CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
CHILD SAFETY ZONES
A Community Speed Reduction Case Study
DECEMBER 2013

THE PROBLEM

Traffic speed and pedestrian safety remained a concern for parents, schools administrators, and community organizations in Chicago despite educational campaigns, enforcement efforts, and other strategies. In the 1990s, local elected officials requested that the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) implement speed reduction strategies, with a particular focus on helping children to safely cross busy arterial streets near schools.

Pedestrian safety strategies implemented since then include:

- the Safe Routes Ambassadors, a pedestrian safety education program that annually reaches over 13,000 Chicago students, parents, and teachers;
- Pedestrian Safety Enforcement that focuses on ongoing enforcement of pedestrian safety laws on streets with high levels of crashes;
- countdown timers and signal timing, both of which are useful to vulnerable populations like seniors and children as they cross busy streets; and,
- a Traffic Calming Program that is designed to make residential streets safer for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

Despite these interventions, and a 22 percent drop in pedestrian crashes since 2001, CDOT recognized that speed still remained a factor in a significant number of the 3,000 annual crashes between motor vehicles and pedestrians, about 800 of which involve children. In fact, children ages 5–18 were most likely to be involved in pedestrian crashes. Notably, 78 percent of all pedestrian crashes and 80 percent of fatal and serious injury pedestrian crashes from 2005 through 2009 occurred within 125 feet of an intersection.
THE SOLUTION

Speed reduction approach
In 2011, the Mayor and CDOT Commissioner renewed the push for traffic safety measures to protect pedestrians by focusing their efforts on areas near the parks and schools. They committed to reducing serious pedestrian injuries by 50 percent every five years and eliminating pedestrian fatalities within 10 years. In 2012, CDOT renewed efforts to slow vehicles by installing signage to remind drivers of the state law requiring vehicles to stop, rather than yield, for pedestrians in crosswalks. To accomplish its injury and fatality prevention goals, CDOT started its Child Safety Zone Initiative, which designates the areas within 1/8 mile of all 1,500 schools and parks across the city as "safe zones." The program uses pedestrian safety and traffic calming tools that focus on intersections in the child safety zones across the city. The program uses multiple safety improvement strategies, including:

- High-visibility crosswalks,
- Median "refuge islands" for pedestrians crossing streets,
- Curb extensions,
- Speed feedback signs, and
- Automated speed enforcement cameras.

As required by city ordinance, speed cameras can be placed in no more than 20 percent of the safety zones, and signage must indicate when a speed camera is present. Speed limits are reduced from the 30 mph city-wide default limit to 20 mph between 7am and 7pm near schools. CDOT reviews and adds safety improvements tailored to meet the needs of each zone. The ultimate goal is to create recognition among drivers of the child safety zones and to change driver behavior so that speeds are reduced within all zones, regardless of the presence of speed cameras. The city began implementation of safety zones in 2013.

CDOT committed to reducing serious pedestrian injuries by **50 PERCENT EVERY 5 YEARS** and eliminating pedestrian fatalities within **10 YEARS**.
THE PROCESS

Key planning and implementation steps

In November 2011, the Illinois State Legislature passed a law that allowed child safety zones to be created. The law allowed for the use of automated speed enforcement within the zones. In the spring of 2012, the City of Chicago passed an ordinance that allowed for changes in the implementation of safety zones locally, including the use of automated speed enforcement in 20 percent (approximately 300) of the 1,500 identified zones.

Limited funding for implementation of the 1,500 zones has made it necessary for CDOT to install the safety zones in phases. CDOT divided the city into six regions and reviewed data to choose the first 12 sites. Key considerations for identifying safety zone sites included:

1. **Collision data for the previous three years.**
   Additional weight was placed on collisions involving pedestrians/bicycles or individuals under 18 years old and on collisions where speed was cited as a factor to identify where to place speed cameras; and

2. **Geographic equity across the city** (to start by placing two safety zones in each of the six regions and ensuring equitable distribution of cameras across the regions).

Partners

CDOT’s partners include the
- Chicago Police Department
- Chicago Parks Department
- Chicago Public Schools
- Chicago private school representatives
- Active Transportation Alliance — an advocacy organization that promotes modes of transport that encourages safety, physical activity, health, recreation, social interaction, equity, environmental stewardship, and resource conservation
- Safe Routes to Schools Ambassadors — Chicago’s pedestrian and bicycle safety outreach team
- Chicago Board of Aldermen, and others.

These partners share the goal of reducing traffic-related injuries and fatalities and have joined to form the Child Safety Zone Committee to support CDOT throughout the planning and implementation phases of the Initiative. The committee is charged with reviewing the program’s progress, recommending improvements to zones, deciding which zones should receive traffic calming priority, and reviewing feedback on the program. Continuous outreach with city aldermen helps communicate with residents about the program and address community concerns.

Despite concerns from some community members about the use of automated speed enforcement, support for the child safety zones was widespread among community organizations, governmental agencies, and Board of Aldermen members.
Costs

CDOT has one staff member who works full time on implementing the Child Safety Zones program. Four other employees spend part of their time on the project. Roles vary among staffers but they include reviewing speed and crash data, choosing where and when to implement safety interventions, and managing the contracts and vendor performance for the automated enforcement program, among others. As directed by State Statute, a portion of the revenue collected from the automated speed enforcement program will be allocated for pedestrian safety projects. Costs for installing traffic calming measures vary widely, from a few thousand dollars for smaller zones to millions for larger areas bordered by multiple arterial streets. City funds from motor fuel taxes covered the costs of the first 12 safety zones. The Board of Aldermen’s general obligation bond funding will help to support safety zones in the future. Federal 402 safety grants, along with matched funding from the city, will also be used. Some camera maintenance costs will be offset by revenue from automated speed enforcement.

CONCLUSION

Chicago collects and reviews three-year data on traffic collisions, and the city will continue to do so in assessing the effectiveness of the child safety zones; results are not yet available, given the pilot project’s recent implementation. Preliminary feedback on the program has been mostly positive. Residents have welcomed safety enhancements in their neighborhoods. Public perception of speed cameras is still mixed, and Chicago will continue to implement automated speed enforcement only in areas where the data support a need for additional enforcement. Successful implementation of the program in Chicago required city officials to navigate a complex legislative and regulatory landscape. CDOT found that regular communication with the community and elected officials representing community members was critical to helping key partners understand the need to address speed-related injuries and fatalities and make the decision to address the problem through traffic calming and automated speed enforcement. The use of crash data to inform decisions about implementation ensured a fair and effective process.

To learn more about how speed reduction can benefit public health:

- Public Health Impact: Community Speed Reduction
- Speed Reduction Fact Sheet: Opportunities to Improve Current Practice
- Community Speed Reduction and Public Health: A Technical Report

Case Studies:

- Columbia, Missouri: Lowering The Posted Speed Limit On Residential Streets
- New York City: Neighborhood Slow Zones
- Portland, Oregon: Neighborhood Greenway Initiative
- Seattle, Washington: A Multi-Faceted Approach To Speed Reduction
- Washington, DC: Automated Speed Enforcement

Disclaimer: This project is supported by Cooperative Agreement Number 3U38HM000520-03 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or NNPHI.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The documents were authored by a team of individuals from Health Resources in Action, Inc. and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. A number of individuals and organizations contributed their time and expertise to the development of these products. For a complete list of those partners, please visit www.hria.org

REFERENCES:

1. Unless otherwise cited, information in this case study was provided in an interview with CDOT’s Safety Zone Project Manager and Deputy Commissioner, 2013.


4. City of Chicago Ordinance 9-12-075


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