

Bellevue City Hall
450 110th Ave NE
Bellevue, WA 98004

To Mayor Robinson, Deputy Mayor Malakoutian, Councilmembers, and staff:

Everyone traveling through Bellevue – no matter their age, race, gender, ability, or background – deserves to get where they're going safely. This value is reflected in the city's Vision Zero approach, which correctly recognizes that the only acceptable number of deaths & serious injuries on city streets is zero, and which sets a target date of 2030 to achieve this milestone. As the largest city on the Eastside, Bellevue has shown immense leadership in its adoption of a safe systems approach in line with industry best practices. By continuing to focus holistically on Safe Streets, Safe Speeds, Safe Vehicles, and Safe People, Bellevue *can* become a city where nobody loses their life while merely getting around.

Through ongoing work to lower speeds on neighborhood & arterial streets, deployment of tactical infrastructure, and using technological innovation, Bellevue is a leader in traffic safety in Washington state. However, **27 people were still seriously injured or killed on city streets in 2023**. Put another way, 27 people in Bellevue had their lives irrevocably changed because of how the city has built its transportation system. Although Bellevue's traffic casualty rate is three times lower than that of Washington state as a whole, progress in recent years has stalled. This indicates that, despite its myriad programs, projects, and initiatives, Bellevue must do more to protect the safety of people traveling on its streets.

Our organizations come together united in this mission because we recognize that Vision Zero, as a transportation paradigm, is about so much more than safe streets. Planning & properly budgeting for Vision Zero supports each of our core visions for a more sustainable, more equitable, more accessible, and more inclusive Eastside.

Vision Zero is an environmental stewardship issue. We know from countless studies & technical briefs that building safe infrastructure for people walking, biking, and rolling helps increase the number of trips that people take via these modes. Absent these facilities, many of these trips will be made with an automobile –which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, as well as dangerous particulate pollution from tires and brakes. Bellevue has committed to reducing its emissions by 50% by 2030, the same year by which it has committed to achieving zero deaths on city streets. We know electric vehicle adoption alone will not help the city meet its Environmental Stewardship goals, so Bellevue must further increase its modeshare for people walking, biking, rolling, and taking transit. A planning approach that leads with Vision Zero & safe infrastructure for vulnerable road users is a critical part of the climate policy toolkit.

Vision Zero is a racial equity issue. Nationwide, traffic violence disproportionately affects Black & Brown communities – a study from Harvard & Boston Universities found that Black pedestrians were twice as likely to be killed in a vehicle collision as compared to white pedestrians.¹ Although such data is not tracked in Bellevue (and our organizations would insist that this practice should change), many streets on the High Injury Network, including NE 8th St, 156th Ave NE, Factoria Blvd, and others, travel through neighborhoods where a majority of residents are BIPOC. Prioritizing safety investments in these neighborhoods will help right historical wrongs around transportation planning and its negative impacts & lack of consideration for Black & Brown communities.

Vision Zero is an economic & disability justice issue. According to city data, Bellevue residents below the poverty line are 30% more likely to walk or bike and 80% more likely to ride transit than those above the poverty line. Importantly, people outside of vehicles disproportionately exposed to traffic violence – while

¹ <https://itdp.org/2023/06/17/road-safety-race-equity-us-cities/>

people walking & biking are only involved in 5% of collisions in Bellevue, they make up 46% of those seriously injured or killed in traffic crashes.² Furthermore, over 25% of Washington state's population cannot drive, whether they want to or not, including many seniors and people with disabilities. By building safe facilities for people who walk, bike, roll, and take transit, the city can protect vulnerable road users who are unable to drive.

Vision Zero by 2030 is possible – but we must act now: Our organizations are sincere in our belief that Bellevue can & must achieve Vision Zero by its 2030 deadline. Our conviction is founded in examples of cities from around the country – such as Hoboken³ & Jersey City⁴ in New Jersey – and from around the world – like Oslo & Helsinki⁵ – that have eliminated deaths on their streets. We acknowledge that progress towards Vision Zero is slow & steady – work that is being completed today is based upon plans & projects set in motion years ago. Therefore, this current budget process is integral towards the city's Vision Zero process – put simply, the commitment shown to Vision Zero in this budget will determine whether we achieve our safety goals.

It is with this understanding of urgency & timeliness that our organizations ask for the following requests to be incorporated in the city's 2025-26 Operating Budget & 2025-2034 Capital Improvement Program Plan:

- 1) **Bellevue should recommit to the funding & deployment of rapid-build facilities to deliver high-quality bicycle infrastructure.** We are concerned with recent planning efforts, such as the current state of the Bike Bellevue program, which have pivoted improvements originally slated for rapid implementation towards longer-term investments. Every year of delay in the implementation of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities represents a tangible risk that another person is going to be seriously injured or killed on Bellevue streets. The urgency of Bellevue's pledges for Vision Zero & Environmental Stewardship necessitate that bold, rapid action be taken. These rapid-build facilities can always be replaced or supplemented with permanent infrastructure in the future. However, in the near- and mid-term, Bellevue must commit to funding & filling gaps in its Bike Network with rapid-build facilities by the city's 2030 Vision Zero deadline.
- 2) **Bellevue should incorporate capital funding for transit speed & reliability improvements.** Our organizations are excited for the initiation of planning work around the RapidRide K Line, which will connect the Eastside's two largest cities with rapid, frequent, and reliable transit. Work to identify & prioritize capital projects to improve speed & reliability is underway as a collaboration between King County Metro & City of Bellevue staff, but this planning should not be limited to just the K Line. Routes like the RapidRide B Line, 245, and 271 would benefit from a similar holistic analysis by staff to identify potential capital projects, such as bus lanes & queue jumps, that could be constructed on city right of way (ROW) to improve reliability. Crucially, current planning work around the Mobility Implementation Plan (MIP) is *not* identifying transit speed gaps as potential projects to be delivered. This budget should introduce a capital improvement plan project to study & build transit infrastructure that would improve the speed & reliability of transit consistent with the city's adopted MIP goals.
- 3) **Bellevue should commit sufficient funding to deploy all viable Road Safety Assessment (RSA) project proposals by 2030.** Between 2021 and 2023, Bellevue staff conducted several Road Safety Assessments (RSAs) of streets near schools, including NE 8th St & Factoria Blvd. From these analyses,

² <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/14093429038345039816d6d72a02df77>

³

<https://apnews.com/article/hoboken-zero-traffic-deaths-daylighting-pedestrian-safety-007dec67706c1c09129da1436a3d97>

62

⁴

<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2023/6/9/jersey-city-achieved-zero-traffic-deaths-on-its-streets-heres-how-they-did-it>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/how-helsinki-and-oslo-cut-pedestrian-deaths-to-zero>

staff have developed a list of over 300 proposals (from road diets to high visibility crosswalks to right-turn-on-red restrictions and more) that could be implemented to improve safety in areas with a disproportionate number of vulnerable road users. We understand that staff are planning to introduce a CIP project proposal (Safe Routes to School) that would be intended to fund these improvements. We urge the city to devote sufficient funds in its CIP so that all proposals can be evaluated for feasibility, designed, and implemented by the city's 2030 Vision Zero deadline.

- 4) **Bellevue should deliver as much infrastructure as possible as cheaply as possible.** Bellevue residents trust city leaders to be good stewards of public funds, and our organizations expect the same. The city's High Injury Network⁶ – the map of Bellevue's most dangerous roadways – includes the 8% of city streets where 83% of the serious injury & fatality crashes occur. To achieve Vision Zero, each of these roadways will need direct, targeted improvements to lower speeds, increase accessibility for vulnerable road users, and reduce conflicts. City officials must empower staff to find creative, cost-effective solutions that enable Bellevue to deliver as many high-quality solutions on as many streets as possible for the least amount of funds.

Funding these priorities will take creative accounting and significant investment. We trust in city staff & elected leaders to find balanced solutions to meet these critical needs, but our coalition presents the following ideas that we would support to expedite Vision Zero funding & deliver more multimodal projects more quickly:

- 5) **Bellevue can dedicate more funds from the Neighborhood Safety, Connectivity, and Congestion levy towards Vision Zero projects.** According to the MIP, nearly 45% of Bellevue arterials are not meeting their pedestrian performance target of having sidewalks on both sides of the street. 46% of streets do not meet their target bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) metric.⁷ In contrast, only 9 of Bellevue's over 200 intersections are not currently meeting their v/c performance metrics, with only 2 not already accounted for in long-range planning. \$2 million of annual levy funds are allocated each year towards "congestion reduction" projects that often involve the widening of roads to the temporary benefit of vehicles (and to the permanent detriment of everyone else). Given the severity of the need for pedestrian, bicycle, and safety funding, these funds could be better allocated towards tactical safety improvements.
- 6) **Bellevue can lengthen its repaving schedule to maintain streets while allocating resources to new infrastructure.** As a forward-thinking city, Bellevue has always prioritized the maintenance of existing infrastructure before building new facilities. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic when budgets were tight, city officials recognized the merits of deferring maintenance and lengthening maintenance cycles in order to stretch both financial and personnel resources. By slightly decreasing the frequency of street repaving, Bellevue can maintain its high quality infrastructure while freeing up funds for building the multimodal infrastructure the city needs. Further savings can be achieved by proactively identifying opportunities where repaving & implementation of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities can occur in tandem – such a policy (Measure HLA) has recently passed in Los Angeles with a resounding majority.⁸ Bellevue would benefit from a similar systematic, coordinated, and holistic approach, which does not currently exist.
- 7) **Bellevue should utilize the taxing authority granted by its Transportation Benefit District (TBD) to raise capital funds for pedestrian, cyclist, and transit projects.** Eastside cities neighboring Bellevue, like Redmond, Kirkland, and Issaquah, utilize the taxing authority granted to them by the state to raise revenue for transportation improvements. Bellevue City Council has created a TBD but not yet levied a tax; Council should use its authority to levy a 0.1% sales tax to generate \$10 million annually. After funds are allocated to facility & infrastructure maintenance, the remaining funds can be used for

⁶ https://bellevuewa.gov/sites/default/files/media/pdf_document/2021/High%20Injury%20Network%20Map.pdf

⁷ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/2cfa8c2e570b4b2cac23b88499878279>

⁸ <https://www.peopleforbikes.org/news/the-power-of-complete-streets-mandates>

capital expenditures. Our organizations recognize that, as Washington state has one of the most regressive taxing structures in the nation, our state government does not leave many tools for municipalities to generate funding that is equitable, and a TBD is no exception. However, we can improve equity outcomes by committing to using funds generated from the sales tax towards infrastructure projects that would disproportionately and more directly benefit lower-income populations: walking, biking, transit, and safety infrastructure. We urge our Councilmembers to continue advocacy with the state government to create more opportunities for progressive revenue sources.

In closing, we appreciate the intentionality with which Councilmembers & staff have approached this budget planning process. With new Councilmembers on the dais come new opportunities, and we appreciate the city reaffirming its commitment for a Safe & Efficient Transportation System, a High-Quality Built & Natural Environment, and Community Health & Safety – each of them a Strategic Target Area in which Vision Zero can play a part. We urge Council and staff to affirm their commitment not just to Vision Zero & safety as a whole, but to the ambitious but possible task of achieving zero deaths on city streets by 2030. The life of every person who travels on Bellevue streets has value – please reaffirm that value by reaffirming our commitment to protecting the lives of all who get around.

Sincerely,



Christopher Randels

Chris Randels
Complete Streets Bellevue
Founder, Director

and the undersigned: