

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Community Highlights

Community Description	<p>Philadelphia, located in southeastern Pennsylvania, is the state's largest city with a population of approximately 1.6 million people. It is renowned for its rich historical heritage, notably being the site where the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution were signed. The city's transportation network is highly developed, featuring an extensive system of roads, highways, and public transit options including buses, trolleys, subways, and regional rail services. Philadelphia's grid street layout facilitates navigation and contributes to its comprehensive urban planning.</p>	
Vision Zero Adoption		Vision Zero Target
2016		As quickly as possible, in support of the Regional Vision Zero 2050 goal ¹
Challenges	<p>Philadelphia experiences high fatality rates compared to their peer cities that adopted Vision Zero, especially in neighborhoods where most residents live below the poverty line. Speed is the number one contributing factor in determining if a crash is fatal in Philadelphia, and it accounts for 40 percent of fatal and serious injury crashes in the city. On average, five children are reported to be involved in crashes daily in the city, and vulnerable users (people walking, riding motorcycles, and biking) are disproportionately killed on Philadelphia streets (46%).</p>	
Safe System Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity • Safe streets • Safe people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe vehicles • Safety data • Vision Zero for Youth
Funding	<p>In the Vision Zero Action Plan, the City has a comprehensive list of Vision Zero projects and grants that will be used to fund each project. Philadelphia was awarded Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Implementation Grants in 2022 for the “Philadelphia Vision Zero Capital Plan” application. In 2023, the City was awarded SS4A Implementation Grants for the “Complete & Safe Streets Philadelphia: Vision Zero High-Injury Network Corridors” application.</p>	

Lessons Learned

- In larger cities, having strong leadership from elected officials can help get Safe System efforts started and a multi-disciplinary coalition formed.
- Using existing Vision Zero action plans from around the country that could provide the basis of a new city's action plan is important. It is also crucial to start simply rather than overthinking the draft action plan.
- Engaging the community during the development of a plan and after improvements are in place is key to overcome resistance to change. Providing electronic and printed resources in multiple languages is effective in providing equal participation opportunities for the entire community.
- Working with the media on messaging around traffic crashes has a measurable impact on public support for improvements to make roads safer for everyone.
- Sharing accomplishments regularly, such as annual reports, tools for visualization of improvements, in-person project showcases, and website and social media posts helps build community understanding and support of the Safe System approach.
- Detailed action items, responsible parties, as well as frequent coalition meetings, are key for sustaining stakeholder collaborations.
- A comprehensive data-driven plan provides a strong basis for grant applications.
- Understanding that commitment and recommitment to Vision Zero and the Safe System approach are necessary will help cities continue to make progress in the long term.
- Making community outreach and education part of the Vision Zero planning process can help address anticipated community resistance to automated enforcement programs.

Phase I: Getting Started

Leadership

- One of the most populous cities in the United States, Philadelphia was experiencing one of the highest rates of traffic-related deaths compared to other peer cities, especially in neighborhoods where most residents live below the poverty line. Further, Philadelphia had the highest rates of chronic diseases among large U.S. cities, particularly in low-income neighborhoods.² Designing streets to promote safe active transportation became a priority in Philadelphia.
- In 2016, the mayor signed an executive order setting a target of zero traffic-related deaths by 2030.³ The mayor also established an Office of Complete Streets to ensure multimodal considerations would be the core of the city's Vision Zero efforts. In addition, the mayor created a Vision Zero Task Force, which was charged with developing a three-year Vision Zero action plan.

Ready Implementors

- At the direction of the Mayor, the Vision Zero Task Force was formed by the following:
 - City of Philadelphia staff (Mayor's Office, Managing Director's Office, Managing Director's Office of Transportation & Infrastructure Systems, Department of Public Health, Department of Streets, Fleet Management, Licenses & Inspections, Planning & Development, Philadelphia Police Department, Office of Complete Streets/Office of Multimodal Planning, Risk Management, and Water Department)
 - African American Chamber of Commerce
 - American Automobile Association (AAA)
 - AARP Pennsylvania
 - Asociación Puertorriqueños en Marcha, Inc.
 - Center City District (CCD); Clean Air Council
 - Delaware Regional Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC)
 - Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
 - People's Emergency Center
 - Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations
 - Philadelphia Parking Authority
 - School District of Philadelphia
 - Public Health Management Corporation
 - Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
 - University City District

Actions

- In 2017, a three-year Vision Zero Action Plan² was adopted in Philadelphia, outlining Vision Zero's near-term goals.

Phase II: Building Support

Starting Simply

- With a Vision Zero Task Force in place, developing the plan was the next step for implementation of Vision Zero in Philadelphia. The Task Force was focused on not overthinking the plan – there were example action plans from around the country that could provide the basis of their action plan. As a result, Philadelphia’s first Vision Zero Action Plan was created within 120 days. It did not need to take years to develop it, but it did take concerted focus.

Understanding Others’ Perspectives, Engaging the Community

- The Vision Zero Task Force engaged Philadelphians across the city during the development of the 2017 Vision Zero Action Plan, with community organizations being part of the task force that developed the plan. The Task Force served as liaison between the community and the stakeholders, informing the development of the Vision Zero Action Plan guiding principles.
- After the draft Vision Zero Action Plan was completed, three tools were created to collect public input: Vision Zero Draft Action Plan Comment Form, Vision Zero Traffic Safety Map, and Vision Zero Traffic Safety Survey, published on the Vision Zero Philadelphia website at the time. To ensure that neighbors without internet access could participate, printed activities – translated to Spanish, Chinese, and Russian – were brought to community events. Between March and July 2017, Philadelphia neighbors were engaged through 44 community events, including neighborhood association meetings, Police District meetings, block parties, as well as at festivals across the city.
- Messaging from the media about traffic crashes involving people walking and biking has a measurable impact on public support for improvements to make roads safer for everyone. The City of Philadelphia, in partnership with the DVRPC’s Regional Planning Commission’s Regional Safety Task Force, held a panel in 2020 with members of the local press to highlight best practices for reporting on crashes and how to provide context and data on the systemic nature of crash problems. Each year, the city continues to build understanding about Vision Zero among local press as a tool to change public perception and better inform Philadelphians about traffic safety.
- Messaging around Vision Zero progress is important to overcome community resistance. When pedestrian fatalities increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, the city focused on communicating the reduction of fatal and serious injuries where safety interventions were implemented rather than focusing on the overall fatality rates in Philadelphia. For example, reporting the progress due to Complete Streets projects (reduced fatal and serious injury crashes by 34%, and total injury crashes by 20%, compared to the High-Injury Network trends from 2012-2022⁴) was essential to continue community support of Vision Zero solutions.

Celebrating and Sharing Success

- Major accomplishments for Safe System efforts in Philadelphia are listed in an annual reports,^{5,6,7,8,9} to provide accountability, transparency, and overall status updates for the community. Examples of completed and proposed safety strategies in Philadelphia include road diets, separated bike lanes, neighborhood slow zones, signal progression to support lower speed limits, automated speed enforcement, speed cushions around schools, bus lane enforcement, automatic red-light enforcement, effective messaging into Vision Zero communications, support of transportation options that reduce driving, fleet purchases and upgrades, and data-driven safety analysis.
- The city hosts events to celebrate the impacts of several projects, including Safe System projects. One example is the Operations Transformation Fund Project Showcase¹⁰, hosted at a local library in 2023. Project teams displayed their work to city staff and community members through posters, visualizations on computer monitors, handouts, photographs, and demonstrations. The showcase is a chance for community members and residents to see “behind the curtain” of municipal government and understand the impact of city projects. One of the highlighted projects was the city’s “Reducing Barriers in the City’s Traffic-Calming Request Program”, which showed the importance of a more accessible, inclusive, and transparent Traffic Calming Program to ensure safer speeds and safer streets.
- The city also has a StoryMap⁴ that provides a powerful set of before-after results for Complete Streets projects over the last few years and show how Complete Streets projects transform safety in Philadelphia.
- The city’s Vision Zero website¹¹ and social media are also good channels for celebrating and sharing success in Philadelphia. Residents can sign up for the Vision Zero newsletter.¹²

Phase III: Institutionalizing the Safe System Approach

Building a Sustainable Coalition

- Tasked with eliminating all traffic fatalities and serious injuries on Philadelphia's streets by 2030, the Vision Zero Task Force is the steering committee of the city's Vision Zero program and works to implement the Action Plan.
- One important factor to sustaining Safe System approach efforts in Philadelphia is the well-structured set of strategies for the Vision Zero Task Force. The action item, description, and responsible agency are listed in the Vision Zero Action Plan for each Vision Zero Action Plan component (safe speeds, safe streets, safe people, safe vehicles, and safety data).
- Another key item that results in continued efforts and collaborations is frequent meetings. The Vision Zero Task Force sub-committees meet quarterly or bimonthly.
- In addition, strong political will and public support for ambitious and transformative policies are important characteristics for sustaining Safe System efforts in Philadelphia.

Securing Resources

- Securing resources in the early stages of Vision Zero adoption was a challenge since Vision Zero did not have dedicated funding. Other than a small budget for branding, all safety data analysis and proposed strategies were developed in-house.
- Over the three years since adoption of their first Vision Zero Action Plan, the Vision Zero Task Force brought state and local government officials side-by-side to work with community and advocacy groups to work towards a goal of zero traffic deaths. In 2020, the city adopted its second Vision Zero Action Plan.¹³ For each project, the Action Plan identifies the lead agency and grants that will be used to fund the project.
- In combination with the 2020 Vision Zero Action Plan, the city developed a Vision Zero Capital Plan,¹⁴ which identifies priority locations on the High-Injury Network to inform safety improvements over the next five years. Although important to the process, the High-Injury Network is not the only criterion to fund projects; the city evaluates other plans (e.g., Transit Plan) and other factors (e.g., equity) to select projects for implementation.
- Having a comprehensive Vision Zero Capital Plan was a strong basis for securing resources such as grant funding. The City of Philadelphia was awarded SS4A Implementation Grants in 2022 for the "Philadelphia Vision Zero Capital Plan" application. In 2023, the city was awarded SS4A Implementation Grants for the "Complete & Safe Streets Philadelphia: Vision Zero High-Injury Network Corridors" application.
- Although resources for safety strategies are sustainable, sustaining maintenance has been an ongoing concern in Philadelphia. One strategy to overcome this issue is to have a balance between quick-build and permanent safety projects.

Phase IV: Sustaining the Safe System Approach

Use an Evidence-Based Approach

- The city understands that eliminating traffic-related deaths on Philadelphia streets requires continual, data-informed prioritization of city streets. Crash data and demographic data were used to inform development of both 2017 and 2020 Vision Zero Action Plans, as well as the Vision Zero Capital Plan.
- The city supports the Regional Vision Zero 2050 goal for the Delaware Valley Region, and has access to other data-driven guidelines developed by the DVRPC, such as the Philadelphia Crash Analysis Standards & Recommendations report.¹⁵

Prepare for the Long Haul

- The development of the 2020 Vision Zero Action Plan provided an opportunity to reflect on what was achieved in the first three years, reassess what had worked and what had not worked, and renew the city's commitment to eliminating traffic fatalities in Philadelphia.
- During the development of the second Vision Zero Action Plan, the global COVID-19 pandemic, an escalating economic recession, and unrest tied to systemic racism and police brutality were taking a toll on Philadelphia. In July 2020, Philadelphia reached the highest number of traffic fatalities in a single month since the city committed to Vision Zero.
- The 2020 Vision Zero Action Plan used a Safe System framework to look beyond the immediate conditions of a crash and focus across connected systems to prevent all fatal crashes.

Commit to the Safe System Approach

- In addition to the Vision Zero Task Force, four sub-committees were created:
 - Safe Streets & Speeds
 - Safe People
 - Safety Data
 - Transformative Policy
- The 2020 Vision Zero Action Plan is human-centered, acknowledges that “human life is our highest priority,” and includes several photos and personal stories of Philadelphia residents that were killed in traffic crashes.
- Understanding that commitment and recommitment to Vision Zero and the Safe System approach are necessary will help Philadelphia make progress in the long term. In 2024, the mayor signed a new executive order recommitting Philadelphia to the goal of reaching zero traffic fatalities.^{16,17} Part of that recommitment is drafting a new five-year Action Plan and Capital Plan.

Overcome Resistance to Change

- One of the city's transformative policies to implement the Safe System approach in Philadelphia is automated enforcement. The city made community outreach and education part of the Vision Zero planning process to help address anticipated community resistance. Not all resistance was overcome, but people have largely embraced the program.
- The city gave a 60-day warning period to allow residents to adjust to the new system. During this period, a bilingual public information campaign to alert residents and better inform the public about the purpose of speed cameras (to save lives) was conducted. A series of videos and blog posts in English and Spanish were distributed via geo-targeted advertising placement to reach people living or driving by each of the camera locations. The campaign reached over 250,000 people through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The campaign placed over 1,000 ads on radio and throughout the city. Following the campaign, the city conducted focus groups to better understand which elements of the campaign's messaging were effective and will use this information to inform future campaigns about automated enforcement and Vision Zero. By law, fees collected from automated enforcement are invested back into traffic safety improvement projects in Philadelphia.

Additional Information

- The City of Philadelphia was awarded SS4A Implementation Grants in 2022 and 2023. A few lessons learned from grant applications that can be followed by similar jurisdictions include the following:
 - **Start early:** This grant can fund so many different types of projects. It is important to start early getting ideas together. Leave time to iterate and think about how you can combine different types of projects into a single application.
 - **Stay true to your action plan:** Have a plan – do not fudge it. This grant is a great opportunity to create an action plan, and it is important for successful implementation applications to have a plan in place before applying. Keep your application focused on your action plan and make sure proposals stay true to that plan. All projects should be on your high-injury network and supplemental planning activities, or demonstration projects should relate to action items in the plan.
 - **Select a focus:** Think about a theme for your grant to help focus the projects included. Philadelphia’s first SS4A was focused on our Vision Zero Capital Plan, and the second application was based on responding to rising bicycle fatalities in the city.
 - **Diversify your request:** You can apply for supplemental planning, demonstration, and implementation within the same grant application. The City of Philadelphia has developed diversified requests that request funding in all three categories and project proposals are scalable based on funding availability.
- Additional resources for [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#)

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