

## SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY



## FOR ARLINGTON COUNTY

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Arlington's Draft Vision Zero Action Plan. This plan is of critical importance for Arlington. We all use our streets and as long as deaths and serious injuries are routinely happening on them, we are all vulnerable. We want this document to be a useful roadmap toward our shared vision of zero deaths & serious injuries on our streets.

The primary problem with the Draft plan is that it is not an Action Plan to achieve the goal of "Zero deaths and serious injuries on our streets", it is an Action Plan to achieve the goal of "creating an actual Action Plan". This becomes obvious when reading the measurements on most of the actions in this plan. Examples: # of data collection efforts, quarterly meetings held, # of before/after studies, # of guidelines/standards reviewed or updated, Multimodal Safety Toolbox published.

If the County comes to the community a year from now and tells us they have done X data collection efforts, held 4 quarterly meetings, done Y before/after studies, updated Z guidelines/standards and published a Multimodal Safety Toolbox, will we know that our streets are now safer than they were a year ago? We will not.

So what needs to be in this plan for it to be a true action plan? First off, **a commitment to overarching strategies**. Arlington is not a special snowflake. Our crashes are caused by the same things that cause crashes in other cities. While improving our crash data is important, we don't need it to be able to lay out effective strategies. Speed kills. The more people drive the more likely they are to crash. Streets built for free-flowing traffic at rush hour become dangerous speedways the rest of the day. Self-reinforcing street design is more effective than enforcement, but enforcement is necessary for things that we cannot prevent through design. This plan needs to commit to overarching strategies:

1. We must design streets that enable and encourage safe behaviors. Streets should discourage dangerous driving by design
2. Speed kills. Speed makes crashes both more likely to happen and more deadly when they occur.
3. Impairment kills. Whether due to alcohol or distraction, impairment can cause a fatal crash on an otherwise safe street.
4. In enforcement, feedback must be fast and frequent, but it does not have to be sizable. Frequent, low-fine tickets are more effective than infrequent tickets with punitive associated penalties.
5. Exposure matters. The more you drive, the more likely you are to get into a crash. Strategies that allow people to get where they need to go, while reducing overall vehicle miles traveled will reduce crashes.
6. Maintenance matters. To function properly, safety infrastructure must be maintained consistently.
7. Safety during construction activities is especially critical. Unsafe detours are a problem, especially for those with disabilities. Accommodations for vulnerable road users during construction should be equal or greater than accommodations during normal times. If a sidewalk exists before & after construction, the pedestrian accommodation during construction should be as safe and comfortable as a sidewalk. If a protected bike lane exists before & after construction, the bicycle accommodation during construction should

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be as safe and comfortable as a protected bike lane. Pedestrian accommodations during construction must meet all requirements of the ADA.

What else do we need? **We need to commit to actual interventions.** In the same way that doing the work to lay out the County's High Injury Network was a necessary part of creating the Action Plan, creating what the plan calls the "Multimodal Safety Toolbox" needs to also be part of creating this Action Plan, not a future deliverable. The notion of this Multimodal Safety Toolbox should also be expanded into a full-fledged *Arlington Street Design, Operations & Maintenance Guide*. This document could provide one place to find all of Arlington's preferred street interventions, whether physical "design" interventions or procedural "operational" interventions like signal timings in a public format that would be of use to County engineers, planning staff, transportation consultants for private development, as well as citizens and advocates. We concur with staff that this needs to be a living document that is updated as new information & research becomes available, but that just means it needs an update schedule; it does not mean that it cannot be created now and incorporated into the plan.

This guide should be created and incorporated into the plan prior to adoption, and the County should set measurable goals for implementing the interventions in the guide. While these goals may be somewhat arbitrary, (how many leading pedestrian intervals do we need to implement each year to achieve Vision Zero? How many median crossings?) they would at least allow the public to track the level of effort being expended on targeted safety interventions and hold the County accountable to a minimum acceptable level. Staff could recommend adjustments to these goals every few years, in the same way that the Street guide could be adjusted over time to add new interventions or adjust existing ones to reflect new research and experience.

Finally, the work in this draft document on improving data collection, crash analysis, and collaboration with internal and external partners is valuable, necessary and critical to be retained in the Action Plan. Improving processes to prioritize safety and improving data collection & analysis to provide supporting evidence that is from within the local context of Arlington are both useful and important. Your work on these actions is to be commended, but they constitute only a portion of an action plan; they cannot be the whole plan. Specific comments on the actions that exist in the draft plan are attached as a comment matrix referencing individual action labels.

Sincerely,

Chris Slatt  
Founder, Sustainable Mobility for Arlington County