20 years strong AMERICA WALKS

On July 11th, 2018, America Walks hosted the webinar, "Act Fast: The Growing Call for Slower Speeds", where we highlighted those leading the call for slower speeds and communities putting people first in the call for safer streets. It featured Alex Epstein, Director of Transportation Safety for **The National Safety Council**, Matt Ferris-Smith, a Vision Zero Specialist at the **Bureau of Transportation in Portland**, Oregon, and Leah Shahum, the founder and director of the **Vision Zero Network.**

America Walks received many questions and comments from attendees. Our panelists took time to offer their expert answers, to continue the conversation and provide further insight on best practices they used for reducing speeds in an effort to create safe, accessible, and enjoyable walking conditions in their communities so you can too.

Are there resources for simplified example Vision Zero Policy that smaller towns with smaller budgets can start at the first stage of adopting a traffic safety policy?

Leah: We don't have specific resources for smaller location. Suggest really **following overall VZ principles**, but on smaller scale. Really everything is scale-able.

I'd appreciate hearing the panelists' thoughts on systems approaches with vehicles -- e.g. speed governors.

Leah: Generally think a good thing and we need more of these tools. Also need more help from govt and industry encouraging this.

Matt: As you are probably aware, vehicle design is generally regulated at the federal level, and so this has not been a focus of our work. The exception to this is large vehicles, which we have more influence over--via our own city fleet vehicles and and our contracted services (e.g. garbage pick-up). We are very concerned about the safety issues associated with large trucks, in particular, but have not yet succeeded in systematically improving the design and operations of these vehicles. At a minimum, we are interested in equipping large vehicles with **side guards that meet the specifications recommended by Volpe.**

How do you get around the 85th percentile that Traffic Engineers insist on using as per MUTCD etc.?

Leah: Agree this needs to be updated because it's out of date and ineffectual. **See this link** for info on more thoughts. In general, we support the NTSB recommendation to update 85% approach w/ a Safe Systems approach. But even now, before then, there is sometimes more flexibility than people realize at local level w/ setting speeds. Worth exploring. The Network is working to support communities doing better on this front....won't be fast but critical.

Everytime I see a car commercial showing cars being driven at high speed, I wonder if there is any

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thought about the influence of those commercials on our increase in speed across the country and if there is a possibility for dialogue with car manufacturers and advertisers. I think about how we were able to reduce smoking in part by attention to advertising.

Matt: Agreed! I spoke with a person here recently who, as a retirement gift to herself, purchased a high-performance vehicle. She was upset with our speed management work because it conflicts with her expectations about how she should be able to use her new vehicle. Taking on auto commercials feels daunting but I agree it would be nice to see changes.

Leah: Agree. We hope and expect that a safety-first mindset in planning, designing, operating, decision making, funding, etc. will help to start to turn that important piece as well –– land use is critical.

There is far too much "siloing" in government at all levels to properly address traffic safety -- how do you break this down?

Leah: Agree. Part of Vision Zero's appeal is that it sets a very clear, measurable goal...and if done well, multiple stakeholders (including different depts/agencies) come together for common goal. Helps break down the silos and reposition safe mobility as a shared goal. Key to have clear responsibilities amongst agencies and to integrate work, have accountability amongst full team, etc. **See resource on this issue we did**.

Matt: In some cases, we have found it helpful to have standing meetings to maintain relationships across groups. For example, we meet monthly with our first responders. Sometimes these types of meetings are helpful even within our own bureau--we meet monthly for 30 minutes with some of our engineers to talk purely about speed management.

Early on, we convened a Vision Zero Executive Committee that had local and regional leaders, including our mayor, county commissioners, state representatives, and Metro (regional government) officials. It's hard to say what the effect of this committee was, but it likely helped spread initial awareness of Vision Zero and perhaps smoothed the pathway to making some of the cross-government connections we continue to rely on.

In Missouri our supreme court ruled against the use of automated speed cameras. Are other states struggling with implementing automated enforcement? If so, how are they dealing with this?

Leah: Yes, sadly you're not alone. Something we and many others are working on. This is key to real progress, so **check out our efforts here** and stay in touch.

Matt: Portland got permission to use automated speed cameras in 2015. This occurred before I was hired, but I know it was a challenge. In our case, the legislation that passed was fairly narrow in scope--cameras can only be used in Portland, only on 10 "high crash corridor" streets defined by certain safety criteria, only within a certain distance of dynamic speed reader boards and speed limit signs, and only as part of a "pilot" that we will need to have renewed at the state level. We also have to submit regularly submit reports to our legislature.

Any efficacy with interactive exhibits at state fairs?
Matt: Maybe! This is not something we have the opportunity to try in our area.

I don't know about other States but in CA School Districts that I am aware of they are no longer offering Driver's Ed whether in the classroom or Behind the Wheel. I recall when I was in High School in the mid-70's we took a 1 semester classroom course called GSR (General State Requirement) which contained Driver Education among other things. We took this our Junior year I believe. We were also offered simulator training and Behind the Wheel through our school as an after-school program. I believe that has all gone away. I realize it is likely a costly endeavor but in my opinion it would be money well spent to curb the disastrous driving that occurs on the roads today. I still have things come back to me to this day that I learned through that education. We are putting drivers on the road with little to no instruction especially in CA where at 18 they can walk in and pass a written test and get behind the wheel to show their "skills" for a 15 or so minute test. I truly believe this is at the core of most of our accidents and road rage that occurs today. I don't know what year this Education stopped but I can bet the statistics will show that the further we get from that date the worse the statistics have become. How do we bring this most necessary program back into our schools, at the very least the classroom portion? Has anyone studied this?

Matt: In Portland we have a Safe Routes to School program that helps younger students (primarily elementary and middle school age) walk and bike to and from school. The program includes both education and capital projects (e.g. crosswalks) components. We are interested in working with our state DMV to update their driving education and testing to include more urban-type infrastructure and challenges. Adding driving education to high school curriculums is not something we have explored.

Leah: Agree wholeheartedly. Big challenge. Not something we're working on yet at VZN because of our limited capacity but would love to support others and engage on this issue.

What are the ways Portland mitigates the danger to VRUs on highways? I ask because in my city, most of the bike/ped crashes happen on arterials which are also state highways.

Matt: Here in Portland we also have a number of state-owned non-freeway highways that are especially dangerous for people walking and biking. We are addressing this challenge at a few levels.

In the long term, I think it's likely we will eventually transfer jurisdiction of most or all of them to the City of Portland, which will allow us to apply our street design standards to make them safer. A sticking point in this transfer continues to be funding, because these highways need tremendous investment in order to make them safe. Portland is reluctant to take ownership without financial assistance to transform them. We are slowly making progress. Last year our state legislature allocated $110 million to redesign a segment of state highway that will then be transferred to the City of Portland.

In the shorter term, we are working to change the "designations" that our state DOT applies to non-freeway highways in Portland. Here in Oregon our DOT's Highway Design Manual section on Urban Highway Design includes a designation called a Special Transportation Area, which if applied to our urban highways would allow for safer designs.

In the immediate term, we simply do the best we can to negotiate with our DOT to mitigate the danger of urban highways. Our state DOT allocates safety funding based on high crash numbers

and treatments that have high benefit:cost ratios, and some of this funding is invested on the state-owned arterials in Portland. In other cases we pay for improvements on state streets. The types of improvements are generally spot fixes, such as sidewalk infill and new or better crosswalks.

Also, the reality is that the City of Portland has many streets that we own and that need safety fixes. We have plenty of work to do even without state highways.

Some resources: State of Oregon Highway Design Manual, Urban Highway Design, non-freeway, **Urban Highway Design**.

How did Portland manage to move away from the 85th percentile method (and/or was it ever on it)? It's a statewide mandate here (Michigan).

Matt: We continue to grapple with the 85th percentile method of setting speeds, but we have still found ways of making progress. All speed limits in Oregon are controlled at the state level, which means we must submit separate requests for every street on which we want to change a speed limit. For requests involving federally classified arterial streets, our state DOT relies heavily on the 85th percentile method, which means our requests are often rejected outright, or we get only a 5 mph reduction when we asked for more, or only a portion of a street is accepted for a speed limit reduction.

Our state DOT is just launching a one-year research effort to consider other ways of setting speeds. We are hopeful this will allow us to move past the 85th percentile method.

In the meantime, our state law allows local jurisdictions to propose alternative methods of setting speeds, if such a method if found acceptable by our state DOT. We successfully worked with our state DOT, after many months of negotiation, to get permission to use an alternative speed setting method. We feel this method is appropriate for all types of streets, but as part of the negotiation we agreed to only use this method on federally classified collector streets posted at higher than 25 mph. Many of our most dangerous streets are classified as arterials, which means this alternative method is helpful but not sufficient for us to achieve our safety goals.

Many of our most recent speed limit reductions have been accomplished by requesting that our state DOT rescind speed zone orders, which allows certain streets to revert to statutory speed limits. This is how we are dropping many of our 30 mph streets to 25 mph. Our statutory speed limits are generally based on land use (e.g. residential, school, or commercial), so the 85th percentile method is not an obstacle for these requests.

We have also begun (very selectively) using two clauses in state law that give us more flexibility. One clause allows us to unilaterally set a speed limit on any street in cases of "emergency," which we must renew every 120 days. This clause was arguably written for issues such as landslides, but we feel that repeated crashes resulting in deaths and serious injuries also quality as emergencies. Another clause in state law allows us to unilaterally set speed limits on streets undergoing construction, and we are exploring how to use this clause more strategically to achieve our safety goals.

See **how Portland sets speed limits** and this **alternative speed method**.

Are there statistics on lower death or injury rates since PBOT's campaign began?

Matt: Not yet. There is about a one-and-a-half year lag time in our injury crash data. Much of what I discussed in the slides only kicked off in 2017, so we don't have the data yet to make any conclusions.

When it comes to street design and lower speeds, we find some resistance in our community from first responders. What have you found to get them on our side for safer streets?

Matt: We are fortunate to have first responders who are willing to work with us on street design and speed management. **NACTO did a presentation with our fire chief on this issue** a few months ago, so I'd recommend checking that out. We are beginning to use fire-friendly speed cushions on more of our emergency routes, and I'm hopeful this will continue. In some cases, we still must compromise, such as using buffered bike lanes instead of parking-protected bike lanes. So it's definitely case-by-case, but overall we have a great working relationship. I have a colleague who is a traffic engineer and has been part of these discussions for a long time––if you are interested in talking with him, please email me at matt.ferris-smith@portlandoregon.gov and I can connect you.

Are you planning to reduce the speed limit in other areas such as commercial or industrial area in the city?

Matt: In terms of commercial areas––if you are referring streets with many businesses with street-facing storefronts, **yes, we have pursued lower speed limits on these streets**. We ask our state DOT to rescind the speed limits on these streets, which then allows us to post them at 20 mph.

In terms of commercial areas that are more like auto-oriented business parks, or industrial areas without much curbside activity--this is trickier. The streets that serve these land uses are often federally classified arterials, which means we remain wedded to 85th percentile speeds (see answer above). We also bump up against concerns about freight movement on these streets. We have not made much progress in these areas yet.

Matt, how important is community engagement when working with traditionally underserved communities of color in Portland? Are there avenues for community members to contribute their input and knowledge (hot spots, danger zones, near miss locations) so that VZ isn't necessarily just expert and hard data driven?

Matt: Short answer: Definitely important. Longer answer: This is a tension that we will always be grappling with--relying on hard data such as crash stats and vetted safety countermeasures versus using community concerns and ideas. We relied heavily on the community to help us create our Vision Zero Action Plan, which provides specific direction on what we should do (and not do) in pursuing Vision Zero. The group that created our plan still meets regularly to help us with implementation.

Early on in our Vision Zero work, we decided not to solicit info from people in Portland on locations they believe are particularly dangerous. **We explored a data set of this type**. Our concern is that we would not be able to capture data that fairly represents the concerns of our

entire community. Crowdsourced data on dangerous locations may instead skew to locations primarily traversed by people who are wealthier and whiter than our population as a whole. Instead of crowdsourcing data, we use crash data to identify the most dangerous locations, and then prioritize those dangerous locations for improvement using equity data (places where the most low-income individuals and people of color live). Our crash data is not perfect, and I have seen some evidence from other cities that crash data may disproportionately omit data on crashes involving people of color (potentially due to reluctance to call police). But we still feel this is the more equitable approach.

Within this framework, we have provided opportunities to give input through our Vision Zero Task Force, which includes individuals representing traditionally underserved communities of color in Portland. Last year we provided our Task Force with a menu of projects that crash data indicate are dangerous, most of which were in areas with more low-income individuals and people of color. We do not have funding for all of those projects, and so asked the task force members to help us choose the highest priority locations. Depending on the scope and scale of the improvements, additional community engagement occurs when we design and implement street design changes.

For people wanting to report non-emergency safety concerns, we log their concerns in a database, and evaluate/fix them as resources allow. But in general, we prioritize locations for funding using crash data and equity data.

Would Greenroads.org be one way to help move to zero deaths by encouraging through a rating system better more sustainable projects?

Matt: I'm not familiar with Greenroads.org, but I'm intrigued. Will check it out. My quick response would be that, while a ratings system may be helpful, we already have plenty of knowledge about creating projects that support walking, biking, and driving, and that the major hurdles to a more sustainable transportation are political in nature. If a ratings system makes the politics more favorable, than I could see this being valuable.

One of my biggest frustrations with traditional traffic safety approaches is a nearly complete LACK of understanding of the role of land use. Aspects of density, mixed-use development, destination proximity, block size/length, school siting and built form, requiring connected streets/banning cul-de-sacs, etc. are important determinants in what kind of roadway network we get, how incentivized driving is, what speeds drivers travel at, etc. What will/are national organizations and agencies do(ing) to change this? Playing around the edges of a fundamentally car-oriented land use system is not going to get us to Vision/Target Zero goals.

Matt: This is a huge question, but I agree it's important to think broadly about all the ways we can achieve our goals, including through land use. In Portland, our areas with the most auto-oriented land uses dovetail neatly with the locations we are seeing the most crashes resulting in deaths and serious injuries. The link is clear but it's challenging/slow to retrofit existing land uses to support safe streets. As redevelopment goes through our development review team, things get better (e.g. consolidating driveways, reducing setbacks, adding sidewalk), but this process is slow and incremental.

You mentioned links to research projects in your slides, can you provide them?

Matt: There is the **NTSB study on speed**. I also briefly mentioned work by our state DOT to consider alternative methods of setting speed limits. **This research is just getting started.**