Peter Lagerwey likes to emphasize street crossings when he talks about pedestrian safety. “Where do we put all our energy? Putting in sidewalks,” said Lagerwey, a former Seattle senior transportation planner who now tours the country regarding bicycle and pedestrian issues for Toole Design Group, which specializes in planning and engineering bicycle and pedestrian transportation. “That’s not where people get hurt,” he said of sidewalks. “They haven’t given any attention to crossing the streets.”

Planning and building a safe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists is more about visual messages than speed limits, Lagerwey recently told a group of Treasure Valley transportation, bicycle and pedestrian officials.

Lagerwey presented simple logistics in a May 2-3 education series offered by the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, or COMPASS. The series focused on best practices for bicycle and pedestrian safety and how to write and implement bicycle and pedestrian plans.

Lagerwey’s key points revolved around:

* Crossing the street

**Pedestrian plans will aid bicyclists, but a bicycle plan will not take care of pedestrian needs.** “When you do a bike and pedestrian plan together, the pedestrians get short shrift,” he said. He advised against including bike/ped plans within transportation plans. “You want to make sure it does not get marginalized.”

**Visual messaging can control vehicle speeds better than speed limits.** Narrower lane, parked cars, buildings close to streets can help slow vehicles down. “If you put a building way back, speeds go up. If you put buildings up to the street, speeds slow down,” Lagerwey said “Visual messaging changed and all of a sudden people started going slower.”

Drivers automatically slow down when open roadway suddenly changes to a clutter of parked cars and buildings, he said.
Lagerwey’s talk attracted transit, cycling and walking officials from Boise, Nampa, Boise State University, Ada County Highway District, Meridian, the Federal Highway Administration, Caldwell, Idaho Transportation Department, Kuna and private sector engineers.

COMPASS brought Lagerwey to the Treasure Valley to speak about safety and planning because bicycles and pedestrians are one of the four components of the agencies Communities in Motion 2040 regional long-term transportation plan.

“For bicycles and pedestrians to be a viable option, people need to feel safe using it,” COMPASS spokeswoman Amy Luft said. “We have several member agencies (cities and counties) updating or starting from scratch on a bicycle plan. We thought (Lagerwey’s planning expertise) would be a good resource for all our agencies.”

Bike and pedestrian safety revolve around eight introductory principles, according to Lagerwey, starting with changing the way streets are designed to manage speed. Second is what he calls inclusive design.

“All of us will be disabled at some point in time,” he noted.

Lagerwey told policymakers that the resources they need, such as national bike safety guidelines, already exist. But planning for bike and pedestrian safety “depends on the local driving culture,” he said.

He provided a three-phase process for writing a policy.

Lagerwey commits 14 steps to before the plan, nine steps to developing the plan and just six steps to implement the plan. The first step is to show elected officials, route designers and engineers, and the public why there is a compelling reason to create a bike and pedestrian safety plan.

“If you can’t get funding, you probably didn’t do Step One right,” he said.
Visual reminders are also key, he said.
“I wrote the first bike plan for Seattle (in the early 1990s),” he said. “Nobody was going to read it. I got a list of every single meeting room in the city and put my map up. That was the most successful thing.”
And he suggested implementing some aspect of the plan while it’s still being drafted.
“Even before a plan is done, you want to show something on the ground,” Lagerwey said. “You want to move very quickly to get a plan adopted. The longer the period, the hard it is to get it done. People change. You’re going to lose the institutional memory of these three groups: the elected, professional, and public.”