In New York, we are finally hearing the voices of a few brave politicians talking about “breaking the car culture.”

The arrival of such language, and the laws and policies that have followed, are not a coincidence. The shift arrives thanks to decades of advocacy work, and at a moment of local and national crisis.

Since 2009, according to the Centers for Disease Control, pedestrian fatalities have been rising across America. Today, people are killed walking at a rate not seen in 20 years. In our cities, the crisis is most severe.

This escalation occurs amidst a global epidemic. In 2018, the World Health Organization reported 1.35 million people around the world died in motor vehicle crashes, 36,750 of whom were in the United States. As you know too well, these are not just numbers, they are people—children, parents, friends—trying to live in places that continue to prioritize inanimate objects over human life.

When you embarked on the path to Vision Zero in your city, you made a commitment to put people ahead of cars. That is a hopeful, powerful act. Whether you are just starting out, or years into this work, the lessons on these pages are applicable to every Vision Zero community.

In the fourth edition of the *Vision Zero Cities Journal* you'll find, among other things, practical advice about working with victims’ families in the aftermath of traffic crashes, adapting Vision Zero to small and mid-sized cities, and advocating for traffic safety without losing your audience. With research and new ideas from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and cities across the U.S., there is much here to inspire, to learn from, and to bring home to your city.

While the research is promising, you cannot resolve a global epidemic in a journal. The real work needs to happen in your city and on your streets. Whether you are an elected official, civil servant, urban planner, community leader, or safe streets advocate, you have the power to get your city to Vision Zero.

Our loved ones deserve it. Our neighbors deserve it. Our cities deserve it. And, they deserve it now.

---

**ABOUT**

**Danny Harris** is the Executive Director of Transportation Alternatives. He is a passionate advocate for livable, walkable, and bikeable cities, and a traffic crash survivor. Previously, he served as Senior Vice President at Civic Entertainment Group and Program Director, San Jose, with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. A native of New York City, he lives in Manhattan with his wife and two children.
Together for Safer Roads supported paid internships for local high school students so they could affect lifesaving change on Hillcroft Avenue in Houston’s Gulfton neighborhood.
Imagine cities making safety fixes before crashes pile up, reinventing the way people use micro-transit, or giving truck operators data about nearby pedestrians and bike riders. On the large scale, these innovations could have infinite potential to accelerate the work of Vision Zero. We can make this the new normal.

In late 2014, a coalition of business leaders united to make the private sector an active participant in solving the epidemic of traffic violence, with a data-driven approach to business and an operational philosophy of continuous improvement. The social business coalition they launched is Together for Safer Roads (TSR).

You are invited to work with TSR. Our capacity for project management, technical expertise, and innovation is here to serve your Vision Zero city in three program areas: Safer Cities; Safer Companies and Fleets; and Data and Digital Innovation. We learn by doing, adapting private sector approaches to benefit the bottom-line and the public.

Take Houston, for example: a dynamic city of 2.3 million with the deadliest roads in America, where over 600 people die in traffic every year. There we are helping Mayor Sylvester Turner, Houston Public Works, Rice University, and local leaders like Connect Community to fix a dangerous street in one of the most underserved neighborhoods in the city. This work is driven by the community with the support of TSR member businesses. Our investment is being matched by Mayor Turner many times over, and the momentum behind this public-private partnership helped convince him to commit to Vision Zero.

TSR recently announced our latest initiative, the Global Leadership Council for Fleet Safety, where public and private sector fleets lead Vision Zero by example. Our members directly manage more than 600,000 fleet vehicles globally—like Anheuser-Busch and AT&T—and are leaders in reducing risk and improving driver behavior—like AIG, CalAmp, and Geotab. Working with our members and Vision Zero leaders, like the City of New York and its fleet, we help build safety cultures, internalize the preventable nature of traffic deaths, make lifesaving technologies standard, and reach a Vision Zero standard of safety.

TSR supports Vision Zero Cities because we are inspired by the movement. Find us to learn about this work and our data and technology initiatives, like our work in Bellevue, Washington, where we’re using artificial intelligence to predict crashes and accelerate progress towards Vision Zero. We often describe TSR as a “do-tank.” We want to learn from collective experience, and together, go from next steps to giant leaps.


ABOUT

As president of Together for Safer Roads, David Braunstein oversees the organization’s strategic direction on behalf of TSR’s Governing Board and membership. He has a distinguished career in business development and is known for breaking new ground using “connected” analytics driven by emerging technologies. Noah Budnick is TSR’s Senior Director of Programs and Operations, where he manages the day-to-day work of the Safer Cities and Safer Companies and Fleets programs. He has worked in the public and private sectors to make transportation safe, environmentally friendly, and fun, and helped introduce Vision Zero to the U.S.

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Editor in Chief: Jessie Singer

Assistant Editor: Ashley Kawakami
Proofreaders: Joe Cutrufo & Ellen McDermott
Designer: Sarah Lang

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Demonstrators block a dangerous intersection in Queens, New York, in 1959. Rush-hour pickets continued intermittently for weeks, until authorities promised (and eventually installed) a traffic light.

After a coal truck killed two ten-year-old girls in East Harlem in 1949, mothers blocked the street at two points. The Daily News dubbed this demonstration a “baby carriage blockade.” There were many similar blockades in the 1950s and 1960s.
PETER NORTON

The Baby Carriage Blockades

The Netherlands is a model for street safety innovation born of public protests called Stop de Kindermoord. Peter Norton reveals the history of an analogous U.S. social movement: the baby carriage blockades.
On July 11 and 12, 1953, local mothers and children blocked an intersection in Philadelphia, demanding stop signs for safety. Stop signs were installed on July 13.

Stop de Kindermoord in the Netherlands: demonstrators block a dangerous intersection in Amsterdam, October 31, 1972.
Among advocates of safe, sustainable, and bike-friendly mobility, the Netherlands has long been the success story to point to. But in English-speaking countries, and especially in the car-dominated United States, how useful is the Netherlands as an example to emulate? The question has been divisive.

For a long time, a common notion got in the way: the assumption that the Netherlands must have an enlightened government that has always favored cycling. In countries lacking this advantage, of what use could the Dutch case be?

Then in 2011, articles in English began circulating about a mass movement in the Netherlands in the 1970s. As it happened, Dutch people had to force their reluctant government to become more bike-friendly. In fact, these articles explained, officialdom had long favored motor vehicles at the expense of other street users. Dutch cities circa 1970 were much more car-friendly than they are today—and much more dangerous, especially for cyclists, pedestrians, and above all, children. Government policy was not enlightened, and did not change of its own accord. Change required a mass movement, including protests and demonstrations.

Stop de Kindermoord

The movement took its name from an editorial written in 1972 by a distraught journalist whose six-year-old daughter was killed while riding her bicycle to school. He called for a new activist group to be called Stop de Kindermoord (Stop the Child Killing). The name became a slogan and a label for a diverse and growing movement.

The belated proliferation of articles in English about the movement finally set aside a frequent objection to the Dutch example. To “we’re not Amsterdam,” there was a new rejoinder: “Amsterdam wasn’t always Amsterdam.” Achieving safer, more sustainable, and less car-dependent mobility does not require an enlightened government. The Dutch people proved it.

But the Dutch example remains divisive.

Why? It seems that other notions have taken the place of the old “enlightened government” assumption. In particular—a common objection runs—the U.S. has no comparable history of popular opposition to automobile supremacy. There have always been critics, but after World War II they were confined to a social elite. There had been substantial popular opposition to car domination in cities in the 1920s, and there was criticism among urban elites in the 1950s and 1960s. But in the postwar U.S. there was—supposedly—nothing like Stop de Kindermoord: popular, collective, and vocal opposition to car domination that included street demonstrations and that cut across class lines. Most Americans were enthusiastic about cars; among those who were not, the preeminence of cars was generally accepted. There was little or no popular advocacy for pedestrian or child safety at drivers’ expense.

Such notions come easily to mind. Americans have grown up with versions of the “car culture” thesis: that Americans like and prefer cars, and that this preference is the biggest factor in the extent of car domination in the U.S. Maybe clever marketing and interest group lobbying has something to do with this, the thesis concedes, and maybe the preference is not rational, but Americans still prefer cars, even in settings that are poorly suited to them, and even to the point of putting up with their high financial, social, environmental, and safety costs. The car culture thesis, also known as “America’s love affair with the automobile,” has endured in part because it is half true. Most people like cars and want to own one. But the preference is not absolute: where the alternatives are good, they’re often popular.

ABOUT

Peter Norton is a professor in the Department of Engineering and Society at the University of Virginia and the author of “Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City.”
And the “love affair” thesis has also endured because motordom developed it, nurtured it, and continues to promote it.

**America’s Car Culture**

In the U.S., car culture’s apogee was in the 1950s and 1960s—decades when most American families had a car, but before ecological values and energy constraints complicated the picture. It was during these decades when the car looked most like the future of urban mobility, and when American influence on other nations’ mobility policies, direct and indirect, was at its height. But even in 1970, driving was far from universal. One in five U.S. households had no car; among the 10.7 million households in which the family income was less than $3,000 a year, 63 percent did not have one. About 56 percent of all licensed drivers were men, and 73 percent of all miles driven were driven by men. White people made 52 percent of their trips as car drivers, but only 37 percent of trips by people of color were as drivers. Among American school children in 1970, 42 percent walked or bicycled, compared to 38 percent who rode a school bus and 16 percent who were driven to school. Car culture, even at its height, cannot offer a complete account of American mobility. Given such disparities in automobility, policies favoring drivers must have been controversial, especially among women and people of color, since they drove less. Their criticisms, however, are absent from the popular “car culture” histories and the museum exhibits, and practically absent from academic articles as well. But all over America in the 1950s and 1960s, residents, particularly women, organized demonstrations against car traffic. Their street protests often closely resembled the Dutch *Stop de Kindermoord* protests of the 1970s. Demonstrators demanded slower driving, usually seeking stop signs, traffic lights, or crossing guards to help. Though most such demonstrations were in dense residential districts of large cities, many occurred in small cities, suburbs, and towns. Though white women predominated in most such demonstrations, black and Hispanic people organized some, and participated in many. Men often participated too, though generally as a small minority of the total. Many of these demonstrations, and particularly the biggest ones, were triggered by the injury or death of a child. Against any tendency to blame the parents, demonstrators consistently demanded streets that local children could use safely. And while the demonstrations were nearly always nonviolent, they were vocal and insistent, and sometimes confrontational. They included some degree of traffic obstruction, and sometimes even full blockades that barred all motor vehicles. Women bearing signs picketed streets and intersections or set up folding chairs across the breadth of streets and sat in them. Children often participated. A mainstay of the demonstrations was baby carriages, occupied or not, which rhetorically associated the demonstrations with motherhood and with the safety of children. The technique was common enough to lead some newspapers to give such demonstrations a name: “baby carriage blockades.”

**The Baby Carriage Blockades**

Beginning in 1914, New York City designated some streets as “play streets,” where children could roam freely. These were cordoned off to motor traffic, but trucks were permitted in to make local deliveries. On Valentine’s Day 1949, a truck driver drove his coal truck into a play street in largely Hispanic East Harlem to make an early afternoon delivery. Two girls, Carmelita Rodriguez and Maria Rodriguez (unrelated), both ten years old, were on their lunch hour from Public School 121. They strode out of a store with the candy they had just purchased, confident in the safety of the play street. The truck driver struck them with his vehicle, killing them both. The next day, local residents formed a “parent and baby-carriage blockade,” stopping and turning back all delivery vehicles. According to a reporter, 100 women participated to protect the children. New York *Daily News* photos show a diverse
population of protesters. Speaking for the blockaders, Mary di Stefano, president of the Parents’ Association of P.S. 121, told the press: “They’ll have to kill us to get through here.” On the following day, parents set up a second picket one block north. The demonstrators extracted a concession: the city would close the play street to delivery vehicles on weekdays at the hours when children were walking to and from school, including the lunch hour.⁷

This 1949 demonstration was not the first of its kind, but it appears to have been the first to be dubbed a “baby carriage blockade.” It bears much in common with typical traffic safety demonstrations of its era: most of the participants were women, in the company of their children. Their demand was primarily a plea for child safety, but without depriving children of their use of the streets. The demonstrators did not object to cars’ pre-eminence in their city; they merely wished to keep residential streets safe. They did not demand playgrounds so that children would not need streets; they demanded streets safe for children.

Demonstrations like this one were common in the 1950s and 60s, but gradually declined in frequency and scale thereafter. The decline coincided with suburbanization, a falling birthrate, and smaller families, but it also signaled the ascendancy of the now-preferred path to child traffic safety: the two-car family, the fenced playground, parental chauffeuring of children, a surrender to car dependency regardless of the costs or family income, and the abandonment of children’s independent mobility. Where streets were unsafe for children, the problem became the mother’s responsibility, and an injury or a death was seen as the mother’s fault.

When they were common, the protests remained isolated local affairs, with no national cohesion. Press interest was local only. But the era of the baby carriage blockades is a reminder that Americans of all classes resisted cars’ predominance and did so in decades we now recall as the height of car culture. These persistent and vocal protests give us cause to doubt that the Stop de Kindermoord movement in the Netherlands is too alien from the American experience to serve as a useful model. Indeed, Americans were engaging in Stop de Kindermoord demonstrations of their own long before the Dutch movement of that name.⁸

The U.S. and the Netherlands are unmistakably distinct cases. But we need not let exaggeration of the differences, influenced by motordom’s version of America’s car history, prevent us from learning from the Dutch example. Mark Wagenbuur of the blog Bicycle Dutch was one of the sources of the rediscovery of Stop de Kindermoord among English speakers. In his 2011 blog post and video about the Dutch movement, Wagenbuur concluded: “the Netherlands’ problems were and are not unique, their solutions shouldn’t be that either.”⁹

CITATIONS


3 Lloyd Alter, “When It Comes to Cycling, Amsterdam Wasn’t Always Amsterdam,” TreeHugger, May 29, 2015; Alter quotes Cycling Professor (Marco te Brömmelstroet): “The argument that your city is not like Amsterdam is invalid. Neither was Amsterdam; it took long, radical effort” (May 26, 2015).

4 Federal Highway Administration’s Nationwide Personal Transportation Study, reports 4, 6, 8, and 9 (1972-73).

5 Norton, “Persistent Pedestrianism: Urban Walking in Motor Age America, 1920s - 1960s,” Urban History (forthcoming; will review several such demonstrations).


8 Though of course the Dutch, too, had struggled against car domination long before the 1970s. Cycling Cities series, published by the Foundation for the History of Technology (Eindhoven).

Keep your safety for the streetcar riders.

“Bicycle tires getting stuck in the streetcar tracks is a common occurrence.”

#FixIt

We deserve safe streets.

No more streetcar deaths.

#StreetcarRageFillsers

My son did not have to die!

Safety now!
In the five years since its U.S. introduction, the fight for Vision Zero has shifted as much as it has stayed the course. As results diverge across the country, Vision Zero Network Executive Director Leah Shahum investigates the state of America’s fight for Vision Zero in 2019.
Yo, no need for speed.
Vision Zero in the United States is growing up and, not unexpectedly, is experiencing some growing pains. While it is not surprising that the new-to-the-U.S. approach has displayed a mix of both advances and setbacks, an analysis of the movement so far shows that the long-term viability of Vision Zero depends on big, bold changes in thinking and action—and soon. Nationally, after a decades-long decline, traffic fatalities are on the rise. Much of this deadly growth is seen in cities and is borne on the backs of people walking and biking.

A few years in, early-adopting Vision Zero cities, including New York, San Francisco, and San Antonio, are running into challenges. Having moved through much of the “low-hanging fruit” strategies and street redesigns, these cities are now confronting tougher, more meaningful changes that challenge the status quo more directly. The conversation is shifting to politically thorny issues like the necessity of removing parking or altering driving expediency to save lives. How these cities decide to proceed will make all the difference.

**The State of Speed**

Chief among these shifts in the status quo are debates about how to reconfigure limited resources, the math of divvying up the street, and the challenge of long-time disinvestment in neighborhoods that have historically lacked political clout or connections. The challenges facing early-adopting Vision Zero cities also go beyond the local; many cities are campaigning to win state approval to reduce speed limits, use automated speed enforcement, and redesign streets to encourage slower, safer speeds. These campaigns—in which cities need to ask permission of state leaders to make conditions safer on the local level—are an apt example of the time-consuming and often thorny nature of meaningful Vision Zero transformation. These are not quick-and-easy changes, but they are essential.

Unfortunately, it is precisely at the state level that some Vision Zero cities are losing ground. The Texas Legislature recently repealed the use of red-light enforcement cameras, despite clear and overwhelming evidence of their effectiveness, and raised speed limits to as high as 85 mph, despite similarly clear and overwhelming evidence of the dangers that will bring. There are brighter spots in the local efforts of Austin, Texas, which aims to defy the statewide policy trends by developing and funding its own robust speed management program, including traffic calming measures and dynamic signage.

Many early-adopting Vision Zero cities are using state-level policymaking to their advantage. For instance, in early 2017, Boston and other Vision Zero cities in Massachusetts successfully won approval from their state legislature to lower default city speed limits from 30 mph to 25 mph. Recent studies show these lower speed limits are encouraging slower, safer travel by drivers. In 2016, state-level Vision Zero efforts in Seattle, Washington successfully lowered speed limits in the central city from 30 mph to 25 mph, and in residential areas from 25 mph to 20 mph. In 2018, Portland, Oregon went through the state legislature to reduce the speed limit to 20 mph on all residential streets, which make up 70 percent of the city’s streets. And within the past few years, both cities have emphasized the proven effectiveness of speed cameras, with Seattle expanding its program and Portland launching a new one.

It is no coincidence that all these efforts are focused on speed. Studies show speed is the most significant factor in fatal traffic crashes, and cities like New York that have lowered their speed limits are among the few that are...
seeing significant reductions in traffic fatalities. Outside the state level, cities as diverse as Fort Lauderdale, Charlotte, and Philadelphia are doing what they can locally toward speed management efforts as part of their Vision Zero commitments, including road design changes, lowering speed limits, and strengthening the case for using safety cameras to manage speed. These cities recognize that they will not be successful reaching zero without managing speed for safety.

This concern with speed management is trickling upward from cities to the federal government. As transportation professionals increasingly recognize that long-held standards for setting speed limits on U.S. roads—dating back to the 1940s and largely based on rural driving conditions—are outdated and counterproductive to safety goals, we are seeing stepped-up national leadership on the critical issue of speed management. This year, the Federal Highway Administration is expected to consider a strong recommendation from its advisory group to modify the U.S. Department of Transportation’s technical design manual, updating the much-maligned 85 percent speed setting standard to consider other road users, such as those walking and biking, as well as land-use and crash history. We can only hope that states will follow suit.

Vision Zero 2.0
Where do we go from here? As Vision Zero and speed management become more commonplace in American cities, it is time to consider a framework for safety that can guide changes beyond the low-hanging fruit. We can call this stage Vision Zero 2.0.

In this world of Vision Zero 2.0, champions of meaningful change must understand and embrace the importance of a Safe System approach, which focuses on designing a forgiving transportation system where inevitable human error does not result in loss of life or severe injury, particularly for the most vulnerable road users. We must pivot from the strategy of trying to influence every individual to behave perfectly all the time to accepting some level of human failure and incorporating this into decision-making and design. We must develop policies and physical environments that make mistakes less deadly.

The reality is that there are deep, systemic problems and injustices in the policies and street designs that brought the United States to the point of accepting 40,000 preventable deaths a year. It will take systemic, transformative change to turn the tide.

Consider the fact that people of color and people in low-income communities are twice as likely to be killed while walking as white people and people in higher-income com-

»The conversation is shifting to politically thorny issues like the necessity of removing parking or altering driving expediency to save lives.«
The call to invest more resources in places where data and experience show us that safety is most sorely lacking is long overdue. People walking and bicycling in the U.S. make up 18 percent of traffic fatalities, yet states report spending less than one percent of their federal safety funds on improving safety outcomes for pedestrians and bicyclists. Correcting these inequities must define Vision Zero 2.0.

As we attempt to rectify these inequities with a focus on redesigning streets and setting speeds for safety, we cannot ignore the toll of enforcement on vulnerable road users. Bicyclists are outsize targets of punitive enforcement efforts, and people of color doubly so. This puts the onus on Vision Zero 2.0 leaders to help change racially biased law enforcement policies and practices. As advocates for Vision Zero, we cannot pretend that racial justice is outside our wheelhouse and wait for other social justice activists to do the heavy lifting. We need our Vision Zero demands to include transparency and accountability from the police to ensure Vision Zero does not cause harm.

This effort will be boosted by data. But the police-collected data many cities use today as the basis for decision-making undercounts and undervalues some community members. For instance, a recent analysis in San Francisco showed that local police data can miss 24 to 39 percent of severe injuries suffered by pedestrians and bicyclists, later captured at a trauma center or hospital. This is foundational to all else, because this data defines everything that happens next. We must demand that everyone is counted, whether walking, bicycling, riding in a car or on a bus; whether an immigrant or a U.S. citizen; whatever their race or ethnicity. Even for the counted victims, the system requires a transformative change. Today, still, in the era of Vision Zero, the justice system sees people who kill with their cars as hapless victims, rather than owning the responsibility that should be inherent in driving. This will be one of the most challenging areas to change, because driver-oriented biases run so deep in our culture, but we must try. From New York to Durham to Minneapolis, Vision Zero is advancing. People are surviving crashes because of lowered speed limits, innovative street designs are rewriting our impression of what is possible, and the Federal government is turning our examples into national models. This is the moment to rise from our laurels. Vision Zero 2.0 will require more complex strategies and a strong commitment to ensure our safe right to the street and the future of our cities. To succeed, our advocacy must persist in pushing for near-term, urgent, on-the-ground change, while also looking upstream to identify and uproot the long-time systemic failures that kill people on streets, sidewalks, and bike-ways every day.

»As advocates for Vision Zero, we cannot pretend that racial justice is outside our wheelhouse and wait for other social justice activists to do the heavy lifting.«
COREY JOHNSON

How to Break the Car Culture

For elected officials who wish to reach Vision Zero in their municipalities, the most effective route is boldness over piecemeal change. New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson introduces the model of leadership he has employed to convince a car-dependent city to rethink its relationship with the automobile.
Transportation isn’t just the way we get around, it’s the way we live. Almost every part of daily life—from going to a doctor’s appointment to visiting friends and family—means being on the move. Transportation impacts all Americans, and when we get transportation policy right, we can take steps toward Vision Zero while significantly improving economic and climate outcomes, no matter the size of the city. That’s why I spend so much time talking about transportation. I devoted my first State of the City address as Speaker of the New York City Council to this issue because I believe if we fix our transportation crisis, in New York City and across the country, many other issues we face will get a whole lot easier. The problems are plentiful: unreliable public transit systems; crippling traffic; and, the most painful, rising pedestrian and cyclist deaths. But if we build transportation infrastructure that makes it easier to get around by public transit, on foot, or on a bike, we can reduce the dependence so many people have on cars. This is a dramatic departure from the past that can only be achieved with bold leadership.

Other cities have done this, from Portland to London. All have different challenges, but they have pushed forward with bold plans. New York City, in some respects, has lagged in redeveloping its infrastructure. But I’m convinced that it can, and will be, the leader in transportation policy going forward, and that our plan will be a model for other cities to follow.

Too many elected officials throw up their hands, thinking it’s too hard to rebuild streets designed for cars. But imagine a future with more cars on the road and fewer alternatives. That’s where we are headed if nothing changes.

In New York City, we haven’t put forth a long-term vision. As a result, we’ve made slow and piecemeal progress toward building out a safe, equitable, and sustainable transportation network that serves all our residents. This has left cyclists, drivers, bus riders, pedestrians, and disabled residents pitted against one another in a battle over the City’s finite street grid. It also hurts our economy, our environment, and ultimately the quality of life of all New Yorkers.

Our crowded, congested, and dangerous streets cost the City’s economy roughly $20 billion a year in lost economic activity from time spent in traffic, wasted fuel, and carbon emissions damage. Our buses, which serve over two million riders, the vast majority of whom are low-income and people of color, are the slowest and most unreliable in the country. There are huge gaps in accessibility for seniors and people with disabilities on our streets and across all forms of transit. Many neighborhoods are underserved by live-saving upgrades like bike lanes, sidewalks, and pedestrian plazas. And there has been a complete lack of progress toward reducing transportation emissions, which account for nearly a third of the City’s greenhouse gases.

This not just a big city issue. New York City, like cities large and small across the nation, is a diverse place, and each of its communities has specific transportation challenges. In Staten Island, traffic makes a simple trip to the grocery store an odyssey, yet life without a car seems impossible. In Queens and the Bronx, commuters who rely on mass transportation can spend four hours a day getting to and from work in Manhattan.

ABOUT

New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson has represented Council District 3 since 2014 and has served as Speaker since 2018. As Speaker, he led the Council in passing transportation safety legislation, including the Vision Zero Street Design Standard, which created a checklist of Vision Zero design elements that must be considered when redesigning roadways, and a law requiring contractors to create and maintain temporary bike lanes when a protected lane is displaced by on-street construction. After gridlock in the State Legislature threatened New York City’s lifesaving speed camera program, Speaker Johnson passed legislation to reinstate and dramatically expand the project.
the Brooklyn Bridge, pedestrians and cyclists fight for space, making a once-enjoyable trip across the storied bridge an exercise in patience and fear.

Too often, the measures that will improve connectivity, safety, and performance to transit in these communities face significant opposition from elected officials. Few projects are as controversial as bike lanes, and politicians don’t score points with constituents for removing parking spaces, or funding real-time bus arrival clocks, or other unsexy—but vital—infrastructure needs for our transit system.

The opposition is natural, but also rooted in the lack of comprehensive vision for the system. As with any piecemeal approach, communities feel unfairly targeted by interventions that remove street parking and change the way traffic flows through their neighborhoods. As a result, New York City has historically taken a path-of-least-resistance approach to street improvements, serving the neighborhoods that pose the least opposition rather than the neighborhoods that need improvements most. Sound familiar? I suspect you live in a city or county with similar challenges.

New York City needs a new vision for our streets, one that sets bold and measurable targets to which our elected officers and government agencies can be held accountable. That’s why I introduced legislation requiring a master plan for our streets once every five years. Establishing a five-year plan for bus, vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle infrastructure, with annual benchmarks so we can hold the City accountable, would bring cohesion to what is now a patchwork system of upgrades.

I know this will be hard, but real change requires leadership. Our neighborhoods have vastly different challenges and needs. We are a microcosm of the country. Parts of New York City without subway stops need better bus service, while some highly congested neighborhoods can stand to lose a few parking spaces to make room for buses, bikes, or pedestrians. The solutions to our transportation crisis should fit the needs of each and every neighborhood while still moving us in the right direction.

As we’re pushing for change, we also must remember that New York City’s streets, like most American cities, were designed for cars, not buses, bikes, or pedestrians. Breaking car culture doesn’t mean that everyone should give up their car. And it’s not an attack on people who live in neighborhoods that are grossly underserved by public transit and rely on cars to get around. It’s about giving everyone better options so fewer people need to drive.

We’re not doomed to have cities that are dominated by constant honking, pollution, and near misses with cars. We can reach Vision Zero. One of the most powerful tools we have in local government is control over streets. Smart transportation policies save lives, build up communities, and fight climate change. Change is difficult. If we work to ask for bold leadership from our elected officials, educate our friends and neighbors on the benefits of improving transportation, and require long-term planning, we can start transforming streets across the country, one city at a time.

»One of the most powerful tools we have in local government is control over streets.«
In the United States, early adoption of Vision Zero occurred primarily in large cities and sprawling urban centers like New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, while small cities lagged in their ability and willingness to adopt the traffic safety model. Urban planner Don Kostelec examines the challenges of Vision Zero for small cities and offers solutions from those that have taken it up.
While their successes may vary as much as advocates’ consternation over the speed of implementation, the largest metro areas in the United States tend to play a better game of Vision Zero. From the sizable budgets required to roll out a new initiative in short order, to the focused, progressive will it takes to push elected officials to do the right thing, smaller U.S. cities lack the critical elements that have helped Vision Zero get off the ground in other places. But the people who live and move about smaller cities have no less of a right to safe mobility as those in larger metropolitan areas. Tailoring Vision Zero to smaller cities presents a unique challenge to America’s small metropolises.

The Challenge
Dr. Wes Marshall, a transportation engineer and researcher at the University of Colorado Denver, conducts research studies on street design and land use development patterns pertaining to traffic safety. His advice for smaller cities is to focus on fundamentals like slowing motor vehicle speeds.

“Instead of focusing on an intersection or corridor, smaller cities need to look at Vision Zero through a specific lens,” Marshall says. “Can children get to the school or park safely by walking or bicycling, and what is the network they need to do so?”

Marshall points out that larger metro areas, specifically central cities, have greater and more varied on-street activity, so it is easier to spot and address a pattern of severe and fatal crashes. The challenge for smaller cities is the lack of crash data due to a lack of activity.

“Unsafe streets and networks make an area’s crash record look great simply because there’s nobody walking or biking there,” Marshall explains. “Therefore, if we just look at where crashes occur, we never identify places where people don’t feel safe.”

Anchorage, Alaska
Anchorage (pop. 295,000) completed its Vision Zero planning in late 2018 and is now moving into the implementation phase. After the city launched some frank conversations on traffic safety, officials developed a plan to bring Vision Zero to Anchorage. Without a larger city’s pool of data, a narrative lens provides context. Anchorage’s “Safer Streets for Everyone” plan starts with a letter from Mayor Ethan Berkowitz, stating, “Our goal is achieving zero traffic deaths, and we can, by taking a data-driven and coordinated approach to designing safer streets, public education, adopting and evaluating best practices, and enforcing effective laws.” The letter also includes an acknowledgment of Anchorage’s seasonal challenges, noting there is a “lack of real, protected, and plowed bicycle lanes and pedestrian pathways,” as well as a “lack of compassion for walkers in the cold.”

As their plan states, “Human stories are an important piece of the puzzle to provide quantitative data.” Anchorage documented those stories during its planning phase. One resident described being a pedestrian as suspect: “Anchorage is not a walking community: if you are walking, you are perceived as suspicious.” Another notes that what happened in the aftermath of crashes was problematic: “There is a lot of victim blaming.” There was an understanding, however, of the core problem: the need of the city “to humanize pedestrians and shift to a culture of respect for them.”

While Vision Zero in Anchorage is just getting started, approaching traffic safety through the residents who live there is a lens that can help outline problems and solutions where data is lacking.

ABOUT
Don Kostelec is a transportation planning and design consultant in Boise, Idaho. His areas of focus include Vision Zero, ADA compliance, and health impact analysis.
Durham, North Carolina
The challenge for small cities in North Carolina is a state department of transportation that plays an overarching role in local street design and funding. State-controlled highways in North Carolina are not designated as interstates, U.S. highways, or state highways, but are instead referred to as “state secondary routes.” Some of these state secondary routes fall within city limits. These are typically wide, fast roadway types that would, in other states, be fully controlled by the city rather than the state.

As a result, the North Carolina DOT manages a higher percentage of centerline miles inside cities than other state DOTs. This creates a cycle of dependence on the state agency for street design guidance and funding. As a result of the state DOT’s hegemonic presence, North Carolina cities tend to adopt the state DOT’s standards as their own, not wanting to spend resources on developing local standards and assuming the state has done its due diligence when it comes to safety. A state effort called “North Carolina Vision Zero” has so far been little more than a traditional education and enforcement-based traffic safety campaign, and does not involve project design efforts or state standards.

In 2017, Durham (pop. 267,000) decided to break this mold. The city launched a Vision Zero effort with the goal of remedying these issues and dealing locally with local traffic safety problems. While the city has moved forward on a couple of fronts, Durham has become subject to an issue common to small- and medium-sized cities: turnover of staff. Durham’s Director of Transportation launched the city’s Vision Zero initiative in 2017, but 15 months after the launch took a job in another state.

Caldwell, Idaho
People interested in building momentum for Vision Zero in smaller cities may take a more bite-sized approach, as Dr. Wes Marshall recommends. This is what is now occurring in Caldwell, Idaho (pop. 55,000), after the United Way of Treasure Valley took a unique interest in working with Caldwell on a variety of health and transportation safety efforts.

In 2017, Caldwell hosted a two-day Vision Zero workshop for elected officials, law enforcement, health department employees, and city staff. After the sessions and a series of community walkabouts, it was determined that no single roadway within Caldwell showcased a Vision Zero street. Rather, Caldwell had piecemeal individual components on a variety of streets that could be packaged together to showcase what Vision Zero meant: there were curb extensions downtown, pedestrian hybrid beacons for school zone crossings, and an ongoing conversation about lowering speed limits throughout the downtown area by taking control of a state-managed road.

The Caldwell Police Department made the connection between Vision Zero and their roundabouts. They noted that the continued

»Residents of smaller cities looking to take up Vision Zero should first aim to learn their local processes.«
building of roundabouts, which self-enforce vehicle speeds, have almost solved traffic safety issues at those intersections, allowing them to devote resources to other critical needs. Conversely, Simplot Boulevard, a five-lane state highway through an industrial area on Caldwell’s west side, was so poorly designed that it made police officers fear for their own safety when they pulled someone over. Within a short stretch of roadway, Simplot Boulevard has three different speed limit expectations (35, 45, and 55 mph) without any change in the street’s design configuration to self-enforce those speeds.

The United Way is now funding an update to Caldwell’s “Active Transportation Plan” to incorporate more modern street design, such as protected bike lanes and other Vision Zero elements, into its recommendations. That effort kicks off in late 2019.

Small City Solutions

Vision Zero is by no means impossible in small cities, there is just a different path to success. Instead of the top-down approach employed by many large cities, advocates in small cities may need to search out their own solutions to help local officials see the light. To do that, advocates will need to reach out to larger Vision Zero Cities, educate themselves, and change local standards to meet their small city’s needs.

Residents of smaller cities looking to take up Vision Zero should first aim to learn their local processes. Getting involved early in a corridor study or project design effort is critical. Find the milestones within your local agency design processes where you can influence change, work your way onto advisory committees, or ask agencies to put their bicycle and pedestrian advisory committee members on consultant selection panels and steering committees for projects and plans.

Another important step is advocating for changes local standards. A common default position by road designers is that they “follow federal standards” for street design. But these are only guidelines, and small cities may adopt their own standards. There is no federal mandate for vehicle level of service, speed limits, or motor vehicle lane widths. Advocating for change in these local standards is important, and full of potential. Change may require only a few votes of a city council.

Advocates can start their path to changing local standards at the library. Federal design guides published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) are the go-to resources that agencies and street designers use to influence their decisions. Work with your library to order guides like the “AASHTO Green Book” and their “Guide for Achieving Flexibility in Highway Design” for the reference desk. The subject matter dealing with vulnerable road users is not overly complex, and local agencies often do not own their own copies of the bicyclist and pedestrian guides. This knowledge will give you an advantage in your advocacy efforts.

With knowledge and potential in hand, advocates should develop a menu of choices for local Vision Zero projects. Collect images of the positive features on local roadways and develop a visual catalog of desired features that could be incorporated to achieve a Vision Zero design. Present it to the city council, the planning and zoning commission, and during public meetings to show what Vision Zero could mean for the city. The social media and neighborhood networks in smaller cities may be less robust, but they can be equally organized and motivated. Employing these networks is key to making Vision Zero work in smaller cities. Additionally, the wider Vision Zero network can help to counter claims of “we can’t do that.” Images of Vision Zero strategies in other cities from around the country can be used to your advantage.

It is high time for Vision Zero to become synonymous with small cities, too. Anchorage, Caldwell, and Durham are leading the way. Is your small city next?
America’s SUV Problem

Pedestrian fatalities are on the rise across the U.S. after decades of decline, with people on foot facing the greatest burden of risk. New research from the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety finds that the rise of large high-horsepower vehicles may bear some of the blame.
A deadly crash involving a pedestrian in St. Paul, Minnesota in January was unusual in that it drew more than passing coverage in the local news. That is largely because it was one of a spate of vehicular collisions with pedestrians over three days, during a mild-weather respite from the cold Minnesota winter. But in other ways, it was typical of fatal pedestrian crashes nationwide: an SUV traveling along a dimly lit urban arterial street struck someone crossing the road after dark.

Pedestrian deaths have jumped 45 percent since reaching their lowest point in 2009, as pedestrian-involved crashes have become both deadlier and more frequent. An Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) study shows that the increase has been mostly in urban or suburban areas, at non-intersections, on arterials—busy roads designed mainly to funnel vehicle traffic toward freeways—and in the dark. Crashes were increasingly likely to involve SUVs and high-horsepower vehicles.

IIHS researchers looked at pedestrian crash trends during 2009-2016 to pinpoint the circumstances under which the largest increases occurred. Using federal fatality data and crash numbers, the researchers looked at roadway, environmental, personal, and vehicle factors to see how they changed over the study period. They also looked at changes in the number of pedestrian deaths relative to the number of pedestrians involved in crashes.

The researchers found that not only did pedestrian crashes increase, they also became deadlier. Deaths per 100 crash involvements increased 29 percent between 2010, when they reached their lowest point, and 2015, the most recent year that data on all crashes (including nonfatal ones) were available. From 2009 to 2016, the largest increases in pedestrian deaths occurred under the circumstances that historically have seen the highest numbers of pedestrian fatalities. Pedestrian deaths increased 54 percent in urban areas, which include both cities and what most people consider suburbs. They also increased 67 percent on arterials, 50 percent at non-intersections, and 56 percent in the dark.

Although pedestrian crashes most frequently involved cars, fatal single-vehicle crashes involving SUVs increased 81 percent, more than any other type of vehicle. The power of passenger vehicles involved in fatal single-vehicle pedestrian crashes, as measured by the ratio of horsepower to weight, also increased, with larger increases at the top of the scale.

The large increase in pedestrian deaths on arterials is not surprising. These roads often have a shortage of convenient and safe crossing locations. When people are forced to walk long distances to the nearest signalized intersection, they are more likely to choose the riskier option of sprinting across multiple lanes of traffic. Communities can improve safety by providing more options to safely cross. But, it is not enough to simply paint more crosswalks on the pavement. Midblock crossings need features that alert drivers to stop, such as pedestrian-activated beacons.

Other improvements, such as curb extensions or median crossing islands, can shorten the distance people must walk or allow them to traverse just a couple of lanes and a single direction of traffic at a time. Adding sidewalks is an obvious way to reduce the risk to pedestrians walking along a road. These elements can be part of broader road diets, in which the number of travel lanes for vehicle traffic is reduced. In addition to

**ABOUT**

Jessica B. Cicchino is Vice President for Research at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Dr. Cicchino conducts research in several areas, including collision avoidance technologies and older drivers. Prior to joining IIHS as a research scientist in 2012, she was a research psychologist at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Dr. Cicchino received a bachelor’s degree from Vassar College and a doctorate in psychology from Carnegie Mellon University.
reducing the number of lanes for pedestrians to cross and sometimes providing room for bike lanes, road diets have been shown to lower vehicle speeds. While reliable information on vehicle speeds is not available in fatality data, IIHS researchers did find that the vehicles involved in fatal pedestrian crashes, like the overall vehicle fleet, are increasingly powerful. Previous IIHS research has shown that vehicles with higher horsepower-to-weight ratios tend to be driven faster and are more likely to violate posted speed limits. Despite the dangers of high speeds, the story of speed limits in recent decades has been one of continual increases. Doing the opposite and lowering speed limits would have obvious safety benefits. Broader use of speed cameras to enforce existing limits is another proven solution. IIHS research has shown that automated speed enforcement reduces both speed limit violations and injury crashes.

Some risks to pedestrians could be lessened by making changes to vehicles. A large majority of pedestrian fatalities occur in the dark, and that number increased much faster than the number of pedestrians killed in other light conditions. In 2016, 4,453 pedestrians were killed in the dark, compared with 1,290 in daylight and 205 at dawn or dusk. Although better street lighting may be needed in some locations, another obvious solution is better headlights. IIHS has been working to encourage improvements in this area through its headlight rating program, launched in 2016.

Vehicles with front crash prevention systems that recognize pedestrians also would help—particularly if they are designed to work in low light. A recent analysis by the Highway Loss Data Institute found that Subaru vehicles equipped with pedestrian detection had claim rates for pedestrian injuries that were 35 percent lower than the same vehicles without the system. Finally, vehicle design changes could help lessen the severity of crashes, especially when it comes to SUVs. These make up an increasingly large percentage of registered vehicles, and previous studies have found that SUVs, pickups, and vans are associated with a higher risk of death or severe injury to pedestrians. Such vehicles have higher and often more vertical front ends than cars and are more likely to strike a pedestrian in the head or chest. Changes in the front-end design of these vehicles could help—it is a strategy that’s been adopted in Europe—but the different vehicle mix in the U.S., with pickups and SUVs that are not offered in other markets, means the effectiveness of these changes remains unknown.

Still, there are many proven strategies that can make a difference. Understanding where, when, and how these additional pedestrian crashes are happening can point the way to the best solutions. Improvements in road design, vehicle technology and lighting, and speed limit enforcement all have a role to play in making streets safer for pedestrians.

»The researchers found that not only did pedestrian crashes increase, they also became deadlier.«
At the Kibera Town Center in Nairobi, cyclists train on using, troubleshooting, and repairing Multimer equipment before tracking biometric data of their bicycle rides.

Multimer data from a dozen Nairobi cyclists over two weeks in January 2019. Data points are visualized on a color gradient of green, indicating high relaxation and low attention, to red, indicating low relaxation and high attention.
Neurophysiological Experience of Cyclists in Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi

Biomarkers of stress are a telltale for an unsafe street. Researchers outfitting cyclists with biosensors in Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi identified brain and heart patterns that correspond to the speed and density of traffic. The data makes a public health case for the necessity of cyclist- and pedestrian-friendly street design.
How can data contribute to efforts toward sustainable mobility? By outfitting cyclists with biosensors to track brain and heart indicators of stress, I set out to answer that question with the help of a team of researchers from the Mobility Unit of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme; Multimer, a spin-off from MIT Media Lab; and sustainable transportation groups in Nairobi, Kenya, and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Our inquiry was two-fold: seeking neurophysiological markers of a stressful street and using our results to map the construction of safer streets.

In both Nairobi and Kuala Lumpur, we structured a short, small-scale study with the goal of visualizing cyclist biometrics on roadways perceived as stressful versus roadways perceived as more relaxing. We focused exclusively on avid cyclists in each city and chose not to include pedestrians in this study. Cyclists provide less “noisy” neurophysiological data than pedestrians by engaging in continuous physical activity; can cover more ground than pedestrians in the same amount of time; and are often used to using technical and athletic gear in their day-to-day travel, meaning they are able to learn to use the Multimer biosensor technology more quickly.

**Multimer System Overview**

The Multimer mobile app can record data from several kinds of commonly available and inexpensive wearable sensors, including EEG (electroencephalogram), ECG (electrocardiogram), pedometer, accelerometer, and gyroscope modules. The app can also record user-entered information via its user interface and micro-surveys. It combines this data with a user’s geo-location using GPS, beacons, and other location tools. Multimer’s study platform displays all this data in real-time at the individual and aggregate level. Multimer also validates the data by comparing the collected sensor and sentiment data in spatiotemporal contexts, and then integrates the collected data with other socioeconomic, environmental, and municipal data sets to provide actionable insights towards the creation of sites and spaces. From this data, Multimer produced data points representing every second of a participant’s ride. Attention (associated with beta and gamma brainwave frequencies and high heart rates) and relaxation (associated with delta, theta, and alpha brainwave frequencies and lower heart rates) were both tracked. Data points were visualized on a color gradient of green, indicating high relaxation and low attention, to red, indicating low relaxation and high attention.

**Kuala Lumpur Results**

In February 2018, a dozen cyclists in Kuala Lumpur participated in a one-week pilot study, cycling with wearable sensors under the observation of Multimer. The study coincided with the opening of Kuala Lumpur’s first dedicated cycle-track separated from the motor vehicle roadway. For this study, 11 participants were able to record human signal data on at least part of the cycling route over the course of two hours, resulting in tens of thousands of data points. Biometric data showed a clear difference in cyclist experience on the dedicated cycle track versus nearby roads that have minimal or no cycling infrastructure. Additionally, the data showed higher levels of attention (and presumably stress) near sharp turns in the

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**ABOUT**

Arlene Ducao investigates the relationship between the natural landscape, our built environments, and ourselves. She is a co-founder and principal of Multimer, a bio-spatial analytics firm and MIT spinoff. She is a recipient of the SXSW Community Service Award for her satellite mapping work in the global south, an instructor at NYU and MIT, and a member-advocate at Families United for Racial and Economic Equality. She holds degrees from UMD, SVA, and MIT. Ilias Koen, Chris Willard, Yapah Berry, Stefanie Holzwarth, Cyprine Mitchell, Naomi Mwaura, Christopher Kost, Jeff Lim, and Scott Sheu were also researchers on this project.
cycling route. Overall, the visualized cycling route is greener than routes on regular streets, indicating that cycling there may not require as much concentration as on a regular street. The data therefore indicates the success of the cycle-track in making cycling less stressful, more relaxing, and safer. Additionally, we conducted a “hot spot” and “sweet spot” analysis, mapping hot spot locations where biometrics indicated high attention and low relaxation and sweet spot locations where biometrics indicated low attention and high relaxation. Even with this limited dataset, there are clearly more sweet spots along the cycling route and more hot spots outside the cycling route. Further studies, over a longer period and with more participants, would be required to confirm this observation.

Nairobi Results
In January 2019, a dozen Nairobi cyclists participated in a two-week study to map some of the most challenging roads in their city. At the Nairobi office of the Institute for Transportation and Development and Policy (ITDP), we trained avid cyclists, all of whom are active in the local Critical Mass group, to record data with brainwave and heartrate gear as they cycled around the city. During training, cyclists were asked to ride on arterial roads that are part of the proposed bus rapid transit (BRT) plan under development by ITDP, making the case that this plan would benefit cyclists as well as bus riders. Prior to this study, ITDP had mapped Nairobi’s limited cycling lanes for its BRT plan; the Multimer data layer is meant to complement ITDP’s research by showing how human stress points along these routes may be related to street and traffic conditions. Cyclist biometric data helped to highlight challenging traffic and road conditions, which were then discussed at length during a stakeholder town hall meeting organized by UN-Habitat and ITDP. The town hall was open to the public in downtown Nairobi, and was attended by study organizers, study participants, representatives from Nairobi County Government and Nairobi’s Transit Authority, practitioners, researchers, designers, and other stakeholders. One of the primary takeaways from this stakeholder meeting is that the “crowdsourced” cyclist data not only helped to quantify cyclist experience but was also a tool for cyclists to discuss their own experiences in a data-driven way that strengthened their voice amongst government officials. At this meeting, ITDP’s presentation highlighted patterns in the Multimer data in relation to the cycling infrastructure in Nairobi. For example, red Multimer data points on Waiyaki Way were correlated with high vehicle speeds on a road which has no usable shoulder. On Ngong Road, the state has tried to create cycle lanes, but they are too narrow and unprotected, and thus not usable. This was confirmed by cyclists sharing their experience on the lack of cycling infrastructure, deep potholes, or street vendors blocking cycle lanes.

How to Use This Data
By multimodally measuring biosensor data to model how the built environment influences neurophysiological processes, this project ultimately aims to support architects, workplace strategists, and urban planners in making better design interventions based on continuous human signals. Our work in Kuala Lumpur and Nairobi demonstrates that small and economically developing cities may find these methods especially useful. While large and developed cities may already collect large sets of real-time, structured citizen data to inform their transportation planning, the crowdsourced data collection methods established by our studies demonstrate simple, quantitative, opt-in ways that smaller cities can use to include more citizens in the data and decision-making process.
Technologists increasingly present beaconization as a solution to autonomous vehicles’ problems anticipating human behavior. Transport journalist Carlton Reid argues that accepting bicycle-to-vehicle transponders sets a dangerous precedent for Vision Zero.
History is awash with ideas that sound good in theory but fail dizzingly in practice. Beaconization—or equipping bicycles with transponder beacons that can be spotted automatically by sensor-equipped cars—looks likely to be another idea to add to the list. Nevertheless, the auto and telecommunications industries, in cahoots with bicycle makers, are pushing ahead with “bicycle-to-vehicle” (B2V) sensors anyway.

Bicycle manufacturers such as Trek are working on B2V systems with Ford and other automakers. The World Bicycle Industry Association is in favor of beaconization, with general manager Manuel Marsilio telling attendees at last year’s Geneva Motor Show’s Future Networked Car symposium that “bicycles will definitely have to communicate with other vehicles.”

On paper, beaconization appears to be a literal life-saver. Who wouldn’t want to cycle with a device that warned oncoming and following motor vehicles that you were riding nearby and needed to be avoided? (Can you imagine how slow a car would be forced to go in a city packed with tens of thousands of beacon-equipped cyclists? The call would soon go up from auto interests to remove the cyclists.)

That bicycle makers are working with the “connected car” industry to discover which “vehicle-to-everything” (V2X) sensor technology works best is seen as a sensible collaboration by many. Finally, cyclists will be safe on the roads; what’s not to like? For tech companies, and rich cyclists, the future will be rosy—connected cars will know exactly where on the highway beacon-equipped bicycles are located and smashes will, therefore, be avoided. Vision Zero made a reality, not through behavior change but technology.

An alternative, and I would say more likely, version of this future is deeply dystopian. Only the beacon-equipped will be spotted. Those choosing—say, for economic or privacy reasons—not to fit bicycle-to-vehicle beacons will be blamed for being hit by sensor-equipped cars.

And if bicyclists must ride with Radio Frequency Identification beacons, the logical next step is for pedestrians to also sport RFID technology.

Oh, it’ll just be a smartphone app, not an actual transponder, is a pat answer from the tech companies. And everybody’s got a smartphone, right? Nope, not everybody. And what about when your battery runs out? You then choose not to ride or walk because you’re no longer “protected” by your forcefield app? Or perhaps you turned off your Bluetooth or forgot to turn off airplane mode? Smash: you’re dead, and it’s your fault for assuming, wrongly, that you were protected.

The auto industry is hyper-interested in getting pedestrians and cyclists to transmit real-time location information because it’s the only way that autonomous vehicles (AVs) could currently operate in cities. Lidar, 360-degree cameras, and other “smart” technologies cannot yet give advance warning of the child running out from behind parked cars.

Naturally, this is also a fundamental failing of human drivers, but the decent ones drive slowly in built-up neighborhoods. AVs are already being programmed to break speed limits (I recently drove a Tesla for a week and was shocked to discover I could set the autopilot function to go as fast as I damn well liked), and automakers won’t be able to sell driverless cars that crawl along just in case a pedestrian appears “out of nowhere.” That the auto industry is so keen on beacons is a warning that AVs are not yet smart enough to travel near soft, squishy humans. If AVs were truly clever, they would be able to spot the child darting out from...
“nowhere.” That they can do so only if that child is equipped with a transponder ought to set alarm bells ringing. Should the transponder be placed in an item of clothing? What if the child ran outside without wearing their beaconized baseball cap? If the beacon always needed to be on the person, logically that means it would have to be embedded in the body—are you ready for chipping all humans? Millions of posts, poles, and signs have already been equipped with low-power transponders, so they can be detected by today’s sensor-equipped cars and tomorrow’s AVs. The chipping of every item of road furniture is a key part of a burgeoning new sector: “intelligent transport systems” (ITS). The deployment of these infrastructure-to-vehicle beacons has been consequence-free so far—the posts and poles have no say in the matter—but ITS isn’t so intelligent when pesky humans are added to the mix.

“The cooperative element enabled by digital connectivity will significantly improve road safety and traffic efficiency by helping cyclists and the other road users to take the right decision and adapt to the traffic situations,” the World Bicycle Industry Association’s Marsilio told the Future Networked Car. He stressed: “The bicycle industry deems that the proper deployment of harmonized connected services is key to this objective and agrees that interoperability is a must. It is unacceptable that road users nowadays could die on roads because vehicles cannot communicate with each other due to non-inter-operable communication technologies.”

He added: “Boosting user uptake requires an appropriate regulatory environment.” Regulatory environment? Fines for those choosing to ride—or walk—beacon-free? Marsilio says not, but let’s remember that the “crime” of jaywalking didn’t exist until the motor industry invented it in the 1920s. I am not arguing that we should stand in the way of sensor technologies that could save lives. But we must be very careful not to repeat the motor-myopic mistakes of the past when “road safety” actually meant “get out of the way of cars” and led to people retreating from the street.

AVs should only be allowed in cities when it can be shown they can spot people at all times, in all conditions, and without the use of don’t-kill-me sensors. Humans should be detected, not connected.

»We must be very careful not to repeat the motor-myopic mistakes of the past when “road safety” actually meant “get out of the way of cars” and led to people retreating from the street.«
The Unique Safety of Cycling in Tokyo

Of all the global bike-friendly cities in the world, Tokyo has the unique distinction of being an organic one, having developed a culture of cycling without infrastructure to support it. Japanese Cycling Embassy advocate Kosuke Miyata examines Tokyo cycling culture to determine whether cycling can be safe in a city without protected bike lanes.
On a typical bike ride through Tokyo, you will find mothers picking up children from kindergarten, kids going to the park on their own, retired people out playing Pokemon, teenagers leaving school, police officers on patrol, workers making deliveries, and lots of shoppers—all on bicycles.

The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy estimates that cycling mode share in Japan is around 16 percent, somewhere between the two percent in the U.S., and 25 percent in the Netherlands.\(^1\) For a country of 130 million people, that 16 percent is a serious number of people on bikes and, for them, cycling is a normal, everyday means of transportation. According to Japan’s latest Nationwide Person-Trip Survey, most bike trips are under five kilometers (three miles). The Japan Bicycle Promotion Institute recently reported that people’s top reason for using their bicycle was shopping, followed by social activities, and then by commuting. Bicycle ownership is accessible in cost, with 65 percent of bicycles in Japan sold for no more than 30,000 yen (under $300). It is also accessible in physicality, with 60 percent of bikes being step-through cruisers, known as city cycles or mamachari (literally “mothers’ bikes”).

But for all this bike culture, and in sharp opposition to places with both smaller and larger mode shares like New York City or the Netherlands, protected bike lanes are virtually nonexistent in Tokyo and across Japan. What is introduced as cycling infrastructure are sharrows or shared paths on the sidewalk. Former New York City Department of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan pointed out this lack of dedicated, protected infrastructure while visiting Japan in 2019, and as other global cities build more and more protected infrastructure, Tokyo’s lack of such infrastructure moved the city from 9th to 16th in the 2019 Copenhagenize Index.

Yet, despite the lack of infrastructure, cycling in Japan is fairly safe. An International Transport Forum discussion paper from 2018 shows that cyclist fatalities per 100 million kilometers cycled were around 0.8 in the Netherlands between 2011 to 2015.\(^2\) Calculated in the same manner, the figures would be around 5.3 for the U.S. (2009),\(^3\) and around 2.3 for Japan (2011-2015).\(^4\) Risk for cyclists in Japan is right in the middle, just like its mode-share, even though the country has less infrastructure for cycling in its cities than either locale.

How, then, does cycling work in Tokyo? How did there come to be a cycling culture in this megacity, and how did it remain, in relative safety, without dedicated infrastructure? Blogger Byron Kidd (a.k.a. Tokyo By Bike) attributes it to the people themselves and a culture of patience called *gaman*. But there are many reasons. Public safety is facilitated by a culture of compliance. Laws are largely abided, and overall crime is low. Tokyo also has a good local railway network with compact, convenient neighborhoods around it, coupled with streets and alleys that are relatively calm, so driving is both less necessary and slower-paced than in other cities that are more car-centric. Bike parking facilities surround train stations and businesses, so shopping by bike makes sense, and cycling can be easily integrated into a multimodal commute. Biking is affordable, while it is relatively expensive to own a car, especially in urban areas. Nearly all arterial streets are built with only cars in mind, but sidewalk cycling is allowed on most of them. And the sheer number of cyclists in Tokyo means that pretty much everyone is used to the presence of people on bikes.

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ABOUT

Kosuke Miyata is a Tokyo-based cyclist, and a member of the Cycling Embassy of Japan, an advocacy group that aims to make every city across the country a better place for cycling and walking. He advocates for freedom and diversity of travel, as well as streets that flourish with fewer cars zipping by. He can be found on Twitter @BikeNextToYou.
After reaching a road fatality peak in 1970 due to rapid motorization, Japan has reduced road fatalities mainly by means of law enforcement and the installation of sidewalks and traffic lights. Sidewalk cycling was made legal in 1970, and in the same year, another law made it municipalities’ obligation to “make efforts” to build cycling infrastructure. In this moment was a chance for the Japanese to have progressed abreast with the Dutch, but little dedicated cycling infrastructure has been built here since then, while sidewalk cycling has become the norm.

Japan’s cycling culture, developed as a spontaneous byproduct of many things that were not planned or designed for, both preceded full-scale motorization and survived it. It is mysterious, and it has worked. The urge could be to leave well enough alone, but all is not ideal. Despite a 16 percent mode share and the known societal benefits of cycling, cyclists are often treated more as a problem than a solution by the news media, the police, and the government, both nationally and locally. And hundreds of people on bikes still lose their lives each year.

Despite its cycling culture, and despite infrastructure that reduces car use, both of which help keep the traffic fatality rate low, Tokyo has been lapped in bicycle infrastructure development by Vision Zero cities around the world. In April 2019, a cyclist was killed in a sharrow on an arterial street in Tokyo. In the same month, a stunt person was killed in Kyoto while performing a “Scared Straight” show, which schools across the country employ to teach kids what not to do when cycling. The few painted bike lanes that exist often serve as parking lanes, and government officials advocate vehicular cycling like it is a complete solution. The ideas are vintage at best, reckless at worst.

In June, the Cycling Embassy of Japan released the 2019 Tokyo Cycling Infrastructure Award. The ranking is evidence of how little the city has built. Even the top five cycling streets in Tokyo are far from ideal in terms of design, continuity, and connection. Still, these spaces show the potential for a city with even more people of all ages and abilities on bikes, without sidewalk cycling and constant derision of cyclists. When it is clear how people should use a space, behavior can be orderly, and street life diverse and vibrant. Tokyo needs high-quality, protected bike infrastructure, and more car-free and traffic-calmed streets. Other cities around the world have proven this for us. For decades, Japan has relied on its cycling culture to keep cyclists safe. That is no longer enough.

CITATIONS

2 Castro, et al., “Exposure-Adjusted Road Fatality Rates for Cycling and Walking in European Countries.”
5 The National Police Agency found in 2018 that 15 percent of people killed cycling in Japan were fatally struck by a passing car.
HANA ZHAUKEN

Rapid Rollout in Kazakhstan

A post-Soviet bureaucracy overcame the political opposition to safe streets with a rapid rollout of Vision Zero. Researcher Hana Zhauken explains how a proof of concept and the pace of implementation led to programmatic success.
This is the story of how a strategy of rapid rollout brought Vision Zero success to a city opposed to progress.

In May 2019, the buzzing noises of urban construction fit right into the bustling city landscape of Downtown Almaty, the largest city of Kazakhstan. Unlike most construction noises, these were welcomed: they marked a new chapter in the city’s urban landscape, a commitment to reduce traffic crashes by 25 percent in three years. Vision Zero was coming to Kazakhstan.

Vision Zero programs around the world are successful when implemented alongside wholesale reform to institutions and transportation systems. Considering the proactive nature of Vision Zero philosophy, where-in the local government must accept the human tendency to make mistakes, and the considerable funding it takes to get Vision Zero off the ground, it is quite extraordinary that a post-Soviet government approved this progressive program on a city-wide level a mere three months from the idea’s inception. Almaty needed to overcome anti-European culture, subvert a hierarchical government, and, most importantly, act fast. Other local governments in developing and emerging countries can learn from Almaty’s experience.

“Every day, people of Almaty are dying. More than 5,000 people were injured, and 133 people died as a result of traffic accidents in 2018 alone,” former Deputy Mayor Erlan Aukenov said in a press interview in April, 2019. “Vision Zero targets a cardinal change in the current state of affairs.” He knew that the longer we delayed, the more people would die on the streets. Statistically speaking, Almaty has a traffic-related fatality rate 3.3 times higher than in Minsk, 3.6 times higher than in Stockholm, 3.8 times higher than in Helsinki, and 4.05 times higher than in Oslo. Over the years, Almaty has lost about 101 billion Kazakhstani Tenge (around $260 million) to traffic crash-related costs. It was clear to Deputy Mayor Aukenov that the severity of the situation required immediate solutions.

And in Almaty, a city with a Kafkaesque bureaucratic apparatus, born in the shadow of Soviet legacy, having the deputy mayor as a patron turned the disadvantage of post-Soviet hierarchical structures to our advantage and saved Vision Zero from being butchered with an endless stream of meetings and memorandums. Beyond this in-road to the seat of power, the next hurdle to introducing Vision Zero was a persistent “this is not Europe” mentality. While public opinion in Almaty may appreciate the polished streets and thoughtful infrastructure of European cities, until recently, citizens believed that Almaty’s etiquette was so low that any public space would be vandalized the instant it was built, while the local government believed they could not afford “European” infrastructure. Both myths were busted in 2017 when our team built the first pedestrian street in the city. This project—the Panfilov Street—was a fight for “Europe-like” public space. It quickly became a social issue and faced a massive backlash from both citizens and government officials. Yet, after the dust settled and people got to experience what it was like to have an outdoor public space of their own, attitudes changed. These 1,500 meters of pavement marked a clear shift in the culture of the city and served us countless of times to justify the righteousness of the often-radical street infrastructure goals of the current administration. This simple pilot project shifted the doubt about ideas historically associated

ABOUT

Hana Zhauken is a Research Manager at the research institute AlmatyGenPlan, where she collects and interprets data, oversees fieldwork initiatives, and acts as a consultant for a variety of transport infrastructure and public space development projects. As a member of the Vision Zero Almaty Development Committee, she leads the analysis of traffic fatalities and their causes in the City of Almaty. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in economics at the University of Warwick.
with European cities and helped citizens see that progressive methods of urban planning implemented in an intelligent way can work here, too. The overwhelming success of Panfilov Street allowed government officials to suggest brave solutions to the challenges Almaty faces—like high mortality rates from traffic crashes—and not be afraid of public backlash. Most significantly, this pilot project showed citizens that the possibility of living in a comfortable and safe city lies within reach. Designing a simple pilot project can serve as a foundation for societal change.

The third hurdle was time. When our team, the Vision Zero Development Committee, was given an opportunity to create a Vision Zero project, we wanted to do it properly—as we had seen in London, New York, and Paris—with a 200-page report, thought-through long-term goals, philosophic vision, and deep analysis of current infrastructure. Yet, the pressure to act fast was very real. If we did not proceed at a rapid pace, there was a chance that other departments would stall the process, burying us in paperwork and leaving the Vision Zero project to collect dust on the shelves while people died in crashes. Remembering the success of the Panfilov Street, and the support for a city-wide pedestrian network that followed, we decided that instead of waiting for our concept to get approved, we should jump in head-first and demonstrate to everyone how Vision Zero could work. Initiating a “quick wins” strategy, we tied principles of safe street design into already-planned street maintenance. Repaving became an occasion for bulb-outs, bike lanes, and more. For city officials, it meant taking small steps toward our principles, like reducing the speed limit, tightening lane widths, creating curb extensions, and designing pedestrian safety islands, without the scope of planning which normally follows a Vision Zero announcement interfering with their existing plans. These shortcuts allowed 72 of the most dangerous intersections accounting for the most traffic crashes in Almaty to be reconstructed under Vision Zero guidelines. This significantly reduced the amount of paperwork required for us to move ahead and provided an immediate path to reducing fatalities.

What’s the moral here? Don’t fight the system, work within it: persuade just one top-tier government officials to support your endeavor. While you have their support, adjust the city’s plans slightly and demonstrate just how effective these small adjustments can be. As you do so, keep in mind future long-term measures, such as creating a sustainable road safety management system, transit-oriented development, and overall systemic change of transport infrastructure. Once your plans are proven to be successful, local government will want to expand the program. Be ready.

Our ingredient list for a safe and comfortable city included the Vision
Zero staples: adopting the “people will make mistakes and crashes will happen” philosophy; a bottom-up approach of putting pedestrians first and cars last; and plans for making public transport, cycling, and pedestrian networks interconnected and more accessible. These were split between quick-wins solutions (reactive measures) and long-term initiatives (proactive measures). The hope was to demonstrate the effectiveness of Vision Zero in reducing the traffic fatality rate via reactive solutions, such as redesigning the most dangerous intersections in Almaty, and using those quick wins to advocate for proactive measures, such as introducing educational programs in schools and launching traffic awareness campaigns around the city later. All objectives served as a foundation to create a safe and sustainable city environment.

Before Vision Zero, we were not able to advance most of our previous projects aimed at diversifying transport infrastructure, like creating a full bicycle network. Yet, by carefully choosing the wording of the “Vision Zero Action Plan,” we have created an effective avenue through which we can advocate for progressive initiatives in the future.

Quick wins and reactive approaches suited the urgent nature of the problem. Most importantly, they served a common goal: creating a safe, comfortable, and accessible city. When the city reaches its initial goal—a reduction of traffic-related deaths by 25 percent in three years—ambitions for moving towards a proactive policy design in Almaty will take the center stage. But for now, Almaty’s 2019 Vision Zero reality means simply demonstrating that zero mortality rates on the streets can become a reality. In the light of such a noble cause, the mild annoyance of buzzing construction noises is a low price to pay.

»Initiating a “quick wins” strategy, we tied principles of safe street design into already-planned street maintenance. Repaving became an occasion for bulb-outs, bike lanes, and more.«
People with Disabilities in the Conversation

As vulnerable users of the road, people with disabilities should be a requisite part of any Vision Zero conversation. Quemuel Arroyo, Chief Accessibility Specialist at the New York City Department of Transportation, delves into what happens when disability advocates are ignored, and explains the powerful effect of broadening the conversation.
n cities around the world, Vision Zero has become an affirmation of governments’ main priority: to protect the public. The success of this affirmation lies in coalition building between affected residents, advocacy organizations, and sister government agencies. However, for all these efforts, there is one piece that often remains absent from the conversation around Vision Zero and its success: an explicit dialogue about how the disability community is being engaged and their voices reflected in our work. The main cause for this omission is governments’ missed opportunity of weaving the interests and demands of diverse stakeholders. This is particularly true of the interests of the disability community, and demands for improvements enhancing accessibility, in all Vision Zero initiatives.

I joined the New York City Department of Transportation a few months after the city’s Vision Zero agenda was made public in 2014. I started as the agencies’ first Policy Analyst for Accessibility. The task was to work closely with senior managers and their staff to bring forward efforts for enhancing the accessibility of our streets, and to establish a visible bridge between the agency and the disability community.

Every single Vision Zero project improves the streetscape, and therefore has the potential to enhance accessibility for all New Yorkers. For example, a protected bike lane adds medians to the roadway, which shortens the lengths of crosswalks and allows for refuge islands. These improvements are a huge win for pedestrians whose gait is not what it once used to be, or for people who lack the stamina to cross a long avenue without pausing. Raised crosswalks also benefit a wide range of our stakeholders. Advocates for reductions of vehicular speeds in residential neighborhoods love raised crosswalks; parents concerned about the visibility of their children are a huge fan of them; and, of course, the disability community sees a raised crosswalk as a tremendous win for the safety of their members. The same applies to our ever-growing aging population, who may feel at risk when they cannot make eye contact with the driver of an SUV or a freight vehicle. No matter the intervention, the Vision Zero toolbox is packed with solutions that affect walkability as much as livability.

Yet despite the wide potential of all these tools, often the public conversation about these interventions does not include the persons with disabilities who most benefit from them. Humans typically gravitate towards what they know best and what makes them feel comfortable, prohibiting us from seeing the world as it is. We believe the world exists in the way that we experience it. This is why it can be exceedingly difficult for a person without a disability to consider what it would be like to navigate a street for a person with one. That is not a luxury that extends to government. It is our duty, as the guardians of the public, to protect all pedestrians’ experiences. Engineers, planners, and government officials must get comfortable speaking about accessibility, particularly about connecting the dots between the shared interests of people with and without disabilities and the fact that accessibility improvements benefit everyone. When city officials are not explicit about processes and public engagement, efforts to improve access for all stakeholders, especially vulnerable streets and road users, can go unnoticed.

I see my role at the New York City Depart-
ment of Transportation as helping to transform this culture of fear into one of comfort with the unknown. Tapping into my own disability has been my strongest asset. As an internal advocate and policy officer, I have been able to fold diverse voices and experiences that have not always been present into the work of the agency. I have accomplished this by hosting various disability advocates, who represent a coalition of New Yorkers with disabilities, at the agency headquarters on a quarterly basis. I also maintain an open dialogue with the Mayor’s Office for Persons with Disabilities, and constantly update and solicit input from the commissioner and his staff on new projects. Together, we ensure that the interests and experiences of the disability community are thoroughly represented. Because of this, there is now a productive harmony between the disability community and agency staff. End users are talking with our planners, policy officers, and engineers, and together, we all carry the weight of the success of Vision Zero.

There are still more issues that we need to work out to institutionalize diverse voices and a sense of belonging into the process of transforming a street. But over the last five years, that missing piece of the puzzle has become a lot smaller. And it will continue to shrink as we bring more people of diverse backgrounds and mixed experiences to the table. Internally, we study the diversity of our projects and the communities we serve throughout the agency to better understand our own comfort zones and oversights. Externally, we hear from New Yorkers on their own time, via a mobile-first feedback portal.

As you tackle underrepresentation in your Vision Zero city, these steps are all important: open the conversation, make all stakeholders visible, and look for your own oversights. But another way we are trying to close the void of underrepresentation is by hiring more persons with disabilities in all sectors of government. Americans with disabilities are one of the largest overeducated minorities with one of the highest rates of unemployment. To my fellow individuals with disabilities I say this: we have always had a strong platform. It is time we jump on and join the conversations happening around us. The microphone has never been louder, and our voices are needed today, more than ever before.

»It can be exceedingly difficult for a person without a disability to consider what it would be like to navigate a street for a person with one. That is not a luxury that extends to government.«
On the street in Hamburg, testing different types of pavement for people with disabilities.
Community participation is a critical part of Vision Zero, but it can also be a hindrance to progress. Participatory process researcher Michiel Stapper looks at how communities in Hamburg have revolutionized local democracy as a model to move Vision Zero forward in the most participatory possible way.
At the headquarters of PlanBude, a sign reads, “Sorry, we are today closed because of the negotiations.”
A
n important aspect of Vision Zero is building and sustain-
ing collaboration between a diverse group of actors, so that traffic policies are designed and implemented in close collaboration with communities. These ideas about community process are not limited to Vision Zero. Since the 1950s, city governments around the world have implemented participatory structures to involve communities in urban development and infrastructure projects.

The results of five decades of experimentation with community outreach show mixed results. There are promising examples of successful participation processes where communities could influence the outcome of a project in significant ways. However, participation processes often fail to engage meaningfully with communities.

In practice, participation faces three major obstacles. The first obstacle concerns language. The consultants and civil servants that organize community outreach make use of professional language that can be difficult to comprehend for some community members. Likewise, it can be hard for non-community members to pick up nuances in the language of community members. The second obstacle concerns time. Participation is time-consuming, and not everybody can attend public meetings and workshops. The third obstacle concerns power. Often residents are asked to participate but lack decision-making power. That can make participation processes frustrating for community members. All these obstacles are related to broader barriers in society. Inequalities concerning race and class tend to be reproduced through participation efforts.

This is the paradox of participation: it promises greater influence for residents, but it does not always deliver. That is why, in many cities, community activists, politicians, civil servants, and developers are exploring new ways to reach out to communities. In this article, I examine the discussions around participation in the city of Hamburg, a major urban center of 1.81 million people in Northern Germany.

In 2013, in Hamburg, thousands of people took to the streets to demand more influence in urban development. These protests resulted in the Right to the City Network, an umbrella organization for several initiatives that intend to create a new, democratic, sustainable method of urban planning. The movement is fueled by left-wing activism and stark criticism of neoliberalism. Through the pressure of the Right to the City Network, several community participation processes in Hamburg were transformed.

Q8 and Neue Mitte Altona

Neue Mitte Altona is a massive urban renewal project near the city center in Hamburg. The redevelopment of a train station and a brewery will result in a new neighborhood with 3,500 housing units, and new parks, schools, and spaces for businesses. The city government of Hamburg rolled out an extensive participation process to incorporate interests from citizens in the plan. A group of citizens were asked to be active in a citizen committee, and they produced a set of recommendations for the project. However, the municipality and the developers only partly agreed to incorporate the recommendations. The municipality argued that the citizens did not understand the legal and financial consequences of their recommendations fully. Although the citizens had invested considerable time in the participation process, they were not seen as stakeholders of equal footing. Moreover, the municipality wanted to push forward with the development project regardless, arguing that it was necessary because Hamburg lacks

ABOUT

Michiel Stapper is a PhD candidate from the University of Amsterdam and a former visiting scholar at New York University. He investigates participation processes in Amsterdam, Hamburg, and New York. The focus of his research is on how the input of residents is translated into contractual agreements.
housing. In the end, the citizen committee dissolved themselves in protest; they did not want to be co-opted by the municipality and the developers.

While this participation process was unsuccessful overall, one aspect of it was highly successful. During the Neue Mitte Altona community process, Q8—an organization that aims to make cities more inclusive to people with disabilities—organized several meetings to discuss how the area could be accessible for people with disabilities. This resulted in a manifesto, called *eine Mitte für alle*, or “one Mitte for all.” The manifesto introduced 30 goals and recommendations to make the neighborhood inclusive, including how to translate the recommendations in legal language, making them easy to implement in the policy documents and contracts.

After the municipality agreed to incorporate the recommendations in the plan, they kept on collaborating with the authors of the manifesto, such as discussing the preferred pavement in the area. People that make use of wheelchairs tend to prefer smooth pavement, while people who walk with a cane tend to prefer tactile pavement. By discussing and testing different types of pavement together, the participants came up with a pavement that worked well for everyone.

**PlanBude and the Paloma Viertel**

Paloma Viertel is a redevelopment project in a neighborhood infamous as the red-light district of Hamburg. Initially, the neighborhood strongly opposed the redevelopment project, primarily because the redevelopment included the demolition of a housing complex. Thousands of people demonstrated against the demolition. However, the city government claimed it needed to demolish the building because they feared it would collapse. A group of activists called PlanBude, which included artists, planners, and social workers, proposed that they be put in charge of the participation process. The municipality agreed, giving them a blank check to manage a community outreach process and agreeing to compensate them financially. PlanBude came up with a participation process that was very creative and reflected the culture of the neighborhood, placing a small building at the construction site where people could come in and talk about their vision for the space. Next to the site, there were sound walks, education programs, and design sessions with clay and Legos. Beyond this creativity, the input of the residents was also quantified by a survey, available in six different languages.

From all these contributions from residents, the team of PlanBude distilled eight principles for development. This formed the basis for a design competition. Several architectural teams were invited to present their designs to the neighborhood. After they received feedback from residents, they submitted their designs to a jury that included two community members, as well as representatives from PlanBude, the landowners, and the municipality. The design that was selected included basketball fields and climbing walls.

»This is the paradox of participation: it promises greater influence for residents, but it does not always deliver.«
on rooftops, a feminist sex shop, and culture incubators. After the design was selected, PlanBude entered lengthy negotiations with the landowners and the municipality about the realization of the design. This was a contentious and difficult process, but in May 2018, the development agreement was signed.

**Lessons from Hamburg**

Neue Mitte Altona and Paloma Viertel are telling examples of how participation is being redefined in Hamburg. Fueled by activism from the streets, the people of Hamburg are demonstrating how residents can be involved in urban development and infrastructure projects in a meaningful, transformative way.

The lessons of Hamburg center on respect for the community and for the participants in the process. Community participation should not be a meaningless checkbox for developers, but a process of earning trust by listening and consideration. Residents should be co-organizers of the participation process, so that they are able to design a process that reflects the local culture. The people doing this work should be compensated financially for their help with organizing community outreach. It is important to be transparent about the input of residents, so, while being as creative as possible, the outcomes of participation processes must also be quantified. It is incredibly important to think through and actualize how the contributions of residents will be incorporated into the policy documents and contracts that manage development projects. Residents must have decision-making power, otherwise the process is a farce. City governments should make sure that residents do not only participate, but that the participation process reflects the local culture, and that residents have decision-making power.

Putting participatory structures in place is a good thing. Democratizing cities is even better.

»All these obstacles are related to broader barriers in society. Inequalities concerning race and class tend to be reproduced through participation efforts.«
LAURA BALLESTEROS

A National Road Safety Law for Mexico

For streets to reach their highest function, planning must be democratic, but in Mexico, where 24,000 are killed in traffic each year, policy is a top-down operation. Laura Ballesteros, a former congresswoman and Undersecretary of Planning in the Ministry of Mobility of Mexico City, details the fight to bring inclusive democracy to transportation in Mexico.
In the fight for Vision Zero, the most important battles are fought at a street level, where everybody is equal, and where people and community can play a key role in change. That is why when we talk about mobility, access, and especially road safety, we also talk about democracy and inclusion.

Even if the public agenda in your city appears to address Vision Zero, you only need to look at your streets to see if the politicians mean it. Most of the time, at street level, the reality is totally different; vulnerable users on the road are still invisible to policy makers. This is true in most Mexican cities, where 80 percent of the road space is given over to car traffic, even though less than 30 percent of the population owns a car, and 70 percent of infrastructure budgets are dedicated to the needs of drivers. One of the reasons for unequal allocation is that public policy is discussed in government offices, without democracy and transparency, and while the automobile industry has a seat at the table, people who use the streets do not. The result is an inefficient public transportation system and unsafe street designs that kill 24,000 people in Mexico every year. Children account for most of the casualties, and poor people are more exposed because of a lack of access to safe pedestrian infrastructure in most of the Mexican territory.

In 2016, to change the equation, a group of activists, non-profit organizations, politicians, and international experts known as the Mobility Agenda began work on a national road safety law for Mexico. The goal here was two-fold: to pass a lifesaving Vision Zero law, and to model a system of democratic, inclusive lawmaking.

The story of Mexico’s National Road Safety Law begins earlier, in 2012, when the Mobility Agenda first began collaborating on a different, more local campaign centered on collaboration, civic engagement, government participation, and private sector cooperation: a road safety law for Mexico City. With a few years of effort, the Mobility Agenda succeeded in passing a road safety law that brought a new constitution to the city, derived from crowd-sourcing, which included mobility as a fundamental right, as well as requirements to democratize transportation planning and to prioritize cyclists and pedestrians in road design. Mexico City’s Vision Zero program also developed as a result of that campaign, as did new traffic regulations including a lower speed limit. Traffic fatalities decreased 30 percent in the city in short order.

Today, the Mobility Agenda is fighting to replicate these efforts on a larger scale with a national road safety law for Mexico. That effort is being guided by the lessons and success from Mexico City. These include opening the room for people and democracy in every single part of the decision-making process; recognizing the long-term effects of resource allocation and infrastructure creation as the most important challenge, especially when new government officials may not be committed to old ideas; and framing all efforts in law and official policy, so that changes remain no matter who is leading the current administration. This effort is more than needed. While traffic fatalities have declined in Mexico City, in the past four years road deaths have increased 200 percent across the country. In one municipality, Colima, the increase was as high as 400 percent.

In 2017, Congress introduced the Mobility Agenda’s proposal for a national road safety law. The law would legislate a new mobility law.

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**ABOUT**

Laura Ballesteros is a young politician, an activist, and an expert in policy and regulation in urban affairs. She has a bachelor’s degree in political science from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey and a master’s degree in strategic management and innovation from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. She has served as a congresswoman, and as Undersecretary of Planning in the Ministry of Mobility, both in Mexico City. Today she is a substitute senator, and Technical Secretary of the Women in Motion initiative.
pyramid, focusing attention on the most vulnerable users of the road; create mandatory driver’s exams with medical, physical, and knowledge-based evaluation; create a national road safety system to coordinate principles, tools, and regulations across the country; and create an official budget for safer streets through a new national road safety fund. The law could bring a sea change to Mexico’s most dangerous streets and create in-roads for democratizing how those streets function. It is expected to pass this year.

The goal is clear: zero deaths on the road, no excuses. To reach that goal, there are questions that need to not just be answered, but also addressed in the public debate: Are our streets inclusive and accessible? Does the infrastructure respect the rights of minorities? Who is involved in the decision-making process? Why do our public streets serve cars rather than the lives and safety of people?

If these questions are not asked, we will not meet our goal; but also, if these questions are only asked and answered in the privacy of the halls of power, our efforts will fall short. Only through a bold vision and an open conversation will it be possible to transform the reality of our cities, and this begins with a new construction of governance, where even the most local street issues are part of the national democratic agenda. This is why one of the most important parts of any road safety agenda is advocacy. To take action, we need to have a voice, and we have to do it together, organized, as a team.

»Even if the public agenda in your city appears to address Vision Zero, you only need to look at your streets to see if the politicians mean it.«
MELODY HOFFMANN

The Case Against Law Enforcement in Vision Zero

As an increasing number of cities question the utility and harm of including law enforcement in Vision Zero, researcher Melody Hoffmann diagnoses the challenges to making law enforcement equitable in the context of transportation.
Vision Zero is often described through the “five E’s” of street safety—engineering, enforcement, education, encouragement, and evaluation. In the United States, enforcement is often the most prominent and increasingly the most controversial, with activists across the country demanding that law enforcement not be a part of their Vision Zero plans.¹ Systemic racism, enforcement of the law regardless of social impact, and the historic disinvestment in lower-income urban spaces that are predominantly communities of color make equitable enforcement in Vision Zero an almost insurmountable challenge.

White Supremacy in Law Enforcement
Documented racial bias is woven into the United States’ policing culture. This pervasive inequity in policing trickles down to bicyclists. Data from cities including Tampa Bay, Chicago, and Minneapolis show people of color, especially African-Americans and Latinxs, are proportionately more likely to be cited for bicycling infractions than their white counterparts.² Citation inequity is found with drivers as well.³ Looking at crash and death rates in lower-income neighborhoods, it is easy to conclude more law enforcement is needed to combat these problems. When residents note an uptick in reckless driving, asking for additional traffic enforcement is a common refrain.⁴ Yet to argue that law enforcement can help these communities stay safe disregards the systemic racism and resulting danger built into policing and our society.

Communities of color have a historically tenuous relationship with police. If you are a person of color in the United States, it can be life-threatening to simply exist in public spaces. Michael Brown was killed by a police officer while walking in the street. Tamir Rice was playing in a park. Eric Garner was standing on a sidewalk in a business district. There is no element of Vision Zero that can keep people of color safe from police harassment. Given the status quo of urban policing in the United States, it is hard to argue for law enforcement involvement in Vision Zero. Cities that have put a focus on enforcement do not always focus on behavior that causes fatal crashes. Rather, enforcement is often used to police marginalized communities.⁵

Enforcing Laws Without Impact
Pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers are expected to follow traffic laws for personal and community safety. But like a sad game of rock, paper, scissors, bicyclists and pedestrians never beat drivers. In a ten-year study of bicycle-vehicle crashes in Minneapolis, 87 percent of the crashes resulted in a bicyclist injury, with 12 bicyclist fatalities. No drivers suffered injury or death.⁶ Law enforcement should target those who kill the most, but the tendency of the police is to enforce laws without a relationship to the social costs of the road, furthering the inequitable premise of enforcement in Vision Zero. For example, three years after New York City became the first U.S. city to adopt Vision Zero, Mayor Bill de Blasio directed law enforcement to crack down on electric bikes (e-bikes), which in that city are primarily used by delivery cyclists of color.⁷ Delivery workers on e-bikes became a main target of Vision Zero enforcement, despite no public safety data that showed e-bikes were a risk to other road users.⁸ On the other hand, hit-and-run crashes in New York City result in

ABOUT
Melody Hoffmann is an urban bicyclist and author of “Bike Lanes are White Lanes,” a book about how bicycle advocacy can inter-twine with gentrification and systemic racism. Dr. Hoffmann’s academic work is supported by local bicycle and pedestrian advocacy work in the Twin Cities. She teaches communication studies at Anoka-Ramsey Community College, and co-hosted and co-produced the “Feminist Killjoys, PhD” podcast for its three-year run. Dr. Hoffmann received her doctoral degree in 2013 from the University of Minnesota.
frequent injuries and deaths, but the police have not put additional resources towards investigating these crashes.\(^9\)

One impactful, and potentially less biased, way to employ enforcement is occurring in cities using automated speed and red-light enforcement cameras in areas where there are a large number of crashes. By sending citations via mail, these cameras can eliminate the implicit bias of police officers as a factor in enforcement. Acute implicit bias (who the police choose to pull over for an infraction) is likely to decrease with cameras. However, cameras cannot account for streets that are unsafe due to historic racial and class-based disinvestment.

**Historical Inequities in Infrastructure**

In the neighborhoods that face the greatest threat of racially motivated harassment by the police, pedestrians are also more likely to be killed by drivers. Black and brown people who live in lower-income communities face a greater risk of being killed while walking compared to white or higher-income people.\(^{10}\)

In many cities, higher crash rates correlate with historical disinvestment in infrastructure. For example, in a ten-year study done by the City of Minneapolis, the greatest amount of bicyclist-motorist crashes happened in lower-income communities of color.\(^{11}\) These areas also lack traffic calming infrastructure. For example, a large number of crashes occur on East Franklin Avenue, a well-known bicyclist thoroughfare and a four-lane street with no bicycle infrastructure. The intersection of East Franklin Avenue and Nicollet Avenue has a high rate of pedestrian-motorist crashes, yet no changes have been made to that intersection to calm traffic. In a *Star Tribune* article, a resident argued that if that intersection was in a middle-class, white neighborhood, “it would have been addressed 20 years ago.”\(^{12}\)

The sentiment of racialized disinvestment was heard in Portland, Oregon when bicycle advocates wanted to reconstruct a bicycle lane in a historically black neighborhood. “That’s part of the whole racism thing,” a longtime resident said in response to the plan. “We wanted safe streets back then;

»In the United States, bringing law enforcement into a zero-deaths plan is uniquely incongruous with the systemic and institutional racism embedded in our society.«
but now that the bicyclists want to have safe streets then it’s all about the bicyclists getting safe streets.”

In areas where there has historically been little investment in infrastructure, crash rates are higher. That makes lower-income communities of color prime locations for supposedly equitable automated enforcement programs. In D.C., these communities receive an inequitable amount of automated enforcement citations, demonstrating that automated enforcement is not a panacea for equity.

**Solutions**

Enforcement is a commonly used “E” in Vision Zero plans, but it doesn’t have to be. When a city adopts Vision Zero, it can decide what to prioritize. In the United States, bringing law enforcement into a zero-deaths plan is uniquely incongruous with the systemic and institutional racism embedded in our society.

Cities should not include enforcement in their Vision Zero plans. Inequitable policing will continue, but Vision Zero should not contribute. We should not trust that the police will enforce traffic laws equitably without the removal of white supremacy from U.S. law enforcement. That is a monumental goal far outside the reaches of Vision Zero.

A trademark of Vision Zero is the teamwork required from people across fields that typically do not work together: elected city leaders, public health professionals, traffic engineers, advocates, and urban planners. On the surface, this sounds like a meaningful opportunity to bring a diversity of perspectives to a Vision Zero plan. But many of these fields are historically dominated by white men, and thus white culture is very likely to recycle itself through Vision Zero. White culture in the U.S. overwhelmingly supports policing. This ideological framework impacts how Vision Zero is rolled out across the country. Establishing Vision Zero teams that are led by people of color will likely tamp down on this ideology and proffer innovative ideas that go beyond policing. An institution that routinely kills people of color is not an institution that is likely to assist in lessening our country’s death tolls on the road. We owe it to our neighbors, our community, and our loved ones to try something else.

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**CITATIONS**

2. Mary Wisniewski, “‘Biking while black’: Chicago minority areas see the most bike tickets,” Chicago Tribune, 2017; Alexandra Zayas and Kameel Stanley, “How riding your bike can land you in trouble with the cops—if you’re black,” Tampa Bay Times, 2015; Melody Hoffmann and Azul Kmiecik, “Bicycle Citations and Related Arrests in Minneapolis, 2009-2015.”
Traffic safety policies can only save lives and transform urban centers if the core ideas behind those policies are tangible, achievable, and relatable. Strategist Rich Kassel shares lessons from the environmental movement applicable to the fight for Vision Zero.
The question I asked to a crowded room in a Harlem housing project one night many years ago was this: “How many people know somebody who died from breathing too much air pollution?”

No hands went up.

It was the summer of 1995, and I was a young advocate at the Natural Resources Defense Council, working on a campaign we called “Dump Dirty Diesels.” Our campaign was designed to educate New Yorkers about the health risks of diesel pollution, and to convince the state to invest in the cleanest buses for the New York City Transit fleet. To succeed, we had to learn how to talk to the broadest possible audience and move beyond our core base of support, because we were not going to win on facts and figures alone.

Yes, like many Vision Zero advocates, we had the facts: in the mid-1990s, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data showed that roughly 50,000 premature deaths were linked to particulate matter in the U.S. every year. We knew that roughly 4,000 of those deaths occurred in New York City. We also knew that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation’s air monitors showed that more than half of the particulate matter on Madison Avenue came from diesel buses and trucks.

But we also knew that we could not actually name any of those deaths. If we wanted New Yorkers to support our campaign’s goals—which, we knew, is what it would take to convince then-Governor George Pat-aki to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in a clean bus fleet—we would need to find a way to get everybody in every room to raise their hands.

Back to that room in Harlem in 1995. I needed a new tactic. I needed to speak to the concerns of the people in the room and connect those concerns to the solution our campaign sought.

“How many people have asthma?” Plenty of hands went up.

“How many of you know somebody who has asthma?” Every hand in the room went up.

“Keep your hands up if you ever worry that the diesel bus depot in your neighborhood—or the buses on Broadway—have anything to do with asthma.” When I changed the question, everyone’s hands stayed up.

The Dump Dirty Diesels campaign was ultimately a great success, and by 2000, the Pat-aki administration had adopted the world’s most ambitious clean-fuel bus program. This reduced diesel particulate soot pollution by 97 percent over a decade and created an approach to reducing emissions that has been adopted by most major transit systems in the nation and throughout the trucking world.

Three important lessons from this environmental campaign can be adopted to the traffic safety issues that are at the core of Vision Zero.

First and foremost, politics is a game of addition. To succeed, advocates always need to compel the core people who are most affected by the problem, and most invested in the solution. But we also need to move beyond the core people to the much larger group of people who are indirectly affected, because there is political strength in numbers.

Cyclists have long been the heart of Vision Zero campaigns, in part because of the real danger felt by sharing space unprotected in fast-moving traffic. But to secure the policies and investments that will be needed to reach

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**ABOUT**

Rich Kassel runs the Energy, Environment + Sustainability program at Capalino + Company, one of New York’s leading government affairs and strategy firms. Prior to joining Capalino, Rich spent two decades at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). At NRDC, his “Dump Dirty Diesels” campaign led to the clean-up of New York City’s diesel buses and helped lay the foundation for national programs that have prevented tens of thousands of premature deaths attributable to diesel pollution annually. Rich is a member of the Advisory Council of Transportation Alternatives and is a co-founder and trustee of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a regional transportation advocacy organization.
Vision Zero, our campaigns need to reach people who worry about family members or friends out on their bikes; people who worry while crossing busy streets with their children; and everybody who would raise their hand to the question, “Have you ever been almost been hit by a motor vehicle?”

Second, we need to add solutions that are technically sound and achievable to our slogans. When we started our Dump Dirty Diesels campaign, some colleagues thought that the campaign should be called the “Dump Diesels” campaign. Doing so would have made the diesel engine itself the enemy, rather than the emissions. The engine companies would have been fighting for survival, and we would have been fighting for something that was not achievable, given the cost and availability of clean-bus technologies at that time.

By framing the solution in terms of eliminating a preventable byproduct of operating a transit bus (its “dirty” pollution), we created a tangible, technically sound engineering task that was achievable (i.e., a “clean” engine), and thereby increased our chances for success. Similarly, safety advocates need to add solutions that are technically sound, and that are tangible and achievable, to our Vision Zero vision. We need to call for specific investments that are tailored to each city, such as X miles of protected bike lanes, Y roadways redesigned to make them safer, Z traffic enforcement cameras to ensure motorists do not speed, and so on.

Third, we need to hold decision-makers accountable by objectively monitoring the implementation of hard-won victories, and never lose steam when other issues take center stage. After all, we cannot applaud—or fix—what we cannot measure. By monitoring the buses purchased by New York City’s transit authority in response to our Dump Dirty Diesel campaign, as well as related capital investments, we were able to gauge progress as the clean-fuel bus program was implemented, adjust to keep it on track, and ultimately know that the program was a success. Besides monitoring investments, we also monitored the real-world benefits of these investments:

- Independent research established that diesel soot emissions were reduced by 97 percent over the course of a decade, which empowered other fleets and cities to follow the New York success story.

In the Vision Zero framework, it is critical that advocates monitor and understand real-world changes in the number of crashes, injuries, and fatalities, because that information will enable Vision Zero advocates to advocate for course corrections and applaud progress as it occurs. New York City, for example, has experienced an increase in bicycle and pedestrian fatalities so far in 2019, energizing advocates to demand greater commitment to the City’s Vision Zero program. This has resulted in pledges from city officials to increase and accelerate the city’s plans to build protected bike lanes, implement complete street redesigns on high-risk corridors, and make other critical street improvements.

Whether talking about dirty diesel pollution or unsafe streets, there are ways to frame our issues and our solutions to inspire individual advocacy and achieve and maintain long-term success. Adding supporters to the obvious core constituency, pushing for technically sound and achievable solutions, and monitoring results to hold decision-makers accountable are three of the most important attributes of a successful advocacy campaign. Adapting each of these lessons to the challenges of reducing crashes, injuries, and fatalities and increasing investments in complete, safer streets should help advocates achieve the ultimate goal of Vision Zero.
The survivors and victims of traffic violence are powerful advocates for Vision Zero but working with people affected by trauma can be complicated as well as rewarding. In this helpful guide, members of Families for Safe Streets offer what they have learned about transforming grief into advocacy.
When people are killed or injured in traffic crashes, lives and spirits, as well as limbs and joints, can be left shattered. Friends, loved ones, and acquaintances are often mystified by how to be supportive and how to talk about what happened, both in the immediate aftermath and months and years after a crash. For safe streets advocates, connecting with those who have paid such a personal price for traffic violence can also be a challenge, whether to offer assistance, comfort, and hope, or to engage them in advocacy and activism to prevent future carnage.

Families for Safe Streets—an advocacy and support organization comprised of people who have been personally impacted by traffic violence, this year marking its fifth anniversary—has found several effective models and strategies for doing this work. Our roadmap is based on the support, resources, and advice that have been most helpful or desired by our members.

Making the Connection

Unless a crash happened to someone you know, the random nature of traffic violence may make it difficult for advocates to find those who have been affected. Not everyone will be open to connecting and it would be futile to look for and reach out to every single person involved in a traffic crash in your community.

At Families for Safe Streets, we instead employ a multi-pronged approach to increase awareness of our organization, allowing interested people to easily find us. We publicize our services and contact information far and wide, both online and in-person. This includes having a strong social media presence; being visible at vigils, public memorials, ghost bike installations, and community meetings; and building relationships with referral sources like hospitals, attorneys, police, clergy, and media. We distribute organizational postcards in multiple languages and use community, political, media, and personal connections to reach out directly in the aftermath of crashes.

In one example, a group of Families for Safe Streets members attended a vigil for a nine-year-old boy who was killed while walking in the crosswalk with his mother. His grieving parents were so moved by the presence of other bereaved parents that they joined the organization and started speaking out as advocates only weeks later. In another, a widow whose husband was killed while bicycling, intrigued by a photo in a local community paper of members wearing Families for Safe Streets’ t-shirts, discovered our website and has since found camaraderie in our support services and an outlet for her desire to make meaningful change. Yet another member, who is now speaking at press conferences and community board meetings, learned about our support community through his therapist who had either been to a presentation or saw a blurb in one of many community emails we ask elected officials and community organizations to send out. In these ways, by being a constant public presence with a clear purpose, the needful public can find us as they are ready.

Providing Needed Services

As you meet people affected by traffic violence, be sensitive to whether they are just in need of a listening ear, support services, and logistical assistance, or if they are interested

ABOUT

Judith Kottick confronted the unimaginable in 2013 when her 23-year-old daughter, Ella Bandes, was killed by a distracted bus driver. She and her husband joined others who were impacted by traffic violence to form Families for Safe Streets, an organization of Transportation Alternatives. Judith is a clinical social worker and maintains a private practice in New York and New Jersey. Chana Widawski is the inaugural organizer for Families for Safe Streets. A social worker with over a decade of experience working with victims and survivors of crime, Chana is also a four-season cyclist, environmental activist, and neighborhood organizer. She serves as Adjunct Faculty at Hunter School of Social Work.
Simply bearing witness to someone’s pain has significant power.

in and ready for advocacy. Having an arsenal of resources is essential. Families for Safe Streets provides a downloadable online manual and offers peer support, monthly support communities, and referral guidance. If you find someone who is ready for advocacy, be conscious of schedules and especially of comfort level. Offer a range of opportunities to engage, from a one-time appearance at a press conference, to attending a support group or leading a campaign for change on our streets. At Families for Safe Streets, we aim to give our members a place to find meaning and support they are unlikely to find anywhere else, always keeping in mind that people come to our group with different needs and expectations.

In New York City, we have found that Families for Safe Streets can bring a human face to statistics that can otherwise seem meaningless and give government agencies the backing they need to resist the inevitable pushback against street safety efforts. However, for all that powerful meaning, it is critical to respect the boundaries and limitations of people in mourning or overcoming trauma. These boundaries may fluctuate over time. The most important thing you can do while working with victims of traffic violence is to allow them to steer, always paying heed to not be exploitative.

Lastly, it is important to recognize the differences between injury and loss. Inspired by a young woman, who after her own crash started a group to connect with others who had been injured, Families for Safe Streets offers a separate community for traffic injury support.

The Reality of Trauma

Confronting the tragedy of losing a loved one or being seriously injured in an instant typically causes a reaction of shock and disbelief, as well as a mix of depression, anger, anxiety, and hopelessness. Dealing with heartbreak and grief, plus physical pain for those who have been injured, is an exhausting full-time job that often takes place while practical and legal issues demand attention. To top it off, the burden is often exacerbated by feelings of isolation and a sense of being alienated from the rest of the world.

The experience of grief and trauma is an assault to the whole body and can have an impact on brain function and behavior. Awareness of the science behind the short- and long-term implications of trauma can be especially important for staff, volunteers, and even friends and family. If making therapist referrals, consider someone who is informed and sensitive to the issues of trauma. If you get into a space where you are unsure of what to say or do, keep in mind that merely listening actively, without judgment, advice, or an agenda, can be hugely impactful.

Knowing What to Say and Do

It is both daunting and a privilege to connect with a fellow human being during their darkest hours, whether as a loved one or acquaintance or as a safe streets advocate. It requires the emotional stamina to tolerate someone else’s suffering and to convey a willingness to listen to their story without minimizing the tragedy.

Be conscious of not wanting to intrude on someone’s private life during a time of crisis, but also remember that most people...
respond with relief to offers of support from an informed party whose only objective is to support and understand their heartbeat. It is not necessary to share the experience of a traffic trauma to effectively reach out with compassion. While there is no “right” way to listening to someone’s story, there are a few things you can do to make sure they feel safe: First, listen attentively, refrain from interrupting, and ask questions for clarification. You should be laser focused without preconceived ideas of how the conversation “is supposed to” unfold. Be patient and present. There may be silences or gaps in conversations, which do not require comment. Simply bearing witness to someone’s pain has significant power. Even if you have experienced a similar loss or injury, refrain from assuming or articulating that you “understand” anyone’s unique experience.

Next, be sure to acknowledge the tragedy and injustice, and avoid unrealistic or false reassurance that one day they will be “back to normal.” Do not try to talk someone out of their feelings, even if taking their own life is mentioned. This is not an unusual thought, given the circumstances, and does not necessarily warrant the panic button unless they indicate plans for how and when they would do so. In that case, you must alert a professional and call 911.

The conversation may revolve around practical issues rather than emotional ones, like requests for attorneys or physical therapists or questions about how the justice system works. If you are unable to respond knowledgeably, suggest the “Families for Safe Streets Resource Guide” and offer to follow up with more information.

The impact of traffic violence is a life-altering event and none of us are prepared for the decisions, pain, physical limitations, grief, and emotional consequences that ensue immediately and in the years to come. You can make a difference in someone’s life by merely witnessing their grief, holding their pain, and when appropriate, offering advocacy opportunities to make change. Doing so is a profound contribution.

»You can make a difference in someone’s life by merely witnessing their grief, holding their pain, and when appropriate, offering advocacy opportunities to make change.«