

powered by feet first



feet first policy

taking a stance to advance walkability

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Walkable Communities and Equity

Policy

where we stand

Advocacy is a major component of the work Feet First does. These policy papers, prepared by our Policy Committee, convey Feet First's position on key issues of interest to increase safe and easy ways for people to choose to go by foot.

Mission

who we are - what we do

Feet First promotes walkable communities and envisions people walking every day for their health, transportation, environment, community, and pleasure.

background

Although improving pedestrian safety and mobility has become a higher transportation planning priority of late, the benefits of good pedestrian infrastructure have not been equally distributed. Studies show that traffic collisions involving people walking are much higher in low-income areas, and disproportionately affect seniors and people of color. An analysis by Governing magazine of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Reporting System shows that between 2008 and 2012, pedestrians in high income census tracts saw 5 deaths per 100,000 residents, people walking in middle income census tracts saw 6.5 deaths per 100,000 residents, and pedestrians in low income census tracts saw 10.4 deaths per 100,000 residents.

There are several reasons for the disparity, including:

- Low income people are less likely to own cars and as a consequence are more likely to walk.
- Low income people are more likely to have swing- or late-shift jobs, which leads to more walking in the dark.
- High-speed, auto-oriented arterials are more likely to run through poor neighborhoods, as low-income neighborhoods generally have less political clout to push back against their construction than wealthier neighborhoods.
- Cities have tended to focus on improving their pedestrian infrastructure in wealthier parts of cities, leaving low income neighborhoods lagging behind.



feet first
promoting walkable communities



Walkable Communities and Equity

These trends will likely only get worse as rising in-city housing costs push low-income residents to the suburbs, which tend to have vehicle-centric infrastructure.

why it matters to walking

In Seattle, Feet First has seen these patterns repeated in neighborhoods like those along Rainier Avenue South. This community experiences a disproportionate share of collisions involving pedestrians that result in injury or death. Inadequate signage, high speeds, neglected and insufficient pedestrian infrastructure, and long distances between crossings create a dangerous confluence of factors that lead to pedestrian injuries and deaths.

A 2013 study by University of Washington Masters in Public Health students showed that there are differences in signal timings for Seattle residents living, working, and playing in Rainier Valley and Ballard at crossings that have similar volumes of traffic. The study highlighted that people in Rainier Valley have longer road distance to cross than residents in Ballard, and less time to cross it. At the two crossings studied, people walking on Rainier Avenue South had 3.0 feet or more distance to cross per second, while people walking in Ballard along Market Street had 2.8 feet or less to cross per second, a small but measurable difference. However, this is based on a very small sample size; further research is needed to verify if this inequity between poorer and wealthier communities is a citywide issue.

A recent study conducted in Portland indicates that motorists are less likely to stop for an African American pedestrian in a crosswalk. A black pedestrian's wait time at the curb was about 32 percent longer than a white person's, suggesting that unconscious bias might make people less likely to yield to people of color.

Seattle's Pedestrian Master Plan uses an equity analysis, which contributes 35 percent to the total score that identifies the High Priority Areas for pedestrian capital improvements. This analysis employs metrics such as income, diabetes obesity rates, and vehicle ownership. However, that alone is not enough to ensure that the benefits that come from pedestrian improvements will actually serve the people they are intended to in the long term. Pedestrian improvements and other amenities will always increase land and housing costs, and without a holistic focus on increasing the amount of adequate affordable housing, as well as investments to strengthen our transit system for people walking who are currently most at-risk for injury and death in Seattle will likely continue to be so outside of Seattle.

feet first position

Eliminating pedestrian collisions and deaths is rightfully a major focus of pedestrian planning in Seattle; traffic collisions and deaths should not be accepted as a cost of using our streets. Feet First supports a Zero Vision plan that focuses on eliminating serious injuries and fatalities. A successful plan would both improve pedestrian infrastructure and signage, and educate drivers. However, simply focusing on collisions is not enough to ensure that a pedestrian plan is a perfect one. Any pedestrian plan must ensure that people can choose the option of walking along safe routes, and that planning benefits most those who have to gain from the health and economic benefits of walking.





Walkable Communities and Equity

The number of people walking involved in collisions on streets like Rainier Avenue South shows that we have not done enough for people who live outside of the economically-booming central neighborhoods in the city. Equity considerations should play a larger role in determining priorities for capital spending on sidewalks and other pedestrian improvements. Communities in low-income areas who have had major, high-speed arterials run through them over the course of the twentieth century should receive higher priority for pedestrian funding, in order to begin to correct the mistakes of the past. Fixes such as increasing the prioritization of sidewalk and pedestrian infrastructure from .5 to 1 mile around senior centers, schools and community centers will go a long way in protecting those pedestrians who are most vulnerable.

Additionally, Feet First supports measures taken to increase affordable housing stock to ensure that people from all economic strata are able to benefit from safe, pedestrian-oriented infrastructure.

resources

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