

## BMTS Article Digest

April – May 2023

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This and past digests can also be accessed from the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee page at <http://bmtsonline.com/about/committees>.



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## Pedestrian & Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) Messenger e-Newsletter

Go to <http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/newsroom/newsletters.cfm>.

Subscribe to the new monthly PBIC Messenger. Send news for future issues to editorial team member Linda Tracy.

## FREE Webinars

Go to <https://www.pedbikeinfo.org/webinars/>.

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## Come out and play in Broome County

Go All Out Broome County is your simple guide to hundreds of places and thousands of acres in your own backyard or just down the road. Easily locate hidden gems and local favorites then map your next outdoor adventure in Broome County. Go to [www.GoAllOutBroome.com](http://www.GoAllOutBroome.com).



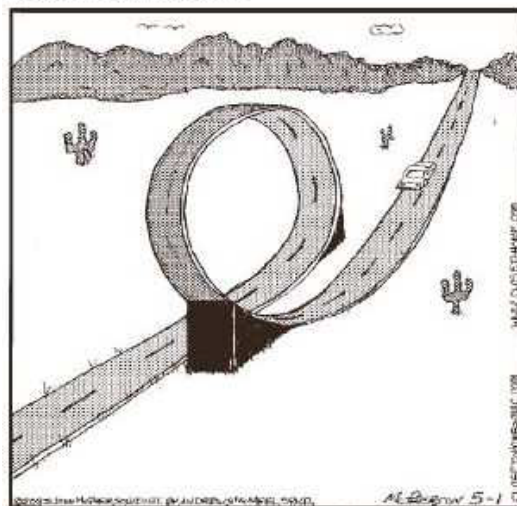
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See the **Two Rivers Greenway Pedestrian & Bicycle Monthly Counting Reports** at <http://bmtsonline.com/data/bikeped-counts>.



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### CLOSE TO HOME John McPherson



"According to the GPS, there's a traffic circle coming up very soon."

[Charles Marohn](#), April 10, 2023

## Award-Winning Complete Street Just Another Deadly Stroad

The intentions behind the concept of [Complete Streets](#) are clear and straightforward. A street should be a safe place for everyone who uses it. It's not enough to design a street for automobiles and make everything else an afterthought; we have to accommodate the mobility of everyone in a way that respects their humanity. [An urban street shouldn't be deemed "complete" until it does.](#)

I absolutely support these concepts, but I don't support Complete Streets.

In my career, I have watched the concept of Complete Streets go from being a fringe, revolutionary idea to being fully co-opted by the old-school transportation professions. It now largely resembles the worst of their mindless excesses instead of the radical ideals Complete Streets advocates originally set out to promote.

To gain widespread acceptance, the Complete Streets strategy was to graft itself on to existing systems and bureaucracies, lubricating bottom-up change with meaningful amounts of top-down funding. State departments of transportation and local transportation offices took the money, and they have continued to check the boxes necessary to keep getting the money, but the results consistently fall short of the original concept.

In a recent [Crash Analysis Studio](#), we examined a fatal crash on Ager Road, a Complete Street in Hyattsville, Maryland. A woman named Hellen Jorgenson was attempting to cross the street on foot when she was struck by an automobile being driven along Ager Road. We [published a report detailing the many design factors](#) that contributed to the crash. As we examined this location, I reacted with shock to the conscious indifference the design demonstrates to the safety of anyone outside of an automobile. It was only later that I was informed that multiple industry organizations have recognized Ager Road with some of their highest awards.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) has named Ager Road one of their [2023 Outstanding Civil Engineering Achievement award recipients](#). ASCE called Ager Road a "Green-Complete Streets Project" and claims the project "improved the safety, functionality, and aesthetics" of the street. According to the ASCE, Ager Road underwent a road diet to reduce speeding and improve pedestrian facilities.

The Ager Road project also [won an award from the County Engineers Association of Maryland](#) (CAEM) as their 2022 Large Project of the Year. CAEM referred to it as a Complete/Green Streets Project.



The Washington DC Section of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (WDCSITE) also [named Ager Road their Project of the Year](#). The organization called the project a "powerful example" that created a more "connected, inclusive community." According to WDCSITE, Ager Road makes good on the Complete Streets objectives to "improve safety, accessibility, functionality, and aesthetics."

In their award presentation, WDCSITE states that Ager Road is "truly is the County's hallmark green-complete streets project that addresses the needs and enhances

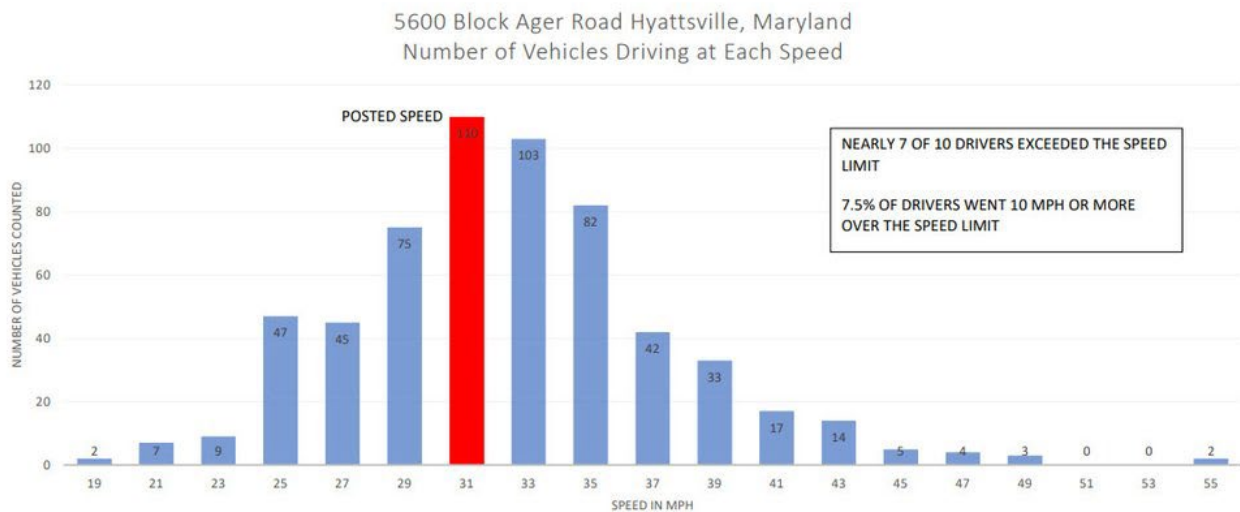
the daily lives of its underserved residents through multi-modality.”

The Maryland Quality Initiative (MdQI), [another industry organization](#), gathered at their annual conference and gave Ager Road their [Modal Award for Projects over \\$5 million](#). MdQI also refers to it as a “Green-Complete Streets Project” that is meant “to reduce speeding” and provide an “intelligent transportation system.”

Ager Road is the transportation industry’s model for a Complete Street. Let me show you some of the things we found when we took a look at Ager Road.

Ager Road is being recognized for reducing speeding. That might be true; we don’t know what speeds were prior to the project. However, we did go out and do a study that measured speeds today. A modest amount of fieldwork revealed that 7 out of 10 drivers on Ager Road exceeded the 30-mph speed limit. A significant percentage went more than 10 miles over that limit.

## Speed Data



Ager Road is being recognized for improving pedestrian facilities. Here’s a before and after photo of one section near the fatal crash site. My colleague Asia Mielezsko pointed this out [in an article last week](#) and I questioned whether we had the photos reversed. We didn’t.

BEFORE (2012):



AFTER (2022):



By “improving pedestrian facilities,” it is also possible the engineering associations are referencing the fence that was built in the median of Ager Road. It is designed to keep people from crossing from the residential area on the left in this photo to the West Hyattsville station on the right (a station on the DC Metro line), except at designated crossings (which are 850 feet apart).



Multiple industry awards cited the improved accessibility achieved on Ager Road. In a Complete Streets framework, that would generally mean that Ager Road is easy and safe for people of all ages and abilities to walk and bike.

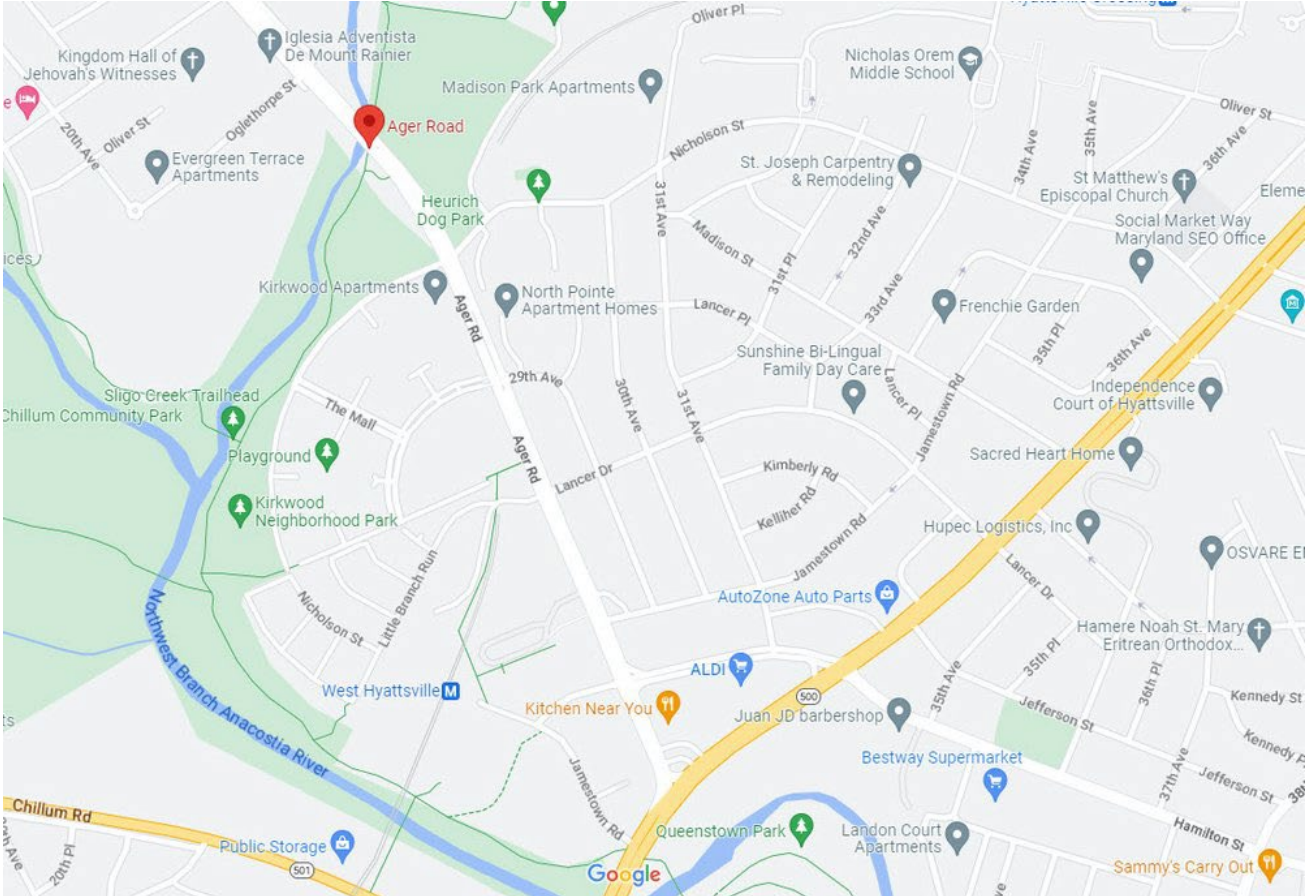
Again, “improved” is a low bar (you can go back and [look at the “before” conditions](#) on Google), but there is nothing about this unprotected bike lane and sidewalk that is easy or safe, especially given



the excessive speeds this design has created.



The professional societies giving their members awards for projects like this like to market their work in the popular language of the day. Thus, Ager Road was said to create a “connected, inclusive community,” one that “enhances the daily lives of its underserved residents through multi-modality.” In a Complete Streets framework, this suggests that the underserved residents who use Ager Road will not experience difficulty getting around.



Go beyond the dangerous bike lanes and sidewalks and focus on the larger context this design was constructed within. [Here's a map of Ager Road's location](#) in relation to the neighborhood. On the left (west), we have the West Hyattsville Metro stop, a major transit investment connecting this neighborhood to one of the nation's most important metropolitan areas. On the right (east), there is a struggling neighborhood full of homes and businesses. Dividing them is Ager Road, a 4-plus lane "Complete Street" moat, complete with a fence down the middle to frustrate anyone seeking to cross.

If you [zoom out a bit in that Google map](#), you'll recognize perhaps the most tragic part of this project: the multimillion-dollar Ager Road is completely unnecessary. The neighborhood is surrounded by highways; there is more than ample auto mobility here. The last thing the residents and businesses of this neighborhood lack is access to high-speed, high-capacity roadways. They're encircled by them!

Let me point out one last thing. Here's one of the "intelligent transportation systems" referenced in the industry awards. It is a rectangular rapid flash beacon powered by a solar panel. I know; the word "intelligent" is doing some really heavy lifting.

Being solar powered, the designers could have placed the rectangular rapid flash beacon anywhere. They chose to place it on the far side of the sidewalk, out of the natural line of travel for a human walking. We all know why it was placed there; so as not to impede the flow of traffic and, ironically, so it would not be struck by a wayward automobile.

This is where [Hellen Jorgensen was struck and killed](#) while attempting to cross Ager Road.

As was noted in the [Crash Analysis Studio](#), the designers of this award winning Complete Street made sure that traffic would flow smoothly, but they didn't bother to note that the lighting placed in this location puts the singular crossing—the only one they provide in 850 feet—in perpetual shadow.

They ensured that there was ample signage dedicated to directing traffic how to flow, but they didn't seem to notice that their signs obscured not just the people crossing but, ironically, the signs that were supposed to alert drivers to those very people. Signs obscuring signs, but you can guess which ones were given priority.

On this "hallmark Green-Complete Streets project," the designers ensured that they checked all the boxes required for a Complete Street, but they put in none of the effort needed to understand the real struggles of someone outside of an automobile.

It should be no surprise that the project received multiple awards from the scions of the transportation industry. This is what success looks like to them. The only question that remains is whether this is what success looks like to Complete Streets advocates.

Are the individuals, nonprofits, and government working groups with "complete streets" somewhere on their business cards going to sit by and silently allow the very professions they sought to reform use the Complete Streets brand to greenwash deadly stroads?





What do you stand for, Complete Streets? I don't recognize you, anymore.

At Strong Towns, we're in the advocacy business. We know that, from time to time, people are going to take our ideas and our message and use them to make arguments antithetical to what we believe. We accept that. It's the messy part of the bottom-up movement we've created. Millions of readers and thousands of members around the world are using Strong Towns concepts to build more prosperous places. Our message will mean something slightly different to each of them.

That's okay, because we've built a large enough movement centered around core principles. A few divergent actors on the fringe won't overwhelm the whole. That's the strength of bottom-up systems. Slow, steady, and powerful.

From the beginning, the coalition of Complete Streets advocates chose a top-down strategy. They defined their actions in terms of existing, centralized systems. That did result in more funding, and broader industry acceptance, at a more rapid pace than a bottom-up approach would have achieved. One can understand how well-intentioned people chose this route for their advocacy.

Yet, a top-down strategy meant working within entrenched systems. It meant finding common cause with the very people who most fervently resisted their ideals. There was certainly more funding with this approach, along with greater access to power, but the ultimate cost of that success was having the core ideals of Complete Streets cast aside and tokenized.

We need you to wake up, Complete Streets advocates, and recognize that your work is being widely used for evil ends. It's time to rediscover your core ideals and stand on principle against the industry insiders who are co-opting your message for their own gain. It's time to refocus on the bottom-up concerns that made your work urgent in the first place.

Hellen Jorgensen needed a Complete Street. Instead, she got a deadly stroad wrapped in half-measures and industry propaganda. It's time for you to find your voice, Complete Streets advocates. This nation needs you.

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## LOCAL

# Binghamton man pleads not guilty after allegedly killing a pedestrian while fleeing police

**Jeff Murray**

Binghamton Press & Sun-Bulletin

A Binghamton man indicted for murder and multiple other felonies in connection with a hit-and-run crash that killed a Johnson City woman has pleaded not guilty on all counts.

Following his indictment by a Broome County grand jury, 20-year-old Rajee Almashni was arraigned Friday in Broome County Court on charges of second-degree murder, second-degree manslaughter, second-degree vehicular manslaughter and leaving the scene of an accident, along with 13 other related charges.

The charges stem from a March 6 incident that started outside the Oakdale Commons in Johnson City, according to village police.

Officers responded to the shopping center around 4:20 p.m. to check on the welfare of man who witnesses said was intoxicated and had entered as many as two vehicles in the parking lot, police said.

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# Blind walkers win safer crossings

Judge rules accessibility disparities violate ADA

Jeff McMurray  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO – After a retinal disease left him legally blind, architect John Gleichman was struck by a taxicab while walking home near Chicago’s Lincoln Park Zoo – at the same intersection where a 4-year-old girl was killed by a hit-and-run driver years earlier.

Although Maya Hirsch’s death in 2006 ignited a citywide crusade for pedestrian safety improvements, almost all the electronic upgrades since then have been for people who can see. Nearly 3,000 Chicago intersections are now equipped with visual crossing signals, yet fewer than three dozen include audible cues.

In a landmark victory for blind residents challenging the accessibility of a major city’s signalized crosswalks, a federal judge in March ruled in a class-action lawsuit that such disparity in the nation’s third-largest city violates the Americans with Disabilities Act.

'Every time I go out to go downtown for a meeting, I have to think I could get hit today and not make it home,' said Gleichman, 65, who has been struck four times by vehicles while navigating the city with his white cane since being diagnosed as legally blind in 2005. He considers himself fortunate to have escaped serious injury each time.

A future hearing could decide how many audible crossing signals Chicago must install, but a similar case in New York City suggests it could be substantial. A federal judge there appointed an independent monitor and in December 2021 gave officials a decade to gradually make at least 10,000 of its approximately 13,000 signalized intersections accessible to blind pedestrians. It’s already well ahead of schedule.

'It’s been huge progress,' said Terence Page, president of the Greater New York Council of the Blind. 'It’s a game-changer to the blind and visually impaired community. As new cities begin to build infrastructure, we want accessibility to not be an afterthought but work in parallel with the upgrades.'

Accessible pedestrian signals, known as APS, have been around for decades, though the technology has evolved.

Many of Chicago’s few APS-equipped intersections – including on a busy street outside The Chicago Lighthouse, which provides services to blind and low-vision residents – still rely on beeps or cuckoo chirps to announce when it’s safe to cross. Newer models actually speak the words 'walk' or 'don’t walk,' and feature tactical buttons to clarify directions so blind pedestrians don’t stray into traffic. Many also convey the time remaining before the light turns red.

Sandy Murillo, a lifelong Chicago-area resident who was born with glaucoma and lost her sight at age 2, said she didn’t even know about APS until she heard a strange voice say 'walk' during a childhood family trip to southern California.

'That kind of made it dawn on me,' said Murillo, who produces a radio show for The Chicago Lighthouse and writes a blog on issues facing the blind community. 'I thought, 'Oh, so that's what it is. They're there for people like me.'

Chicago's Department of Transportation declined to comment on the judge's ruling, citing the ongoing litigation. But spokesperson Erica Schroeder told The Associated Press in an email that APS devices are installed at 35 intersections and 'under construction, in design, or in procurement' at more than 150 others.

The department estimates a \$50,000 to \$200,000 price tag per intersection to install APS, although grant money is available through the 2021 federal infrastructure law to help cities defray some costs.

Advocates for Chicago's blind residents say they pushed the city for years to add APS with little success before taking legal action.

Kathy Austin, a community engagement specialist at Second Sense – a downtown organization serving blind residents – recalls a meeting in 2017 or 2018 in which she and others in the blind community presented a list of the most dangerous intersections, only to be told by city officials that APS was too difficult to install in many of those places.

Blind residents know from their mobility training to wait to hear the sounds of parallel traffic before crossing a street. That's often difficult in noisy downtowns like Chicago's with its overhead 'El' train stations and other ambient noises. Then, when the pandemic hit and downtown traffic steeply declined, they encountered the opposite problem – not enough vehicles or even people around to help decipher when to walk or stop.

London-based Waymap, which created a smartphone navigation app for blind pedestrians that Washington, D.C.'s subway system uses as an accessibility tool, found in a study that blind people average just 2.5 regular routes – such as from home to the office or grocery store and back – if they use a cane or 3.5 if they use a guide dog. Celso Zucollo, Waymap's chief operating officer, said the study found that people who lack independent mobility were far more likely to experience depression.

Maureen Reid, a job-placement counselor at The Chicago Lighthouse, said she feels more comfortable than many of her blind friends moving about the city because of her familiarity with its sidewalks and the help of her guide dog, Gaston.

But she acknowledges there's room for numerous safety improvements – including more tactile strips at pedestrian crosswalks and transit stations. Her previous dog slipped off a platform edge at an 'El' station and dangled from his harness over the commuter train track as Reid yelled for help. The dog was unharmed.

San Francisco voluntarily entered a settlement with blind residents nearly two decades ago to add APS, and numerous other U.S. cities as well as the state of Maryland require it, said Torie Atkinson, senior staff attorney with Disability Rights Advocates, which represents plaintiffs in both the New York and Chicago cases.

Matt Baker, vice president of sales and marketing at Greenville, Texas-based Polara, a leading manufacturer of APS products, said the Chicago market has been one of the toughest to crack

- with just a few intersections equipped with Polara devices. Baker said that could change due to the court ruling and expectations the federal board reviewing public right-of-way issues will eventually require APS at most new or rebuilt signalized intersections nationwide.

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