

August 17th, 2023

To:

Portland City Commissioners

Metro Councilors

Multnomah County Commissioners

Multnomah County Sheriff Nicole Morrisey O'Donnell

Portland Bureau of Transportation Director Millicent Williams

Portland Police Chief Chuck Lovell

Trimet Board of Directors

Rian Windshiemer, Director, ODOT Region 1

Re: Death and Injury on Our Streets

Dear Community Leaders,

It does not have to be this way.

8 deaths in a recent 10 day stretch. 43 deaths in Portland so far in 2023. 70 deaths in Portland in 2022. 87 traffic fatalities in the tri-county Metro area thus far this year. As you know, these are record numbers year after year.

It does not have to be this way.

There are likely many reasons we are facing this continued escalation of violence on our streets. However, what is most devastating is that we do not have a shared understanding of why. Ask elected officials, transportation planners and engineers, and transportation advocates why there continues to be year over year rises in traffic injuries and deaths and you will get myriad answers:

Some will say it is unsafe infrastructure.

Some will say it is distracted drivers.

Some will say it is drugs and/or alcohol.

Some will say it is a lack of enforcement.

Some will blame a culture of unsafe drivers.

Some will blame ever-increasing vehicle weight and front end vehicle height.

What does this tell us? It tells us that as deaths and injuries continue their persistent rise, we still do not have a grip on the most fundamental first step when it comes to solutions: ***understanding the problem.***

When it comes to understanding the causes, our work is siloed. PBOT's Vision Zero team analyzes traffic fatalities in Portland. Multnomah County recently reviewed and reported on two years of traffic fatalities and injuries and shared valuable insights. Trimet host a crash review committee. ODOT is establishing the Vulnerable User Crash Response (VCR) Program and engaging advocates in shaping its launch in 2024. In 2021, Oregon Walks released its Fatal Crash Report and BikeLoud PDX is currently working on a Bicycle Fatal Crash report. This all important work that we applaud! Yet, we are and continue to be in our siloes, not working together to crack this puzzle.

To solve this pervasive and ongoing problem of traffic violence, we suggest a critical first step: ***Create a regional Fatal and Serious Injury Crash Committee, with a diverse composition of members, both public and private, that analyzes every fatal and serious injury crash that occurs in our region.*** This task force can create a list of suggestions to de-silo the work of analyzing fatal and serious injury crashes in our region. This task force would also leverage the many stakeholders in the region who are engaged in this work. By working together to analyze the data, we can create a shared understanding of the root causes of this ongoing problem.

Additionally, we know that speed and intoxication are leading factors in recent years. Therefore, while we are identifying the core issues at play, there are immediate, relatively low cost actions that can improve safety:

1. **The Safe Systems Approach acknowledges human error and requires the hardening of infrastructure so that human error does not result in death or serious injury.** Trimet, PBOT, and ODOT—in partnership with local advocates—can analyze data trends that indicate the most dangerous pedestrian, cyclist, and transit user areas. At these locations, harden the infrastructure by installing physical protection (concrete, steel bollards, etc) on sidewalks, crossings, and transit stops. This does not affect vehicular throughput, is relatively low cost, and can be implemented immediately.
2. **We know there is a direct relationship between higher speeds and increased probability for death or serious injury.** We can change the narrative around speeding by (a) rapidly increasing the deployment of automated speed enforcement cameras, (b) continue to review ticketing data to assure low-income and BIPOC groups are not disproportionately fined and/or surveilled, and (c) lower the threshold for which speeding tickets are given from the current 10-15+mph over to only 5 mph over. We all must understand—and vulnerable road users deserve—that speeding is not tolerated.
3. **Enforcement alone is not effective nor equitable.** All jurisdictions named on this letter can immediately identify the appropriate staff who can work together to identify funding, coordinate, and implement a safe streets public health campaign. This campaign should be centered on the three primary factors that, according to Multnomah County's

recently-released traffic crash deaths, contribute to traffic fatalities: speed, intoxication, and houselessness.

We all have the same goal: to stop the deaths and injuries on our streets. And yet, we know that the status quo is not working. We are calling on you to act now to interrupt the deadly reality we are facing on our streets. **We ask that you form an intergovernmental task force, with advocates at the table, to create a Fatal and Serious Injury Crash Review Committee in the Portland Metro Region. We stand ready to work with you, arm in arm, on this work.**

Sincerely,

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Coordinator
Andando en Bici y Caminando

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BikeLoud PDX

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