# Crash Analysis Studio – Session 2 Transcript

## Introductory Trailer

**Chuck Marohn:** I want to give you two scenarios. Scenario number one a plane crashes. Scenario number two, two cars collide. In scenario number one, we pull out all the stops – we bring in the NTSB, we try to figure out exactly what went wrong. Scenario number two – we send out the cops, we sweep up the mess, and we go on our way.

**John Pattison:** If we, collectively – everyone on this call and the broader Strong Towns movement – if we do this right, we're going to save thousands of lives.

**Edward Erfurt:** Mayors and local council members want to do the right thing. They have the ability to solve it. We're going to help provide those tools for them.

## Session

**Rachel Quednau:** Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us. We'll give a minute for folks to come into this webinar. But if you're here today, we appreciate you joining us for this Strong Towns' Crash Analysis Studio. And I'm Rachel Quednau, I am the Program Director at Strong Towns. So in a second here, I'm going to introduce you to our expert panel.

But let's start out today by talking about why we are here for this Crash Analysis Studio Session number two. Last year, over 40,000 people died in automobile crashes in the United States. Hundreds of thousands more suffered traumatic injuries, and despite the best efforts of public safety officials, we know that those numbers have been increasing and all of our lives are impacted.

There's this prevalent misconception that car crashes are caused solely by mistakes that drivers make. Looking at your phone, changing the radio, even drinking alcohol - and when a crash occurs, the American response is often to send out law enforcement, send out insurance agencies, and their job is to assign blame. Who made the mistake that caused this crash? Who are we going to put the blame on?

The reality is that crashes are caused by multiple factors, not just driver error. When a traumatic crash occurs, we need to identify all the contributing factors and learn what we can from the experience so that we can hopefully reduce the number of deaths and traumatic injuries in our cities. What you're going to see now is a Crash Analysis Studio drawing from the best practices of the medical profession.

We have convened a panel to review a crash today in Hyattsville, Maryland, where a driver hit and killed a pedestrian in a crosswalk. This crash was submitted to us by a Strong Towns member from Hyattsville. We're going to start by introducing you to our panel of experts, then review the facts of the crash, and then consult with our panel on the design factors that

contributed to this crash. And again, our goal is not to assign blame. The objective is to learn as much as possible about what happened and identify the design factors that contributed to this unfortunate incident.

So before we get into the particulars of this crash and hear from our panel, we need to begin with the fact that this tragedy resulted in the death of a community member, Hellen Jorgensen. Please take a moment of silence with me to honor and acknowledge Hellen Jorgensen and the loss of her life.

Thank you. So I'm going to hand it over to our expert panel in a little bit here, and I want to introduce them to all of you. So our panel, you can turn on your cameras now so people can see you.

First is Dan Burden, a walkability expert, a visionary and innovator, and an authority on built environment topics. He has more than 45 years of experience helping create livable communities. And Dan recently transitioned to become the first fellow for Blue Zones, LLC - an international health organization that honored him as a lifelong innovator and successfully rebuilding communities for human and community health.

Next, I want to introduce Council Member Fisher, who represents District two of Prince George's County. She was sworn in during December of 2022 and is passionate about engaging community members and leaders in addressing the transportation and development issues that surround them.

Melissa Schweisguth is a community member who regularly travels - mostly on foot or bike, but sometimes via car - through and around the area where this crash occurred. And she got the Maryland Open Data crash report and has helped, Tony, my colleague, in a lot of the organizing and reviewing to prep for this conversation today. Melissa wants to see state, county and local governments invest more money quickly and strategically in making our streets truly safe for everyone.

We also have joining us Yohannes Bennehoff, who is a transportation planner working in Washington, D.C. and has lived in Hyattsville for seven years. He lives a few blocks from the crash location and travels through the area regularly. And he's here today in his personal capacity.

Next, Chuck Marohn is the president and founder of Strong Towns, civil engineer, and author of the book *Confessions of a Recovering Engineer: Transportation for a Strong Town*. And he is the creator of this crash analysis studio concept.

Finally, Edward Erfurt is the director of Community Action at Strong Towns. He's a trained architect and passionate urban designer with 20 years of public and private sector experience and a keen eye when it comes to evaluating the safety issues posed by roads and intersections.

So now I'm going to hand it over to Chuck Marohn to go over the details of this crash in Hyattsville.

**Chuck Marohn:** Thank you, Rachel. And thank you also to our panel members. This crash in Hyattsville involved a pedestrian, Hellen Jorgensen, being fatally struck in a crosswalk at the 5600 block of Ager Road. There's some discrepancy on the crash report, so we spent a lot of time going through crash reports from different jurisdictions. Even some of the crash reports themselves had contradictory data.

The county crash report said that it was a northbound direction of travel, but they have a diagram that shows southbound direction of travel. The Hyattsville crash report indicates southbound, but the media coverage indicates northbound. There's consensus that the crash happened in the evening on August 13th, 2021, that the weather was clear, and that the roadway was dry.

Volunteers have documented a 30 mile an hour posted speed limit in this section. The crash reports did say that the speed limit was 35, but the actual speed limit here is 30 miles an hour. Driver and passenger were traveling either north or south along Ager Road. Jorgensen, the victim, was most likely crossing east to west - although could potentially have been crossing west to east - toward the metro station within the crosswalk. The driver and the passenger left the scene and came back.

There's some discrepancy within the county crash report over the exact position of the crash, but it seems very clear that it happened in the crosswalk going in one or the two other directions. The most likely scenario and I think this is what we're going with at this point, although it's possible it was the other direction - you can see that we've denoted the vehicle here in yellow and their direction of travel, the pedestrian there in orange crossing in the crosswalk, and the location roughly where the crash occurred.

The county crash report lists some contributing circumstances for the driver. They indicate that the driver failed to give full time and attention, was driving too fast for the conditions, was inattentive, and that they were potentially distracted by an electronic device. The crash report notes that the driver was accelerating prior to the collision.

The driver was not administered an impairment test. The driver and the front seat passenger were both uninjured, but the vehicle sustained functional damage. According to the crash report, the victim entered the crosswalk at the intersection of 5600 block of Ager Road. It was noted in the police report that the victim disobeyed the pedestrian signal. That was what was reported.

The victim - it was noted that the victim was wearing, and I put in quotes here, “mixed clothing”, although it's unclear what mixed clothing actually means. And the victim did have a very high blood alcohol level of 0.315. The overall site conditions, Ager road itself is a stroad

environment. It has a 30 mile an hour speed limit. There's some turn lanes and other things here.

You can see the kind of highways that surround this particular neighborhood - Ager Road lies right in the middle of it. You've got the transit station, all the gas stations, different office/commercial type of uses in this area. Here's a little bit more zoomed in, the location of the crash. For orientation purposes, there is a Sunoco gas station right very near the crash.

And then this little area here is the bus loop on the west side. The crosswalk where the crash took place is the crosswalk to the metro station. This is - you can see the Sunoco on the right here in this diagram. The fence on the left. This is Ager Road as it approaches the crosswalk. If you see on the very right here, there's the yellow pedestrian ahead sign.

You can look up the street and see another yellow sign. And then a third yellow sign. I'm going to go a little bit closer now and you can see that second and third yellow signs here. That is the crosswalk right there where that crash occurred. I'm going to go a little bit closer to that now.

This is coming at it from the other direction, then, so from the southbound direction. That is the crosswalk in front of you. And again, a little bit closer.

The cross section of the street has a sidewalk, bike lane, travel lanes. It was noted as we went out and surveyed that these are shown as two 11-foot travel lanes, but the actual lane width is 12 and ten. Here is the crossing as viewed from the person walking's angle. I'm going to now turn and look across. This is standing at this crossing right here.

Looking straight across. This would have been where the victim entered the crosswalk. This is looking at it from the opposite direction. So, looking back towards the towards the east and then a little bit set back here as you enter the intersection. That's the Kaiser Permanente building there in the background.

We were able to do - we had volunteers go out and many thanks to them - going out to do a speed study. Preliminary speed study indicates that there were a significant number of vehicles traveling at fatal speeds. The posted speed limit here is 30 miles an hour. Seven out of ten drivers in the speed study exceeded that speed. So there's an excessive amount of speeding as a, as a regular condition here. Seven and a half percent of the drivers went more than ten miles over the posted speed limit.

Of course, we know when we start to get over 20 miles an hour that we are at speeds that are fatal for people who are walking or biking. Everybody in this section except for two vehicles that were measured out of our total, exceeded that safe speed. A couple went actually 55 miles an hour through this stretch, so it's a very high speed stretch.

Rachel, I'll turn it back to you. Thank you.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. So now we'd like to go through and hear from each of our experts about what they identify as design factors that might have contributed to this this crash. And Dan Burden, I'd like to start with you. And if at any point in this conversation, you want us to pull up a screen share so we can look closer at the street, just say that and we'll make sure to do that.

But, Dan, what do you see as the main design factors that might have contributed to this crash?

**Dan Burden:** Sure. I'm delighted to be part of this working group. I look at the driver factors, the pedestrian factors, the environmental factors, and then the overall conditions - like it was night, what time of night? And the first thing I look at is what induces this higher end speed. Our quest, our goal should be to design streets so that if 30 is the safe speed that the majority of motorists are going 30 - some just a little under, some just a little over, but not the excessive speeds we see here.

This not only reduces their ability to respond to an unexpected event on their part - pedestrian entering the street - but it means that the likelihood of fatality goes way up uh and so on. So there are many factors in the design of the road that I look at. And one is the signal that the motorist would be fixated on as opposed to on the crossing.

And so there are a number of things that I look at, at the crossing itself. First of all, it's pretty well designed. It's not perfect. I've yet to find a crossing that is truly perfect. And we can talk about recommendations later. But I want to say that not knowing that much about the vehicle because we haven't seen the full report yet, there are just all kinds of factors as to whether the motorist would have seen the pedestrian or not.

Essentially, if a motorist is driving 35, they're driving way over their headlights. That is, they wouldn't see the pedestrian unless it was good additional lighting and other conditions that would do that. And just to use as an example, just having weight in the trunk of a car will realign the headlamps so that they no longer are a factor.

And a lot of drivers don't understand this. And then on the pedestrian side, I would say the vast majority of pedestrians don't realize that they are very difficult to detect at night, that the motorists are overdriving their headlights. So they see the car headlamps, so they make the assumption they can be seen - when it's just not true.

And so that's a major factor here. Getting the speeds down is the big the big event or the factor that we're striving for. So everything you're going to see or hear in my recommendations are how do we get those speeds back down? Especially for night conditions when the risk factors go, go up. I took … uh… a good intro, I think, to the topic. Yeah.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. Thank you. So pointing out that at 30 miles per hour, especially at night, a driver is not aware that their headlights are not actually going to catch someone in time to stop if they were on the road. Also, I appreciate you pointing out that the driver might be

looking at - I think this is what you're saying - that the driver might be paying attention to the pedestrian sign and not be looking down at the street where a pedestrian actually is at.

**Dan Burden:** A-and looking further down the road. The task of driving - this does not call for scanning every single intersection for the possibility of a pedestrian. So they are fixated further down. Yeah.

**Rachel Quednau:** Okay. Yeah. And then as-as the person walking, you're also thinking, oh, there's headlights so they can see me. So I'm good. And when they're going that fast, it's not the case. Okay. Thank you. Good place to start. Councilmember Fisher, could we go to you and hear - from your perspective - what are some of the design factors that might have contributed to this crash?

**Council Member Wanika Fisher:** Sure. Thank you, Rachel. It's really interesting to hear Dan's perspective and thank you all for having me today. I actually live 5 minutes from the crash site and I drive Ager Road quite a bit. So I'm really used to the area. I'll start with, I think, I'm going to probably take us more to a more regional perspective on this crash than as detailed as my colleagues have been at this call about the actual crosswalk itself.

And Rachel, I don't know if you're able to do this on the shared screen, if you're actually like if you're on Google Maps, for example, and you're looking at where the crash site is and you zoom out a little bit and we see it right, like there. So if you start there and you see how like this area is totally enclosed by state highways, it's not just that it's near a state highway.

So you have Chillum Road, which is 501 at the bottom. Yeah. There you go, that, this one - that's actually Riggs. But that's Chillum, that's 501. Then if you go up there, you have Riggs which is 212. Yup, then 410 is on top and then you have Queen's Chapel, which is 500. And I think that's important perspective to bring in.

And it's like a literally totally enclosed square. And I only bring I bring that up for the conversation in that, this area of our - and you see the D.C. borderline - so this area of our community is also a throughway between the District of Columbia, Montgomery County, and you're in Prince George's County. And I think that's an important factor to bring in when it comes to pedestrian safety and traffic here in my community, and particularly at Ager Road, where you have a new health care facility, you have West Hyattsville Metro Station.

If you go over Queen's Chapel a little bit, you're going to need that to either get up to the part of Hyattsville to commute out to the rest of the county or you're going to go the opposite way to get to D.C.. And so I wanted to just highlight kind of a little bit of a more of a thousand foot view of having these major state highways go through, go throughout this community.

And it's transporting hundreds and hundreds of people really adds to a different type of congestion level and I think a different mental nature behind the driver about speed and a lack of awareness of community as they're passing through an area that is three jurisdictions

touching at once and then has four state highways that I am working on when it comes to sidewalk and walkability with the State Highway Administration.

And even as your Council Member, I directly impact county roads, not state roads. And so that would literally be the governor's office and the State Highway Administration. And so I think it's really important that we also look regionally on where traffic flow is and the mentality of the drivers. And I think to me it really highlights and what I would love to see improved and - hopefully from this call will follow up - with stronger, Strong Towns and ask for you to come help me test…

I [will] support would be like a flashing crosswalk light at that particular intersection. And that intersection is also near an economic hub. There are restaurants, there are places to consume alcohol. There are other things where people are going to be walking and shopping and using facilities.

I think all of those things combined that you weren't just on a county road with just residential. It's a budding commercial, which means you're abutting where there's a lot of people and things happening. But I think I agree with sort of like the flashing of the light of when someone's walking. I have to say. And… speed bumps wouldn't be really realistic on that road because we do have to balance in our community, which is quite complicated - I have to constantly balance on where emergency vehicles can go through.

And now you have the Kaiser Permanente there. I do believe Ager Road is one of those that, depending on how speed bumps are with our fire and EMS, there are specific roads in our county that we can do that. There are other roads where I talk to neighbors and community and they want speed bumps, but I can't and I'm not allowed to due to emergency vehicles being able to pass through those roads.

And I'd have to follow up with Ager, but I believe Ager would not be feasible in that way. But I think a speed strip could be feasible on Ager Road. And what's interestingly enough, on that particular accident, you're not too far away from where a light, a light is going to make you stop or figure out in order to turn… let me get myself back up there. Yeah.

In order to… where am I on Ager? Yeah. In order to turn on to Ager to Hamilton Street, there's a light right there at the intersection as well. So I really do feel something that would help in that area because I think the accident happened before the Sunoco gas station would be the flashing of the lights.

Yeah, there's the light intersection and then the right-hand side you have the metro, we don't have – that was the KFC, but it's empty right now. So this is a place where food is consumed, alcohol is consumed, people are getting health care services, there is metro - it is just a higher congested area and a higher propensity of pedestrians.

And so my take to that would be one to have sort of a flashing light around the crosswalk section. And number two, I think it's really upon those in my position and my state partners to look at when you have an enclosed residential area by state highways - what is that doing for that? Basically, it's a square which you all saw - what is happening in that square holistically with traffic and people using alternative roads like Agae Road and others to get through and through - passing through the community.

So, I think that would be my initial response and what I've taken forward from working to get to be on this webinar with you all and trying to make our community safer.

**Rachel Quednau:**Yeah, thanks for giving that perspective. So is it fair to say that people are potentially getting off those highways and like zooming through to get to another highway?

**Council Member Wanika Fisher**: Yes.

**Rachel Quednau**: Or some other destination.

**Council Member Wanika Fisher:** And if there's another accident or there's traffic now, I'd have to go back because I forgot what Dan said about the time of this accident. And I don't know what the con-- and I didn't really get a sense from the traffic crash report myself, what the congestion was like at that time. But we do - I mean, there are regular rush hour hours in, you know, in our in our area for sure.

But it's so specific. Every crash. Right. Like I didn't know if there was like - was there a game happening that night at University of Maryland? Was there - that affects traffic on my side to get to the campus on one eight, on 193. Like there's so many different things like - I'd have to like really look that night of that accident about what was what was going on in our community.

But for sure people are passing through and it's just I never really realized that before I was contacted for this webinar. But like, how strange that west part of Hyattsville, Green Meadows area and Chillum are enclosed in the state Highway Square, which is, which is unique. You know, everyone does in the northern part of our county have state roads.

Start roads are, are really in this part of Prince George's County, have a lot of our economic centers. But it's very yeah. So you look at it, it's very interesting that it's totally enclosed. Other areas will have three, other areas will have one, but this is like an enclosed square, which is really interesting. And I'm - I wouldn't say I'm a total traffic expert or anything like that - but I'm interested to see what the what that is creating in the road, in the road usage in this particular community.

And then the other thing I would add to it, which is different, but I again, I don't I don't recall the date of this particular accident is we have a lot of traffic being pushed to different areas because of Purple Line construction. So that's something I also wanted to add to the

conversation and again, to look at the time it will take you if you are on Riggs Road 210 intersects with 193, which has Purple Line construction going on, on it.

And if you're trying to pass through to get another route, that can happen very impromptly and cause and cause different traffic things. That's also another layer that's sort of a different factor in our area as we're trying to make decisions now before Purple Line is actually done and there's no more construction and we actually have a functioning metro line on what - what is the construction doing?

I will say they definitely do the construction more at night and try to try to help with congestion areas, but that's not always guaranteed at this point in the construction line up. So that was like an interesting thing that I was thinking about, especially when people are coming down and trying to find a way around in our community.

So yeah, that's what I would, I would say in my reaction and [are] really interested to pursue some flashing crosswalk lights to help the drivers see and really take a pause when they're approaching that intersection. I do find it - people because Ager Road when you really also look at it Ager Road is a pretty as you went through the 11 and a half feet it's also a pretty significant road in that it's not like a smaller - it's not a smaller county road.

It's a place where you can really drive and cut through versus the other ones or like single family homes. They're not near transit, they're not near commercial buildings. And so that's another aspect that I think Ager Road is getting a heightened level of use than it has in previous generations.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. Okay. Thank you. Let's go to Yohannes. What are the design factors that you notice in this area that might have caused the crash?

**Yohannes Bennehoff:** Yeah. Thank you, Rachel. So, you know, as you mentioned in my intro, I do live, you know, a few minutes' walk from this location. And this is kind of a regular commuting route for me if I take my bicycle to work. So, this - something that kind of got, we noticed in the post-pandemic, the construction period was still underway kind of in that 2020 and 2021 timeframe.

The roadway seems to have been designed for a much larger traffic volume expectation than currently exists. So you have four lanes of vehicle traffic in each direction with small painted bike lanes and the amount of traffic that goes through there really is never congested except for like maybe a few minutes per day when it's very, very heavy during peak commute times.

So, a lot of drivers see like an open roadway, and they really are having that expectation to go very fast. You see it in the speed study that, like most drivers, do not feel that 30 miles an hour is the speed limit on this road. You know, regardless if that's legal speed limit or not, that's not the feeling the road gives you.

And even when I drive through here, I also had that similar, you know, sense that like, hey, this roadway should be, you know, a 45 mile an hour roadway with, you know, no access to anybody else except vehicles. And it gives that feeling. And I don't know if that was I don't think that was the design intention, but that is how it feels.

So I think that when you don't have congestion, you don't have cars on the roadway preventing you from going quickly, your natural inclination is to speed up that. Also, having that wider roadway makes the crossing distance a lot longer, right? So it does have the good aspect of having a center median that's wide enough to stop and wait if you can't make the crossing in one movement and you have to wait for cars coming the opposite direction. So that does have that aspect. But you're still looking at, you know, a 25, roughly 25-foot crossing for each direction of travel.

So, for somebody that's late at night, they're not visible by cars - in this case, you know, the victim had a high blood alcohol content, right? So, there is a possibility that like making it across that roadway in a like quick enough manner to be able to avoid a car is not, you know, necessarily feasible. So, there's that. One intersection back at Hamilton that's the Signalized intersection there is a slip lane from Hamilton when you're heading on Hamilton to head north, kind of north-ish on Ager.

Yeah, I think they're dropping it, dropping us in there - like if you turn the camera around. Yeah, you can see this is a little bit older design, but that slip lane is still there. So, the predominant movement right now is vehicles coming off (of) this section of Hamilton to head northbound on Ager because straight ahead on Ager is closed off for construction.

So most vehicles heading northbound are going to come off of this Hamilton slip lane. So, they're already moving at a pretty high speed once they're even through this intersection. And then by the time they get to that next pedestrian crossing, you know, a couple hundred feet up the road, they're already able to, you know, accelerate, and achieve that high speed.

And then the crosswalk being on the far side of the intersection - they've already gotten to an intersection and may not be expecting to see a crosswalk at the far side of the intersection when there wasn't one on the near side, for the north, for that northbound travel. So those are kind of some of the things that I notice, you know, whenever I'm in the area is drivers don't really seem to be expecting there to be a crossing there or they're not very knowledgeable about it because they're coming out of that slip lane and they're just they're going and they see a big open, wide, straight road and they just want to they want to get to their destination and be done with their, you know, driving trip, right? All of us want to just, you know, get to our destination, and go. And I think that, like the roadway conditions really make drivers feel like, "Oh, I'm just driving straight, and I can go fast. And I think that has definitely contributed to this crash.

**Rachel Quednau:** So, this is a wide road, even with the addition of like the painted bike lanes and some of the bump outs and things you mentioned, that is just way wider than it needs to

be for the small traffic volume. And then that open road just induces speeding - also pointing out that people are not really expecting across all to be there all of a sudden.

Yeah. Thank you. Next, I'd like to go to Edward and let's hear what design factors you noticed that might have contributed to this crash.

**Edward Erfurt:** Great. Thank you, Rachel. Yea, so when I look at something like this, my perspective on it is that this is a really, really wide road. And if I sit in the role of the driver and I come off of Hamilton Street onto Ager, the first experience I have is a high-speed slip road. It's a dedicated right turn that brings me, drops me right onto the road.

When I turn around and I look up the road to where this crosswalk is at, my one lane has now expanded to not just two lanes, but three lanes. So as we come up this road, imagine coming out of an intersection, the acceleration that's occurring because you're speeding up and the signs that the intersection have told you it's not a yield - so I've got to get in a rush and I've got to move. When I look at this section, the first thing I see is now at this section there is a left turn lane and the only people that are going to use that left turn lane are the busses that are going to the metro station. So and, I'm sure there's a lot of bus traffic there, but I'm not sure that warrants its own dedicated lane.

So there's this extra asphalt at that location. And as a driver in this road section, everything on my periphery have been removed. So, this just kind of opens you up. So, as Dan's talking about headlights at night, even the daytime, you could see where your eyes are, are across the whole street. And in this view, you can see how big a pedestrian is on this sight.

And this is during the daytime. So even at night, I also took a look at this roadway because the two lanes - there are two lanes – so it's a four-lane road in the whole roadway section. Every road that comes into this section of roadway - Hamilton has one lane of traffic that comes under this road. Queens, one lane of traffic comes onto this road. East-West Highway, one lane of traffic onto this road.

So, every road that feeds into this is one lane of traffic. But the road has been designed with four lanes plus turn lanes. So, the math doesn't add up. One doesn't equal two. So, when you look at this roadway, why - I would question why you would actually need that many lanes on this section of road when all the roads feeding into it are one lane.

The other thing is all the subdivisions around this, all the residential neighborhoods except for one, the brand-new Stanley Martin townhouse development, have a grid of streets and multiple opportunities for residents to choose roads other than an Ager to maneuver locally. So, if there was a street that maybe was a little difficult or, you know, there's another way out within the overall grid of the neighborhood. So, it appears that the roadway has been overbuilt from that experience.

The other component here is that there's a metro station, right at this location, and the purpose for this crosswalk. There's a parking lot at the metro station, which is smaller than the parking lot which is a garage for the medical office in the same corridor.

So, I would - from an experience side of looking at these things, I would feel that most of the riders on this metro, they're coming to the station, very few of them are actually driving, contributing to the trips on this roadway. They're either walking from the residential neighborhood and clearly there's value to that because new development of higher intensity is occurring here.

So, there's a pedestrian generator that is occurring here that's putting pedestrians in the location. The other piece is if you fine grain down to the intersection, there is a lot of signage that overlaps. And when you look at the - it's the southbound approach to this intersection, because it stands out to me most there - on the southbound approach… so the - yeah, if we look to the left and we scoot down a little bit further, I want everybody to pay attention on the left hand side in the center median - oh go around the other way… as we get closer to the intersection on the left hand side in the center median, there's actually three different signage signs that are there.

So, there's a very expensive flasher light identified. A pedestrian is going to cross at that location, which is blocked by another sign that's telling you that you need to veer to the right because there's really an unnecessary left turn lane up ahead with the Berlin Wall that's there. And then you go in front of all of that. Is it even a bigger sign that tells you that going ahead, as soon as I go through this intersection, I have to be in the left - if I'm in the left lane, I have to turn left. This - I'm using this side as a point because the same condition happens on the other and it's not as apparent. As a driver, I'm given too many instructions. I'm asked to look at too many locations and the signage is only the symptom of what's happening on the road.

You could see on that roadway section being overbuilt with that that turn lane, again from a driver perspective, I'm not able to focus. There's no character on this street to know that it's pedestrian oriented. Everything's been stripped away except for the movement. So, every driveway that could be removed has been removed, making less resistance on the road for drivers.

Anything that would involve the pedestrian is on the periphery of it. And again, when I look at this, I could see in the police report why a police officer would think this is 35 miles per hour - and the characteristics - the first sign that tells you it's less than that is well beyond this crash site. So, I mean, my big thing is that experience in that the design of this area from that that urban design perspective.

**Rachel Quednau:** Thanks, Edward. So definitely just adding to this point that the road is way too wide for the uses and also pointing out that with the metro station right there that it's probably largely visited by people on foot there should be a much better prioritization of those

people versus throughput of car traffic and the clutter of signage would definitely distract the drivers.

I want to clarify some things because I feel like I've heard different things. Maybe I'm misinterpreting for someone who lives in the area like Yohannes, could you just clarify, does the pedestrian sign there, is it like a flashing light that you press a button, and it flashes, or does it - is it not light up? What's the status of that?

**Yohannes Bennehoff:** Yeah, so I cannot confirm if it was installed at the time of the accident, but it is there now and when you push it, it does light up. So, it's the rapid rectangular flashing beacon.

**Rachel Quednau:** Right, okay.

**Yohannes Bennehoff:** During the daytime, it's very difficult to see even with the flashers. Most drivers don't even know it is actually flashing.

It's very, it's very hard to see. At night, I don't, I don't, I didn't test it at night out there. It looks like there's a comment that it was installed in 2020. So, it would have been installed at the time of the crash.

**Rachel Quednau:** Of course, you have to press the button...

**Yohannes Bennehoff:** But you have to press the button -

**Rachel Quednau:** Notice the button and wait for it. Yeah.

**Yohannes Bennehoff:** Yeah. And it's not a common piece of infrastructure for pedestrians in the region, so you might than even know what it does, right? Like, if you're not that familiar with this type of like infrastructure, do you know that this is going to activate flashing lights to help drivers notice you in the intersection? Maybe. Maybe not… so…

**Edward Erfurt:** Yeah, again, like as a pedestrian, it's not in your line of sight of where you're heading to go. You actually have to go and turn and face a direction that you're not traveling. So, again, if you weren't aware that it was there, I could see it overlooked time and time again by pedestrians.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. Okay. Thanks. Yes. Dan?

**Dan Burden:** Yeah. And on the opposite side of the street, the place where you push the button is not at the crossing itself. It's 30 feet away and you can't even see it, if you were approaching from the one direction as a pedestrian. So, there are a number of things that could be corrected to make it easier for the pedestrian to activate the system.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. Okay. Thanks for clarifying that. Let's go to Melissa. What are the design factors that you notice in this in this area that might have contributed to this crash?

**Melissa Schweisguth:** Okay. So, there's just about 15 minutes left. I want to allow for discussion, questions, and pretty much I think everyone has said the truth that needs to be said. I would just summarize it by saying that this road was not designed with consideration for equitable use for cyclists and pedestrian it was designed for cars.

Even though they did a so-called road diet, again, they left a pretty much, you know, a nice straight raceway. They left in that slip lane. We don't know – actually, from the police reports, there's a discrepancy as to whether the driver or as they call the "vehicle" because police reports assume they're all self-driving cars or just vehicles - we don't actually know if this driver was going north or south.

The diagram shows them going south, but the GPS and, you know, other things say they were going northbound. If they were coming southbound, they have a really a much longer straightaway to build that speed. If they were coming from Hamilton Street going westbound and then went through the slip lane again, they didn't have to stop at all. So you can build that speed.

And I agree that it's surprising that there's - there's not a speed limit sign for the road, you know, after you cross the intersection. You actually don't know the speed until you get a bit past the – past the crash site, unless you have entered the road from Queens Chapel, which is closed. There is a sign down by Queens Chapel that says 30 miles per hour.

But again, it was it was not designed for safety. Even though they painted these green bike lanes, I don't feel safe biking on that road. When our - they had to close part of the adjacent park trail for some work and they wanted to do a detour on Ager - I advocated for some of our council members to go and ask Parks to please find an alternate detour, and they wound up routing it through our community instead of that road, because I don't believe that we should be robbing masses of people, especially not parents with children on their bikes onto that road.

It's just, it's just not safe. If you go farther, farther north on that road where there's a school, the parents who pick up their children at the school use that for a parking lane and the county also doesn't - they don't protect - there's no legal protection for bike lanes. They don't ticket people stopping and standing. That's totally, evidently, is totally legit.

So again, it's this was not designed for safety. There were also comments about that crosswalk again, yeah, the rapid rectangular flashing beacon - it's not a common thing and it's a pretty pathetic light. And, again, to someone, someone who's crossing at night – you know - and again the pedestrian was unfortunately intoxicated - may not have that mindset – "Oh, I to hit the button." Right. But we shouldn't count on the person knowing that there's a button there and that -knowing that they need to hit it.

If there are only two rectangular rapid flashing beacons in this entire road design error, every other crosswalk is just a standard crosswalk, and this is actually the only rectangular rapid flashing beacon that also has the light in the median. The other one doesn't. The crosswalks, as others have noted, are really not very visible. When I drive on this road, I am conscious of being very slow – not very slow, but conscious of staying the speed limit and then making sure I'm looking ahead at the crosswalk.

So, I'm afraid I'm going to get rear ended because most other drivers, they want to go at least 35. They go around me. So, you have to just tap your brakes if you want to stop at this crosswalk, you have to do that ahead. You know, so even like for conscious drivers, it can be challenging. And I would say again, this maybe the design standards at the time this road was initially the redesign, they started to plan it in 2012 and they were using older - the prior design standards, the prior street design standards, they have since done, but they didn't actually start the construction until 2018. So why was there not a revisiting of some of the assumptions using more modern, more data-informed ideas about… about what makes a road safe and what's really needed for the traffic volumes that we have.

So again, I think it was just bad planning and planning that was primarily, you know, Level of Service, but keep, you know, keep cars moving and assuming that all these people are going to be in cars. And unfortunately, not - not thinking of the pedestrians and the bicyclists and really putting the burden of safety on the pedestrian and bicyclists, and that as we see tragically and fatally doesn't work.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. Thank you. Chuck, do you have any final notes to add on design factors that we might not have mentioned yet? … Oh, muted.

**Chuck Marohn:** I'm the one who forgets to unmute. I've got a couple of things that haven't been brought up yet. I… as soon as I saw what Edward called the Berlin Wall, I just… Hmm. Here in Minnesota, we put up deer fence along the side of the road to keep deer from crossing on to the highway. Right, so when there's a new highway built and there's high deer crossings, we put up the fence and it's to keep the pests off the roadway, so we don't hit them.

Right. And it's astounding to me, as soon as I saw this, I knew intuitively what was going on, because what you have here is the fence to discourage the pests, you know, human beings from crossing in a straight line. We have to send them down many, many blocks to cross over at a place that's inconvenient for them.

And the way you make people do that is you make it even less convenient to cross here where like a straight line would normally have you cross. And I raise that because this is not an interstate, right? Like if this was an interstate like that would make sense. We don't want people randomly walking on and trying to cross an interstate like, I get it. This is not an interstate.

This is a street in the middle of a neighborhood on one side of the road, you literally have houses, right? Like you have people who are living here. And on the other side, you have a very expensive transit hub that goes to the nation's capital. I mean, this is not like a modest little thing here. Yet, we've put up this this fencing and we put up this fencing for one reason.

And it's the reason that everybody is brought up because the design here is to facilitate the fast movement of vehicles. When we go out and do a speed study and we show that everybody - everybody driving here is driving at lethal speeds - you have a design mismatch. You've designed this incorrectly. There's one little thing that I want to point out, up here, and it has to do with the visibility of someone standing here crossing at night.

If this crash did occur from the victim starting on, what would be the left side here and crossing the right, you can see there's a light here and there would have been a light shining on them and ostensibly they would have been a little bit more visible. But over on this side of the road, there's no light shining on them.

What the designers have chosen to do here - likely because here's where the, you know, it was the most convenient place to hang up a light because there was already a pole there - have chosen to light up the intersection. But when you look at this light, this is just kind of one of those diffuse lights. And the way these happen is that they actually cast a lot of shadow.

It's very likely that someone I mean, someone standing here at the, at the intersection at that signal waiting to cross would be in the dark. I mean, they would be… the light would be shining somewhere else. It would be shining and… the intersection itself would be visible, but that crosswalk would actually be in the dark and in some ways almost blinded, you know, like blinded-ly so, because of the location of those downward directional lights.

It is very likely that someone driving at the lethal speeds that the street is designed to accommodate, would not only be - as Dan said - outrunning their lights, but would not have the added, you know, assistance of downward lighting. And in fact, the downward lighting would actually obscure a person standing at that crosswalk.

So that's what I had, Rachel.

**Rachel Quednau:** Thanks, Chuck. I'm glad you pointed out the fence, too, because that was one of the first things I noticed when I was looking at the crash. It's such a signal that people want to cross here, and yet we're going to stop them from doing the logical thing of trying to cross here.

**Chuck Marohn:** It's amazing because everywhere else throughout, and the Councilwoman pointed this out, everywhere throughout this whole place, we've got highways. This is like a shortcut connector road. We've gone out of our way to make sure that the traffic here can flow in the most unhindered high-speed way possible. But yet, despite the huge investment in rail, despite the neighborhood grid and everything else going on, we've said if you're walking or if

you're biking, you're going to have to go far out of your way and be very inconvenienced in order to do that.

And that is really a design mismatch for this whole place. And it's not surprising that ultimately someone would be killed because of that.

**Rachel Quednau:** So in our last few minutes here, I want to ask for recommendations that you all might offer to, help design this intersection to be safer. And Dan, let's go back to you. What suggestions would you offer?

**Dan Burden:** Yeah, and in part, I'm just going to be capturing what has already been pointed out, but these are my recommendations as well. We only need one lane in each direction. This, this road does not need to be this wide for 11-14,000 cars. We're now doing road diets, it's called, clear on up to 25,000 vehicles a day. So, this is in a very safe zone. And so, it's overbuilt for speed and it induces speed as a result.

The appropriate target speed, the speed we should be designing for, for nighttime conditions, acknowledging what headlamps will do and will cover is 25. It's posted at 30, but it's designed for inducing speeds clear up to 35 or even 40, which the 37 mile an hour average speed is showing that that's the case.

I also love the RRFB. I think it is very effective, but only if people activate it, right? And again, it's it's possible and even likely that the pedestrian didn't know that they needed to activate. And thank you for pointing that out.

Would it be better if we used - considering the fixation on the Hamilton signals, the driver is fixated on that - would it be better to use a HAWK signal, which basically, once it's activated the motorist comes to a stop for the pedestrian. It's a much - more aggressive approach, but it's - and I don't know where Maryland is on adopting HAWKS, but they are a significant step up, and considering the volume of pedestrians at this transit stop, I think it really should be studied.

And then other techniques to slow traffic down, considering they're being fixated on the signal, this may be an appropriate location for a raised crossing which, which would bring the speeds down and so… I'll let others share their insights too. But those are my key recommendations. Yeah.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. Lots of good suggestions. Thank you. Council Member Fisher, I know you mentioned also enhancing the signal. Any other recommendations that you would add?

**Council Member Wanika Fisher:** That - that's going to get me in trouble because then I'm going to have to continue to do that in my role. Let me think. I definitely think, for me, lighting is the one and I think I do agree the road is quite wide when you look at it compared to Sargent Road that also goes through this area.

And so, I'm just like thinking out loud, but thinking about how I can work with DPWT on a study about that. And I know there's a lot of parking and congestion issues in this area, so maybe the space can be used in different ways to thin out in the road. So that's going to be, it's going to be interesting.

So, I definitely agree with those and I definitely want to highlight that, I think, I forgot the acronym for RFB for the pressing of the light for the crosswalk. It's not common throughout our county or our transit - I guess I would say like our pedestrian culture on different intersections. So, I do think if you're going to have it, you actually need to install more throughout the region so that it becomes more of like a common place of practice, which would be something really, really interesting and cool to see if the county can get grant money and other, other means to, to really do that.

So, I'm very interested. I'm very interested in pursuing a lot of your recommendations and I'm taking them home with me in my "job homework" to work on it.

**Rachel Quednau:** Thank you. Let's go to Yohannes. What suggestions do you have?

**Yohannes Bennehoff:** Yeah. So, I would echo what Dan said. I think that having a single lane in each direction for the entire stretch of this roadway really would be sufficient. And, you know, I understand that, like, there are cost constraints, especially with a project that was just constructed. So, my recommendation would be to start tactical, right? Look at doing some like low-cost parking protected bike lanes for that curbside lane.

Right, like, there's, you know, great examples right across jurisdictional lines of like projects that, you know, aren't costing millions and millions of dollars, but still kind of letting the jurisdiction test out the ability for those types of interventions. And it also allows you to test and prove to the skeptics that would say, "No, we need all these lanes" like no, look, see, we just did this with a low-cost tactical project.

The single lane in each direction was able to maintain, you know, all of the traffic flow that needed to access Ager Road because, you know, not everybody is able to, you know walk and bike through this area and some people need to drive. So, I think that having that tactical approach should really be able to like test those ideas and then, you know, work on implementing more permanent solutions like as… the, you know, proof of concept happens.

But I think, you know, there's a lot of evidence even relatively close - of what works, and I think, you know, there's lots of energized folks that are willing to like help and provide ideas. So I think that, you know, that that lane reduction in a tactical manner should be followed on with more projects later on is most helpful and that, you know, crosses the short - like shortens the crossing distance and does a lot of stuff for like the visual aspect of the road, looking more like a 25 mile an hour road, or looking more like appropriate for that mixed environment rather than a highway condition.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah, seems like definitely narrowing to one lane is job number one. Melissa, are there any recommendations that you would add here?

**Melissa Schweisguth:** You know what, we've heard a lot of great technical recommendations and I'd say, you know, certainly yes, I agree on it - enhanced crosswalks, maybe not a raised crossing, if there's, there's concern about the emergency vehicles. Again, they can get over those.

But it's like grooved pavement, something to alert drivers to like pay attention, wake up, get off your device. Right. Like you ever slightly run off road, you run across that grooved pavement. you're like, “Okay, I'm here.” So again, just keep keeping those drivers alert because this was a case where, again, the driver had a distraction and was going too fast.

But I would say, you know, overall, just, we have requested from Council Member Wanika Fisher's office to ask DPWT to come out - our County Department of Public Works and Transportation - to come out and do a walk audit. They're really proud of this road. They have received about at least three awards for it. And it is the first complete green street that the county has done.

So, you know, we don't want to tell them that it's horrible overall, but again, that it could be improved. And this is a great opportunity now that we have two years of data since it's been constructed, we know that there still have been fatal crashes, at least three since it was redesigned.

So, it's really time to take a walk and to listen to the community… that the county can't just look at this crash data and say, okay, or look at the volume of car data and make the decision - in about 2017 or 2018 or earlier in the planning process, the city did ask for a signal at Lancer, which is just a few hundred feet north of the crash site, another intersection. And then after this fatality, there was there was a flurry of local reserves where what our former, our former councilor who has been succeeded by Council Member Fisher, wrote to the Director of Public Works and asked the County Public Works and ask for a HAWK signal or an actual full signal at the intersections adjacent to this area, really acknowledging the safety issues.

There was an interim director at the time we were sort of stonewalled, said that they couldn't move forward. Now they have a director. So I'm really hoping that, but with Wanika Fisher, your knowledge of – her knowledge of the roads is amazing. The commitment is incredible, and I hope that this session will galvanize her office to do a little extra push.

And also, I could see a hundred people and I see a lot of community members who use this road. So, you know the community members need to echo the call for that walk audit and need to show up and voice the concerns and say, “This is how this road can be better and needs to be better. It needs a protected bike lane. It needs improved crosswalks. It needs crosswalks that don't put the onus on the pedestrian to, “oh, this person was wearing dark clothing”, victim blaming.

Right. It can't be the pedestrian's responsibility to stay alive, just trying to cross the road and get back to your home and you die because someone is on a road that is designed for them to drive too fast and they're doing so. And so that that walk audit and pushing the city again to the county to make those tactical improvements and to realize, you know, and to push for that as a standard moving forward for other complete streets, that we can't repeat this elsewhere.

We can't repeat it here. And we have the knowledge to do it better. So please show up, folks, please. I'm calling on a hundred plus folks on this call to please advocate, please, please show up for these, these things. And thank you for all being here.

**Rachel Quednau:** Thank you. Edward, any recommendations that you would add that haven't been stated yet?

**Edward Erfurt:** Yeah. I think we need to be really clear on this, that for this street you need to design the road to match the behavior you desire from the driver. And I think there's a disconnect there. So, really my first recommendation is that nobody should call this a complete street. It's not. So, a complete Street is about providing safe access for all people using - the pedestrian, the bicyclists and even the motorist - and it's not.

Because we've had an incident here. We've had citizens tell us it's not safe to ride a bicycle on the road. So, we really have to get away from that terminology. Now, the Council Member pointed out something, and if you zoom out a little bit, there's a thriving commercial center here. And when I look at this site, there is an opportunity for redevelopment adjacent to this site.

I can tell you anywhere else I've worked in the country, if you're next to a metro station in transit, the desirability for housing and shopping and grabbing a cup of coffee is through the roof. And Ramada is not going to let you build anything on their site. So, across the street you have that opportunity. And I think that Great Wall of China, the giant Berlin Wall that's preventing the pedestrians going across there, it's because people from the metro station want to spend money in this district.

So, when we look at that, what I would recommend, I think doing something tactical is great. The very first thing I would suggest is doing on street parking in one of the lanes tomorrow, promote that as a redevelopment tool. It costs the city absolutely nothing and it provides the economic development and inspiration for somebody to build on that street.

And we can tell you that not only the lane, you know, reducing the lanes through this innovative road diet process by providing on street parking, you create that natural friction. The design of that street is a 25 mile per hour design. Not this large probably was engineered at 45 miles per hour. So, the on-street parking - anywhere you could remove a turn lane - again, I would go out tomorrow, I would stripe out that left turn lane for the bus lanes, paint it out so that it just disappears again.

Couple hundred bucks in paint. It will add a little bit of friction to that intersection and a little congestion that's necessary. Again, the users there are familiar it's… it's transit. So that piece. And then I would start putting on the books and hit as hard as you possibly can to get rid of every one of those right, dedicated right turn lanes.

I would work as hard as I possibly could to get rid of those. Again, that former KFC for me is a development site. And right now, I can't imagine any desirability of sitting in that as a retail business with speeding cars in front of it. But you could imagine that converted out to a high pedestrian amenity space. So, the economic(s) development side of there I think is where it is, and I think that's what the Council Member has shared in her district that has immense opportunity at the site.

**Rachel Quednau:** Thanks. Councilmember Fisher, did you want to jump in?

**Council Member Wanika Fisher:** I just wanted to jump in for a second because I don't want people to view too far. So, one I would love if the county functioned tomorrow, but that's not how our county government works. But I'm going to take this all back and Melissa's great at contacting my office, so we're going to be following up. We are heading into budget season, so it's a little intense.

I just want the community know that and I will say it's many different factors where the KFC site is empty and actually went to the Court of Appeals. City of Hyattsville did not want them to have a drive thru capability, like we want it more walkable, we don't want cars. I agreed with them, but the previous councilmember approved it and so they do - it went all the way there.

And by the time I got sworn in there, they're still allowed to have a drive thru permit for the next five years - there's nothing I can do about that. So, a tenant is chosen by the property owner, not by me. So, there's many different factors that occur even around a small area like that and redevelopment and… and in what kind of businesses and walkability there is.

But I have to say I have been… just a parking lane, and parking is always a huge issue in our community, will be early interesting. And the other interesting fact about Ager Road is that it's where Hyattsville City stops and Green Meadows begins, which means you have a city government and a mayor on one part, and then the other part it's just me.

It's just county government. There's no municipal government, there's no municipal tax. So, it's everybody working together about what folks need. And I will tell you what, folks on one part of a road where the - that's called Green Meadows - what they view and what they will want will be different from what, in my experience, oh, what city of Hyattsville will want.

So, all of those partners have to kind of come together in order for us to move forward on - on one road.

**Rachel Quednau:** Yeah. Chuck To close it out, any recommendations that you would add that haven't been stated yet?

**Chuck Marohn:** Yeah. The only two things that I would add that hasn't been brought up and I think that the narrowing of lanes, the on-street parking, the protected bike lanes are all critical here, tightening up those intersections. I think that we have to go out and fix the deal with the problems that Edward pointed out with the signage and just the redundant unnecessary signage.

I mean it's like you put in an unneeded left turn lane and then it prompted you to put in two unneeded signs that blocked your other sign. It's like one mistake is compounding and compounding and compounding and we need to go out and fix that series of mistakes. I also think if your design ethic here is that we are going to, regardless of how or inconvenient it is, we're going to force all pedestrians to go to a single spot to cross.

You better light that place up like the DMV at night. I mean, I don't know what - to me, we've got to go in and get something there so that people aren't sitting in the shadows just by a normal course of crossing here. So that, that is an easy one that can be done tomorrow. And it, you know, it should be done.

**Rachel Quednau:** Thank you. So, let's close it out here. I want to extend a special thank you to Danny, who nominated this crash for a discussion today. And helped provide many of the materials that we used. Thanks also to my colleague Tony for doing a lot of the planning behind the scenes. And thank you to the Washington Area Bicycle Association who did the radar gun assistance, Dan Behrend, Coalition for Smarter Growth and the Hyattsville Street Design Team.

And of course, a huge thank you to all of our panelists joining us today. You guys really contributed a lot to this conversation. Appreciate you taking the time. Thank you to the sponsor for this whole Crash Analysis Studio, who's an anonymous donor. And for those watching or interested, you can find a recording of this session and all of our additional sessions by going to www.strongtowns.org/crash-studio.

There will also soon be resources you can access for establishing your own studio in your community because we really want to see this model spread. On behalf of my colleagues and this panel - thank you everyone, for watching. Thank you again to our panelists. Keep doing what you can to build a strong town. Take care.