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# ITS AMERICA NATIONAL VISION ZERO POLICY

## Safer Streets For All Users

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## ITS America National Vision Zero Policy: Safer Streets for All Users

### Introduction

Far too many vulnerable road users—including people walking and cycling—die on U.S. roads. Motor vehicle crashes killed an estimated 42,060 Americans in 2020, the worst death toll in 14 years.<sup>1</sup> Historically, these deaths have been accepted as an inevitable consequence of modern life. Vision Zero is an initiative founded on the tenet that crashes are preventable, and thus deaths and serious injuries in traffic can be eliminated through a comprehensive program of engineering, education, and enforcement.

In a year in which Americans have turned to walking and cycling as a socially-distant way to get to work, school, see their doctor, or get groceries, walking and cycling fatalities have soared. The Governors Highway Safety Association projects that the U.S. pedestrian fatality rate rose 20 percent in the first six months of 2020.<sup>2</sup> The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found risky driving behaviors, particularly speeding and impaired driving, increased during the pandemic, leading to higher rates of death and serious injury even as total vehicular miles traveled decreased.<sup>3</sup> 2020 is projected to have the largest ever annual increase in U.S. pedestrian fatalities.

Central to Vision Zero’s engineering ethos is the concept of a “safe system.” We need to recognize that human beings will always make mistakes. This leads to street and vehicle designs that are meant to be forgiving of those errors, ensuring a crash does not lead to serious injury or death. Commercial aviation has long embraced a safe systems approach, and since 1997, the risk of a fatal crash has fallen 95 percent.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in 2017, there were no passenger jet crash fatalities anywhere in the world – a previously unimaginable achievement. The same principles, applied to road traffic and focused on data-driven policy, have the potential to significantly reduce the burden in death, disability, and property damage from crashes in the United States, which was estimated at \$474.4 *billion* in 2020.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Safety Council (2021). *Preliminary Semiannual Estimates*. <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/motor-vehicle/overview/preliminary-estimates/>

<sup>2</sup> Governors Highway Safety Association (2021). *Spotlight on Highway Safety: Pedestrian Traffic Fatalities by State, 2020 Preliminary Data*.

<sup>3</sup> Wagner, E., Atkins, R., Berning, A., Robbins, A., Watson, C., & Anderle, J. (2020, October). *Examination of the traffic safety environment during the second quarter of 2020: Special report* (Report No. DOT HS 813 011). National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

<sup>4</sup> United States Department of Transportation. *The State of Airline Safety: Federal Oversight of Commercial Aviation*. Statement of Daniel K. Ellwell, Acting Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration. March 27, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> National Safety Council, *ibid*.

This is a public health emergency, with low-socioeconomic status communities disproportionately feeling the impacts.<sup>6</sup>

ITS America supports a National Vision Zero policy that includes technology deployment to improve detection of vulnerable road users, leading to safer roadways for all.

## Policy Recommendations

1. Define “Vision Zero” as a program that operates on the principle that roadway crashes resulting in fatalities and serious injuries are preventable through comprehensive programs of data-driven engineering, enforcement, and education, all of which can include both established and new technology deployments provided in an equitable manner.
2. Establish funding for local and state governments, MPOs, or regional transportation planning organizations to establish and implement Vision Zero plans which outline, within a specific period of time not to exceed 20 years, how the jurisdiction will use available data on fatality, serious injury, and other crashes, and the factors contributing to them, in order to create programs, strategies, or policies that use the safe system approach to prioritize the safety of vulnerable road users. This may also include funding for State Departments of Transportation to incorporate into their State Strategic Highway Safety Plans such an approach. The term ‘safe system approach’ means a roadway design that emphasizes minimizing the risk of injury or fatality to road users and that—
  - 2.1. Takes into consideration the possibility and likelihood of human error;
  - 2.2. Accommodates human injury tolerance by taking into consideration likely crash types, resulting impact forces, and the human body’s ability to withstand such forces; and
  - 2.3. takes into consideration vulnerable road user.<sup>7</sup>
3. Require that Vision Zero plans include:
  - 3.1. An analysis of pedestrian deaths and serious injuries within the most recent five years for which FARS data is available;
  - 3.2. An analysis of bicyclist deaths and serious injuries within the most recent five years for which FARS data is available;
  - 3.3. An analysis of motorcyclist deaths and serious injuries within the most recent five years for which FARS data is available;
  - 3.4. An analysis of motor vehicle occupant deaths and serious injuries within the most recent five years for which FARS data is available;

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<sup>6</sup> Harper, S., Charters, T.J., & Strumpf, E.C. (2015) “Trends in Socioeconomic Inequalities in Motor Vehicle Accident Deaths in the United States, 1995–2010.” *American Journal of Epidemiology*, Volume 182, Issue 7, 1 October 2015, Pages 606–614

<sup>7</sup> INVEST in America Act H.R. 2 116<sup>th</sup> Congress (2019-2020) Sec. 1209. Highway Safety Improvement Program (a)(1)(D)(10) Safe System Approach.

- 3.5. An analysis of the factors contributing to fatalities and serious injuries on the roadways of a jurisdiction;
  - 3.6. An analysis, to the extent possible, of the magnitude and impact of vehicular speeding within the jurisdiction and a plan for equitably addressing dangerous speeding conditions to minimize injury potential for road users through engineering, education, and enforcement;
  - 3.7. Proposals for programs, strategies, operational changes, and/or policies to address roadway design and operation to reduce fatalities and serious injuries to vulnerable road users;
  - 3.8. Proposals for programs, strategies, operational changes, and/or policies to focus equitable law enforcement on the motorist behaviors and predominant contributing factors most frequently involved in roadway fatalities and serious injuries within the jurisdiction;
  - 3.9. Proposals for programs, strategies, operational changes, and/or policies to disseminate public information and conduct public outreach regarding practices and behaviors that contribute to roadway fatalities and serious injuries within the jurisdiction;
  - 3.10. Proposals for programs, strategies, or policies to deploy safety-related technologies, including intelligent transportation systems such as Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems (ADAS), and Vehicle-to-Everything (V2X) technologies to reduce fatalities and serious injuries to vulnerable road users as well as vehicle occupants;
  - 3.11. A plan for prioritizing specific locations and/or typologies of roadway within the jurisdiction based on the proportion, frequency, or rate of road users killed or seriously injured within the most recent five years for which FARS data is available;
  - 3.12. A plan for developing proactive systemic safety approaches to reducing crash potential related crash types, contributing factors, overrepresentation of road user groups or road characteristics; and
  - 3.13. A plan for publicly reporting annual progress towards the elimination of transportation deaths and serious injuries.
4. Ensure new Vision Zero program funding includes substantial discretionary direct federal grants to local and regional government entities for training, stakeholder engagement, performance monitoring and evaluation, diagnostic assessment of crashes, and agency capacity building to support the development and execution of plans to meet program goals, with block grants available to support approved programs of projects.
  5. To expedite timely progress towards zero deaths, design project delivery requirements for funding with streamlined procedures for grant applications and project reviews, opportunities for self-certification with periodic audit for qualified local and regional entities administering direct-aid

federal funds, and simplified procurement procedures, including use of indefinite specification/indefinite quantity contracting and use of force-accounts for in-house work.

6. Require, as a condition of funding, a performance monitoring and implementation structure that pays heed to the urgency of reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries, so that all projected annual highway fatality goals must follow a negative trajectory and programs need to be adjusted to address those needs on an ongoing basis.
7. Eliminate the prohibition on the use of Highway Safety Improvement Program Act (HSIP) funds for automated traffic enforcement, a proven countermeasure.

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