

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

RE: IE7.2 Congestion Management Plan 2023-2026

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 and better policies around the uncontrolled way cars are allowed to proliferate on our streets.

We appreciate the plan to provide more transparent information to the public about construction work zones using QR codes, including contact information to report unsafe conditions, and considering technology that can be programmed to prioritize people outside of cars.

Prioritizing People Over Driving Convenience:

A significant concern we have around this report is that while there is a lot of content relating to technology, some of which might be helpful to people walking and biking, the main focus is on increasing motor vehicle throughput, which is different from efficiently moving people or delivering a successful Vision Zero program. This report has nothing to say about the most obvious and safest solution to car congestion: reducing the number of cars. The only way cities around the world have made headway on car congestion is by disincentivising or disallowing driving in congested areas, either by implementing a congestion charge, or prohibiting car access.

It is clear that in Toronto, we are overdue to have an adult conversation about prioritizing public transportation, active transportation, and vehicles with accessibility permits ahead of dangerous, polluting and inefficient single-occupancy car access. Where the public right of way is infringed upon by a construction site, people outside of cars and TTC vehicles must be prioritized in order to keep Toronto moving. When streets are allowed to be clogged with cars, it grinds our surface level TTC routes to a halt, making the TTC an unreliable option for anyone on any kind of a schedule. When we choose to undermine public transportation by allowing unfettered car access to clog surface routes, it forces people back into their cars if they have one, our congestion problem worsens, and our streets become even more dangerous because there are more cars on them. We ought to be getting cars out of the way in order to incentivize people to take the TTC, instead of trapping riders in transit vehicles

that can't move because of car congestion, causing people to be late for work or miss appointments. Getting cars out of the way also empowers people to choose active transportation instead of taking their car by making our streets safer and more inviting, supporting our Vision Zero goals and making our streets less polluted and hostile.

The current status quo, prioritizing car throughput above all else through construction zones, freely closing bike lanes and sidewalks and suddenly forcing people who have a right to safe passage into the path of potentially distracted, impaired or rage-fueled and aggressive drivers, is a ticking time bomb for road violence, and it is grossly inequitable.

Undeniably, an immense amount of construction will be required to address our housing crisis and to build the Ontario Line. The leaders of Toronto have a chance now to be brave with a transformative Congestion Management Plan that prioritizes safe, efficient and accessible modes of transportation on our compromised public right of ways, instead of allowing all of our streets to be congested and ground to a halt by single-occupant cars. The bravery in restricting car access through congested areas and construction zones would also make our streets instantly safer, supporting our Vision Zero goals and resulting in fewer Torontonians suffering the horrendous trauma of road violence.

Concerns Regarding Police as Traffic Wardens:

Another significant concern we have regarding the content of this report is the intention to recruit police to act as traffic wardens. The police have admitted that as an institution they have a significant and unacceptable problem with violence motivated by racism. Police have openly admitted their officers are 1.2-1.6 times more likely to use force on a person of colour, and more than twice as likely to draw a gun on an unarmed Black person as an unarmed white person. Though this disturbing fact was brought to light over a year ago, Toronto Police have not produced a credible, public-facing plan for how they will end this violent racism. Deploying more police officers more widely is counterproductive to public safety. How can people of colour feel safe walking or rolling past officers who are known to be racist and violent?

Police already receive an enormous percentage of the city's annual budget, reducing the city's capacity to deliver capital projects that would save lives, like Vision Zero, or deliver services that improve residents' lives. It does not make sense to give them even more resources when they already aren't efficiently using the enormous budget they have. Anecdotally, we have heard many accounts of police officers who are directing traffic denying passage to people trying to walk or bike who have the right of way, in favour of increasing car throughput in a given traffic signal cycle. This is a completely unfair practice, and does nothing to make our streets safer or contribute to climate mitigation goals.

Police have released many problematic PSAs around road safety in the past, placing the responsibility of not getting struck by a reckless driver on people walking and biking, rather than on the shoulders of the drivers who are doing the harm. Examples are distributing

ineffective reflective armbands and scolding pedestrians who are forced to cross midblock, ignoring the fact that there are no nearby safe pedestrian crossings for them to use at all, instead of focusing on the reckless drivers or deadly street designs that do the harm. This shows that as a whole, Police do not understand the fundamental reasons why our streets are so dangerous to people outside of cars, nor do they understand the effective solutions.

Most of all, we know that police dramatically reduced traffic enforcement in 2013, and after they carried out that decision, rates of road violence and preventable death from collisions skyrocketed. In 2019, epidemiological analysis showed that the police's reduction in enforcement caused about 140 extra deaths in preventable collisions, deaths that otherwise wouldn't have happened. 140 more families were shattered, and uncountable hearts broken, solely because the police decided not to do a core part of their job. The police absolutely knew the effects of their inaction, because they are the keepers of the KSI statistics which started rising after 2013, and yet not one member of the force said or did anything about it until it was brought to light by media coverage. Police allowed the violence and human carnage to rise and rise, and calmly watched as more and more people, our family members, were violently killed. The police have shown us how much they care about road safety or the lives of people outside of cars.

We urge you to be brave enough to reduce congestion by reducing the root cause - the number of cars on a road - and stick to employing civilians as traffic wardens.

Sincerely,



Jessica Spieker
Spokesperson, Friends and Families for Safe Streets