

A History of a Pedestrian-Traffic Safety Movement

By: Bill Bronrott, Member, Maryland House of Delegates, 1999-2010

When Maryland designated walking as the State exercise on October 1, 2008, it became the first state in the nation to name a state exercise (Chapters 400 & 401, Acts of 2008; Code General Provisions Article, sec. 7-328).

Will Smith, a Montgomery Blair High School student originally brought the idea to Delegate Bronrott when he was a student at East Silver Spring Elementary School and successfully lobbied the General Assembly to approve the bill!

Introduction

The flame for my passion for pedestrian and traffic safety was first lit early in life – at Woodlin Elementary School in Silver Spring, which required crossing six lanes of Georgia Avenue to get to and from school. The spark was in 5th grade when a new neighbor – a mom of two young children – was struck and killed while walking in the same crosswalk that I traversed twice a day for years.

Over the years, as a public relations professional and a safety advocate inside and outside of government, I saw how pedestrian safety typically took a back seat to higher profile challenges, such as drunk driving and seat belt usage, and how vehicle throughput was seen as the core measure of a roadway's efficacy. That was about to change.

Walking the Walk

I walked away from that early campaign experience convinced that much more had to be done to “civilize” our county's transportation network and provide our residents a truly pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly community.

Smart Growth, Complete Streets and the Three – Make that Four – E's.

During the 12 sessions that I served in the Maryland General Assembly, pedestrian and traffic safety was a cornerstone of the vision I pursued legislatively to foster safe, healthy, and economically vibrant, transit-oriented communities where people can live, work, learn, and play. This vision was largely informed by the principles of [Smart Growth](#) and [Complete Streets](#).

This framework also featured a Three E's approach to highway traffic safety: Education, Enforcement and Engineering. A fourth E was added to Empower residents to engage in this process of boosting safety and walkability.

A Brief History

Below is brief history of steps taken to launch a sustained pedestrian-traffic safety program in Montgomery County, Maryland and how it came about that I introduced Walking as the State's official exercise:

Early 1999: Began organizing the Greater Bethesda Chevy Chase Pedestrian Safety Coalition to promote safety and walkability.

June 1999: Announced the formation of the Greater Bethesda Chevy Chase Pedestrian Safety Coalition promoting the theme: “Drive With Care, Walk With Caution.”

June 2000: The appointment of the Montgomery County Blue Ribbon Panel on Pedestrian and Traffic Safety.

October 2000: Organized what became Montgomery County’s annual “Walk to School Day” pedestrian safety campaign to engage children, parents, teachers, principals, government officials, law enforcement, and motorists in greater pedestrian safety and accessibility.

January 2002: The Montgomery County Blue Ribbon Panel on Pedestrian and Traffic Safety issued its [Final Report](#).

2002: COG created the [StreetSmart](#) safety campaign.

2003: Will Smith, a Montgomery Blair High School student, brought the idea to me when he was a student at East Silver Spring Elementary School, The idea came from his 2nd grade class to promote health, safety, and a sense of community.

October 1, 2008: Maryland designated walking as the State exercise.

Conclusion

A final word of thanks to Mrs. May, the Woodlin Elementary School 6th grade teacher who, decades ago, gave that eager 5th grader a running start to make a difference in his community.