# Niles Mayor Appeals To Gov For Help Solving Pedestrian Safety 'Crisis'

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By Tom Robb | on April 29, 2019

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View from the north side of Golf Road east of Dee Road in Niles where there is a lack of sidewalks across the street from residential buildings. Golf has been the site of several fatal accidents involving cars and pedestrians over the last few years. (Tom Robb/Journal photo)

In the wake of mounting accidents involving serious injury and death on state roads running through Niles, Mayor Andrew Przybylo sent a letter asking Gov. J.B. Pritzker for help to improve safety along those major arterial roads.

"Our village finds itself at a critical moment where lives are being lost and solutions are seemingly out of our hands due to financial, logistical and jurisdictional constraints," Przybylo's letter said. "We humbly but emphatically request assistance through the Illinois Department of Transportation to develop solutions for the issue of pedestrian safety along regional arterial roadways in the Village of Niles. I, along with (village) staff, stand ready to meet with you and/or your staff to discuss current data and possible solutions to this crisis."

In his letter Przybylo quoted the village's 2014 bicycle and pedestrian plan saying, "'Severe or fatal crashes (in Niles) occurred primarily on major (regional) roads, particularly Milwaukee, Golf, Dempster, Oakton, Touhy, and Greenwood.' To view a growing news trend, simply Google 'pedestrian crash Niles Illinois' to view pages of recent articles. These recent fatal crashes have continued to take place along Niles' major regional roads."

Przybylo wrote in his April 18 letter to Gov. Pritzker: "Since 2014, vehicle and pedestrian collisions in the village of Niles have resulted in 15 severe (injury) and 10 fatal crashes."

That accident total does not include accidents on roads which border Niles, such as Dempster, but were determined to be on the side of the street belonging to another jurisdiction. That count also does not include vehicle-on-vehicle accidents.

Ahead of the letter from Przybylo, public works and police officials worked together to compile a list of 14 pedestrian vs. vehicle accidents, most along state routes between 2017 and 2019, which was sent to the Illinois Dept. of Transportation asking if the village could install signage asking drivers to watch out for pedestrians, Niles Police Cmdr. Robert Tornabene said.

The list showed five accidents resulting in fatalities and nine resulting in an incapacitating injury between 2017 and 2019 within the village boundaries. The list included three accidents on Milwaukee Avenue, two on Golf Road, two on Dempster Street, two on Greenwood Avenue, two on Touhy Avenue, one on Oakton Street, one on Golf Mill Center and one on Melvina Avenue.

Police are stepping up both a public awareness campaign and stronger enforcement of jaywalking and other pedestrian safety laws.

IDOT's five-year list of its own projects identified nine which could improve safety including eight in Niles which would include "ADA (Americans With Disabilities Act) improvements" which could include sidewalk work and one lighting project. Those projects would take place between 2019 and 2024.

When Przybylo read the letter at the Tuesday, April 23 village board meeting, he said he hoped Springfield would be more generous under Gov. Pritzker than under former Gov. Bruce Rauner.

He said added lighting, pedestrian islands or other measures to improve safety could be added along those state roads.

State Rep. John D'Amico (D-5th) said he is aware of traffic safety issues and said he would be happy to advocate. He said it is "early days" in the Pritzker administration, but initiatives including legalizing sports betting and recreational marijuana could quickly infuse revenue into the state which could be used for a state capital plan.

He said the proposal to move the state from a flat income tax to a graduated income tax system could bring in even more revenue to the state, but said that would not likely happen for several years, given legal requirements to change the Illinois Constitution.

There are areas in the village, many along major arterial roads such as Golf Road, where sidewalks are lacking. In the 2014 bike and pedestrian plan, Village Manager Steve Vinezeano said 28 miles of sidewalk gaps were identified in the village, with 40 percent of those being along major streets or “regional” roadways. Village officials are calculating how many of those miles have been filled in.

Village officials set aside funds for engineering in the fiscal year 2020 budget to work on sidewalk infill on areas of Golf Road this summer. Officials are seeking additional grants through the Regional Transportation Authority, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant program for $2 million for those Golf Road projects. That funding would not likely come to the village until 2021.