

This is my personal response to Vision Zero's draft report.

http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Imagine_Austin/VisionZero/DRAFTAction_Plan_Layout1.14.16.pdf

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At the end of December the City Manager re-assigned the management of the Zero Vision process from Planning to Transportation. An outside observer might suggest that the City bureaucracy's "Turfs and Silos" game was the driving the agenda, not one focused on reducing the number of fatal and serious injury traffic incidents. (In 2015 Austin recorded 102 fatalities.)

The Vision Zero Task Force has been run since its inception a year ago by the City's Planning Department, with the Department of Transportation constantly in the background having a temper tantrum because it was not given this responsibility, trying to hijack and undermine the committee's process by insisting that it control any discussion or recommendation that might be on its turf. (Examples: Reevaluation of all posted speed limits, most especially in neighborhoods. Queries regarding the department's justification for directing its engineering and construction resources to improve intersection safety at three intersections that are statistically much lower in risk than many other intersections in the City.)

So it appears that Transportation controlled the draft.

The Vision Zero Task Force was not given an opportunity to make comments on the draft before it was locked up to be presented to COA committees and commissions and to the media.

The draft was not sent to members of either the Task Force or the Public Safety Commission, but rather it was buried in the City's web site.

Transportation apparently kept out of the draft as a critical recommendation to immediately change the conversation so that focus is not primarily on high speed roadways such as IH-35, but make equally important neighborhood and secondary streets, with recognition of the risks on these streets to pedestrians, bicyclists, and children at play. We know that speeds over 30 miles-per-hour are especially dangerous for people walking or biking. Nine out of ten healthy adults hit by a vehicle traveling 20 mph will survive, but at just 40 mph, those odds are reversed. This means the speeds on most Austin roads are potentially deadly to people walking and biking. Dangerous driver behaviors account for 90% of deaths and incapacitating injuries between 2010-14. Speed is a factor called out in the contributing factors in police reports, but even when vehicle speed isn't what is reported as a contributing factor, it is ultimately what determines whether someone survives or dies: improper maneuvers, distracted driving, etc. simply aren't deadly at low speed. And from p. 26 of draft plan: Research clearly links higher speeds to increased crash occurrence and severity of crashes. Higher speed increases stopping distance, making it harder to avoid a crash and increasing the severity of crashes. At higher speeds, a driver's field of vision is effectively narrowed, inhibiting their ability to see and react to potential hazards. Even when speed is not a cause of a crash, it is the key variable influencing the severity

of injuries and damage. The Institute of Transport Economics advises that “if government wants to develop a road transport system in which nobody is killed or permanently injured, speed is the most important factor to regulate”.

Transportation put into the draft lots of distracting flim flam and background charts and verbiage, dumping in a kitchen sink of recommendations, many of which most obviously have no nexus to the goal of reducing fatal and serious injury traffic incidents. It is a list of just about every possibility generated, many reflecting excellent “out of the box” thinking that went onto bulletin boards during Task Force discussions, knowing that all could not be a priority or were not realistic. The draft begins with “collecting robust data and analyzing and sharing that data”, which is what the Task Force has been doing for the past year.

Transportation put in as a recommendation “Seek funding to establish a dedicated Traffic Safety Engineering team with the financial resources (enhanced analytical capabilities, infrastructure improvements, operational strategies, etc.) to work on safety engineering projects”. Hasn’t that been the primary mission of Transportation, so why does it need more resources? Transportation attempts additional money grabs when it makes as high priorities: “Additional staff, design, and construction funding will be necessary” and “Seek funding to establish a dedicated Traffic Safety Engineering team with the financial resources (enhanced analytical capabilities, infrastructure improvements, operational strategies, etc.) to work on safety engineering projects toward the Vision Zero goal. This team should include a minimum of 3 engineers and 3 technologists. Implement at least 5 major safety improvement projects per year. Include safety as the priority in every transportation project sponsored/ managed by the City”

What the draft does NOT do: Focus on a few critical, simply stated recommendations that would begin to have an **immediate** impact on reducing traffic related fatality and serious injury incidents.

In my opinion, these five should be:

- 1) Increased enforcement on both high speed and neighborhood roadways, along with more aggressive prosecution of offenders, must be the most important recommendation. Because of APD’s shortage of officers, this will require funding for sufficient overtime for APD.
- 2) Equal emphasis between high speed roadways and secondary streets, most important being neighborhood streets, with immediate reevaluation of all posted speed limits, most especially in neighborhoods.
- 3) The Department of Transportation justifying to the Vision Zero Task its use of resources so they are in fact directed where they will have the most immediate impact, with appropriate emphasis given to pedestrian safety devices such as Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons.
- 4) Continuation of the Vision Zero Task Force with management of the process returned for obvious reasons to the Planning Department.

- 5) Since a very large percentage of fatal accidents involve unlicensed/uninsured drivers, whenever a car is stopped for any reason, and the driver is unlicensed and uninsured, the car must be impounded. (See chart below)

In addition, the draft must be clearly and succinctly re-written with significantly fewer “recommendations”, leaving a manageable few ranked by level of impact opportunity and that have very specific nexus to the goal of significantly reducing traffic related fatal and serious injury incidents. It could easily have at least half its current number of pages. (Unlike high school, the number of pages don’t yield a higher grade.) As it is currently written, the report is the kind that goes on a shelf and is quickly forgotten, which unfortunately is perhaps the real goal in the City’s “Turfs and Silos” game.

Calendar Year 2015

Count of Citation	Collision		Grand Total
	N	Y	
Charge Description			
NO DRIVERS LICENSE	10,233	2,106	12,339
FAILED TO MAINTAIN FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	8,831	1,573	10,404
DRIVING WHILE LICENSE INVALID - SUSPENDED	3,433	450	3,883
EXPIRED DRIVER LICENSE - OPERATOR (NON-COMMERCIAL)	1,027	151	1,178
FAILED TO OBTAIN TX DRIVERS LICENSE	798	81	879
FAILED TO MAINTAIN FINANCIAL RESP 2ND CONV	369	41	410
NO DRIVER LICENSE - MOTORCYCLE	132	17	149
NO DRIVER LICENSE 2ND OFFENSE	128	17	145
ALLOW UNLICENSED DRIVER TO DRIVE	21	8	29
DRIVING WHILE LICENSE INVALID - PROHIBITION ORDER	19	2	21
PERMITTING UNAUTHORIZED PERSON TO DRIVE	10	3	13
NO DRIVERS LICENSE 2ND OFFENSE	8	1	9
ALLOW UNLIC DRIVER - NOT CHILD/WARD	6	1	7
Grand Total	25,015	4,451	29,466