

October 25, 2023  
Toronto City Hall  
Infrastructure and Environment Committee  
100 Queen Street West  
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

RE: IE7.4 Updates on Vision Zero Road Safety Initiatives

To Councillors McKelvie, Colle, Burnside, Peruzza, Saxe, and Morley,

Friends and Families for Safe Streets (FFSS) is a group of people whose loved ones were senselessly killed in violent traffic crashes, and people who survived a preventable crash with severe, life altering injuries. All of the trauma, violence and loss that was inflicted on us, very suddenly and utterly against our will, could have been prevented with effective Vision Zero design changes to our streets.

We would like to express our thanks for the work in this Vision Zero update. There are many important improvements. We are heartened to see an expanded Automated Speed Enforcement program with some permanent locations, the use of crossing guards to allow people to cross safely at mid-block locations, and the easing of warrant requirements to get safety improvements added. However, this update and the Vision Zero plan overall continues to stop well short of something that could effectively end road violence in Toronto.

We have many suggestions for improvements and are optimistic that under more caring political leadership, more ambitious and effective Vision Zero improvements will be more boldly and more rapidly implemented than they were before.

#### Data Source Improvement and Involvement of Public Health

The data source used to make decisions is not as good as it could be. Police collision records can dramatically underrepresent rates of road violence. This is because many people are rightfully afraid of the police, given Toronto Police's self-admitted tendency to commit violence against people who aren't white. Therefore, people will, if at all possible, get themselves to a hospital rather than calling the police and risking a hostile or dangerous interaction. In addition, police officers have no medical training and are therefore poor judges of injury severity, resulting in an undercounting of severe injuries. Hospital records, on the other hand, are much more accurate in reflecting the number of injuries inflicted by reckless drivers on our badly designed roads. Toronto's Public Health Unit should be able to access hospital records arising from collisions and provide much better statistics, which will both give a more accurate sense of the enormity and urgency of the public health crisis posed by road violence, and lead to better decisions and a more successful Vision Zero program.

Our Public Health Unit, if allowed a seat at the Vision Zero table, could also give valuable input on the urgency of implementing effective Vision Zero designs from a broader public

health perspective, as they have significant expertise on the benefits of physical activity on population health, as well as how to encourage it, and where residents have been underserved in terms of being empowered to use active transportation.

### Redesigning Deadly Arterial Roadways

Zooming out, it remains clear from the timidity of our Vision Zero program that the car is still king in Toronto. The paradigm remains that driving convenience is the most important consideration, and all other upgrades are weighed against that primary factor, and often not implemented if it is deemed they will inconvenience drivers too much, or implemented in a disconnected piecemeal fashion, or implemented as a reversible pilot project.

We say this because there is no action, in this update or in the overall Vision Zero plan, with the possible exception of our limited implementation of ASE, that confronts head-on our deadly arterial roadways, which are the site of the majority of senseless, violent deaths inflicted on people outside of cars. This is because there is no network-wide plan for bold road diets or complete streets on our arterials. We can only conclude that this lack of widespread action stems from a fear of public backlash, but if this fear is indeed the factor blocking transformative action, it is costing innocent Torontonians their lives and inflicting unspeakable pain, grief, anguish and heartbreak that devastates individuals, families, and wider communities.

The case against one of the drivers who caused the crash that killed a deeply loved 18-year old student at the corner of Richmond and Yonge on Boxing Day in 2021 is currently before the courts, so let's use this case as an example. The only thing in this report that might have prevented the devastating violence, death and severe injuries inflicted on the group of people standing on that corner would be Automated Speed Enforcement. There is currently nothing in this update that otherwise would have prevented the driver on trial, Demar Kerr, from feeling perfectly comfortable gunning his car up to 79km/h on Richmond St, because there is nothing in this update that would change Richmond St's high-speed design: 3 car lanes, all wide and straight and highway-like, with no vertical speed calming measures like raised crosswalks or speed humps or speed cushions, no narrower car lanes, no chicanes, no curb extensions at crosswalks, no road textures, absolutely nothing to change Richmond's highway-like design that encourages extreme speed and reckless driving. While we love the dedicated protected cycle track on the north side of Richmond, it does not prevent fatally reckless speeding.

We hope this makes it obvious to you that until leaders at City Hall have the political will to take on deadly arterial road design and transform arterials into speed calmed complete streets, this horrific and devastating violence and death is guaranteed to continue. For Vision Zero to succeed, at some point our leaders will bravely have to choose safe designs instead of preferring to "minimize the impacts to drivers."

We would like to suggest the implementation of a dedicated group within the Vision Zero department that is dedicated to transforming our deadly arterial roadways into complete streets. As the group gains experience and repeatedly solves the same recurring issues that might arise from this type of road, the design and building work should become familiar and quicker. These roadways present our most urgent safety threat, yet they don't receive resources commensurate with the death toll and the enormous human suffering they exact.

#### Dangerous Construction Zones:

The Vision Zero program and any updates to it have also been silent on the issue of construction zone endangerment, when construction sites are allowed to block cycling infrastructure and sidewalks, forcing people who expected safe passage into the path of potentially aggressive, rage-fueled, distracted or impaired drivers who could kill them in a heartbeat. These practices could not be more flagrant in their disregard for our citywide Vision Zero program, or our TransformTO climate mitigation goals. Any network is only as good as its weakest link. There is currently almost no cycling corridor anywhere in the city that is actually useful, because so many of them are blocked by construction with no safe passage provided. These sites are all ticking time bombs for someone to be killed or severely injured, and it is especially insulting and troubling how easy it is for any layperson to see how easy it would be to make these zones safe for people outside of cars. In addition to the measures in the Construction Management Plan 2023-2026, our Vision Zero staff should be empowered and adequately resourced to put a stop to the reckless public endangerment. Construction must happen, but there is no need for it to endanger the public.

#### Raised Crosswalks as a Standard Design Element:

Another element that seems to be missing from our Vision Zero program and subsequent updates is the installation of raised crosswalks. As far as we can gather, the fear seems to be of drivers having to drive over bumps, especially on arterial roads. There seems to be little appetite to install them on non-arterial roads either, and especially not in equity deserving communities. The only ones we know of are in wealthy neighbourhoods, and we know children in low income families are 50% more likely to be harmed by road violence than children in high income families. Modern vehicles have shock absorbers and are capable of being driven at slower speeds over bumps, and slowing down car traffic is the main way Vision Zero is achieved. We know that our intersections in Toronto are extremely dangerous with few measures to keep people outside of cars safe, and installing raised crosswalks at arterial intersections would tremendously improve their safety. A raised crosswalk might have saved the life of the woman who was recently horribly killed at Mt Pleasant and Davisville in the crosswalk while she had a green light, by making her more visible to the driver of the dump truck who ran over her, and signaling to that driver that he was entering pedestrian territory and was required to carefully check his blind spots before proceeding. The safety benefit to slowing down drivers at every crosswalk would be staggeringly huge, such a massive benefit it is difficult to understand why raised crosswalks are not a standard part of our Vision Zero implementation.

Moreover, Toronto has seen many people on foot killed for crossing the street at a midblock location in order to get to a TTC stop. A rapid build of raised crosswalks and pedestrian crossovers at all TTC stop locations that are in a midblock location would save lives. People like Celeste Jones, Jessica Salickram and the 21 year old woman killed on Browns Line at Jellicoe earlier this month could all still be alive, if only our leaders would acknowledge that it is unethical to force people to cross the street at dangerous locations in order to access public transit.

Immediate Collision Response:

Our Vision Zero program proclaims that it goes above and beyond responding to crashes one at a time, taking a more systematic approach. However, this approach has been so timid to date that it has fallen far short of zero deaths or severe injuries, even after several years. Though trends seem to be downward, in our view it is difficult to know what to attribute this gradual trend to, due to the complications caused by the pandemic and ongoing changed traffic patterns from people working at home.

We would like to suggest that in addition to the more systematic approach, an immediate crash response be implemented, similar to the way workplace fatalities are treated, which are taken very seriously by the Ministry of Labour. The work site is shut down, investigated, and reopened after safety measures are implemented that would prevent that death from happening again. The people outside of cars who use our streets deserve the same level of consideration. An example of an immediate response would be building raised crosswalks to calm speed, narrowing car lanes to discourage speeding, installing a quick-build protected cycle track, or installing a missing sidewalk. One of the things that makes the aftermath of road violence so painful and insulting to survivors and bereaved families is the callous-feeling lack of appetite to make design changes after a serious crash. This makes us feel like the city doesn't care that another such crash could happen at any time, and it shows us that in the eyes of the city, what happened to us and the value of our loved one's life was so trivial that it merits no action.

While we appreciate the effort and resources reflected in this update, we urge you to add even more bold measures like implementing standard raised crosswalks, implementing a dedicated team to take on our most deadly arterial roads, using data from Toronto Public Health, requiring construction zones to never deny people outside of cars safe passage, and implementing a rapid post-crash redesign response to our Vision Zero plan.

Sincerely,



Jessica Spieker  
Spokesperson, Friends and Families for Safe Streets