

POLICY INFOCUS:

Puwedeng Tumawid Dito, Hindi Nakakamatay

by Janel Balitaon, James Braga, Clarize Kristine Deguzman,
Hans Gabriel Empleo, Malaya Masaquel, Rhodson Saltorre, and Ariane Soriano

PROBLEM

According to the data released by the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), in 2022 the number of pedestrians involved in a traffic incident totaled 3,397 persons (MMDA, 2022). The absence of essential safety measures such as barricades, speed restriction signs, or traffic lights in designated regions exacerbates this trend. The lack of pedestrian safety infrastructure poses a severe threat to the lives of individuals, particularly students, who are disproportionately affected. This issue not only jeopardizes the fundamental right of people to walk freely and safely but also reflects a failure of the State's responsibility to ensure the well-being of its citizens.

The pressing need to address pedestrian safety in Metro Manila stems from the fact that it has traditionally been a city of walkers, many of whom rely on walking and active mobility and public transportation for their daily travel (Leather, Fabian, Gota, and Mejia, 2011). The startling number of accidents and injuries, particularly among students, highlights the urgent necessity for comprehensive solutions. Individuals should not be compelled to compromise their lives or disobey traffic regulations due to the lack of proper infrastructure to protect pedestrians. The State bears a fundamental responsibility for this inconvenience, as citizens, including students, deserve the right to safe and unimpeded mobility.

Furthermore, ensuring pedestrian safety is not just a matter of convenience but a crucial aspect of fostering a conducive learning environment. According to a study, the design of pedestrian environments does affect people's perceptions of pedestrian safety and their willingness to walk (Kweon B.-S., Rosenblatt-Naderi J., Ellis C.D., Shin W.-H., and Danies B.H., 2021). To receive quality education, students must travel to and from educational institutions without fear for their safety. The impact of this issue extends beyond individual well-being; it influences the overall community, emphasizing the need for Local Government

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Units (LGUs) to prioritize the value of pedestrian lanes. By addressing this problem comprehensively, the government can contribute to a safer, more accessible urban environment that supports its citizens' well-being and educational pursuits.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- **Policy Lobbying:** The group proposes lobbying for a policy that aims to urge the government to establish pedestrian lanes that are truly functional and accessible to the public. Furthermore, the initiative aims to mobilize traffic enforcers with relevant information regarding pedestrian safety and foster public awareness to encourage proper road crossing through pedestrian-friendly crossings. However, it is crucial to note that despite the seeming simplicity of lobbying for a policy, the process involves an extensive process and does not ensure long-term effectiveness and sustainability.
- **Infrastructure Building:** Pedestrian lanes are most of the time seen to be inaccessible to pedestrians; this is witnessed in various accounts such as faded paintings that make the lanes appear invisible, the absence of audible or tactile traffic signals to alert Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) to a pedestrian lane, and a shortage of CCTVs to monitor pedestrian lanes. In response to these challenges, the group has proposed an ideal pedestrian lane designed with high-quality rubberized painting that resists easy washing off, in-ground solar lighting to guide senior citizens during the night, and tactile paving extending across the crossing to assist visually impaired pedestrians. Nonetheless, the feasibility of this proposal is as theoretical as its concept; while it is objectively designed for sustainability, its approval could be hindered by the associated costs.
- **Environmental Mapping:** To track down pedestrian lanes that require rehabilitation and locate places that need said crossings, the group suggests an action plan where local areas should be mapped out to observe the space's visibility, utilization, and maintenance. This solution is both cost-efficient and objective and is meant for long-term sustainability.

PROPOSED INITIATIVE

To improve the accessibility, safety, and usability of pedestrian lanes, the On Wheels Advocacy Squad proposes the “Puwedeng tumawid dito: Hindi nakamamatay” (*It is okay to cross here, it is not dangerous*) project, an initiative that aims to create a conducive environment for all pedestrians, including Senior Citizens and PWDs, by addressing visibility, functionality, and awareness issues associated with pedestrian lanes.

This project is locally tailored for the vicinity of Ermita Manila, an urban locale that houses many schools. Consequently, most pedestrians navigating its streets comprise students rushing to class or eagerly heading home to rest. However, the insufficiency of accessible and visibility pedestrian lanes compromises the safety of these pedestrians. With this, the groups plan to carry out said project by scheduling meetings and coordinating with the LGUs, particularly the Barangay’s Committee on Public Works and Highways, to introduce the project and its objectives to the local office. Our goal is to secure authorization to conduct the initiative. Next, the group should seek funds through donation drives and solicitation, appropriating whatever is gathered to ensure sufficient funding for initiating groundwork and sustaining the project toward its progress and fruition.

Once the necessary funds have been raised, the group will map out the locality by physically creating a map highlighting existing pedestrian lanes and identifying areas that require additional ones. In collaboration with the LGUs, the group will conduct quarterly visits to these mapped-out crossings to observe and document any fading or loss of visibility. If identified, these areas will undergo revitalization through, at a minimum, repainting. Following the subsequent quarterly visit, the areas with revitalized pedestrian lanes will be evaluated to determine their improved visibility and any potential changes, especially in incident rates within the vicinity. The data collected during these quarterly evaluations will be presented and interpreted in collaboration with the LGU, showcasing the benefits of accessible and usable pedestrian lanes.

The group envisions a future where pedestrian lanes are visible but also functional and inclusive. The group dreams of when their small project, initially conceptualized on the four corners of a table, becomes a reality—an ideal pedestrian lane that ensures safety and makes the Philippines’ cities more walkable. Because in our ideal pedestrian crossings, “Puwedeng tumawid, Hindi nakamamatay”.

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References

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