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METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300 Washington, D.C. 20002-4239

Telephone (202) 962-3200 TDD (202) 962-3213 Fax (202) 962-3201 Internet: [www.mwcog.org](http://www.mwcog.org)

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CONTACT: Mary Ellen Menton  
202-289-2001 (cell: 540-229-4505)

## Putting the Brakes on Regional Pedestrian Fatalities

### *Law Enforcement Highlight Dangers in Stopping-Distance Demonstration*

Already 80+ Pedestrian Fatalities in the Washington Metro Region

Washington, D.C. – As evening commutes go dark with the end of daylight savings time, regional law enforcement officials held a stopping-distance demonstration today to highlight the need for drivers and pedestrians to pay close attention to one another.

As part of the *Street Smart* campaign, the demonstration showcased the lengthy distances required for vehicles to come to a halt at different speeds. For example, a vehicle traveling at 25 miles per hour requires 86 feet to come to a complete stop. Traveling at 35 miles per hour, a vehicle requires 137 feet to halt – nearly half a football field. Stopping distances reflect average driver recognition/reaction times and skid distances. Also featured at the event were numerous blind spots around buses and trucks, highlighting the need for walkers and bikers to exercise particular caution around large vehicles.

More than 80 pedestrians have been killed in traffic crashes across the region since the start of the year. In the District of Columbia, where biking and walking are particularly prevalent, pedestrians account for 47 percent of traffic fatalities – more than four times the national average of 11 percent. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that a pedestrian is injured every eight minutes and killed almost every two hours on our nation's roadways. Research shows the responsibility for pedestrian incidents is shared between drivers and pedestrians.

"The *Street Smart* campaign focuses on raising awareness of dangerous behaviors and educating drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists on how to be safer on the roads in the Washington metropolitan area," said Dave Robertson, executive director of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). "Heightened awareness coupled with increased law enforcement is the key to protecting pedestrians on our roadways."

Since speeding exponentially increases the likelihood that pedestrians will be hit, injured and killed, the region's police agencies are stepping up enforcement efforts. Additionally, *Street Smart* includes an extensive public education campaign – with a "Steel vs. Flesh" theme – to boost awareness of the dangers confronted by pedestrians and bikers every day.

At higher speeds, motorists are less likely to react in time to avoid colliding with pedestrians. Higher speed crashes are much more lethal to pedestrians. When struck by a vehicle going 40 mph, a pedestrian has an 85 percent chance of dying, whereas a pedestrian hit by a vehicle traveling at 20 mph has a five percent chance of dying.

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This region sees approximately 3,000 pedestrian injuries each year; approximately 92 percent of pedestrians involved in local crashes with motor vehicles sustained one or more injuries. Average hospital charges per patient range from \$17,000 to \$30,000. Underscoring the often-violent outcome when people are struck by vehicles, pedestrian injuries require the second longest average hospital stay of all injury categories.

Under the sponsorship of COG and the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), the *Street Smart* outreach and enforcement campaign is designed to reduce pedestrian deaths and injuries throughout the Washington metropolitan area. Creative advertising strategically placed on the radio, Metrobus, the Fairfax Connector, bus and transit shelters and the Internet seeks to capture the attention of drivers, bicyclists and walkers to ensure they pay due attention to each other on area roads. A strong focus of the campaign is to reach the area's Hispanic residents through Spanish-language brochures and advertising outreach.

The *Street Smart* pedestrian safety effort focuses on the "three E's:" education, enforcement and evaluation.

- **Education** targets pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers, and includes information about devices designed to enhance pedestrian safety, such as the use of crosswalks, pedestrian warning signs, pedestrian signals and reflective materials for nighttime safety.
- **Enforcement** will ensure residents are aware of the stepped-up, region-wide initiative.
- **Evaluation** is vital to understanding the awareness level for the message and the future direction of the campaign.

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#### **About Street Smart**

*Street Smart* is a public awareness program that was launched in October 2002 to change driver and pedestrian behavior in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. For more information about *Street Smart*, please go to <http://streetsmart.mwcog.org>.

*Street Smart* is funded through:

Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Motor Vehicles  
District of Columbia, District Department of Transportation  
Maryland Department of Transportation's State Highway Administration's Safety Office  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority  
Fairfax County, Virginia  
Montgomery County, Maryland  
Prince George's County, Maryland  
City of Alexandria, Virginia  
City of Gaithersburg, Maryland  
City of Manassas Park, Maryland  
City of Rockville, Maryland

\*Injury data and statistics gathered from 2005 COG regional report as prepared by the Northern Virginia Injury Prevention Center and INOVA Regional Trauma Center in Falls Church, Va.

\*\* National data pulled from 2003 NHTSA Pedestrian Safety Facts disseminated through the Federal Highway Administration.

\*\*\*Stopping distance and speed data provided by the Montgomery County Police