)?
7. The crash analysis also suggests that most bicyclist and pedestrian crashes involve males and individuals between the age of 18 to 24 years old. What suggestions do you have for reaching road users that fall into these demographics with traffic safety messaging?
 - a. What type of messaging (e.g., gory, funny)?
 - b. What type of dissemination (e.g., social media, campus signs/outreach)?
8. What challenges do you think there are in regard to reaching students and other members of the university community with traffic safety messaging on pedestrian and bicycle safety laws?

9. How important do you think it is to make traffic safety messaging regarding pedestrian and bicycle safety laws specific to Texas Southern University? How do you suggest we make messaging specific to Texas Southern University?
 - a. What are your thoughts on using a campus wide communication network?
 - b. What are your thoughts on using "TSU PROUD" or other unique Texas Southern University traditions in the messaging?
 - c. Are there other methods to target members of the Texas Southern University campus?
10. What methods would you recommend for educating Texas Southern University campus visitors in regard to traffic safety on and around campus?
11. What types of educational approaches would you recommend for promoting information on pedestrian and bicycle safety laws?

Appendix B – Stakeholders Contacted and Invited to Participate

University Departments / Offices – 22

- Disability Services (2)
- Office of Student Life (5)
- Center for Transportation Training and Research
- Residential Life and Housing (5)
- Student Conduct
- Trio Support Services (8)

Student Organizations – 42

- Fraternity and Sorority Life
 - Chi Sigma Iota (CSI) (2)
 - Beta Beta Beta Biological Honors Society (3)
- Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)
- Alliance of Black School Educators (ABSE) (2)
- Health and Kinesiology Club (2)
- TSU Spirit Program
- Ocean of Soul – Band
- Dance Team – Tiger Sensations
- Student Business Leadership Organization (SBLO)
- American Drafting & Design Association (ADDA) (2)
- Biology Undergraduate Student Association (2)
- Environmental Toxicology Graduate Students Association (ETGSA) (2)
- Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) (3)
- Society of Physics Students (2)
- The Associated General Contractors (AGC) Student Chapter
- The Construction Club
- TSU Student Chapter of Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) (4)
- TSU Student Chapter of National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) (2)
- Student Government Association (9)

Colleges / Schools of Study – 216

- Honors College, Advisory Board (5)
- College of Education

- Administrative Team (3)
- Department of Curriculum and Instruction (6)
- Department of Counseling (6)
- Department of Educational Administration & Foundations (9)
- Department of Health, Kinesiology, & Sport Studies (13)
- Jesse H Jones School of Business
- Dean's Office (8)
- Business Student Services (4)
- Graduate Student Services
- Barbara Jordan Mickey Leland School
- Dean's Office (4)
- Administration of Justice – Faculty (7)
- Political Science Faculty and Staff (13)
- Urban Planning and Environmental Policy Faculty and Staff (7)
- College of Science, Engineering & Technology
- Department of Biology (18)
- Department of Computer Science (15)
- Department of Engineering (21)
- Department of Environmental and Interdisciplinary Sciences (4)
- Department of Mathematical Sciences (23)
- Department of Physics (3)
- Department of Transportation Studies (19)
- College of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences, COLABS
- Dean's Office (4)
- COLABS Academic Advisors (4)
- College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences
- COPHS Administration (8)
- School of Communication
- SOC Official News Platform (2)
- Office of the Dean
- Student Services Administration and Staff (3)
- Graduate Programs
- Dean's Office (2)
- Admissions and Scholarships
- Advising and Student Service

