



On Walk & Roll to School Day 2022, Crawford Long Middle School students use a crosswalk during an educational pop-up demonstration designed to gain community feedback on a quick-build walk/bike lane on Empire Boulevard SW. Source: The City of Atlanta.

Atlanta Uses Quick-Build Projects to Engage Community and Improve Road Safety for Young Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Communities across the United States are embracing low-cost, quick-build materials, approaches, and techniques to advance road safety. Some projects allow communities to pilot and experience a design that changes the use and feel of streets and public spaces. Other projects are installed for longer periods of time to [address an urgent safety need](#).

In 2022, the City of Atlanta [received a grant](#) from the National Center for Safe Routes to School to support the implementation of a walk/bike lane near a middle school as part of a “quick-build projects” pilot program created to improve road safety for youth. Made possible by General Motors, this program offers grants of up to \$10,000 to select communities to fund low-cost, quick-build

infrastructure improvements to provide immediate safety benefits in underserved areas where children walk and bike.

The City of Atlanta held a one-day pop-up demonstration event to pilot the walk/bike lane design and engage the local community for feedback. Outcomes from and response to the pilot led to a longer-term installation of a walk/bike lane and also increased support for future Safe Routes to School (SRTS) projects in the community. This case study provides a glimpse of the project and offers several insights that can inform other communities interested in using quick-build approaches to support community engagement and advance road safety.

Piloting a quick-build design and engaging the community

The City of Atlanta has an established equity framework developed for its [Vision Zero efforts](#). The framework utilizes specific data indicators (e.g. households without access to motor vehicles, percentages of school-age children, older adults, and persons with disabilities, as well as race, income, and health insurance coverage, among several other indicators) to establish prioritization for “communities of concern.” The City of Atlanta’s Vision Zero action plan calls for the elimination of all traffic fatalities and injuries, directing efforts to the communities of concern.

Crawford Long Middle School—a Title I school serving a large number of students from low-income households—is located in one such community of concern, as well as within the City of Atlanta’s High Injury Network. Crawford Long Middle School is located off Empire Boulevard SW in the Glenrose

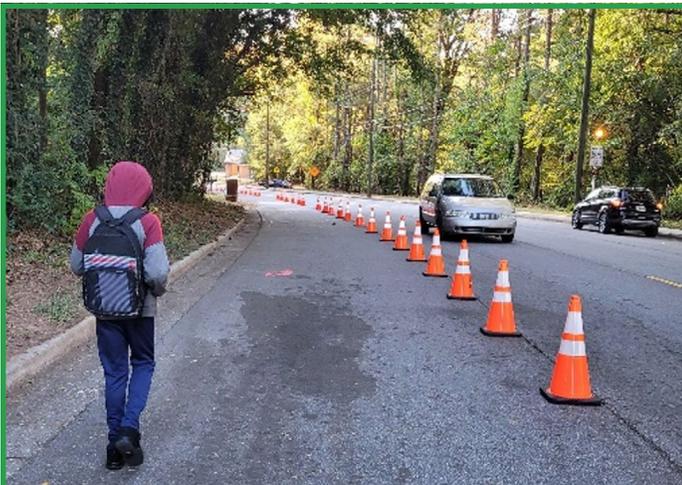
Heights neighborhood and enrolls 670 students, with a predominately Black and Hispanic population. In the 2022 to 2023 school year, 36 percent of the student population (or 244 students) lived within the school district’s designated walk zone—a mile and a half or less from the school. In May 2022 and September 2022, students completed tallies that revealed their travel patterns during arrival and dismissal hours. The initial data collection in May found that eight percent of the student population (or 50-60 students) were walking to school daily.

The City’s interest in implementing infrastructure improvements to calm traffic and provide more protected space for walking and biking on Empire Boulevard SW was spurred by community feedback, the City’s assessment of the wide, two-lane road, and a recent crash event in which a motorist struck a student near the school.

When considering potential quick-build infrastructure improvement projects in its communities of concern, the City prioritized improvements near Crawford Long Middle School for several reasons:

1. the number of students living in the school’s designated walk zone,
2. the number of students taking active trips to school including walking and biking modes,
3. the school administration’s interest, capacity, and commitment to partner with the City on infrastructure improvements, and
4. road safety concerns on Empire Boulevard SW near the school campus.

Shortly after being selected as a grant recipient in August 2022, the City of Atlanta began project implementation by hosting planning meetings with Crawford Long Middle School, the local district council member, and public engagement outreach efforts to residents in the Glenrose Heights Neighborhood, with a particular focus on those living along Empire Boulevard SW and heavily impacted by the project. City staff collected stakeholder input and feedback through three consecutive (in-person and virtual) public engagement community meetings in the Fall of 2022 and outreach to the local Neighborhood Planning Unit. Additionally, the City sent residents of the Glenrose Heights neighborhood living within a quarter mile radius of the project post mailers with more information. The City also



Crawford Long Middle School students use a pop-up installed on Walk & Roll to School Day 2022 and designed to get community feedback on a pilot quick-build walk/bike lane. Source: The City of Atlanta.

used social media channels, including Nextdoor, to send notifications and distributed advisory traffic notifications to the public during construction. In addition, homes directly impacted due to parking restrictions received multiple rounds of door-to-door engagement leading up to the project's construction phase. Crawford Long Middle School administrators supported and connected with students and families about the project during monthly family engagement events and activities during the school year, as well as through mail and virtual school reminders.

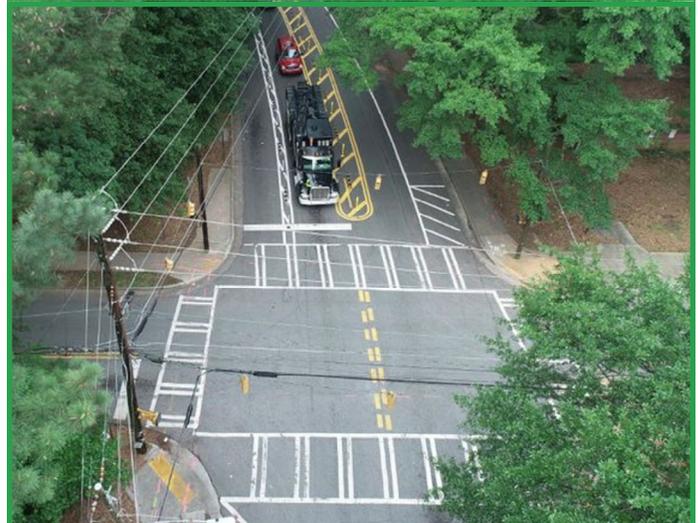
In October 2022, the City of Atlanta held a pop-up demonstration of the walk/bike lane using traffic safety cones during Crawford Long Middle School's Walk & Roll to School Day event. This event allowed the student population and surrounding community to experience the walk/bike lane design prior to its implementation and to offer feedback to City transportation planning staff.

"The City of Atlanta's Department of Transportation saw that Crawford Long Middle School and our community had a need," said Ms. Kathy Mayfield, School Business Manager. "They successfully invited all stakeholders to be part of the decision-making process that would make the community safer... This initiative will lead to more students walking and bike riding to school."

Making the route to school safer with a quick-build walk/bike lane

Following the pop-up demonstration event, in December 2022, the City adopted legislation to

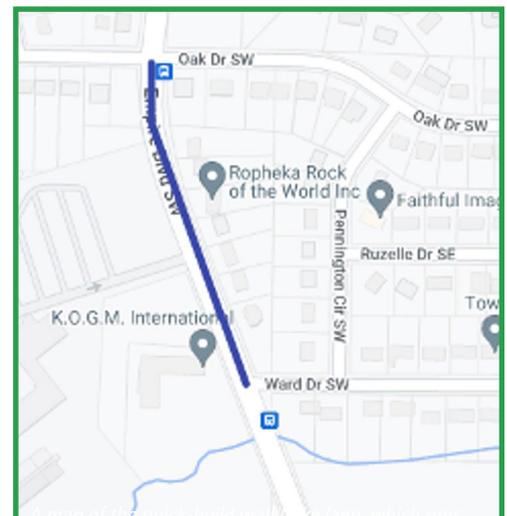
implement a longer-term quick-build walk/bike lane and began construction in March 2023. The walk/bike lane runs from the intersection of Empire Boulevard SW and Oak Drive SW to the intersection of Empire Boulevard SW and Ward Drive SW, where the school zone ends.



Empire Boulevard SW after quick-build improvements were implemented in 2023. Source: The City of Atlanta.



Crawford Long Middle School students travel to school using the new walk/bike lane on Empire Boulevard SW. Source: The City of Atlanta



A map of the quick-build walk/bike lane, which runs from the intersection of Empire Boulevard SW and Oak Drive SW to the intersection of Empire Boulevard SW and Ward Drive SW. Source: The City of Atlanta.



City of Atlanta officials including Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens, District 12 Council Member Antonio Lewis, Department of Transportation Commissioner and members of the Crawford Long Middle School community gather at a ribbon cutting to launch a quick-build walk/bike lane on Empire Boulevard SW during Bike & Roll to School Day 2023. Source: The City of Atlanta.

As a longer-term demonstration project, the City installed more durable materials than those used to construct the one-day, walk/bike lane pop-up event. The City used thermoplastic traffic striping and vertical barriers with reflective bands, including flex posts and wheel stops, to construct the walk/bike lane and traffic calming measures. Additionally, the City added pedestrian walk symbols and bike sharrows, or road markings shaped like two inverted Vs above an icon of a bicycle used to indicate road sharing with bicyclists.

Following the implementation of the project, the City and school administrators provided education and encouragement on the benefits of walking and biking to school and the value of the walk/bike lane to students.

Sparking support to advance road safety

The City held a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the installation of the walk/bike lane on Empire Boulevard SW in May 2023 as part of Crawford Long Middle School's Bike & Roll to School Day event. This ceremony, attended by Atlanta's Mayor, a local Councilmember, Department of Transportation Commissioner, community partners, school administrators, and students, offered a chance for local community members and leaders to experience

and provide feedback on the changes made on Empire Boulevard SW to protect road users, particularly those who walk, bike, and roll.



While planning to collect more traffic data and input from the community within a year of implementation, the City has already received positive feedback from students and school administrators about the improvements.

"This investment undergirds our mission to provide a safe environment for all stakeholders not just on campus, but also while transitioning to and from," said Ms. Lisa Hill, Principal of Crawford Long Middle School. "The tactical walk/bike lane and designated carpool drop-off and pick-up area have created a much safer environment and reduced the speed of vehicles in our school zone tremendously. Additionally, students have expressed their excitement and appreciation for the opportunity to now have walking and cycling as a safe transportation option."

“This project has highlighted a need within our community and met it by providing a sense of travel security,” added Ms. Gabrielle Donaldson, [Communities in Schools](#) Site Coordinator at Crawford Long. “Our students will now maneuver to and from school with a sense of comfort and protection.”

In surveys distributed after the Walk & Roll and Bike & Roll to School Day events, students expressed interest in participating in future events, and most students indicated their belief in the importance of having safe streets to walk, bike, and roll.

Further, the local council member legislated City funding to deploy more SRTS projects in the district based on the success of the Empire Boulevard SW infrastructure improvements, illustrating the power of quick-build projects as tools for sparking support for advancing road safety.

“Pilot programs such as this help spark change and address the needs of our most vulnerable road users in the city, including our youth,” said Marsha Anderson-Bomar, Interim Commissioner for the City of Atlanta Department of Transportation. “Designing for children is designing cities that work better for everyone.”

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