

Pittsburgh ranks high in national study on pedestrian safety

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By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Larry Roberts/Post-Gazette

America's unofficial jaywalking capital has been rated as one of the nation's safest metropolitan areas for pedestrians.

Pittsburgh was the fourth safest among 52 U.S. metro areas in a study of pedestrian fatalities occurring from 2000 to 2009, according to the report, issued Tuesday by Transportation for America, a national coalition of interest groups that favors progressive transportation policies.

The only metro areas rated safer for walking than Pittsburgh were Boston, Cleveland and New York City.

The report painted a gloomy picture of pedestrian safety nationwide, saying "decades-long neglect of pedestrian safety in the design and use of American streets is exacting a heavy toll" -- 47,700 pedestrians killed from 2000 to 2009, the equivalent of a jumbo jet full of passengers crashing about every month.

"Despite the magnitude of these avoidable tragedies, little public attention -- and even less in public resources -- has been committed to reducing pedestrian

deaths and injuries in the United States," the report said.

It urged Congress to adopt a national complete streets policy that designs roads with all users in mind, not just drivers. It noted that some in Congress were calling for eliminating dedicated funding for biking and walking projects, including the federal Safe Routes to School program.

The four most dangerous metro areas for walking all were in Florida: Orlando, Tampa-St. Petersburg, Jacksonville and Miami-Fort Lauderdale, according to the report.

The researchers assigned a Pedestrian Danger Index to each metro area based on the number of actual fatalities and the estimated volume of pedestrians. It made the estimates using census data about the percentage of people who reported that they walk to work, a method they acknowledged was not infallible.

Pennsylvania ranked 33rd among states and the District of Columbia for pedestrian danger. Florida, South Carolina and Louisiana had the highest Pedestrian Danger Indexes.

"Pittsburgh is helping save lives and encouraging better lifestyles by investing in sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic calming and other safety measures," said Josh Karns of PA Walks and Bikes, a statewide group based in Harrisburg. "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."

A reporter jaywalking his way through the Golden Triangle on Tuesday found mixed opinions about the assertion that Pittsburgh is pedestrian-friendly, even relatively speaking.

"Absolutely," said Patty Schmigel of Emsworth, who was completing her regular lunchtime walk from Downtown to the North Shore and back.

"I don't think it's very safe," said Kayla Smith of McKees Rocks. "Most cars won't stop" for pedestrians in crosswalks, she said. "You've got to wait five minutes to cross."

"We like to jaywalk in Pittsburgh, and most people will stop for you," said Cynthia Burch of McCandless, noting that jaywalking is aided and abetted by narrow streets. "Our streets Downtown aren't very wide. You can do that here."

"Honestly, nobody obeys pedestrian laws around here," said Phil Dellaquilla of McCandless, who had just finished a noontime run. "I'm surprised there aren't more pedestrian accidents."

Mr. Dellaquilla said he was pleased years ago when Pittsburgh police started citing jaywalkers. "Why did they stop?" he asked.

Asked if he ever jaywalks, he let out a laugh.

"I try not to," he said.

The report, "Dangerous by Design 2011," can be viewed at <http://t4america.org>.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11145/1148915-53-0.stm#ixzz1S62GNZU2>