

PEDS

Safer streets support walking in the Atlanta region

Executive Director Sally Flocks remembers a time in Atlanta when she would wear a whistle around her neck and blow it while crossing the street. She felt desperate to get drivers to slow down, to be safer. She knew Atlanta, like many urban centers, didn't support pedestrians, so she founded Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS), a Georgia-based organization serving Atlanta and the surrounding region. Within a year of founding the organization, Flocks had an "aha moment." She realized that PEDS wouldn't be nearly as effective as it could be by reaching out one driver at a time. PEDS needed a broader approach. Now, through policy and environmental change and innovative use of web-based technology, PEDS has become a leader in creating and maintaining pedestrian-friendly environments to support recreational and incidental physical activity.

For the last 10 years, PEDS has emphasized pedestrian safety for immigrants and in-town communities because these populations are disproportionately



HIGH-VISIBILITY CROSSWALK MARKERS HELP KEEP PEDESTRIANS SAFE

QUICK FACTS

LOCATION . . . Atlanta, GA

POLICY JURISDICTION

■ Local □ State □ Federal

POLICY ORIENTATION

■ Policy □ Poised □ Education

APPROACH

■ Environmental/Institutional □ Services/Programs

EQUITY FOCUS Strong

ISSUE AREAS . . Physical Activity

POLICY DOMAINS

■ Bikeability/Walkability

WEBSITE www.peds.org

involved in pedestrian injuries and fatalities. Low-income families and immigrants are less likely than the general population to own a car and so, are more likely to walk or bike for errands or to commute to work—incidental physical activity. PEDS sees that making the road safer for the most frequent and vulnerable pedestrians can improve pedestrian safety for everyone. As Atlanta's population booms, PEDS has begun to expand to suburbs, where pedestrian injuries are increasing. Among people over 60—who will represent 20% of the Atlanta population in the next five years—Flocks also sees a critical opportunity to improve pedestrian infrastructure. If the region's older adults feel safe on the streets, then children, the disabled and the general population will also benefit from safe places to walk and they will be more likely to engage in this common form of activity.



BRINGING ATTENTION TO PEDESTRIAN HAZARDS
ACROSS CULTURAL LINES

Since being named one of the ten most dangerous cities for pedestrians in the US by *Mean Streets 2004* (issued by The Surface Transportation Policy Project), Atlanta has experienced a number of positive shifts to make their streets safer. PEDS has been at the forefront of those changes. At the helm, PEDS has advanced a statewide policy to get cameras installed at signal lights to help enforce red-light violations. The organization moved forward a policy to install in-street crosswalk signs throughout Atlanta that will alert drivers to the presence of pedestrians.

In addition to changing the built environment, PEDS has also created a web-based hazard reporting system that allows pedestrians from nine jurisdictions to report dangers and request repairs. Whether it's a busted sidewalks or a broken crosswalk signal, the PEDS system encourages pedestrians from places including DeKalb, Decatur, Conyers, and the city of Atlanta to "take action" by reporting anything—from speeding cars to overgrown shrubs—that makes the walking environment unfriendly. When visitors register a complaint, their requests are automatically forwarded to the appropriate city department. The online system takes the leg-work out of trying to track down who is responsible for what, an often confusing and daunting maze of bureaucracy for the average pedestrian.

PEDS has begun shaping a walking friendly region and Flocks laments that there is still plenty of work to be done. Armed with effective partnerships and an emphasis on policy and environmental changes, though, Flocks is confident that PEDS is on the right track. Since its early days of crosswalk protests, PEDS has developed fruitful partnerships with city departments of transportation, planning, public works, and law enforcement to influence planning, enforcement, and funding decisions. With experience, PEDS has learned how to engage traffic engineers and policymakers to develop pedestrian friendly solutions to new projects and existing infrastructure. PEDS tries to get involved in projects as early as possible to make sure developers, planners, and engineers are paying attention to pedestrian issues. She insists that, "If you don't get involved early, it is much harder to shift the momentum."

Through wins like the in-street crosswalk signs designed to make pedestrians more visible, PEDS is slowly beginning to see a culture shift. Even so, one of the persistent obstacles to creating a pedestrian friendly region is the auto-centric culture that pervades traffic planning and development. To accelerate the paradigm

"When I first founded the organization in 1996, I thought it was primarily about educating drivers...By '97, I knew policy issues like road design really mattered."

Sally Flocks, president, CEO, and founder
Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety (PEDS)

shift, PEDS hopes to "get a seat" at the state and federal planning tables so that the needs of pedestrians are systematically explored. Without pedestrian advocacy groups like PEDS, pedestrian voices are drowned out by the din from lobbyists, developers, and traffic engineers who tend to think about cars before people. Flocks acknowledges that, "One pedestrian advocacy organization is too small to create the world it wants on its own," but, she says, "if we can influence others to see the world the same way, we won't be working alone."