



## PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION 20141103-5A

Date: November 3, 2014

Subject: Vision Zero Task Force

Motioned By:

Seconded By:

### **Recommendation**

*Creation of a Vision Zero Task Force to address traffic safety in Austin.*

### **Description of Recommendation to Council**

*Vision Zero is a campaign to develop strategies to holistically address traffic safety for all road users with the aim to achieve zero fatalities and zero serious injuries.*

### **Rationale:**

#### Summary

This memorandum recommends that City Council establish a Task Force to provide recommendations on creating a Vision Zero initiative in Austin. Vision Zero sets the goal of eliminating deaths and serious injuries on Austin's roads through a comprehensive approach that includes design, enforcement, education, and evaluation. A Vision Zero initiative supports and builds on Imagine Austin and the Complete Streets policy. It also creates a framework for the recommendations in the City's 2012 Traffic Fatality Report, which called for a Consolidated Mobility Safety Plan to reduce traffic-related deaths.

A Council-created Task Force should research and consider traffic fatality and injury data, current safety initiatives, and national and international best practices to devise a traffic safety strategy with the goal of reducing traffic fatalities and serious injuries in Austin to the only acceptable number: zero.

#### Persistent problem despite existing initiatives

Despite safety improvements for users of motor vehicles, traffic injuries and deaths remain a persistent problem. In the decade from 2004 through 2013, 634 people were killed in Austin traffic. Even as vehicles have gotten safer for their occupants, traffic injuries and deaths have increased for people outside the protection afforded by safer vehicles. Increased risk of injury or death for people walking is a frightening national trend - across the US, pedestrians accounted for 14 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2012, up from 11 percent in 2007 - and is especially severe in Austin where pedestrians make up around a third of all traffic fatalities. In 2012, Austin ranked seventh in the number of pedestrians killed in U.S. cities with populations over 500,000, with a fatality rate of 2.97 pedestrians killed per 100,000 residents (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).

These traffic deaths have not gone unnoticed: in addition to the recently adopted Complete Streets policy, the city has passed several ordinances that address traffic safety, including a no texting law, a distracted driving law, and a 3' passing law. The City has a Safe Routes to School program focused on making it safe for children to walk and bike to school; a "Safe Walk Safe Bike" initiative; and is currently preparing a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan. The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) calls for an annual active transportation safety summit. The Austin Walkability Summit is similarly focused on legal rights and enforcement to increase safety of people who walk in Austin. Following the 2014 SXSW drunken driving rampage that killed four people and injured almost two dozen, Police Chief Acevedo called for a Traffic Safety Symposium. These laws and initiatives aim in the right direction but, as the 2012 Traffic Fatality Report identifies, a more comprehensive approach coordinating these individual efforts is needed.

### Vision for the future

Imagine Austin envisions an Austin that is more walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly. It calls for a well-connected and safe transportation network that provides an array of options for the needs and capabilities of the diversity of Austinites as well as supporting complete communities across the city.

The recently adopted Complete Streets Policy moves the city closer to Imagine Austin's vision, calling for a transportation network that expands safe and convenient mobility choices. This policy specifically cites safety as a fundamental component for arriving at complete streets and for encouraging people to make active transportation choices. A policy for zero deaths and serious injuries sets a target for safety efforts and changes the focus to safety as the first and foremost consideration in our transportation network.

Achieving zero deaths or serious injuries will be a challenge, although the holistic approach titled Vision Zero has proven effective internationally and nationally at leading to impressive gains in safety. It started in Sweden in 1997, has been adopted in cities throughout Europe, and has begun to take hold in the United States. In Sweden road deaths have been reduced by half since 2000 (The Economist, Feb. 2014). At its core, Vision Zero holds that there is no acceptable number of traffic-related deaths or serious injuries. Importantly, it acknowledges that people will make mistakes and works towards preventing those mistakes from being fatal.

Vision Zero is effective at improving traffic safety because of its multifaceted approach. The responsibility for safety begins with the design, operation, and use of roads. If road users aren't obeying rules or if injuries occur, the system needs to be engineered in such a way that compliance with safety becomes the easiest option. Vision Zero works toward zero deaths and serious injuries through data-driven approach that identifies how collisions occur, which informs how safe facilities for all users should be designed, how to more effectively enforce dangerous behavior, and how to best educate all road users. Outcomes of these efforts are monitored and evaluated over time to best target the causes of serious injuries and death.

### Vision Zero creates a goal to work toward and connects existing efforts

A focus on safety is aligned with existing initiatives, as well as supporting other goals, such as complete, people-friendly streets that provide mobility and a sense of place. Vision Zero is a multi-disciplinary, multi-pronged approach with a focus on safety as the primary objective of transportation systems.

Comparable cities have implemented policies that reduce traffic fatality and serious injury rates more effectively than Austin by incorporating Vision Zero initiatives. Austin has a history of developing long-term goals as bold as zero traffic deaths: Zero Waste and No-Kill policies in animal shelters are multi-faceted approaches working toward goals that once seemed impossible. Vision Zero similarly provides a strong, unifying goal that connects existing traffic safety efforts and encourages better coordination between departments and more efficient, targeted use of resources.

### Create a Vision Zero Task Force

The Pedestrian Advisory Council recommends that City Council establish a Task Force to explore safety issues, national and international best practices, and to develop recommendations for a comprehensive initiative to prevent all deaths and serious injuries on Austin's roads. This study group should represent the diverse array of stakeholders affected by such a zero-deaths initiative and has the support of the following groups, boards, and commissions:

### Recommended groups to participate in Vision Zero Task Force

The Pedestrian Advisory Council believes pedestrians, bicyclists, children, the elderly, transit riders, drivers, and multiple agencies and departments are necessary to achieve the diverse expertise necessary to comprehensively address safety.

The Pedestrian Advisory Council recommends the following groups as potential participants in the Vision Zero Task Force:

- Pedestrian Advisory Council
- WalkAustin
- AARP
- ADA Access and Sidewalk Task Force
- Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities
- ADAPT
- Bike Austin
- Bicycle Advisory Council
- Crossroads Coalition
- ATX Safer Streets
- Urban Transportation Commission
- Police Department
- Fire Department

- Planning and Development Review Department
- Transportation Department
- Public Works Department
- Health and Human Services Department
- Capital Metro
- Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Federal Highway Administration, Austin District
- Texas Transportation Institute
- University of Texas Center for Transportation Research

Sources

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/02/economist-explains-16>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811888.pdf>.

**Vote**

For:

Against:

Abstain:

Absent:

Attest: *[Staff or board member can sign]*

---