

Re-Review of the 2016 Audit of the City’s Programs Responsible for Improving Pedestrian Safety

Why OCA Did This Study

In 2015, the City of San Diego took the Vision Zero pledge—committing to end all traffic deaths within the City in 10 years. In 2016, the Office of the City Auditor (OCA) conducted an audit of the City’s pedestrian safety programs. That audit issued 18 recommendations covering infrastructure prioritization, increased enforcement, and coordinated education efforts.

The objective of this re-review is to determine the extent to which the City is still implementing the identified (or similar) recommendations, and the potential impact of these efforts, as pedestrian fatalities continue to increase in San Diego and nationwide.

What OCA Found

The City has maintained implementation of most recommendations from the 2016 audit, but some efforts should be expanded or updated.

Topic 1: Transportation

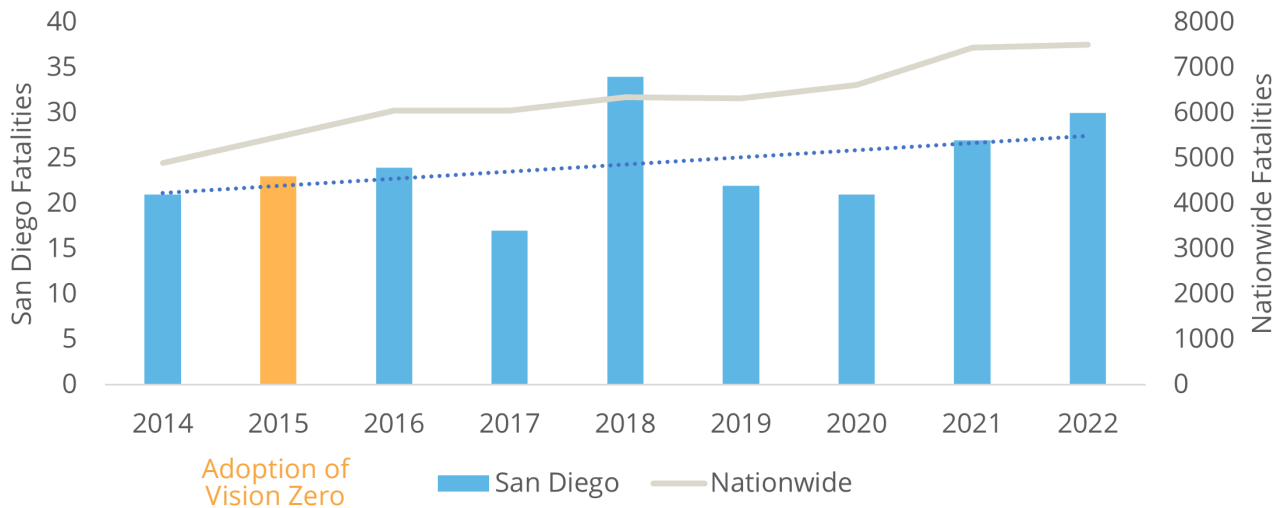
The 2016 audit found that the City should prioritize its limited infrastructure resources towards locations that pose the greatest risk to pedestrians, and issued four corresponding recommendations.

Our re-review found that Transportation is still conducting high-crash analyses and programming treatments for the identified high-risk intersections.

Additionally, in 2019, the City conducted a systemic safety analysis to proactively identify high-risk intersections based on a variety of factors, including road type, traffic volume, and speed limit. **While we found the City is responding to the highest-crash locations, there are not enough resources to fix all the dangerous areas**—hundreds of unfunded pedestrian-related projects have been placed on the Transportation Unfunded Needs List. Transportation should complete an update of this systemic safety analysis to ensure limited resources continue to be prioritized efficiently and effectively.

An emerging issue since the initial audit is the equitable distribution of improvements and resources. In this review, we analyzed available treatment data against the City’s Climate Equity Index (CEI)—a tool that incorporates both environmental justice and social equity by using dozens of measurements to produce an overall index score for areas throughout the City. We found that areas with lower CEI scores had a lower proportion of pedestrian safety improvements. While the data we analyzed was limited, and the City is taking some steps to combat this issue, it should monitor and report out equity metrics to increase public accountability and transparency.

Exhibit 2: Pedestrian Fatalities in San Diego and Nationwide Continue to Rise



Source: OCA generated based on data from the City of San Diego and the Governors Highway Safety Administration.

Topic 2: Communications

The 2016 audit found that the City should increase awareness and change pedestrian and driver behavior by developing a Citywide public education and outreach campaign, and issued four corresponding recommendations.

Our re-review found that **the City is still collaborating with outside agencies and internal departments, but should develop a community outreach and engagement plan** that includes an updated media strategy, work with community-based organizations, and a focus on project-specific information.

Topic 3: Monitoring & Evaluation

The 2016 audit found that current funding levels may not have been sufficient to achieve long-term Vision Zero goals, and that the City did not have strategies to evaluate or monitor the City's progress nor to report results; the audit issued five corresponding recommendations.

Our re-review found that the Mobility Board is still identifying priority engineering, enforcement, and education initiatives. **However, the City should expand its program and treatment evaluations as well as improve the City website to increase public transparency and better communicate project benefits.** The City currently completes some basic crash evaluations as requirements for grant funding, but should consistently evaluate both the impact of the systemic safety programs and larger infrastructure projects in order to ensure that treatments are having the intended effects.

Additionally, while the Vision Zero website contains some basic information and is still updated, other cities are expanding access by including more detailed information and compelling narratives. Both treatment evaluations and **an improved website can help enhance public transparency and potentially increase support for Vision Zero projects.**

Topic 4: Oversight & Management

We found that although the City still conducts inter-departmental meetings, **there is a risk that without a consistent driving force or dedicated position, the City may not be able to fully use data-driven systems,** and certain tasks, such as ensuring the website is updated and coordinating interdepartmental efforts, may be delayed. We also found that other cities operate with a central authority that oversees Vision Zero activities, and all cities we interviewed had a staff member dedicated to Vision Zero.

Exhibit 17 below shows different cities and their oversight bodies or staff positions.

Exhibit 17: Other Cities Have a Dedicated Vision Zero Coordinator and Oversight Bodies to Conduct Vision Zero

	Dedicated Vision Zero Coordinator	Internal Oversight Committee	External Oversight Committee
San Diego	✗	✗	✓
Austin	✓	✓	✓
Minneapolis	✓	✓	✓
Portland	✓	✗	✓
San Francisco	✓	✓	✓
San Jose	✓	✓	✓

Source: OCA generated based on interviews and data from relevant cities.

What OCA Recommends

We make eight recommendations across the four re-review topics as described below:

Topic 1 – Transportation: Two recommendations to improve reporting efforts, specifically around equity, and to complete an updated systemic safety analysis.

Topic 2 – Communications: One recommendation to develop an inclusive public engagement and outreach plan around mobility and update the Vision Zero communications plan.

Topic 3 – Monitoring & Evaluation: Two recommendations to develop a policy for evaluating the impacts of the high-crash and systemic-safety analysis programs, and to evaluate large pedestrian-related infrastructure on speeds, volumes, and crash data. One recommendation for relevant departments to collaborate on website improvements, including progress on identified goals.

Topic 4 – Oversight & Management: Two recommendations creating or assigning a Vision Zero coordinator and forming an interdepartmental mobility governance group to provide oversight and ensure departmental collaboration.

Management agreed to implement all recommendations.

For more information, contact Andy Hanau, City Auditor, at (619) 533-3165 or cityauditor@sandiego.gov.