

# Dane County Traffic Safety Commission

## Co-Chairs

**Sgt. Matt Meyer**  
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## Members

AAA Wisconsin  
American Family Children's  
Hospital / Safe Kids  
Belleville Police Dept.  
Blue Mounds Police Dept.  
CESA 2 Driver's Education  
Cottage Grove Police Dept.  
Cross Plains Police Dept.  
Dane Co. Court Commissioner  
Dane Co. District Attorney's Office  
Dane Co. EMS  
Dane Co. Highway & Transportation  
Dane Co. Sheriff's Office  
DeForest Police Dept  
DeForest Public Works  
Fitchburg Police Dept.  
Fitchburg Public Works  
Greater Madison MPO  
Madison Metro  
Madison Municipal Court  
Madison Police Dept.  
Madison Traffic Engineering  
Maple Bluff Police Dept.  
Marshall Police Dept.  
McFarland Police Dept.  
Middleton Police Dept.  
Monona Police Dept.  
Mount Horeb Police Dept.  
Oregon Police Dept.  
Public Health Madison & Dane Co.  
Safe Communities Madison-Dane Co.  
Shorewood Hills Police Dept.  
SSM Health  
Stoughton Police Dept.  
Sun Prairie Pedestrian Task Force  
Sun Prairie Police Dept.  
Sun Prairie Public Services  
UW Extension  
UW Health Trauma Centers  
UW-Madison Police Dept.  
UW TOPS Laboratory  
UW Transportation Services  
Verona Police Dept.  
Waunakee Police Dept.  
WI Alcohol Policy Project  
WI Bike Federation  
WI Dept. of Transportation/  
Bureau of Traffic Safety  
WI State Laboratory of Hygiene  
WI State Patrol

September 7, 2023

**For Immediate Release (See interview opportunities, p. 3 and JPG attached)**

**For more information, contact: Cheryl Wittke, (608) 256-6713  
Executive Director, Safe Communities of Madison - Dane County**

**Signs and increased enforcement remind drivers to SLOW DOWN for students**

With schools in session, all Dane County law enforcement agencies are teaming up with each other, the Wisconsin State Patrol, area communities and the Dane County Traffic Safety Commission (TSC) to urge

drivers to keep children and adolescents safe. The collaboration includes free SLOW DOWN yard signs for residents and businesses and increased surveillance for speeding and other risky driving from September 11-15.



“We all see motorists speeding through neighborhoods, running stop signs, ignoring crosswalks, or driving while checking their phones,” said Matt Wagner, Cottage Grove Police lieutenant and co-chair of the TSC’s law enforcement subgroup. “Always dangerous behaviors, these are even more alarming when more kids are out walking, biking or skateboarding to and from school. Traffic can be especially congested around schools, and frustrated motorists are more likely to demonstrate unsafe driving behaviors.

“Kids may be crossing busy streets, learning routes to a new school, rushing to start the day or get home, looking at their phones, or chatting with friends. We have to watch out for their safety, even while parents warn them how to watch for inattentive drivers,” Lt. Wagner said.

“The SLOW DOWN signs are an ongoing reminder to look out for children and all pedestrians. Of course, people driving should exercise caution, regardless of whether they’re near a school or not. We hope reminders of safe driving practices during this especially critical start-of-school time will reduce traffic injuries and fatalities all year.”

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The faster vehicles travel, the more likely crashes will occur, according to Cheryl Wittke, TSC co-chair and executive director of Safe Communities of Madison-Dane County. “Children are especially vulnerable because of their size and inexperience.” Wittke said that when a child is hit by a vehicle going 40 mph, 85% of crashes are fatal.

According to TSC member Rishelle Eithun, Pediatric Injury Prevention Manager at UW Health Kids, pedestrian injuries are the second leading cause of unintentional injury-related deaths among children 5 to 14 in the United States. Each year, nearly 900 children ages 14 and younger die from pedestrian injuries, and another 24,000 are injured in traffic-related crashes.

Eithun said, “It’s a significant problem, for example, based on what we have experienced at UW Health. In the last five years, 35 children and adolescents have been treated for injuries at UW Health hospitals as a result of a vehicle striking a pedestrian, and 16 from running into a bicycle. Injuries sustained in pedestrian crashes were far more severe. Nine of the injuries were “profound,” the most serious types of injuries, and two children died. The majority are teens: of those killed or injured, 51% were aged 12 to 17, 35% were 6-11 and 14% were five or younger.”

Eithun added that it’s not just a Madison problem. Eighty-four percent of the 51 injured children were hurt in communities outside Madison.

Drivers also need to do their part to keep kids safe, Lt. Wagner said. He recommends:

- Obey speed limits, usually 15 mph in school zones but subject to local regulation.
- Slow down and exercise caution when kids are walking, biking, or skateboarding.
- Stop for stopped school buses; never pass them.
- Watch for crossing guards.
- Approach all crosswalks and intersections with caution. Never go around a vehicle stopped at a crosswalk.

Participating in this program are the Wisconsin State Patrol and all Dane County police departments: Belleville, Blue Mounds, Cottage Grove, Cross Plains, DeForest, Fitchburg, Madison, Maple Bluff, Marshall, McFarland, Middleton, Monona, Mount Horeb, Oregon, Shorewood Hills, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Verona, and Waunakee. Also participating is the Dane County Sheriff’s Office, providing law enforcement services to Black Earth, Brooklyn, Cambridge/Deerfield, Cottage Grove (town), Dunn, Mazomanie, Middleton (town), Westport/Dane, Windsor, and other outlying communities.

The Slow Down yard sign and increased traffic enforcement effort is a countywide collaborative effort among law enforcement agencies, community groups promoting safer driving, Dane County Traffic Safety Commission, Safe Communities of Madison-Dane County, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and Vision Zero - Madison.

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**Potential Interviewees:** The following may be contacted for comment directly:

- 1) **Law Enforcement:** Lt. Matt Wagner, Cottage Grove Police Department, co-chair, Dane County Traffic Safety Commission Law Enforcement Subgroup, [mwagner@cottagegrovepolice.org](mailto:mwagner@cottagegrovepolice.org), (608) 839-4652.
- 2) **Traffic Safety Commission:** Cheryl Wittke, Exec. Director, Safe Communities of Madison - Dane County and TSC co-chair. [cwittke@safercommunity.net](mailto:cwittke@safercommunity.net), (608) 256-6713.
- 3) **Pedestrian/Bicycle Injuries:** Rishelle Eithun, Pediatric Injury Prevention Manager, UW Health Kids. Contact through Emily Kumlien Greendonner, Press Secretary, UW Health Communications, [egreendonner@uwhealth.org](mailto:egreendonner@uwhealth.org), (608) 516-9154.