



WalkBoston

Walking Audit Summary Helen Keller Elementary School, Franklin November 16, 2011

WalkBoston conducted a walk audit along Lincoln Street in the vicinity of the Helen Keller Elementary School / Annie Sullivan Middle School campus in Franklin, Massachusetts. After a brief presentation on the features of a walkable community, the group carried out an on-the-street audit of the pedestrian facilities near the school, with an emphasis on the route students would walk between the school grounds and Dacey Field, a remote drop-off location.

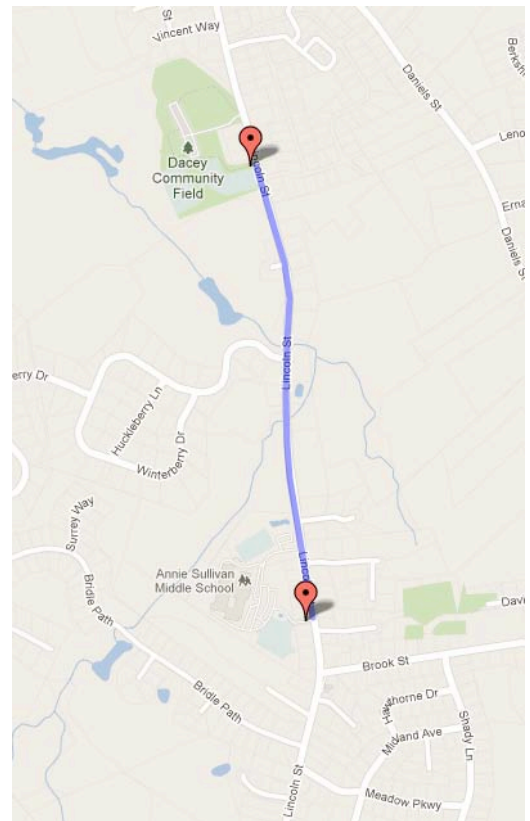
The walking audit was organized by the Hockomock YMCA in conjunction with Helen Keller Elementary School as part of a grant from the MetroWest Community Health Foundation. One WalkBoston staff member, three Hockomock YMCA staff members, and a grandparent of two Keller Elementary students participated in the audit.

Helen Keller Elementary School and Dacey Field

On one Wednesday each month, the school holds a “walk to school day” during which children are dropped off at Dacey Field, situated .9 mile north of the school on Lincoln Street, and then they walk to the school. Parents, school personnel and Hockomock YMCA staff supervise the event. There is a desire to move toward using Dacey Field as a regular remote drop-off location.

The route from Dacey Field to the school grounds follows Lincoln Street, a two-lane collector road that originates at the Franklin Town Common in central Franklin and stretches north into the neighboring town of Medway. The posted speed limit on Lincoln Street between Dacey Field and the campus is 35 MPH except in the immediate area of the school, where flashing beacons indicate a 20 MPH speed limit around the time of arrival and dismissal.

The route passes through a sparsely-settled, mostly wooded area. Lincoln Street collects traffic from a few housing subdivisions, but there are only a handful of houses directly facing this section of Lincoln Street. There are many more homes and connecting streets south of the campus. Beginning at Keller Elementary School, the workshop participants covered the entire section of Lincoln Street from the school’s pedestrian entrance (south of the school’s vehicular entrance) to the pedestrian entrance at Dacey Field and documented the following issues:



Walking route along Lincoln Street between Keller Elementary and Dacey Field.

Overall Assessment:

The walking route from Dacey Field to the campus is reasonably walkable since there are sidewalks along the entire route and there are no wide roads that have heavy volumes of fast-moving traffic for pedestrians to cross. The sidewalks are an adequate width for a low-density suburban area, but there is (with few exceptions) no buffer between the sidewalk and vehicular travel lanes. Add to that, vehicles traveling along Lincoln Street have been observed by participants to regularly travel at speeds in excess of the 35 MPH speed limit.

1. Observation: Sidewalks along Lincoln Street are close to travel lanes.

The sidewalk along Lincoln from the campus to Dacey Field is within just a few feet from the southbound vehicular travel lane. Vehicles appear to travel at speeds in excess of Lincoln Street's posted 35 MPH speed limit.



The narrow sidewalk along Lincoln Street is uncomfortably close to the vehicular travel lane.

Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: Reduce the effective width of the travel lanes, which are approximately 12 feet wide, by painting a white line at least 1 foot in from the curb, thus visually reducing the travel lanes to 11 feet (or less). This is nothing new: there is a hardly-visible, faded white line that once existed on this stretch of Lincoln Street. There currently exists a more recently painted white line on a small section of Lincoln Street near the campus.
- Long-term/large-investment: Rebuild a wider sidewalk between Dacey Field and the campus, with the walk zone separated from the roadway with a grass buffer. This buffer not only discourages walking close to the travel lanes; it would also keep plowed snow from being piled on the walk zone. According to the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools,
“Sidewalks with a width of eight to ten feet or more should be built where there is no sidewalk buffer along an arterial street and along roads adjacent to school grounds where large numbers of walkers are expected.”

2. Observation: Intersection of Winterberry Drive and Lincoln Street allows for fast turning movements.

The intersection of Winterberry Drive (a residential street) and Lincoln Street, has turning radii much in excess of what is needed on a residential two-lane street with limited local traffic.

Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: Add a crosswalk and “Children Crossing” signage at this intersection to indicate to motorists that children use this route to get to and from school. Also, “narrow” the width of Winterberry Drive by painting white lines a few feet in from each curb
- Medium-term/moderate-investment: Install planters or barrels at the corners to create a narrower turning radius on both sides of Winterberry Drive.
- Long-term/large-investment: Re-engineer the intersection with narrower turning radii.



Winterberry Drive is very wide, which allows fast turning movements.

3. Observation: Vehicles travel in excess of the posted speed limit on Lincoln Street

Recommendations:

- Short-term/Small-investment: Re-painted white fog lines (see Observation 1) will slow traffic somewhat by narrowing the travel lanes.
- Medium-term/moderate-investment: Electronic radar speed limit signs (also called changeable message signs or dynamic speed displays) that display vehicle speeds in real time have been proven to calm traffic by making drivers more aware of their speeds and making them think they’re being monitored.
- Long-term/large-investment: Add a grass buffer and plant trees. Vertical elements like trees help lower vehicle speeds.

4. Street furniture partially blocks sidewalks within the School Zone

Utility poles and mailboxes narrow the effective width of the sidewalk on Lincoln Street between the campus’ main entrance and the pedestrian entrance. These obstacles create potentially hazardous conditions, especially for those who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids. According to the US Department of Transportation’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Information Center:

“Sidewalks need to be kept clear of obstructions and should be promptly repaired when damaged. Wider sidewalks should be used closer to schools where larger groups of students are walking.”

Furthermore, mounting mailboxes in large wood-framed boxes (pictured) or large buckets filled with stones violates Chapter 125-4 of the Town of Franklin Code:

§ 125-4. Obstructing streets and sidewalks.
No person shall place any object in or upon any public street or sidewalk so as to obstruct travel thereon or to create a risk to public health or safety.

Recommendations:

- Short-term/small-investment: The Town of Franklin should work with residents whose mailboxes block the sidewalks to devise an alternative mailbox mounting technique that keeps the walk zone clear and eliminates the need for large weighted devices.
- Short-term/small-investment: Expand the sidewalk with asphalt around utility poles. This appears to have been done at one point along Lincoln Street (pictured).



Mailboxes should not obstruct the sidewalk. The town should work with residents to find another way to mount mailboxes that allows for safe pedestrian passage.



Expand the sidewalk with asphalt around utility poles.