

White Center Heights Elementary Walking Audit



White Center Heights Elementary School (WCH) is located in the White Center neighborhood in unincorporated King County. Part of the Highline School District, WCH serves nearly 550 students and their families.

The award-winning WCH building was constructed in 2004 and was designed as a community center. It is adjacent to the Greenbridge Housing Development, a mixed-income residential area designed for walkability. Greenbridge construction is ongoing and is scheduled to house a total of 3500 residents by 2012.

The walking audit route was divided into two one-mile loops that began and ended at the school entrance (see map on page 2). Observations at the school and meetings with school families and staff contributed to the information in this walking audit report.

Participants: 20 adults and 4 school students joined in this walking audit. In addition to area residents, partners joined us from the following agencies: Highline School District, King County Department of Transportation, King County Housing Authority, Greenbridge Neighborhood House and Community Action Team (CAT), Bicycle Alliance of Washington, King County Food and Fitness Initiative and Feet First.

Special thanks to Kevin Chang and Jake Jacobovitch of the King County Department of Transportation for their assistance planning this event.

Audit Date:
December 8, 2010



Top Observations:

- The Greenbridge neighborhood is predominantly a pedestrian-friendly urban environment. Many of the problems in this area will be addressed with educational and enforcement efforts for proper use of the shared space.
- There is a dramatic difference in the walking experience once leaving Greenbridge and entering the older residential neighborhood to the south, which lack sidewalks and other basic pedestrian infrastructure. Many problems here will require engineering solutions and funding for those solutions as well as enforcement efforts to reduce risk to pedestrians.
- Pedestrian, school bus, and vehicle entry locations are physically separated, making drop-off and pick-up better than they would otherwise be at this school. However, safety concerns in both the parking area and bus zone area need to be addressed (see recommendations, below).

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Top Recommendations:

1. The intersection of 4th Avenue and 102nd Street has several urgent needs before it can be considered a suitable place for children to walk without parental supervision. This intersection should be prioritized for sidewalks and curbs to connect existing gaps, maintenance of overgrowth, and squaring off curb radii.
2. The crossing guard at 8th Avenue and 100th Street needs to be retained and increased to include a second guard.
3. The main school entrance / parking lot area is a difficult environment for pedestrians and holds potential for more difficulty as new housing is completed. WCH should apply for funding from the Washington Traffic Safety Committee to bring a student patrol program for help in the school drop-off / pick-up area.
4. The intersection of 4th Avenue and 100th street is of high concern to residents because of fast moving traffic and failure to yield to pedestrians. A combination of education, enforcement and engineering improvements will increase pedestrian safety at this location (see item 11).

Organizers:

Feet First and King County Food and Fitness Initiative (KCFFI)

Audit Leaders: Lisa Quinn and Jen Cole, Feet First

Write-up: Jen Cole and Will Beard, Feet First

Photo Credits: Jen Cole, Will Beard, Ariana Taylor-Stanley, and White Center residents.

Thank you for sharing your point of view!



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KCFFI Project for Safe Routes to School at White Center Heights

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a growing movement to encourage and support “active commuting” on the part of school children and families. At the intersection of public health, public safety, education and transportation, SRTS helps communities counterbalance the effects of an increasingly car-centered society.



The King County Food and Fitness Initiative (KCFFI) is a collaborative of experts and community partners that works in White Center and neighboring Delridge to fight obesity through improving access to healthy foods and physical activity. KCFFI works with White Center Heights Elementary to improve health throughout the school - an appropriate fit for a school that includes "Collaborating to Promote Wellness" in its mission. One of the group’s projects has been encouraging active transportation through a number of Walk-to-School activities. This audit will help the school and its partner organizations work together with King County Department of Transportation to help make the surrounding neighborhood a safer and more inviting place to walk.

Map of Walking Audit Routes







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Issues and Action Items for SE Route - White Center Heights community

Item	Location	Description	Photo
1	Crosswalk on the east side of 8th Avenue SW crossing SW 100th Street Top Recommendation #2	<p>A crossing guard staffs this marked crosswalk near the school after school, when this intersection gets crowded with family vehicles. The guard reports poor driving behavior and illegal parking on and near the marked crosswalk, restricting movement and visibility for pedestrians.</p> <p>Feet First recommends that a second guard be placed at this corner because of the high volumes of both pedestrians and traffic.</p>	
2	8th Avenue SW between SW 100th Street and 102nd Street	North of 100th Street, parked cars and businesses provide a visual reminder for traffic to slow. However, South of 100th, Greenbridge residents report, traffic moves noticeably faster and feels less safe for pedestrians.	
3	8th Avenue Bus Load Zone	The bus load zone along 8th Avenue SW is used by some families as an alternate pick-up and drop-off zone for personal vehicles. Several drivers were observed parking on the west side of the street and having their children cross midblock to get to their cars. Feet First recommends parent education to keep this area free of family vehicles. A map with desired drop-off and pick-up procedures should be distributed to families each year, with related education and enforcement activity.	
4	Intersection of 8th Avenue SW and SW 102nd Street	Looking south of SW 102nd Street on 8th Avenue SW, the pedestrian and transit infrastructure disappears: there are no sidewalks on either side of 8th Avenue SW south of 102nd, and the bus stop on the south side of 8th Ave lacks shelter and adequate landing. A teacher informs us that on this block around 2 years ago, a student pedestrian was hit by a car when walking to school with siblings. Sidewalks on this street would greatly improve pedestrian safety, and are in great need throughout the area. Feet First recommends that any walking encouragement campaigns on the part of KCFFI require parental supervision for students walking from south of the school.	


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5	Intersection of 6th Avenue SW and SW 102nd Street	6th Avenue SW is an important connecting route to White Center Heights Elementary, yet there is no marked crossing over SW 102nd Street. There is also a sightline issue due to an incline west of this intersection, and visibility is much clearer when crossing at the east corner of the intersection. Feet First recommends that King County DOT assess whether a marked crosswalk is appropriate at this location and identifies the sightline issue as an important educational opportunity for pedestrians.	
6	Intersection of 6th Avenue SW and SW 102nd Street	Large water puddles consistently appear at the NE corner of this intersection and restrict pedestrian access. The King County DOT engineers, who accompanied us on the walk, offered their engineering services to redirect the water flow with drainage remediation.	
7	North side of SW 102nd Street between 6th Avenue SW and 4th Avenue SW	At this point in the route, the environment becomes very difficult for pedestrians: the sidewalk on SW 102nd Street disappears east of 6th Avenue SW; next the walking shoulder narrows substantially just west of 5th Avenue SW; and then at 4th Avenue SW, the walking shoulder is completely blocked with overgrowth. Pedestrians should use extreme caution when walking in this area, as traffic volume and speeds seem to increase as visibility worsens. Feet First recommends calling (206) 386-1218 to schedule street maintenance in order to contain the overgrowth and to maximize the available shoulder space for pedestrians. Feet First also recommends that this location be prioritized to receive a sidewalk to bridge the gap between 4th and 6th Avenues.	
8	South side of SW 102nd Street near intersection with 4th Avenue SW	For drivers, the laurel hedge at the SE corner of the intersection blocks visibility of pedestrians crossing 4th Avenue to the north toward school. For the 3 young teens observed in this photo, the lack of sidewalk and overgrown hedge push them dangerously into the roadway with traffic to their backs. Education is necessary to teach young pedestrians to walk facing traffic when sidewalks are missing. However, the option on the other side of the street is not much better (see item #7). Feet First recommends that maintenance be scheduled to trim this hedge away from the pedestrian right of way.	



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<p>9</p>	<p>Intersection of SW 102nd Street and 4th Avenue SW Top Recommendation #1</p>	<p>This intersection is problematic for pedestrians for multiple reasons. A wide curve at the NW corner makes it easy for drivers to speed through this intersection, inadequate landings do not accommodate wheelchair access, and the NE corner streetlight is not operational. Feet First recommends prioritizing the repair of each corner to make it a safer environment for all. Specific recommendations from walking audit observations include: squaring the NW corner, completing the sidewalk to a full landing on the SE corner to become ADA compliant at each corner, maintaining the hedge at the SW corner, and repairing the streetlight.</p>	
<p>10</p>	<p>4th Avenue SW between SW 104th Street and SW 100th Street</p>	<p>Even though traffic creates a less than desirable walking environment at this location, the sidewalks on the west side of 4th Avenue SW have buffer zones that benefit pedestrians by providing extra distance from vehicle traffic. In order to further benefit pedestrians, Feet First recommends KCFFI coordinate with the police department to schedule for targeted speed enforcement along 4th Avenue SW.</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>Intersection of 4th Avenue SW and SW 100th Street Top Recommendation #4</p>	<p>This location has growing pedestrian traffic due to new residential construction. Residents report that cars drive fast and do not stop for pedestrians at the marked crosswalk. The close proximity of bus stops to the intersection means that stopped buses will block sightlines to oncoming traffic. A combination of education, engineering and enforcement will help make this location safer for pedestrians. Feet First recommends the following, in partnership with all area stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community Action Team should adopt and install pedestrian flag buckets here, with coordinated education for residents and school students. Education efforts can include a “crosswalk action” with Feet First and ped safety instruction from KCFFI. • Area police should conduct targeted speed enforcement and/or a pedestrian sting operation at this location. • King County Metro should weigh this input and consider moving the bus stops to the far sides of the intersection. • Better signage should be installed with a “Stop Here for Peds” message and stop bar for vehicles. 	





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12	Intersection of 4th Avenue SW and SW 100th Street	<p>The bus stop on the east side of 4th Avenue SW just south of the intersection with SW 100th Street has an inadequate landing area. The teacher participating in the walking audit described waiting with a class of students here for field trips, struggling to fit on the narrow sidewalk. If the bus stop remains in this location (see item 11), Feet First recommends that additional pavement be installed for the bus stop landing area. This may be a good location for bulb outs on four corners to address this problem and the issue addressed in #10.</p>	
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Issues and Action Items for NW Route - Greenbridge community

Item	Location	Description	Photo
13	Street parking along 8th Avenue SW between SW 100th Street and SW 97th Street	<p>There is apparent confusion regarding the proper back-in method for the diagonal street parking. When cars pull forward into these spots, it puts them in the position of having to back out across a lane of traffic while exiting. There is an opportunity for education focused on how to perform back angle parking and why it is better for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.</p>	
14	Mid-block pedestrian crossing at 8th Avenue SW just south of SW 97th Street	<p>This location is a working example of mixed-use transportation planning: bulb-outs are installed north and south of the mid-block crosswalk that features an overhead traffic signal; bus schedules are posted at the stop near this intersection thanks to the efforts of the Greenbridge Community Action Team. This group's efforts continue as they now request the installation of a public telephone along this stretch of 8th Avenue SW.</p>	


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15	Walkway connecting 9th Place SW and 9th Avenue SW	In this area, residents have access to a pedestrian-only walking path that features artistic sculptures. This path provides beneficial neighborhood connectivity and shared walkable greenspaces.	
16	Staircase just east of 12th Avenue SW and 98th Street	Currently, SW 97th Street ends for drivers and pedestrians at 10th Avenue SW, leaving a gap in the connection between 10th Avenue SW and 12th Avenue SW. Feet First recommends a gravel path be installed between the communities of White Center and Greenbridge to connect the staircase just east of 12th Avenue SW and SW 98th Street to the corner of 10th Avenue SW and SW 97th Street.	
17	Northwest corner of 10th Avenue SW and SW 97th Street through undeveloped area west toward 12th Avenue SW and SW 98th Street	Large puddles currently form at the corner of SW 97th Street and 10th Avenue SW. Residents voice interest in having a gravel path or other walkway installed here to allow comfortable use throughout the year.	
18	Staircase just east of 12th Avenue SW and 98th Street	Open ponds allow for planned water control in this wetland environment. However, shoreline access to these ponds is not blocked. This access coupled with a lack of informative signage increases risk for improper use. Feet First recommends that a barrier and informational signs be installed around these ponds.	

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19	Traffic circle at the intersection of SW 100th Street and 10th Avenue SW	In the daytime, this intersection provides a safe environment for the pedestrian with sidewalks, marked crossings, pedestrian warning signs, and a well-designed traffic circle that discourages improper left turns. However, lighting from residential housing and street lamps is very limited here. There is currently one large street lamp on the southeast corner and one small street lamp on the northwest corner. Feet First recommends installing additional street lamps to improve nighttime safety for pedestrians.	
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Issues and action on the school grounds

Item	Location	Description	Photo
20	Crosswalk through White Center Heights Elementary parking lot at SW 100th St Top Recommendation #3	Visibility of pedestrians can be blocked by parked vehicles close to the crosswalk in the elementary parking lot. Teachers report that after parent drivers pick-up or drop-off their children at school, they are prone to speed right through this crosswalk. High volumes of personal vehicles before and after school make this area difficult to navigate on foot. The number of pedestrians crossing this area will possibly increase as housing is completed to the northeast of the campus. Feet First recommends that White Center Heights pursue a grant from the Washington Traffic Safety Commission to create a student patrol to help with pedestrian safety in the drop-off and pick-up area	

Contacts & Project Information

For more information about this report, please contact Feet First.

For information about the King County Food and Fitness Initiative, please contact Maggie Anderson.

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Feet First is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Feet First promotes walkable communities through advocacy, community organizing, research, and education.