

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Community Highlights

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| Community Description | Massachusetts is situated in the northeastern United States within the New England region and has a population of approximately 6.9 million residents. Massachusetts is home to America's oldest subway system, the Boston Subway, which is a key component of the region's public transportation network. Transportation is the primary source of greenhouse gas emissions by the economic sector within the state. The state is covered by 13 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs). Statewide transportation is overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). |
| Safe System Adoption: | Safe System Target: |
| 2023 | Varies by Location |
| Challenges | Riskier road user behaviors following the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in increased speeding and impaired driving-related serious injuries and decreased seat belt use rate. |
| Safe System Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement speed management to realize safer speeds • Address top-risk locations and populations • Take an active role to affect change in vehicle design, features, and use • Accelerate research and adoption of technology; double down on what works • Implement new approaches to public education and awareness |
| Funding | The state provides resources to support the Safe System approach in local municipalities. In addition, MassDOT partners with communities throughout the commonwealth to support projects and programs for the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) federal grants. |

Lessons Learned

- Having regional and municipal associations and, the state Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) participating in the development of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) is key for establishing communication with local jurisdictions.
- Given the size of a state, holding virtual meetings can be an effective way to provide equal opportunity for participants from all regions.
- Making stakeholders aware of their key role, and supporting them through funding, helps to keep them engaged.
- States play an important role in providing informational and funding resources to guide institutionalization of the Safe System approach in local municipalities.
- Focusing on the actions that can eliminate road fatalities and serious injuries can be more effective for public engagement than focusing on the structure and terminology of the Safe System approach.
- Not all stakeholders agree with strategies to be included in the SHSP. Stating main initiatives in the SHSP and developing a more detailed action plan, with specific roles for each stakeholder group, is helpful. Constant coordination with different groups is needed to ensure that the Action Plan continues to represent all needs.

Phase I: Getting Started

Leadership

- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts developed their 2023 SHSP¹ with strong coordination with local communities. The effort to support municipalities and other public entities to address safety locally and regionally was motivated by the fact that approximately 80% of Massachusetts roadways are under local jurisdictions, and more than 60% of fatalities and serious injuries occurred on local owned roadways.
- Per Federal Legislation, the SHSP is to be updated every five years. The Traffic & Safety Section within the Massachusetts Department of Transportation Highway Division led the development of the SHSP.

Ready Implementors

- An Executive Leadership Committee comprised of leaders from 18 agencies affirmed the Safe System approach framework for the SHSP and led the efforts to develop the plan. The members of the Executive Leadership Committee included the following:
 - Executive Office of Elder Affairs
 - Executive Office of Health and Human Services
 - Executive Office of Public Safety and Security - Highway Safety Division
 - Federal Highway Administration
 - Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
 - Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies
 - Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
 - Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association
 - Massachusetts Council on Aging
 - Massachusetts Department of Fire Services, Massachusetts
 - Department of Public Health
 - Massachusetts Department of Transportation Highway
 - Massachusetts Department of Transportation Planning
 - Massachusetts Department of Transportation Rail and Transit
 - Massachusetts Department of Transportation Registry of Motor Vehicles, Massachusetts Municipal Association
 - Massachusetts State Police
 - National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Action

- The five-year SHSP for Massachusetts was adopted in 2023.
- “Despite the name Strategic Highway Safety Plan, the plan does not solely focus on highways as defined by interstates and freeways, but all roadways—neighborhood local roadways, main streets, municipal roads, and state roads regardless of jurisdiction and functional classification.”¹

Phase II: Building Support

Starting Simply

- The SHSP was developed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through a multi-step process that engaged 270 people.
- Key members of the Executive Leadership Committee, Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies, Massachusetts Municipal Association, and Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association led communication with local municipalities and requested their participation in the development of the SHSP. With support from those associations and the University of Massachusetts LTAP, all 351 cities/towns in the state were included in the process.

Understanding Others' Perspectives

- Led by MassDOT's Traffic & Safety Section, several meetings were held throughout the development of the SHSP. Local municipalities were mostly represented by their Department of Public Works, Planning Department, and Police Department.
- All meetings were held virtually to give equal opportunity for all jurisdictions to participate.
- Although an important first step, inviting multi-disciplinary, multi-agency local representatives to participate in meetings is not enough to get them engaged in the process. Understanding each stakeholder's perspective and role in the Safe System approach is key. For example, MassDOT had always worked closely with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health; however, making them aware of their key role as data providers, as well as supporting them through funding for data linkage projects, helped to keep them engaged.
- Although speed safety cameras are proven safety countermeasures,² opposing views on automated enforcement bills exist. Currently, Massachusetts General Law does not permit the use of automated enforcement. Understanding the interest from local communities in implementing automated enforcement, the commonwealth is working with municipal partners in order to develop pilots to test technologies and develop recommendations for legislature approval. Pilot projects must account for equity and have safety as the sole focus of automated enforcement efforts.

Engaging the Community

- Beyond state-municipal coordination, the 2023 SHSP highlights how external partners and private industry can contribute to improving safety. No single actor can achieve Safe System goals alone, and stakeholders from the community, philanthropy, and business all play important roles.
- Having associations of local agencies as part of the Executive Leadership Committee helped with outreach of community representatives in the development of the SHSP.
- MassDOT has a history of building a relationship with the community and listening to their concerns. For example, in 2018, MassDOT recommended the removal of protected bicycle lanes along the Longfellow Bridge to better accommodate plow trucks to clear snow off the bridge. After community engagement, MassDOT reversed plans and maintained the protected bicycle lanes along the bridge. Local agencies continue to work with MassDOT to provide bicycle connectivity to the Longfellow Bridge protected bicycle lanes.³

Celebrating and Sharing Success

- Celebrating stakeholders and community members for their contributions to improving safety is important to foster relationships. MassDOT's Safe Routes to School (SRTS)⁴ program, for example, hosts a Yard Sign Design Contest for students to use their creativity to help promote safe roads for cyclists and pedestrians in their communities. Further, the SRTS program hosts an Annual Awards Ceremony that brings together champions from all over the commonwealth to celebrate schools, community partners, Crossing Guards, and award winners. Another contest that is the highlight at MassDOT's Moving Together Active Transportation Conference is the Roadway Safety Video Contest,⁵ which recognizes high school video submissions.

Phase III: Institutionalizing the Safe System Approach

Building a Sustainable Coalition

- The Executive Leadership Committee is a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency coalition ensuring all voices are heard from a variety of stakeholders in all locations in the state.

Securing Resources

- Members of the Executive Leadership Committee provide resources to support institutionalization of the Safe System approach in local municipalities. A few examples are listed below:
 - Mass in Motion:⁶ Community resources: from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that provide informational resources for safe active transportation in the state.
 - Safe Speeds:⁷ from MassDOT, provides informational resources and funding opportunities to municipalities, examples are listed below:
 - Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program: A funding program that supports quick-launch improvements to public health, safe mobility, and strengthened commerce in Massachusetts municipalities.
 - Learn about Speed Management: Informational resource hub for data-driven speed management.
 - Procedures for Speed Zoning on State Highways and Municipal Roads: Municipal toolkit to help local partners address safety issues.
- Safe Streets and Roads for all (SS4A):⁸ MassDOT partners with communities throughout the commonwealth to support projects and programs for these federal grants. In 2022, over \$30 million were awarded to MPOs and municipalities in Massachusetts (\$6.5 million in Action Plans and over \$24 million in Implementation), which covered all MPOs and RPAs. In 2023, local communities in Massachusetts were awarded over \$22.2million.

Phase IV: Sustaining the Safe System Approach

Use an Evidence-Based Approach

- A data-driven analysis is the basis for identifying high-risk locations in the commonwealth. Data used to identify areas for safety improvements included sources and tools such as the Fatality Analysis Reporting System,⁹ Fatality and Injury Reporting System Tool,¹⁰ Massachusetts IMPACT database,¹¹ Massachusetts Department of Public Health,¹² Massachusetts 2020 Census,¹³ Massachusetts Safety Belt Usage Observation Study,¹⁴ Massachusetts Youth Health Survey,¹⁵ Massachusetts Injury Surveillance Program,¹⁶ and Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles Crash Data System and Merit Rating Board Citation Data¹⁷. Data analysis is “jurisdiction-agnostic,” safety issues are addressed regardless of the jurisdiction.
- Initially, meetings were organized around 14 emphasis area topics identified from the previous SHSP, which generated 400 ideas for input into the new SHSP.
- Following USDOT’s adoption of the Safe System approach, MassDOT leadership embraced the Safe System approach. From that point, the 400 ideas were synthesized during five virtual meetings, which were organized by Safe System approach elements: Safe Roads, Safe Speeds, Safe Road Users, Post-Crash Care, and Safe Vehicles. The ideas were then presented to the Executive Leadership Committee and all stakeholders involved in the development of the SHSP.
- From these meetings, the ideas were further distilled and prioritized into six core initiatives with actions aligned with the Safe System Approach:
 1. Implement speed management to realize safer speeds
 2. Address top-risk locations and populations
 3. Take an active role to affect change in vehicle design, features, and use
 4. Accelerate research and adoption of technology
 5. Double down on what works
 6. Implement new approaches to public education and awareness

Prepare for the Long Haul, Commit to the Safe System Approach, and Overcome Resistance to Change

- Structuring the five virtual meetings based on the Safe System approach elements resulted in an unintended perception that the Safe System approach downplays the important role of law enforcement. MassDOT maintained the meeting structure and found other ways to engage law enforcement. Community advocates also felt like safety concerns such as distracted driving and the use of seatbelts were not well represented in the five Safe System approach elements.
- In addition, since the Safe System approach does not explicitly mention equity, several stakeholders mentioned the need for an equity focus in the SHSP. Even though following Safe System principles and addressing all elements will most likely drive improvements to environmental justice areas, and the data-driven approach to identifying top-crash and top-risk locations did guide improvements to environmental justice areas, the fact that it is not a Safe System approach element created some resistance.
- Meetings were helpful in gathering stakeholder input, identifying gaps and identifying additional stakeholders that need to be involved in this conversation. During a post-crash care-themed meeting, the need for full cell coverage in the state for more rapid response time was indicated as a need, but representatives from telecommunications were not part of the meeting.
- Although the SHSP includes safety initiatives framed on the Safe System approach, mostly resulting from a data-driven analysis and stakeholder meetings, the specific actions will be included in an Action Plan being developed. To sustain the Safe System approach and ensure the plan includes all important strategies, MassDOT continues to work with groups that did not feel as represented in the SHSP initiatives and will incorporate their recommended strategies in the Action Plan.

Additional Information

- Advice for similar agencies wanting to incorporate the Safe System approach in SHSPs: When coordinating with various stakeholders, rather than focusing on the terminology of the Safe System approach (e.g., specific elements) focus on the commonsense things that will bring down the fatalities and serious injuries by using the principles of the Safe System approach. Agreeing to the principles and how to get there would likely result in successful stakeholder collaboration and development of a comprehensive SHSP.
- Additional resources for [Massachusetts](#)

References

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