THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET ANALYST REPORT

Date Issued: May 12, 2025 **IBA Report Number:** 25-15

Active Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Docket Date: May 22, 2025

Item Number: TBD

Response to Resolution R-315764 Affirming Safety as the Highest Transportation-Related Priority

OVERVIEW

On September 23, 2024, the City Council passed Resolution R-315764, "A Resolution Of The Council Of The City Of San Diego To Affirm Safety As The City's Highest Transportation-Related Policy Priority And Direct The Independent Budget Analyst To Analyze Current Policies and Provide Recommendations Regarding Street Safety, And Related Actions."

That resolution recognized that street safety is the City's highest transportation-related policy priority, and directed our Office to analyze transportation-related Municipal Code sections, Council Policies (particularly CPs 200-07 and 200-08), and other regulations and guidelines, as well as review present policy options that would prioritize the use of temporary "quick-build" projects, and provide this analysis and any recommendations to the Active Transportation & Infrastructure Committee (ATI). This report responds to that direction.

In regard to the Council Policies, our Office recommends that *Council Policy 200-07: Marked Crosswalk Criteria at Uncontrolled Locations* be updated to:

- Shift from a reactive to a proactive safety approach by implementing pedestrian demand forecasting.
- Require automatic safety assessments in areas with major land-use changes.
- Create Vision Zero Priority Zones where crosswalks can be preemptively installed based on risk factors.
- Expand safe crossing enhancements beyond high-traffic areas by allowing interim solutions like high-visibility paint, flex posts, and curb extensions which could improve pedestrian safety while awaiting funding for more advanced enhancements.

- Reduce crosswalk removal risks by requiring a Vision Zero Safety Audit before any removal, ensuring a safer alternative is identified, and prioritizing crosswalk enhancements over elimination.

We recommend *Council Policy 200-08: Criteria for the Installation of Stop Signs* be updated to:

- More clearly explain the process for evaluating locations for stop sign installation.
- Reassess criteria in light of current pedestrian and bicycle safety priorities, including determining if additional factors and details are needed as well as how these are weighed.
- Provide a more formalized process for appealing an adverse decision.

Beyond those updates to Council Policies, we also recommend that:

- When funding becomes available, implementing the open recommendations contained in the High Risk Re-Review: Performance Audit of the City's Programs Responsible for Improving Pedestrian Safety (OCA-24-04) should be a priority, especially adding/designating a Vision Zero Coordinator to oversee the program.
- City Planning staff should update various master plans to incorporate specific safety improvements based on the needs of particular communities, and future community plans should consider designating specific corridors for various travel modes to comply with the Complete Streets Policy.
- City management ensure that staff from the Transportation and Engineering & Capital Projects Departments use the Street Design Manual and adhere to its guidelines when designing projects within the right-of-way. Additionally, these departments should use the Mobility Master Plan, community plans, and other planning documents when making decisions about what projects to include in the right-of-way. When deviating from these plans, additional public outreach should be conducted prior to installation.
- City Planning should consider coordinating joint meetings between the Mobility Governance Group and the Mobility Board on either an annual or semi-annual basis.
- As part of parking reform measures, City staff and Council should ensure that safety improvements within the right-of-way are included as projects eligible for parking meter funding, and that future budgets include allocations to these projects with revenue derived from enhanced parking meter revenues.

Regarding Quick Builds, while we do not offer specific recommendations, we caution there may be unintended consequences if the City relies on the redeployment of existing resources, particularly as those redeployments may result in larger Transportation Department maintenance and capital needs in the future.

BACKGROUND

Safety of those using the City's public right-of-way has been a growing concern for a number of years. The City's right-of-way includes all public thoroughfares over which members of the public may travel, and includes roadways, intersections, sidewalks, bike paths, and other thoroughfares. These spaces are managed by the City's Transportation Department.

Vision Zero History

The Vision Zero program began in Sweden in 1997 and is an approach to road safety where no loss of life is acceptable. According to the Vision Zero Network, it is fundamentally about re-envisioning the approach cities take to developing and maintaining the public right-of-way. Some differences between a more "traditional" approach to right-of-way management and Vision Zero are provided in the table below.

Traditional Approach	Vision Zero
Traffic deaths are *inevitable*	Traffic deaths are *preventable*
Perfect human behavior	Integrate *human failing* in approach
Prevent *collisions*	Prevent *fatal and severe crashes*
Individual responsibility	*Systems* approach
Saving lives is *expensive*	Saving lives is *not expensive*

Since the inception of Vision Zero, it has been adopted by numerous European and American cities and was adopted by the City of San Diego in October 2015. Following adoption, City staff began working on implementing the policies and design guidelines for Vision Zero, which resulted with the publication of the Vision Zero Strategic Plan in 2020. The Strategic Plan identified the following five actions:

1. *Taking a Data-Driven Approach* – this includes the Systemic Safety Analysis reports,[1] with a plan to continue to review this data annually.

2. *Plan for Long Term Transformation Based on Safe System Principles* – this includes such measures as anticipating human error and mistakes, and accommodating human injury when those mistakes occur, in the design of right-of-way assets; this focuses mostly on roundabouts and other intersection designs as well as speed management.

3. *Budget and Build Improvements in Identified Equity Communities* – this includes providing adequate funding to develop and install new safety measures through the annual budget.

4. *Engagement and Enforcement* – this recognizes that right-of-way rules cannot be implemented through design alone, but also proactively require engagement with the community and enforcement of traffic safety laws and regulations.

5. *Education, Community, and a Culture of Safety* – this recognizes that the public must be made more aware of the various safety features the City develops, and that the public should know how to support the implementation of various safety options in their own neighborhoods.

The Strategic Plan also identified numerous focus areas and performance metrics to determine if the City was fully implementing the actions.

[1] The City has performed two of these analyses, including 2019's Injury Report and 2024's Fatal Crashes Report.

Vision Zero in Other Cities

According to its website, the Vision Zero Network is a "collaborative campaign to help communities reach their goals of Vision Zero – eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries – while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all." As of February 2025, the Network recognizes nearly 70 communities that have demonstrated a strong commitment to Vision Zero.[2]

The table below shows the average annual pedestrian fatality rate from 2010 to 2022 for 24 cities recognized by the Vision Zero Network.[3] Note that these cities were selected for having a population of over 150,000 and for adopting Vision Zero between 2013 and 2018.

Cities Recognized by Vision Zero Network	Vision Zero Adoption Year	Average Annual Pedestrian Fatality Rate from 2010-2022	Average Annual Pedestrian Fatality Rate Before Vision Zero Adoption [a]	Average Annual Pedestrian Fatality Rate After Vision Zero Adoption	Change in Average Annual Pedestrian Fatality Rate After Vision Zero Adoption
San Diego, CA	**2015**	**2.52**	**1.95**	**3.01**	**53.9%**
Alexandria, VA	2017	1.42	0.80	1.91	139.5%
Anchorage, AK	2018	2.30	2.13	2.68	26.1%
Austin, TX	2015	2.98	2.32	3.55	53.3%
Boston, MA	2015	1.30	1.23	1.35	9.7%
Denver, CO	2017	2.20	2.07	2.43	17.6%
Durham, NC	2017	1.50	1.33	1.77	32.9%
Eugene, OR	2015	1.24	1.16	1.31	13.0%
Ft. Lauderdale, FL	2015	7.20	5.80	8.40	44.8%
Los Angeles, CA	2015	2.98	2.45	3.45	40.8%
Minneapolis, MN	2017	1.25	1.18	1.36	15.5%
New York, NY	2014	1.49	1.73	1.34	-22.4%
Orlando, FL	2017	4.06	3.45	5.02	45.5%
Philadelphia, PA	2016	2.40	2.15	2.71	26.0%
Portland, OR	2016	2.37	1.77	3.07	73.2%
Richmond, VA	2017	2.20	1.82	2.80	53.6%
Sacramento, CA	2017	3.44	2.80	4.46	59.0%
San Antonio, TX	2015	3.39	2.83	3.88	37.1%
San Francisco, CA	2014	1.99	2.00	1.99	-0.7%
San Jose, CA	2015	2.08	1.70	2.40	41.5%
Seattle, WA	2015	1.50	1.11	1.84	65.8%
Washington D.C.	2015	1.64	1.53	1.73	13.0%

[a] Includes the year when Vision Zero initiative was adopted.

As the table above shows, only two cities, San Francisco, CA and New York, NY, experienced a decrease in their average fatality rates after adopting Vision Zero. Although the remaining cities, including the City of San Diego, have seen an increase in their average fatality rates after adopting Vision Zero, it is possible that fatality rates would have been higher if the initiative was not adopted. Notably, cities with higher density, compact urban cores, and/or a variety of transportation options generally have lower fatality rates than cities with lower density that are more car dependent.

We note that not all cities that have adopted a Vision Zero initiative are recognized in the Vision Zero Network., One such city, Hoboken, NJ, is one of the mostly densely populated cities in the

[2] Vision Zero Network, *Vision_Zero_Communities_February_2024*. Available from: docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-aN1-2gn0JNKZ_GacxehL62S4QofhFmEeySNr-X0AOg/edit?gid=0#gid=0

[3] Data taken from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

country, with approximately 57,000 residents within its 1.25 square miles, and has achieved seven consecutive years without a traffic-related death in 2024.

Our Office reached out to Hoboken to discuss its Vision Zero measures; staff there noted several factors that led to this achievement, such as: prohibiting parking within 25ft of crosswalks; reducing the citywide speed limit from 25 miles per hour (mph) to 20 mph; the utilization of "No Turn On Red" signals for all corners of its main streets and "pedestrian scramble" crosswalks that temporarily stops *all* vehicle traffic at high volume pedestrian intersections; raised crosswalks; and high transit ridership.

For context, the City of Hoboken has been working towards safer streets for a long time. It adopted its initial Complete Streets resolution in 2010,[4] which was accompanied by a specific Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. These projects were implemented incrementally as Hoboken worked on specific sections of the right-of-way, gradually increasing residents' expectations on safety infrastructure. In response to these increased expectations, Hoboken's Mayor issued an executive order in 2019 that launched the city's Vision Zero initiative, aiming to eliminate all traffic-related injuries and deaths by 2030. The executive order helped establish a Vision Zero Task Force, which includes both internal and external stakeholders, to provide insights on transportation safety issues. That same year, Hoboken's Street Design Guide was released. Using the recommendations from the Task Force, the Street Design Guide, and other existing city plans, Hoboken released its Vision Zero Action Plan in 2021. This plan describes actions Hoboken city departments will take, and the timeframe to achieve their Vision Zero initiative.

Regarding Vision Zero projects, Hoboken staff emphasized that *reliable funding is crucial*, and highlighted that the city leverages current infrastructure projects to add Vision Zero upgrades. Notably, Hoboken can use its allocation from its state's annual repaving budget for safety upgrades in repaving projects.

Pedestrian Safety Audit

Following the City's commitment in 2015 to Vision Zero, in 2016 the Office of the City Auditor (OCA) conducted a performance audit of the City's pedestrian safety programs (OCA-17-006). OCA found more than 8,000 pedestrians were injured and 270 pedestrians were killed in the City between 2001 and 2015. Particularly in the latter years, the number of pedestrian fatalities increased significantly, with 66 pedestrian fatalities from 2013–2015 (more than any other three-year period since 2001). The 2016 audit found as the City moves forward with Vision Zero, pedestrian safety could be improved using data and leveraging the experiences of other cities. Key findings and recommendations included the following.[5]

- **High-Collision Intersections –** Pedestrian collisions, injuries, and fatalities are concentrated at relatively few high-collision intersections, indicating that safety improvements are most needed at these locations.

[4] Complete Streets is a street design, maintenance, and operation policy that aims to ensure safe access for all users within the public right-of-way.

[5] The 2016 audit report also includes findings and recommendations related to driver violations and targeted enforcement by the Police Department.

- **Educational Campaign to Affect Pedestrian Behavior** – Pedestrians were at fault in approximately half of the pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries, often due to entering a path suddenly or crossing between controlled intersections, and a public education campaign designed to raise awareness of pedestrian safety issues could improve driver and pedestrian behavior.
- **Funding and Evaluation** – The City's Vision Zero Task Force did not have comprehensive strategies for financing Vision Zero efforts, evaluating their effectiveness, and communicating results to the public.

Despite subsequent investment, pedestrian injuries and fatalities have remained a persistent issue. In 2023, the OCA conducted a High Risk Re-Review of the Pedestrian Safety audit to assess the implementation of recommendations and their impact. The re-review found that while most recommendations of the prior audit were implemented, some efforts need expansion or updates. Key findings and recommendations from the re-review are discussed in the *City Auditor Re-review of the Pedestrian Safety Audit* section of this report.

Other Related Planning Efforts

Beyond specific Vision Zero initiatives, the City has been developing many other plans with an aim to increase non-vehicular travel to achieve various other City priorities. These plans tie into Vision Zero in numerous ways, as one of the major impediments to increasing both pedestrian and cycling travel is safety considerations of cyclists and pedestrians. Some plans, such as the Climate Action Plan, contain specific goals for mode-shift between vehicular and non-vehicular traffic, including cycling, walking, other transit options. Other plans then build off of these goals, such as the Mobility Master Plan, the Bicycle Master Plan, the Pedestrian Master Plan, and various community plan updates, by recommending specific projects, programs, funding opportunities, and other initiatives that would proactively improve the City right-of-way for non-vehicular users. Additionally, the City Council recently adopted the Complete Streets Policy to guide design of the right-of-way to better incorporate these elements, and a new Street Design Manual is currently in development (more on this is provided below).

The development of these plans demonstrates the City's efforts to provide for new right-of-way improvements that consider the needs of non-vehicular travelers as well as vehicles, the promotion of safety as well as ease of travel. However, while the plans detail useful strategies, approaches, and programs, inadequate funding for right-of-way projects has hampered widescale implementation of these plans. As detailed in the latest Capital Planning Outlook, all transportation assets are projected to be underfunded over the next five years. Given a lack of sufficient immediate funding for all infrastructure needed, the development and maintenance of good planning documents is a best practice to ensure that *when* opportunities for right-of-way improvements arise, the safety improvements included in planning documents are incorporated as projects are implemented.

FISCAL AND POLICY DISCUSSION

Our Office comprehensively reviewed both Council policies that were recommended by the City Council, as well as other polices, municipal code language, and written documents as necessary. We also met with numerous stakeholders from the community to hear their desires and recommendations associated with improving the City's right-of-way. We also researched cities

that are implementing Vision Zero effectively, including those that had improving fatality and/or serious injury data, and spoke with at least one city that we found to be successful in implementing the kinds of transportation improvements that were recommended to us by various stakeholders. Finally, we met with the Transportation Department, Sustainability and Mobility Department (SuMo)[6], Engineering & Capital Projects Department (E&CP), and the City Auditor (OCA) to discuss their approaches, challenges, and feedback. We would like to thank all groups, individuals, departments, and other cities for assisting us in this research.

Below, we highlight various areas and initiatives. For those areas where we have specific recommendations, **those recommendations will be bolded for emphasis**.

Community Groups Concerns and Ideas

Community group representatives have beneficial experience and understand the needs of various neighborhoods as well as San Diego overall. Our Office met with representatives of the Climate Action Campaign, Circulate SD, SD Bike Coalition, BikeSD Priorities, and City Heights CDC to discuss their concerns about the City not achieving Vision Zero goals, as well as to obtain their ideas for improving pedestrian and bicycle safety in the public right-of-way. By and large, those groups appreciated the City's Vision Zero goals and the development of a Complete Streets policy and stressed those are lifesaving measures and should be a top priority. Improvements such as daylighting intersections (red-curb painting), adding stop signs, modular cement curbs, accessibility ramps, lead pedestrian intervals, and flex posts were noted as essential to reduce vehicle-related deaths and to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety. However, representatives expressed concerns that the City is not effectively implementing needed improvements due to significant funding limitations and the complexity of internal processes.

To address this, they recommended increasing the use of Quick Build projects to provide needed improvements. Compared to capital projects, Quick Builds provide a relatively low-cost solution and could have a significant impact on safety and be implemented quickly and efficiently. These are discussed in more detail in the *Quick Build* section of this report. Further, representatives underscored that when the ongoing Street Design Manual update is completed (tentatively anticipated in summer 2025), it is expected to incorporate Vision Zero and Complete Streets concepts that will be required for all future projects. Discussed in more detail in the next section, the City of Hoboken also indicated that revising its Street Design Manual helped to better incorporate Vision Zero concepts into all improvements. Another approach to increasing pedestrian and bicycle safety raised by these groups was to reevaluate and reduce speed limits on City streets by developing a Speed Management Plan, which has successfully been used by other cities such as Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco.[7]

Representatives raised the need for a dedicated Vision Zero staff person to coordinate with communities regarding what safety improvements are needed and to provide updates on planned improvements for cycling, walking, and rolling (with a mobility device such as a wheelchair or

[6] While writing this report, the Sustainability and Mobility Department was reassigned to various other departments as part of a cost-saving measure developed by the Mayor. For this report, staff that we interacted with have moved to the City Planning Department.

[7] With the passage of AB 43, California cities now have authority to assess and reduce speed limits within their jurisdiction.

scooter). As we discuss later in this report, the City Auditor 2023 High Risk Re-review of the Pedestrian Safety Audit also recommended a Vision Zero Coordinator to coordinate with departments on traffic safety issues and conduct public engagement and outreach. Finally, community groups noted that more analysis and transparent reporting are needed to measure outcomes and better understand which measures improve safety and which are less effective.

Additionally, we heard concerns about the implementation of various safety improvements within the right-of-way echoed during various budget presentations and through our engagement with the general public. These concerns ranged from general disapproval of how many bike lanes are being built and their underutilization, and whether there is a better use for resources dedicated to them, as well as more specific concerns including not having adequate street sweeping capacity to keep newly separated bikeways clean. Concerns were also raised about removing traffic lanes in front of sensitive use sites such as schools, which may have led to unintended consequences related to traffic and safety of students being dropped off and picked up. Given that Council has declared that safety is the primary policy goal for improvements within the right-of-way, we believe that ensuring improvements are implemented proactively and in way that includes community input to minimize public disapproval, is critical.

Council Policies Related to Vision Zero

We reviewed two Council policies that provide guidelines related to pedestrian and bicycle safety that were raised by Council staff and members of the public as not fully meeting Vision Zero goals, including *Council Policy 200-07: Marked Crosswalk Criteria at Uncontrolled Locations* and *Council Policy 200-08: Criteria for Installation of Stop Signs*. These are discussed in this section.

Council Policy 200-07: Marked Crosswalk Criteria at Uncontrolled Locations

Council Policy 200-07 supports Vision Zero by ensuring pedestrian crossings are strategically placed, equipped with necessary safety enhancements, and protected from removal without due process. Originally adopted in 1990 and last updated in 2015, the policy aims to reduce pedestrian fatalities and injuries by improving safety, enhancing visibility, addressing speed and traffic flow, encouraging safe crossings, and preventing unnecessary crosswalk removal. However, while the policy generally aligns with Vision Zero, some of its criteria and thresholds may inadvertently hinder pedestrian safety improvements.

One limitation is the thresholds for crosswalk installation, requiring a minimum of 10 pedestrians per peak hour and a 16-point warrant system,[8] which can delay or prevent safety upgrades in areas with latent pedestrian demand. Additionally, restrictions on uncontrolled crosswalks require installations with costly enhancements like flashing beacons or hybrid signals in high-speed or high-traffic areas. If funding for these enhancements is unavailable, crosswalks may not be installed at all, leaving pedestrians without safe crossings. The policy also allows for crosswalk *removal* if there are changes to the basic or point warrant requirements, potentially reducing pedestrian access without providing alternative crossings. Furthermore, case-by-case engineering judgment can result in inconsistent safety improvements rather than a systematic, consistent approach. Lastly, the policy prioritizes existing pedestrian patterns over future demand, potentially

[8] A point system that determines whether a location without a traffic control device (e.g. traffic signal or stop sign) qualifies for a crosswalk.

denying crosswalks in areas where pedestrian activity would increase if safer crossings were available.

To better support Vision Zero, our Office recommends that Council Policy 200-07 be updated to:

- **Shift from a reactive to a proactive safety approach by implementing pedestrian demand forecasting when considering the installation of a crosswalk;**
- **Require automatic safety assessments in areas with major land-use changes;**
- **Create Vision Zero Priority Zones where crosswalks can be preemptively installed based on risk factors (e.g., past crashes, near-miss data, high-speed corridors);**
- **Expand safe crossing enhancements beyond high-traffic areas by allowing interim solutions like high-visibility paint, flex posts, and curb extensions which could improve pedestrian safety while awaiting funding for more advanced enhancements; and**
- **Reduce crosswalk removal risks by requiring a Vision Zero Safety Audit before any removal, ensuring a safer alternative is identified, and prioritizing crosswalk enhancements over elimination.**

Council Policy 200-08: Criteria for Installation of Stop Signs

In line with the Federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) , the City adopted Council Policy 200-08 to provide criteria that must be met for intersections to be considered for the installation of stop signs.[9] This policy became effective in 1962 and was last updated in 1997. Installation of unneeded stop signs can have adverse impacts, such as increased traffic congestion, impacted traffic flow, and increased emissions. Therefore, San Diego and many California cities rely on engineering judgment for determining appropriate traffic controls.

Council Policy 200-08 indicates that stop signs are installed facing traffic on every street intersecting a through street (as defined in Council Policy 200-11). To determine whether a stop sign should be installed in other locations, the policy provides two categories of criteria which are each allotted points: (1) criteria for installing a stop sign on a side street (requiring at least 15 out of a possible 30 points) and (2) criteria for installing an all-way stop (requiring at least 25 out of a possible 50 points). As shown in the following table, the criteria include accidents experienced in the location, visibility conditions, traffic and pedestrian volumes, and any special conditions that are present. Special conditions focus on pedestrian and bicycle safety, including proximity to certain facilities (i.e., schools and playgrounds), and also includes location-specific conditions, such as visibility; pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle circulation patterns; and other conditions that may be identified by the community. In the case that an intersection does not receive a sufficient number of points to warrant installation of a stop sign, the policy briefly describes an alternative process for appealing the decision but does not include findings needed for the decision to be overturned, and does not include a formal appeals process such as an appeals hearing board.

[9] Stop signs are installed to establish right-of-way at intersections between motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians, reduce delays, and enhance safety for all roadway users. The Federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) guidelines dictate the size, shape and color of all traffic signs and has guidelines for installing signs and thus creates uniformity from state to state. The City of San Diego is required to comply MUTCD guidelines (with the California Supplement).

Council Policy 200-08: Installation of Stop Sign Criteria and Points

Category	Criteria	Total Possible Points
Stop Sign Control Installation Criteria – Side Street Approach	Accident experience	9
	Visibility conditions	9
	Traffic and pedestrian volumes	9
	Special conditions	3
	Minimum required points/total available	15/30
All Way Stop Sign Control Installation Criteria	Accident experience	15
	Special conditions	5
	Traffic volumes	15
	Traffic volumes difference	10
	Pedestrian volumes	5
	Minimum required points/total available	25/50

Note: If some criteria exceed certain thresholds, then the 15-point or 25-point requirement may be a waived and the stop sign installed based on that criterion. For example, if three of more accidents have occurred within a three-year period for the side street approach, then the stop sign could be installed solely based on the accident experience criteria.

Based on our assessment of the Council Policy and issues raised by community groups, we identified concerns regarding the criteria in Council Policy 200-08. As shown above, the criteria seem to prioritize vehicle collisions, visibility, and traffic volume *more* than pedestrian and bicycle safety. Total points possible for "accident experience" is 9 out of 15 for side streets and 15 out of 25 for all-way stop signs. This compares to a only s potential 3 points for side streets and 5 points for all way stop signs, which would be considered under "special conditions." Also, the "pedestrian volumes" criteria are combined with "traffic volume" for the side street approach, and "pedestrian volumes" are capped at 5 points for all way stop sign locations.

Community groups we met with noted the points system generally relies on traffic collisions to occur before a stop sign can be considered. They recommended that the process for evaluating stop sign locations should be more clearly described so the public can understand it and be more proactive, potentially using surveys and mailed notices to determine what locations communities consider to be dangerous so that safety concerns can be addressed before accidents occur. Additionally, groups noted existing criteria require a certain amount of pedestrian traffic to exist for a stop sign to be installed, which does not consider that pedestrian traffic might increase if a stop sign were put in place.

Council Policy 200-08 provides an engineering based, structured approach to installing stop signs using traffic and safety data, similar to other California cities. However, the policy has not been updated for almost 30 years, and does not reflect current pedestrian and bicycle safety priorities. Based on our review of other cities criteria for stop sign installation, we found that several cities with more recent policies have more detailed criteria and more highly weigh pedestrian and bicycle safety. For example, the City of San Jose's criteria for the installation of stop signs was updated in 2019 and provides a higher number of points for special conditions (including high pedestrian and bicycle activity for example, near schools and recreation centers and includes intersections within a pedestrian corridor or zone as identified in their General Plan). Several other cities also have

established a more formal process for appeals including using an appeals hearing board as well as explaining what findings are needed to overturn a decision.

Our Office recommends Council Policy 200-08 should be updated to:

- **More clearly explain the process for evaluating locations for stop sign installation so it is clear to the public;**
- **Reassess criteria in light of current pedestrian and bicycle safety priorities, including determining if additional factors and details are needed as well as how these are weighed; and**
- **Provide a more formalized process for appealing an adverse decision.**

City Auditor Re-Review of Pedestrian Safety Audit

As discussed earlier in this report, as pedestrian injuries and fatalities continued to persist in San Diego, in 2023 the Office of the City Auditor (OCA) conducted a High Risk Re-Review: Performance Audit of the City's Programs Responsible for Improving Pedestrian Safety (OCA-24-04) of the 2016 Pedestrian Safety Audit to assess the implementation of recommendations and their impact. The re-review found that while most recommendations had been implemented, some efforts need expansion or updates. The re-review included four key topics (Transportation, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Oversight and Management) and eight related recommendations that the administration agreed to implement. Five recommendations have been implemented and three recommendations (considered "in process – not due") remain open as they depend upon the allocation of additional resources. These are discussed below.

Transportation

The re-review found the Transportation Department continues to conduct high-crash analyses and prioritize pedestrian improvements at high-risk locations.[10] However, the City lacks sufficient resources to address all dangerous areas, and hundreds of unfunded pedestrian-related projects have been placed on the Transportation Unfunded Needs List. Recommendations from the re-review which have been recently implemented include updating Transportation's systemic safety analysis and expanding reporting to ensure high crash locations continue to be prioritized and resources are distributed equitably. The re-review also addressed an emerging issue and analyzed available treatment data against the City's Climate Equity Index (CEI), finding that areas with lower CEI scores had a lower proportion of pedestrian safety improvements.[11] While the available data was limited and steps are being taken to address this issue, OCA concluded the City should monitor and report out equity metrics to increase public accountability and transparency.

Monitoring and 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 re-review found the Mobility Board continues to identify priority engineering, enforcement, and education initiatives, but the City should expand its program and

[10] In addition, the City conducted a systemic safety analysis in 2019 to proactively identify high-risk intersections based on a variety of factors, including road type, traffic volume, and speed limit.

[11] The City's Climate Equity Index (CEI) is a tool that incorporates environmental justice and social equity to produce an overall index score for areas throughout the City.

improve the City website. Two related recommendations remain open: (1) Transportation should develop a policy for evaluating the effectiveness of the high-crash and systemic safety analysis programs, and (2) Transportation should evaluate large pedestrian-related infrastructure projects for the effect on speeds, volumes, and crash data. Both recommendations may require additional positions or resources, which may be unlikely given current fiscal environment. Implementation of these recommendations would enable Transportation to proactively monitor program effectiveness and adjust as needed rather than waiting to respond to complaints raised or re-raised.

Oversight and Management

The 2016 audit found that without a consistent driving force or dedicated position for Vision Zero, the City may not be able to fully use data-driven systems and certain tasks might be delayed. OCA found during the re-review that other cities generally operate with a central authority overseeing and dedicated to Vision Zero activities. While the City collaborates with internal departments and outside agencies, the re-review recommended the City create or assign a Vision Zero coordinator to share information and coordinate with departments on traffic safety issues, conduct public engagement and outreach, and support departments in analyzing traffic safety data.[12] Earlier in this report we also noted that several community groups indicated the need for a Vision Zero coordinator to improve communications. This recommendation remains open as it requires the allocation of additional resources to implement, which is not anticipated in the upcoming tight budget year. **Our Office believes, when funding becomes available, implementing the open recommendations should be considered a priority, especially adding/designating a Vision Zero Coordinator to oversee the program.**

Research into Other Cities (Lessons from Hoboken)

In addition to meeting with community groups, our Office also sought out other municipalities for additional insight and advice on best practices from a municipal perspective. Given that many large cities have seen *increases* in fatalities in spite of the adoption of Vision Zero goals, we reached out Hoboken to learn about how they have been able to *decrease* fatalities and injuries through their processes and programs.

As a preface to this section, while there are lessons to be learned from Hoboken, it is also important to note that Hoboken is an extremely different city than San Diego in terms of size, population density, street size, and expectations. That stated, we believe some lessons that the City of San Diego should take away from our conversation with their transportation staff, include the following:

- *Focus on Speed Reductions.* Hoboken staff significantly emphasized their efforts on reducing speeds through multiple means. As part of their efforts, Hoboken introduced a citywide speed limit of 25 mph, which they have recently reduced to 20 mph. Speed limit reductions were also accompanied by designs that promote reduced speeds, as well as educational campaigns to enhance public acceptance and support.
- *Having Strong Street Design Guidelines.* Hoboken has had a Complete Streets policy for a number of years, and after a significant amount of time it was supplemented with a specific Street Design Guidelines Document. This has ensured that Hoboken's traffic engineers are

[12] A related recommendation was implemented in 2024 to form an interdepartmental mobility governance group to provide oversight and ensure departmental collaboration on pedestrian-safety related projects.

adequately equipped during every resurfacing and utility project to implement safety improvements as part of those projects when redesign of the right-of-way is the most efficient.

- *Vision Zero Task Force.* The implementation of a Vision Zero Task Force, including both internal and external stakeholders, was described by Hoboken staff as another crucial factor in their success at implementing Vision Zero. Internal stakeholders ensured that all parts of city government understood the directive to implement safety enhancements and ensured those enhancements were actually implemented, while external stakeholders were able to note additional opportunities for safety improvement development and worked to ensure public feedback was included in these discussions.

Our Office also emphasizes another lesson from Hoboken: even with steady resources, adequate and updated planning, and a whole-city effort, *it still took many years (since 2010) for this smaller city to implement many Vision Zero elements, and to eventually achieve the significant results that makes them an "ideal city" of Vision Zero success*. Their improvements did not happen overnight, but occurred iteratively through a concerted effort of all City staff to ensure that improvements are incrementally made.

The City is Implementing Many Lessons Learned from Hoboken

As will be further discussed below, the City of San Diego has either implemented or is currently in the process of implementing many of the same steps that Hoboken took to implement its Vision Zero plan. This includes the adoption of a Complete Streets Policy, development of a Mobility Governance Group for internal coordination, development of a Mobility Board for external feedback, and the current development of the Street Design Manual and a Speed Management Plan.

Speed Management Plan

Speed of vehicles is a crucial factor that directly correlates to the severity of accidents within the right-of-way. Historically, in California state laws required municipalities to set speed limits at the 85th percentile of the speeds travelled by vehicles as determined in through regular traffic studies, which limited the ability of municipalities to adopt lower speed limits. While cities could attempt to design roads to encourage slower speeds, speed limits on many roads were essentially determined by driver behavior as opposed to also seeing speed limits as an opportunity to influence driver behavior.

This changed recently with the passage of Assembly Bill 43 in 2021, which allows cities to lower speed limits in specific areas and to avoid incremental speed limit increases as a result of traffic studies. In response to this law, in February 2025 Transportation brought an item to the Active Transportation & Infrastructure Committee that seeks to proactively lower speed limits in various business activity zones and maintain speed limits that would otherwise have needed to be increased in response to traffic studies. This item was approved by Council on April 22nd, 2025.

Additionally, staff from Transportation are currently working on a Speed Management Plan, due to be released by the end of 2025 that will evaluate all the new provisions of AB 43 and make citywide recommendations for the modification of speed limits based on new provisions contained

in the California Vehicle Code. The development and implementation of this plan will be an important effort in improving the safety for all travelers in the right-of-way.

Street Design Manual and Other Planning Documents

Following the adoption of the Complete Streets Policy, staff from SuMo (now City Planning) have been working on a new Street Design Manual, which is a guidance document for the design of the public right-of-way throughout the City. This technical document informs both City engineers and those hired by private development of the City's standards for how streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, and other improvements within the right-of-way are to be designed and built. While the current edition is from 2017, a wholesale update has not been completed since 2002. This document will require Council approval as it is an appendix to the Land Development Manual.

As mentioned earlier, having an updated Street Design Manual that incorporates and prioritizes the concepts of complete streets and that focuses on safety is a crucial step towards making the public right-of-way safer for all modes of travel, as it will streamline the design and engineering process for new projects. It should also streamline engineering designs for projects conducted by Transportation and E&CP, since they should be working off of the same design manual that has already considered various complete street concepts.

As drafted, the Street Design Manual provides a singular design guide that can potentially cover all of the various street types for the entirety of the City. This is different than the manuals that smaller cities with less street variation such as Hoboken use, as the City of San Diego is both large and diverse in its land uses, neighborhood types, and right-of-way design. As such, the Street Design Manual should be more flexible when it comes to guidelines and requirements for factors like lane widths, bikeway requirements, street tree placements, and more. What works well in the urban portions of the City may not be appropriate in other parts of the City, as the City contains many industrial and even rural areas.

Providing guidelines, as opposed to restrictions, could have additional benefits, including greater public acceptance of various safety improvements. While many community advocacy groups desire to see additional improvements, there are also citizens who feel that many improvements are being installed in parts of the City where they have limited use. Anecdotally, we also found that many advocacy groups seemed focused on very specific areas - in particular the more urban and densely populated suburban and mixed-use portions of the City. These same areas are also where various Quick Builds have been developed and received more positively. However, most *negative* feedback has come from other, less dense portions of the City. While public acceptance of every project may not be necessary, fostering public support for these improvements is valuable: a high level of public acceptance can help to ensure safety improvements are embraced by and integrated into the City's communities.

Notably, the City does have numerous other planning documents, including specific community plans and asset-specific master plans, that take these types of variations into consideration. While the Street Design Manual is best thought of as a document that guides *how* the right-of-way should be put together depending on what features are going to be used, other planning documents should be the guiding documents about *what* should go into the right-of-way. This should be reflected in specific community plans, since these plans can both focus on specific areas of the City in greater

detail and determine how each street segment should be designed while also incorporating community feedback in those designs. However, since these community plans normally take years to develop, and are only done one neighborhood at a time, City Planning staff should concurrently continue work on larger, more asset-focused planning documents, such as the Mobility Master Plan (adopted by Council on April 22nd 2025), the upcoming Bicycle Master Plan update, and a potential update to the Pedestrian Master Plan. These documents should delineate the variations by community type and should inform staff from Transportation and E&CP on *what* should be included when they are designing new right-of-way projects. The Street Design Manual then can guide *how* those elements should be designed so that they work as intended within the right-of-way.

Additionally, for future community plans, the City should also consider designating specific corridors and roads not just by carrying type (residential, connector, etc.) but also by preferred travel type. While having Complete Streets concepts incorporated on *as many* streets as possible may be desirable, not *all* streets will be able to accommodate all transit types throughout the City. Having designated corridors planned where some transit types are prioritized over others could ensure that all travelers are considered on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis. This would also have the benefit of allowing greater community feedback and buy-in through the community planning process for transportation amenities like dedicated bus lanes and bikeways prior to their construction.

Our Office recommends that City Planning staff update various master plans to incorporate specific safety improvements based on the needs for particular communities, and that future community plans consider designating specific corridors for various travel modes to comply with the Complete Streets Policy.

The Street Design Manual is still being worked on by City staff, but a draft was released in December 2024. Staff are now going through comments that they have received and are adjusting the manual as appropriate. We asked both Transportation and E&CP about their involvement in the development of the new guidelines, and both departments noted they have been heavily involved in the comment and review process. Our Office also reviewed the draft, and we note that it seems to be comprehensive and fully consider various different roadway types and treatments, including specific sections on bike lanes, speed designs, narrow vehicle lanes, guidelines for bus lanes, and off-street non-vehicular treatments as well.

We will continue review development of the Street Design Manual as it moves forward, including how comments from City staff are incorporated into the final document. *Ensuring a fully updated Street Design Manual includes a full complete streets framework is possibly the largest single action the City can take to ensure safety improvements are prioritized and developed for the right-of-way*. Therefore, **City management must ensure that staff from Transportation and E&CP use the Street Design Manual and adhere to its guidelines when designing projects within the right-of-way. Additionally, these departments should use the Mobility Master Plan, community plans, and other planning documents when making decisions about what projects to include in the right-of-way. When deviating from these plans, additional public outreach should be conducted prior to installation.**

Mobility Governance Group and the Mobility Board

A key finding of both the OCA's audits and our own research from Hoboken is that having a coordinating entity such as a Vision Zero Task Force is a best practice most other Vision Zero cities have implemented. San Diego has not developed a single entity that includes both internal staff and outside groups, but rather has developed two separate entities that oversee Vision Zero implementation: the Mobility Governance Group and the Mobility Board.

The Mobility Governance Group is an internal working group made up of various departments that was called for both in the recent High-Risk Re-review as well as the Complete Streets Council Policy. Departments that take part in these meetings include Transportation, Engineering & Capital Projects, City Planning, Development Services, and others as necessary, as well as representatives from Government Affairs and the Mayor's Office. The Governance Board has been focused on grant opportunities, the Vision Zero Communications Plan, outstanding audit recommendations, and other issues.

For external stakeholders, the City established the Mobility Board in 2019. This group is made up of volunteers who are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council, and they provide a range of guidance and recommendations concerning Vision Zero as well as the implementation of many of the plans that have been discussed in this report, including the Climate Action Plan and the Mobility Master Plan. Currently, this board is staffed by City Planning with employees that work on long-range mobility issues.[13]

While the City established two separate boards, the primary goals of coordinating activities among City departments and receiving public feedback can still be achieved provided sufficient coordination between those boards takes place. Given the City's size and complexity, having a separate staff-only board is appropriate given how often participating departments need to meet to ensure Vision Zero elements are appropriately incorporated in the City's various projects. However, City staff from Planning should ensure that the Mobility Board has access to the proceedings of the Mobility Governance Group, particularly when the group grants exceptions to the Complete Streets Council Policy. **City Planning should consider coordinating joint meetings between the two groups on either an annual or semi-annual basis.**

Quick Build Projects – Best Practices and Implementation Challenges

Quick Build projects are projects that do not typically require a full CIP process to implement and that can be done with in-house operations and maintenance teams, or projects that require very little to minimal concrete work to complete. Examples can include the installation of modular and temporary right-of-way improvements, such as modular roundabouts, paint within intersections, and flexible post bike lanes.

Quick build projects are a priority of both councilmembers and the public since they can be brought to fruition on a shorter timescale than a full CIP project. They also present additional opportunities and benefits, such as allowing City traffic engineers to study designs after implementation to see what modifications and changes can have the most beneficial impact prior to moving forward with a permanent project. As such, quick builds are a very important tool for the Vision Zero implementation.

[13] These staff were originally in the Sustainability and Mobility Department prior to moving to City Planning.

Both Transportation and E&CP have a thorough understanding of various quick build concepts and designs and are willing to install and maintain these types of projects on a regular basis. Transportation in particular pointed to a number of quick build options that they generally consider and are currently implementing, including:

- Modular improvements such as roundabouts, pedestrian refuge islands, bulb outs (where curbs are extended into an intersection to shorten the crossing length for pedestrians), bike infrastructure, raised crosswalks, and raised medians
- Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons
- Leading pedestrian intervals, blankout signs (signs that emphasize traffic rules such as no turns on red lights), and/or accessible push buttons
- Additional speed limit signs
- Daylighting intersections, which includes painting curbs red were parking is no longer allowed[14]
- Striping modifications to either change travel patterns or used enhanced colors to increase the visibility of various assets within the right-of-way (i.e. painting bike lanes and pike parking at intersections green)
- Additional installation of stop signs
- Centerline hardening to prevent traffic from crossing into oncoming traffic
- Chicanes, which changes lanes from being straight to being "wavy" in order to slow down traffic

The Transportation Department is also seeking a grant to further develop a quick build toolkit to further improve its potential designs and ability to deliver projects more quickly. As part of our research, we asked Transportation for data on how many of these projects they have completed in the last five years, going back to 2020. That data is presented in the table below.

Quick Build Option	Number Implemented Since 2020
Crosswalks	253
Leading Pedestrian Intervals	204
Stop Signs	198
Accessible Pedestrian Signals	133
Blankout Signs	100
Speed Signs	56
Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon	23
Modular Roundabout	2
Pedestrian Refuge Islands	2

Transportation has been and continues to implement quick build projects. However, the large number of assets and the backlog of all Transportation projects - including paving and potholes, streetlights, sidewalks, and Vision Zero improvements - result in many projects that cannot be maintained with existing staffing levels. We note there are no dedicated resources for quick build

[14] A recent change in state law (AB 413, which took effect January 1, 2025) mandated "daylighting" at all intersections, which is where parking is prohibited within 20 feet of an intersection in order to improve sightlines and ensure that both drivers and non-drivers can see other approaching intersections.

implementation in the current Transportation budget, and in the absence of additional resources, shifting resources that would otherwise go to the large backlog of existing Transportation work such as potholes, sidewalks defects, and broken streetlights or traffic signals may increase overall City liability and take away from more permanent safety improvements.

Additionally, when new quick-build safety assets are implemented, the City often lacks the capacity to maintain those assets, including adequate street sweeping and repair of broken bollards, thereby rendering them in some cases unsafe and unusable within a short time period after development.

The most effective way to improve the deployment and development of additional quick build solutions is enhanced resources for the Transportation Department that would support those solutions *in addition to* existing maintenance activities. Given the City's fiscal constraints, however, adding additional maintenance teams and a dedicated quick build team may not be realistic in the near term. Given this, **our Office cautions that potential unintended consequences of redeploying existing resources within Transportation to quick-build projects may result in larger maintenance and capital needs in the future.** *An increase of funding for quick build projects in addition to existing maintenance levels would require a reduction in the budget elsewhere.*

Affording New Improvements (Parking Revenues)

Given the fiscal condition of the City and the large infrastructure backlogs for both maintenance and capital projects, finding the resources to further advance Vision Zero and other related projects continues to be extremely difficult. However, there is a potential revenue source that could be considered for safety-related improvements within the right-of-way for certain areas of the City.

City staff are currently working on various parking-related reforms, including changing both the locations, amounts, and pricing strategies for parking meters throughout the City. Based on current parking demand studies, additional revenue could be realized if these reforms are implemented. While previous parking meter revenues have been used to backfill eligible General Fund activities that the City is already incurring in parking zones, the increase passed in February 2025 to parking meter rates is anticipated to fill most of that gap. Therefore, *additional* revenues generated within parking districts from parking meters will need to go to *enhanced* activities within those areas.

Safety improvements in the right-of-way should be on the list for eligible expenditures for any additional parking revenues. Improvements to sidewalks, bikeways, and traffic signals are already considered eligible expenses since they can lower parking demand by providing alternative means of transportation for individuals to come to specific areas. Because parking and safety improvements can sometimes compete for space, having safety improvements funded with parking revenues would also create a closer nexus between ensuring the availability of parking, which generates the revenue for these projects, and the development of these new assets. Additionally, many of these improvements are already on the Transportation Unfunded Needs List, and having a new revenue source for these improvements would not only provide funding for these projects but could lower the overall General Fund need for these projects. **Our Office recommends that, as part of proposed parking reform measures, the City ensure that safety improvements**

within the right-of-way are included as projects eligible for funding, and that future budgets include these projects with revenue derived from enhanced parking meter revenues.

Our Office does acknowledge using parking meter revenues for safety improvements does carry equity considerations. Parking meter revenues, per restrictions written into state laws, may only be used within the areas where they are generated. There are many areas in the City where parking meter zones are viable and should either be established or improved. However, parking meter zones do not make sense in all areas of the City, including areas that are either highly residential or areas where commercial zones already contain adequate private parking lots. While these areas of the City do not have the same parking challenges, many of them *do* have mobility and safety issues that will require additional resources that will not be available through parking meter revenue. Additional consideration and resources will need to be developed to bring these improvements to these areas.

CONCLUSION

As directed by R-315764, our Office met with various stakeholders, departments, and other community members, and reviewed the various policies and procedures that the City uses to implement Vision Zero. We would like to thank everyone that met with us and provided input.

In summary, while we find that while some policies should be updated, including Council Policies 200-07 and 200-08, for the most part the City has been moving forward with the steps needed to implement Vision Zero, including standing up both internal and external working groups, developing a Speed Management Plan, and overhauling the Street Design Manual. However, based on the experience of other jurisdictions, it will take years for these plans to be implemented and bear fruit, and the funding shortfalls for maintenance staff and right-of-way capital projects will exacerbate delays. We also caution that there may be unintended consequences of redeploying *existing* resources within Transportation to quick-build projects, particularly as those redeployments may result in larger maintenance and capital needs in the future.

Our Office does make specific recommendations for both Council Policy 200-07 and 200-08, which are detailed in this report. We also make the following general recommendations for safety improvements:

- When funding becomes available, implementing the open recommendations contained in the High Risk Re-Review: Performance Audit of the City's Programs Responsible for Improving Pedestrian Safety (OCA-24-04) should be a priority, especially adding/designating a Vision Zero Coordinator to oversee the program.
- City Planning staff should update various master plans to incorporate specific safety improvements based on the needs for particular communities, and future community plans should consider designating specific corridors for various travel modes to comply with the Complete Streets Policy.
- City management must ensure that staff from Transportation and E&CP use the Street Design Manual and adhere to its guidelines when designing projects within the right-of-way. Additionally, these departments should use the Mobility Master Plan, community plans, and other planning documents when making decisions about what projects to include

in the right-of-way. When deviating from these plans, additional public outreach should be conducted prior to installation.

- City Planning should consider coordinating joint meetings between the Mobility Governance Group and the Mobility Board on either an annual or semi-annual basis.
- As part of the parking reform measures, City staff and the Council should ensure that safety improvements within the right-of-way are included as projects eligible for funding, and that future budgets include these projects with revenue derived from enhanced parking meter revenues.

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