

Portland Lays Out Plan to Eliminate Traffic Deaths

BY JOSH COHEN | DECEMBER 12, 2016



A bicyclist and traffic navigate through downtown as the first winter storm of the season hits Portland on Dec. 8. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)

It's been a bad year for traffic deaths in Portland. Just last week, in separate incidents on the same night, drivers hit and killed two people walking on SE Division Street, a busy arterial. Their deaths bring the Oregon city's 2016 traffic fatality total to 40, the most for Portland since 2003 and slightly more than the 20-year average of 36 annual traffic fatalities.

Portland hopes to get that number of traffic deaths to zero by 2025. In June 2015, the city adopted a **"Vision Zero" resolution**, but did so without a specific plan for accomplishing the goal. Nearly 18 months later, the Portland Bureau of Transportation has released a **Vision Zero Action Plan**. Adopted unanimously by the city council on Dec. 2, the plan lays out short-term and long-term engineering, education, and enforcement goals.

It was created with input from a task force and advisory committee. The task force members

represented PBOT, the Oregon Department of Transportation, police and fire departments, the auto and trucking industries, EMTs, low-income advocates, accessibility advocates, an African-American community group, an Asian-Pacific Islander community group, elderly advocates and more.

“In some ways this was a very bottom-up process We took some criticism for taking a year [to produce the action plan], but it’s going to be that much stronger,” says Rob Sadowsky, executive director of the Bicycle Transportation Alliance and a member of PBOT’s Vision Zero task force.

The action plan maps out a “high crash network” of the most dangerous streets in Portland (according to the plan, 57 percent of deadly crashes occur on just 8 percent of streets) and establishes 32 items for the city to implement over the next two to five years. They include plans for infrastructure and design changes, curbing impaired driving, stopping speeders, and improving education and outreach. It also includes metrics by which to measure their progress on everything.

The plan says, “Streets should discourage dangerous driving by design. The safest streets slow down traffic, provide separation between modes, and provide visual cues that make it clear that people using different modes share the space.” It sets a goal of building capital safety improvements on two segments and five intersections of the high crash network each year for the next two years.

PBOT also intends to create a targeted DUI enforcement program in the city’s “entertainment district” by working with on-demand transportation services, public transit and bar owners. They’re also going to start allowing pre-payment for morning parking meters in certain neighborhoods to encourage people to leave their cars in place after going out.

To curb speeding and dangerous driving, they’ll implement a speed camera pilot program on four high-crash corridors and expand the city’s red light camera program.

Sadowsky says he is perhaps most excited about how the action plan addresses racial equity. “We were able to put together a really diverse group of people including communities that had never been at the table around transportation before.”

Equity-minded safer streets advocates **have criticized** Vision Zero’s emphasis on traffic enforcement because people of color get stopped by police at **disproportionate rates** to white people (a problem **prevalent in Portland**). And, as the high-profile deaths of Philando Castile, Walter Scott, Terence Crutcher and many others illustrate, those traffic stops can escalate in fatal ways. So there is concern that Vision Zero traffic enforcement could have unintended consequences in communities of color.

But, at least on paper, PBOT is taking steps to address the issue. The plan states that 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.”

Communities of concern is the term regional transit provider TriMet uses to identify areas of the city

with high rates of the aforementioned characteristics.

The plan continues to say that PBOT will, “prioritize filling gaps in infrastructure where those gaps contribute to fatalities and serious injuries, or limit the transportation options of communities of concern” and that it will, “not result in racial profiling.”

Sadowsky says concerns about enforcement are part of the reason the plan calls for using speed cameras instead of increasing the number of officers patrolling for speeders.

“We need to do more on enforcement. But, the first step is to deal with police brutality and profiling. Then we can deal with issue of enforcement,” he explains.

Of course police reform is difficult and beyond the scope of PBOT’s plan. Sadowsky says, “Changing police is not an easy one, two, three solution. But [the police department] came to the table. They listened. They committed to the group that they’re interested and willing to work on these issues.”

As is often the case, laying out the plan and finding ways to pay for it remain two separate things for PBOT. They have some funding in place, but not enough to pay for everything. In fact, several of the near-term items in the plan are about finding sustainable funding sources for Vision Zero.

In the meantime, the city plans to use a portion of its gas tax revenue. And thanks to a successful amendment from Portland Commissioner Amanda Fritz, some of the city’s recreational marijuana tax revenue will go toward funding Vision Zero initiatives.

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Sacramento Wants Developers to Help Fund Transportation Projects

BY [KELSEY E. THOMAS](#) | DECEMBER 9, 2016



A storm passes over the state Capitol in Sacramento, Calif.. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

Sacramento expects to add up to 68,000 houses and apartments over the next two decades. While the city has been encouraging increased density and growth, especially downtown, some city officials worry the streets aren't ready handle the influx of new traffic. To help prevent increasingly clogged streets, city leaders say they plan to impose a "transportation impact" fee on most new construction to help fund biking and pedestrian infrastructure and expand streets, the *Sacramento Bee* [reports](#). The idea is for developers — and, to an extent, those renting or buying new units — to help pay for increased transportation infrastructure.

The city is still nailing down amounts that would provide enough funding but wouldn't overburden developers. Builders will likely pay between a few hundred dollars to more than \$2,000 per residence, depending on its location and other factors. The fee could produce about \$3 million a year, which could then be used as "local match" funds to help the city compete for federal and state transportation grants worth five times that amount. The fee amounts would also be lower in areas where the city is trying to encourage more housing, such as the center of downtown and within a half-mile of light-rail stations, as well as areas where housing is more difficult to build, such as south Sacramento.

City officials also named 20 road projects the proposed fees would help fund, including a new bridge for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit and cars over the American River and more walking and biking infrastructure for downtown.

The city has been hurting for transportation funds in recent years, in part from declining gas taxes as vehicles get better mileage and as electric power grows in popularity. The city also **failed to pass Measure B**, which would have provided an estimated \$3.6 billion over 30 years for light-rail expansion, new bus rapid transit and other road projects.

Representatives from a local building association warned that too high of fees could make some products financially unfeasible.

“I understand the need for the fee,” says developer Kevin Smith, “but it is a bit of a hard pill to swallow for an infill development working to put people close to bus lanes, streetcars, bike lanes. It all ends up: ‘Where is the line?’”

Some city officials, however, say the fee doesn’t go far enough, and that the city still needs a broader sales tax to fund transportation. Downtown Councilman Steve Hansen told the *Sacramento Bee* that the developer fee “will make some intersections better and bring some safety improvements for bike and pedestrians. But this is not a solution for a region’s (transportation) needs.”

City Council will vote on the fee in late January or February.

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