

Panel pushes for more Delaware subdivision sidewalks



Karl Baker, The News Journal

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(Photo: KARL BAKER/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

The chairman of a state panel created to reduce the number of Delaware pedestrian deaths wants there to be new rules requiring subdivisions to have more sidewalks linking to adjacent neighborhoods and fewer gaps in walkways on busy arteries.

"If you are a Delawarean and you don't own a car — and you live in 90 percent of this state — it is amazingly difficult to go anywhere," said Jonathan Kirch, chairman of the Advisory Council on Walkability and Pedestrian Awareness, during the group's inaugural meeting Tuesday in Dover.

The News Journal in October reported that Delaware was the most dangerous state in the country ([/story/news/traffic/2015/10/16/danger-do-not-cross-delaware/73444700/](http://story/news/traffic/2015/10/16/danger-do-not-cross-delaware/73444700/)) for pedestrians in recent

years. During the past decade, the state's deadliest road was the U.S. 13/U.S. 40 suburban corridor, between Interstate 495 and Del. 1, where at least 29 people were struck and killed.

Gov. Jack Markell appointed the 20-member committee to address the issue and increase safety and connectedness of pedestrian paths. Members include the secretary of the departments of transportation, as well as officials appointed by the heads of the departments of natural resources, state, homeland security, education and health; officials with various health, social service and disability agencies; and citizen representatives.

The panel is charged with identifying gaps in sidewalks, reviewing traffic rules and developing ways to educate about pedestrian safety.

Pedestrians' only option in many suburban communities is to walk along high-speed roads, which can be dangerous to cross, Kirch said. He said the state should not allow new subdivisions to be built without direct road or path connections to adjacent subdivisions.

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Shayne Jackson walks along U.S. 13, from Wal-Mart to the Hollywood Motel near New Castle. Jackson says that crossing U.S. 13 is dangerous even at the crosswalk, as short crossing times can leave pedestrians stranded in the median. (Photo: DANIEL SATO/THE NEWS JOURNAL)

Kirch cited a proposal for apartments, town homes and single family homes at a 182-acre property ([/story/news/local/2015/07/23/meeting-unit-home-development-near-newark-tonight/30556751/](http://story/news/local/2015/07/23/meeting-unit-home-development-near-newark-tonight/30556751/)) in Newark as contrary to that ideal. The owners of the property, which housed Our Lady of Grace Home for Children, currently have plans for one road outlet on to Chestnut Hill Road (Del. 4), a four-lane, divided highway.

"We gotta stop doing that," said Kirch, who also is a state advocacy director for the American Heart Association. "It has to connect up, that just has to happen."

Plans call for no connections to adjacent communities because neighbors were vocally against the idea, said Larry Tarabicos, attorney for the developers of the property. He said those plans might change, but residents of secluded communities rarely wish to see new roads or pathways onto their streets.

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[\(http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/traffic/2015/10/16/danger-do-not-cross-delaware/73444700/\)](http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/traffic/2015/10/16/danger-do-not-cross-delaware/73444700/)

"If you have communities that were built 20, 30 years ago, the people will always be against it," Tarabicos said.

DeIDOT has an initiative to connect suburban communities with 89 proposed trails, which would eventually link Wilmington and Newark. Construction on the first of the new pathways could begin in 2018, but some neighbors oppose the plan.

"With regards to safety, it comes down to one thing, and that's a connected system," said John McNeal, DeIDOT's coordinator for the American's With Disabilities Act. "Funding is also always an issue."

McNeal also said too many Delaware sidewalks are not compliant with 25-year-old ADA standards requiring ramps, sidewalk connections and crosswalks. Much of that work lies outside of DeIDOT's jurisdiction, with larger municipalities, said McNeal, who is physically disabled. He declined to say which cities need to do more, saying it would be unfair to single any one out.

DeIDOT Secretary Jennifer Cohan said a sidewalk network without gaps is the agency's current focus.

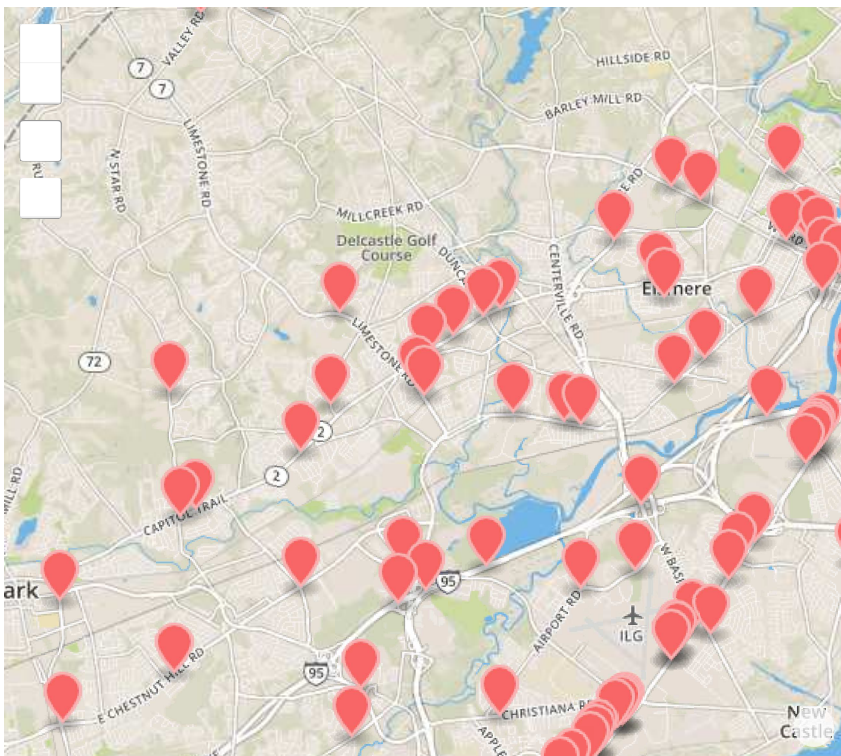
"We're pretty far behind on sidewalks," said Cohan.

To reduce fatalities, the state also needs to better educate people who rely on walking, she said. She said that in some cases pedestrians need to be cited by law enforcement for crossing outside of crosswalks, a concept that is missing from the pedestrian council's goals laid out by Markell. The issue is especially a problem in Delaware beach communities, she said.

"I think we need to target enforcement, especially in our resort areas at the beach," Cohan said. "We've got a lot of work to do."

The panel is scheduled to meet monthly and a report of recommendations is expected to be issued to Markell by the end of the year.

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STATE OF DELAWARE



EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
DOVER

**EXECUTIVE ORDER
NUMBER FIFTY-FOUR**

TO: HEADS OF ALL STATE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

RE: REESTABLISHMENT OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WALKABILITY AND
PEDESTRIAN AWARENESS

WHEREAS, pedestrian related fatalities have been consistently high in recent years (25 deaths in 2013; 27 deaths in 2014; 26 deaths in 2015 to date); and

WHEREAS, there is a desire to eliminate pedestrian fatalities in Delaware; and

WHEREAS, my administration's First State Trails and Pathways Initiative, Executive Order No. 6, and Executive Order No. 26 promote the walkability of communities by linking communities through interconnected pathway networks, creating and maintaining Complete Streets, and focusing transportation investment in Level 1 Investment Areas of the Strategies for State Policies and Spending; and

WHEREAS, during 2014 Delaware Department of Transportation ("DelDOT") accomplished many pedestrian focused improvements along our roadways such as the installation of a pedestrian-hybrid beacon at the intersection of DE Route 8 and Heatherfield Way and upgrades to pedestrian facilities (crosswalks, pedestrian signals/buttons) at 28 intersections; and

WHEREAS, Delaware has an extensive network of greenways, trails, sidewalks and pathways for the enjoyment of its citizens and visitors; and

WHEREAS, improving the walkability of a community increases property values by making these communities more connected, linking our work, schools, parks, libraries and businesses together; and

WHEREAS, land-use and traffic patterns and a lack of interconnectivity in many suburban areas make families dependent on motor vehicles for almost every activity; and