

Attachment 2 - Additional Details on Permanent Roadside Memorials

In September 2025, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee (IEC) requested the General Manager, Transportation Services to review feasibility and sustainability options for a permanent roadside memorial program that incorporates engraved steel brace materials, in consultation with interest groups representing cyclists and pedestrians, and not to replace "ghost bikes", and report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee by the first quarter of 2026 with an update ([2025.IE24.12](#)).

Background

The installation of roadside memorials is currently regulated by Municipal Code Chapter 743, Streets and Sidewalks, Use Of. As outlined in §743-19, temporary street memorials can be installed in the public right-of-way for up to 30 days. In practice, enforcement is complaint-based and temporary memorials are often permitted to remain longer than 30 days, unless they pose a safety or maintenance concern. Community-led memorials to honour victims of fatal traffic collisions, including 'Ghost Bikes' installed by Advocacy for Respect for Cyclists (ARC) and memorial signage installed by Friends and Families for Safe Streets, are generally accommodated, where feasible.

The City currently offers two (2) permanent commemorative options through the [Commemorative Tree and Bench Program](#) administered by Parks & Recreation Division. These programs are designed to serve a broad range of commemorative needs, rather than marking a specific location or incident. The Commemorative Tree and Bench Program provides an avenue for residents to honour loved ones, community members, or significant life events through the installation of a tree or bench in a park setting, subject to space availability, horticultural considerations, and cost recovery. These programs are generally used for long-term, contemplative remembrance in recreational or naturalized spaces and are not intended to mark the location of a specific fatality.

As a result, the Commemorative Tree and Bench program does not address potential requests from families and advocates who wish to honour victims of traffic-related fatalities at or near the location of the collision, particularly where no nearby park space exists. This has contributed to the continued use of temporary, community-led roadside memorials in the public right-of-way.

Following traffic collisions that result in a fatality, Transportation Services undertakes two (2) levels of investigation. First, staff conduct an initial high-level site investigation to see if there are any actions that can be taken to address existing conditions, such as faded or damaged signs and pavement markings, as well as traffic signals. Work orders to repair or replace these items are prioritized if necessary to correct an immediate safety concern, such as a motor vehicle operator damaging a stop sign or a malfunctioning traffic light.

If the traffic-related fatality involves a Vulnerable Road User (VRU, defined as a pedestrian or person cycling or riding a motorcycle), a more in-depth review is

scheduled with a range of staff across different units within Transportation Services, as well a representative from the Toronto Police Service (TPS) and the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), if the collision involved a TTC vehicle. These reviews typically take place a few months after the collision, in order to review the collision history of the location and additional collision details provided by TPS during their investigation. The procedures for the Fatal VRU Review are based on an engineering evaluation typically referred to as a “Road Safety Audit” or “In-Service Safety Review” (ISSR) and consist of a comprehensive examination of the overall intersection or mid-block collision location, to improve safety for all roadway users. Reviews focus on potential contributing factors to the collision under review and any trends or patterns that can be determined from the recorded collision history, future roadwork planned at the location, and other opportunities to overall upgrade the operational and physical characteristics of the location, in line with City guidelines and standards.

Recommendations from the investigation are then reviewed internally, with short-term recommendations routed to the appropriate unit for further investigation, such as potential changes to signal timing or traffic regulations. Long-term recommendations are reviewed and used to plan future road work, such as changes to the geometry of the intersection and those that require capital construction.

Jurisdictional Review Summary

A scan of comparable jurisdictions demonstrates that while many cities have explored roadside memorial programs, there is no widely-adopted model and overall uptake tends to be low.

Canadian municipalities that offer permanent or semi-permanent roadside memorials have generally opted for **small, discreet, standardized installations** rather than prominent signage. Calgary’s Honour a Loved One ([HALO](#)) program permits engraved steel bands wrapped around light standards on a cost-recovery basis. Winnipeg’s [memorial plaque program](#) uses small, eye-level plaques affixed to existing infrastructure and has strict eligibility rules. Ottawa’s [memorial sign program](#) provides a standardized safety message sign in both official languages, but since its launch in 2016 has received limited demand.

In the United States, programs tend to be more visible and often incorporate safety messaging and the names of victims. Cities such as [Los Angeles](#), California offer multiple memorial approaches administered through its Vision Zero program. These include named roadside memorial signs, artist-commissioned installations through the Rainbow Halo series for pedestrian fatalities, and an online memorial map. Participation is capped annually, installations are valid for a fixed term of generally two (2) to seven (7) years, and costs are covered through dedicated safety budgets. Public feedback indicates that named memorial signs are preferred over symbolic installations; however, according to staff, overall program activity has declined in recent years, and new installations are infrequent.

Several states, including Texas, Florida, and Arizona, offer roadside memorial signs for victims of collisions involving impairment, often partnered with organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). These programs are request-based and include limits on wording, location, and duration. Participation varies widely and is often low after initial interest.

Cities such as New York, Washington, Chicago, and Seattle do not generally provide permanent physical roadside memorials, instead permitting temporary, community-led tributes under defined conditions. These cities emphasize centralized remembrance through annual events, public reporting, online memorials, or Victims of Traffic Violence initiatives, rather than asset-based installations within the right-of-way. Where signage programs do exist, they are often constrained by concerns related to sign clutter, distraction, equity of access, and long-term maintenance. Many jurisdictions report an initial surge of interest following program launch, followed by diminishing participation. Fees, where charged, are typically in the range of \$125 to \$250 USD, though some programs are fully subsidized through state road safety budgets.

Importantly, academic research consistently finds that roadside memorials have **limited and short-term impacts on behaviour of people operating a motor vehicle**, and they do not deliver sustained road safety outcomes. As a result, best practice guidance emphasizes that memorial programs should be framed as a compassionate accommodation for grieving families, rather than as a safety intervention, and should avoid sign clutter or features that may lose meaning over time or distract road users.

Implications for Toronto

The jurisdictional scan demonstrates that, even in cities with more permissive approaches to roadside signage, permanent and asset-based memorial programs tend to be limited in scope, time-bound, and resource-intensive, with participation declining over time. Accordingly, Transportation Services does not recommend the establishment of a City-run permanent roadside memorial program, as it would introduce ongoing administrative and maintenance obligations, without delivering clear public benefit or road safety outcomes.

Recommendations

Rather than installing permanent roadside memorial markers, Transportation Services proposes to continue to work towards a coordinated set of actions intended to provide meaningful opportunities for remembrance, while remaining operationally feasible and aligned with best practices.

Through this approach, the City could host or formally support a potential annual, City-wide memorial event, such as participation in [World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims](#) or the World Health Organization's [United Nations Global Road Safety Week](#), to provide a consistent, inclusive forum for public acknowledgement and reflection. In parallel, staff could convene a proposed road safety and remembrance workshop to bring together relevant City divisions, agencies, and community

organizations to share information, strengthen partnerships, and link remembrance with ongoing Vision Zero efforts.

Transportation Services also proposes to undertake additional coordination and consultation with community and advocacy organizations involved with public memorials. The purpose of this effort would be to determine potential opportunities to support established community-led advocacy and memorial initiatives, while also addressing concerns with clutter and maintenance of community-led memorials. This would recognize the role of community and advocacy organizations in grassroots remembrance and public engagement and could include reviewing and updating regulations to formalize existing practices and potentially extend the permitted duration of temporary roadside memorials, for up to 13 months to allow a memorial to remain in-place through the first anniversary of a traffic-related fatality. A longer, clearly defined temporary roadside memorial bylaw aligns the City with neighbouring municipalities and allows the city to manage and maintain sites in an orderly way over time, preventing the neglect and clutter that can result from short but not effectively enforced rules while providing compassionate acknowledgment of families grieving the loss of a loved one. As a package, these measures offer a thoughtful, flexible alternative to permanent installations, support public grieving, and clarify expectations within the public right-of-way while allowing Transportation Services to remain focused on evidence-based road safety interventions.

Conclusion

Transportation Services recommends an alternative approach that emphasizes City-wide remembrance, supports established community-led memorial practices, and clarifies the permitting and duration of temporary memorials through by-law updates. This approach aligns with best practices by framing memorialization as a matter of compassion -- rather than a road safety tool -- respecting existing advocacy efforts, while avoiding the introduction of a complex, asset-based roadside program. It strengthens partnerships with community advocates, supports public grieving in appropriate ways, and codifies current practices, allowing Transportation Services to remain focused on evidence-based safety interventions while still visibly acknowledging the human impact of traffic fatalities.