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Report lists Top Counties for Pedestrian Fatalities

*Pedestrians disproportionately injured and killed due to poor street design and lack of funding;
WV Citizen Action calls for increased focus on pedestrian safety*

Charleston, WV — Kanawha Co. is among the most dangerous counties in the state for pedestrians, ranking 4th most dangerous out of the 55 counties, a new report released by Transportation for America shows.

Dangerous by Design 2011:

Solving the Epidemic of Preventable Pedestrian Deaths (and Making Great Neighborhoods),

This Report ranks every county according to a Pedestrian Fatality Rate that measures the relative risk to pedestrians.

Link to Report: <http://t4america.org/resources/dangerousbydesign2011>

West Virginia Counties in the top ten (in order of pedestrian fatality rates) are:

1. McDowell
2. Berkley
3. Wayne
4. Kanawha
5. Mineral
6. Mercer
7. Greenbrier
8. Raleigh
9. Jefferson
10. Monongalia

One of the biggest contributors to this problem of pedestrian fatalities is the way streets are designed. An overwhelming proportion of such fatalities occur on roads designed for speeding traffic with little concern for pedestrians, lacking safe sidewalks, crosswalks, and signals. Sadly, it is the elderly, children and minorities who are killed and injured in disproportionate numbers, due to this failure to build roads with everyone's safety in mind.

In West Virginia, from 2000 to 2007, the average pedestrian death rate for African-Americans was 7 percent higher than for non-Hispanic whites. Nationwide, older Americans are twice as likely to be killed while walking as those under 65 years of age. Forty-five senior (over 65) pedestrians were killed in WV according to the report. And in West Virginia, 33 children 15 and younger were killed from 2000 to 2007; pedestrian injury is the third leading cause of death by unintentional injury for children 15 and younger.

While walking conditions remain perilous across the country, many communities are working to make their streets safer and welcoming for people on foot or bicycle, the report shows. In recent years, scores of communities have begun to retrofit poorly designed roads to become "complete streets," adding sidewalks and bicycle lanes, reducing crossing distances and installing crosswalks to make walking and biking safer and more inviting for all users. Charleston is now in the process of installing bright crosswalk stripes in the east end and other residential areas.

“Here in Charleston, officials are helping save lives and encouraging better lifestyles by investing in sidewalks, crosswalks, and other safety measures,” said Gary Zuckett, Exec. Dir. of WV Citizen Action. “We want to continue moving in this direction and hope that additional federal funding dedicated to pedestrian safety can help us save even more lives.”

Pedestrian safety is often perceived as a strictly local issue but for decades, federal dollars have been invested in thousands of miles of state and local highways. 67 percent of all 47,000+ pedestrian fatalities from 2000-2009 occurred on these federal-aid roadways — roads eligible to receive federal funding for construction and improvements with federal guidelines or oversight for design. Yet Congress is contemplating elimination of the two main programs for improving conditions and safety for walking and biking.

“Our tax money that goes to the federal government and comes back to West Virginia for transportation should be used to build streets, roads and highways that are safe for all users,” said Zuckett. “Both Rep Capito and Rahall are senior members of the House Transportation Committee that is now working on a new Federal Transportation bill. We encourage them both to help allocate resources to make our streets safer for all forms of transportation including pedestrian and bicycle traffic.”

Pedestrians account for 12 percent of all traffic deaths, while state departments of transportation allocate only 1.5 percent of available federal funds to projects that retrofit dangerous roads or create safe alternatives.

One of the biggest contributors to this crisis is the way streets are designed. An overwhelming proportion of pedestrian fatalities occur on roads designed for speeding traffic with little concern for pedestrians, lacking safe sidewalks, crosswalks, and signals. Sadly, it is the elderly, children and minorities who are killed and injured in disproportionate numbers, due to this failure to build roads with everyone’s safety in mind.

“Some in Congress have questioned the federal interest in keeping pedestrians safe, believing it to be a strictly local issue,” said James Corless, director of Transportation for America. “But 67 percent of all pedestrian fatalities in the last 10 years occurred on federal-aid roads — roads eligible to receive federal funding and with federal guidelines or oversight for design.”

“Given the rising cost of gas, more and more people are getting out of their cars and seeking alternative forms of transportation. As demand increases, so too does the need to make sure that all of our roads are safe for everyone. Congress must stop punting on a long-term transportation bill and prioritize the safety of all road users and give states the resources they need to stem the tide of preventable deaths.”

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ABOUT WV CITIZEN ACTION

WV Citizen Action, since 1974 has worked for consumer protection and good government through building community coalitions and empowering citizens to have direct participation in progressive public policy. It is the local affiliate of Transportation for America. www.wvcag.org

ABOUT TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA

Transportation for America (T4 America) is the largest, most diverse coalition working on transportation reform today. Our nation’s transportation network is based on a policy that has not been significantly updated since the 1950’s. We believe it is time for a bold new vision — transportation that guarantees our freedom to move however we choose and leads to a stronger economy, greater energy security, cleaner environment and healthier America for all of us. We’re calling for more responsible investment of our federal tax dollars to create a safer, cleaner, smarter transportation system that works for everyone. www.t4america.org