

# Menlo Park, California

## Community Highlights

<b>Community Description</b>	<p>Menlo Park is a city in San Mateo County within the San Francisco Bay Area of California. It has approximately 34,000 people and is home to corporate headquarters of numerous venture capital, private equity, financial services, law firms, and other professional service companies focusing on technology. Menlo Park is located at the heart of a regional transportation network, bounded by freeways and transit systems that connect the city to San Francisco and San Jose. Menlo Park has 28 public, private, and charter schools.</p>	
<b>Vision Zero Adoption</b>		<b>Vision Zero Target</b>
2016		2040
<b>Challenges</b>	<p>In Menlo Park, vulnerable populations (people walking and bicycling) are overrepresented in fatal and serious crashes, particularly people of color. Factors contributing to fatalities and serious injuries in Menlo Park include unsafe speeds, older pedestrians, younger bicyclists, downtown areas, impaired driving, and state-owned roadways<sup>1</sup>. Many of the major roads are state highways—SR-82 (El Camino Real), SR-114 (Willow Road), SR-84 (Bayfront Expressway)—which have a significant portion of Menlo Park’s collisions and traffic and require complex interactions between the city and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).</p>	
<b>Safe System Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe users</li> <li>• Safe roadways</li> <li>• Safe vehicles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe speeds</li> <li>• Post-crash care</li> <li>• Planning and culture</li> </ul>
<b>Funding</b>	<p>Menlo Park stays up to date on relevant grant opportunities and proactively pursues funding for safety projects. The city’s Safety Action Plan includes a list of potential safety funding opportunities from federal, state, and local levels.</p>	

## Lessons Learned

- Implementing the Safe System approach can be motivated by strong community leaders. In Menlo Park, commitment to safety began with a group of organized parents that heavily advocate for road safety near schools.
- Starting from a community that was already committed to making safety a priority resulted in the city adopting of a Vision Zero policy and development of a Vision Zero Action Plan<sup>1</sup> with strong stakeholder and community engagement.
- Holding meetings in both English and Spanish provided opportunity for various members of the community to actively participate in the process.
- Engaging stakeholders and elected officials in several meetings throughout the development of the Vision Zero Action Plan was key to get their perspectives and buy in.
- The strong relationship between the city staff, stakeholders, community groups, and elected officials led to the development of a Safety Action Plan that includes strategies to advance its safety goals and institutionalize safety practices in its policies, programs, and operations. The Safety Action Plan identifies responsible parties and timelines for all actions.
- Starting partnerships and creating a Vision Zero coalition are not enough to sustain the Safe System approach. The Vision Zero coalition should meet regularly to oversee and facilitate delivery of safety projects and programs, holding all parties accountable for their commitments to advancing safety.

# Phase I: Getting Started

## Leadership

- Traffic deaths and serious injuries cause tragic personal loss for family and friends and significantly impact the Menlo Park community. The impetus for changes can start with safety concerns that personally affect people. Menlo Park has a group of organized parents that heavily advocate for road safety near schools. Elected officials and key representatives who are involved in those efforts are also council members.
- Prior to Vision Zero efforts, Menlo Park had already prioritized safety through an established Safe Routes to School (SRTS)<sup>2</sup> program.
- Menlo Park's commitment to Vision Zero began with the adoption of a Vision Zero policy in the General Plan Circulation Element in 2016<sup>3</sup> which was incorporated into the 2020 Transportation Master Plan. Initially motivated by community groups, implementation of Vision Zero and the Safe System approach in Menlo Park was led by the city Public Works staff.

## Ready Implementors

- One key element for implementation of Vision Zero in Menlo Park was their partnership with community-based organizations, particularly Climate Resilient Communities (CRC) and SRTS Task Force.

## Action

- In 2024, Menlo Park adopted the Vision Zero Action Plan, which affirms their goal to eliminate all traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2040. The city will do this through the creation of a Safe System.

## Phase II: Building Support

### Starting Simply

- Menlo Park's efforts to improve safety had been happening prior to Vision Zero efforts through a range of plans and infrastructure projects. Citywide and neighborhood plans established the foundation for safety planning in Menlo Park. The Vision Zero Action Plan builds on these past and ongoing efforts.
- The development of the Vision Zero Action Plan included critical input from stakeholders and the community. Further, the city also collaborated with the SRTS Task Force, a group that had started years before Vision Zero efforts, to gather input from the school community.

### Understanding Others' Perspectives

- An interdisciplinary group of stakeholders provided input on the Vision Zero Action Plan through three virtual meetings. The stakeholder group included representatives from Menlo Park Planning Division, Menlo Park Police Department, Menlo Park Fire Protection District, SRTS, Menlo Park Complete Streets Commission, San Mateo County Transit District, and CRC.
  - The initial meeting introduced the stakeholders to Vision Zero and the Safe System approach, discussed the process of developing a Vision Zero Action Plan, and provided an overview of the current state of traffic safety in the city. The second meeting explored safety emphasis areas and candidate systemic safety strategies. The last meeting provided an opportunity for discussion of priority projects and strategies.
  - The stakeholder group provided key insights that ultimately informed the development of the Vision Zero Action Plan.
- In addition, Public Works staff held three meetings with the Menlo Park Complete Streets Commission, which provided an opportunity for elected and appointed officials to discuss Vision Zero, the current state of traffic safety in Menlo Park, and recommended safety strategies to accomplish the city's safety goals.

### Engaging the Community, Celebrating, and Sharing Success

- Building on the City Planning Division's ongoing work to develop the city's first Environmental Justice Element<sup>4</sup>, the city engaged with CRC to help extend the outreach for the plan to engage populations in Menlo Park in historically underserved areas of the city (Belle Haven) and with groups that are more likely to experience collisions.
  - CRC led the development of one community listening session and four community workshops, two in English and two in Spanish, to gather input on the safety-related experiences of Belle Haven residents. To highlight the importance of holding meetings in two languages, the workshops in Spanish had higher attendance than the workshops in English.
  - All engagement sessions were held in-person.
  - The initial listening session and workshops discussed roadway safety conditions in Menlo Park. The final workshops gathered input from the meeting participants on how the city should prioritize safety.
  - Overall, the community agreed with the safety concerns presented by the city and supported the proposed Vision Zero recommendations.
  - While engaging residents from Belle Haven, the team encountered challenges to keep the team focused on road safety discussions due to the several other longstanding unaddressed issues in the neighborhood. Having a moderator that brought the group back to the focus of the meeting was important for a successful discussion.
- The city also conducted four targeted meetings with the Safe Routes to School Task Force and the senior community, where representatives asked questions about and commented on Vision Zero Action Plan development.
- In addition, a community pop-up event at a local farmers market was hosted by the city to inform residents of the Vision Zero Action Plan, where residents shared their safety concerns and desires.
- The City of Menlo Park continues to communicate Vision Zero progress and engage with the community. Examples of activities include advice from the Police Department on how to navigate the event of a crash,<sup>5</sup> Complete Streets project updates,<sup>6</sup> guides to teach pedestrian and bicyclist safety,<sup>7</sup> safety tips for pedestrian safety month,<sup>8</sup> bicyclist community events,<sup>9</sup> and other activities.

# Phase III: Institutionalizing the Safe System Approach

## Building a Sustainable Coalition

- The strong relationship between the city, stakeholders, and community groups led to the development of a Safety Action Plan that includes 48 strategies to advance its safety goals and institutionalize safety practices in its policies, programs, and operations. The plan is organized into six core elements: safe users, safe roadways, safe vehicles, safe speeds, post-crash care, and planning and culture, and identifies responsible parties and anticipated timeline for every action.
  - The Menlo Park Safety Action Plan recognizes that, in addition to the five Safe System approach elements, planning and culture must be a core element of the plan. The planning and culture element includes leadership and commitment, meaningful engagement, data and analysis, funding, development review, and under resourced and underserved communities as key categories.
  - Menlo Park's Safety Action Plan establishes specific actions related to leadership and commitment, such as the creation of a Vision Zero coordinator and working group and the development of Safe System training program for city staff.
- The responsible parties for strategies in the Safety Action Plan are:
  - Public Works – Transportation: Leads the overall implementation of the action plan).
  - Public Works – Other Units (Engineering, Maintenance): Primarily accountable for coordination on specific actions within their areas of responsibility.
  - Police – Traffic: This is the strong partner to the Public Works- Transportation group for enforcement and education actions; the city is leveraging an existing coordination meeting between transportation and traffic to review the action plan on a monthly basis.
  - Police – Records: Oversees the city's collision and traffic stop records for tracking data and information on an ongoing basis.
  - Other City Departments – A few actions that involve coordination with Library and Community Services, Community Development, and others, but these tend to be focused.

## Securing Resources

- Menlo Park is committed to staying up to date on relevant grant opportunities and proactively pursuing grant funding for the most competitive projects. The Safety Action Plan describes responsible parties for funding actions, such as the following:
  - Project evaluation framework: Development of a project evaluation framework, which prioritizes funding based on fatal and serious injury crash reduction opportunities, especially for under-resourced and underserved populations.
  - Grant funding: Proactive pursuit of grant funding to implement projects from the Vision Zero Action Plan.
  - Safety in Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects: Institutionalization of safety considerations in all project types to systematically implement safety improvements through operations and maintenance efforts.
- The Safety Action Plan lists several funding sources, including the following:
  - Federal: SS4A Grant Program; Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program; Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity; Highway Safety Improvement Program; Active Transportation Program; Metropolitan Transportation Commission's One Bay Area Grant Program.
  - State: SB-1 Transportation Funding; Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant Program; California Office of Traffic Safety; Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities.
  - Local: City of Menlo Park Transportation Impact Fees; City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County's Transportation Development Act Article 3; City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County's Transportation Fund for Clean Air; San Mateo County Transportation Authority's Measure A & W Programs.

## Phase IV: Sustaining the Safe System Approach

### Use an Evidence-Based Approach

- The development of Menlo Park's Vision Zero Action Plan was informed by data-driven analysis. Using data on traffic collisions, the city identified its high collision corridors – approximately 20% of streets in Menlo Park that experience over 90% of serious injuries and fatalities in Menlo Park. Based on this information a systemic, proactive approach to roadway safety resulted in a set of six emphasis areas that organized proposed safety solutions across the city's transportation system.
- Moving forward, Menlo Park's Safety Action Plan describes specific actions and responsible parties to continue data collection and analysis:
  - ACT Menlo Park process: Menlo Park has an online and mobile application called ACT Menlo Park, which allows users to report non-emergency issues from a smartphone, tablet, or desktop computer. One of the actions for the city is to review the ACT Menlo Park process for reporting resident concerns to ensure that it includes effective tracking of safety hazards and requests for safety interventions and establish a data-driven approach for evaluating the reports/requests.
  - Safety + asset data: update and maintain the City's GIS inventory.
  - Innovative data: Explore opportunities to use innovative data collection and analysis approaches, such as crowdsourcing or video detection data.
  - Data dashboard: Create a data dashboard and update schedule to provide regular progress updates on Vision Zero implementation

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

- Safety implementation requires ongoing, long-term commitment from the city, with different areas of focus over different time horizons.
- Starting partnerships and creating a Vision Zero coalition are not enough to sustain the Safe System approach. The city's Vision Zero committee or task force made up of key stakeholders and community members meets regularly to oversee and facilitate delivery of safety projects and programs, holding all parties accountable for their commitments to advancing safety.
- Sustained support from key safety partners is essential and can be achieved through regular updates on action plan progress, consultation early in the implementation process to gather suggestions and feedback, and project bundling to align safety goals with other partner projects.
- Continued communication with stakeholders and community members in collaboration with the Complete Streets Commission builds trust and support for the city's safety goals through strategies such as communication across diverse channels, publication of factsheets on action plan progress, and regular public conversation on the topic of safety.

## Additional Information

- Menlo Park plans to update the Vision Zero Action Plan every three to five years to assess whether new direction is needed as conditions within the city and the region change.
  - Successes and challenges:
    - Building community support
    - Sailing while building the ship: While the city was working on the Vision Zero Action Plan, they were dealing with a lot of requests to address specific issues and numerous ongoing projects. This became clearer as time went on, but the city did not stop implementing safety improvements while developing the plan. They stayed focused on the data (i.e., existing collisions or speeding patterns) to inform improvements when the Action Plan was not finalized.
    - Pilot projects: Menlo Park has started several pilot projects, including roadway reconfigurations on Middle Avenue and Middlefield Avenue, as well as intersection upgrades using bollards and striping at places such as Menlo Avenue/University Drive and Alma Street/Willow Road. Using pilot projects helped keep things moving while they were developing the Vision Zero Action Plan. One challenge was that tracking all the pilot projects takes a considerable amount of work and can turn a single project into multiple projects.
    - Vision Zero Action Plan cannot be all things to all people: Menlo Park is working to use Vision Zero as the primary lens to review requests from residents; however, it does not address every question that city staff gets. During development of the Action Plan, the city made it clear that certain questions would not have a definitive answer from the Action Plan, but the plan would help them focus on the challenges that were most important.
    - Building trust: Building community trust, especially in historically underserved areas, is key to implementing the Safe System approach equitably.
  - Coordination with an independent fire district: the independent fire district is a unique configuration. The Menlo Park Fire Protection District serves Menlo Park, East Palo Alto, Atherton, and some unincorporated communities. As a result, coordination on things such as curb radii and traffic calming can be more involved and more public than it might otherwise be.
- Additional resources for [Menlo Park, California](#)

## References

- <sup>1</sup> City of Menlo Park. (2024). *Vision Zero Action Plan*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/5/public-works/documents/transportation/transportation-projects/menlo-park-vision-zero-action-plan-final.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> City of Menlo Park. (n.d.) *Safe Routes to School*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/Government/Departments/Public-Works/Transportation-Division/City-Safe-Routes-to-School-program>
- <sup>3</sup> City of Menlo Park. (2016). *General Plan*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/community-development/documents/general-plan/circulation-element-adopted-20161129.pdf>
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- <sup>5</sup> City of Menlo Park. (2024). *A Crash Aftermath Guide from the Menlo Park Police Department*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/News-articles/Public-safety/20240304A-Crash-Aftermath-Guide-from-the-Police-Department>
- <sup>6</sup> City of Menlo Park. (2024). *City Transportation Projects Updates*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/News-articles/Public-safety/20240207City-transportation-projects-updates>
- <sup>7</sup> City of Menlo Park. (2024). *A New Guide to Teach Pedestrian & Bicyclist Safety in Menlo Park*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/News-articles/Public-safety/20240207A%C2%A0new-guide-to-teach-pedestrian-bicyclist-safety-in-Menlo-Park>
- <sup>8</sup> City of Menlo Park. (2023). *Safety tips for Pedestrian Safety Month*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/News-articles/Public-safety/20230918Safety-tips-for-Pedestrian-Safety-Month>
- <sup>9</sup> City of Menlo Park. (2024). *Spring Bike Events Throughout San Mateo County*. Retrieved from <https://menlopark.gov/News-articles/City-news/20240501Spring-bike-events-throughout-San-Mateo-County>