



CITY OF  
**PALO  
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**CITY OF PALO ALTO**  
**Planning & Transportation Commission**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Wednesday, January 29, 2025**  
**6:00 PM**

<b>Agenda Item</b>
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4. Palo Alto Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan      **7:00 PM – 8:00 PM**



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## Planning & Transportation Commission Staff Report

**From: Chief Transportation Official**  
**Lead Department: Office of Transportation**

**Meeting Date: January 29, 2025**  
**Report #: 2410-3728**

### **TITLE**

Palo Alto Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Review and provide feedback on the Draft Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan and Resolution.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The draft SS4A Safety Action Plan was developed to align with Federal policies and requirements to adopt the Safe System Approach as a strategy for eliminating traffic related injuries and fatalities. This report highlights some of the tradeoff considerations that come from the shift to the new roadway safety planning and engineering approach.

### **BACKGROUND**

In late 2023, the City of Palo Alto and its consultant, Fehr & Peers, began the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan. While PTC held study sessions<sup>1</sup> on the two prior project phases, Council received two informational reports about the SS4A Safety Action Plan; the first introduced the plan and provided background on the Safe System Approach while the second provided an overview of the collision analysis and stakeholder engagement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Planning and Transportation Commission, October 11/2023; Agenda Item #2, SR #2309-1975, <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/meetings/ItemWithTemplateType?id=3138&meetingTemplateType=2&compiledMeetingDocumentId=11215> and Planning and Transportation Commission, February 28, 2024; Agenda Item #2, SR #2402-2630, <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/meetings/ItemWithTemplateType?id=4316&meetingTemplateType=2&compiledMeetingDocumentId=11353>

<sup>2</sup> City Council, November 27, 2023; Agenda Item #18, SR #2309-2039, <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/api/compilemeetingattachmenthistory/historyattachment/?historyId=36025c95-52b1-4da0-bc8b-fad9df86f7e8> and City Council, April 29, 2024; Agenda Item #3, SR #2404-2839, <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/api/compilemeetingattachmenthistory/historyattachment/?historyId=79d7c1d2-b1a1-4eb9-acca-039fab914f74>

The primary goal of this planning effort is to identify proactive, citywide opportunities across the Safe System elements (safe users, safe speeds, safe roads, safe vehicles, and post-crash care) to improve safety for all road users in support of the Vision Zero goal of reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries by 2035, 2040, or another target year to be adopted by the Council.

This Plan complies with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)'s SS4A requirements for a safety action plan<sup>3</sup> and will make Palo Alto eligible for implementation funding from the annual \$1 billion Safe Streets for All federal funding program as well as other state grants that require such a plan.

## ANALYSIS

### Safe System Approach

The Safe System Approach is the USDOT's recommended framework to reach zero fatalities and serious injuries on US roadways.<sup>4</sup> The major tenants of the Safe System Approach are – death and serious injury is unacceptable, humans make mistakes, humans are vulnerable, responsibility is shared, safety is proactive, and redundancy is crucial. The Safe System Approach highlights the need for the commitment and leadership by City leaders, City staff, and the community to align policies and create a physical environment that accommodates the reality that humans make mistakes and crashes happen, but none have to lead to a death or serious injury. Communities following the Safe System Approach are also advised to adopt the FHWA Safe System Roadway Design Hierarchy, which focuses on managing speeds to community context and then separating users in space and time.<sup>5</sup> FHWA has also provided alignment tools for adopting communities to use to assess how projects and policies should be adjusted to be consistent with the Safe System framework.<sup>6</sup> This Plan reflects these recommended practices.



Source: FHWA.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of Transportation, SS4A Action Plan Components, [https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-06/SS4A\\_Action\\_Plan\\_Components.pdf](https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-06/SS4A_Action_Plan_Components.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Transportation, National Roadway Safety Strategy, <https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-02/USDOT-National-Roadway-Safety-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> US Department of Transportation & Federal Highway Administration, Safe System Roadway Design Hierarchy, [https://highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/2024-01/Safe\\_System\\_Roadway\\_Design\\_Hierarchy.pdf](https://highways.dot.gov/sites/fhwa.dot.gov/files/2024-01/Safe_System_Roadway_Design_Hierarchy.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Federal Highway Administration, Safe System Project-Based Alignment Framework, <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/zero-deaths/safe-system-project-based-alignment-framework>, and Federal

## Tradeoff Considerations

Following the Safe System Approach and prioritizing multimodal safety and accessibility in Palo Alto represents a paradigm shift in how transportation decisions will be made in the City. The policies, programs, and procedures recommended in this Plan are more proactive and systemic in nature, and the tradeoff decisions associated with project prioritization and design will reflect the City's commitment to reducing safety risk factors in the transportation system.

Program level strategies include:

- Developing a citywide speed management approach and prioritizing interventions to reduce speed in locations with vulnerable road users.
  - This could streamline project implementation and focus community engagement on speed reduction treatments and non-safety-based decisions.
  - This could lead to additional delay for single occupant vehicles traveling in Palo Alto due to traffic calming strategies applied.
- Developing default tools for separating users in space and time based on the volume, speed, and configuration of the roadway.
  - This could streamline project implementation and focus community engagement on speed reduction treatments and non-safety-based decisions.
  - This could lead to a reallocation of vehicle travel lanes and/or on-street parking to active transportation facilities.
- Prioritizing safety in all roadway projects planned, funded, and built in the City, including routine maintenance efforts.
  - This could lead to auditing and eliminating or re-envisioning projects that add new safety risk to the system.
- Considering safety upstream, with a focus on land use planning, accessibility to key services, transportation demand management, and partnerships with transit providers.
  - The City's Housing Element and transit services within the City will be seen as safety focus areas for staff, following a public health-based, population-scale approach.<sup>7</sup>

When these efforts are collaborative and proactive, and especially when they lean on emerging technologies and clear goals and performance metrics, they will allow staff to identify challenges and look for win-win solutions. In other communities, challenges arising late in the process have included concerns regarding emergency vehicles and evacuation, as well as ample and transparent access to project and planning processes and tradeoff decision-making bases. Additionally, communities have faced challenges aligning efforts with the Safe System Approach

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Highway Administration, Safe System Policy-Based Alignment Framework, <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/zero-deaths/safe-system-policy-based-alignment-framework>

<sup>7</sup> Thinking & Acting Differently for Vision Zero: Applying the Health Impact Pyramid to Roadway Safety, <https://visionzeronet.org/applying-the-health-impact-pyramid-to-roadway-safety/>

when they have commitment statements in a Safety Plan but have not accompanied this with sufficient efforts to institutionalize the commitment and reduce barriers to adoption. This staff report, in particular, seeks to provide the transparency on how this Safety Action Plan will shift staff priorities, focus areas, and the decision-making processes. The public review and community engagement efforts for this draft Safety Action Plan offer the opportunity to influence the tradeoff process that the final Plan will direct staff to follow.

#### Draft Safety Action Plan Public Review

The [Draft SS4A Safety Action Plan](#) was published on the City's website on December 13, 2024. Staff distributed information about the Draft Safety Action Plan through the City's project website and citywide communication channels. Public comments will be accepted via the project website through February 14, 2025.<sup>8</sup>

#### Next Steps

The Palo Alto SS4A Safety Action Plan will return to Council for adoption in Spring 2025. For consistency with Federal funding requirements from the SS4A Self-Certification Eligibility Worksheet<sup>9</sup>, staff intend to recommend a resolution that contains a policy that commits to eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries by a specific date. The draft resolution can be found on page 3 of the draft Safety Action Plan (Attachment A).

When the project was first brought to the standing committees and Council, the zero-goal year was identified as 2030. Discussions with stakeholders and City staff identified that more time is needed to strengthen the City's culture and climate of systemic safety within the agency and the community. This starts with more systematically addressing key risk factors and barriers to safety that exist in Palo Alto and instilling or fortifying the City's commitment to align design, maintenance, and operation decisions in alignment with the Safe System Approach. With the policy, planning, design, and implementation needed to create a roadway system that is self-enforcing and proactively reduces speeds, staff recommends that the standing committees and Council identify a zero-goal year of 2035 or 2040 with the final Plan adoption.

Once feedback is consolidated from the community, standing committees, and Council, staff and the City's consultants will update the Draft Safety Action Plan and bring it back to City Council for final review and adoption.

#### **FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT**

The total cost for the SS4A Safety Action Plan is estimated at \$200,000 with the FWHA contributing \$160,000 (80%), and City contributing the remaining \$40,000 (20%). On June 19, 2023, the Council

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<sup>8</sup> Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan website,  
<https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Transportation/Transportation-Projects/Safety-Action-Plan>

<sup>9</sup> Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Self-Certification Eligibility Worksheet,  
<https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2024-02/SS4A-FY24-Self-Certification-Worksheet.pdf>

approved CMR 2305-1525<sup>10</sup> which amended the FY 2024 Parking and Transportation Improvements Project Budget (PL-12000) by increasing revenue and project expense by \$160,000. The remaining \$40,000 was absorbed in the project's existing FY 2024 Adopted Capital Budget appropriation.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

### **Community Engagement for Plan Development**

Chapter 2 of the draft SS4A Safety Action Plan details the community engagement conducted. Since Fall 2023, engagement opportunities included an online survey, an interactive web-based map, and tables at Bike Palo Alto and the May Fete Fair. For each phase of outreach, the project team met with standing committees, including the City/School Transportation Safety Committee (CSTSC), the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee (PABAC), and the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC). In addition, the Human Relations Commission (HRC) received a presentation on the draft SS4A Safety Action Plan at their January 9, 2025, meeting. As noted in the Background section, informational reports sharing interim deliverables and summarizing committee feedback were provided to Council for each phase of the project.

### **Safety Action Plan Task Force**

Ongoing stakeholder engagement is required for the implementation of the Safety Action Plan. Rather than create a new body to oversee plan implementation, staff propose to use existing standing committees staffed by the Office of Transportation: the CSTSC, the PABAC, and the PTC. SS4A Safety Action Plan progress and collision data would be shared with the three bodies that would make recommendations to the City Council about SS4A Safety Action Plan activities.

## **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 15061(b)(3).

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Draft Palo Alto Safety Action Plan

## **AUTHOR/TITLE:**

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<sup>10</sup> <https://cityofpaloalto.primegov.com/Portal/viewer?id=2303&type=0>

## Attachment A

The Safe Streets for All Safety Action Plan can be viewed at this link:

[https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/transportation/projects/ss4a-safety-action-plan/palo-alto\\_public-draft-safety-action-plan-121624.pdf](https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/transportation/projects/ss4a-safety-action-plan/palo-alto_public-draft-safety-action-plan-121624.pdf)