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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Transportation Secretary Commits to “Urgent Action” as Traffic Deaths Soar & Communities Call for Change

Marking what many hope will be a turning point in the long overlooked safety crisis on America’s roadways, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg committed to “urgent action” to prioritize safe mobility, as record numbers of people organized local events across the nation calling for change on World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims.

“A single preventable death is a tragedy. Tens of thousands of them a year is a national crisis – one that demands not just our remembrance, but our urgent action,” said Buttigieg, in [recorded remarks](#) released yesterday on annual [World Day of Remembrance](#), which honors the 1.3 million people killed in *preventable* crashes worldwide each year – including more than 42,000 people in the U.S. last year. The U.S. has one of the worst traffic fatality rates amongst high-income nations.

“Just about all of us can think of the names of people we care about lost in a crash,” said Buttigieg. “And yet too often these deaths are described as if they’re somehow inevitable, as if it was just the cost of living in the 21st century, when the truth is these deaths can be prevented.”

In a growing movement for change, people in more than [35 communities](#) – ranging from [Washington, D.C.](#) to [Wichita, KS](#), and [Wheaton MD](#) to [Alameda, CA](#) – organized memorials, vigils and rallies yesterday to mourn those killed and injured in crashes and to call on leaders to more aggressively use [proven safety solutions](#) to save lives on the nation’s streets, sidewalks and bikeways.

The demands for action are particularly poignant this year. In the first half of 2021, 18.4% more people died in traffic crashes compared to 2020, according to the [U.S. Dept. of Transportation](#). Last year, 42,060 people died on the U.S. roads, a 24% spike over the prior year’s rate of traffic deaths – the highest rate increase in 96 years – according to the [National Safety Council](#).

(contd.)

In contrast, the [European Union reported](#) a 17% decrease in traffic deaths in 2020 compared to 2019. And preliminary estimates for the first six months of 2021 show a 2% increase in traffic deaths in the E.U. compared to the same period in 2020, but still 19% lower than the years 2017-2019.

“We should not have to organize these memorials to honor our loved ones and demand safety for others,” said Amy Cohen, co-founder of Families for Safe Streets, whose 12-year-old son Sammy was hit and killed in NYC. “We need leadership, starting at the top, to make the change we know is possible to prioritize safety. We see Secretary Buttigieg’s commitment as a step in the right direction and we look forward to his leadership because lives depend on it.”

Cohen was one of hundreds of people participating in a rally in [Brooklyn](#), NY for World Day of Remembrance, along with NYC Mayor-Elect Eric Adams and U.S. Senate Leader Charles Schumer. They dedicated 1,800 potted trees in honor of the people who died in traffic crashes during the past eight years. Other events around the nation included shoes lining the steps of the State Capitol in [St. Paul, Minnesota](#) in the shape of “447,” the number of people killed in traffic crashes in the state, so far, in 2021. And in [Texas](#), organizers read the names of everyone killed in traffic crashes in the past year – a solemn process which took more than 12 hours.

“We hope that Secretary Buttigieg’s recognition that this traffic safety crisis *is* preventable will be a turning point for the nation to stem the tens of thousands of traffic deaths and millions more injuries each year,” said Leah Shahum, director of the Vision Zero Network. “We look forward to the Secretary’s leadership, which is sorely needed to help ensure every person in this country can get where they need to go safely. We have a lot of work to do, but we’re encouraged by the shift in attitude and commitment coming from the top. We can do better. We must do better.”

Learn more about the campaign for [#ZeroTrafficDeaths](#) in the U.S. and [World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims](#) – including updates from events around the nation with compelling images and personal stories from organizers.

[Families for Safe Streets \(FSS\)](#) are individuals who have been injured or who have lost loved ones in traffic crashes, and are working to confront traffic violence in communities in the U.S. [Vision Zero Network](#) is a national advocacy group working for Vision Zero - the goal of zero traffic deaths or severe injuries.

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