

West Windsor Bicycle & Pedestrian Alliance

May 18, 2008

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Recommendations from May 13, 2008 educational walk of Bear Brook Road

On May 13 during the evening rush hour, local residents and township officials participated in an educational walk of Bear Brook Road in an examination of pedestrian and bicycle conditions along this heavily traveled commuting route to the Princeton Junction Train Station. Participating in the walk were over thirty local residents, including those living in the communities of Windsor Haven, the Estates at Princeton Junction, and the Mews at Princeton Junction, as well as Trustees and members of the West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance (WWBPA), members of Township Council and Mayor Hsueh. The walk was organized by the West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance in cooperation with the Windsor Haven Condominium Board of Trustees and was part of a series of public outreach walks, "West Windsor Walks," to examine conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists on local roads. This particular walk route was requested by Windsor Haven Board member and resident and WWBPA member, Dan Damon, in response to the dangerous conditions that residents along Bear Brook Road face when walking or bicycling to the train station.

The group assembled at the intersection of Bear Brook Road and Winthrop Way (located at one of the entrances to the Estates of Princeton Junction). We then walked along the macadam path that runs parallel to Bear Brook Road and proceeded to cross Bear Brook Road at the crosswalk near Windsor Haven Drive. We then proceeded on the sidewalk along the Windsor Haven side of Bear Brook Road to the intersection of Bear Brook Road with Alexander Road where we observed conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists at the intersection as well as the driving behavior of motorists at this intersection. This intersection was the scene of a pedestrian fatality in 2003 when an elderly woman was struck by a motorist while crossing Alexander Road.

General Existing Conditions and Observations:

The existing conditions for pedestrians and cyclists along this road is a mixed bag at present.

Macadam Path- The macadam path along Bear Brook Road alongside the Estates and Mews of Princeton Junction neighborhoods is an excellent facility for pedestrians and cyclists. It is used extensively by local residents, including Windsor Haven residents who use the path for recreational walks. The main problem with the pathway is a lack of street lights for proper illumination- it is very dark here at night, yet there are people using the paths for commuting and exercise.

There is also a missing sidewalk link (approximately eight feet) between the sidewalk on Winthrop Way and the path on Bear Brook Road, making it difficult for baby strollers and those in wheelchairs to navigate. In addition, the macadam path abruptly ends at the crosswalk at Windsor Haven Drive instead of continuing along the Maneely property all the way to Alexander Road (the Maneely property is under consideration for mixed-use development in the near future).

Crosswalk at Windsor Haven Drive-The first serious pedestrian and cyclist deficiency is where the macadam path ends at the crosswalk across Bear Brook Road at Windsor Haven Road. The crosswalk is faded and lacks pedestrian crossing signage. There is also a need for increased lighting at the crossing.

Traffic Calming on Bear Brook Road- There is a clear need for traffic calming and better signage to alert motorists of pedestrian crossings. The speed limit is 35 mph along Bear Brook Rd from Meadow Road to just before the crosswalk. At which point there is an "End Speed Zone" sign, which signifies the beginning of a 50mph speed zone (although there are no signs signifying the speed limit on either side of this sign). The increase in the speed limit just before the crosswalk creates a direct conflict with pedestrians who are attempting to use the crosswalk.

Bicycle Deficiency and Conflicts with Pedestrians- The lack of bike lanes along Bear Brook Road also creates a conflict once the macadam path ends. Cyclists tend to cross at the crosswalk and bicycle on the sidewalk along the frontage of the Windsor Haven community. A number of Windsor Haven residents complained about the dangerous conditions that they have encountered with cyclists moving at bike commuting speeds along the sidewalk, particularly at one point along the sidewalk where there is a blind curve.

Sidewalk from Windsor Haven Drive to Alexander Road- With the exception of the conflict with cyclists, walking on the sidewalk along the northern side of Bear Brook Road (along the Windsor Haven community) to the intersection with Alexander Road is relatively problem free, with well-marked crosswalks at Windsor Haven Drive. The sidewalk on the southern side of Bear Brook Road has vegetation that needs to be cut back. There is need for pedestrian lighting along the sidewalks along both sides of the road.

Intersection of Alexander and Bear Brook Roads- There a number of serious pedestrian and bicycle deficiencies at this intersection.

- The Walk/Don't Walk signalization at the northern crossing of Alexander Road is not working properly. When the light changes, a green hand signal appears for just three seconds and then the signal is blank, when it should be a blinking green hand signal for a defined period of time. Pedestrians crossing Alexander Road get only halfway across before the green hand disappears- this is confusing and dangerous to pedestrians.
- There are existing crosswalks at each potential crossing of the intersection, but the crosswalks are not high visibility and there is a lack of pedestrian crossing signage. There are no flashing lights in the crosswalks to help illuminate pedestrian crossings.
- Motorists making right turns on red create conflicts with pedestrians. We saw a number of near misses as motorists making right on reds nearly struck pedestrians.
- The pedestrian crossings at Alexander Road are too wide due to a lack of pedestrian refuge islands. This is also true of the pedestrian crossing across Bear Brook Road.
- Street lighting is insufficient for pedestrians

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- The speed of traffic on Alexander Road is inconsistent- it is 30 mph to the south of the intersection and 40mph to the north of the intersection. Due to the four lane nature of Alexander Road to the north of the intersection, cars often travel at speeds in excess of 50mph creating a dangerous condition for pedestrians.
- There is a lack of police presence at this intersection during rush hours. The volume of cars through this intersection is extremely high and the movement of cars through the intersection is chaotic.
- Motorists turning left onto Alexander Road from Bear Brook Road or Vaughn Drive do not have left turn arrows and are often in a rush to make their turn before the light turns red, creating conflicts with crossing pedestrians.

Recommendations:

Macadam Path along Bear Brook Road:

- Add sidewalk linkage between sidewalk on Winthrop Way and macadam path along Bear Brook Road. This would require about an eight foot sidewalk
- Add pedestrian street lighting along macadam path
- Continue macadam path beyond the crosswalk with Windsor Haven Drive all the way to Alexander Road by working with the developers of the Maneely property as they seek approval for their development project. This path could be constructed before the development is begun as a good faith gesture to the community.

Crosswalk across Bear Brook Road at Windsor Haven Drive

- Improve the faded crosswalk by making this crosswalk a high visibility crosswalk
- Add pedestrian crossing signage
- Add yellow crossing light and embedded flashing lights in roadway
- Reposition adjacent telephone pole to allow for better viewability of pedestrians
- Add pedestrian lighting to help illuminate the crossing at night

Traffic Calming at Crosswalk

- The speed limit should be reduced to 35 mph on the east side of the crosswalk as it is on the west side of the intersection
- Remove End Speed Zone sign that is located on the east side of the crosswalk

Bicycle Facilities

- Bikelanes should be developed on Bear Brook Road between the crosswalk at Bear Brook Road and Windsor Haven Drive and Alexander Road
- Bicycles should be discouraged from using the sidewalk on the north side of Bear Brook Road

Sidewalks along Bear Brook Road

- Pedestrian street lighting should be added along these sidewalks
- Vegetation should be cut back on the sidewalk on the south side of Bear Brook Road

Intersection of Alexander Road and Bear Road/Vaughn Drive

- Replace existing walk/don't walk signalization with pedestrian count-down signalizations units
- Replace existing crosswalks with high visibility crosswalks. Include embedded flashing lights in the roadway
- Add pedestrian crossing signage at all points in the intersection
- Do not allow right on red at the intersection to cut down on pedestrian conflicts
- Add a pedestrian refuge island in the middle of the Bear Brook crossing

- Add left turn arrows for cars making a left onto Alexander Road from Bear Brook Road and Vaughn Drive (one direction at a time) to reduce pedestrian conflicts
- Improve streetlighting for pedestrians
- Add a police presence to this intersection during rush hour

Alexander Road

- Alexander Road should be placed on a road diet, reducing the roadway from two travel lanes to one travel lane in each direction, with a middle turning lane, bikelanes, and pedestrian refuge islands. The narrowed nature of the road will serve to calm traffic and will allow for a speed limit reduction. A narrower roadway will also make it easier for pedestrians to cross the roadway at the intersections of Bear Brook/Vaughn Drive and Roszel Road. Reducing the travel lanes will also make the roadway width of Alexander Road consistent with the two lane nature of the road south of the Vaughn Drive intersection and north of Route 1.

Opportunities:

- West Windsor Township has announced future improvements to the intersection of Alexander Road and Bear Brook Road/Vaughn Drive, including count-down pedestrian signals, signage, street lighting, and high visibility crosswalks. These improvements are expected within six months.
- The owner of the Maneely property on Bear Brook Road will be seeking approval of the property for mixed use development. As soon as possible in this process, the Township should request that the developer extend the macadam recreational path along its frontage and all the way to Alexander Road.

There is a dramatic need to make immediate improvements to pedestrian and bicycle safety along Bear Brook Road and at the intersection of Alexander Road and Bear Brook Road/Vaughn Drive. This is a direct commuting route for cyclists and pedestrians commuting to the train station from the communities along Bear Brook Road, and if made pedestrian and bicycle friendly, will ensure the safety of residents and encourage more residents to not commute to the train station in their cars. We welcome the future improvements that the Township will implement, but encourage the Township to expedite these improvements as well as to examine the additional recommendations suggested in this memo, particularly the recommendation of placing Alexander Road on a road diet.

Sincerely,

Ken Carlson, President,
West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance (WWBPA)

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the WWBPA and the members of the public who participated on this educational walk.