



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax

Trails, Sidewalks and Bikeways Committee

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(at large)

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(Washington Area Bicyclists Association)

March 1, 2023

Jeffrey C. McKay, Chairman
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors
12000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 530
Fairfax, Virginia 22035

Dear Chairman McKay:

The Trails, Sidewalks, and Bikeways Committee calls the board's attention to our alarming pedestrian safety situation, which continues despite increased attention and funding. Twenty-three pedestrians were killed on Fairfax County streets and highways in 2022 – the highest number since consistent statistics started to be collected in 2010. As of November 2022, there were more pedestrian-involved vehicular fatalities (22) than homicides (20) – a gruesome statistic on both counts.

Fairfax County has been making progress applying the needed tools and policies to address pedestrian and bicycle safety, such as the Safe Streets for All program and speed limit restrictions on Route 1, endorsed unanimously by the Board of Supervisors at their May 10, 2022, meeting. This was supported by dedicated funding for implementation. Last year's losses show, however, that these efforts are not going to be enough. In analyzing the details of these incidents, it appears that more, direct, and system-wide changes need to be made immediately to reduce risk and increase safety for pedestrians and bicycles at intersections.

Several intersection-focused initiatives are included in the Safe Streets for All program. These include the installation and maintenance of safety related equipment, marking and signage such as rapid flashing beacons, pedestrian hybrid beacons, crosswalk markings, "Yield to Pedestrian" signage, and street and walkway lighting. The TSB notes that the critical impediment to progress on this front has been and will be the hiring of the necessary staff and sufficient dedicated funding for these systemwide programs.

Beyond recommendations contained in the Safe Streets for All program report, we urge the Board of Supervisors to prioritize additional measures along major arterials in the county. The most promising would be a "turn calming" program like those being implemented in New York, San Francisco, Portland, and elsewhere. Such programs have successfully reduced turning speeds, pedestrian fatalities, and injuries at intersections citywide. The components of such a program are illustrated in the attachment.

Why intersections? According to the VDOT Crash Analysis Tool of recorded crash data from 2015 through October 2022, there were 120 pedestrian involved vehicular crashes in Fairfax County resulting in a pedestrian fatality. 54 of those crashes (45%) occurred at or approaching an intersection. This is much higher than the nationwide statistic of between 15 and 20%. Figure 1 maps those 54 fatalities, clearly showing this is a county-wide problem and necessitates a systemic solution.

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A more comprehensive look at the problem can be seen in Figure 2, which shows the locations of all pedestrian-involved injuries (both fatal and non-fatal). 656 of the 1323 pedestrian-involved vehicular crashes (nearly 50%) occurred at or related to intersections between 2015 and 2022. The county-wide character of this larger problem is also apparent.

The last two pedestrian fatalities in Fairfax County occurred at intersections that lacked basic and fundamental safety provisions such as high visibility crosswalks on all four legs of the signalized intersection, adequate lighting, adequate signage, and adequate pedestrian signals that increase safety for pedestrians crossing at intersections. One of the recent deaths (on Braddock Road at Kings Park Drive) occurred in a crosswalk that VDOT, inexplicably, plans to eliminate.

In addition to the turn-calming program, the committee recommends that *no crosswalk in which there has been a pedestrian fatality be eliminated*. If VDOT proposes such a removal, the Board of Supervisors should insist that the VDOT director publicly describe the specific, data-driven, and objective mitigation strategy that will replace this increased risk to Fairfax County citizens. As with our other recommendations, this is driven by the fact that previous ideas and concepts about safety have clearly been inadequate.

Intersection-related accidents are likely due to several factors that would be addressed by a turn-calming program: many drivers are traveling at too high a speed through intersections, cut corners and accelerate through intersections, and have limited awareness of potential presence of pedestrians. Speed affects not just the frequency, but also the severity of the crashes – injuries become fatalities (an issue also noted in the Safe Streets for All Program report).

While commendable, the Safe Streets for All program appears not to have an impact on the safety of the county's pedestrian (and bicyclists). We are concerned that it is not adequately funded and does not have dedicated staff to implement the measures if they were funded. Moreover, the board has additional options to address this challenge in a proven "turn calming" program. We are certain that the supervisors share our sense of urgency on this issue.

Sincerely,



Kenneth Comer
Chairman

cc: Board of Supervisors
Bryan Hill, County Executive

Addendum 1: Maps of Countywide Pedestrian Involved Crashes

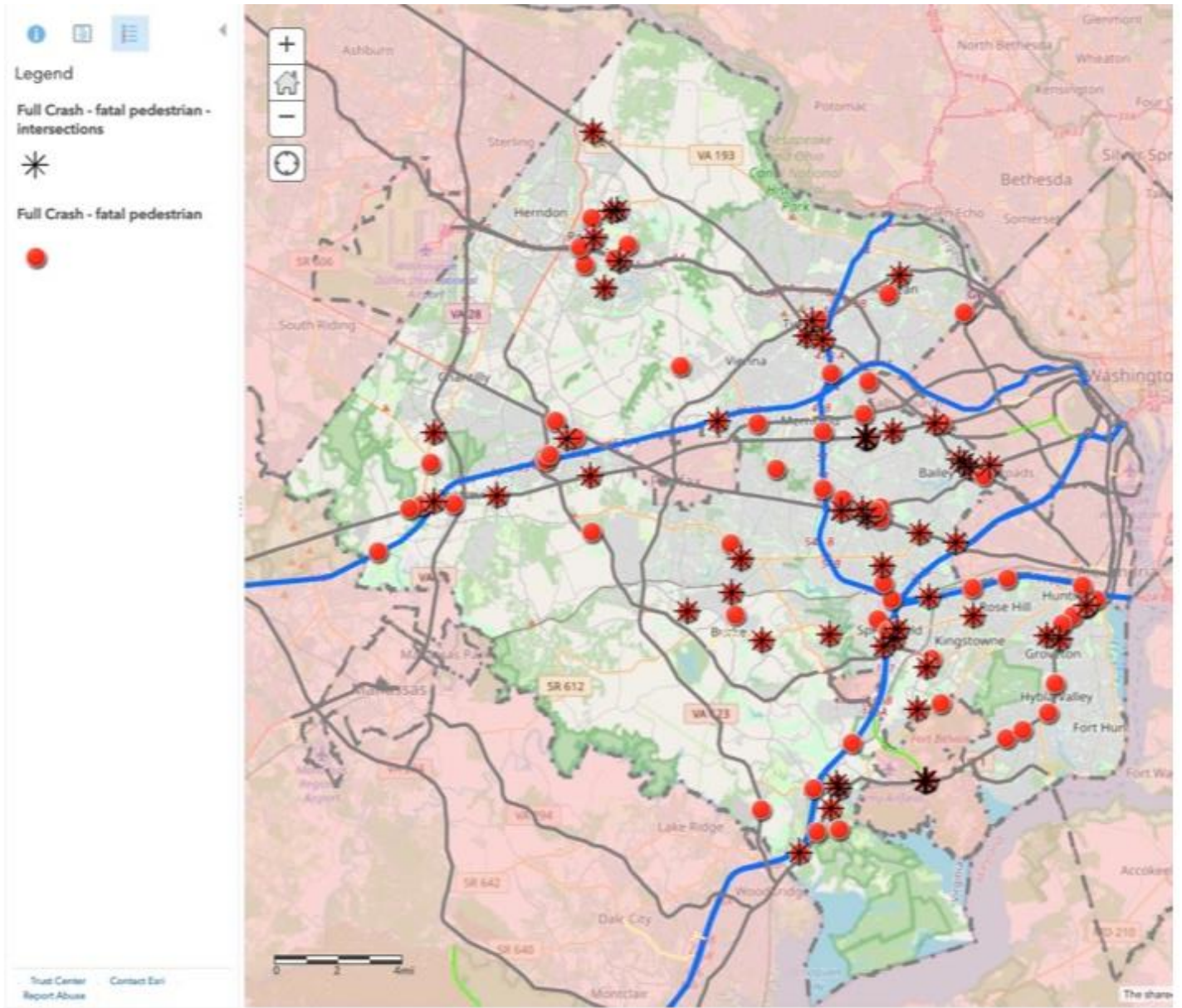


Figure 1 Pedestrian involved fatalities at intersections (star symbol)

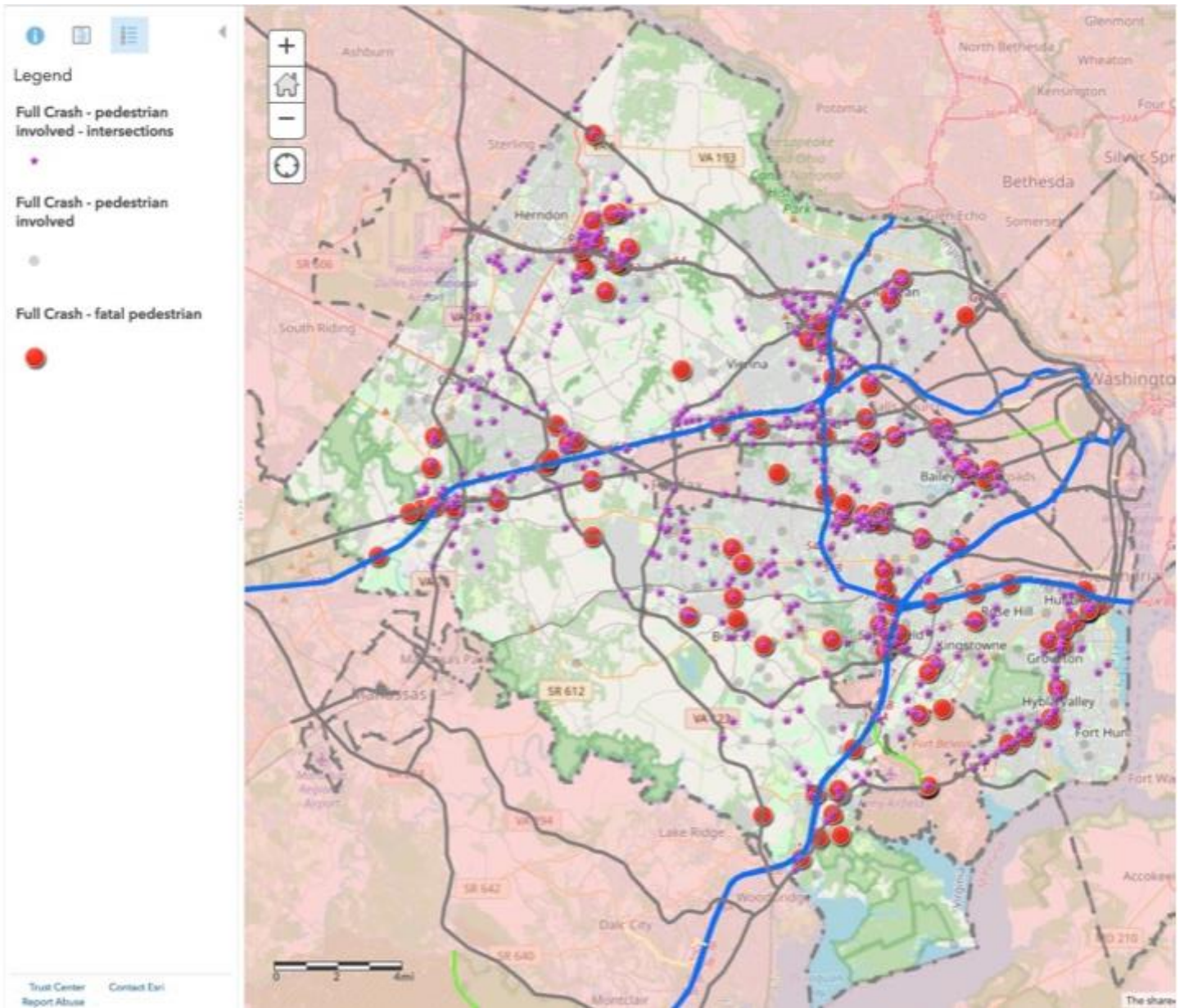


Figure 2 The purple dots show the locations of the 656 pedestrian involved vehicular crashes with serious injuries between 2015 and 2022 in Fairfax County/

Addendum 2: Essential Components of a “Turn Calming Program

A comprehensive “turn calming” program would include the following elements.

1. **Slow Turn Education campaign** providing a multi-pronged safety and awareness campaign for intersections similar to that in San Francisco.



Figure 3. Slow Turn Education poster.

2. Reduce the **posted speed limit on all urbanized arterials to 35mph** (such as was recently approved for Route 1 between Alexandria and the GW Parkway intersection north of Fort Belvoir).
3. Accelerate the implementation of pedestrian safety measures to reduce risk to pedestrians at intersections:
 - a. **Eliminate right turn on red** at all signalized intersections.
 - b. Accelerate the installation of **high visibility crosswalks** striping at all four intersection legs of every signalized intersection (and prevent VDOT from eliminating crosswalks at intersections such as they are attempting to do along Braddock Road at Kings Park Drive (pedestrian fatality #22 in 2022)).
 - c. Accelerate the installation and programming of pedestrian signals for **leading pedestrian interval** and/or establish as the default setting for “**Ped Recall**” (WALK indication will be given every cycle (as if someone were always there pushing the button) and/or “**rest-in-walk**” (automatically gives the WALK indication during the green signal for the major street) as appropriate for the intersection.
 - d. Modify signal phasing options at appropriate intersections to reduce conflicts from left turning vehicles by providing a **protected period for left turning at the end of the cycle** rather than the beginning. This option may be appropriate where left turn traffic volumes are relatively manageable but opposing through volumes are relatively high¹

¹ See http://www.pedbikesafe.org/pedsafe/countermeasures_detail.cfm?CM_NUM=51

- e. Accelerate the **installation of “stop for pedestrians”** signs in advance of all crosswalks parallel to arterials (in place of “yield to pedestrian” signs which do not convey the appropriate message to reduce risk to pedestrians) (Figure 4).



Figure 4. City of Alexandria “Stop for Pedestrian” signage in Old Town.

- 4. Accelerate the implementation of physical improvements that decrease turning traffic operating speeds and increase visibility and awareness of pedestrians in crosswalks:
 - a. **Hardened centerlines** – install physical barriers that allow through traffic movement, but force left turning drivers to slow down to navigate the turn (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Low cost but effective turning barriers for left turning traffic can be installed immediately at signalized intersections (example from nyc.gov)

- b. Install **“wedges” at corners**: works for both left and right turning traffic to reduce turning radii (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Low cost but effective turning barriers for right turning traffic can be installed immediately at signalized intersections (Portland.gov).

- c. Restripe right turn intersections at corners to **25' maximum radii** and use double thickness widths to reinforce desired turning movement (mountable aprons can be installed for larger vehicles that contrast with asphalt pavement and crosswalk markings). This can be done through the repaving program as well as spot improvements at high-risk intersections. (Figure 7).



Figure 7 Example of reduced radii installed by VDOT along Route 50 in Middleburg with a mountable apron for truck and trailer

- d. Eliminate all right turn deceleration and acceleration lanes at signalized intersections (in combination with any of the above)