



Quick Build Success in Erie County

Transforming Buffalo's Infrastructure Through Data-Driven Demonstration

THE CHALLENGE

Erie County, New York, home to Buffalo and nearly one million residents, faced a persistent challenge in creating safe, accessible transportation infrastructure. Despite Buffalo's early adoption of a Complete Streets policy in 2008—the first in New York State—significant challenges remained for people walking, biking, and using mobility devices.

The most problematic area was Buffalo's Parkside neighborhood, where a 1930s freight-rail underpass created a dangerous bottleneck. The intersection of Parkside Avenue, Linden Avenue, and Depew Street featured 40-foot-wide travel lanes, deteriorating four-foot sidewalks, zero accessibility ramps, and a posted 30 mph speed limit that 62% of drivers exceeded. The design made crossing impossible for wheelchair users and unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists.

BUILDING THE COALITION

In 2021, Erie County assembled an interdisciplinary team to participate in the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors' (NACDD) Active People, Healthy NationSM Walkability Virtual Academy (WVA) — a virtual adaptation of the Walkability Action Institute (WAI).

The WAI brings together cross-disciplinary teams representing public health, planning, transportation, elected officials, and other disciplines to participate in an intensive, applied-learning course on improving walkability with a focus on community and transportation design.

The team included representatives from the Erie County Health Department, Erie County Office for People with Disabilities, the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Go Bike Buffalo.

[Learn more at chronicdisease.org](https://www.chronicdisease.org)

Project Impact at a Glance

- **Investment:** \$33,000 demonstration project
- **Result:** \$3 million in permanent funding secured
- **ROI:** Nearly 90-to-1 return
- **Safety:** Cut dangerous speeding by more than half
- **Activity:** Doubled pedestrian use, tripled cycling

The WVA experience equipped partners with a shared vocabulary and unified goal: **prove, with data, that safer street design could work in Buffalo.**

Their strategy involved three key elements:

- **Prioritize the most challenging location.** Crash-risk mapping, accessibility complaints, and safety data all identified the Parkside underpass as the highest-priority intervention site.
- **Implement Western New York's first protected intersection.** Using quick-build techniques, the team narrowed 20-foot lanes to 10 feet, added six-foot buffers, and installed modular rubber curbing and flexible posts so pedestrians and cyclists could move behind protected corners.
- **Collect comprehensive before-and-after data.** Traffic counters and video monitoring documented speed and user volumes for baseline measurements and post-implementation analysis.





THE NUMBERS TELL THE STORY

The project's total cost of \$33,000 (\$15,000 WVA seed funding plus \$18,000 city district capital) demonstrated that significant safety improvements could be achieved with modest investment. The demonstration project delivered dramatic, measurable improvements within five months. Most significantly, **dangerous speeding dropped by more than half**—from 62% of drivers exceeding the 30 mph limit to just 30%. At the same time, the safer design attracted more people: **daily pedestrian activity more than doubled** (from 79 to 182 people), and **daily cycling nearly tripled** (from 39 to 94 cyclists).

Source: [Erie County DPW & GoBike Buffalo Final Report, October 2023](#)

The documented success convinced the City of Buffalo to earmark approximately \$3 million in capital funding for permanent improvements including concrete curb extensions, new traffic signals, and a two-way cycle track along 0.75 miles of Parkside Avenue - a return of roughly 90-to-1.

FROM COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS TO MUNICIPAL CAPACITY

The Erie County approach emphasized community engagement and local workforce development. Disability staff co-designed temporary accessibility ramps, while neighborhood volunteers helped clear vegetation and paint new lane markings. This collaborative approach built lasting community investment in the project's success.

The team also prioritized knowledge transfer to city staff. Municipal maintenance crews learned to install quick-build elements themselves, reducing future consultant costs and building local technical capacity.

BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Evidence drives investment. Comprehensive data collection provided objective proof of concept that convinced stakeholders and unlocked permanent capital funding.

Temporary solutions create lasting infrastructure. Off-the-shelf materials allowed residents to experience safer street design before major infrastructure investments were committed.

Start with safety compliance. Making accessibility compliance the project's primary driver built community support and ensured solutions met federal requirements.

Invest in local workforce capacity. Training municipal staff to implement quick-build projects reduced costs and accelerated future deployment while building technical skills.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Erie County's protected intersection project demonstrates how communities can use temporary infrastructure changes to test solutions, gather compelling evidence, and secure permanent improvements. By leveraging their WAI experience to unite various stakeholders around data-driven goals, the team transformed an 80-year-old infrastructure problem into a catalyst for economic development.

The project's success—cutting speeding by half, more than doubling pedestrian activity, and more than doubling cycling within five months—provided the foundation for \$3 million in permanent infrastructure improvements. As communities nationwide seek to upgrade aging transportation infrastructure, Erie County's experience offers a proven model for using quick-build demonstration projects to advance safety and economic development goals.



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