On June 12th, 2019, America Walks hosted the webinar, “Safe Speeds, Safe Communities—Partners in Speed Management”, where we highlighted how organizations and individuals can work together to decrease speed and increase safety in their communities.

It featured Chris Bell, a retired, blind attorney who has spent 40 years advocating for the rights of blind and other persons with disabilities, Sarah Abel, Technical Programs Manager with the Institute of Transportation Engineers, and Sam Balto, Physical Education teacher and Safe Routes to School Champion at Cesar Chavez K-8 school in North Portland, Oregon. Our inspiring panelists shared intimate details of the common countermeasures and interventions used to manage speed, the importance of accessibility, local community efforts, and ways walking advocates should be engaging on topics related to this work.

America Walks received many questions and comments from attendees. Panelists took time to offer their expert answers, to continue the conversation and provide further insight on best practices they used for creating safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions in their communities, so you can too.

*How can someone engage Police Departments that seem to be disinterested?*

**Sarah:** Encourage more interaction and data exchange between transportation and police departments.

**Sam:** Hopefully your police department has a community engagement office or someone who connects with schools. As a SRTS Champion at my school it feels less daunting engaging them when its about children.

*How does a small city of 20k, located in a larger urban area and bisected by a shared street grid, address traffic speed?*

**Sarah:** Check with state regulations on statutory speeds, then requirement for engineering speed studies. Then develop a local policy on speed limit setting practices that comply with federal and state laws.


*How do communities move from a reactive to proactive approach to safety on the streets?*

**Sarah:** Creating a speed management action plan and program, collecting and analyzing more data, and considering mapping and measuring a high injury network.
Sam: You can’t predict the future but it is powerful advocating for what you do not and not what you don’t want. I like watching Streetfilms to see what is going on around the world around transportation and advocating for those things. See [this article](#) for more inspiration on this.

**Do you have Safe Routes to School specific experience/advice?**

Sarah: Yes, school speed zones were one of the first special speed zones permitted by law to increase safety around schools.

Sam: Sure please contact.

**Any information on enforcement?**

Sarah: We have some information about enforcement on [our Resource Hub here](#).

**What do you do when State laws conflict with your abilities to lower speed limits?**

Sarah: Advocate to state legislation to change. We also have information about this on our [Resource Hub here](#).

I would like to understand the legal and technical details of speed management including the 75th percentile rule.

Sarah: [Our setting speed limits section here](#) highlights all types of setting speed limits.

Just to clarify on LPIs, a blind pedestrian can still wait to cross when they hear the sound of parallel traffic that comes after the LPI is complete. This does not cause them to walk into oncoming traffic. Also, LPIs (at least in NYC) do not take time away from blind pedestrians, they add conflict-free time to the existing crossing time. A blind pedestrian may not be able to take advantage of the LPI but they are not losing crossing time after the LPI is installed.

Chris: My point regarding a traffic conflict after losing time by not responding to the LPI was simply that if the LPI reduces the time to cross an intersection, the end result could be that the blind person is still in the intersection when the opposing traffic is released. If NYC is adding the LPI time to the time already available to cross the intersection, then this presumably would not be a problem. As to the NYC litigation, I was told by my NYC blind colleague that the litigation has not yet been settled as the plaintiffs rejected the city’s latest settlement offer. If this is the same litigation to which you were referring, the City is not being “compelled” by a court to install APGs throughout all intersections. If the parties entered a settlement agreement and the court adopted the settlement agreement into a consent order, the City would be “compelled” to comply but only because of its own agreement.

**How do we implement Complete Streets elements to slow speeds?**

Sarah: Complete street, self enforcing roadways and traffic calming to hand in hand and should be selected using a safe systems approach and with all road users in mind.
This is for Sam. Regarding autonomous cars, do you consider they will improve safety regarding pedestrians?

Sam: No, I am not waiting for autonomous cars to save us. I actually think they will make things worse. Governments won't do a good job regulating these companies if there is a death caused by autonomous cars and the drivers in the cars won't be held accountable because they are not "driving" the car.

For running SRTS programs such as walk to school bus, what are good strategies or tips to guarantee that students can walk to school safely?

Sam: Every school has different challenges. I don’t know your specific school location etc but I would say that power in numbers is the best way to guarantee safety. If there was a public parking lot a couple blocks away you could organize parents to park there and walk as a group. Please feel free to reach so I can give my thoughts on your personal school.

I’m struggling to convince an old-school engineer above me that roadway design changes are necessary to reduce traffic speeds, even though he knows traffic speeds are a problem. What would you say to someone who still believes 12’ lanes and the like are necessary?

Sam: I would figure out why he thinks that and what he values. Is he a data person, is this person a big truck driver or he was taught that 30 years ago and still believes it. There is data out there that shows narrower lanes reduce speed and crashes. I would assume that he is scared to try something new and make a mistake. He can't get in trouble if he doesn't change anything. I would look at Streets Plans which is an engineering firm with a twist. They use tactical urbanism to engage the community about infrastructure changes. This might be a good approach. Do something temporary to show that the world doesn't end and that cars still move. Hopefully, people will also see the improvements and start to ask their leaders for them.

Do you know which states have lower their lowest speeds and have they gone from 25mph to 20mph?

Sam: Portland has gone from 25MPH to 20MPH on many neighborhood streets if not all.

If police allow up to 9 mph over the speed limit, how does that affect this work? Any thoughts here?

Sam: This is why I like speed and red light cameras. Enforcement will be consistent and discretion is not on an individual officer. I also would like our police officers enforcing crimes and not doing a job we know technology can do better.

Individual and non-traffic orgs should never decide to install their own traffic control devices in the street!

Sam: We wear reflective vests.

How do you express the scariness of the situation without making it seem so scary that people don’t want to walk/bike?
Sam: Great questions, I think it’s more scary when we don’t actually acknowledge how unsafe it is. If we never talk about it, things will never get better. This questions also comes from a place of having options with transportation. You can walk but if it isn’t “safe” you have the choice to drive. Lots of people don’t have that privilege. They have to walk or bike no matter if its safe or not.

Are you familiar with the 20's Plenty initiative? Is it recommended? how can an organization work to implement it in the community?

Sam: I just moved to Portland and I believe the 20 is Plenty campaign was rolled out two summers ago. It’s good to lower the speed limit but you also have to add traffic calming. Signs don’t often do much to deter speeding. You have to change the infrastructure or add lots of enforcement.

Do any of the panelists provide pedestrian safety training for pedestrians in their communities, i.e. cross only at crosswalks, eye contact with vehicular drivers prior to crossing a street, use of bright colored clothes during darkness, stop using cell phones when crossing a street, etc.?

Sam: We teach pedestrian and bike safety at a lot of schools in Oregon.