

Safe Roads Residents' Committee

Proposal to the Selectboard

November 22, 2021

Background

This committee formed based on several resident complaints to the selectboard about close calls on bikes and in crosswalks, including a petition to reduce the speed limit circulated by Richard Butz. We began meeting in July 2021, and reviewed all the materials that had been shared with the selectboard, as well as the research on traffic calming. Our group invited Mike Winslow, Transportation Planner at Addison County Regional Planning Commission, and Jonathon Weber from Local Motion, to join us to provide technical advice; and in September 2021, joined forces with the Bristol Bike/Walk residents who had already conducted an audit of road/sidewalk safety. The draft proposal below has prioritized the suggestions from both groups of residents to develop a comprehensive plan to begin improving our sidewalk and street safety.

Committee members: Jessica Teets, Sally Burrell (Energy Committee), Chris Urban, Mary Yates, and Melanie Kessler (Regional School Coordinator, Local Motion).

Committee resources: Michele Gilbert (RiseVT), Mike Winslow (ACRPC), and Jonathon Weber (Complete Streets Program Manager, Local Motion).

Our Vision

We envision a Bristol where children walk or bike safely to school, and where residents walk dogs and commute by bicycle, on foot, or with a mobility device. In addition to reducing pollution and improving resident health, walkable towns increase the civic interaction so important to the health of a small town, where residents look out for children that are not their own, help each other, and feel a common sense of belonging. Additionally, walkable towns create a vitality that draws customers and visitors into local businesses, improving the economic health of the community and building a strong base of tax revenue to invest back into our community. With a compact settlement pattern and connected street grid, Bristol is exceptionally well-positioned to become one of the best small towns for walking and biking. The proposals outlined below focus on improving road and sidewalk safety such that residents and visitors feel comfortable walking and biking around Bristol.

Best Practices for Safe Roads and Sidewalks

Slowing car and truck traffic is key to creating a safe, walkable, and bikeable environment. Research shows that three strategies together, rather than any one method on its own, most effectively slow traffic:

1. Traffic calming measures
2. Speed limit reductions
3. Education

Speed limit reductions, enforcement, and education are important tools, but on their own will not yield meaningful, lasting results. Driving is an intuitive activity, meaning that drivers generally behave based on how the roadway is designed. Wide, straight roads, for example, provide drivers with a high degree of comfort, resulting in higher speeds. Narrower roads with shorter sight lines and higher levels of activity prompt drivers to operate more carefully—resulting in slower speeds. This is why we are comfortable driving at 65 MPH on a highway, but would never go this fast through a village or on a winding dirt road. Efforts to reduce speeds through statute, enforcement, and education alone do not encourage drivers to act intuitively. The effect of those efforts would be temporary at best.

To effect meaningful reductions in speed and improve road safety, the roadway's features must be adjusted to prompt drivers to naturally operate safely at lower speeds. This is referred to as “traffic calming.” Education and enforcement have important roles to play, but will only be effective when combined with traffic calming measures. Thus, we are recommending a three-pronged approach to safer streets in Bristol that includes traffic calming, speed limit reductions, and education.

I. Traffic Calming

- a. Walk/Bike infrastructure - Several roadways in Bristol are sufficiently wide to add walk/bike infrastructure through paint striping. This will also visually narrow the roadway, and likely reduce speeds.
 - i. Pine Street - Install advisory bike/pedestrian lanes by striping the road so that there are wide shoulders for pedestrians and bikes and a single two-way lane for vehicles. Vehicles may use the shoulders for passing, but are expected to yield to people walking and biking. Compared with building sidewalks, these lanes are less expensive, less imposition on homeowners, and safer for bikes and pedestrians.
 - ii. North Street – Paint bike lanes on both sides of North Street for safe north-south bike travel. These lanes will also align with the proposed Addison Triangle Bike Loop for connecting Vergennes and Middlebury with Bristol.

iii. Install speed tables or raised crosswalks - long raised speed hump with a flat top and more gradual ramps that allow plowing and do not need to be removed in the winter.

1. Place at 3 locations as vehicles first enter town to slow traffic before the rest of the crosswalks: West Street by the Fire station; North Street by Pine; East Street by Mountain (shift the crosswalk for better sight lines)

b. Signals and Visual Cues

- i. Install RRFB at 2 locations: North-Pleasant intersection (school crossing) and East-Mountain intersection (already being installed at West-Airport intersection)
- ii. Continue placing bollards at as many crosswalks as possible, with a focus on Fitch (for BES) and seasonally at Maple-West intersection (creemee stand)

II. Speed Reduction

- c. Reduce the speed limit in town to 25 mph (town responsibility)
- d. Apply to VTRANS to reduce speed to 25 mph on east/main/west street through town
 - i. Mike Winslow can provide assistance with the speed studies for the application

III. Education

- f. Enforcement into village - regular presence of law enforcement and a reputation that the area is policed
 - i. Ask state for assistance to help temporarily increase capacity
- g. Install signage warning of slower speeds (25mph), pedestrians, etc (in addition to the solar-powered speed indicators being placed where the speed is first reduced)
- h. Conduct before and after studies to document effectiveness, and share publicly (Addison Independent, FPF, etc)

Future Policy and Regulation Changes

To ensure that this focus on walk/bike safety continues to receive attention, we suggest that the SB:

- Form a municipal Walk/Bike Committee to support and advise on traffic calming initiatives, infrastructure investments, events, etc. The committee should meet regularly with the town planner and representatives from highway department to discuss issues and potential solutions, give feedback on annual staff work plans, budgets, and project designs, and hear and respond to resident concerns related to walking and biking. The committee should take on volunteer roles, such as performing an audit of available bike parking.

- Appoint a representative from the Walk/Bike Committee to serve on the Addison County Regional Planning Commission Transportation Advisory Committee.
- Establish dedicated funding for walk/bike infrastructure improvements in the budget.