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Don't forget walkers, cyclists in street design

The headlines have become too common. An older woman struck **by a car** on her way to the store. A young man killed while riding his bike home from work. A grandfather hit by a vehicle shortly after stepping off of the bus. Children injured on the way to school.

It seems we've seen an increasing number of these stories in recent months, and too often they've included a common theme: The older woman walking along a road without a sidewalk. The young cyclist trying to navigate through an area without bike lanes. The pedestrian crossing a street with no crosswalk or traffic light. A child with no safe route to school.

Once, designing commercial, retail, residential or school areas without accommodations for pedestrians would have been unthinkable. But in recent decades, as the **car** became our primary means of transportation, many neighborhoods were designed exclusively for automotive travel. Walking or bicycling became a perilous, if not impossible, notion.

The result? Disconnected neighborhoods. Increases in health problems such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Gas money spent on walkable errands.

Increased air pollution. Streets that are dangerous by design, engineered for speeding traffic with little or no provision for people walking, cycling or using a wheelchair.

It's time for us to rethink our streets. We've got to stop designing neighborhoods and commercial centers with only **automobiles** in mind, and we need to redesign and rebuild existing roadways that squeeze out pedestrians and cyclists. We need to add sidewalks and pathways where possible, repair sidewalks that are deteriorating or unusable, offer adequate lighting and provide safe crossings.

Progress is being made. More developments have included pedestrian projects since the City-County Council passed a sidewalk ordinance in 2008. Some neighborhoods have seen sidewalk improvements as part of RebuildIndy. In addition, Indianapolis has added miles of bike lanes to key routes.

But more can be done. Health by Design is

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a coalition working to ensure that neighborhoods, public spaces and **transportation** infrastructure promote physical activity and healthy living. It advocates for federal, state and local policies and funding for initiatives that support a balance of all forms of transportation, from walking and cycling to driving and riding public transit.

We are advocates for "complete streets" policies, which ensure that transportation planners and engineers consistently plan, design, operate and maintain the entire roadway with all users in mind.

And we're asking you to help. First, learn more about the complete streets concept by going to www.completestreets.org. Then look around your neighborhood and community, considering whether it's safe and welcoming for pedestrians and cyclists. Let our leaders know that you want complete street policies adopted in Central Indiana -- that you want to be able to stroll to the store, walk your son or daughter to school, or ride your bike to work, safely and easily.

This letter was written by Dr. Virginia Caine, director, Marion County Public Health Department; Kim Irwin, executive director, Health by Design, an Alliance for Health Promotion initiative; June Lyle, Indiana state director, AARP Indiana; Rose Scovel, president, American Planning Association -- Indiana Chapter; Stephen J. Sullivan, CEO, Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS; and Kevin Whited, president of the Board of Directors, INDYCOG.

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