

Bridging You To Safety- A First Evaluation of Suicide Prevention Signage on Bridges in CT

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Project Overview

The objectives of this internship was to support CT's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan for Suicide Prevention:

Objective 4.3:

Develop and implement new technologies and techniques to reduce access to lethal means specific to suicide prevention signage on bridges/highways

Internship Duties

Partner with United Way on list of locations and contacts for signage

Locate current signage posted on bridges throughout CT

Obtain feedback through key informant interviews with local officials on effectiveness of signage

Partner with CT Suicide Advisory Board and related committees

Report to the Data to Action Committee

Background/Introduction

Draper (2018) stated that transportation and bridge authorities have been under enormous pressure to address "suicide-prone" bridges. He also stated that placing signs promoting a hotline number near bridges could encourage people in crisis to call for help from their home, their car, or some location removed from the "perilous precipice of the bridge." It is likely that most suicidal persons who select a specific bridge from which to jump have traveled across that bridge repeatedly, or "cased the bridge" previously in planning their suicide. Exposing persons in crisis to hotline information well before an imminent jump is clearly preferable to providing a suicidal individual with a chance to get help exclusively from a phone on a bridge.

In consideration for this rising concern, beginning in 2017, The United Way and the CT Suicide Advisory Board collaborated on suicide prevention signage across the state. Each Regional Suicide Advisory Boards (RSABs) is the driving force across the state of CT for suicide prevention and programming

Towns and cities were identified based on the history of an incident or area of high risk. The CT organizations created signage with the message of "There is Hope. There is help." with the corresponding phone number to call or text and website for help. Using public health data and funding from the Public Health Block Grant, the Lethal Means Committee has been working with the state and municipalities to install National Suicide Prevention Lifeline signage over the past few years in high-risk access areas.

References

1. Draper, J. (2008) Suicide prevention on bridges: The national suicide prevention lifeline position.

Accomplishments/Contributions

- Reconciled list of 19 towns and contacts for signage
- Created key informant interview questions to understand purpose and effectiveness of sign
- Connected with 16 towns officials regarding corresponding signage
- Located 21 signs
- Completed 6 key informant interviews to date including questions about number of signs ordered; reason for order; issues/barriers; date of placement; impression of sign or reaction from community; effectiveness
- Identified signs in disrepair and potential new locations

Challenges

- Lists from original source were incomplete or had outdated information
- Cold calls and emails as primary mode of contact
- Phone calls and email contacts in 6 towns resulted being redirected which took an extensive amount of time, many without any outcome
- Turnover in local and state positions, i.e., Dept of Transportation, local government, Dept of Public Works
- Jurisdiction over signage on bridges and roads varies across towns and cities
- Signs were allocated for bridges, but some signs were found in parks or on streets
- Some signs were vandalized, and local officials were unaware
- 988 number not on current signs

Recommendations

- Create repository of signs with designated contact information upon request with indication of high-risk activity that led to sign placement – use google form or smartsheet
- Review data related to location such as public safety answering point, 911, violent death report prior to sign placement
- RSAB leads to connect with designated contacts 1-2x a year for an update on sign condition and solicit interest for additional signs
- Compare data from initial posting at each check point
- If sign is vandalized what is criteria for it to be replaced

Fig. 1 Dog Hill Bridge- Killingly.



Fig. 3 New version at Water Street Bridge in Norwich

Fig. 2 Suffield Bridge Rt 190- Suffield



Fig. 4 Route 291 Windsor- Vandalized Sign.

Windsor

*Interview completed 4/4/23 by Paul Norris,
Director of Recreation Town of Windsor

How did you decide the location of the signs?

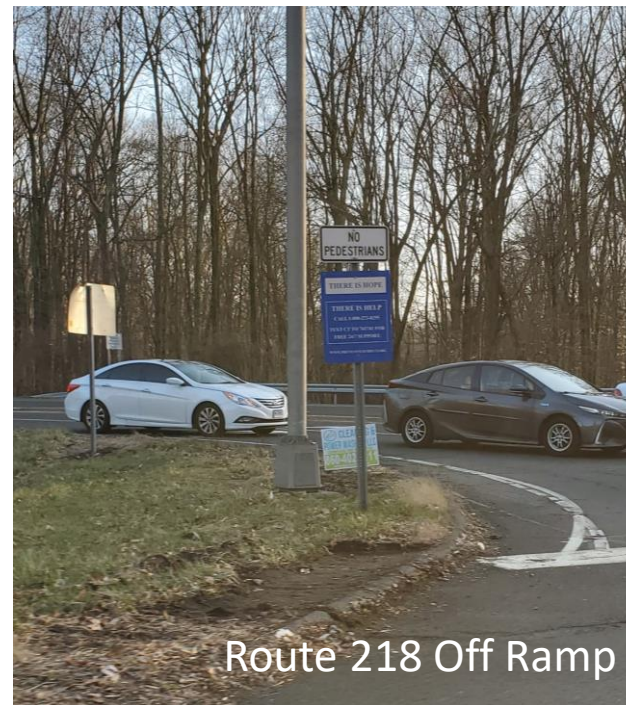
"We decided where to put the signs based on a potential person going for a walk and saying I am going to jump. We have seen kids climbing on the fence."

What is your impression of the impact of the signs?

"Unfortunately, it can't be measured but my instinctive value in me says, they work because if someone is going for a walk the sign reminds them that things are not that bad."

Would you recommend this process to others?

"Absolutely would recommend it to others. It is even more important today because what we are seeing with young adults 16-24. Lots of self-doubt, lots of mental questioning and people don't understand it is so easy when you are in a place to think about suicide- I don't want to do this anymore- it is that easy."



Route 218 Off Ramp

I-291 Bridge



Westport

*Interview completed 4/10/23 by Lt. Woods, City of Westport

How did you decide the location of the signs?

"An email went to the operation deputy chief for the train station, who is in charge of the railroad station. That was how it was decided to put them there. They decided that the Saugatauck train station was a concerning area."

What is your impression of the impact of the signs?

"We have not had a train suicide in several years. I think anything that can raise awareness there is not a bad idea."

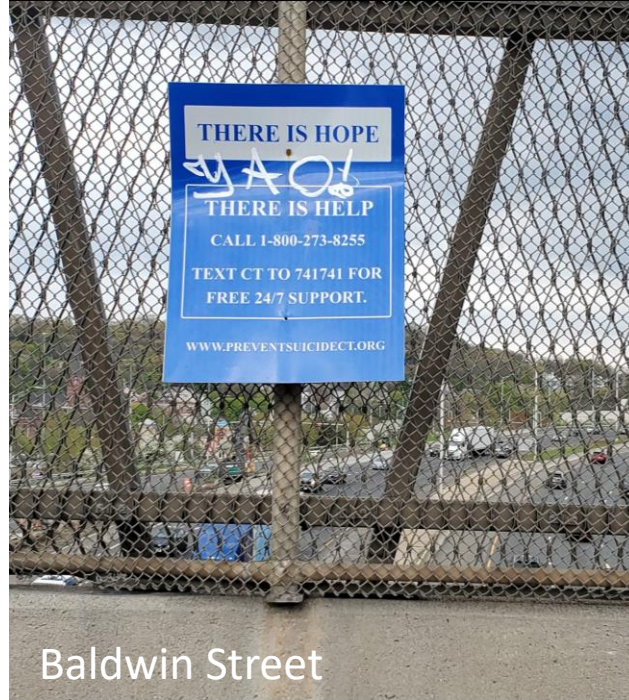
Would you recommend this process to others?

"Yes, I would recommend to others. In this area, the deputy chief and chief selectwoman decided, so it was not a discussion."





Austin Road



Baldwin Street



Highland Avenue

Waterbury

*Interview completed 4/25/23 by Mark Lombardo,
Deputy Director of Public Works

How did you decide the location of the signs?

"These were high risk areas."

What is your impression of the impact of the signs?

"I don't think there is any drawback. We only had one comment from a person stating they were the wrong color. It should be a softer color."

Would you recommend this process to others?

"Yes."

Soap Street



Dog Hill Rd



Dayville/Killingly

*Interview completed 3/30/23 by Matthew Dube, Highway Director, Town of Killingly

How did you decide the location of the signs:

"In response to death at the bridge at Dog Hill. It was the first time and hasn't happened since then." Soap street is at the bottom of the high school and lots of kids walk there. There is a bridge and I think if they are having a bad day and walking by the sign, maybe they'd call for help."

What is your impression of the impact of the signs?

"I have not heard any negative feedback. This is a conservative area like if we don't talk about it then it won't happen. I was anticipating I would hear something like why do we need that sign but so far no complaints."

Would you recommend this process to others?

"I would not change anything. If the sign just makes someone think twice then it is worth it. I don't want to do too many because people start ignoring them because there are too many. You can see it when driving by. We are sensitive to sign pollution, like people do not even read Stop Signs."

Norwich

*Interview completed 4/17/23 by Mark Irons, Eastern Regional Suicide Advisory Board

How did you decide the location of the signs:

"We decided to put a sign on each side of the pedestrian sidewalk of the bridge."

What is your impression of the impact of the signs?

"We have not had any feedback from the community with any concerns."

Would you recommend this process to others?

"Yes everything worked out very well."



Water Street Bridge



Farmington (unable to locate sign)

*Interview completed 3/30/23 by Nancy Parent, Director of Community and Recreation Services in Farmington

How did you decide the location of the signs:

"We decided with neighboring towns and the Farmington Valley Collaborative. We are very focused on creating safe spaces for the discussion of any topics such as vaping among teens and suicide prevention, which is all part of Farmington Valley Health District. We are looking at health issues and the number one issue is mental health."

What is your impression of the impact of the signs?

"No drawbacks at all. Our dept has been working hard to increase visibility to mental health. We have done QPR trainings to have the community be aware that mental illness is an illness and in conjunction with that the signage. Whether it is one person that sees the sign, that is great. It is hard to benchmark some of it but the more visibility the better."

Would you recommend this process to others?

"We are always exploring more ways to get to people to have awareness."

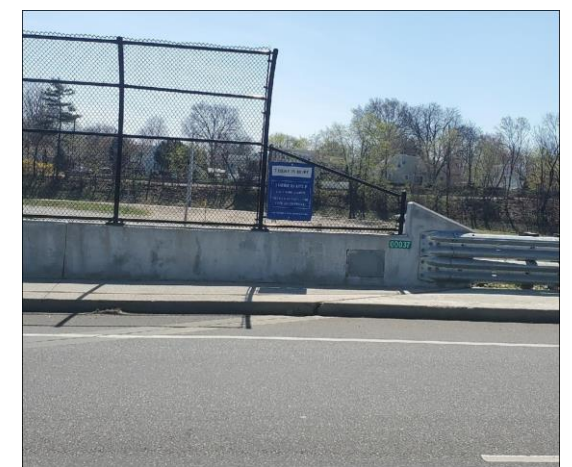
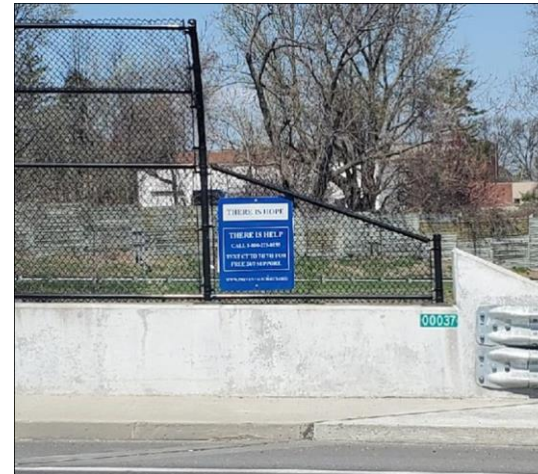


Located Signs

Interviews unable to be completed

Norwalk

Overpass at West Ave (L) / Route 7 Southbound (R)



Stamford

I-95 Northbound by Exit 9- both sides of the bridge



Derby

(L) Derby Shelton Greenway

(R) Derby Shelton Train Station



Middletown

Arigoni Bridge- Middletown side upon entry to the bridge



Suffield

Enfield/Suffield Bridge Route 190

