Pedestrian Fatalities in Southern New Jersey

*How improved data collection can aid
future road safety planning efforts*

National and state-level data shows that minorities and those with low-incomes are more dependent upon walking than the overall population and are disproportionately at risk on unsafe roadways.[1] This report offers policy recommendations on how public agencies in New Jersey can improve tracking of pedestrian fatalities based upon demographic factors (specifically focusing on ethnicity) in order to target safety improvements to dangerous roadways in areas where residents are more likely to walk.

National Demographic Profile of Pedestrian Fatalities

- The US pedestrian death rate is higher for Hispanics/Latinos and African-Americans than for non-Hispanic whites;[1]

- Approximately one-third of US residents are unable to drive or choose not to, due to factors such as level of income, age or mobility status;[1]

- The overall rate of poverty in the suburbs is predicted to grow,[2] — suburban automobile-centric development often forces pedestrians to travel long distances between work, home and shopping destinations with few pedestrian roadway safety features.

New Jersey Pedestrian Fatality Rates, by race/ethnicity per 100,000 people (2000-2007)[1]

African-Americans	2.32
Hispanics	2.05
Non-Hispanic whites	1.40

Figure A: Nine-County Southern New Jersey Region

Southern New Jersey: Higher overall pedestrian fatality rates

Data from the Federal Highway Administration's *Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)* shows that the pedestrian fatality rate in New Jersey is higher than the rate for the nation. From 2007 to 2009, the pedestrian fatality rate for all of New Jersey was 17% higher than the national rate.[3] The nine-county Southern New Jersey region (Figure A) suffers an even greater fatality rate than does northern New Jersey, with a 30% higher rate.[4] 167 pedestrians were killed by vehicles on southern New Jersey roads From 2007 to 2009. For specific pedestrian fatality rates by region, see Figure B.

Figure B: Pedestrian fatality rates per 100,000, by geography, 2007-2009[4]	
United States	1.45
New Jersey– statewide	1.69
Northern New Jersey*	1.55
Southern* New Jersey	2.01

*"Southern New Jersey" refers to the "nine-county southern New Jersey region" identified in "Figure A" in this report. Northern New Jersey encompasses all remaining New Jersey counties.

"...when you construct a good sidewalk, you are constructing democracy. A sidewalk is a symbol of equality."

—Enrique Peñalosa, former mayor of Bogotá, Colombia[5]

Tracking of Race/Ethnicity Pedestrian Fatality Data—Southern New Jersey

Transportation for America's 2011 report *Dangerous by Design* showed that New Jersey pedestrian fatality rates from 2000-2007 were higher for African-Americans and Hispanics than for non-Hispanic whites[1], but more recent or more localized data focusing on the southern New Jersey region is unavailable through centralized pedestrian fatality databases.

Pedestrian fatality data is tracked by both the National Highway Safety Administration's *Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)* and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)*; however, *FARS* race/ethnicity data is incomplete at the state level and *WISQARS* race/ethnicity data is unavailable at the sub-state level and is also incomplete after 2007, due to new privacy measures.

Methodology

In an effort to determine the demographic profile of pedestrians killed on southern New Jersey roads between 2007 and 2009, TSTC conducted a thorough review of pedestrian fatalities in the study area using *FARS*. TSTC supplemented this research using *Access World News*, a database with access to the majority of New Jersey news sources. For newspapers not available through Access World News, TSTC conducted searches through individual New Jersey newspaper websites.[6] These searches allowed TSTC to obtain the names of many of the 167 pedestrians who lost their lives during this period. Each name was then submitted to the New Jersey Department of Criminal Justice, which then provided race and ethnicity data for each reported pedestrian fatality.[7]

To provide consistency between the greatest number of data sources available, this report focuses on southern New Jersey pedestrian deaths that occurred between 2007 and 2009 in Mercer, Burlington, Ocean, Gloucester, Camden, Salem, Atlantic, Cumberland and Cape May counties. Based on conclusions derived from this research, this report offers policy recommendations on how public agencies can improve tracking of pedestrian fatalities in order to more effectively utilize pedestrian safety funds on dangerous roadways throughout the state.

Tracking Southern New Jersey Fatality Data

Of the 167 fatality incidents reported in FARS, 128 of them were covered in New Jersey newspapers. These incidents were used in our analysis. There is a gap of 39 known pedestrian fatalities for which the names of the victims were unavailable, making it infeasible to submit these incidents to the New Jersey Department of Criminal Justice for race/ethnicity identification. The percentage of reported articles on pedestrian fatalities varied widely by county, with 38.9% of known pedestrian fatalities in Camden County lacking associated articles, while all pedestrian fatalities in Salem, Cumberland and Cape May counties were covered in New Jersey newspapers.

Figure C: Comparison of pedestrian fatalities reported in *FARS* to pedestrian fatalities reported in newspapers with New Jersey coverage*[8]

County	Number of Fatalities	Number of Fatalities with Articles	Percent of Fatalities Not Reported in NJ Media
Camden	36	22	38.9%
Gloucester	13	8	38.5%
Atlantic	29	22	31.8%
Mercer	15	11	26.7%
Burlington	30	25	16.7%
Ocean	37	35	10.8%
Salem	2	2	0%
Cumberland	3	3	0%
Cape May	2	2	0%

* Pedestrian fatalities "not reported in New Jersey media" determined through periodical review by TSTC.

Unavailability of race/ethnicity data

While age data is centrally reported through the *FARS* system, there is no corresponding system with complete race/ethnicity data. *WISQARS* data is not available at the sub-state level and is also incomplete after 2007, due to new privacy protections implemented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2011.

Lacking key demographic information, such as race/ethnicity of pedestrians who have lost their lives on New Jersey roads, it is difficult for transportation agencies, elected officials, advocacy groups, and community members to orient pedestrian safety measures and research and design efforts towards populations who are disproportionately at risk on our roadways. Without this information, certain populations (racial/ethnic minorities, non-English speakers and low-income individuals) may remain disproportionately vulnerable.

Recommendations for Tracking Pedestrian Fatalities:

- Improve coordination between the New Jersey Department of Transportation, the New Jersey Department of Criminal Justice and state, county and local law enforcement agencies, with the aim of standardizing pedestrian fatality reporting (all pedestrian fatalities should be recorded with race/ethnicity data to complement existing age, gender, and location data available in *FARS* and *WISQARS*);

- Create a publically accessible statewide pedestrian fatality database that incorporates all race, ethnicity, age and gender data;

- Coordinate with statewide media outlets to highlight pedestrian fatality hotspots throughout key communities (seniors, low-income, communities of color).

Conclusions

Pedestrians often face significant danger walking along and crossing roads in southern New Jersey. These pedestrians have been killed at a higher rate than the nation as a whole. National data indicates that Hispanics/Latinos and African-Americans have a higher pedestrian fatality rate than non-Hispanic whites. However, there is no way of substantiating these nationwide statistics locally, because race/ethnicity data is not uniformly collected at the local level. This report shows significant gaps in the reporting of race/ethnicity for southern New Jersey pedestrians killed between 2007 and 2009.

The missing data leads to reporting inconsistencies. A centralized database that tracks pedestrian fatalities by race/ethnicity, age, and gender would make it possible to analyze whether certain populations are more vulnerable and would allow community organizations, public agencies, advocates, and other groups to suggest ways to mitigate these disparities through road design and targeted public education campaigns.

Black Horse Pike near the Shore Mall, Egg Harbor Township, NJ[9]

Works Cited

1   http://t4america.org/resources/dangerousbydesign2011/

2   http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/pssp/background/psafety.cfm

3   http://www.-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Main/index.aspx

4   http://www.-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Main/index.aspx; www.census.gov

5   http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/08/magazine/08WWLN-Q4-t.html?_r-0

6   Newspapers examined include all available through *Access World News* database (http://www.newsbank.com), the *Courier Post* (www.courierpostonline.com) and the *Asbury Park Press* (www.app.com)

7   Within the Department of Criminal Justice, the medical examiner conducts an investigation of each pedestrian fatality incident, at which time race and ethnicity data is recorded.

8   Chart by Tri-State Transportation Campaign; data from newspapers available through *Access World News* database (www.newsbank.com), the *Courier Post* (www.courierpostonline.com) and the *Asbury Park Press* (www.app.com)

9   Image source: Press of Atlantic City, Danny Drake—http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/communities/hamilton/black-horse-pike-in-atlantic-county-called-fourth-most-dangerous/article_21192a74-68b8-11e1-a3f8-001871e3ce6c.html?mode=image&photo=0