

Westbrook Safe Mobility and Access Committee

Safety Central

Spring 2022 Editor Kimberly Tarbox, Chair

Who Are We

WSMAC began with a Facebook post in the fall of 2016 concerning the safety of the crosswalk at Main and Stroudwater Streets in Westbrook. Neighborhood resident Leelee Prince expressed frustration with repeated close calls with cars while attempting to cross the street in her wheelchair. Several other residents responded and started talking about forming a group to try to do something to make streets safer for all users. We began meeting regularly in 2017, at the same time that the Maine DOT chose Westbrook as the first community in which to hold a series of public workshops on pedestrian safety. Since then, we have become a presence at Westbrook Together Days, the Westbrook Kids Safety Fair, and other events promoting our message of advocating and educating to make Westbrook's roads safer. For more information about the topics in our newsletter and other topics please visit our website at <http://www.westbrooksafemobility.org>

General Safety by Kimberly Tarbox, Chair

Construction Zone Safety 101

With Warmer weather comes an increase in construction activity. This can pose a danger to pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. To minimize this risk there are things that you can do. For starters, you should remain alert at all times. Put your cell phone away. Avoid operating any vehicle while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, this includes medications that may be purchased over the counter.

Reducing speed through construction areas will not only reduce your risk but also the risk to construction workers. Operating a vehicle at a faster than safe speed through a construction area will reduce your reaction time. In addition to a reduced reaction time, if an obstacle is hit the amount of damage to yourself or vehicle will be increased which can be fatal. Plan your route accordingly and whenever possible avoid construction zones altogether.

As a pedestrian you must also take care when traveling through a construction zone. Do not walk on sidewalks that have been blocked off or take a shortcut through the construction zone. The blockades that are placed around a construction zone are there for your protection. Even though it may be inconvenient you should steer clear of a construction zone whenever it is possible. If there are signs posted, obey them. Most construction zones will have some sort of signage informing you of what hazards to avoid. Some may warn of falling debris, road hazards, or other potential dangers. In some cases failing to adhere to the warnings can result in legal actions against you.

What legal actions could you possibly face? You could receive a fine for speeding through a construction zone and if you are caught chances are that fine will be doubled. If you trespass through a construction zone you could also face a fine and/or jail time.

In summary, it is best to avoid construction zones whenever possible. If you must go through or near a construction zone stay alert, slow down, obey any signage, and know your route. Be prepared for any detours and a possible increase in travel time. Stay alert, don't get hurt.

Bike Safety by John Brooking, Secretary, Certified Cycling Educator

Beat High Gas Prices - Ride a Bike!

Gas prices got you down? Eyeing that unused bike, wondering if you could use it to get to work, or school, or the grocery store?

For trips under 10 miles, by yourself, without too much stuff, the answer is definitely YES! (And you can also get a trailer for kids and more stuff, if you're serious.)

What do you need to get started? Well, first make sure your bike works. We recommend the "ABC Quick Check": Air in the tires, two working Brakes, and a Chain that is clean and moves freely, with working gears (or close enough). If you have Quick releases on the wheels or seat post, make sure they are closed firmly.

If you need help with any of those things (or a new bike), Bruce and Sylvia at Ernie's Cycle Shop on Conant Street will be glad to help.

For personal safety equipment, lights are legally required for riding in the dark. Not only might you find yourself on a dark street and need to see, drivers also need to see you. A headlight is especially necessary for when their lights are not shining towards you, like if they're pulling out of a driveway or side street. You need a white light in front, and a red or orange light or reflector in the back. Reflective surfaces on your pedals, heels, or ankles are also legally required. You can buy reflective ankle straps at Ernie's, which are also great for keeping your pant cuffs out of the chain..

Two pieces of safety equipment which are legally optional but still good ideas are a helmet, and bright clothing. Make sure the helmet says it is CSPC or ASTM certified. A fluorescent windbreaker is great not only for visibility, but will help keep your body heat in and cold air out on chilly commutes. If it's downright cold, make sure to keep your hands, feet, and ears warm.

Make sure you get a lock, and lock both the frame and at least one wheel to something, especially if your wheels are quick release.

To carry stuff, a backpack is okay, but can only carry so much. Also, in the summer, it will make your back sweat. (Ugh!) A more versatile solution is to install a rear rack, off of which you can hang bike bags (“panniers”). They can carry more, like groceries, and more comfortably. Kitty litter buckets can make excellent DIY panniers - Google it!

But those car drivers! How to stay safe on the roads these days?

The key is to be predictable, visible, and *communicate*! Following the same laws as car drivers makes you more predictable, puts you where they are looking, and keeps you from being found at fault if anything does happen. Shoulders are optional, and not all roads have usable ones. Know that you have the right to use the travel lane, and don’t be afraid to be assertive. If you are moving to a new lane or turning, just point in the direction you intend to go (legal for both left and right turn signals.) Stay aware of what’s going on around you.

Lane position can be a subtle decision, but the takeaway is that there are plenty of situations where being in the middle of the lane is legal and can be the safest option. It’s safer to stop in line at red lights, not pass stopped traffic on the right, especially large trucks. On a 2-lane road (one each direction), it’s allowable to occupy the middle to prevent unsafe squeeze passes if it’s too narrow and there is oncoming traffic. A little “stay back” signal acknowledges that you know they are there, and when oncoming traffic clears, you can move back to the right and give them a friendly wave. It really works! On a 4-lane road, it’s easiest for everyone if you just use the middle of the lane all the time. Those lanes are always too narrow to share, so people need to change lanes anyway, and there’s a passing lane. Lastly, where there are parked cars, make sure to leave yourself plenty of room from them, so a door doesn’t open into you.

Enjoy the fresh air, and take yourself out to dinner (by bike) with all that gas money you’re saving! :-)

Pedestrian Safety by Dennis Marrotte, Vice Chair

Spring & Summer Safety in Construction Zones

We are now in the midst of spring which is a beautiful Time here in Maine and also a very busy construction period. With spring weather comes road and highway repair. Main Street downtown is currently experiencing construction, during which you may see flaggers directing traffic. Please pay attention to those men and women and the directions they are giving you. Construction vehicles may be present and extra care should be taken. Courtesy and Patience is a priority for everyone.

At the Cumberland Mills Triangle you will notice several new overhead traffic signals and directional lane signs. A very important new addition to this new traffic pattern are the new pedestrian activated crosswalks and the new raised island medians. When this entire project is repaved and new pavement striping is completed, getting familiar and comfortable with the new systems will take awhile for everyone to master.

Being alert in a construction zone and general areas of service work is extremely important. If you have to pass through a construction area, be aware of the loud alert beeping of a construction vehicle that is backing up. Obey the construction zone speed limits ! There is a motorist law in Maine that is referred to as “ The Move Over Law.” This law is to increase the safety zone for emergency vehicles, tow trucks, utility vehicles, and those that may have broken down alongside the road. Utility Workers who are working in aerial bucket trucks on the shoulder of the road are extremely vulnerable. A utility worker in a fiberglass bucket truck who is 20 – 30 Feet in the air is especially vulnerable to having their vehicle struck. If this should occur the worker has nowhere to go except down to the ground in the fiberglass bucket. Such vehicles will have orange cones and flags placed ahead and behind their work zone to warn motorists to move over and to proceed with caution.

Important motorist etiquette to follow is to stop behind a marked crosswalk and not in a marked crosswalk. This is even more crucial in construction zones because it forces a pedestrian to have to walk in the back of the stopped vehicle, in a dangerous construction zone, or to walk in traffic. Keeping the crosswalks clear is not only courteous; it is also unlawful to block a crosswalk.

Enjoy your spring and summer and please practice safe driving and pedestrian practices.

Walnut's Corner by Kimberly Tarbox, Chair

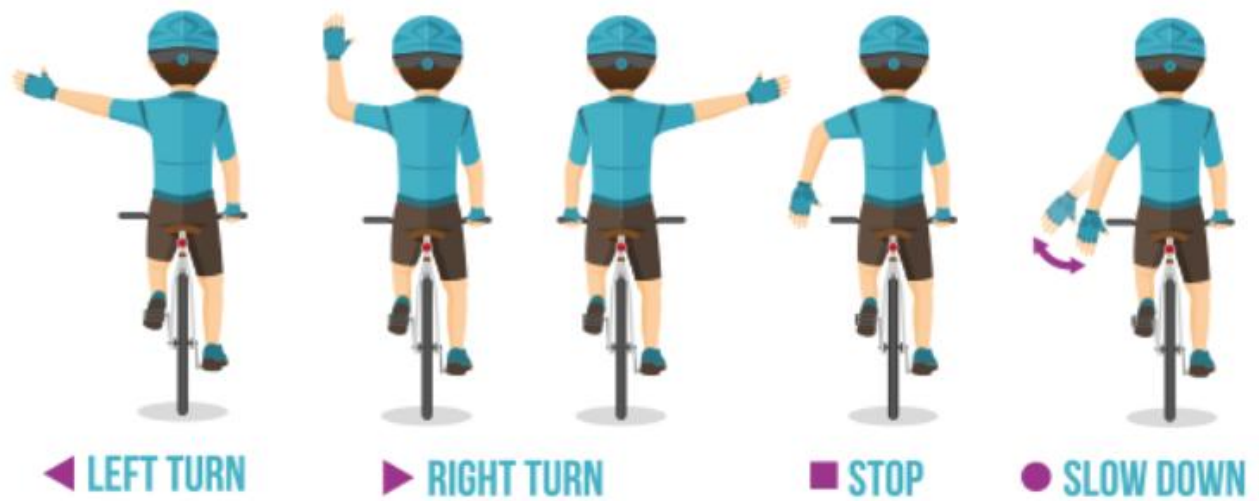
Let's Go Biking

Walnut was excited. The weather was now warm enough for him to take his bike out. Before his mom would let him go out by himself in the neighborhood he had to take a bicycle safety course. Walnut would do anything to be allowed to ride on his own.

It was Saturday morning and Walnut had just arrived for his bicycle safety class. He was a little nervous but he was also excited. His teacher, John, gave him some information to read and study. They also watched several videos. At the end of the class Walnut had to ride his bike through an obstacle course that included street signs, crosswalks, and other obstacles he might encounter on the road.

Walnut put on his helmet, checked that his mirrors and lights were working and then he started out. He soon came upon a stop sign. He started to slow down and remembered that he should use his hand signals to let the vehicles behind him know that he was going to stop. He slowed down and stopped at the sign. He looked both ways and when it was clear he continued to go straight. He soon came to an intersection and he wanted to turn right. He again signaled his intent to turn, looked both ways and proceeded. He continued along and then came upon another intersection but this time he signaled to turn left. Walnut then crossed the finish line. He was proud of himself. John congratulated him on a job well done and told him he would have to practice all of the things he learned to be a safer bicyclist.

When Walnut got home he was smiling ear to ear. He had done a good job and now Mama would let him ride his bike around the neighborhood. Do you know the rules of the road? Do you know what the hand signals are? Check out the image on the next page to learn more about using hand signals when riding your bike. Walnut will be answering questions in our next issue. Send your questions to wsmactarbox@gmail.com and your question might be featured in our next issue.



Take the time to learn your hand signals. This is one safety tool that does not require any special equipment.