



Vision Zero in Portland

Problem

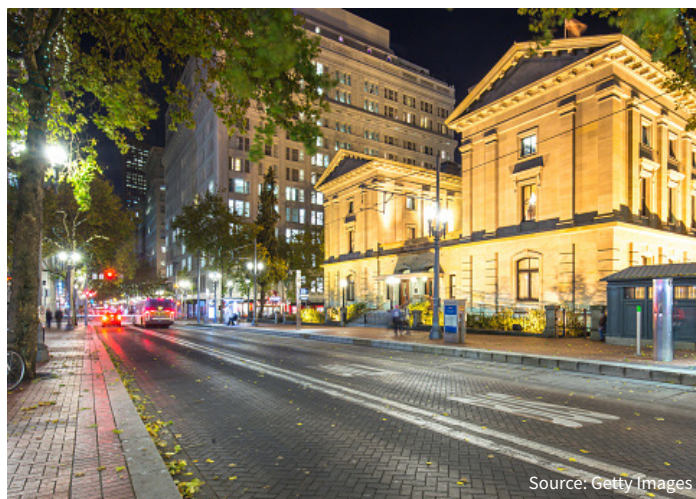
Portland's traffic fatality rate is among the lowest of the 50 largest American cities, yet the number of pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers killed on city roads has remained almost unchanged over the past 20 years. The annual average number of traffic fatalities breaks down to 11 pedestrian, 2 bicycle, and 24 vehicle collision deaths. This lack of progress prompted Portland to adopt the Vision Zero approach and develop a plan of action to end traffic related deaths and serious injuries.



Interstate Avenue, Portland. Source: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/59277>.

Solutions

The impetus behind Portland adopting Vision Zero came largely from concerned grassroots organizations and elected leadership. Walking and biking advocacy groups came together in 2014 to push Portland to adopt Vision Zero. About the same time, the city hired a new Director for the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) who made Vision Zero one of the bureau's top priorities.



Source: Getty Images

In response, the Portland City Council voted unanimously in 2015 to adopt Vision Zero. The council also gave PBOT a directive to assemble a diverse task force to craft a Vision Zero Action Plan. The 26-member task force included representatives from the traditional "4E's" of road safety (education, enforcement, engineering, and emergency medical services) as well as a fifth "E"—equity—for the purpose of addressing the needs of diverse groups.

In December 2016, the city adopted the [final plan](#) and committed to ending traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries by 2025.

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Portland's Vision Zero Principles

Portland's Vision Zero Plan incorporates the following three principles:

- 1) **Equity.** Addresses the disproportionate impact of traffic crashes on communities of concern (defined as areas of the city with identified equity-related issues, such as large numbers of low-income households, minorities, or older adults), ensuring the transportation system is safe for all.
- 2) **Accountability.** Demonstrates success through transparent performance measures that will be tracked and publicly reported over time.
- 3) **Data-driven analysis.** Uses crash and other data to identify the locations of and factors contributing to severe traffic crashes and then prioritizes solutions.

Portland also relies heavily on data to guide project prioritization. The [High Crash Network](#) (HCN) is based on safety data gathered from the Oregon Department of Transportation. It identifies the location, behaviors, and circumstances related to serious and deadly crashes. Streets listed in the HCN represent 8 percent of streets in Portland, yet account for a disproportionate 57 percent of deadly crashes. The HCN includes the 30 streets and intersections that have the highest number of people killed or seriously injured in crashes among people driving, walking, and bicycling.

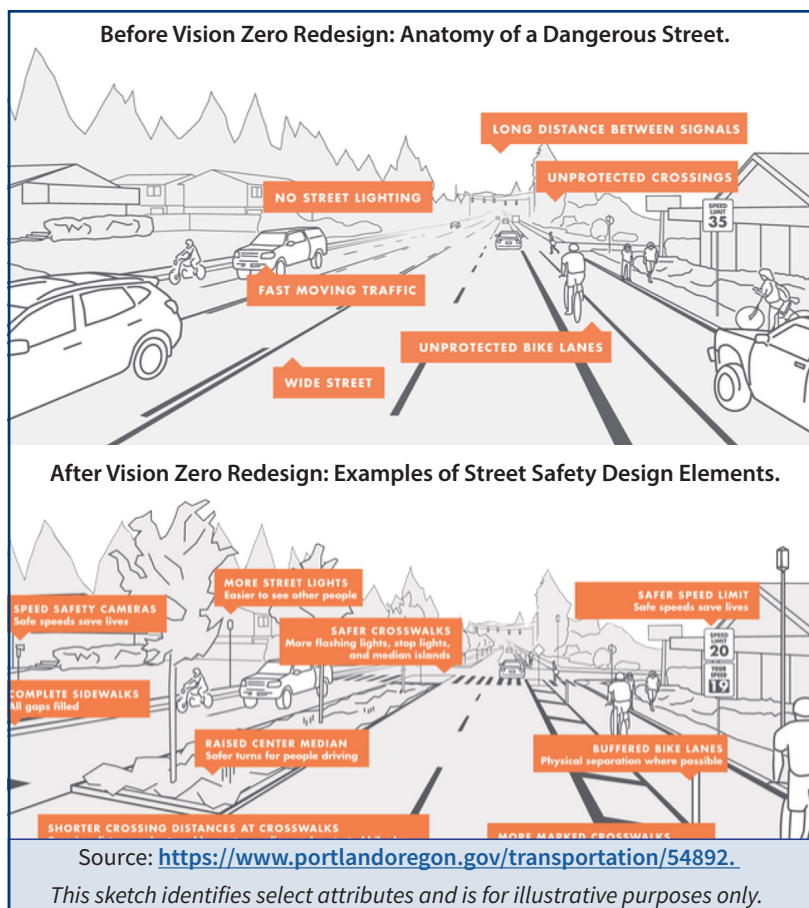
Focus Areas of Vision Zero Plan

In the Vision Zero Plan, Portland is focusing on [several areas](#) that will improve roadway safety: street design, driver impairment, speed, education and enforcement, and engagement and accountability.

Street Design

Portland plans to:

- Redesign streets originally built to move cars efficiently to streets that move people safely.
- Prioritize infrastructure investments on streets in traditionally under-invested communities that it defines as being dangerous.
- Implement safe street design to encourage safe behaviors. The safest streets slow down traffic, separate modes of traffic, and give visual cues that different modes share the same space.
- Use narrower lanes, increase on-street parking, develop more visible bike lanes, install more frequent street crossings with active crossing control or warning, and plant more trees and landscaping on medians and sidewalks to reduce speeds.¹



¹ Naderi, J.R. 2003. "Landscape Design in the Clear Zone: Effect of Landscape Variables on Pedestrian Health and Driver Safety." Transportation Research Record 1851:119-130.



Impairment

Impairment is a factor in 56 percent of traffic deaths in Portland. To address this, the city:

- Is working with taxis, rideshare services, and bar owners to reduce collisions caused by impairment through the [Safe Ride Home](#) program, which focuses on Portland's downtown entertainment district and other identified hotspots where impairment-related crashes are concentrated.
- Adopted new guidelines for a later parking enforcement start time (10:00 a.m.) in new parking districts to encourage impaired drivers to leave their car overnight—without having to worry about getting a parking ticket or being towed.

Speed

Speed is a factor in nearly half (47 percent) of Portland's traffic deaths, and PBOT has been working with the Oregon Department of Transportation to [explore innovative ways](#) to reduce speed limits on city streets, such as:

- Portland's Vision Zero Action Plan calls for installing speed safety cameras on four [High Crash Network streets](#) as part of a 2-year pilot and expanding the program over time.
- Since fall 2016, cameras have been installed on all four corridors. In the first 30 days after installation, top-end speeding decreased by an impressive 93 percent, 91 percent, and 71 percent respectively on three of the corridors. Data on the impact on top-end speed for the fourth corridor is not yet available.

Education and Enforcement

- The Vision Zero task force launched a multi-media education campaign in spring 2018 that focused on the human impact of speed. The team launched the campaign in conjunction with Portland's initiative to reduce residential speeds from 25 to 20 MPH.
- Portland increased access to traffic schools by offering a safety education class in lieu of paying a traffic citation issued through speed or red light running cameras for a driver's first offense.
- Enforcement will focus on behaviors that contribute to fatal and serious injury crashes. Portland Police Bureau is tracking distribution of [Vision Zero enforcement actions](#) and types of citations issued as well as working to track enforcement data to ensure that its commitment to Vision Zero does not result in racial profiling.
- The city plans to install safety measures on fleet vehicles including sideguards, mirrors, and educational messaging on heavy trucks.

Community Engagement

- Portland's Vision Zero task force created Street Teams comprising PBOT staff and community volunteers to conduct education and outreach activities in communities along the High Crash Network.
- Vision Zero task force is partnering with existing programs like Safe Routes to School to broaden its reach.
- PBOT is exploring a community grant program to support community efforts to improve dangerous streets in neighborhoods.
- PBOT releases [annual reports](#) on its Vision Zero programs to share with stakeholders.

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Early Successes

Portland adopted its Vision Zero Action Plan in December 2016. From the start, public and political support for Vision Zero has been strong, and subsequently the Portland City Council recently voted to fund Vision Zero as an ongoing budget item.

- One early success story was the fast tracking of the [Southeast Division Street redesign](#) in response to two pedestrian fatalities.
- Southeast Division Street is a 4.5 mile road stretching from East Portland to the east city limits. It is in a diverse area of new immigrants.
- On December 7, 2016, two people walking across Division Street were killed within 2 miles and 2 hours of each other.
- In response, the Portland City Council appropriated \$300,000 to implement multicultural, multilingual outreach and supplement existing appropriations for the already underway Southeast Division Street redesign, which is partially funded by FHWA's Highway Safety Improvement Program.
- The redesign includes a landscaped median, limited left turns, a buffered bike lane, enhanced bus transit, and additional crosswalks.
- The city also passed an emergency speed ordinance to drop the speed limit from 35 to 30 MPH and installed speed safety cameras.
- The city's swift action in response to these tragic deaths would not have been possible without the Vision Zero framework.