



**STATEMENT OF**

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**ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT HEARING**

**“ADDRESSING THE ROADWAY SAFETY CRISIS: BUILDING SAFER ROADS FOR ALL”**

**JUNE 8, 2022**

Good morning, Chairman DeFazio, Chair Norton, Ranking Member Graves, Ranking Member Davis, and members of the Subcommittee.

I am here today on behalf of the National League of Cities to discuss the commitment of local governments to saving lives on our nation's roads, streets, and sidewalks. Last year, 42,915 Americans died in motor vehicle traffic crashes. This annual death toll represents the entire population of cities like Burlington, VT, Jefferson City, MO, Woodbridge, VA, or Tigard, OR. In Idaho, this death toll is more than the populations of two of Idaho's largest cities, Twin Falls and Post Falls, in just two years. Year after year, we are losing entire populations of cities to this crisis on our roads, and that is why we must prioritize road safety now.

We must also acknowledge that safety is not a big city issue alone. Almost every small Idaho community has a highway running through and that transportation corridor is the lifeblood of their economy. Yet, towns are a place to stop, a place for residents to live safely, a place with a special purpose that caused them to be formed. After working with nearly forty small Idaho towns, I can tell you that highway choices can cause real blood shed when highway design does not connect their town but divides it. Too often, crashes that have maimed and taken the lives of locals simply trying to cross the street connect back to design issues – unsafe crossings, narrow inconsistent sidewalks, and little space for outdoor dining or other local economic drivers that make the city a great place. This doesn't serve Idaho or the small towns in all the other states, nor does it serve the drivers who are often haunted forever by the people they hit. We can do better, and we need to do better.

We also know that pedestrians and older Americans are especially vulnerable and make up an outsized proportion of the yearly deaths with fatalities increasing at a rate of 13% to 17% of all deaths for pedestrians. [The Governors Highway Safety Association believes this is the largest](#)

[number of pedestrian deaths in four decades.](#) Fatalities among older Americans have increased 17% to nearly 20% of all deaths. Idaho had the most traffic deaths in 16 years in 2021, and one of the highest rates of increase in the nation at 36% a – that is three times the average rate of increase in other states. The reality in America right now is that no matter the size of your community or whether it is urban, suburban or rural, this persistent issue hits hard at home and in your Districts. So many communities are concerned – from Idaho’s communities to Doraville, GA, to Ferndale, MI, to Greenville, NC, to Culver City, CA – and taking action to set up plans and projects despite tough recovery budget cycles and difficult decisions.

As the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) said so well, behind each of these numbers is a life tragically lost, and a family left behind. In Idaho, we take part in a memorial to line up shoes representing the pedestrians and bicyclists who have died in crashes in the last five years on the state capitol steps. At our ceremony each year, we hear from family members who have lost a loved one in one of these terrible crashes and learn about the personal human toll this takes on our families. There is the sad reality behind the numbers – like the mother who has raised her two daughters without their father after he was killed biking to work. These are stark reminders to double-down on what works and act to save lives today.

Zero is the only acceptable number of deaths on America’s roads. Yet, many of the fundamental measures and guides of transportation are reasons that cities and towns cannot easily change our roads to be safer for everyone and reach this goal on our own. Collectively, federal, state and local governments must be willing to adjust our rules of the road for design and speed in order to save lives. Cities and towns have found that federal measures and designs rely too heavily on car throughput measures set during the era of freeway building to

keep single-purpose, high-speed, limited access roadways safe and moving. But no city or town is only a highway – Main Street America in cities small and large have a multitude of access points and users with a need to create safe and efficient access from their homes to their destinations. As a local example, an intersection near my daughter’s house in Boise was recently redesigned with the benefit-cost of those moving straight through the intersection prioritized above all other users. This means that it now takes her up to five minutes longer to drive her children to school; because to turn left she has to turn right, cross two lanes of traffic, travel a quarter of a mile, complete a U-turn across two lanes of traffic and then wait for the light to travel across the intersection she might have turned left at. It has forced the school district to change and lengthen bus routes as they deem the move too dangerous for their buses. The businesses on the four corners of this intersection are now all but impossible to reach on foot or by driving. The choice to prioritize that throughput was made without analyzing these other impacts.

As we begin a great time of rebuilding America’s infrastructure, we need to work together to quickly adopt better measures and designs that can take into account more factors like speed, distance, impact on non-drivers, and time of travel. We believe that if we reset our goals and allow safety to be the primary measure, transportation engineers can modernize the foundational cost-benefit transportation measures and truly assess the costs America is now paying in lives. Growing communities like mine in Boise, Idaho, and smaller and rural communities I work with across the state and the country are ready to make the changes necessary to bring our road deaths down to zero, but we also realize we cannot do this alone. It will take action at the federal, state and local levels to reach this goal by removing barriers, changing the way we measure success, and inviting innovation where we have stagnated.

This is why the National League of Cities and all the communities taking action on road safety applaud the focus on safer streets for all from Congress in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and USDOT with the new National Roadway Safety Strategy. The increase to state safety funding in IIJA especially through the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) was notable, and for communities, the new locally targeted safety program – the *Safe Streets and Roads for All* program – based on a Safe Systems approach will finally allow us to directly plan for and invest in needed safety projects all across the country in a condensed amount of time. Together with our regions and states, we hope to see what larger scale focus on safety might result in. We are also glad to see that Vulnerable Road User Assessments reporting will be done holistically and hopefully in concert with State Safety Plans, that can be informed by our Local Road Safety Action Plans. Cities and towns have been focused on plans and implementing safety solutions for many years, but we must be clear that we have found our efforts often thwarted from moving forward due to barriers created by the federal and state foundational transportation guides, plans, and processes.

We also must be realistic that transportation safety has become an equity and resource issue where some disadvantaged neighborhoods, school districts, and cities were recipients of “improvements” that advantaged drivers traveling through their neighborhoods at the expense of residents. Additionally, when they could get safe designs adopted and approved, they could not pay for safety upgrades while others could, leading to higher death counts for many minorities and their communities. For example, one of the high-speed facilities was built on the edge of our downtown without marked safe crossings at most intersections so that drivers were not slowed. When the city attempted to add safer crossings, we were told there was no money and that it did not meet the benefit-cost test for drivers. It still haunts me today that a

pedestrian was killed at one of those intersections, a woman about my age, and we still have not been able to add the needed safety infrastructure. The National League of Cities will continue to ask Congress to ensure that any modest increase in targeted safety federal funds makes it to the cities who need it and that you use your authority to ensure changes to the measures and processes that determine the majority of the federal funds through formulas so that proven safety countermeasures known to work on streets inside cities and towns are given equal footing if not priority.

### Recommendations

As we move forward, one change we must all make was highlighted in the new USDOT [National Roadway Safety Strategy](#). As policymakers, as drivers, as leaders – is to design and set policy that accepts our mistakes. Humans will absolutely make mistakes, but the consequences should not be

deadly. This is the heart of the [“Safe System” approach](#) which works by building and reinforcing multiple layers of protection into our infrastructure to: 1) prevent crashes from happening in the first place and 2) minimize the harm caused to those involved when crashes do occur. The Safe System approach takes us back to the laws of physics – a pedestrian loses against a speeding car, a car loses against a larger truck, and even a truck against a train. It is a fatal combination of speed, weight, inertia, and impact. By addressing the design of our roadways through engineering and research that looks at the speed, angles, and weight of crashes, we can begin to layer more protections that we so clearly need. I want to be very



clear – crashes are still going to happen, but we want our residents to be able to walk away from a crash and be grateful that the system prioritized them.

As we prioritize peoples' lives on our roads, the National League of Cities believes we should be open to analyzing if the structures we have put in place for roads are still serving us today, and we would like to share several opportunities for action both by Congress, the Administration, State Departments of Transportation, and the road safety community.

- *Encourage clarity in infrastructure spending:* Transparency is a powerful tool for instilling confidence in government investment as many communities from Georgia to California have seen with their infrastructure programs. Both Congress and USDOT lack granular clarity on formula funding provided primarily to State Departments of Transportation. With the flexibility and significant resources Congress has provided, funding recipients have a responsibility to show how the funding was invested and how progress has been made to ensure that the case for infrastructure investment is made clearly.
- *Increase transportation support to small and rural local governments* – America is a country built of small and suburban towns, and while they can clearly identify safety issues, many are not staffed or equipped to make the actual improvement themselves. The joint Local Technical Assistance support made available from the federal and state levels far outstrips the needs of cities, towns and villages today. As an example, a small Idaho town that I assisted had a Public Works Director who was also the baseball coach and EMT. When we determined that the appropriate countermeasure included adding paint on one of the local streets, he brought out his baseball field striping machine to stripe the road. This is the same city that was supposed to maintain the pedestrian paint markings on the state highway because the DOT insisted the state highway's purpose

did not include crossing pedestrians – that was a city need. In Idaho, our Local Highway Technical Assistance Council is far more resourced than have I seen in other states and might offer a model for how to get more of federal and state resources to places that desperately need that capacity.

- *Expedite data delivery to inform safety:* The safety data reporting process moves quite slowly in a world that uses real time information. We are just seeing national data from 2021, and it is not yet complete or deemed ready for analysis. Yet right now, the FHWA, states, and researchers are seeking full and complete safety data sets in order to take on important Congressionally mandated tasks like the Vulnerable Road User Assessments and Vulnerable Road User Safety Special Rule. Given our road death rates, the U.S. cannot afford to delay prioritizing getting complete data sets ready for these assessments so we are not making today's decisions without complete information. NLC would also like to see more available federal data sets from USDOT catch up to inform both current Vulnerable Road User Assessments and safety practices across regions so we can truly deliver safer streets for all.
- *Shift measures for safety:* What gets measured gets done, and the National League of Cities believes we should measure our progress in meeting our national safety goals. We also need to broaden our measures and leave behind the practice of using travel speed as the most important measure in a benefit-cost analysis. Analysis should address total travel time, impact on other users (including pedestrians, bicyclists and other drivers), average travel distance, and impact on travel distance and impact on the local economic output of the measures being recommended. When crashes do occur, states' processes and local first responders should prioritize consistent capture and



reporting to ensure that more significant data is provided for research, including speed and roadway design factors such as visibility of users and roadway dimensions.

- *Reconnect the virtuous cycle of federally funded research with updates to foundational transportation decision documents:* Our transportation safety research investment from the federal government cannot be disconnected from the data needed to update foundational federal transportation decision documents, such as the USDOT Federal Highway Administration Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which IIJA has now put a shot clock deadline on. Ensuring that research activities such as the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) are fully connected to the MUTCD Request to Experiment and providing more Crash Modification Factors could begin to close the safety research gap and take some of the cost burden off those who want to innovate. Tying federal research funding to required updates to foundational and federally supported manuals and design guides is not only a best practice but a good use of taxpayer funding.
- *Delineate MUTCD's purpose:* NLC and our local partners have requested USDOT consider how the MUTCD can best fulfill its intended purpose in delivering consistent road signs, lines, and signals across the U.S. in the upcoming update as well as setting up a federal advisory committee to provide more balanced perspective. However, what started as a basic manufacturing specification of roadway devices in the 1930s has been burdened by serving too many purposes that have substantial costs. Local governments have found that MUTCD in its current form and governance is a roadblock to safety improvements and innovation while it remains an essential tool that must be

updated to provide the minimum necessary guidance for the uniformity of traffic control devices.

- *Large vehicle design standards must be analyzed:* USDOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that pedestrians are two to three times as likely to die when hit by a pick-up or SUV than a passenger car, and that drivers of pickups and SUVs are three to four times more likely to hit a pedestrian while turning because of blind spots. Congress has the oversight to address this issue through vehicle design standards, road safety education, and even licensing. In Boise, we lost two citizens last year, a retired couple on their daily walk, who were hit by a turning pick-up whose driver did not see them. Both the driver and the car design are responsible to be able to see and safely respond to people outside the vehicle.
- *Engage America's youth in safety and transportation alongside the international community:* Road safety is an issue that spans farther than U.S. borders, and it is essential that America's youth are able to travel safely. The United Nations has proclaimed a [Decade of Action for Road Safety from 2021-2030](#), to target a reduction of road traffic deaths and injuries by 50% by 2030, and engaging our youth is a key way to join this effort. Reconnecting them with a variety of travel modes that allow them access and independence will enable the transportation system to serve all of us more efficiently while providing youth the value to engage in their communities and with peers around the world. As a life-long transportation nerd, I also would love to have more youth look at transportation as a future career that can change lives at home and offer an ability to learn from other places.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee, and I look forward to your questions.



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# Promising Local Practice in Road Safety: A Primer for Safer Streets



**PROMISING LOCAL PRACTICE IN ROAD SAFETY:  
A Primer for Safer Streets**

America has reached the highest number of fatalities on roads since 2007. In the United States, [road deaths](#) fell in our nation in 2020, a five percent increase from 2019. Black, Hispanic, and Native populations are more likely to experience a pedestrian accident that results in a death compared to their total percentage of the population. From the [2020 data](#), fatality impacts were up 23 percent for non-Hispanic Black people. Neighborhoods experiencing poverty are also [disproportionately impacted](#).

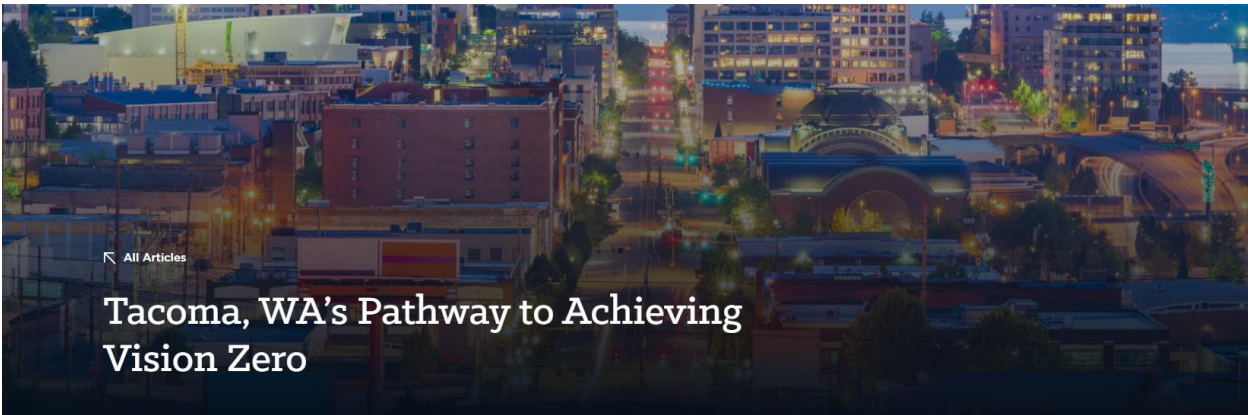
The federal government, through the Department of Transportation, is expanding coordination of existing and new programs on road safety into a comprehensive National, State, Tribal, and Local (NSTL) effort. The effort is a response for reducing the country's burden and equity to improve, connect, walk, and local streets using [4 pillars](#). Their focus for local leaders includes:

- [An equity and justice lens](#) to address the needs of all communities, including those that are most vulnerable.
- [A focus on data and evidence](#) to inform decision-making and to track progress.
- [A focus on partnerships](#) to leverage resources and expertise from government, industry, and academia.
- [A focus on innovation](#) to explore new solutions and technologies.



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