

Traffic Violence in Los Angeles

Why Los Angeles Gets an “F” Grade for 2023

Written by Damian Kevitt, Executive Director of Streets Are For Everyone
24 January 2024

I am starting this report with a question that anyone reading this must think about:

How many more Angelenos need to die before we, as a collective city, start treating traffic violence with the urgency it deserves?

In January 2023, Streets Are For Everyone produced its first report, *Dying on the Streets of Los Angeles*¹, looking at traffic violence trends, the numbers behind them, and other statistics related to traffic violence in Los Angeles.

The numbers were disturbing. They showed that what was being done to address traffic violence was clearly not working and needed a significant change in action, level of funding, and dedication if our elected officials truly intended to save lives on the roads of Los Angeles. The report laid out four broad steps that needed to be taken. In short, these were:

1. Cut the bureaucracy by declaring a state of emergency related to traffic violence.
2. Reestablish Vision Zero with accountability, transparency, and PURPOSE.
3. Prioritize lives over the right to speed.
4. Get real about the magnitude of the problem by funding road safety improvements at a level that might start to make a difference.

¹Kevitt, Damian. "Dying on the Streets of Los Angeles: 2022 Traffic Fatalities, Why & What Needs to Change." *Streets Are For Everyone*, 10 Jan. 2023, www.streetsareforeveryone.org/blog/dying-on-the-streets-of-los-angeles. Accessed 24 Jan. 2024.

The hope with the first report was that it would serve as a wake-up call for our elected officials and responsible agencies about the need to safeguard the lives of our community members as they travel to and from work, home, and other activities. Over the course of 2023, it became clear that it was business as usual for LA DOT and LAPD. There's been no sense of urgency by Mayor Bass on this subject and no coordinated effort by the LA City Council to address this public health crisis. This is not to say that no actions were taken by some in these agencies and our elected officials. Still, the little that was done was ineffective or too late to make a difference in this drastically worsening public health crisis.

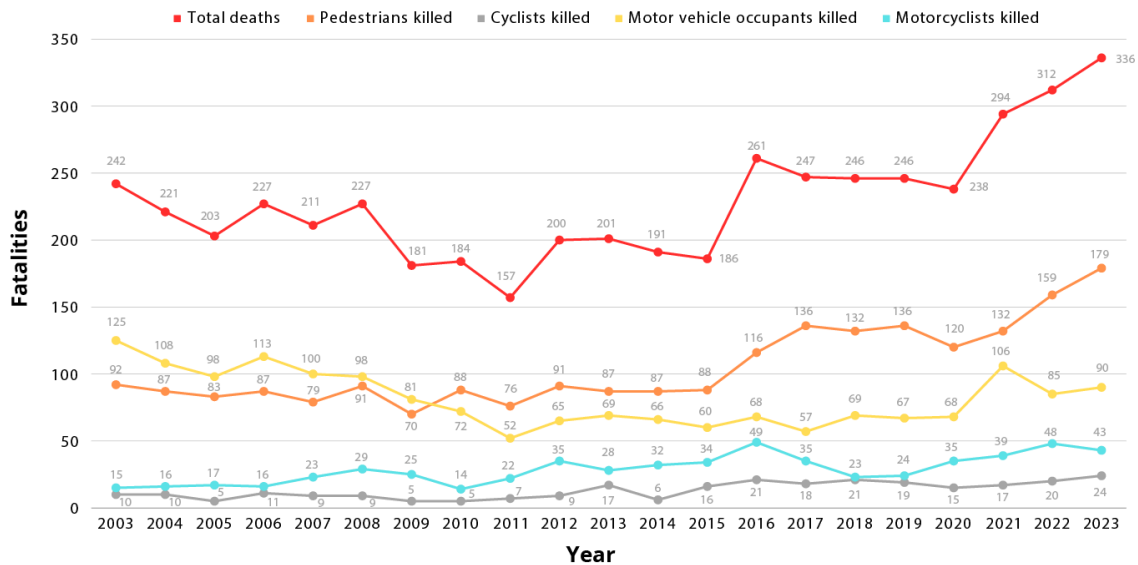
If the number of our people lost on LA City roads isn't enough to get elected officials and city agencies to take effective action, let's look at the fact that, in just four years, our beautiful city will host millions for the 2028 Olympic Games. We must prioritize resolving these problems now to ensure everyone's safety. This is important, not just for the relatively short time of the Olympic Games, but also to encourage the world population to return for years to come to a world-class, safe, equitable, active, transportation-minded city. **There are solutions that can be implemented and positive impacts that can be made right away.**

2023, ANOTHER WORST YEAR ON RECORD

There were 336 traffic fatalities in 2023, breaking the 300 mark for the second year in a row and the highest number of fatalities in over 20 years, which is how far our records reach. This was an increase of 8% from the previous year and a staggering 81% increase since the Vision Zero program was started in 2015 by then Mayor Garcetti.



Fatalities from Traffic Collisions, Los Angeles City 2003-2023



Source: City of Los Angeles Open Data Portal for traffic incidents. Taken from LAPD records. Figures are preliminary and subject to change as data is reviewed and finalized.

The increase in fatalities was largely driven by an increase in pedestrian and bicycle fatalities, with pedestrians alone making up 53.3% of all 2023 traffic fatalities. **Together, pedestrian and bicycle fatalities comprised nearly two-thirds (60.4%) of all traffic fatalities in 2023.**

- Pedestrian fatalities jumped by 13% and are over double their numbers (up by 103%) since the start of Vision Zero in 2015.
- Bicycle fatalities are much smaller, 24 in 2023, but increased by 20% compared to 2022 and have jumped 50% since 2015.
- Motor vehicle fatalities have been slightly up, 6%, since 2022 but are up 50% compared to 2015.
- Motorcycle fatalities are down by 10% this year, the only good news in 2023 traffic violence stats, but still up by 26% compared to 2015.



Breakdown of Traffic Fatalities, Los Angeles City, 2023

	2023 Fatalities (% change to 2022)	2020 Fatalities (% change 2023 to 2020)	2015 Fatalities (% change 2023 to 2015)
Total Fatalities	336 (-8%)	238 (-41%)	186 (-81%)
Vehicle Fatalities	90 (-6%)	68 (-32%)	60 (-50%)
Motorcycle Fatalities	43 (10%)	35 (-23%)	34 (-26%)
Pedestrian Fatalities	179 (-13%)	120 (-49%)	88 (-103%)
Bicycle Fatalities	24 (-20%)	15 (-60%)	16 (-50%)

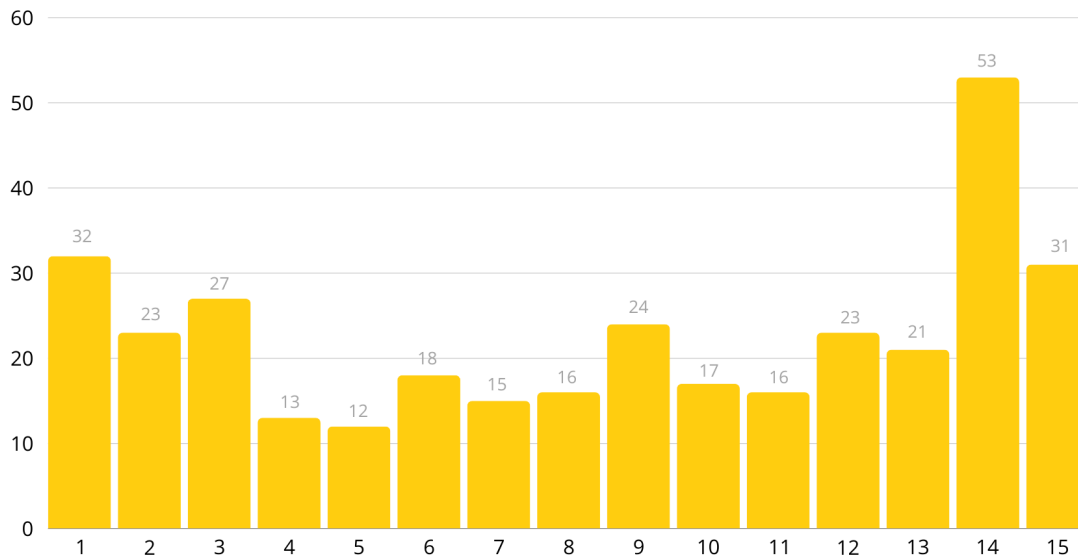
Source: City of Los Angeles Open Data Portal for traffic incidents. Taken from LAPD records. Figures are preliminary and subject to change as data is reviewed and finalized.

NOT EVERY COUNCIL DISTRICT IS THE SAME

SAFE looked at traffic fatalities broken down by the LA City Council Districts. The results clearly showed that **Council District 14 was far more deadly than any other district.** The exact reasons for this deserve further study. Still, it is not surprising considering that Downtown LA is almost entirely in CD 14, meaning this is likely the highest concentration of pedestrians and cyclists in all of LA, packed in with many cars in a small urban space.



Traffic Fatalities Data By Council District



Source: City of Los Angeles Open Data Portal for traffic incidents. Taken from LAPD records.

We also looked at the number of collisions by council district. **The three most dangerous council districts in 2013 were Council Districts 13, 14, and 9, in that order.**



Collisions by Council District, Los Angeles City, 2023

Council District	Total Collisions Reported
1	818
2	865
3	1146
4	817
5	860
6	839
7	957
8	1039

Council District	Total Collisions Reported
9	1560
10	895
11	967
12	1233
13	1619
14	1605
15	948
Unknown	346

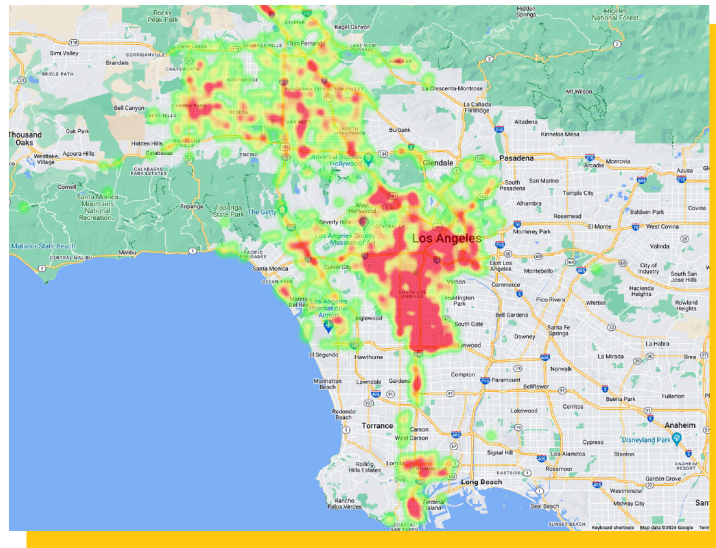


Source: City of Los Angeles Open Data Portal for traffic incidents. Taken from LAPD records.

It should be noted that the number of collisions are less accurate than the number of fatalities. In 2020, LAPD stopped responding to minor traffic collisions, instead asking those involved in a traffic collision to self-report using their online reporting system.

Since that time, the number of traffic collisions reported has dropped by over half while serious injuries and fatalities, which LAPD still responds to, continue to go up. This indicates that there are perceived barriers for individuals to report traffic collisions – language, lack of internet, lack of time, and difficulty filling out complicated forms – which could be some of the reasons. The number of collisions reported in a council district will be lower relative to the number in that district who are experiencing one or more of these barriers.

SAFE | **Heat map of all serious injuries and fatalities in the City of Los Angeles for 2022.**
Streets Are For Everyone



Source: TIMS

LA'S UNHOUSED CONTINUE TO BE KILLED FAR MORE BY TRAFFIC VIOLENCE

SAFE was able to obtain from LAPD updated figures on the number of unhoused individuals killed in traffic collisions on the streets of Los Angeles from 2018 to 2023. The information provided was not broken down by the mode of transportation, but it is fairly safe to assume that all of them were likely pedestrians or cyclists. The number killed was up by one, to a total of 41 fatalities. This is lower than the peak number of fatalities recorded at 47 in 2020.

Traffic Fatalities of Unhoused Individuals Los Angeles City, 2023

Year	Unhoused Fatalities
2018	40
2019	46
2020	47
2021	36
2022	40
2023	41



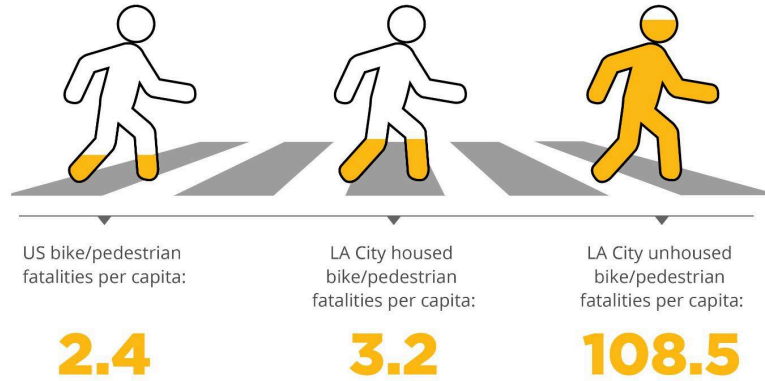
Source: City of Los Angeles Open Data Portal for traffic incidents. Taken from LAPD records. Figures are preliminary and subject to change as data is reviewed and finalized.

On average (2018-2023), housed pedestrians and cyclists in Los Angeles are killed at a rate of 3.2 per capita (100,000 individuals), a rate that is significantly higher than the national average of 2.4 per capita². However, on average (2018-2023), the rate of unhoused individuals killed by traffic violence every year in LA City is 108.5 per capita. **This is 33.9 times more than housed pedestrians and cyclists in Los Angeles and 45.2 times the national average.**

² USA Facts Team. "How Many Pedestrians and Cyclists Are Killed by Cars in America?" *USA Facts*, 4 Apr. 2023, usafacts.org/articles/how-many-pedestrians-and-cyclists-are-killed-by-cars-in-america/. Accessed 24 Jan. 2024.



LA City unhooded pedestrians and cyclists are killed 45.2x the national average.

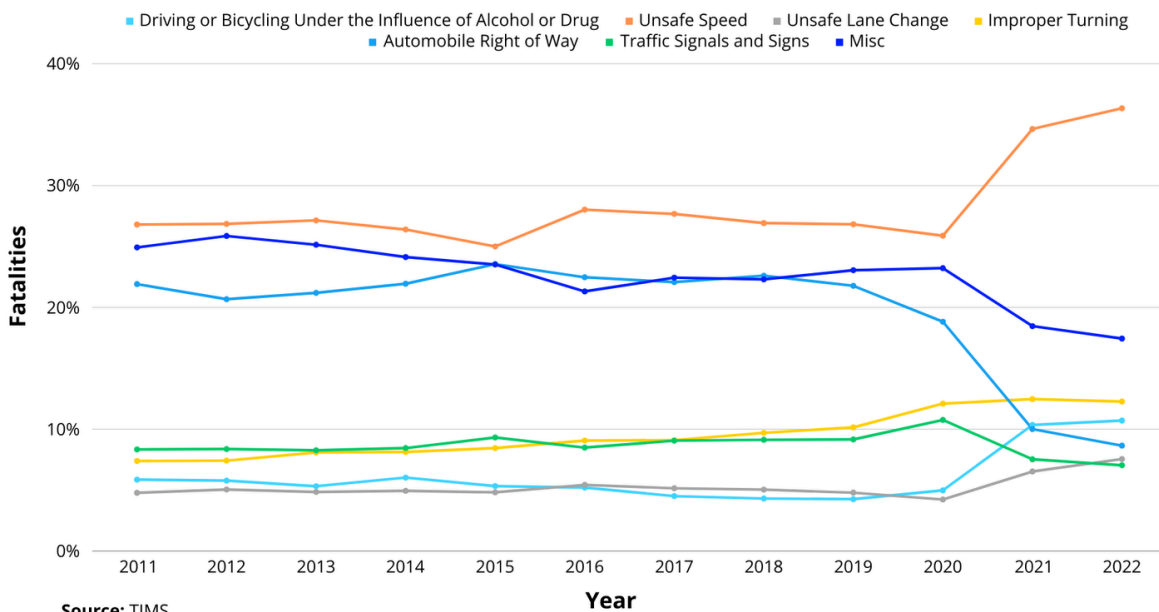


Source: LAPD

WHAT'S DRIVING THE FATALITIES? IT'S SPEED AND DRUGS AND ALCOHOL!

While the primary collision factors (PCFs) for 2023 are not yet available, we do know that speed has historically been and continues to be the single largest factor for all collisions since 2011. This is still the case for our information up through 2022.

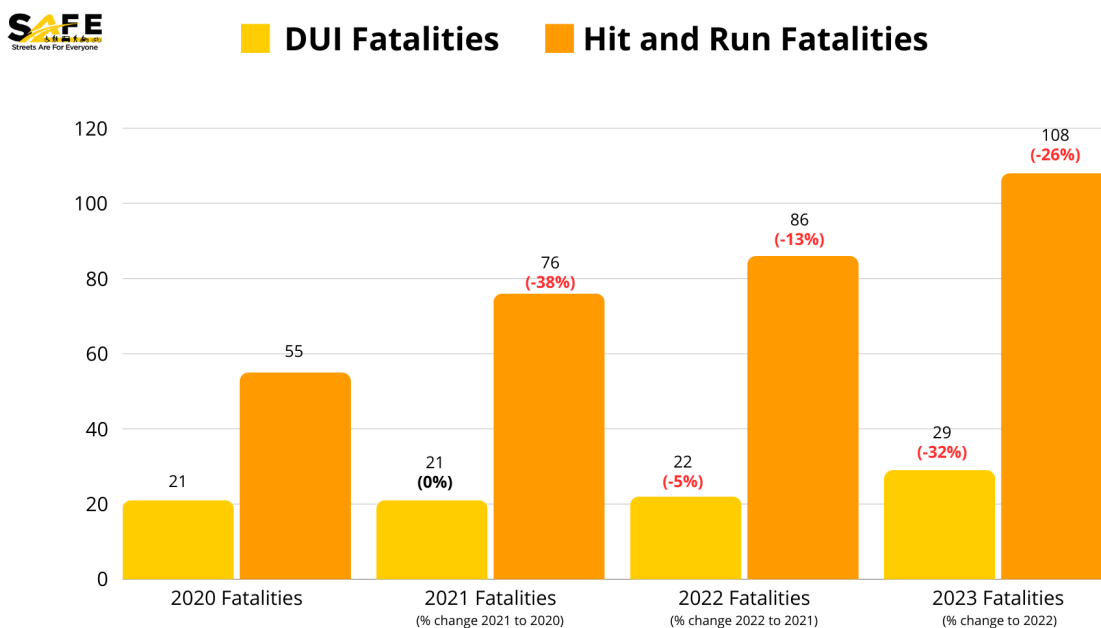
SAFE | 7 Most Common PCFs, All Injuries & Fatalities, LA City 2011-2022



Source: TIMS

However, since 2021, there has been a new trend emerging – **a significant increase in DUI fatalities due to the use of drugs (legal and illegal) and alcohol while driving.** This was true for 2022, and, per LAPD’s year-end report, it was an even greater problem in 2023.

We believe that, due to the rapidly increasing amount of hit-and-runs, this problem is likely a lot worse than is currently being reported. **The number of hit-and-run fatalities has increased by 96% since 2020.** Per a AAA Foundation study³ on hit and runs, one of the reasons why people run from the scene of a crash is they are driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol and don’t want to be caught for that crime. It’s therefore probable that one of the reasons hit-and-run felonies have gone up so much is because of drug and alcohol use while driving.



Source: [City of Los Angeles Open Data Portal](#). Taken from LAPD records.

³ Benson, A., Arnold, L.S., Tefft, B.C. & Horrey, W.J. (2018). *Hit-and-Run Crashes: Prevalence, Contributing Factors and Countermeasures* (Research Brief). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

IS VISION ZERO DEAD?

The Vision Zero strategy was initiated in 2015 by the then mayor, Eric Garcetti, to protect the most vulnerable road users and reduce traffic fatalities to zero by 2025. It started with an impressive roll-out of grand plans⁴ detailing a multi-faceted approach⁵, including “the 5 Es”: equity, evaluation, education, engineering, and enforcement.

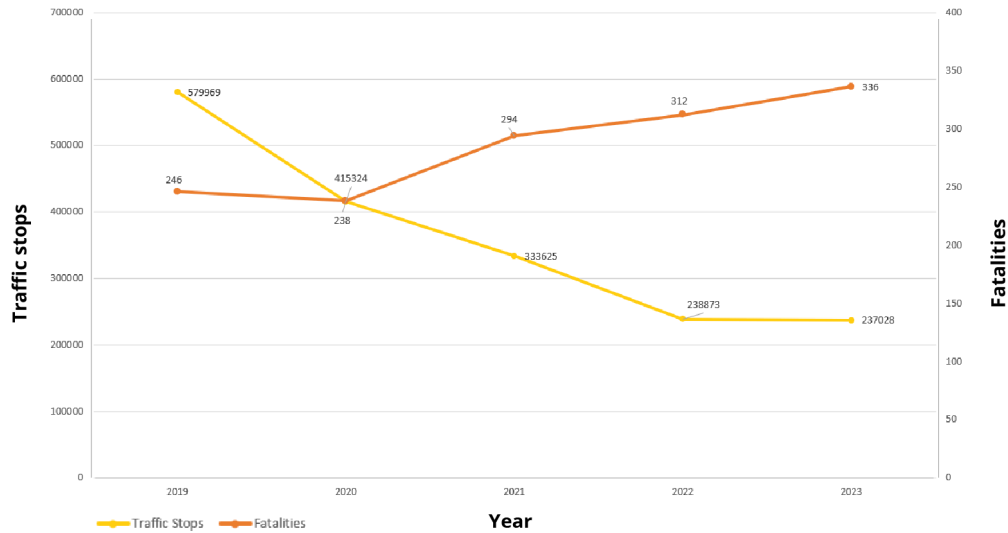
Around 2019, education was dropped out of the equation, and enforcement was de-emphasized in favor of re-engineering the roads to make them safer. Evidence of this shift is the 59% decrease in the number of traffic enforcement stops by LAPD starting in 2020. Yet since 2020, the number of fatalities has increased by

41%. Before this significant change in the use of traffic enforcement, between 2016 and 2020, the number of traffic fatalities actually decreased by 10% and were in a significantly lower range.

⁴ "Vision Zero Los Angeles, 2015-2025, Action Plan." *LA DOT Livable Streets*, ladotlivablestreets-cms.org/uploads/cb1ecd97c922382b165e79.pdf. Accessed 24 Jan. 2024.

⁵ "Eliminating Traffic Deaths in Los Angeles by 2025." *LA DOT Livable Streets Document Library*, Aug. 15. <https://viewer.joomag.com/vision-zero-los-angeles/0915902001459876247?short>

SAFE | Traffic Stops Compared to Fatalities 2019-2023, Los Angeles City



Source: City of Los Angeles Open Data Portal LAPD RIPA (AB 953) STOP Person Detail. Taken from LAPD records.

The LA City Council directed the reduction in traffic enforcement stops in reaction to the George Floyd protests in the Summer of 2020. It became clear at this time that traffic stops by LAPD were being conducted in a systemically racist fashion⁶, with blacks being stopped by police officers at a rate five times greater than their share of the city's population.

The relationship detailed in this report between the significant reduction in traffic enforcement by LAPD and the commensurate rise in traffic fatalities is in no way meant to condone a system of traffic enforcement that created injustices for an entire race. It is pointed out as a fact that shouldn't be ignored.

In 2020, the focus of Vision Zero shifted even more to only re-engineering roads to make them safer. Traffic enforcement by police officers has become almost nonexistent.

⁶ Chang, Cindy, and Ben Poston. "Stop-and-frisk in a Car: Elite LAPD Unit Disproportionately Stopped Black Drivers, Data Show." *LA Times*, 24 Jan. 2019. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-lapd-traffic-stops-20190124-story.html>

There has been a lot of talk since 2020 about piloting the use of unarmed city employees in traffic enforcement. It's now almost four years later, and there's still no concrete plan to implement it, leaving a large gap in the Vision Zero strategy that has been successful in many other cities and countries worldwide. Meanwhile, more and more pedestrians are killed by speeding and intoxicated drivers. **This sudden lack of enforcement might have been mitigated had a massive increase in funds for road safety engineering and other non-biased traffic enforcement solutions implemented, but this never materialized.**

In the 2022-2023 LA City fiscal budget, \$50.6 million⁷ was allocated to LA DOT for Vision Zero-related projects. This is a drop in the bucket compared to what cities who are serious about saving lives spend. For example, the City of New York, with fewer miles of streets – 6300 miles⁸ compared to 6614 miles⁹ in LA City – spent over \$270 million¹⁰ on its Vision Zero program in the 2019 fiscal year alone. It also had fewer traffic fatalities than Los Angeles by 2021 (273 in NY¹¹ compared to 294 in LA), with twice the number of people living there.

Then, with COVID-19, many of the key staff needed to implement Vision Zero projects at LA DOT were encouraged to retire as a solution to a fiscal financial cliff, further reducing the ability of LA DOT to implement Vision Zero projects even if they were funded.

⁷, Fonseca, Ryan . "A Threat To Public Safety': LA'S Street Improvement Programs Are Severely Understaffed." *LAist*, 5 May 2022.

<https://laist.com/news/transportation/los-angeles-vision-zero-funding-public-safety-streets-traffic-deaths-ladot-staffing>

⁸ "About NYC DOT." *NYC.Gov*, www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/about/about.shtml.

⁹ "Miles of Public Roads Los Angeles County." *Los Angeles Almanac*, www.laalmanac.com/transport/tr01.php.

¹⁰ Fonseca, Ryan . "A Threat To Public Safety': LA'S Street Improvement Programs Are Severely Understaffed." *LAist*, 5 May 2022.

<https://laist.com/news/transportation/los-angeles-vision-zero-funding-public-safety-streets-traffic-deaths-ladot-staffing>

¹¹ "NUMBER CRUNCH: Inside the Deadliest Year in Vision Zero History." *Streetsblog NYC*, 26 Jan. 2022, nyc.streetsblog.org/2022/01/26/number-crunch-inside-the-deadliest-year-in-vision-zero-history.

Per a May 2022 LAist Article¹², 50% of the Vision Zero and Active Transportation positions in LA DOT remain unfilled. As of this writing, we know that LA DOT still has a large personnel shortage, though that gap has improved. SAFE has requested updated information from LA DOT on how many positions remain unfilled but is still waiting to hear back on this request.

There was also talk about the use of technology, specifically speed cameras, as a non-racially biased way of doing traffic enforcement without relying on armed police officers. After four years of legislative work, in late 2023, AB 645 was finally signed into law¹³ by Governor Newsom.

It currently remains unclear how long LA DOT expects to take to develop its speed camera program, find a vendor to provide the cameras, train the needed personnel, identify possible locations, do the required community outreach, and install the first cameras. While not a lot is being publicly said by LA DOT, based on what little information has been shared, they likely won't start operations until the end of 2024 or later.

This essentially leaves the City of Los Angeles without any effective Vision Zero program and no tools to stem the rapidly deteriorating public health crisis on our roads. While one could argue that Vision Zero isn't actually dead, it's also hard to argue that it is still alive.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

These recommendations to solve a rising surge of traffic violence were first detailed in January of 2023. They are largely still correct today, with only a few changes. SAFE's four revised recommendations are:

¹² Fonseca, Ryan . "A Threat To Public Safety': LA'S Street Improvement Programs Are Severely Understaffed." *LAist*, 5 May 2022.

<https://laist.com/news/transportation/los-angeles-vision-zero-funding-public-safety-streets-traffic-deaths-ladot-staffing>

¹³ "Speed Safety Camera Bill AB 645 Signed Into Law!" *Streets Are For Everyone*, 17 Oct. 2023, www.streetsareforeveryone.org/blog/speed-safety-camera-bill-ab-645-signed-into-law.

- **Cut the Bureaucracy**

Treat the continuing increase in lives lost due to traffic collisions on the streets of Los Angeles as the public health crisis that it is. This means issuing a State of Emergency Declaration for Traffic Fatalities and Serious Injuries, forcing city departments to prioritize working together to address the spike in fatalities. This means fast-tracking hiring the personnel needed by LA DOT for road safety projects. It also means implementing speed cameras by Summer 2024, not at the end of 2024 or later.

- **Reestablish Vision Zero with Accountability, Transparency, and PURPOSE**

Vision Zero was launched in 2015 with a multi-agency Executive Steering Committee that included representatives from the LA Mayor's Office, LA DOT, LAPD, Bureau of Engineering, Streets LA, LAFD, Dept. of City Planning, and the LA County Dept. of Public Health. Per an LA DOT official, this larger Executive Steering Committee stopped regularly meeting in 2018 and has, at least from our perspective, been dissolved. Smaller subgroups, for example, meetings between LA DOT and LAPD, have continued.

The LA Mayor's Office needs to re-establish the Executive Steering Committee with accountability, transparency, and PURPOSE, not as just another bureaucratic meeting to waste people's time and taxpayer money. This means that:

- Community groups that work on road safety issues, like SAFE, need to have a voice at the table, be allowed to bring constructive criticism to the process and be allowed to bring community input to the very highest levels of the program.
- It means that the purpose of the Vision Zero Executive Steering Committee, to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries, needs to

be the first and foremost focus with regular reporting to, and direction given by, the LA City Mayor.

- It means that each City Councilmember needs to take an interest in Vision Zero as it relates to their district and the city as a whole and update their constituents on progress made, just as they do on the issue of homelessness.
- Lastly, it means that the Executive Steering Committee needs to be accountable to the people of Los Angeles with regular public quarterly reports on traffic fatalities and serious injuries by the council district, as well as the actions being taken on a short-term and long-term basis to prevent further trauma.

- **Prioritize Lives over the Right to Speed and Drive Drunk or High**

On 24 January 2024, the Chief of Police and Mayor of Los Angeles stated in a press conference that they would be devoting more officers to traffic enforcement¹⁴. This is a fine statement to make, but it's also well known that the LAPD has a large personnel gap¹⁵ and is not hiring officers at the rate needed to fill this gap. Simply put, they don't have the personnel needed to ramp up a concentrated effort on enforcement. Additionally, it is not clear to SAFE if the policies and procedures that encouraged racially biased traffic

enforcement have been properly and fully addressed. While putting some officers on traffic enforcement might be the quick and easy solution, we don't recommend relying on LAPD enforcement as the only solution to LA's

¹⁴ "Los Angeles Had More Traffic Deaths than Homicides in 2023." *Spectrum 1*, 24 Jan. 2024, spectrumnews1.com/ca/la-west/news/2024/01/24/los-angeles-had-more-traffic-deaths-than-homicides-in-2023?cid=id-app15_m-share_s-web_cmp-app_launch_august2020_c-producer_posts_po-organicc.

¹⁵ Joe N. "Southern California Law Agencies Still Stuck in a Staffing Crisis." *OC Register*, 14 May 2023, www.ocregister.com/2023/05/14/southern-california-law-enforcement-agencies-still-in-grips-of-staffing-crisis/.

traffic violence. Instead, we must:

- Implement the new speed camera law by Summer 2024, not at the end of 2024 or later. While this does need to be fast-tracked, it also needs to be done with proper outreach to the communities where cameras could be placed to ensure they are actually wanted there. A limited number of camera systems are allowed as part of this new pilot law. There's no reason to place a speed camera in a location that's not wanted by a majority of community members in that area.
- Review LAPD traffic enforcement procedures and policies to ensure that all those that encouraged racially biased traffic enforcement have been properly and fully eradicated. Some of these changes, like no longer allowing pretextual stops, have already been implemented. There might be other changes needed. With updated procedures and training completed for those officers doing traffic enforcement, reimplement traffic enforcement fairly and equitably, ensuring it is focused on the most dangerous roads.
- Demand that hit-and-run crimes are prosecuted to the full extent of the law, not just jumping to courtroom plea deals with minimal penalties. Get the word out about the tougher penalties for hit-and-runs on media lines for every prosecution. Make people think twice about hitting and running from the scene of a collision, even if they are drunk or high on drugs.
- Reform the red light camera law so it can be implemented equitably, correctly, and justly, none of which is possible with the current law's language. Any changes to this law should align with the IIHS

checklist¹⁶ on implementing automated enforcement technologies. This will require legislation, but we need to start now.

This doesn't mean the city can't continue exploring non-armed solutions, but lives are being lost right now, and the city is already experiencing a budget shortfall this year. We can't wait another three more years for funding and the slow gears of bureaucracy on this subject to turn.

- **Get Real About the Magnitude of the Problem**

Throwing only \$50.6 million at road safety issues in a city this big, especially considering how many lives are being lost, is a joke. Mayor Bass and the LA City Council need to:

- Provide LA DOT with the personnel needed to honestly implement Vision Zero and related programs at the magnitude needed to start making a difference. Don't cut these jobs because the city has a budget shortfall. See point A above.
- After LA DOT has sufficient personnel, LA City Council needs to 4X the funding for Vision Zero and related programs in 2025 and commit to increased funding for at least the next ten years.
- Support Measure HLA, requiring the City of LA to adhere to its own Mobility 2035¹⁷ plan. Mobility 2035 was another grand plan to improve mobility in LA and make it safer for all road users. It was passed unanimously by the LA City Council in 2015. Still, between individual council members deciding not to follow it and a lack of funding, only

¹⁶ "AUTOMATED ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM CHECKLIST For Red Light Cameras and Automated Speed Enforcement." <https://www.iihs.org/>, 6 May 2021, www.iihs.org/media/431e551b-3f64-4591-8e30-ad35a069f41f/cF4n4g/News/2021/050621%20auto%20enforcement/AE-checklist-May-2021.pdf.

¹⁷ "Mobility Plan 2035 An Element of the General Plan." <https://Planning.Lacity.Gov/>, 23 Jun. 2016, planning.lacity.gov/odocument/523f2a95-9d72-41d7-aba5-1972f84c1d36/Mobility_Plan_2035.pdf.

5% of the road safety improvements¹⁸ detailed in Mobility 2035 have been implemented.

These four action items are broad strokes and must translate to thousands of individual improvements and changes at the street level to stem the flow of blood on our streets due to traffic violence. I close this report with the same question I opened it with, **“How many more Angelenos need to die before we, as a collective city, start treating traffic violence with the urgency it deserves?”**

We will know the answer from our elected officials very soon, not by words but by real and tangible actions.

To Mayor Bass and our City Councilmembers: the ball is still in your court.

¹⁸ "Yes on HLA." <https://Yesonhla.Com/>, yesonhla.com/.