

AARP Vermont

Livable Communities for All Generations



Colchester Street and Sidewalk Audit Survey Results – July 22, 2015



Introduction

Complete Streets legislation was signed into law in 2011, which has changed the approach to our state's roadways – it requires town and city officials to consider all users when planning, designing, constructing and maintaining our roadway – to include pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. Since the passage of complete streets legislation, municipalities are tasked with the implementation of this concept when constructing and maintaining their town roadways. AARP Vermont places the implementation of this law as a high priority as we work to further our mission to champion more livable communities. Land use planning is a powerful mechanism for municipalities to shape their communities. By utilizing planning language such as “complete streets” that considers access, health and well-being, communities can ensure residents have a healthy, more livable community.

On July 22, 2015 AARP volunteers partnered with community members and staff from the Regional Planning Commission and Town of Colchester to survey the intersections, sidewalks, and crosswalks in Colchester to shed light on the challenges pedestrians face as they walk on their streets. The survey reveals gaps in the town's pedestrian infrastructure and points to a need to design roadways to be more safe and accessible for all users of all ages. The following report provides an analysis of the data collected in Colchester.

Building vibrant, walkable, and healthy communities is a complex and many-layered process. There are many different factors to take into account including safety and enjoyment of all methods of travel, infrastructure quality, and ease of access to different modes. Mixed-use development within village centers can increase housing affordability, economic diversity, and accessible amenities, and when coupled with an interconnected system of sidewalks, and bicyclist and pedestrian infrastructure it supports a vibrant livable community. Adopting planning language in your Town Plan, Zoning and Bylaws to promote mixed-use development, bike and pedestrian facilities will support healthy, active living.

Methodology

AARP's Sidewalk and Streets Survey Tool was used to conduct the walk audit on Wednesday, July 22, 2015 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. with twelve community members from Colchester. The AARP survey tool was designed in collaboration with members of the Institute of Transportation Engineers. The surveys were used to assess multiple factors ranging from the condition of infrastructure to the behavior of drivers and pedestrians. During the walk audit, the condition of West Lakeshore Drive and the sidewalks along the roadway were examined and photographed, with some emphasis on the following:

- Crosswalks and Crossing Signals
- Overhead traffic lights
- Turning lanes
- Sidewalks
- Important signage
- Driver behavior



Walk Audit Results

The 12 participants took part on the July 22, 2015 walk audit of Colchester's West Lakeshore Drive, beginning at the Boat Launch at Mallet's Bay traveling southeast along West Lakeshore Drive to the intersection with East Lakeshore Drive. On the walk audit the participants noted the following results:

The town of Colchester is attractive and inviting for motorists; there is a mixture of types of services and amenities available for pedestrians and the lake provides a wonderful asset for the community. Pedestrian infrastructure is lacking in regards to crossing, safety and comfort along West Lakeshore Drive which is key to creating a vibrant, walkable, livable town center.

The overall comfort and appeal is quite good with a picturesque setting of the lake, and there are a number of amenities and recreational opportunities available to residents, but many of the assets and amenities are difficult to access as a pedestrian and even more so if you have a disability.



Findings: Overall, the participants found the intersections that were surveyed to be in **fair to poor condition** for crossing the street and a range from **good to fair** regarding sidewalk quality for people walking, but **poor** for those using a wheelchair or walker. Few amenities were found that supported access for people with disabilities. The public park has no access to the restrooms by sidewalk.

Crossing the road along West Lakeshore Drive safely was difficult, and it was unclear about the right of way along the various access points along the roadway. The intersection at Prim Road is dangerous for pedestrians because many motorists did not stop completely at the stop sign but rolled into the intersection. There are no crossing amenities (need examples of amenities) for pedestrians or people with disabilities at the Prim intersection, and the sidewalk ends losing connectivity to residential areas. The crossing from the shopping center to the marina was found dangerous for pedestrians. Motorists approaching intersections at Prim Road and East Lakeshore Drive are often speeding. The intersection at East Lakeshore Drive is very wide and did not provide adequate time to cross the road safely, particularly if one is using a wheelchair or walker. In addition, the audible signal was very difficult to hear.

Driver Behavior: Speed is a major concern and there is a lack of traffic calming measures. Motorists along West Lakeshore Drive exceeded the speed limit of 25 mph; the average speed of motorists was 30-35 mph. The traffic noise is quite loud along the sidewalk which brought down the overall comfort and appeal of the walk. Many drivers did not yield to pedestrians at crosswalks and did not stop at crosswalks and rolled into intersections at stop signs. Many drivers made unexpected turns and maneuvers at the various access points along West Lakeshore Drive.

Sidewalks: The condition of sidewalks and streets can make life much easier or much more difficult for pedestrians, particularly those who cannot or do not own or drive cars. Sidewalk along West Lakeshore Drive provides good pedestrian access from Mallets Bay east to the park at the corner of East Lakeshore Drive.

- Many sections of the sidewalk are broken up and interrupted by driveways with poor pedestrian signage or markings for pedestrians and motorists.
- There are no benches or places for people to rest along the sidewalk following West Lakeshore Drive.
- There are no curb cuts or textured markings for people with visual impairments.
- There is a lack of connectivity with the sidewalk dead-ending at Prim Road, the interruption of sidewalk from driveway access points and there is no connectivity to public transit.
- Drainage along the sidewalk was a challenge on our walk audit which impacts walkers and bicyclists who got splashed by motorists where water accumulated and there is no shoulder or buffer between the sidewalk and motorists.
- Sidewalk is narrow in places which makes it difficult when bicyclists are traveling along the sidewalk with pedestrians.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Making the streets safer for pedestrians would be a useful step towards promoting a more livable Colchester. Connectivity of sidewalks, safety of crosswalks, and availability of bike lanes are all elements worthy of consideration when reviewing the current infrastructure and future needs of Colchester. Developing a Complete Streets Plan as part of Colchester's Town Plan and partnering with Vermont's Safe Routes to School program will help further address access to all modes of transportation.

Recommendations:

- **Adopt traffic calming measures to reduce speed:**
 - Designate a speed zone in front of the park.
 - Add crosswalks to the Prim Road intersection, and along West Lakeshore Drive to increase crossing opportunities to access the lake.
 - Increase signage along the road for pedestrians.
 - Create sharrows along West Lakeshore Drive to increase access for bicyclists.
 - Consider rapid flashing beacons and pedestrian signals at key crosswalks.

- **Increase the crossing time at the intersection of West and East Lakeshore Drive by 7 seconds. The road is wide and difficult to cross in the current allotted time, especially for those with mobility issues. Increase the audible signal volume as it is difficult to hear, especially for the hearing impaired.**

- **Provide benches and places to rest along West Lakeshore Drive.**

- **Improve pedestrian accessibility at the various access points along West Lakeshore Drive by providing signage and striping for pedestrian right of way and direction for motorists.**

- **Provide sidewalk access from West Lakeshore Drive to the public park and the restrooms located at the park; for people with disabilities it is challenging to access the public park without a sidewalk.**

- **Form based code could be used as a tool to promote infill development and repurposing of existing structures, giving developers a more flexible framework than traditional zoning from which to use land that meet the aesthetic and actual needs of the community.**