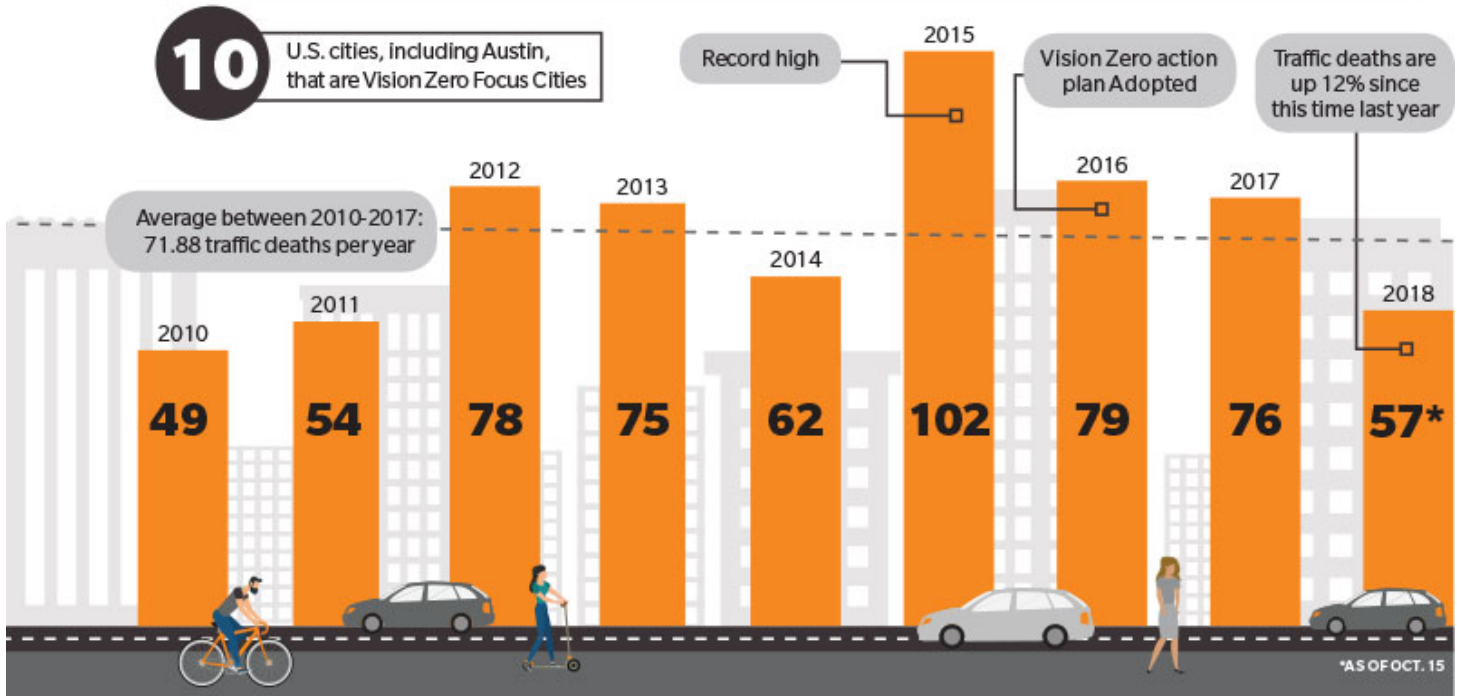


# Vision Zero pushes for alternatives to Austin's car culture

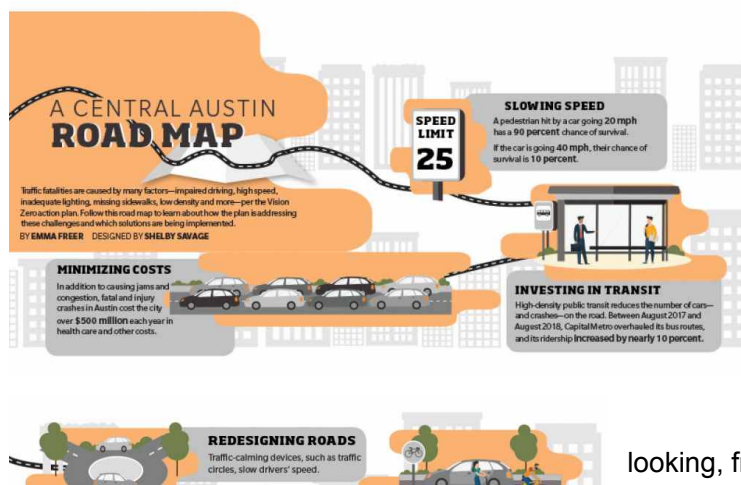
## AIMING FOR ZERO TRAFFIC DEATHS

In 2016, the city of Austin adopted an ambitious action plan—Vision Zero—that aims for zero traffic deaths by 2025. Despite the concentrated effort, there have been at least six more deaths in 2018 since this time last year.



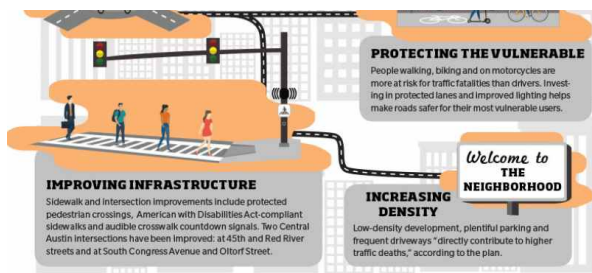
Sources: Austin Police Department, City of Austin 2016-2018 Vision Zero Action Plan, Vision Zero Network/Community Impact Newspaper ()

By Emma Freer | 7:00 am Oct. 25, 2018 CST | Updated 11:11 am Oct. 25, 2018 CST



**As the plan approaches its third year, traffic fatalities are on pace to exceed the city's average**

Intersection improvements. Downtown's new Sobering Center. The scooters. Austin Police Department officers riding a Capital Metro bus looking, from their perch, for drivers who are texting.



These are some of the initiatives that fall under the city of Austin's Vision Zero action plan, which City Council adopted in 2016 following a record-high year for traffic fatalities.

It was produced by a network of partners, including the city's planning and zoning, police, public health, public works, and transportation departments; the bicycle and pedestrian advisory councils; the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities; local nonprofits; Capital Metro; and the Texas Department of Transportation.

The goal? To reach zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2025.

As the plan enters its third year, however, at least 57 people have died in Austin in 2018, a nearly 12-percent increase from this time last year.

"I think it is difficult to have an expectation on an issue that is so complex and [for which] the solutions demand such a broad spectrum of action," said Laura Dierenfield, active transportation program manager for the Austin Transportation Department.

In line with the plan, city staff and safety advocates agree that traffic fatalities will decrease only when there are fewer cars moving at lower speeds on higher-density streets shared with people using other forms of transportation: bikes, dockless mobility, public transportation and their own two feet.

But they also acknowledged that, in a city full of commuters with a developing public transit system, this is a hard task.

## Car culture

The post-World War II economic boom spurred the growth of America's middle class, as did the G.I. Bill, which provided money for veterans to purchase homes.

In response to increased demand, automobile production quadrupled between 1946 and 1955, according to the U.S. Department of State.

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Then, in 1956, Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act, which provided over \$100 billion to develop a 41,000-mile interstate network, solidifying Americans' dependence on driving.

"People say that Americans love their cars, but it's also deeply true that cars are not just a way of getting from point A to point B. [They are] a status symbol," said Alex Karner, an assistant professor at The University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture.

Today more than 350,000 people commute into the city of Austin each morning, 80 percent of whom drive alone, per data collected between 2002 and 2014 by the U.S. Census Bureau.

For many commuters, some who live as far as Georgetown and San Marcos, cars are the obvious option.

"Public transit in the U.S. in the vast majority of places has never really worked super well," Karner said. "It doesn't really provide a high level of service that's comparable to driving."

On roads built for speed, other forms of transportation pose risks as well as inconvenience. Per the plan, people walking, biking and riding motorcycles account for less than 7 percent of traffic in Austin, but over half of traffic deaths.

## Follow the data

With so many partners involved, data collection and sharing between departments, across agencies and with the public is paramount.

The plan lists a number of goals to facilitate this, including funding regular cyclist and pedestrian counts, providing training and technology for officers to better record crashes and their causes, and creating an interactive online tool to display the collected data.

These initiatives help city staff know, for example, which intersections are most dangerous and in need of the \$15 million allocated for safety improvements in the 2016 Mobility Bond.

In those intersections that have been improved, preliminary data from ATD shows an annual overall crash reduction rate of 21 to 56 percent.

## Keeping the law

Enforcement is another major focus area of the plan, which listed the creation of a DWI prosecution unit and funding for red-light cameras as goals.

APD sent officers out in unmarked cars to identify distracted drivers and launched its No Refusal initiative, which helps officers more easily obtain search warrants for blood samples from drivers who refuse a breathalyzer test.

Still, the department responded to over 15,000 crashes in 2017, more than 41 a day, according to TxDOT.

Crash management strains the understaffed department, said Patrick Oborski, a detective with APD's Highway Enforcement Command, and some officers spend up to 90 percent of their time responding to collisions.

The work also takes an emotional toll.

"The first autopsy I ever saw was on a 4-year-old" who died in a crash, Oborski said. "You get broken in real quick."

## Intelligent design

Engineering—which includes land use, infrastructure improvements and street design—and education are the third and fourth pillars of Vision Zero.

Per the plan, "Lower density, longer blocks, large parking lots and free or low-cost parking, frequent driveways, and lack of street connectivity directly contribute to higher traffic deaths."

But efforts to increase density, such as CodeNEXT, have met strong resistance.

"Even with our current land-development code, there are a lot of things that we can do as a city to address safety," Dierenfield said, citing ongoing efforts to add and rehabilitate miles of sidewalks, urban trails and bike lanes.

ATD staff are also in the process of drafting the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan—a guide to transportation policies, programs, projects and investments over the next 20 years—and plan to present it to council for adoption in early 2019.

In the meantime more can be done to disincentivize driving, advocates said.

"Take one darn car parking space per block. Boom. Put a [bike rack]there. You've got 12 bikes," said Katie Smith Deollos, interim executive director of the local advocacy group Bike Austin.

Such infrastructure improvements, Deollos said, should also accommodate Austin's new dockless mobility options.

By offering an alternative to cars for short trips—those under 3 miles—dockless mobility helps reduce traffic congestion and fill the gaps in the city's public transit system, said Trevor Theunissen, a spokesperson for Uber, which owns electric ride-share service Jump Bikes.

While Austinites have raised concerns about the safety of dockless mobility technology, city staffers embrace it. "Cities where more people are walking and biking and taking transit are generally safer for everyone," Dierenfield said.

## Policy goals

While committed to the plan, the city of Austin is not the only player.

"A lot of the policy that really drives the Vision Zero plan is ... outside of the city's direct control," Dierenfield said.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has criticized the city's corridor mobility plan, and speed management bills have failed to gain traction at the Capitol.

Jay Blazek Crossley, chair of the Pedestrian Advisory Council, said he hopes this changes in the 2019 session.

"The car transportation system is the safety problem," he said. "Although missing sidewalks are less safe [and] missing ramps are a problem, what's going to kill you is a car driving too fast."

In the absence of meaningful speed-management reform and broader cultural change, Blazek Crossley said the city, at least, is on the right track.

"Vision Zero has changed the culture in Austin and how the city looks at things," he said. "In terms of long-term planning, it's been extremely effective."

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**EMMA FREER**



Emma Freer began covering Central Austin for *Community Impact Newspaper* in 2017. Her reporting focuses include employment and economic development. She graduated from Columbia Journalism School in 2017.





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## Two years after Vision Zero, when will Austin streets be safer for pedestrians?

Before he was killed, 14-year-old Alexei Bauereis had quit the backyard stunts like jumping from trees onto roofs and downhill skateboarding that defined his childhood. He was saving his legs for ballet.

“Dance was so important to him,” said Eric Bauereis, Alexei’s dad.

Just past 10 p.m. on June 7, 2016, a driver hit and killed Alexei near his family’s home in far-Northwest Austin. Alexei had been hanging out with a friend when he offered to walk his friend the roughly six blocks home. The journey required crossing the four lanes of Spicewood Springs Road at the top of a hill.

The traffic lights turned to flashing red and flashing yellow signals just after 9 p.m., according to the police report. The signal to let pedestrians cross had also shut off when the lights changed. As he was crossing the street, a man driving a Toyota SUV hit Alexei and killed him.

([http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/alexei\\_bauereis.jpg](http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/alexei_bauereis.jpg))





“The real question was, ‘What happened here?’” Bauereis said. “And I guess to a certain extent, ‘Whose fault was it?’ We really believed that a major contributor to the accident was the intersection itself.”

The idea that road design can help dictate the safety of the road isn’t unfamiliar to the city of Austin.

In May 2016, it passed the Vision Zero Action Plan

([https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Imagine\\_Austin/VisionZero/ActionPlan\\_5.19.16adoption.pdf](https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Imagine_Austin/VisionZero/ActionPlan_5.19.16adoption.pdf)), which outlines an aggressive goal of reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries on Austin roads to zero by 2025. Since then, fatal crashes have dropped slightly, but pedestrians still represent roughly a third of the deaths.

Nationally, traffic deaths have been on the rise since 2009, and pedestrians are increasingly a larger portion of those killed (<https://www.npr.org/2018/03/01/590022679/why-pedestrian-deaths-are-at-a-33-year-high-and-how-to-prevent-them>).

“And it appears possibly that Austin is kind of staying where it is, which itself might be a remarkable feat,” said Jay Blazek Crossley, the executive director of Farm & City, a nonprofit that lobbies for safe streets and transit across Texas.

Several pedestrian-safety advocates KUT spoke to for this story said the city’s done a fair job of making streets safer for pedestrians in the two years since the Vision Zero plan passed. But these same advocates say the city will need to step up its efforts if it’s going to dramatically lower the number of traffic fatalities each year.



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## ‘THE INTERSECTION ITSELF’

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In 2017, Bauereis sued both the driver and the city of Austin (<https://www.statesman.com/news/local/just-family-teen-struck-car-sues-driver-city-austin-says-stoplight-played-role-death/bCpITBHLwzjSCAgAG9ydRO/>) seeking damages for his son’s death, claiming that the city’s design of the intersection was partly to blame.

“The light shouldn’t change to flashing red and flashing yellow so early in the evening when it’s populated with kids,” said Bauereis.

A couple of weeks after Alexei’s death, the city tweaked the timing of the traffic light, pushing back the start time of the flashing lights from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.

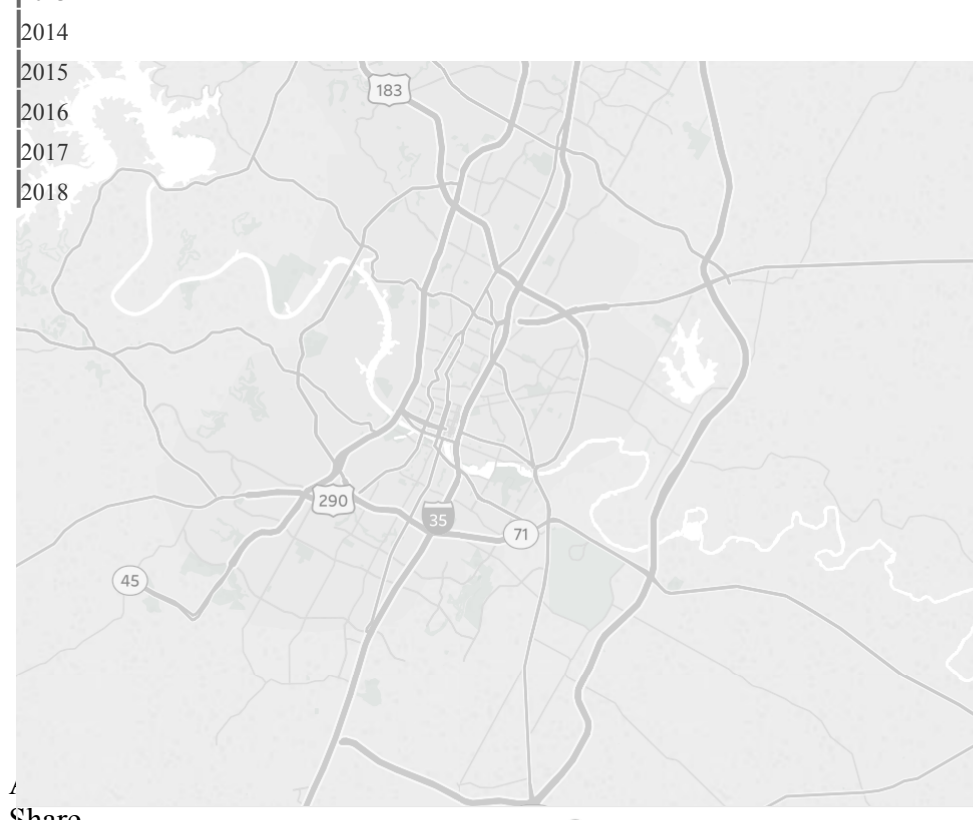
Bauereis says his case against the city was dismissed.

But Bauereis was onto something.

By passing a Vision Zero plan, local elected officials and city staff bought into the idea (<https://www.statesman.com/news/local/just-family-teen-struck-car-sues-driver-city-austin-says-stoplight-played-role-death/bCpITBHLwzjSCAgAG9ydRO/>) that drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians will make mistakes on city streets, but that

roads should be designed to prevent death as a result.

## Pedestrian Fatalities in Austin 2013-2018



But that decision to address design to avoid traffic fatalities was spurred by the record-high number of traffic deaths in 2015. Of the 102 deaths, 30 were pedestrians. In 2016, 28 pedestrians died on Austin’s roads, making up 35 percent of total traffic deaths. In 2017, 23 pedestrians died, roughly 30 percent of the year’s traffic fatalities. Eight of 23 traffic deaths so far this year have been pedestrians.

In response, the Austin Transportation Department said it has tried to institute systemwide changes to pedestrian infrastructure across the city by installing more pedestrian signals and redesigning some of Austin’s most dangerous intersections. Heyden Black Walker, an urban planner who serves on the city’s Pedestrian Advisory Council, said design often dictates to drivers the right they have to the road – including how fast they feel comfortable driving.

“When we started building streets and roads, we started coming up with standards, and for highways we came up with standards where lanes are really, really wide,” said Walker. “There’s not a lot of visual clutter,” which, she said, would force a driver to slow down.

Walker commutes to work by bus from her home in Allandale. Every day along her half-mile walk to the bus stop, she said she encounters nearly every type of road in Austin – quiet residential streets with no sidewalks, busy streets with sidewalks and the bustling four-lane road with dicey pedestrian crossings.

Walker pointed to the intersection at Burnet Road and West Koenig Lane, which is close to her bus stop, as a particularly dangerous one. She says the majority of the time drivers whip around the corners without stopping.

“They can do it quickly because the corner has a huge turning radius,” Walker said. “They don’t have to slow down very much.”

She says she’s hopeful the number of pedestrian deaths is trending downward – but that hope is tempered by caution.

“The population is increasing and the numbers is staying the same,” said Walker. “So, the rate is going down which I think is important to note. But I don’t know how we know we have a goal to have zero traffic fatalities by 2025. It’s going to take a lot of effort to get there.”

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## CONSISTENCY IS KEY

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Despite losing his case against the city, Bauereis still contends that the design of the intersection Alexei tried to cross on that June night in 2016 is partly to blame for his son’s death.

“I do think that the city should be able to have more consistent and better design and better practices around our intersections that would protect both drivers, cyclists and pedestrians,” he said.

Tom Wald, who serves on the board of the nonprofit Walk Austin, agrees. While the city and the state are ramping up pedestrian-minded safety efforts, he said Austin isn’t doing enough.

“They have resources that they could devote to addressing traffic safety that they instead devote to ensuring that people have shorter commutes,” he said.

Wald said, for example, the city could more quickly respond to pedestrian deaths by putting in temporary or low-cost design elements to slow drivers.

“So, when there is a fatality or a serious injury collision, that we look at how that roadway is contributing to that,” he said. “Looking at that, fixing it relatively quickly and also fixing the other similar situations that we see in other parts of Austin.”

Wald cited the intersection of East Sixth Street and Waller Street as an example, where in 2016 the city installed bollards and “turtle shells” – the small, round bumps in the street – to slow cars passing through the intersection. Both the bollards and the turtle shells, which cost the city considerably less than a full-scale redesign of the intersection, were destroyed by cars (<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2016/04/transportation-department-rolls-with-punches-at-polka-dotted-intersection/>).

Typically, the city waits to review traffic deaths at any intersection and coordinates with engineers and regional transportation agencies before proposing solutions. It’s not necessarily a quick-fix process.

Bauereis says his son’s death has pushed his wife and him into activism to help speed up those processes. So far, they’ve met with the Pedestrian Advisory Council and Walk Austin, among others. But he says it hasn’t been easy while coping with the loss of their son.

“How do you appropriately grieve, move forward and help others all at the same time?”

*This story was produced as part of the Austin Monitor's reporting partnership with KUT. Photos by Julia Reihs and KUT. This story has been updated.*

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**Vision Zero** (<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/tag/vision-zero/>)

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## Housing Austin's homeless will reduce road deaths, but that will require a big investment

Part 2 of a three-part series (<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/05/two-years-after-vision-zero-when-will-austin-streets-be-safer-for-pedestrians/>)

Mike Villegas learned his oldest child had died on Christmas Eve 2016.

Villegas said he was doing work around the house with his 12-year-old son. When he went out to the front yard, he noticed a police car parked outside the house.

"I knew immediately that this was not going to be good," said Villegas.

Officers informed him that his 25-year-old daughter, Sarah Jane Villegas, had been hit by several drivers and died the night before. Sarah Jane, who struggled with substance abuse and was living on the street at the time of her death, had a strained relationship with her dad.



([http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/40540477685\\_9d1bf2634e\\_k.jpg](http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/40540477685_9d1bf2634e_k.jpg))

*Mike Villegas' daughter, Sarah Jane, was hit and killed by multiple drivers in 2016 while she was temporarily homeless. While roughly a third of all deaths on Austin roads are pedestrians, a third of those deaths are people experiencing homelessness. Credit Gabriel C. Pérez / KUT*

"I was in and out of her life a lot," said Villegas, who works in food services at Lake Travis Independent School District. "Then there would be times where she would need help or something, and she would call, as she got older, and I would help her."

Villegas said he bought Sarah Jane a hotel room in early December, and she appeared to be working toward getting clean.

"She was trying to take care of herself, doing the best she could," he said.

According to the police report, Sarah Jane tried to cross Loop 360 just after 10 p.m. on Dec. 23, 2016. It was raining. Sarah was hit by several drivers, including a fire truck. A passenger in one of the cars that hit Sarah, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said she came "out of nowhere."

When asked if he blames anyone for Sarah's death, Villegas hesitated.

"I would probably say myself. I mean, I would say if I was a better dad in her time of need," he said. "I also blame her for being where she was doing what she was doing, (especially) after a lot of people really loved her."



([http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/39626089370\\_1d2b84c300\\_k.jpg](http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/39626089370_1d2b84c300_k.jpg))

*Credit Gabriel C. Pérez / KUT*



In May 2016, City Council members approved the Vision Zero Action Plan ([https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Imagine\\_Austin/VisionZero/ActionPlan\\_5.19.16adoption.pdf](https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Imagine_Austin/VisionZero/ActionPlan_5.19.16adoption.pdf)), which outlines an aggressive goal of reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries on Austin roads to zero by 2025. Since then, fatal crashes have dropped slightly, but pedestrians still make up roughly a third of the deaths.

Of those deaths, people experiencing homelessness account for one in three.

“These people are often displaced and forced to live in places not meant for human habitation such as underpasses and along roadways,” said Karen Dorrier, program manager for Austin-Travis County Integral Care’s Homelessness Outreach Street Team.

And being on the streets most of the day can up your chances of being hit.

On a Thursday morning in Austin, Theron Russell stood at the corner of Interstate 35 Frontage Road and 15th Street. He held up a sign that read “Anything Helps” to passing cars.

Russell said he’s been hit twice by cars at that intersection.



([http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/28243575038\\_649d6f6168\\_k.jpg](http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/28243575038_649d6f6168_k.jpg))

*Theron Russell says he’s been hit twice at the corner of 15th Street and I-35. Credit: Julia Reihs / KUT*

those were people living on the streets.

When the city’s Vision Zero plan passed in 2016, the proposed solution for preventing homeless death in traffic was pretty simple: house those who are unhoused. But anti-homelessness advocates KUT spoke to for this story said a significant uptick in resources is needed to reach this goal.

“You know, we’ve done a whole lot right,” said Ann Howard, the executive director of ECHO, or the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition. ECHO recently released the results from its 2018 Point in Time Count, which attempts to count the number of people experiencing homelessness on any given night in Austin. The numbers represent a roughly 5 percent uptick in Austin’s homeless population.

“One car bumped the other one and it fishtailed up onto the curb,” he said. “And when they’re doing 40 miles an hour, you can’t move. Then another car hit another car, and I got hit with debris. And again, when they’re doing 40, you can’t get out the way.”

“It’s real dangerous out here,” said Russell.

According to the most recent numbers from the Austin Police Department, roughly one-third of pedestrians who die on Austin roads are experiencing homelessness at the time. In 2015, 10 people living on the streets were hit and killed by drivers. In 2016, that number rose to 11 – accounting for nearly 40 percent of pedestrian traffic deaths that year.

APD does not have numbers for 2017 or 2018. But of the five police reports of pedestrian deaths in 2017 KUT was able to get, two of

“But we haven’t seen any surge in resources to be able to really change the end game here to make the impact that the community I think is looking for,” said Howard.

There have been several initiatives. In 2016, APD took part in a pilot to ramp up outreach to people experiencing homelessness downtown and on West Campus. Recently, the Texas Department of Transportation started a campaign to promote pedestrian safety along I-35, where many homeless people are hit and killed, by handing out reflective bags and partnering with social services organizations to offer help.

Regardless, Howard’s comment about needing to up efforts has made its way to the desks of local elected officials.

“We absolutely need more resources,” said Mayor Pro Tem Kathie Tovo.

Last month, Council members approved (<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/05/city-council-approves-plan-to-end-homelessness/>) an Action Plan to End Homelessness, a guide for the future allocation of resources. But the funding mechanism – which would include private dollars and a potential return on investment – is still being worked out.

*Top Photo: Sarah Jane Villegas was struck and killed by a vehicle near South Capital of Texas Highway in 2016. Gabriel C. Pérez/KUT*

*This story was produced as part of the Austin Monitor’s reporting partnership with KUT. Its headline has been changed since publication.*

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## When roads are built to prioritize cars, pedestrians are often faulted for getting hit

*Part 3 of a three-part series*

A driver hit and killed Judy Romano's son, Barry Friedman, while he was walking in Austin two years ago.

According to the police report, Friedman tried to cross East Parmer Lane just before 6 a.m. on July 9, 2016. The driver said Friedman was in the crosswalk even though he didn't have the light to cross. Romano said she believes Friedman was running to catch the bus to work.

"He was a very positive person," said Romano, who lives in Baltimore. "Even when things didn't go well, he believed they would get better."

*Part 1: Two years after Vision Zero, when will Austin streets be safer for pedestrians?*

(<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/05/two-years-after-vision-zero-when-will-austin-streets-be-safer-for-pedestrians/>)

11/19/2020  
In May 2016, City Council members approved a Vision Zero Action Plan with the goal of reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries on city roads to zero by 2025. Since then, fatal crashes have dropped slightly, but pedestrians still make up roughly a third of the deaths.

The plan hinges on the idea that humans make mistakes while driving, biking and walking – but roads should be designed to absorb these mistakes so they don't prove fatal.

Some people argue the way law enforcement and members of a society talk about pedestrian fatalities does not take into account how road design contributes to pedestrian deaths.

*Part 2: Housing Austin's homeless will reduce road deaths, but that will require a big investment*

(<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/05/austin-said-house-people-to-reduce-road-deaths-advocates-say-that-still-requires-big-investment/>)

In the police reports of pedestrian deaths from 2016 and 2017 that KUT obtained, many cases are deemed “death of offender.” Friedman's death is referred to this way, as is the death of 14-year-old Alexei Bauereis (<https://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2018/05/two-years-after-vision-zero-when-will-austin-streets-be-safer-for-pedestrians/>), who was killed in 2016 while walking his bike across an intersection.

Patrick Oborski, a detective with Austin Police Department Highway Enforcement, said the department uses the phrase “death of offender” when it concludes there's nothing a driver could have reasonably done to not hit and kill a pedestrian.

“(The pedestrian) did a bad thing and made a wrong decision to cross where they shouldn't cross,” Oborski said. “Death of offender” denotes that no criminal charges need to be filed – on the driver, who is found not to be at fault, or the deceased pedestrian.

“Once they come to the determination that the pedestrian did something that's really stupid and cost them their life, they're not going to, you know, do search warrants on cellphones and the like,” he said. “That's not going to matter at that point. ... You're not going to file criminal charges on someone that's already dead.”

But Heyden Black Walker, an urban planner who serves on the city's Pedestrian Advisory Council, said often the way roads have been built leave pedestrians with few safe options to get around – leading them to make dangerous decisions.

“(Pedestrians) weren't wearing reflective clothing, or they were crossing mid-block or they failed to yield to the vehicle,” she said. “We don't always think about how we've left them without choices in a lot of cases.”





([http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/heyden\\_walker.jpg](http://www.austinmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/heyden_walker.jpg))

Walker cited a 2016 case where a 66-year-old man using a motorized wheelchair tried to cross North Lamar Boulevard and was hit and killed by a driver. According to Walker, the strip of road where the man was trying to cross has no sidewalks and few crosswalks.

“He became a statistic of someone who is counted as a pedestrian who failed to yield to the motor vehicle,” she said. “But we left him without any other choices.”

The police report on Friedman’s fatal crash goes beyond “death of offender” and broadens, slightly, where blame should go. “(B)ased on these factors it is determined that Friedman’s actions and poor lighting lead (sic) to this crash not the actions of (the driver),” an officer wrote.

Oborski said the department has gotten better about acknowledging the role road design plays in pedestrian deaths.

Kea Wilson, the director of community engagement at the nonprofit Strong Towns (<https://www.strongtowns.org/>), said road design not only affects how law enforcement assigns fault in pedestrian deaths, but also how drivers consider the rights of others to use the streets.

“We’ve literally engineered it,” she said. Wilson, who lives in St. Louis, said she usually bikes to get around the city. But when she does drive a car, she finds that she begins to prioritize her need to travel above the needs of others.

“I find myself slipping into a higher speed when there are other cars around me that are driving at a speed that isn’t safe for pedestrians,” she said.

Tom Wald agreed that when roads are built for cars, drivers believe they have more of a right to them.

“There definitely is just a weird attitude you’ll see from people driving,” said Wald, who serves on the board of the nonprofit Walk Austin. “Somehow they have more of a right to be getting around than people who are walking or biking.”

Wald said while he thinks APD has become more considerate about how it assigns blame in the cases of pedestrian traffic deaths, he’s still troubled by the fact that the pedestrian is faulted when the driver’s account is all police have.

“The police should be careful about understanding what evidence they have,” he said. “And if they’re only relying upon the statement of a driver who hit a pedestrian, it might just be the conclusion they can draw is inconclusive.”

Police concluded Friedman was not in the crosswalk when he was hit, despite the driver’s recollection that he was.

Despite this, Friedman’s mother said it still seems unfair to blame him for his own death – especially since the driver was the only witness.

*This story was produced as part of the Austin Monitor’s reporting partnership with KUT. Photos by Julia Reihs/KUT.*

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