Prioritizing Health Equity in Vision Zero Planning
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Acknowledgements

This resource builds on the robust and impressive efforts of many others working to address persistent disparities that exist in our transportation system. The insights and dedication of numerous individuals and organizations have significantly enriched the foundation upon which this resource is built.

Additional recognition goes to Rachel Krause for exceptional graphic design; Michelle Jewel of Fehr & Peers for technical content revisions; and Jenn Fox and Kate Fefelova of Vision Zero Network for ongoing dedication to equity in transportation planning.

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Thank you also to the many people and organizations whose work we feature as examples and sources of learning throughout this resource. We are grateful for these models, as well as so many individuals and groups who inspire and motivate our work.

Prioritizing Health Equity in Vision Zero Planning

Authors: Tiffany Smith and Leah Shahum
September 2023

The Vision Zero Network is a nonprofit project working to advance the goal of Vision Zero – safe mobility for all. We are proud to support the life-saving efforts of the dedicated policymakers, implementers and advocates who are working in communities across the nation and who understand that we can prevent roadway deaths and severe injuries.

Learn more at visionzeronetwork.org.
Whether you’re new to roadway safety work or have been involved for some time, thank you for taking time to explore ways to prioritize health equity goals, strategies and outcomes in Vision Zero planning and implementation. We cannot achieve the goals of Vision Zero without addressing the systems that result in disproportionate safety risks for some, particularly low-income and BIPOC communities. Prioritizing health equity in roadway safety efforts is not only long overdue but also essential to uplift the collective safety of everyone.

The number of communities committing to Vision Zero—the goal of eliminating roadway deaths and severe injuries—is growing across the U.S. This has been spurred by many factors, including an unacceptably high number of fatal and severe crashes harming our loved ones; acknowledgement that the U.S. lags far behind other nations in ensuring that people can move around their communities safely; and growing recognition that these tragedies are preventable.

Today, we are seeing stepped-up leadership from policymakers and other influencers calling for Vision Zero; increased advocacy challenging the status quo of more than 40,000 preventable traffic deaths a year in the nation; and increased federal funds and policy direction aiming to address the health and safety crisis on our streets, sidewalks and bikeways.

We must also recognize and address the fact that some people in our communities suffer disproportionately, and in a myriad of ways, due to transportation-related decisions—both past and present. As the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) states in its 2022 National Roadway Safety Strategy: “The disproportionate safety impacts are especially true in underserved communities, where people face heightened exposure to risk.”

### Total U.S. Traffic Deaths per 100,000, 2016-2020

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
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<td>13.9</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>150.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
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**U.S. traffic deaths disproportionately affect Black and American Indian people.**

Stark examples of these disproportionate roadway safety impacts in the U.S. include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Black people are killed in traffic crashes at a rate almost 30 percent higher than white people in recent years, a disparity that worsened during the coronavirus pandemic.
- People who are American Indian/Alaska Native are killed in crashes at more than twice the national rate on a per population basis.
- People living in high-poverty areas are more likely to be hit and killed in crashes. Counties with the highest poverty rates in 2019 experienced a fatality rate 35 percent higher than the national average on a per population basis.

These disparities in roadway safety risks are spurred by the reality that these same communities are more likely to be overburdened with roads designed for high volumes of traffic and high speeds, leading to more crashes, serious injuries and fatalities. These same communities also experience a lack of safety infrastructure, especially for people walking and biking. This includes limited crosswalks and connected sidewalks; fewer functioning street lights; fewer bikeways; and limited traffic calming and other basic safety features. Despite this, most traditional transportation planning and policy work continues to focus on individual behavior-related strategies, rather than addressing the policies and choices that created and sustain these unsafe built environments in the first place.

As leaders in Vision Zero, or any meaningful roadway safety efforts, we have the opportunity—and responsibility—to recognize and address equity disparities in our work. Given the urgency of both the nation’s roadway safety crisis and the need to remedy historic and ongoing inequities, now is the time to make change. This resource shares actions and examples to align Vision Zero work with meaningful advancements for safe, healthy and equitable mobility for all.

“Health equity means all people, regardless of who they are, where they came from, how they identify, where they live, or the color of their skin, have a fair and just opportunity to live their healthiest possible lives — in body, mind, and community. Achieving health equity requires removing social, economic, contextual, and systemic barriers to health, and a continuous and explicit commitment to prioritize those affected by historical disadvantages.”

- City Health

**Transportation & Health Equity**

Transportation is often thought of as a means to an end—a way we get from Point A to Point B most quickly, conveniently and smoothly. But within the basic need to move around and go about our lives exists a myriad of factors that influence our health and well-being.

Decisions related to our everyday transportation systems intersect with many consequential aspects of our lives: access to jobs, education and healthy food; opportunities for economic advancement and active, healthy living and community connectivity.
Transportation and mobility are critical social determinants of health, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define as nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes. These determinants are a mix of personal, social, economic, policy, environmental and healthcare factors that relate to the environments in which we are born, live, learn, work, play and age.

With growing focus on Vision Zero—safe mobility for all people—there is an immense opportunity to align the goals of roadway safety with lessening health disparities amongst all people. Just as Vision Zero centers the Safe System approach, one that is human-centered and prioritizes safety, it should also center health equity and operationalize it through planning, decision-making, investments and robust prioritization.

**To operationalize health equity in Vision Zero, it will require us as practitioners and advocates to do the following:**

- **Value all people, communities and their mobility needs equally:** The goal is that no one is invisible, undervalued or underrepresented in transportation decisions and investments.

- **Recognize and rectify transportation decisions that have exacerbated disparities:** We can eliminate policies and practices that create barriers to freedom of movement and access to resources, as well as those that have caused harm directly or indirectly, including increased air pollution, noise pollution and chronic stress.

- **Provide investments in safety policies, practices and infrastructure according to need and risk:** This includes allocating investments and resources equitably, or according to need, rather than distributing resources equally across communities or according to requests or complaints.

*Source: Our definition of health equity is based on Dr. Camara Jones’s work on Achieving Health Equity.*
There is a difference between prioritizing “equality” and “equity” in Vision Zero work. Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same level of attention and resources, such as those involved in safety planning, policies and practices. And equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the investments and supplementary planning needed to reach an equal outcome. Health equity in Vision Zero includes prioritizing attention and resources to known high-injury areas in low-income, BIPOC and/or communities that have experienced a history of underinvestment and adverse health outcomes (See Recommendation 4: Center Equity in Analysis and Prioritization).

The opportunity for transformation in road safety and equitable mobility is ripe. Local, regional and tribal communities across the nation are receiving significant federal funding for Vision Zero Plan development and implementation. In distributing these and other funds, as well as promoting equity-focused policies, the USDOT is urging action to prioritize the safety of underserved communities and vulnerable road users. Communities should feel empowered and equipped to invest in transformative changes that aim not only for safe mobility for all, but also more equitable and inclusive spaces for everyone.
Prioritizing Health Equity in Vision Zero Planning shares actions and examples intended to help develop roadway safety plans, including Vision Zero Action Plans, that center health equity. We hope that planners, engineers, policymakers, consultants, advocates and other key stakeholders working on Vision Zero efforts will find these recommendations useful to incorporate equity goals, strategies and outcomes in Vision Zero Action Plans to help achieve your goals.

Each recommendation is accompanied by a set of:

**Actionable Steps for Equitable Vision Zero Planning**

**Helpful Resources**

We recognize that communities are at different stages of development on these topics and have varying needs. So, the strategies recommended here should not be considered one-size-fits-all, but rather a place to build from whatever stage you are at.

In some communities, the ideas shared here may already be under way or may be actionable in the near term, while in others, the ideas may be seeds planted for longer term progress. If some recommendations seem out of reach for your community now, we encourage thinking about how they can be helpful conversation-starters with colleagues and stakeholders to encourage steps toward change.

As developers of this resource, we recognize that we bring limited perspectives, knowledge and experience to this work, including as it relates to equity. We value and reference the work of many other people who inform and inspire our thinking. We encourage you to explore these topics further and to reach out to existing groups within your community to diversify the voices and perspectives included in your roadway safety planning process and to evaluate how effective and equitable planned strategies will be.

Don’t be discouraged by the magnitude of the challenge. We encourage you to start from where you are and do what you can.

“Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.”

- Howard Zinn
Recommendations
Prioritizing Health Equity In Vision Zero Planning

Recommendation 1
Acknowledge Past Harms

Recommendation 2
Develop a Framework to Operationalize Equity in Safety Planning

Recommendation 3
Establish and Nurture Relationships to Inform Vision Zero Planning

Recommendation 4
Center Equity in Analysis and Prioritization

Recommendation 5
Shift to a Safe System Approach Based on Effective, Equitable Strategies

Recommendation 6
Track & Share Progress of Equity Commitments
Recommendation 1

Acknowledge Past Harms

Safe mobility efforts do not exist in a vacuum. In the U.S., past systemic harms and their resulting inequities continue to impact how people move about and experience the world. Recognizing and acknowledging the role of urban planning and transportation policy in perpetuating systemic racism is an important, early step in planning for and advancing Vision Zero.

Making a shift can start by raising awareness of both the historical and ongoing factors that have caused some communities to bear the burden of lower levels of safety, health and opportunity in our everyday transportation system. To do so, begin asking yourself and your team questions to understand the history and context that may influence your planning efforts, such as the following:

- Which neighborhoods in our community suffer from the racist legacy of “redlining” policies, which used race to diminish home values, robbed Black people of their opportunity to create wealth and harmed future generations?

Redlining policies of the 1930s made loans to new homeowners by refinancing mortgages at low-interest rates and used color-coded and letter-graded maps to group neighborhoods into financial risk and lending categories. Areas color-coded as green ("Best") and blue ("Still Desirable"), that were predominantly white were systematically approved for and publicly guaranteed home loans, while neighborhoods color-coded as yellow ("Definitely Declining") and red ("Hazardous"), populated by Black people and immigrants, were denied homeownership loans, ultimately impacting generational wealth and limiting community-level investments.

- Which neighborhoods in your community were torn apart by federal highway expansion that displaced thousands of households and people across the country, particularly Black and low-income families?

This 1937 redlined map of Baltimore highlights residential neighborhoods with large populations of Black, Asian, Latinx and other racial groups as “hazardous;” those with some minority populations as “definitely declining;” neighborhoods that were mostly white as “still desirable;” and neighborhoods with only white people as the most desirable or “best” for investment.

Source: Howard Center for Investigative Journalism
PRIORITIZING HEALTH EQUITY IN VISION ZERO PLANNING

Acknowledge Past Harms

Federal highway expansion projects in the 1950s incentivized planners to build extensive arterial road systems to facilitate convenient access to suburban neighborhoods. Many routes were strategically placed in areas where land costs were the lowest and/or where political resistance was weakest, often cutting through low-income and BIPOC communities. These highway expansion projects not only physically divided marginalized communities but inflicted other profound harms via disrupting well-established communities, displacing residents and businesses, and exacerbating racial segregation.

- Are these neighborhoods that were harmed decades ago still suffering disproportionate numbers of traffic injuries and deaths today?
- What efforts can be taken to engage with the local community to understand the harms experienced, particularly in neighborhoods that experienced displacement and damages due to government policies?
- Have the tribal communities in your area experienced historical and ongoing dispossession at the hands of transportation and other policy-related decisions?

Actionable Steps for Equitable Vision Zero Planning

Develop and include an acknowledgement of past harms in your Vision Zero Plan

Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC) suffer disproportionate road safety risk due to harmful transportation-related policies and practices of the past that have torn apart communities, displaced families and created unsafe spaces. Recognizing how these past harms manifest in your community should be an important early step in the Vision Zero planning process. Whether this is referencing the harms caused by the 1950s Federal Aid-Highway Act, the legacy of redlining or other planning decisions specific to your community, this is an opportunity to take accountability, signal the intent to make change and build greater trust between government leaders and the communities they serve.

For example, the USDOT states in their Equity Action Plan: “As we continue to advance this work, it’s important to recognize that past federal transportation investments have too often failed to address inequities, or even made them worse. And because a piece of physical infrastructure endures for decades, families and communities today must contend with the results of discriminatory choices that may date back generations. For example, highways routed directly through Black and Brown neighborhoods, often in an effort to divide and destroy them, continue to affect the wellbeing of the residents who remain. In other cases, we see inequities in our failures to invest, as with transit deserts that leave out the communities that most need affordable transportation options, or contracting opportunities for transportation projects that fail to engage and utilize women and people of color.”
The California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) acknowledges past harms in its Reconnecting Communities Handbook, a resource to help local agencies develop projects that restore community connection. In it, Caltrans states: “In many cities throughout the U.S., freeways were built to bisect communities with significant populations of Black and Latino residents, displacing thousands of families and breaking apart communities. These highways were built directly, and purposefully, through Black and Latinx communities...When coupled with other forms of systemic racism, such as redlining, there have been multiple negative impacts to these communities that persist to the present and will continue to harm these communities into the future if left unaddressed.”

Sonoma County, California—in which 80 percent of the land is comprised of agricultural and open spaces—states in its Vision Zero Action Plan: “At its core, Vision Zero emphasizes that all people have a right to move about their communities safely. However, it is impossible to meet that goal without acknowledging and addressing racial and socioeconomic disparities in the transportation realm.”

Tacoma, Washington’s Vision Zero Plan includes a land acknowledgement, a formal statement that something is taking place on land originally inhabited by indigenous peoples of the area in the past and the present:

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional homelands of the Puyallup Tribe. The Puyallup people have lived on and stewarded these lands since the beginning of time, and continue to do so today. We recognize that this land acknowledgement is one small step toward true allyship and we commit to uplifting the voices, experiences, and histories of the Indigenous people of this land and beyond.


Elevate lived experience from the start
Quantitative data and official narratives do not always tell the full story. Make space for the voices and experiences of people who have been impacted by past decisions. This means engaging with the community members in areas that have historically experienced underinvestment, suffered disproportionate health outcomes due to transportation related decisions and who have historically been underrepresented in planning. The goal is to understand the ramifications of past efforts on people’s lived experiences and to better center people in Vision Zero work. (See Recommendation 3: Establish and Nurture Relationships to Inform Vision Zero Planning.)

Contextualize past actions that have marginalized BIPOC communities
Learn how land use actions can impact communities; recognize which neighborhoods are disproportionately affected; and intentionally examine how potential strategies can impact opportunities for BIPOC and other historically marginalized communities. In your Action Plan, share data and maps of a community’s High Injury Network overlaid with race and income demographics to contextualize the history of harmful practices with road safety results today. (See Recommendation 4: Center Equity in Analysis and Prioritization.)
Recommendation 1

Acknowledging Past Harms

With more organizations and leaders openly acknowledging past harms, including transportation agencies, there is opportunity to build (or strengthen) relationships with the communities who have historically been excluded in past transportation planning and other important decisions.

This is not to say that an acknowledgement of past harms, alone, will resolve the impact of these harms. However, it can be used as a basis to continuously lift up underrepresented voices and set the tone for a more inclusive planning process that incorporates and accounts for people’s desires, needs and lived experiences.

Helpful Resources

» Redlining in New Deal America, Mapping Inequality
» Segregation by Design, Adam Paul Susaneck
» Racism has shaped public transit, and it’s riddled with inequities, Christof Spieler
» How Racism Is Built Into America’s Interstate Highways, The Daily Show
» Untokening 1.0: Principles of Mobility Justice
» Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in the Age of Extremes, Mimi Sheller
» Right of Way, Angie Schmitt
» Driving While Black: Race, Space, and Mobility in America, PBS
» There Are No Accidents, Jesse Singer
» Mobility Justice Resources, Transportation Choices Coalition

This reworked map of Minneapolis from 1947 highlights residential neighborhoods with large populations of Black, Asian, Latinx and other racial groups as red, or “hazardous;” those with some minority populations are labeled as yellow, or “definitely declining;” neighborhoods that were mostly white residents as blue, or “still desirable.” The bright yellow lines show planned federal highway construction projects, which would displace and tear apart these already marginalized communities. Source: Segregation by Design
Recommendation 2

Develop a Framework to Operationalize Equity and Infuse it in Safety Planning

Specifying what equity means, particularly in context of your community’s roadway safety work, is another important, early step. We encourage you to go beyond stating equity as a priority and instead determine how it applies to your community context, embed it into the core principles of your Vision Zero Action Plan and shape your ongoing work to reflect these principles in practice.

Creating space for diverse voices in developing a shared understanding of what equity means in Vision Zero is important. This can build a stronger basis for determining which strategies are most appropriate to ensure equitable safety outcomes in your community’s ongoing Vision Zero work. These conversations may not be easy or comfortable, but having them—and taking action based on them—is critical to advancing Vision Zero goals. As referenced above, generations of harm may have led to distrust or skepticism of some key roadway safety stakeholders, including government agencies.

Actionable Steps for Equitable Vision Zero Planning

Develop a clear understanding and glossary of key equity related terms

Specifying and defining terms used in your Vision Zero Plan (such as justice, bias, inclusion, racism, equity vs equality, disparities) supports collective understanding. It is important to include diverse stakeholders in broadening your understanding of these baseline terms, especially the people most impacted by inequities. So, in addition to transportation agency staff, invite community members to participate in this process of contextualizing these terms; this is an opportunity to engage your Vision Zero Task Force and to build mutual understanding amongst partners who may enter this work from different places, ranging from planners and policymakers to advocates, public health staff and others.
Identify equity priorities informed by your community context

Use terms, such as those noted in the glossary above, to set an equity goal as it specifically relates to your Vision Zero work and your community. Ask questions about safety and health disparities in your community: Who is disproportionately at risk as they move about your community’s streets, sidewalks and bikeways? Who is underrepresented in forums for community input and engagement?

Following are some examples of communities defining equity and inequities in the context of their roadway safety work.

**Jersey City highlights what they define as a Community of Concern in their Vision Zero Action Plan.**

What is a Community of Concern?

Places with the following characteristics are classified as a Community of Concern:

1. **Minority** concentration equal to or exceeding the regional threshold; or
2. **Low-Income** concentration equal to or exceeding the regional threshold; or
3. **Two or more Other Indicators of Disadvantage** equal to or exceed the regional threshold:
   - Female Head of Household with Children
   - Persons with Limited English Proficiency
   - Carless Households
   - Elderly Populations (75 years and over)

(Source: NJTPA Together North Jersey)

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**High Risk Users**

**Collisions in Vulnerable Area**

Collision rates were examined among areas with vulnerable populations identified in a transportation vulnerability analysis. The areas with the highest vulnerability scores were determined through a degree of vulnerability analysis adapted from the Greater Nashville Regional Council’s methodology. For the analysis, thirteen indicators were assessed to identify vulnerable communities with high transportation need. Indicators used in the analysis include:

- Active transportation users
- Carless households
- People with disabilities
- Educational Attainment
- Females
- Cost-burdened households
- Limited English proficiency
- People of color
- Households below the federal poverty line
- Unemployment rate
- Homeownership
- Older adults
- Youth

Vulnerable Areas are described in Nashville’s Vision Zero Action Plan with an emphasis on 13 indicators, which are also mapped on the city’s High Injury Network.
Additionally, explore the root causes of those inequities: What factors are putting these groups at disproportionate risk? What safety needs are not being met? For example, is there not adequate pedestrian infrastructure for people to walk safely? Are there no safe, connected bikeways to ride in? Are bus stops placed on roads that feel dangerous to cross?

**Define and use consistent terminology specific to “priority” communities**

It is important to be intentional about the terminology used in your plan to define communities experiencing disproportionate safety risks. This is a chance to encourage shared understanding and collaborative goal-setting and work. For instance, when collecting and analyzing crash data or selecting priority actions or evaluating progress, it will be critical to work from the same base of understanding of which communities are defined as priorities from a health equity perspective. Examples of terminology used in Vision Zero Action Plans include: communities of concern, historically underserved communities, vulnerable areas and disenfranchised communities, among others.

**Be specific about how you will advance equity in your Vision Zero Plan**

After developing common language, work in partnership with community members, your Task Force, and other stakeholders to develop core principles, specific strategies, desired outcomes and evaluation frameworks that consider the communities most at risk on your roadways.

For example, Portland, Oregon’s Vision Zero Action Plan acknowledges the disproportionate safety outcomes in some neighborhoods and acknowledges concerns surrounding racial profiling in enforcement. Portland goes beyond saying the word “equity” and explains how equity priorities will be supported by the plan’s goals, actions and staff work (see below).

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**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

**EQUITABLE**

- The plan will be **Equitable**
  - It will address the disproportionate burden of traffic fatalities and serious injuries on communities of concern, including people of color, low-income households, older adults and youth, people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, and households with limited vehicle access
  - It will prioritize filling gaps in infrastructure where those gaps contribute to fatalities and serious injuries, or limit the transportation options of communities of concern
  - It will not result in racial profiling

**DATA-DRIVEN**

- Actions in the plan will be **data-driven** to address the factors that lead to serious injury and death on Portland’s streets
  - Safety data will be gathered from both traditional and innovative sources to identify the location, behaviors, and circumstances— including street design— related to serious and deadly crashes

**ACCOUNTABLE**

- The plan will be **accountable**, setting out clear objectives and measuring performance against them
  - Progress will be communicated in annual reports and in an easily accessible dashboard
  - Engagement with communities will be ongoing
  - Success will be measured by the level of investment in communities of concern, as well as by safety metrics

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*Portland's Vision Zero Action Plan places a strong emphasis on equity at the start by listing actions to support equitable implementation.*
In San Francisco’s Vision Zero Action Plan, equity is defined as “advancing actions that prioritize our most vulnerable populations and are sensitive to community context.” The plan lays out specific steps to prioritize equity and states that the “City will prioritize safety improvements where vulnerable users travel and in Communities of Concern and will strengthen community engagement to build trust and foster traffic safety champions.”

The strategy commits to the following:

- **Deepening community engagement** with community leaders and local stakeholders to ensure that strategic actions reduce injury inequities and do not exacerbate existing inequities.
- **Prioritizing and monitoring improvements on the High Injury Network, in Communities of Concern**, and where there are concentrations of severe/fatal injuries to seniors and people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations to address historic differences in resource allocation.
- **Ensuring Vision Zero strategic actions consider and address equity impacts** on vulnerable populations, including the impact of fines and fees on low-income residents.
- **Implementing data-driven, culturally competent, multilingual education, engagement and enforcement campaigns** targeted in impacted areas.
- **Developing and institutionalizing an injury surveillance system** to ensure that injury crash data is accurate, publicly available and includes an analysis of vulnerable populations.

We encourage you to work with community leaders and stakeholders early in the planning process to develop and document a shared understanding of equity needs, building a stronger base of shared goals and commitments to change.

### Helpful Resources

- Racial Equity Tools Glossary, Racial Equity Tools
- Key Equity Terms & Concepts: A Glossary for Shared Understanding, Center for the Study of Social Policy
- Defining “Communities of Concern” in Transportation Planning, Urban Institute
- Power, Money and Time: Defining Equity for Your Organization, Central Indiana Community Foundation
- Equity Strategies for Practitioners, Vision Zero Network
- Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism and New Routes to Equity, Robert Bullard
- Centering Equity in Collective Impact, Stanford Social Innovation Review
- Elevating Equity in Vision Zero Communications, Vision Zero Network
Recommendation 3
Establish and Nurture Partnerships to Inform Vision Zero Planning

In developing a Vision Zero Action Plan, the process can be as important as the product because moving from commitment to action takes more than words or good ideas. Progress requires building buy-in to make real, lasting change and includes developing relationships and integrating the input of key stakeholders.

The Vision Zero planning process is an important early opportunity to recognize and break down traditional silos. Given that transportation decisions intersect with so many consequential aspects of our lives (including access to jobs, education, food and other critical destinations to opportunities that influence our health and well-being), the range of stakeholders who should be collaborators in Vision Zero work is broad. Engaging with non-traditional stakeholders alongside transportation staff is a chance to recognize roadway safety work as more than just planning to get people from Point A to Point B.

Actionable Steps for Equitable Vision Zero Planning

Build a Vision Zero Task Force that moves beyond traditional stakeholders

Because every community has its own cultural, political and societal characteristics, what meaningful collaboration looks like will vary, but strong Vision Zero planning and collaboration often begins with the formation of a strong and diverse Task Force to help shape the Action Plan and ongoing work. A multi-agency, cross-disciplinary group can help develop goals and strategies that incorporate the intersections of income, health, employment and access to opportunities in advancing Vision Zero.

Examples of other agencies to include in a Task Force, beyond the traditional realms of transportation and enforcement, include representatives from the following:

- Public Health, to help inform the intersections between roadway safety and other key social determinants of health.
- Housing/Development, to help address concerns about communities who may be at risk for gentrification and displacement.
- Environmental justice, to identify areas of overlap between transportation policies and environmental justice needs.
- Representatives from impacted communities, those disproportionately impacted by roadway safety problems, often people in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.
- Youth, who are over-represented in traffic deaths but rarely consulted in transportation decision-making.
- Advocates/Community-based organizations, to represent the most at-risk road users, such as people walking and biking and people with disabilities.
Some communities set up Task Forces with a mix of public agency staff (from housing, parks, public works, public health, etc.) and community members, while others form two groups: one of public sector staff only and another with a mix of participants, including people outside government agencies. There are benefits and challenges to both approaches. And if your community is smaller or has less capacity, consider contacting regional or county agencies or community-based groups who can bring diverse perspectives.

**Keep equity at the forefront of Task Force work**

Bring more attention to equity in your roadway safety work by identifying and listening to equity champions. One strategy is to create an equity team or standing committee within the Vision Zero Task Force to help keep equity commitments front-and-center in ongoing work. If so, it’s important to ensure the work is not siloed and that regular time is also made for the full Task Force to discuss and revisit equity priorities, actions and progress.

Another strategy is to develop a Task Force charter to clearly outline its purpose and deliverables, including those pertaining to equity work. For example, Portland, Oregon’s Task Force charter outlined its purpose, members’ roles, the decision-making process and expectations and best practices for attendance and participation. A Task Force charter can also set processes to elevate the equity team’s, or committee’s, recommendations on proposals.

**Encourage shared learning about the relationship between equity and Vision Zero**

The planning process is a chance for shared learning about the intersection between Vision Zero work and equity issues. You can provide readings, interview recordings and documentaries as background materials, and facilitate forums to discuss the topics together. (See this sample reading/listening list.) You can also encourage stakeholders to participate in equity-focused trainings, coupled with discussions, about what authority your jurisdiction has to address existing inequities.

While health equity frameworks may not have historically been part of formal transportation related training, Vision Zero staff have more opportunities than ever to learn and incorporate best practices into their work.

As stated in the Minnesota Department of Transportation’s multi-modal transportation plan: “Transportation equity is an ongoing journey of listening, learning, changing, implementing and adapting. Everyone in our agency regardless of position or work assignment has a role to advance transportation equity.”

**Sustain your Task Force beyond Action Plan launch**

The Task Force should play an ongoing role in Vision Zero work. We recommend meetings at least every month or two in the first few years to support implementation and institutionalization of the Vision Zero approach. Ongoing meetings of the Task Force provide a regular platform to monitor progress and challenges, encourage accountability on equity priorities and help to address evolving equity concerns and community needs. You might also consider creating a safety commission or appointing some Task Force members onto other commissions to support involvement in ongoing work and safety efforts.
Investing in meaningful community engagement to inform and watchdog progress toward Vision Zero and equity commitments is also critical. If community members see that their input is being prioritized in the planning stages, they are more likely to trust in follow-through on the plan.

**Invest time and resources in relationships with community members**

To cultivate trust, it is important to engage with your community early and often during the planning process, not waiting to do so until a draft is already developed. The planning process is a chance to recognize the value of people’s lived experiences and to build stronger, lasting ties with communities. Think about how to engage your community in ways that are not simply extractive but rather foster long-term genuine relationships. This includes not just front-end planning meetings, but also returning repeatedly to communities throughout the project or policy process to highlight how their perspectives have influenced decision-making and presenting opportunities for ongoing input.

One impressive example of meaningful relationship building is Denver’s Community Connector program, which aims to reduce health disparities through active transportation and built environment strategies, including Vision Zero. The program is a part of the Denver Community Active Living Coalition and is housed in the city’s Department of Transportation & Infrastructure. The program hires full-time employees with lived experience in the communities they serve to support community-driven priorities and projects. Community Connectors “lead with relationships” as they attend community events, meet people in the neighborhood, volunteer and become a known, friendly face. They show up consistently and ask, “How can we help?” not just when a city agency needs something but also to find out what people in the community really need beyond transportation issues. In addition, the program supports community members’ ideas to improve walkability, bikeability and access to safe public places by offering Community Micro-Grants. The Community Connectors foster trust in the transportation department’s projects to improve safety and health within their neighborhoods.

**Community Connector Model**

- locally-focused and community-driven
- equity priority areas in NE and SW Denver neighborhoods
- Full-time city employees with lived experience in the communities they serve
- Refer to other resources to increase access to health

Learn more about Denver’s Community Connectors program.
Another example is the Los Angeles Department of Transportation’s (LADOT) Dignity Infused Community Engagement (DICE) approach to center community members in the Vision Zero planning process. This cross-sector effort weaves perspectives and lived experiences into planning. Beyond promoting Vision Zero, the dignity infused planning process seeks to heal and atone for the negative impacts of systems and practices within Los Angeles and the broader field of transportation planning. The approach includes street team development, capacity building training for city staff, restorative justice mediation between agencies and residents, and paid partnerships with community leaders.

**Invest in meaningful community engagement**

Engagement requires funding and staff skilled in outreach. If consultants take on some of this work, be sure not to fully delegate this work, as agency staff should also participate and hear direct feedback from community members. We recognize that agencies have varying levels of capacity and access to resources for engagement, so consider whether other departments have access to engagement funds for communities. For example, a dangerous corridor in a business district might involve both transportation staff and economic development, so these departments could work collaboratively to leverage resources.
Empower & value community with compensation
It is important to learn from community members and neighborhood groups with lived experience. And it is important to recognize that this is work, and work should be valued. Therefore, we should compensate community members for sharing their time and expertise to help advance Vision Zero. If agencies are willing to pay consultants to get feedback from the community, shouldn’t we be compensating the people who live and work within the community, whose input is so valuable? Find ways to budget to compensate community members, including organizations, for their time and expertise. Read about some examples in Vision Zero communities.

Ensure accessibility for community members
We should prioritize eliminating barriers to participation. For instance, rather than asking community members to come to special (often inconveniently timed) meetings, go out and engage in their neighborhoods, as described in the Denver Community Connector program example above. Attend or table at neighborhood events hosted by community groups. If hosting your own engagement event, make sure meetings are ADA accessible, include childcare and meals, are transit accessible, provide language translations and closed captioning, and are scheduled at convenient times for people who may not work traditional hours. See examples in Safe Routes Partnership’s Checklist for Facilitating Community Engagement.

Along with the strategies discussed above, it should be stressed that engagement with local elected officials is essential. Building buy-in with key leaders on the front end will help strengthen their understanding of the work and, hopefully, their resolve to resist pushback to change that is likely to come later. Regularly update key leaders on ideas, challenges and the rationale behind strategies so they are not surprised later. This fundamental shift requires top-down commitment from local elected officials to Task Force leaders and community members, and bottom-up attention from the community, supporting a virtuous cycle of communication and change.

Helpful Resources

» From Planning to Practice: The Role of Collaboration in Vision Zero Planning, Vision Zero Network
» Collaborating across departments to achieve Vision Zero, Vision Zero Network
» Spectrum of Public Participation, International Association for Public Participation
» Answers from the Margins: Participatory Planning with Disadvantaged Communities, Institute of Transportation Studies at University of California, Davis
» Community Engagement Assessment Tool, Nexus Community Engagement Institute
» Vision Zero Implementation Toolkit, Changelab Solutions
» Creating and Sustaining a Strong Taskforce, Vision Zero Network
» The State of Transportation and Health Equity (pg. 51-58), Smart Growth America
» Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making, USDOT
Recommendation 4
Center Equity in Analysis and Prioritization

Using data to identify and prioritize a community’s High Injury Network (HIN) is a best practice in roadway safety. It helps an agency be more systematic and intentional with its safety planning efforts, addressing locations with high numbers of crashes resulting in serious injuries and deaths (note that this is different from preventing all crashes). Using the HIN helps staff and elected leaders focus resources on the most problematic areas and can serve as a tool for transparency and accountability, especially for health equity needs.

Tracking progress on your community’s HIN, and sharing this information publicly and visually, can help build a broader understanding of problem areas, illustrate more urgency and the need for buy in for changes, and promote opportunities for agencies to better coordinate safety improvements with other infrastructure work, such as repaving or sewer repair projects. With Vision Zero's data-driven approach, communities are increasingly overlaying a map of their High Injury Networks with data about communities considered at disproportionate risk, bringing greater awareness and attention to long-looked over problems.

We must also recognize that quantitative data does not always tell the whole story. So, we should ask ourselves: Whose data is being used and to what end? Who is collecting and analyzing the data, and what blind spots might they have? What’s being left out of data sets and to whose detriment? And to whose benefit?

So, what does an equity-centered approach to data analysis look like? The following steps can help ground a community of any size in planning and prioritizing based on an equitable and data-driven foundation.

**Actionable Steps for Equitable Vision Zero Planning**

**Build a strong base with data**
Identify and map your community’s HIN by analyzing data on roadway deaths and severe injuries over a certain period of time (e.g., past five years). Some communities only track fatalities, but this can undercount and undervalue serious injury crashes. A larger body of relevant data that includes roadway fatalities and severe injuries should be used to build your HIN.

**Include all roadways that rank as part of the HIN, not just those owned and maintained by the agency leading the planning work**
State-owned (and often county-owned) roads are more likely to be high-speed, high-volume arterials and are more likely to run through communities of color, which should be highlighted in your plan for improvements. Explicitly noting which parts of the HIN are not owned by the agency leading the plan’s development is an opportunity to encourage action from other important stakeholders. For example, a local Vision Zero Plan is likely to have segments of its HIN owned by other levels of government, such as the county or the state, so the municipal agency leading Vision Zero work should acknowledge this, include it in the plan and partner with those entities for change.
Use an equity-centered approach to data
Along with traffic injury and crash data, a Vision Zero Plan should consider an array of data sources, including but not limited to those related to demographics, housing and employment. In the U.S., traffic injuries and fatalities disproportionately impact certain segments of the community (including children, seniors, people living in low-income communities, communities of color, people with disabilities, active and public transportation users and others), so additional information is needed to inform inclusive and equitable safety planning.

For instance, layering data sources (such as HIN and demographic data) and including neighborhoods with a high number of children or a high number of low-income people, often illustrates a relationship between the most dangerous streets and other indicators of vulnerability. Importantly, it can also help safety practitioners prioritize which areas are most in need of improvements and attention.

For example, Nashville’s Vision Zero Action Plan highlights that a staggering 90 percent of the city’s High Injury intersections are located within “highly vulnerable” areas and more than 50 percent of the overall HIN miles are in these areas. Residents in Nashville’s “Vulnerable” or “Highly Vulnerable” areas experience collisions at rates 2 to 4 times greater than those in non-vulnerable areas. (Nashville defines “highly vulnerable” areas as those with high concentrations of people living in poverty, lower rates of homeownership, high concentrations of active transportation users, carless households, people with disabilities, educational attainment, older adults, youth and other indicators.)

Data shows that it is common for a community’s HIN to be disproportionately located in neighborhoods with significant numbers of low-income people and communities of color. And as described in Recommendation 1: Acknowledge Past Harms, these safety disparities often result from disinvestment in certain neighborhoods, such as the harmful legacy of redlining in communities of color.

A helpful strategy to develop an equity-centered, data-driven approach to Vision Zero is to partner with public health professionals or agencies. They often have experience identifying and linking important social determinants of health, such as access to employment, healthcare, housing and green space, which can factor into road safety planning decisions. Bringing a health equity framework to transportation planning is an example of a shift to a more proactive and preventative approach to roadway safety. For example, San Francisco’s Vision Zero work is co-led by its transportation and public health agencies, a model of a more comprehensive approach than transportation-only led work. If you have not already done so, get to know your public health colleagues and invite them to collaborate on Vision Zero.

One of the strongest benefits of Vision Zero’s data-driven approach is that it often yields closer analysis of and recognition that certain communities, particularly communities of color and low-income neighborhoods, are disproportionately suffering due to certain roadway safety policies and decisions. Showing this clearly is a key step to addressing and improving these dangers.
These disparities are widespread across the U.S. Many communities are increasingly recognizing and acknowledging the inequities in roadway safety conditions, with high rates of their HINs located in communities of color and low-income communities. Following are more examples of communities bringing greater awareness and attention to these safety inequities, which can and should be addressed as part of Vision Zero planning and ongoing work.

**Nashville, Tennessee**

In Nashville, low-income communities and communities with a high concentration of renters, deemed as “Highly Vulnerable Areas”, are burdened with 53% of the High Injury Network, despite representing only 20% of the city’s population.

**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

In Philadelphia, fatal and serious injury crashes are 30% more likely to occur in communities of color and three times more likely in low-income areas, compared to the city overall.

**Kansas City, Missouri**

In Kansas City, disadvantaged areas comprise 45% of the High Injury Network, despite representing only 13% of the city’s streets.
Prioritizing Health Equity in Vision Zero Planning

Snapshot of Safety Disparities

**Tampa, Florida**

Crashes within Communities of Concern (2014–2018)

In Tampa, 52% of fatal and serious crashes occur in areas deemed as communities of concern, despite these making up only 27% of the city overall.

**Tacoma, Washington**

In Tacoma, 75% of the High Injury Network is located in areas experiencing racial and socioeconomic disparities.

**Dane County, Wisconsin**

In Dane County, Wisconsin, which includes the Vision Zero city of Madison, Black people are nearly 2x as likely to be hit and killed in crashes and more than 4x more likely to be hit and killed while walking, compared to the general population of the area.
Prioritize investments in marginalized areas or communities

After identifying high-risk areas, or the HIN, it is critical to commit to prioritizing investments in those communities, as well as tracking and sharing progress on these investments (see Recommendation 6: Track & Share Progress of Equity Commitments).

As part of their Vision Zero planning, communities are more clearly stating commitments to emphasize efforts and resources in neighborhoods that have been traditionally disadvantaged and are suffering from safety disinvestments.

Specific examples of these public commitments and specific language include the following:

Nashville’s Vision Vero Plan includes a commitment to utilize the data analysis to bring more resources to underserved areas. Its plan includes the following specific actions:

“...Incorporate the Greater Nashville Regional Council degree of vulnerability analysis and results into [Metro] funding decisions, prioritization processes and other key transportation planning processes...” and “...utilize the degree of vulnerability analysis as an input to prioritize the funding, design, and maintenance of transportation projects, including WalknBike project priorities.”

Philadelphia’s Vision Zero Plan lays out a process to prioritize projects based on the city’s HIN locations, along with proximity to schools, pedestrian zones, transit and efficient government zones. The Action Plan states:

“Equity in Vision Zero means avoiding simplistic approaches. For example, allocating purely equal shares of resources all around the city ignores the fact that not all areas are confronting the same levels of risk. Therefore, this plan commits to focusing Vision Zero efforts in the next five years in neighborhoods where a majority of residents are either people of color or people living on low incomes where data shows the impact of traffic crashes is highest.”

Austin’s Speed Management Program prioritizes which communities receive attention based partly on equity criteria, including percentage of people in poverty, percentage of people of color, proximity to public transportation, proximity to community destinations and the presence or absence of sidewalks.

Oakland’s Geographic Equity Toolbox helps leverage attention and funding toward neighborhoods that have been historically and currently overlooked by city services and planning processes, and which are likely to suffer disproportionate roadway safety (and other health) impacts. In the Equity Toolbox, “priority neighborhoods” are defined based on demographic factors such as the percentage of people of color, low-income households and people with disabilities, race and ethnicity, language, displacement and gentrification and pollution levels.

Oakland’s Department of Transportation has taken this prioritization work further by partnering with the city’s Department of Race and Equity to develop an equity-focused paving plan. This brings a systematized focus toward improved street maintenance and safety investments in Oakland’s priority neighborhoods—streets that have been neglected and concentrated in underserved communities.
Augment data sources to be more complete

Supplementing police-collected crash data with additional sources of information, such as from hospitals and emergency responders, is an emerging best practice. It has been shown that police data can undercount incidents among some populations. For instance, San Francisco updated its HIN to add hospital injury data, thereby including injuries not previously reported in police reports. The hospital data revealed that a significant portion of severe injuries and fatalities occurred within the city’s most disenfranchised communities.

Communities with limited capacity to collect and analyze their own data can collaborate with other entities at the county or state levels. The USDOT’s Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer tool, equity maps, and additional tools can also be used to identify areas where transportation disadvantages exist and help prioritize areas for improvement.

An example of this is North Carolina’s Burlington-Graham Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which covers a small, rural community. The MPO, which has only three staff members, used the North Carolina DOT Transportation Disadvantaged Index and the USDOT Transportation Disadvantaged Communities Map to develop its Transportation Safety Plan. When they overlaid this accessible data on their own HIN, they found that nearly half, or about 100 miles, were within a Disadvantaged Community. Analysis of their “Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Other Nonmotorized Transportation” HIN showed an even greater proportion, with nearly two thirds, or about 60 miles, being within a Disadvantaged Community (see image below).
Supplement data with community input

Feedback from community members should further contextualize roadway safety problems and potential improvement strategies. Data often shows crashes that have already happened, but your community members may also provide input on potential crashes or areas that are increasing in crash risk severity. They may also share insight on which roads feel dangerous despite not showing up on the HIN. These may be areas that are likely to be future problem sites or, perhaps, crashes are underreported in these locations (read more in Recommendation 3: Establish and Nurture Relationships to Inform Vision Zero Planning).

As part of Vision Zero, communities are finding creative ways to gather and integrate community input into their efforts. For example, in Alameda, California, Vision Zero staff developed an online, interactive map to encourage members of the public to identify locations where they experienced “near misses.” These locations may not show up on official data sources but may still point to looming problems and areas that feel threatening. In its Vision Zero Plan, Alameda used this qualitative data to inform strategies for street redesigns.

Helpful Resources

» What is the High Injury Network, Vision Zero Network
» Lessons from San Francisco’s High Injury Network Data, Vision Zero Network
» Dangerous by Design, Smart Growth America
» Vision Zero Implementation Toolkit, Changelab Solutions
» Publicly Available Data Sources for Identifying Problems, USDOT
» Collect and Analyze Safety Data Equitably, FHWA
» Equity in Roadway Safety Webinar Series, FHWA
**Recommendation 5**

**Shift to a Safe System Approach Based on Effective, Equitable Strategies**

If Vision Zero is our goal, then the Safe System approach is how we get there.

A fast-growing number of communities, and the USDOT, recognize that a Safe System approach is a more effective and just foundation for roadway safety work. So, when developing (or updating) a Vision Zero Action Plan, start with a Safe System foundation for more effective and equitable safety strategies and results.

The Safe System approach to roadway safety differs from the traditional mode in fundamental ways. The traditional approach, often referred to as the “Es” (Education, Enforcement, Engagement, Engineering, Emergency Services, etc.), has been prominent in the U.S. for the past century. It implicitly stresses the importance of addressing individual behavior and gives equal weight to strategies based on education and enforcement.

In contrast, the Safe System approach is built on the recognition that people will inevitably make mistakes, so transportation systems should be designed to be more forgiving and survivable when mistakes do occur. It focuses on upstream strategies such as redesigning the built environment and vehicles to be safer, managing speeds and setting policies to help make safe driving behavior the easiest choice. This acknowledges that people are more likely to behave safely on the road if they are offered safe mobility options and environments. The Safe System approach to road safety is proving to be far more effective in other nations around the world.

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**Traditional approach**

- Prevent crashes
- Improve human behavior
- Control speeding
- Individuals are responsible
- React based on crash history

**Safe System approach**

- Prevent death and serious injuries
- Design for human mistakes/limitations
- Reduce system kinetic energy
- Share responsibility
- Proactively identify and address risks

*Difference between the traditional approach and Safe System approach to roadway safety.*

Source: Federal Highway Administration, USDOT
The equity ramifications of a Safe System approach are significant. The traditional Es approach is likely to over-emphasize education and enforcement strategies, sending the message that what needs to change most are individuals themselves. This downstream approach overlooks the fact that some communities, especially people in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, are disproportionately exposed to dangerously built environments with poorly designed, high traffic, high-speed roads; a lack of sidewalks and bikeways; insufficient street-level lighting; and limited access to high-quality (read: safer and more costly) vehicles.

By over-relying on the Es approach, there is risk of over-emphasizing individual-level solutions and overlooking systemic-level problems. For instance, an over-emphasis on traditional education strategies, such as promotional campaigns reminding people to “be safe” while walking or biking, rests on the assumption that all individuals have safe walking or biking choices to begin with, which is not always the case, particularly in underserved communities.

Making the shift from the E’s approach to the Safe System Approach.
Source: Vision Zero Network
A 2021 study in the Journal of Transport and Land Use shows that three-quarters of the nation’s “hot spot” injury corridors for people walking are bordered by low-income neighborhoods and share common traits of wide, multi-lane roads carrying many vehicles at high speeds. Therefore, making meaningful safety improvements in these neighborhoods calls for roadway redesigns and lowering speeds, rather than an over-reliance on education campaigns discouraging behavior that is likely enabled by the built environment and policies in place.

Over-reliance on the traditional Es approach can also perpetuate a cycle of unjust, racialized or discriminatory enforcement in the very neighborhoods that are more likely to be designed with less safe mobility options. For instance, dangerous driving is more of a problem on roads designed for high speeds and high volumes of traffic, which are more likely to be in Black, Brown and other communities of color. As a result, these communities are not only disproportionately harmed by traffic crashes but also more likely to be in neighborhoods in which police focus traffic stops, exposing people in these communities to potentially harmful police interactions. Studies show that Black drivers in the U.S. are more than 20% more likely to be pulled over by police in traffic stops than white drivers, and far more likely to be searched during those stops. Moreover, communities of color in the U.S. suffer from disturbing trends of police violence as part of traffic stops.

As is being increasingly recognized and acted on, there exists an urgent need to re-evaluate roadway safety strategies and to adjust them to be more effective and equitable. Because the Safe System approach focuses on upstream, preventative strategies—such as designing Complete Streets that accommodate all road users, lowering speeds, requiring safer design of vehicles, and setting policies that improve overall safety—rather than downstream, reactive strategies, such as ticketing people for behavior that may be enabled by poor road design, the Safe System approach offers an opportunity—and responsibility—to make these important changes.

So, while the Es have some role to play in roadway safety efforts, they should be better evaluated for shortcomings and held to higher standards, especially in terms of efficacy and equity. Developing a new (or updating an existing) Vision Zero Plan is an ideal opportunity for this.

**Use a Safe System foundation (evolving beyond the E’s)**

Increasingly, communities are developing Vision Zero Action Plans based on Safe System elements: Safe Streets, Safe Speeds, Safe Vehicles & Safe People, rather than on the traditional Es (Enforcement, Education, Engineering, etc.). This fosters a more interdisciplinary approach and signals a commitment to upstream change—focusing on the systems, policies and practices that encourage safe behavior—rather than over-emphasizing individual behaviors.

A prime example is Philadelphia, which developed its first Vision Zero plan in 2017 on the typical Es foundation. In 2020, the City updated its plan, shifting to a Safe System foundation. (See image on the next page and read more about Philadelphia and other communities’ shifts to a Safe System framework.)
Another example is from the Burlington Graham Metropolitan Planning Organization, a rural community in North Carolina. Its safety plan, released in 2020, is built on a Safe System foundation with the focus areas of Safe Road Users, Safe Vehicles, Safe Speeds, Safe Roads & Post-Crash Care.

The Burlington Graham Metropolitan Planning Organization (BGMPO) built their safety plan on a Safe System foundation. Source: BGMPO Transportation Safety Plan
Priortize upstream, not downstream, strategies

The strategies, or actions, included in your community’s Vision Zero Plan are the crux of roadway safety work. They should focus on the most effective and equitable upstream strategies, rather than emphasizing reactive, downstream strategies, such as increased traffic stops.

An example is the difference between efforts to manage “speeding” (a downstream approach) versus managing “speeds” (an upstream approach). While there is a need to address speeding, which USDOT describes as “exceeding the posted speed limit or driving at a speed that is too fast for conditions,” it is not enough. Experts agree that greater attention should be focused on the systemic strategies of managing speeds, including guidance shared in this 2023 USDOT report: Safe System Approach for Speed Management.

A traditional approach to try to curb speeding often focuses on education campaigns telling people to slow down, but those effects are fleeting at best. Another traditional strategy is increasing traffic stops, but those are not only costly with temporary effects, but they also contribute to community distrust, given the known harms of racialized enforcement. On the other hand, Safe System strategies to manage speeds focus on adding traffic calming measures (to cultivate self-enforcing roads), lowering speed limits and increasing awareness with more speed limit signage. Another approach is adding speed limiters, or Intelligent Speed Assistance, to vehicles, which can start with a city’s fleet of vehicles.

Seattle is one of the many U.S. communities proactively lowering speed limits to advance Vision Zero. In 2016, Seattle lowered default speed limits from 30 mph to 25 mph on arterial roads and from 25 mph to 20 mph on smaller, mostly residential streets. This was coupled with adding new speed limit signage to increase awareness of the new speed limits. Research by the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety (IIHS) shows that Seattle’s speed management efforts were associated with a statistically significant 17 percent drop in the odds of an injury crash downtown (less outside the city center); and on arterial roads only, there was a statistically significant 20 percent reduction in the odds of an injury crash downtown (less outside the city center).

As touched on earlier, Philadelphia updated its education strategies to be more in line with the Safe System approach. The city’s first 2017 Vision Zero Plan dedicated a section to education, which focused largely on people’s individual behavior on the streets, including traditional PR campaigns encouraging safe behavior. In its updated 2020 Plan, the “Safe People” section replaced education and included strategies to empower Philadelphians to advocate for safer streets and take community action, acknowledging the clear connection between people’s behavior and their safety options, many of which they do not control, including how roads are designed, how speeds are set and what options exist for vehicle safety.
There is no simple roadmap to fix the inequities that are part of the U.S. criminal justice system, as evidenced by trends of discriminatory traffic stops. And the question is more complex than whether enforcement is all good or all bad. In developing your community’s Vision Zero Plan with an intentional focus on equity, you have the opportunity to examine and, where needed, help right-size the role of enforcement in your work.

Following are actionable steps to analyze and adjust the role of enforcement as part of your community’s Vision Zero planning:

**Analyze and adjust the role of enforcement**

Too often, racialized enforcement, including discriminatory traffic stops and inequitable ticketing fines and fees systems, are conducted in the name of “safe streets” but do not necessarily correlate to the safety of road users. But it does not have to be this way. As Vision Zero leaders, we have an opportunity—and responsibility—to acknowledge when the status quo is inequitable and to work for change.

**Reserve regular time to share information and raise awareness of the equity impacts of roadway safety work, including enforcement**

Make time for discussions between impacted communities and Task Force members, local elected officials and administrative leaders about what works and what does not in your community’s Vision Zero approach. We suggest starting with identifying and supporting involvement of community groups and other agencies centering racial justice and sharing data with Vision Zero partners to assess whether current enforcement strategies are proving to be both effective and equitable. The USDOT is augmenting its equity efforts and is a helpful resource for Vision Zero efforts.

**Set equity commitments, including prioritizing equity in enforcement measures**

As Minneapolis’ Vision Zero Action Plan states: “Ensure that our actions support equity and do not exacerbate other existing inequities, including addressing inequities related to traffic safety enforcement.”

Tacoma’s Vision Zero Plan includes the following statement:

“In line with equity goals, this plan deprioritizes enforcement, focusing instead on actions toward building, modifying, and supporting systems that contribute to road safety in Tacoma, including street infrastructure and supportive policies...Our conception of road safety should be expanded to include the inherent danger resulting from traffic stops with armed police officers...”
Tacoma’s Plan goes on to lay out explicit strategies to support this commitment (see below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPPORTING ACTION 2</th>
<th>Prioritize enforcement of violations that have major impacts on safety rather than infractions that do not pose a safety risk.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Implementer(s):</td>
<td>Public Works, Police Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Area</td>
<td>Safe People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Metric(s):</td>
<td>1. Creation of education materials related to common driver violations that put vulnerable users in harm’s way for enforcement personnel to utilize when they witness a violation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Annual education campaign related to common driver safety violations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation Notes:</td>
<td>1. Focus enforcement, including parking enforcement, on violations that most contribute to safety issues such as speeding, red-light running, impairment, distraction, obstructing crosswalk visibility, and/or not yielding right-of-way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Deprioritize citations for infractions due to expired registration or objects hanging from mirrors or violating a signal as a pedestrian/bicyclist when there is no apparent safety risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Engage Tacoma Police in identifying areas with repeated minor traffic violations and where traffic calming measures could be warranted to achieve higher compliance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Deploy high visibility campaigns around key safety issues to raise awareness and provide education as a first step before enforcement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tacoma highlights their efforts to deprioritize enforcement actions for non-safety related violations as a supporting action. Source: Tacoma’s Vision Zero Action Plan

Increase transparency of traffic stops & searches
Incorporating comprehensive, transparent data on traffic stops as part of a Vision Zero Plan will provide communities and policymakers with vital information to support more effective and equitable safety strategies. Collecting, analyzing and sharing data on traffic stops is key to measuring whether these strategies improve safety and can illuminate any inequities in police practices. (Read recommendations based on California’s comprehensive state legislation on policing data collection: Collecting, Analyzing, and Responding to Stop Data: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement Agencies, Government, and Communities.)

One of Vision Zero’s strengths is its focus on data-driven prioritization and strategies. We should be examining enforcement data to understand what results from each strategy and who is being affected. A Philadelphia law requires the collection and publishing of data on traffic stops, including information about the demographics of the drivers and their passengers, the stated reasons for conducting the traffic stops, the time and location of the stops and the police actions taken during them. This data is intended to help the city ensure that its policy to shift enforcement away from low-level, non-dangerous traffic stops achieves its intended goals for safety and equity.
Work to eliminate traffic stops that do not directly support public safety

Many police departments make a high volume of traffic stops for low-level offenses without a clear relationship to crashes, such as minor equipment violations. These stops may be incentivized by a department’s performance metrics and/or attempts to find evidence of a serious crime for which they lack reasonable suspicion (known as a pretextual stop). Research shows that, in the U.S., the use of pretextual stops allows and encourages racial profiling. Analyses of millions of U.S. traffic stop records have shown that Black drivers are stopped more often than white drivers and that police require less suspicion to search Black drivers than they do white drivers. Analysis also shows that police officers are often trained to react with outsized aggression in traffic stops, with fatal consequences, particularly for Black people.

With increasing awareness of significant harms caused by pretextual stops, many jurisdictions are taking steps to curb traffic enforcement actions that do not increase public safety by restricting low-level stops and/or non-public safety stops for issues such as tinted windows, registration or inspection issues, rear view mirror obstruction and other minor equipment violations. Examples of other efforts across the country to right-size the role of traffic stops, in addition to Philadelphia, include the following:

- Ramsey County, MN’s analysis that a 2021 policy to reduce non-public safety stops led to more equitable traffic policing and had no discernible effect on crime rates.
- Virginia’s 2020 law banning officers from being able to pull someone over exclusively for 17 different offenses, including marijuana odor, tinted windows, items suspended in a car, expired tags, brake lights and jaywalking.
- San Francisco’s 2023 ban on nine types of stops, including broken taillights and objects hanging from the rearview mirror.

Cities and states are increasingly decriminalizing “jaywalking,” as studies show that these laws are not only ineffective at reducing pedestrian deaths, but disproportionately impact people of color and those residing in low income communities. Moreover, these laws penalize behaviors that are often symptoms of built environments with poor street design and little or no safe pedestrian accommodations. Kansas City, Virginia and other places have recently passed laws decriminalizing jaywalking, and more are moving in this direction.

Explore non-police-initiated strategies to support road safety

Cities including Brooklyn Center, MN and Berkeley, CA are exploring options to establish unarmed Traffic Safety Divisions outside of their police departments to handle traffic violations. Other strategies include creating new response approaches to non-moving violations that do not depend on police-civilian interactions. In the case of actual dangerous behaviors, such as drunk driving and speeding, approaches to addressing these problems include investing more in redesigning streets, lowering speeds, utilizing technology such as speed governors, or Intelligent Speed Assistance, and requiring alcohol ignition interlocks for repeat drunk driving offenders. (Note that these kinds of approaches are often controlled at the state level and will require state leaders to step up their safety efforts.)

Other technology (such as speed safety camera programs that are thoughtfully designed and monitored) can deter high speeds without involving police interactions. Speed cameras are shown to reduce roadway fatalities and injuries by 20 to 37 percent, according to the USDOT’s Speed Safety Camera Program Planning and Operations Guide.
However, important equity concerns about cameras persist, including: the potential for over-enforcement in predominantly low-income and/or BIPOC communities that are often burdened with high speed roadways; disproportionate financial burdens on low-income people; over-dependence on revenue generated by the programs; and lessened urgency to address speed problems in design oriented ways. Speed safety camera programs should be considered short-term strategies until longer-lasting, design-based measures are put into place. (See an example of Tacoma’s approach Vision Zero Plan.)

Explore alternatives to traffic fine and fee systems, which excessively burden low-income community members

Much evidence exists about the harmful cycles of debt and punishment created by excessive fines and fees. Vision Zero leaders must play a role in addressing regressive financial costs, which disproportionately harm low-income communities and BIPOC communities. Consider alternatives recommended by the Fines & Fees Justice Center, as well as ability-to-pay or income-based fee structures, traffic safety classes, restorative justice programs, and issuing warnings before tickets.

Where we can minimize or eliminate the need for enforcement, we should by using more upstream, preventative measures that prioritize safe roads, safe vehicle designs, safety-first policies, and leverage technology in meaningful and conscientious ways.

Helpful Resources

- Demystifying the Safe System Approach, Vision Zero Network
- The Case for Self Enforcing Streets, Transportation Alternatives
- Zero Deaths and Safe System, Federal Highway Administration, USDOT
- How to Shift to the Safe System Approach, Vision Zero Network
- The Safe Systems Pyramid: A New Framework for Traffic Safety, Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives
- Equitable Enforcement to Achieve Health Equity, Change Lab Solutions
- Redesigning Public Safety: Traffic Safety, Center for Policing Equity
- "Dismantling Law Enforcement’s Role in Traffic Safety", Livable Streets Alliance
- Taking on Traffic Laws: A How-To Guide for Decriminalizing Mobility, Safe Routes Partnership & BikeWalkKC
- Breaking the Cycle, Reevaluating Bike Laws, NACTO
- Integrating Equity into the Safe System Approach, Federal Highway Administration, USDOT

Enforcement with Empathy

“Enforcement must not have an outsized effect on low-income communities and communities of color, nor should they damage police-community relationships.

Because safe infrastructure is lacking in many low-income communities and communities of color, these communities are already unfairly burdened by the transportation system.

Strategies to integrate equity into enforcement include community policing, officer training, careful application of automated enforcement, transparency in traffic stop data, diversion programs that focus on education rather than punishment and graduated fines.”

Regional Vision Zero: Safe Streets for Metro Denver, DRCOG, p.39
Recommendation 6
Track & Share Progress of Equity Commitments

Vision Zero Plans should not only set goals, but also lay out specific actions, assign “owners” to these actions, and set clear objectives and timelines. Building accountability and transparency into the plan and making evaluation part of the ongoing work are important in general, but even more crucial in keeping equity goals and outcomes front and center in Vision Zero work.

When it comes to measuring equity in Vision Zero, we recognize a current knowledge gap exists for meaningful equity-related metrics but encourage you to develop ways to measure impact and outcomes and track progress. Embedding explicit transparency and accountability steps into your Action Plan can build trust with community members and bolster momentum toward equity commitments, especially as staff and leadership may shift over time.

And because equity-centered planning is not static in nature, a Vision Zero Plan should be considered a living document that can and should be updated regularly. We suggest instituting regular plan reviews and updates (e.g., every three to five years) to reflect cultural and political developments, emerging needs of your community and evolving best practices.

Actionable Steps for Equitable Vision Zero Planning

Develop and share robust reporting on equity work
The multi-departmental team leading Vision Zero work should develop equity-related metrics to measure and track safety outcomes for those experiencing disproportionate safety risk and share regular updates on progress and challenges.

Once your community has identified priority populations and committed to making investments in these areas, regular reporting that includes disaggregated data by demographics can be used to measure whether communities are benefitting equitably and offer transparency as to whether your set goals are progressing. We suggest building in a plan or timeline for regular reporting, such as quarterly public reports at City Council meetings or at community-based public forums.

Ongoing updates should be supplemented with a more robust annual report, highlighting actions to date to advance Vision Zero, including what is working effectively and where change or more attention is needed. Examples include NYC’s Annual Scorecards and Key Metrics & Visualizations; Austin’s Vision Zero Dashboard and list of ongoing and completed projects; and Philadelphia’s 2022 Vision Zero Annual Report.

Denver uses an in-depth tracking system to measure and communicate progress on all of its Vision Zero Action items (see image below), as well as to promote accountability for projects, programs and policies.

Denver’s tracking system highlights which infrastructure projects address the city’s High Injury Network and its Equity Index. In its Annual Report, Denver notes that, of the 337 Vision Zero safety improvements that its Department of Transportation and Infrastructure made in 2020, more than 50 percent occurred along the city’s High Injury Network and more than 40 percent of projects occurred in identified equity areas—the areas of greatest need.
Tacoma uses a similar, robust public-facing dashboard to track and communicate on its Vision Zero actions. Source: Tacoma’s Vision Zero Crash Data Dashboard
Portland, Oregon also hosts a robust public Vision Zero dashboard that reports on investments in the city’s priority areas and compares these to overall citywide investments. As Portland’s Vision Zero Plan states: “Each year, staff will update data and report on safety performance. Every two years, the Vision Zero Action Plan will undergo a comprehensive review, including an equity analysis. This review will be shared with the Portland City Council and the public.”

**Gather input from stakeholders regularly**
During and after the planning process, set up regular channels for public feedback such as gathering input at quarterly briefings to policymakers and scheduling regular check-ins with community leaders, elected officials, advocacy organizations and other stakeholders in public health and policy realms. Include input from community members and non-governmental organizations analyzing progress towards your plan’s equity-specific goals. Examples include the following advocacy organizations analyzing their cities’ work: the Denver Streets Partnership’s Progress Report Card; Boston’s Progress Report, developed by the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition; and Walk San Francisco’s district-by-district Vision Zero Report Cards.

**Develop an equity framework, or checklist, to assess strategies**
An equity or fair process tool can help shape and track the efficacy and equity of Vision Zero actions and outcomes. ChangeLab Solutions developed a Fair Process Checklist that communities can use to identify equity considerations as they plan and implement projects, programs and policies. Although not specifically tailored for Vision Zero, it can be applied to this work (see example below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Equity Implications</th>
<th>Community Engagement Strategy</th>
<th>Data Metrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Example:* Reduce vehicle speeds | Implement changes to traffic signals to support safe speeds and updated speed limits | Potential for increase in traffic citations for people living in the area | Hold community meetings in affected neighborhoods to solicit feedback, gather ideas for how the community wants compliance efforts to work, and address concerns | - Vehicle speeds  
- Traffic violations along the corridor, disaggregated by race, if possible |
| *Example:* Build safety culture | Carry out an education campaign about safe driving behaviors | Potential need for translation and interpretation of materials as well as translation services during community engagement sessions | Partner with and fund community organizations and trusted community leaders to share information and support engagement and outreach | - Number of materials used or downloaded  
- Number of meetings held |
| [Fill in a goal] | [Fill in a strategy] | [Fill in equity implications] | [Fill in community engagement strategies] | [Fill in data metrics to use] |

*ChangeLab Solutions’ Fair Process Checklist that communities can use to identify equity considerations as they plan and implement projects, programs, and policies.*
Oakland, CA has developed a framework to assess the efficacy and equity of various prospective safety strategies as part of its Safe Oakland Streets (SOS) initiative to prevent serious and fatal traffic crashes and eliminate crash inequities on Oakland’s streets (see below).

Oakland, CA’s framework helps to assess whether roadway safety strategies meet the goals of being both effective & equitable.

Incorporating equity into Vision Zero planning and implementation will take ongoing reflection, updates, and commitment to learn from what works and what does not. This includes consistent review of goals, strategies, processes and outcomes and regularly inviting community members and key stakeholders to share their input.

**Helpful Resources**

- Vision Zero Implementation Toolkit, ChangeLab Solutions (See page 40 for Fair Process Checklist)
- Guide to Developing a Vision Zero Plan Collaborative Sciences Center for Road Safety, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Evaluating Safety Improvements Equitably, FHWA
Conclusion

We know that there is no simple way to remedy historic and ongoing inequities, including those intertwined with roadway safety issues in this country. And we acknowledge that this resource is neither perfect nor enough. Our goal is to encourage positive change in places where change is long overdue, even if starting small and building up.

We hope the ideas and examples shared here are helpful to Vision Zero champions and practitioners, who are in positions to address health equity disparities in this realm. We encourage people to think critically and have conversations with others, to recognize that we have the opportunity and responsibility to do differently and, as one panelist in our webinar on this topic shared, to stretch our thinking and use “radical imagination” to connect roadway safety and health equity priorities.

At the same time, we understand that many people have been working to address health inequities far longer than most of us in the traditional traffic safety world. We must hold space to listen and learn from others, particularly people with lived experiences and local knowledge. And we must make time to do individual work to better understand the historical context of the systems in which we work and recognize our own biases and blind spots and address disparities in our field.

Because our communities are at different stages of acknowledging and acting on these issues, we will find varying degrees of support (or pushback) for aligning Vision Zero efforts with health equity priorities. In communities where strong leadership is not yet being shown, significant work is needed. Identifying and reaching out to community groups and other agencies centering health equity is an important early step. We hope that resources like this and others can serve as a base for conversation and collaboration. Most important is to start where you are and with intention and action to prioritize equitable strategies and outcomes in your roadway safety work.