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Portage County - Kickoff Meeting Transcription

[00:00:00] Rebecca Roberts, here. Jan Way, here. All right, and then the last is the Demonstration Activity Subcommittee. We've got Chris Johnson, Josh Ostrowski, here. And then Amy Tolbert, Jake Wilcox, here. All right, thank you all. Um, Kristen, Dean Curtis is here from the task force. Okay, wonderful. Thank you, Dean. Yeah, Kristen Brent Matthews here as well. I think I missed my roll call. And Gracia Day.

[00:01:00]

Okay, thank you. I'll kind of keep my eye. Kristen, Adam declined here as well on behalf of Carmen Anderson from the Village of Plover. All right. Thank you, Adam. Um, I will try to keep my eye just on the participant list. So, as people come in late, I can still get them on, uh, checked off for the roll call. Um, but Without further ado, I guess I would like to kind of start our project introduction, um, like purpose of the project.

I'm going to introduce our consultant that we're working with from TADI is John Campbell, and he is on and he's got this wonderful PowerPoint presentation that he's going to kind of roll us through and really give us the background of what we're all doing here together. Um, So without further ado, John, go ahead.

All right. Thank you, Kristen. I

[00:02:00] can't say how excited we are to kick this study off today. It's really going to be transformative in how the community and Portage County approaches traffic safety. We're also very thankful that so many of you took time out of your day to participate in this kickoff meeting.

And we're looking forward to working with you, um, really to create an amazing, Safety Action Plan and a fantastic update to the county's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

I'll start with a quick overview of the project and the purpose. First and foremost, the county has set a goal of zero fatal and serious injuries by year 2045. And to help achieve that goal, Portage County applied for a Safe Streets For All scrapes, safe streets and roads for all planning and demonstration grant,

[00:03:00] uh, to prepare a safety action plan and to update their bicycle and pedestrian plan. And it's great news. The, the county was successful in their application and they received 200,000 dollars and federal grant money to conduct this study. Um, let's review a couple of components of this study. So, what is a safety action plan? Well, it's a data driven. And collaborative study meant to give you a plan for eliminating fatal and serious injuries. Um, it involves community involvement, uh, demonstration activities to test temporary improvements to see how effective they might be. Um, it follows the safe system approach, which I'll explain more on the next slide. There's a structured planning process with a task force and subcommittees, as many of you may know.

And lastly, it's a collaborative effort between many stakeholders

[00:04:00] who influence traffic safety throughout the community.

All right, let's talk about the safe system approach. So the safe system approach is a federal initiative, and it's growing in both popularity and acceptance throughout the nation. And some of the general principles are death and serious injuries are unacceptable that humans make mistakes, that humans are vulnerable, responsibility is shared, and safety is proactive and redundancy is critical.

Um, there's five main pieces to the safe system approach, safer vehicles, safer speeds. Safer roads, better post crash care, and safer people. And I first heard this analogy from Andy Bill at the University of Wisconsin's Traffic Operations Lab.

[00:05:00] And it's a good one. She likes to use cherries in her pie, but I like to use blueberry berries.

But the concept is kind of the same. We want to build each section of this safe system pie so strong, So, packed with gooey blueberries, that when we take one piece of the pie out, which would represent a failure in the system, that the other parts of the system are so strong and filled that they ooze in and fill in the gap.

And that's what we're after. We're after working together to build these sections of the pie up strong enough, That they can compensate for each other when one part of the system fails.

Why are we doing this? Um, I want you to take a look at these potential impacts. This is what the impact on the local and county

[00:06:00] roads could be. This does not even include interstate, um, impacts. Um, by reaching a Vision Zero goal of 20, by 2045, is now exiting. We could save 47 lives and experience 316 fewer serious injuries on both on the local and county network that assumes we're linearly improving safety to a, an ultimate goal of zero serious injuries and fatalities by 2045.

All right, let's talk about the project team. I'll start on the consultant team on the right and then. Uh, transferred over to Kristen to introduce the county's team task force and so committees, um, as Kristen mentioned, I'm John Campbell. I'm, uh, the director

[00:07:00] of traffic safety at TADI. TADI is a full service engineering firm that primarily serves Wisconsin. I just completed my 18th year here and I've specialized in traffic safety analysis pretty much all 18 years. From TADI's team we have Christian Sternke and Angela Rinaldi on the call today. But our team members also include some very talented specialists from Vandewalle & Associates, I'm going to turn it over to Jackie for a second to introduce her Vandewalle team.

And after that, Brian can say hi as well. So, Jackie. Great. Good afternoon. I'm Jackie Mich. I'm the lead associate planner with Vandewalle and Associates. I've been with the firm for about 11 years. I'm joined by Meredith Perks, who has been with the firm six or seven years. We are really excited to be leading the bicycle

[00:08:00] and pedestrian plan update for Portage County.

Great, Brian. Hi, I'm Brian Lee, president of Revelation. We specialize in public relations, public involvement, and community relations. We work a lot with WisDOT and municipalities

throughout the state. And I'm also joined on this call by my co worker, Jaimie Onasch. She's somewhere in one of these grids here.

Hello, everybody. And we are, uh, excited to work on this project as well.

Great. Um, Kristen? Yeah, so like I said, I'm Kristen Johnson. I'm a planner for Portage County Zoning Office, and I am the lead project manager for the entire project. But I can't take all the credit because I have an amazing team that I'm working with, um, that I call this core, um, project team. It's made up of.

Um, city folks, county, um, I shouldn't say city folks. I should say city staff, county staff.

[00:09:00] Um, so I just want to make sure that I name everybody because everybody deserves the credit. Um, Tim Reed is the director of Portage County Zoning. He is on the project team with me. Lucas Meadow is the engineer with our highway department.

Um, Adam Kuhn is a city planner and zoning administrator. Um, and then Scott, but doing is the city, uh, uh, engineer for the public works department. And then Carmen Anderson. She's with the village of Plover as a planner there. And then finally, we have a citizen member Trevor work, um, who is very passionate about bike and pedestrian planning and advocating for, um.

Um, all of that and safety, of course, um, so that core team has done so much already behind the scenes, of course, with, um, you know, applying for the grant, or really drafting the grant and getting that submitted and and getting awarded the grant

[00:10:00] funding to be able to leave this wonderful project. Um, and so we will always be, um, kind of meeting as a team.

To be the lead on developing our safety action plan. Um, and then, of course, we've got our planning structures in place being the task force. That is 15 members plus four alternates.

Wonderful. We've got, um, everybody in their, uh, list here. Um, we've got a lot of members on our task force are, you know, from, What do I want to say?

Um, we've got county residents. We've got elected officials, again, municipal staff, county staff involved in there and just, um, citizens. So, uh, so very thankful for this wonderful, um, spread of amazing people that we have here to work with us on this. Plan, and then the bicycle and pedestrian

[00:11:00] subcommittee that's going to be tasked more with, um, the supplemental plan being our county wide bicycle and pedestrian plan.

We are going to be amending that, um, along with the writing of the safety action plan. And so that, um, Bike ped subcommittee will really be, um, focuses, focusing in on that and leading that charge as well. So, um, we've got those. And then finally, the last would be the demonstration activity subcommittee, um, along the way, we plan on providing or not providing, but having some key locations where we roll out, um, activities, these are going to be locations where the data is going to point to us and say, these are very dangerous locations.

And then. Potentially, we could roll out, um, activities. Um, to hopefully maybe tell us, um, different design of the road or whatever it tells us, but that subcommittee is going to lead the

[00:12:00] charge and tell us where the, where we should be going. Of course, with the consultants help. So, um. That's a that's that in a nutshell, which is a lot, but yeah, Kirsten, you know, there's been a lot of work done behind the scenes by, you know, many of the key stakeholders, um, uh, on your task force and subcommittees as well.

It's not an easy endeavor. And, you know, you, you see 200, 000 in grant money. Well, there's a lot involved with that. Getting that money from completing the application to, you know, soliciting and selecting a consultant to help. It's a, it's a lot of work and I'm glad you're doing it because it's going to lead us to vision zero.

Um, we, we had talked about the SAGE system approach before. Um, and we know, you know, me with an engineering background that, you know, I know I can't build all of those pie pieces as strong as they need to be. By myself, or just by an engineering team. So

[00:13:00] we need help from numerous stakeholders throughout the community.

Um, And you know, here's an opportunity on this call, not to put anybody on the spot, but if you're a stakeholder on this call, we're interested in kind of hearing your feedback at the start of this project. You know, I have a couple of questions up in the top here. You know. So, you know, if you're willing to share, just please tell us, you know, what your role, uh, in your organization, uh, what's the role your organization plays in community safety, and how do you envision contributing to the safety action plan or the bike and ped plan.

So I can kind of open it up to anybody on the call. I'll keep an eye out for anybody who raises a hand. Otherwise, just feel free to speak up and, you know, introduce yourself and. You know, I envision helping see

[00:14:00] three screens of individuals. So I'm flipping through them. Is anybody raising a hand? Oh, I see one Jack.

Hi, it's really nice to meet you. Uh, I'm Jack Orlando. I'm actually a student at the university of Wisconsin students point. And I really wanted to contribute here because I actually took a class in transportation that was held on campus last fall, and especially for students of UWSP being someone that takes the bus system every day, bikes, walks in and around.

I wanted to be here to kind of, um, be a voice for, you know, the students and making our streets safer. So it's nice to meet you. And thanks for having me. Thank you. Jack. Your,

[00:15:00] your inputs are going to be very welcome, Carolyn, but you might be on mute, Carolyn. I think I got to see you on mute.

Okay, can you hear me now? Yes. Okay, good. Um, I'm Carolyn Peterson. I'm from Mid State Independent Living Choices. We are an independent living center. Um, and we focus on people with disabilities mostly, and, um, well, exclusively, actually. And, um, I think what we do plays a role in the community to make it safer for people with disabilities who are

[00:16:00] trying to traverse the world.

Layout, um, they're trying to get from point A to point B and a lot of our consumers do not have their own vehicles. They either ride the bus or they walk a lot of the time, so, um, I think it where it applies to us a lot. Great. Thank you for sharing, Carolyn. Gary, I see you had your hand up. I'm Gary Garsky. I oversee public health here at Portage County Health and Human Services. I'm also the county's health officer. So, um, I was involved in the committees that designed the 1st plan, you know, almost over a decade ago. Um, and really, you know, as from a public health perspective, really support this work and having the opportunity to have, you know, both safe pedestrian and bicycling

[00:17:00] traffic.

Uh, here in Portage County and going beyond our typical urban centers and looking more into like the rural areas. We do have a variety of trails that could be utilized and really just always kind of looking at opportunities that can get our citizens more engaged in physical activity. So that is why I'm here.

Right? Thank you. Gary.

Hello, I'm with the DOT, specifically State Patrol's Bureau of Transportation Safety, so BOTS. Just want to let everybody know that we're happy to help in any way that we can. Um, I specifically focus on motorcycle safety, so it'll be interesting to see how we can all share the road together.

Hi Brent, hey, long time no see. Hey John, how you doing? Good. Hey, um, yeah, so my, I'm a citizen here in Stevens Point, and um, Uh, Trevor Rourke actually got me kind of turned on to

[00:18:00] this, this committee, um, but a little bit about my background. I spent, uh, 10 plus years working for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and most of that time I was, um, very involved in the highway safety pieces, um, actually worked with John on various different, uh, Um, initiatives, um, as well as the UW Madison folks and Andy Bill that he mentioned, um, so I, I moved on in my career and I'm, um, now working in a different field altogether, but I still have a passion for safety.

So I wanted to get involved and, uh, kind of tie back into my, um, background. Great. Thanks, Brent.

Uh, Megan. Hey, everybody. I am Megan. I am a registered nurse, and I have, um, I'm also a Stevens Point resident. I'm really interested in the, oh,

[00:19:00] just a second. We have a little extra noise. No problem.

While we're waiting for Megan, I see in the chat, David Shore noted that he recently concluded four term tenure on Common Council, uh, where pedestrian friendliness, uh, what's his name? The main issue. Glad to have you. Hey, thanks everybody. Sorry for the interruption. But yeah, I'm really specifically, I guess, interested in school children and healthy forms of non vehicle, you know, just more physical activity, kinds of transportation for the kids, um, I mean, for different schools in Stevens Point.

And I would love to, um, just see that improve. Great, Megan. Thank you.

Do we have anybody else? Thanks

[00:20:00] everybody for sharing thus far.

Sarah. Hey, everybody. My name is Sarah and I'm from Noble Community Clinics. Um, so this is important for our, for our organization. Um, just because we focus on health and wellness, uh, for our community members, um, no matter of ability to pay, um, and whatnot. So, yeah, I'm excited to be part of this group. So, Thanks, Sarah.

All right, after at the end of the meeting, which is almost over, and I see Trevor's hand up, I'll get to him in a second. There'll be a time for question and answers to Trevor.

Thank you, John. I'm Trevor work. I think I know most people in this call, which is awesome.

[00:21:00] So, uh, coauthor of the grant, um, part of the project team, uh, on the task force and the demonstration activity subcommittee, which I think is the thing I'm most excited about because we haven't seen that here in Portage County before.

And I think that's great. Is something that can really share in real time, um, how streets design and or driver behavior is critical to our safe streets, uh, or to safer streets. Um, the other reason I jumped on is because, uh, I don't know if there's any representatives of the green circle trail board and I think maybe just John, if you can make a note or Kristen, uh, we should probably reach out to them down the road.

So Green Circle Trail Board. Thanks. Uh, this is Mike Helmrich. I can weigh in. I actually recently joined the Green Circle Trail Board.

[00:22:00] Um, so I think that could be a good opportunity to engage that group, um, and get some feedback that we can bring back for the plan.

Excellent. Thanks, Mike. Jan,

how did that mute button caught you?

Uh, Town of Hall resident and supervisor and an avid rider of the Green Circle Trail, which runs. Right out alongside and behind my home. Um, so I'm very interested in how the green circle trail also, uh, is a part of, uh, bicycle safety in the town hall.

Excellent thanks, Jim.

[00:23:00] Hey, I'm not seeing any other hands up. There will be other opportunities throughout this project. There's 2 public involvement meetings planned. Um, there'll be numerous opportunities to continue to collaborate, but thanks for introducing yourselves.

Um, next thing, um, I think I have two slides left. This slide is just a overview timeline of the study. Um, we're having our kickoff meeting now in August 2024, um, safety analysis. Public and stakeholder engagements will occur through 2024 and 2025. Um, and then we'll be testing some demonstration activities, uh, where we'll have some temporary installations of, of different techniques or technologies, um, to, to try out and see their effectiveness on a short term situation,

[00:24:00] uh, to inform, uh, the ultimate plan.

Um, that's planned for, uh, 2025. Um, we have a draft plan, um, on scheduled for the end of 2025 with a final plan by July, 2026. Um, with the anticipated adoption in September of 2026, um, and that also includes not only the Safety Action Plan, but updating the Portage County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

And then the last slide is, you know, I'm. I'm excited to see, um, all this interest in traffic safety, getting to zero serious injuries and fatalities is not an easy endeavor. It's going to take some hard work and some, uh, perhaps even unpopular decisions to be able to make this happen. Um, I'm happy that we were able to

[00:25:00] introduce the project here.

Um, let's do this together. And if we want to have any discussion or questions, um, there's time right now. So. Feel free to raise your hand and Kristen, Kristen and I or, um, you know, other task force members might be able to answer your questions.

Trevor.

Thank you, John. And thanks for kicking us off. Um, I'm also excited. I don't know if you, if you could bring that timeline up again for me, please. So, so the public and stakeholder engagement, uh, do we have a kind of a general sense of when like the first big public in person. You know, open house kind of event might be

[00:26:00] we're working on that public involvement plan right now.

Um, I was just talking with Brian about that earlier today. Um, I think we'll be in communication in short order with, uh, Kristen and getting that set up. Okay. Thank you.

Gina, I really like the goal of zero serious injuries or fatalities by 2045, but I'm curious to understand what is the current statistic for those. Oh, sure, I'll slide back to this slide right now. In over the past 10 years, Portage County on non interstate roads is averaging about 30 serious injury crashes.

And, uh, 4.4 fatal crashes per year.

[00:27:00]

Thank you.

Hey John, do you have statistics on the number of bikes and pedestrian? Um, like what the proportion is of those? I, I do. Um, I will look that up. Um, I can look that up on my computer. I have some of those stats. Okay. I'll, I'll multitask here and look that up for you.

While I'm looking that up, Kristen, was there anything else you wanted to add? Share or discuss at this meeting.

Um, I didn't per se. I thought maybe there would be more questions on how often we would meet.

[00:28:00] Um, of course, I don't, I don't fully know, but I think ideally, it would be nice to meet like, once a month, if we, if we were to meet. I need to or every other month. Um, John, do you know how often the task force would be meeting?

Um, I believe the task force is scheduled to meet.

I thought it's monthly. The task force is scheduled to meet monthly. That's what I thought too.

Yeah, I just wanted to make sure.

And Trevor just added in the chat, um, about crash data. He said that the data set of 2017 to 2021 Portage County had 7,382 total traffic crashes.

For a five year time frame. Okay.

[00:29:00] Thanks.

Is Malia. Did you have your hand up? Or was that? I did. Um, just wanted. I know you're looking up some information. Does that information includes also to travel the location of this, um, incidences because that will help if we have the spatial location. Oh, yeah, absolutely. We'll be looking at, um, the spatial location.

We'll be doing a hard look at. Okay. Um, roadway segments, intersections, and then specifically, uh, pedestrian and bicycle crashes. But yeah, spatially, we'll definitely be looking at that. Thank you. And, um, I was able to look up the head and bike crashes, at least for the last five years.

Um, I'm seeing Um, one fatality, one bicycle fatality, um, two serious injury bicycle

[00:30:00] crashes, and four serious injury pedestrian crashes.

Steve? Uh, yeah, uh, I worked for the city of Stevens Point in the parks department. I'm not representing them. I just worked there. I also live in the city. Uh, but I'm curious and I'm on the bike and PE pedestrian subcommittee. I'm curious as if, is there anything we can do to prep for our next meeting?

Well, I would say the first, Kristen, have, have you had any subcommittee meetings yet? I'll ask that question first. No, we haven't. Okay, I, I think a good thing to discuss at first meetings is, um, just recap your experiences with bicycle and pedestrian safety. You know, what the common

[00:31:00] issues that you're familiar with hearing, and then, you know, what some of the goals you might have.

you know, what's the vision so that would be my suggestion. Yeah, thank you.

Anytime, I'm not seeing any more hands up. Um, uh, we, as a consultant team, we were just authorized to begin this study in mid August. So we're, hitting the ground running and developing a work plan and that, um, you know, public involvement plan. So Christian, we'll be. In contact with you

[00:32:00] and in short order here, getting some rough dates, um, mapped out for the public involvement meetings and some of the other major milestones of the project.

I will probably if it's OK with most of you, um, just putting a doodle poll out. I feel like that worked really well last time just with the sheer numbers that we have in here. Um, I feel like that will work good going forward.

I do have a question on the meeting times. Do we intend to continue with like meeting times during the day or are there opportunities to do meeting times outside of work hours? Um, I guess we'd be open to it. It just, this one just didn't work out for after hours.

[00:33:00] Um, do you have a time in mind? Um, not necessarily.

I mean, typically, you know, I don't, I don't want to cause a problem, but typically my work hours, like eight to four 30, um, so really, really any time out outside of that is best. Um, and I'm assuming other people are in that situation as well, but, um, you if that's not the case. That's fine. I can, I can accommodate

Trevor. Yeah, to piggyback off of Brent's, um, requests there. I think not speaking for myself necessarily because I'm, um, self employed, but if we do want additional access from the public, which these committee, um, Excuse me, the subcommittee and the task force meetings are open to the public.

[00:34:00] I do think after hours is ideal.

Um, I know that gets complicated with other county and city meetings, of course. Um, but if we do want to increase that access, uh, to the public, I, I guess I'd vote for that. Yeah, my 2 cents. Thanks, Trevor.

One thing I wanted to mention with so many people on the call here, um, part of the safe system approach. Is safer vehicles, right? And, um, I didn't hear anybody on the call that was necessarily from a, an automobile dealership in the area. Um, there are so many safety features that can be added to vehicles.

That can help prevent crashes

[00:35:00] and we want to better understand what hurdles there are that we got to overcome to be able to get some of those safer vehicles on the roadway in Portage County and the surrounding areas. So I, I encourage you to, you know, think about your, your networks, um, and if you happen to know, um, you know, people within the auto industry in Portage County, um, that they

could definitely be a stakeholder in this process because that's going to be a big component to reaching that goal of zero serious injuries and fatalities.

And I'll, I'll put my contact information in the chat. Um, you're more than welcome to contact me with. You know any ideas or or people that you think might fit that bill as a stakeholder in that on that front Or for any other reason

[00:36:00]

Steve, did you still have your hand up? Was I not calling on you? I'm, sorry I didn't call. No, I just don't know how to get rid of that. Okay, was it your arm getting sore? And

Kristen, is there anything else you'd like to cover? Um, I'm good, but I want to just think thank you to everyone again for taking time out to attend our 1st kickoff meeting. I know I'm excited to really kind of get the ball rolling here and just really appreciate everyone's involvement.

Sounds good. everybody for attending. so much. Thanks everyone. Thank you. We'll be in touch. See you. Bye. Bye.

[00:37:00] Thank you. Bye.