



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Richard Mendoza, P.E., Interim Director, Austin Transportation Department
Joseph Chacon, Chief of Police, Austin Police Department

DATE: July 27, 2022

SUBJECT: **Staff Update to Resolution No. 20220616-052 – Increased Traffic Safety Enforcement for Major Roadways**

This memorandum provides an update on Resolution No. 20220616-052. The resolution directed the City Manager to consider internal and external resources to address current traffic enforcement gaps on the wide, high-speed roadways where most severe crashes occur. It also directed research on various items, including alternatives to traditional traffic enforcement, within the full report due back by December 1, 2022.

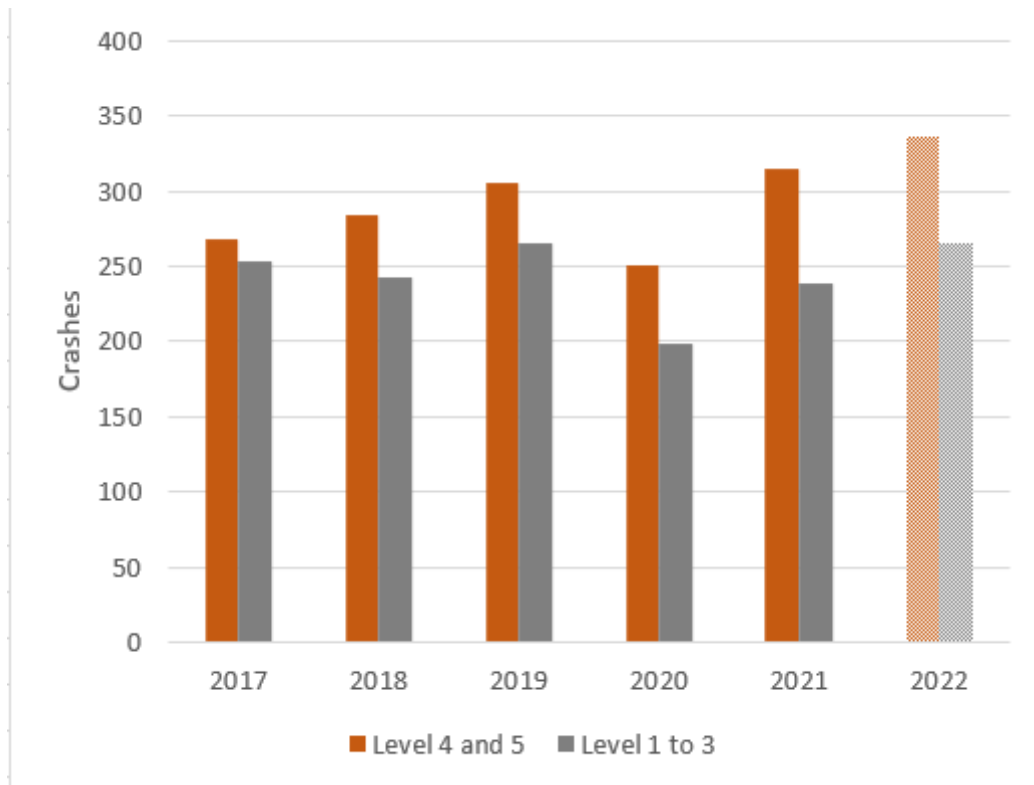
Background and Context

Vision Zero was first adopted by City Council in 2015 as it was incorporated into Imagine Austin. This policy goal commits the City to a goal of zero traffic-related deaths and serious injuries. Traffic fatalities reached a record high in 2021 and are meeting last year's pace in 2022, while serious injuries have typically been flat or lower than a recent high in 2015. At this rate, and without any significant intervention, it is likely that 50 more people will die on Austin's streets and another 250 people will be seriously injured in the last six months of the year. This increase in local fatal crashes is similar to statewide and national trends of increased roadway fatalities over the past two years.

In 2021, over 300 severe crashes occurred on [ASMP Street Level 4 and 5 roadways](#) in Austin, whereas fewer than 250 severe crashes occurred on ASMP Level 1-3 roadways. Level 4 and 5 roadways are typically the largest arterials (i.e. Parmer Ln., FM2222, Slaughter Ln., William Cannon Dr.), frontage roads, and freeways (i.e. IH-35, Mopac/Loop 1, SH71). These roadways carry the highest volumes of vehicular traffic and tend to have the highest operating speeds due to the design of the roadways. While these roadways represent locations where over 50% of the severe crashes occur each year, they are only ~25% of centerline miles of [the roadway network](#).

Fatal and Serious Injury Crashes by ASMP Roadway Levels

(2022 Estimated with data through May 2022)



Addressing the traffic safety problems evident on these roadways will take significant resources and time through engineering approaches. In addition, the City of Austin does not own most of the Level 4 and 5 roadways as they are owned by the State (aka “on-system” roadways), however the City and other agencies do manage operations and maintenance on some of the Level 4 facilities. With this understanding, narrowly focused traffic safety enforcement efforts need to be an immediate and sustained strategy to attempt to address the rapid recent rise in fatalities while the City continues to work with the State to improve roadway designs toward desired safety outcomes shared by both.

Internal Resources for Narrowly Focused Traffic Safety Enforcement

The Austin Police Department (APD) is currently authorized 1,809 sworn positions. 773 of those authorized sworn positions are patrol Police Officers, and as of July 1, 2022, there were 112 patrol Police Officer vacancies. 76 of those authorized sworn positions are patrol Corporals, and as of July 1, 2022, there were 2 patrol Corporal vacancies. Combined, there is an 13.4% vacancy rate for these two ranks which perform most of the patrol efforts, including most traffic enforcement activities.

Specialized units, like DWI and motors (motorcycle units), have been reassigned to patrol to respond to 911 calls. Graduating new cadet classes will help to fill authorized positions and add resources for patrol activities, however APD continues to see officer attrition as well. Increasing overall staffing levels towards currently authorized levels will continue to be a challenge for APD.

As of June 1, 2022, there have been over 149,000 calls to which APD responded this calendar year, including both dispatched and self-initiated calls. Out of that total, there were over 38,700 Priority 0 (P0) and Priority 1 (P1) calls – the highest priority calls reflecting a need for urgent public safety response to protect the health and safety of residents. These calls often require multiple officers to respond to the

incident and may require a long period of time spent at the location per call, depending on the situation encountered. While Priority 2 and higher calls are not considered as urgent relative to P0 and P1 calls, patrol officers and corporals spend much of their remaining time responding to these calls from residents for public safety assistance.

After the top urgent priority calls are addressed, there may occasionally be opportunities when on-duty patrol officers and corporals could perform narrowly targeted traffic enforcement. Over the next few months, ATD and APD will work together to increase communications and data sharing between the departments. Specific APD sector reports are produced regularly which provide areas of focus for patrol efforts to achieve the greatest public safety benefit; these could include data for each sector reflecting the high-risk locations where there is a history of severe car crashes or higher likelihood of severe crashes due to current built environment conditions.

Since 2019, ATD has financially supported a small portion of APD's traffic enforcement efforts through an overtime program targeted to roadways with higher numbers of severe crashes than other similar streets. In 2020, over 100 overtime shifts were filled; for 2022 through June, the number of filled shifts is fewer than 10. Through discussions between APD and ATD leadership about the lack of participation in the overtime program and lack of general resources dedicated to traffic enforcement, both departments agreed that seeking partnerships with other agencies who employ public safety officers to assist in filling the current gap was the next best alternative.

ATD is also utilizing other types of strategies to raise driver awareness on these high-speed roadways. While they are not considered active enforcement strategies, Dynamic Speed Display Devices (DSDDs) raise driver awareness of the speeds at which they are traveling, and we are seeing early positive results from evaluating the impact on crashes from the original installation of 14 devices in January 2022. ATD is in the process of purchasing 15 more DSDDs for use at locations with higher comprehensive cost values or with a history of severe crashes at a particular location.

External Resources for Narrowly Focused Traffic Safety Enforcement

ATD and APD staff have engaged with Travis County Constables to discuss the possibility of a partnership for traffic enforcement in the city's full purpose jurisdiction. While APD has historically handled most of the traffic enforcement efforts in the city, most Austin residents are also Travis County residents and sworn peace officers licensed by Travis County can regulate driver behaviors tied to state laws on roadways throughout the whole county.

The Travis County Constables submitted a budget request to the County Commissioner's Court to create 30 new positions, representing 5 new Deputy Constable positions and 1 new Sergeant per each of the five precincts. ATD is in a position to financially support, subject to the terms of an interlocal agreement, a portion of the new resources in exchange for traffic enforcement services within the City limits. The total amount of funding from the City needed to fund a potential interlocal agreement may exceed \$1.1M for FY2023. This new resource request from the Constables to the County Commissioners Court will be considered along with other County needs during their budget review and adoption process.

Should the Travis County Commissioners Court approve creation of the new positions in their FY23 Budget and move forward with an interlocal agreement, ATD has included \$650,000 for support of traffic safety enforcement activities in the proposed FY2023 budget, which leaves a delta of at least \$450,000 short of the estimated \$1.1M for FY2023. There are two primary budget options that City staff are exploring to cover costs for an interlocal agreement. ATD is analyzing its FY22 ending balance in

conjunction with the potential of repurposing funds within ATD's FY23 proposed budget to be able to accommodate this potential new agreement. Another option under consideration is Financial Services staff monitoring sales taxes and/or property tax collections for FY22 and determining whether those sources of revenue will likely come in above expectations. If so, City Council could consider budget amendments in August to assist in funding a potential partnership with the County.

If this estimated level of funding is not available, or if the budget request is scaled back by the County, another option available to the City is to negotiate a different level of enforcement services provided by Constables within city limits. Execution of an interlocal agreement would need to be approved by both the Austin City Council and the Travis County Commissioner's Court.

No Refusal Initiative

The "No Refusal Initiative" provides funding for overtime for APD detectives to assist in processing arrests where impairment or intoxication is presumed in the field. These detectives also can obtain blood search warrants when needed; this is critical evidence for prosecutors in jury trials, particularly in cases of intoxication manslaughter car crashes.

ATD has funded this initiative in partnership for approximately three years after APD lost grant funding in FY19. Overall costs are approximately \$185,000 per year, which covers most weekend and special events/holiday periods. There will still be a need to identify funding for No Refusal in FY2023 and beyond should ATD take on fully funding an interlocal agreement with Travis County.

Next steps

Travis County Planning and Budget staff anticipate publishing the County's preliminary budget during the week of July 25, 2022. Potential budget hearings could be held by the County during the period of August 17 - 22, 2022, budget mark-up is scheduled for September 1 and 2, 2022, and [County budget adoption](#) is planned for September 27, 2022.

The City's budget adoption process will be completed prior to the County's. The proposed budget will be released July 15, 2022, and the first public comment session is planned for July 27, 2022. Budget meetings will continue in early August, and final adoption is scheduled for August 17-19, 2022.

City staff will continue conversations with the County regarding an interlocal agreement and will keep Mayor and Council informed during budget discussions in August on the latest developments. Per the resolution direction, staff will begin working on the full report due on December 1, which will include details on the following:

- Budget analysis on public safety resources utilized for crash response
- Impact of No Refusal on impaired driving analysis
- Alternative strategies (other cities' approaches, use of technology, changes in state law)
- Long-term plan for proactive traffic enforcement at City

For additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Lewis Leff, Transportation Safety Officer, Lewis.Leff@austintexas.gov, or James Mason, APD Assistant Chief, James.Mason@austintexas.gov.

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