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# Vision Zero: How It Works, How We Got Here

by Carolyn Szczepanski

Originally published for the Vision Zero Network at [visionzeronetwork.org/](http://visionzeronetwork.org/)

Back in December, the District released its Vision Zero Plan of Action, a detailed set of nearly 70 specific actions, including legislative and regulatory changes, with the explicit goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2024. Thanks to community input, advocacy engagement and deep buy-in from all corners of city government, the Plan makes clear that D.C. isn't just committed in words, but is taking action to shift the status quo.



That didn't happen overnight. WABA has been following Vision Zero for years and making the case for adoption in D.C. since 2014.

“It took a couple of years to get the conversation to a point that, when we had a major leadership change last year, Vision Zero could be part of that dialogue,” said Greg Billing, WABA’s Executive Director. “When Muriel Bowser was elected, her major transportation priority was Vision Zero; it was a key element of what she wanted to do as mayor. So we felt very confident that something was going to happen in the new administration.”

It was true. In March 2015, Bowser made a public commitment to Vision Zero in her new capacity as Mayor—and her administration got to work. Like many cities, the Department of Transportation (DDOT) took the lead in advancing the new initiative. But, moving beyond the norm, DDOT significantly widened the conversation beyond the traditional circle of transportation stakeholders.

“We decided to have a broad call to action among a lot of different agencies, many of which might not have been involved with traffic safety before,” said Sam Zimbabwe, Associate Director of DDOT’s Policy, Planning and Sustainability Administration. “We started with internal working groups with District agency staff focused around the four Es [engineering, education, enforcement, evaluation] and then we added a data working group. These were all internal—no external stakeholders—and I think because of

that we were able to get the agencies to open up a bit more about what they’re able to do.”

While it took some time to get new stakeholders up to speed on the transportation landscape, once they got rolling, representative from all corners of D.C. government—from the Office of Disability Rights to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)—didn’t just buy-in to the concept, but also invested their time and resources to integrate Vision Zero into their day-to-day operations.

“A lot of the work was describing the goal of Vision Zero, which was a little bit of building the plane while we were flying it,” explained

Jonathan Rogers, a Transportation Management Specialist with DDOT who led the inter-agency discussions. “We were trying to illustrate how it was different from existing plans and initiatives and what was new about it. Then it was getting agencies to think about their captive audiences—who do they regulate or who are their customers? The Department of Motor Vehicles was a good example. They have a lot of residents in waiting rooms, waiting to get served. So we talked about educational videos, and got them to start playing those videos in their waiting rooms right away. Agencies were really creative and gave a lot of suggestions.”



The Vision Zero Plan is the work of and signed by 23 government agencies

In fact, for Rogers, one of the highlights of the Plan is a collaborative effort involving the Department of Public Works (DPW) and Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). For years, the MPD has operated nearly 100 speed

*continued on p. 3*



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Continued from p. 1

cameras and more than 40 stop light cameras to reduce dangerous driving behavior. But, because the tickets are issued to the vehicle rather than the driver—a parking violation, rather than a moving violation—many motorists can avoid paying the fines if their cars are registered in other jurisdictions and they don't get pulled over by the officers in the District. The Vision Zero Plan calls for both expanding MPD's photo enforcement capacity and also investing additional resources for the DPW to dramatically expand its efforts to boot and tow cars with multiple tickets.

"With stepped up enforcement, we're targeting those drivers who are habitual offenders with safety violations," Rogers said. "There are 230,000 vehicles on the list that have two unpaid violations; that's a lot people gaming the system with safety-related violations. With targeted enforcement, we can catch some of these dangerous



DDOT held 10 public events to gain insight on traffic perceptions and concerns.

drivers."

Externally, DDOT took steps to get wide public buy-in, as well. During the summer, they hosted 10 community events in all areas of the city, raising the profile of Vision Zero and soliciting residents' top concerns around traffic safety. Based on more than 2,700 survey responses, District residents overwhelmingly agreed that speeding and distracted driving were the most pressing problems. That public consensus elevated the urgency to change the status quo within the District government and helped to direct the priorities of the Plan.

"We found that 45% of people know somebody who's been killed or



seriously injured in a crash," Zimbabwe said. "That's really powerful."

Following the lead of New York City, DDOT also crowd-sourced public input through an interactive, online Safety Map. As of November 2015, the map had captured nearly 2,400 concerns from people walking, 1,330 concerns from people biking, and 680

from people driving. It also signaled the District's commitment to integrate public input and become more transparent and effective with its data collection and dissemination.

"Early in the Action Plan, we show all the crashes over the past five years, and it paints the whole street grid," Rogers added. "It showed that Vision Zero isn't for one mode or one neighborhood. It's for everyone in the District."

Still, while the Vision Zero efforts address all road users, the Action Plan highlights the disproportionate impact of traffic crashes on people who walk or bike. Those walking and bicycling, the Plan points out, accounted for nearly half of all fatalities between 2010 and 2014—vastly higher than their representation on the streets. While not directly connected to the Action Plan, the Vision Zero progress was also influenced by a Bike/Ped Working Group convened by the City Council. That group included advocates like Billing, but it went beyond organizations like WABA. It also included the Amalgamated Transit Union, AAA and representatives from insurance agencies.

"We discussed 70 different proposals and got to 25 or 30 consensus items," Billing recalled. "It was challenging to reach consensus on everything. For instance, we couldn't get consensus on lowering speed limits in the city—but the Vision Zero Plan addresses that, piloting 25 mile-per-hour arterial safe zones and safe neighborhood slow zones to 20 mph. So it was nice to have that discussion happening on the legislative side and the Vision Zero planning on the administration side."

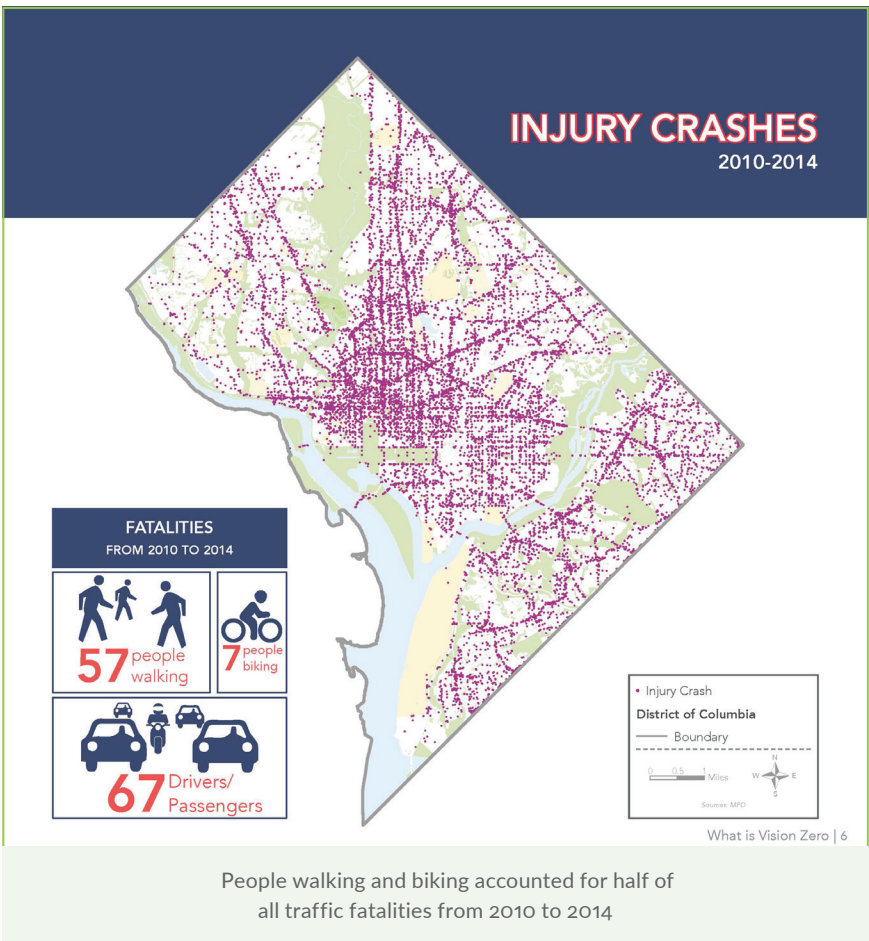
The Action Plan encompasses both: prioritizing culture changes in DDOT and other departments, but also elevating legislative changes. For instance, the Plan includes the Vision Zero Enforcement Act, which would institute a Complete Streets law, and strengthen impaired and distracted driving rules. On the regulatory side, the Plan supports increased fines for dangerous driving, including \$1,000 for driving more than 25 mph over the speed limit (up from \$300) and \$500 for striking a bicyclist (up from \$50).

"The legislation and regulatory changes were important so we have more buy-in than just us on the executive side," Zimbabwe said.

Before the Action Plan was released, DDOT convened two review sessions for advocacy groups and advisory bodies to provide feedback on the draft. "And they pushed us to make it more ambitious in places," Rogers said. The result: A detailed plan with deep evaluation of the data and strategies implemented thus far—and nearly 70 specific actions centered on four key themes:

### 1. Creating Safe Streets

Stating clearly that "streets should be designed for all users and need to be built to account for inevitable human errors," the Plan doesn't just focus on infrastructure improvements, including protected intersections, but also develops a Risk Analysis Model. The new model represents a significant departure from the status quo, shifting from deploying resources to a dangerous area after a crash has occurred to proactively directing limited resources to areas that have high risk factors—and fix safety issues before lives are lost.



### 2. Protecting Vulnerable Users

Recognizing that "younger and older people, people biking, people walking, and people with disabilities are all more vulnerable to serious traffic injuries and fatalities" the Plan includes a wealth of infrastructure improvements, including filling at least 40 blocks of sidewalk gaps, upgrading bus stops and enhancing police enforcement of "improper U-turns through bicycle facilities, parking in/blocking bike lanes, improperly entering mixing zones, dooring, and failure to observe three-foot passing law."

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# Quick Updates: Regional Trail Projects

## *The Anacostia Riverwalk Trail—Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens Segment*

**Location:** Washington, D.C.

**Brief Explanation:** Construction of the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens Segment is in full swing, and expected to be completed by this fall. This 4-mile segment fills a gap from Benning Road to the Bladensburg Waterfront, completing an almost 70-mile network of bicycle and pedestrian trails on the Anacostia River and its tributaries. It includes boardwalk sections that meander around trees and wetlands in the Aquatic Gardens and other National Park lands.

As it passes through the Mayfair and Parkside communities, the trail travels on widened sidewalks and protected bike lanes, linking these neighborhoods to more than 40 miles of trail, numerous schools, businesses, libraries, museums, shopping centers and transit stations.

**Current Status:** The protected bike lane is one of the first to be developed in Ward 7, and it is nearly completed. Extensive public outreach was done during the years of planning from 2004 to 2014.

**Action to take:** Residents of Ward 7 who want more safe places to walk and bike in their neighborhoods should contact their government officials at DDOT and the City Council to speak up in favor this and future projects.

## *Purple Line and the Capital Crescent Trail*

**Location:** Montgomery County, MD

**Brief Explanation:** WABA has been working for more than two decades on making the vision of a seamless trail from Georgetown to Silver Spring a reality. The Purple Line will make substantial improvements to a portion of that route, transforming the Georgetown Branch Trail segment into a safe, viable transportation and recreation connection between two of the county’s hubs of activity (Bethesda and Silver Spring).

**Current Status:** Maryland’s Board of Public Works approved a contract for a team of companies to build, operate and maintain the Purple Line, a 16-mile transit line that will link the Red, Green, and Orange lines in the Maryland suburbs. We will continue to track progress on the development of the trail, and will keep you informed along the way.

## *Metropolitan Branch Trail*

**Location:** Washington, D.C. & Montgomery County, MD

**Brief Explanation:** When completed, the MBT will be a 8-mile multi-use trail from Union Station in the District to Silver Spring, MD. The finished segment we have today is the result of more than 25 years of steadfast effort from committed residents, advocates, and planners through a lengthy public process. But we aren’t there quite yet.

**Current Status:** There are two segments that MCDOT is currently engaged in. From the Maryland line to the Silver Spring Transit Center, the designs look good, with one exception: the B&O train station just off of Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring. The nonprofit that controls this site, continues to reject proposed solutions and compromise design alternatives, despite the County’s attempts to compensate them for the space the trail requires.

**Action to Take:** Sign up to receive updates and action alerts from WABA about the Met Branch Trail at [waba.org/mbt](http://waba.org/mbt)

## *Rock Creek Park Trail*

**Location:** Washington, D.C.

**Brief Explanation:** The Rock Creek Park Trail is in deplorable condition. Since 2014 when 2,500 WABA members and supporters signed a petition demanding action to rehabilitate the trail, a lot of work has been done. Over the next three years, the trail and Beach Drive will be completely reconstructed and improved.

**Current Status:** The funding is allocated, the engineering designs are complete and construction contracts are issued. We anticipate construction starting any day now. Beach Drive will be fully rebuilt and repaved over the next three years. It will be a long construction project but the road and trail will a last another 50 years.

## *Washington Baltimore and Annapolis Trail*

**Location:** Prince George's County, MD

**Brief Explanation:** The Washington Baltimore & Annapolis trail (WB&A) is a paved multi-use trail that runs from Maryland Route 450 in Prince George’s County to the Patuxent River at the border of Prince George’s and Anne Arundel Counties. Efforts are underway to extend the WB&A trail

north-eastward over the Patuxent River and toward the Thurgood Marshall Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

**Current Status:** WABA released a report that provides a preliminary analysis of extending the current WB&A trail in the opposite direction: southwestward to connect with the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail (ART) at the Washington, D.C. border. Extending the WB&A trail to the ART at the Maryland/Washington D.C. border would provide analogous trail connectivity for a large area of central Prince George’s County serving residents and visitors.



## Also, this is REALLY cool:

The National Park Service National Capital Region recently released its Paved Trails Study.

It’s a long document with more than a hundred recommendations that range from major capital projects like new bridges and trail connections to programmatic changes like clearing snow from important commuter trails and developing better, more unified systems for measuring trail use.

Look for a more thorough analysis from WABA soon, but in the meantime you can read the document yourself at [parkplanning.nps.gov/NCRtrailplan](http://parkplanning.nps.gov/NCRtrailplan)

A portion of our Trails Advocacy is funded by a generous grant from





Continued from p. 3

3. Preventing Dangerous Driving

Noting that “speeding was the top concern of people during public engagement events,” the Plan pilot “safe zone” projects that will reduce traffic speeds to 25 mile-per-hour on select arterial roads and 20 miles-per-hour on neighborhood streets.

4. Being Transparent and Responsive:

While acknowledging the complex landscape of agencies and sources of information, the Plan “commits to improve the District’s collection, analysis, and transparency of data for the collective benefit of all stakeholders,” including establishing one public location for all crash and safety data on the Vision Zero website and making that data available in a format that makes it easy for folks outside the government—advocates and citizens—to analyze the numbers, as well.

On the advocacy side, WABA is building community support for the Plan with four upcoming safety audits and four neighborhood workshops around the District. They’re also organizing a Vision Zero Summit for D.C. in 2016 to elevate the leadership of the District government, assess progress thus far and get surrounding jurisdictions involved.

“D.C. had 26 traffic fatalities last year. While that is too many, the region as a whole has hundreds of fatalities,” Billings said. “About 425 people die on the region’s streets each year. 25% of these are people biking or walking. The summit will call on the whole region to take this on as an issue.” ■

WABA’s Vision Zero  
Community Outreach



Funded By D.C.BR!

D.C. Bike Ride (D.C.BR) and WABA are geared up to work across all District of Columbia communities. Proceeds from the ride will fund WABA’s work as a leading partner in D.C.’s Vision Zero Campaign. These critical funds will allow for dedicated advocacy and community outreach work to raise the profile, reach, and effectiveness of the city’s eight-year initiative to put an end to traffic deaths and serious injuries.

Special Programs

We’re watching Vision Zero play out in major cities across the country, and it’s clear D.C. is missing a vital piece: community engagement. We can’t design a comprehensive campaign to change traffic safety culture without involving and empowering people. D.C.BR funding will enable us to design and implement the necessary community outreach surrounding Vision Zero, and activate all eight wards.

**Families for Vision Zero Summit:**  
We’ll bring together D.C.’s residents, experts, and the press for a series of presentations, a panel discussion, and facilitated town hall meeting with emphasis on engaging community groups.

**Neighborhood Street Safety Audits:**  
To equip families with the information and tools to redesign the streets that shapes their lives the most—those surrounding their homes—we’ll build partnerships with four neighborhoods to define what makes streets safe, identify what projects need to be carried out, and form a plan of action to work with DDOT and partner agencies. We’ll select the neighborhoods based on areas of greatest need.

**Towards Safe Streets Workshops:**  
We’ll host interactive public workshops similar to the safety audits, except geared toward a geographically broader audience.

**Deanwood Family Bike Block Party:**  
To build momentum and host a family-centric bike celebration that connects people to Vision Zero, we’ll host a block party in Deanwood, D.C. that will serve as the culminating event of our workshops and audits. We’ll partner with the established local rides, coordinate kids games and a mobile bike shop for free bike repair, and provide interactive activities for all ages. ■

Thanks to the organizers of D.C. Bike Ride for supporting this work!

Vision Zero Region-wide:

**Montgomery County:** The Montgomery County Council has introduced a resolution in support of Vision Zero. Members of the Council held a press conference on January 19th to announce their support for the program.

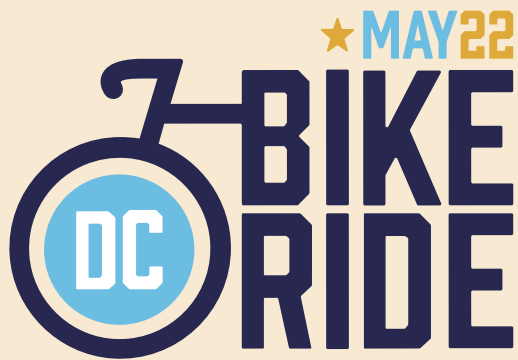
The next step is for the Council to set a target year for achieving Vision Zero, which is necessary to keep up the pressure and urgency this issue deserves.

2015 was an especially tragic year for road users in Montgomery County. Frank Towers died on his new bike crossing Veirs Mill Road on the Matthew Henson Trail. In Bethesda, Tim Holden was struck and killed by a driver while on his morning ride. And Montgomery County Police Officer Noah Leotta

was killed by drunk driver during a traffic stop. In total, more than 80 people died in traffic crashes on Montgomery County streets in 2015.

**Alexandria:** The Alexandria City Council adopted Vision Zero on April 28th as part of an update to its transportation master plan. We look forward to working with city officials as they develops and implements a Vision Zero plan.

**Fairfax, Arlington and Prince George's counties** do not have Vision Zero commitments yet. WABA will work to get the entire region committed to Vision Zero in the next few years. If you’d like to get involved, visit [waba.org/visionzero](http://waba.org/visionzero)





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As WABA reflects on our success in the last decade, we owe a hearty thank you to our partners at Signal Financial FCU.

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Signal Financial's support for biking also includes outreach events and promote bike confidence-boosting tips and tricks among their members.

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**City Explorers Camp** will focus on route creation, group riding, and longer rides.

Campers will ride every day (weather dependent), and as much as 20 miles per day!

Campers will bike to different field trips and volunteer opportunities across the city.

This camp will include at least one session of basic bike maintenance with Gearin' Up Bicycles.

This is a great camp for campers who want to see the city, visit new places, and help the community.

*July 18 – July 29 | Ages 10 – 14*

**Bike Build Camp** will focus on mechanics training and mastery of bike parts. Campers will build a bike from the frame up under the guidance of Gearin' Up Bicycles.

Campers will have the opportunity to go on multiple shorter rides during the session.

This camp will include at least one hands-on visit to a local bike shop maintenance department.

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