

Promoting Vision Zero: Case Study from Richmond, Virginia

Background

The City of Richmond, the capital of Virginia, is among the oldest cities in the U.S. The City formed a Safe and Healthy Streets Commission in 1966 as one of earliest multidiscipline initiatives of its kind in the nation and helped lay the groundwork for their Vision Zero plans and program.

Vision Zero Action Plan

In 2016, under a newly elected Mayor, the City Council formally passed a resolution stating their goal of zero serious injuries and zero fatalities by 2030. That action helped Vision Zero gain traction throughout government offices, local organizations, and with the public. The City engaged a range of stakeholders, including local staff, school board members, and advocacy groups, in the development of the City's Vision Zero Action Plan as well as in the kick-off event intended to unite the community around the shared goal of zero serious injuries and fatalities. The logo shown in Figure 1 helped create consistent messaging around Vision Zero. Richmond's Vision Zero activities received the Governor's Transportation Safety Award for its Action Plan and the 2018 ITE Public Agency Award for its public engagement, elevating the status of Vision Zero within its local agencies and supporting organizations.



Figure 1: Richmond, Virginia's Vision Zero logo. Logo Source- City of Richmond

Safety Commitment and Call for Actions

Richmond built its [Vision Zero Action Plan](#) upon the Safe and Healthy Streets Commission already in place and drew from the stakeholder group identified under the commission. Following the Mayor's public commitment to the goal of zero serious injuries and fatalities, the Commission was charged with developing and monitoring the Action Plan through a diverse group of stakeholders, which the Commission successfully developed in four months. The Commission worked to engage diverse stakeholders, including transportation safety experts from the Public Works, Planning, and Public Health Departments; representatives from the City Police; School Board members; and others.

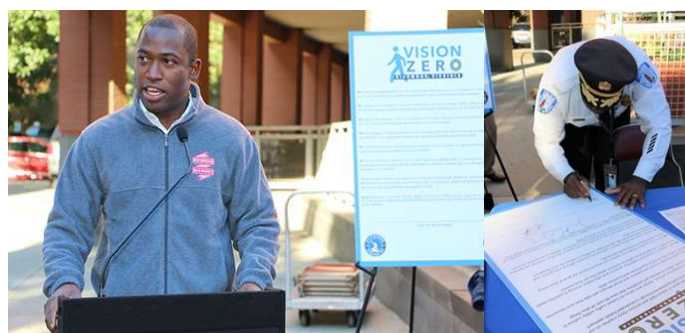


Figure 2: City of Richmond's Vision Zero kick-off event, Pictured: Mayor Levar M. Stoney. Photo Source- City of Richmond

In October 2017, the City of Richmond and the Office of the Mayor hosted a successful kick-off event which brought together local officials, stakeholders, non-profit organizations, the public, and both State and Federal representatives. The event, shown in Figure 2, communicated



the City’s mission and goals of Vision Zero and secured leadership and the public commitment to Vision Zero. Stakeholders in attendance signed a Vision Zero pledge to commit to each other to eliminate traffic related injuries and fatalities. The Mayor also issued a Safe and Healthy Streets Challenge to the public. Five common actions were identified based on the most common causes of traffic-related deaths and serious injuries. The challenge used positive language to encourage everyone to participate to create safer streets for all: “Share the road, Obey speed limits, Buckle in, Avoid distractions, Drive sober. If we do not, it would be **SO BAD**.” The community could learn more about the challenge through various press releases as well as the City’s website.

Safety Culture Building through Partnerships and Messaging

Strong partnerships among various entities helped Richmond integrate a culture of safety and Vision Zero practices across different department’s missions, increasing the overall safety of Richmond’s roads and people. To start building and leveraging those partnerships, the Department of Public Works reached out to all departmental leaders to emphasize how Vision Zero fit into each department’s goals. For example, a department could include tailored leadership talking points that linked Vision Zero directly to its work. The cross departmental conversations increased the status of Vision Zero throughout the City’s offices. One specific partnership that proved beneficial was between the Department of Public Works and the Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs within the Health Department; the latter provided advice on appropriate outreach and inclusion of non- and limited-English speaking community members.

The City partnered with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to develop a required online transportation safety course for all freshman; the VCU cohort selected this project due to high incidents of pedestrian crashes – from 2015-2018, there were 84 pedestrian crashes resulting in one fatality. The course aimed to raise awareness and educate students on roadway safety with the goal of reducing serious injuries and fatalities on campus. Additionally, the City partnered with the Brandcenter at VCU to create a graduate-level project where students developed advertising strategies and messages for agency use in promoting Vision Zero. Students developed a song and a ghost story for use in video or radio advertisements.

Richmond currently deploys targeted outreach strategies based on the audience. For example, every month, the Department of Public Works, in partnership with the Department of Public Health, develops short, people-centered talking points that link to national safety campaigns. People-centered language, shown in Figure 3, is used to emphasize the person rather than the mode of transportation such as “people who walk” or “people who ride motorcycles.” While those messages are initially intended for leadership, they are publicly available for media, schools, or non-governmental organizations to use. The Vision Zero team collaborates with Public Information Officers to generate consistent language and data interpretation surrounding Vision Zero across government departments, media, and the public.

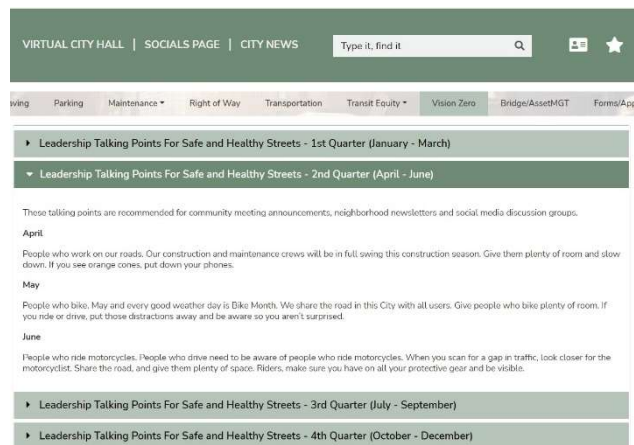


Figure 3: Richmond's quarterly talking points for leadership and the public. Source- rva.gov/public-works/vision-zero

Richmond also developed a public facing Vision Zero dashboard to share with partners and the public progress towards the Vision Zero goal. The [Dashboard](#), below in Figure 4, includes traffic safety data from 2015 to 2023, allowing the community to see what is happening on the City’s roads. The information helps drive conversations surrounding safety, implementation activities, and needs.

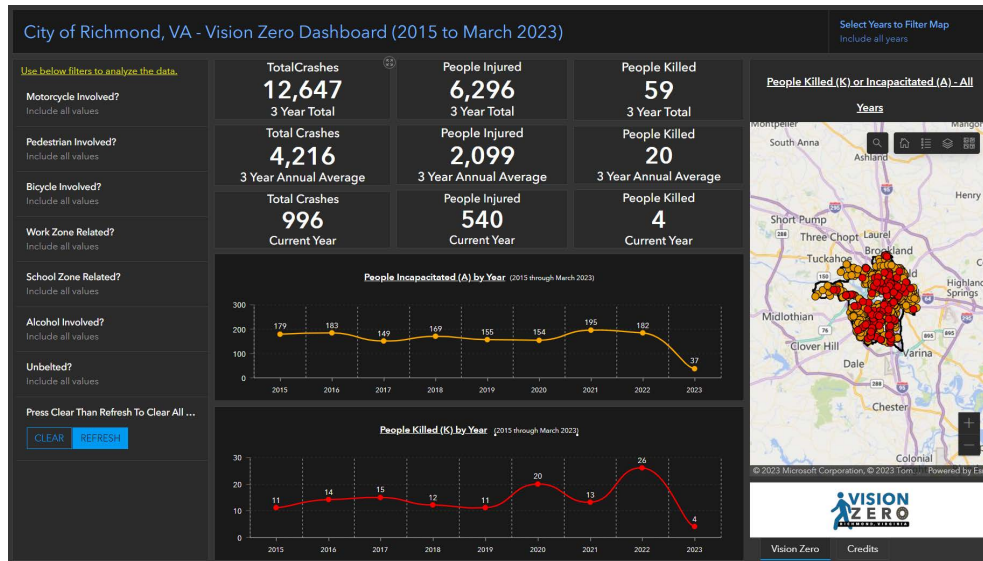


Figure 4: Richmond’s Vision Zero data dashboard. Source- rva.gov/public-works/vision-zero

Community Engagement

The City continues to engage the community when identifying new projects that align with Vision Zero. For example, at town hall meetings, the Department of Public Works shares conceptual designs and seeks community member’s reactions. The Department repeats this process for detailed design after incorporating those changes. The City also increased engagement through strong partnerships with various local organizations. Those partners, including schools, places of worship, and community centers, help reach a large and diverse population within the City.

Richmond employed a variety of tactics to engage with traditionally disenfranchised populations during the *Path to Equity (PTE)* and the on-going *Richmond Connects* planning processes. These tactics consisted of pop-up events, canvassing, the use of compensated ambassadors, web blasts, and appearances at community events. Following best practices, ambassadors were fairly compensated for their time, whether that was attending Advisory Committee meetings or helping with community outreach events. The team also worked hard to ensure all online surveys could also be accessed via a paper form to improve accessibility.

For the PTE plan, the team organized three pop-up events. These pop-ups, dubbed “Tacos for Transportation”, brought a food truck to communities, and fostered a relaxed and fun environment to engage meaningfully about transportation with the community and build trust. City staff joined the Whitcomb community, an underserved community, at their “Back to School Summer Jam” and their National Night Out event to increase awareness and excitement for Path to Equity. The Department conducted PTE outreach using ad time on two Radio One stations and Ultra Radio— a Spanish-language station –, posted to social media, and deployed surveys at several transit stops to gain additional input from the community.

The on-going Richmond Connects outreach process has included continued participation in community-based events such as the National Night Out, Que Pasa Festival, Jubilation in June, and other smaller community events. Current outreach included mobile materials that are geo-specific to the identified communities of concern; these materials will be shared at community locations to target people where they already go, such as grocery stores, bus stops, and community centers. A community outreach specialist was hired to assist with completing this in-depth public engagement.

Key Takeaways

- Build strong partnerships with both local government organizations and key community stakeholders. Share how Vision Zero supports their missions and identify ways to collaborate to achieve the shared goal of zero traffic related injuries and fatalities.
- Target messaging to reach the intended audience. Take time to understand what messaging will engage and compel each audience.
- Use people-centered messaging to communicate with the public.

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