



CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

City Council Staff Report

From: City Manager

Report Type: INFORMATION REPORTS

Lead Department: Transportation

Meeting Date: November 27, 2023

Report #:2309-2039

TITLE

Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Action Plan & Safe System Approach Introduction

RECOMMENDATION

Informational Report on the Development of the Safe Streets for All Action Plan and an Introduction to the Safe System Approach. No action requested.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Improving safety for all road users is a constant need in Palo Alto and one that will require the City to assess existing conditions and prioritize actions to proactively address locations and situations that are associated with the highest risk for severe injuries and fatalities. The City intends to follow the Safe System Approach for this assessment and action items to follow.

The Safe System Approach is a transportation system safety strategy to eliminate fatal and severe injury crashes on roadways. The Safe System Approach is promoted by the federal, state, and regional transportation organizations. This approach identifies traffic safety as the highest priority for the design and operation of the transportation system and views traffic fatalities and severe injuries as unacceptable and preventable through joint action. The Safe System Approach is the foundation for the National Safety Strategy released by USDOT in 2022.¹ Caltrans has also adopted both a Safe System Approach and a Vision Zero goal in roadway safety planning across California.²

Several state and federal funding sources now require adoption of roadway safety action plans or Vision Zero plans to ensure funding for transportation projects that prioritize safety for all road users. In June of 2023, the City executed a Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant agreement with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to develop a safety action plan informed by the Safe System Approach.³ This planning effort will assist in identifying and prioritizing safety projects

¹ <https://www.transportation.gov/nrss/usdot-national-roadway-safety-strategy>

² <https://dot.ca.gov/news-releases/news-release-2022-009>

³ [June 19, 2023 Council item #35, CMR 2305-1525](#)

and programs in Palo Alto. Completion of this grant-funded project will also enable the City to apply for subsequent SS4A Implementation Grants as well as other funding programs, such as the State's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP).

BACKGROUND

The 2017 Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan Policy T-6.2 states the community goal to reduce fatal and severe injuries on local roadways to zero. This concept of "Vision Zero" includes a multi-modal focus and has come to fore nationally and regionally since the 2012 adoption of the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan. In June 2020, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) adopted the first Regional Vision Zero policy under Resolution 4400 and formed a Vision Zero working group to advance regional Vision Zero safety efforts. In June 2023, the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) adopted a strategy for the Valley Transportation Plan 2050 to eliminate pedestrian and bicycle severe injuries and traffic deaths as part of its goal to prioritize active transportation to encourage healthier multimodal options.⁴

Meeting this safety objective will require a cooperative, multi-sector and multi-jurisdictional effort, built on the Safe System Approach (Attachment 1). The Safe System Approach addresses the safety of all road users and prioritizes roadway safety through acknowledgement of these six principles:

1. Death and serious injury are unacceptable
2. Humans make mistakes
3. Humans are vulnerable
4. Responsibility is shared
5. Safety is proactive
6. Redundancy is crucial

The approach requires elements that remove stakeholders from silos and create critical collaboration and coordination opportunities. These include:

- Safe Road Users
- Safe Vehicles
- Safe Speeds
- Safe Roads
- Post-Crash Care

For many jurisdictions, the Safe System Approach represents a fundamental shift in how safety is viewed, discussed, and prioritized. These shifts, as shown in the graphic below, refocus safety practices to anticipate human mistakes and reduce crash severity by lessening the impact to the human body:

⁴ [June 1, 2023 VTA Board item 6.12](#)

Traditional

Safe System

Prevent crashes	→	Prevent deaths and serious injuries
Improve human behavior	→	Design for human mistakes/limitations
Control speeding	→	Reduce system kinetic energy
Individuals are responsible	→	Share responsibility
React based on crash history	→	Proactively identify and address risks

DISCUSSION

To advance the goal of improving roadway safety for all modes in Palo Alto and to support the requirements of the SS4A grant, Fehr & Peers, a transportation consulting firm with expertise in safety planning, will assist city staff in developing a safety action plan⁵ completed by VTA for Palo Alto by adding robust community engagement and an equity analysis that was not included in the LRSP, as well as a review of opportunities to institutionalize safety within the City's policies, programs, and practices. A list of the required SS4A safety action plan components can be found [here](#).⁶

While meeting requirements for funding is important, the primary goal of this planning effort is to identify opportunities across the Safe System elements to improve safety in support of the Vision Zero goal of reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries to zero by 2030 or a different target year to be adopted by the City.

The City's Safety Action Plan includes the following activities:

1. An assessment of the City's current policies, plans, guidelines, and/or standards to align with the Safe System Approach and identify opportunities to improve how processes prioritize safety
2. An analysis of safety data to understand historic collision trends including the number of fatal and severe injury crashes from 2018 to 2022. This includes analysis of crash locations, the severity, contributing factors, and crash types while identifying higher risk locations and a high injury network that highlights the portions of the City's roadway network responsible for disproportionate numbers of collisions
3. A project website and data dashboard to highlight results of the collision data analysis and host links to an outreach survey and interactive map

⁵ [Local Road Safety Plan for Palo Alto and other cities, September 2022](#)

⁶ [US Department of Transportation, SS4A Action Plan Components](#)

4. A survey of community preferences regarding safety improvements that will help inform the project list and safety strategies
5. An equity analysis to understand how collisions may be impacting different population groups
6. Development of a list of projects and strategies for the Safety Action Plan
7. A description of how plan progress will be measured over time and resource needs for ongoing data collection and analysis

FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

On June 19, 2023, Council approved CMR 2305-1525, the funding agreement with FHWA and related budget amendments to the Fiscal Year 2024 Adopted Capital Budget for the Transportation and Parking Improvements Project (PL-12000) to increase both revenue and expense appropriation by \$160,000 to reflect the grant revenue and project cost. As explained in CMR 2305-1525, an additional \$40,000 in project cost, which is the 20% City match portion required in the funding agreement, will be absorbed by existing appropriation within the same project (PL-12000) as a part of the FY2024 Adopted Capital Budget, with no additional budgetary action required.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is a required element of any SS4A Safety Action Plan receiving federal grant funding. The City is engaging the public in plan development through an online survey, interactive mapping, in-person tabling at two community events, and via the City's communication channels. Much of this engagement will be coordinated with the concurrently scheduled Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan Update. The City will engage the Planning and Transportation Commission, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee, and the City/School Traffic Safety Committee, which is a historic partnership between City Departments, the Palo Alto School District, and the Palo Alto Parent Teacher Association Council. These three bodies were introduced to the SS4A Action Plan and Safe System Approach in October 2023.

Community Engagement Summary from October Outreach & Committee Meetings

Bike Palo Alto, October 1, 2023

Overall, participants of Bike Palo Alto were very enthusiastic about this effort. Many expressed enthusiasm for safer bicycle facilities throughout the City, especially routes that lead to schools, recreational trails, grocery stores, and through the downtown area. Prominent issues identified by participants included motorists speeding as well as the visibility of vulnerable users at intersections along major thoroughfares and at stop-controlled intersections.

Many expressed interest in future updates about the planning process, and the consultant team noted that the City's project website will include the latest information on the status of the project.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee (PABAC), October 3, 2023

The following themes and questions were raised by Committee members at the October 3, 2023, PABAC meeting:

- Questions about the definition of a severe injury
- Concerns that SUV's and certain vehicle designs contribute more to injury than other kinds of cars
- Question about community engagement reaching commuters and having gender and geographical representation.
- Questions about the role of education in the Safe System Approach and requests to maintain education initiatives
- The importance of street design and redundancy in safety systems when there is a collision.
- Comment about the policy trade-off between more smaller collisions versus fewer but more serious crashes. Another member stated that modern roundabouts are an example of an engineering solution providing a tradeoff of lower collision severity while not necessarily reducing the number of collisions.
- Comment on reducing kinetic energy by reducing speed, mass, and providing an energy-absorbing component
- Question about what will be considered a favorable outcome
- Comment that separated bikeways create geometric conflicts at driveways and intersections
- Question about how the equity analysis will be done
- Question about the amount of collision data needed for statistical accuracy
- Concern that an engineering-focused approach may lead drivers toward more speeding and bad driving
- Comment that speed cameras could change driver behavior for the better
- Question about analyzing the demographics of drivers who cause injuries
- Questions about how El Camino Real, a State highway, and County roads will be addressed.
- Support for the plan to reduce kinetic energy via slower speeds, lighter vehicles, walking, and biking
- Support for the plan to change streets to accommodate how humans behave and to signal to drivers to look for conflicts at corners
- Support for the potential of engineering to change human behavior
- Comment about the aspirational nature of the target year and goal
- Request to frame the plan goal as providing safe transportation infrastructure and diverse transportation modes

- Request that project materials emphasize the post-crash investigation and care elements that are part of the Safe System Approach
- Question about who will pay for the needed improvements and how much it will cost
- Comment that this plan will likely have a large impact on eliminating car-on-car collisions
- Comment that Helsinki and Oslo, cities much larger than Palo Alto, have been successful in eliminating traffic deaths
- Requests to reduce the speed limit to 20 MPH

Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC), October 11, 2023

The following themes and questions were raised by Commissioners and the public at the October 11, 2023, PTC meeting:

- Request to improve the swiss cheese graphic depicting redundancy in safety layers
- Question about the definition of severe injury
- Comments on how to publicize the interactive map and online survey with PAUSD, PTA, Stanford, and other community partners
- Question about Stanford collision data
- Question about whether ebikes/e-skateboards are considered safe vehicles
- Comment that reducing speed is key and question about the ability to restrict roads to certain kinds of vehicles
- Comment about S. Palo Alto Bikeways project and resistance to parking removal
- Request for more bike paths along creek rights-of-way
- Requests to coordinate with Caltrans on El Camino Real
- Request for a year-round interactive map
- Request for post-collision follow-up
- Several comments that the 2030 target year is too far away
- Multiple requests for temporary solutions, even if they look ugly
- Request for transportation planning for areas newly designated for housing
- Requests to prioritize school commute routes, school areas, seniors, and new housing zones
- Concern that the map will either attract too much or not enough data
- Request that garbage trucks stay away from bike routes during rush hour
- Concern that there is not political will to move quickly
- Question about how the City can be more aggressive in making roadway changes
- Multiple supportive statements for proactive measures for safety
- Support for the plan development
- Support for overcoming human error and inattentiveness
- Support for a 2030 target year
- Requests to include but not overstate the equity aspect of this work.
- Requests to broaden the scope of injuries covered since lesser injuries are also traumatic
- Concerns that bad driving is increasing at a time of reduced police presence

- Request to automate data collection
- Request to add “collisions with children” to the vision statement which would be deemed inadequate without this phrase
- Request to place a crossing guard in front of every school and across all lanes of large roads
- Request to find a solution for sun glare
- Concern that the pandemic years will dilute the collision data analysis
- Appreciation for the Charleston/Arastradero Corridor project
- Request for pedestrian refuge islands for seniors
- Comment that there is a trade-off between speed and safety and that reprogramming drivers to drive slower will be a challenge
- Request for alignment on how to prioritize aesthetics
- Question about a democratic mandate for a road diet on El Camino Real

City/School Transportation Safety Committee (CSTSC), October 26, 2023

The following themes and questions surfaced at the October 26, 2023 CSTSC meeting:

- Request that PAUSD allow students to fill out the interactive map and survey during Advisory time
- Comment that 2030 is too far away as a target year
- Comment that the word “effort” in the vision statement is too weak
- Comments that the communications strategy for publicizing the survey and interactive map should include earned media, Palo Alto Moms group, Palo Alto Parents group, NextDoor, school newspapers and Uplift Local
- Support for the Safe System Approach

TIMELINE

Palo Alto Safety Action Plan Timeline (subject to change)

DATE	TASK
October 1, 2023	Community Outreach Event at Bike Palo Alto!
October 2023	Document existing safety practices, policies, standards
October 2023	Committee Meetings (PTC, PABAC, CSTSC) to introduce project and announce community survey. Will return to Committees with results from the collision analysis in January-February 2024.
Late October/Early November 2023	Informational Report to Council to introduce project
September – November 2023	Analyze collision data, identify collision profiles, map High-Injury Network

December-January 2024	Equity Analysis
January-February 2024	Committee Meetings to review collision analysis and High-Injury Network. We will return to Committees to review project list and the Safe System Toolbox in May 2024.
December – March 2024	Develop project list and Safe System Toolbox
March – May 2024	Document progress measures and outcome data for ongoing monitoring and data collection
May 2024	Community Engagement Event (May Fete) & Standing Committee Meetings to review project list and Safe System Toolbox. Will return to Committees in October to share draft safety action plan.
July-August 2024	Draft Vision Zero Action Plan Review
September – November 2024	Council & Committee Meetings Final Plan Adoption

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This study session is not a project as defined by CEQA because it does not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment. CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(4).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: FHWA Safe System Approach Brochure⁷

APPROVED BY:

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⁷ [FHWA brochure, The Safe System Approach, FHWA-SA-20-015](#)