



Office of the Deputy City Administrator
Priya Dhanapal
Public Works

Priya.Dhanapal@portlandoregon.gov
1120 SW 5th Avenue
Portland, OR 97204
Portland.oov

November 4th, 2024

Dear Auditor Rede and staff,

Thank you for completing the review of Portland's Vision Zero Two-Year Update (2019), which outlined traffic safety work commitments for 2019-2021.

The City of Portland adopted Vision Zero in 2015, which is the goal to eliminate deadly and serious injury traffic crashes. Embedded in this commitment is the belief that no person should die or be incapacitated from simply going about their day. Protecting human lives is core to our work.

As the operator of streets in Portland, PBOT has an outsized responsibility to design, build and maintain safe streets. Through a Safe System approach to traffic safety, PBOT aims to design and maintain streets that protect people, slow driving speeds, and uplift a culture of shared responsibility for safety.

City Council adopted Portland's original Vision Zero Action Plan in 2016. Since then, PBOT has undertaken two updates to the plan, one in 2019, which is the focus of this audit, and another in 2023. Where we have been able to invest in street design changes, we are seeing safety gains. The Vision Zero Action Plan 2023-2025 Update guides the current priorities and investments of the Vision Zero program. PBOT is implementing initiatives from this action plan that address specific recommendations in the audit:

1. PBOT is consistently completing evaluations for significant safety projects and is committed to doing annual reviews of the findings with leadership to inform safety work. We began using an updated consistent methodology for High Crash Network projects in 2023.
2. In collaboration with our partners at Portland Police Bureau, we have continued to run the camera program and expanded to 37 cameras that are either operating or in construction. Implementation under the current contract is nearing completion.
3. PBOT uses both quantitative and qualitative data and tools to support our commitments to racial equity and climate justice, this results in prioritization large- and small-scale infrastructure projects that are both on and off of the High Crash Network.

Eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries in Portland is possible. PBOT can lead the way by significantly changing the design of Portland's most deadly streets, slowing driving speeds, reducing speed limits, and encouraging safe behavior by people in the right of way.

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However, Portland will not reach Vision Zero with street design alone. Achieving our safety goal requires collaboration and commitment from many partners. The crash data clearly indicates that societal issues related to housing, behavioral health, substance abuse, and a culture focused on the individual are factors contributing to deadly and serious traffic crashes. People experiencing houselessness do not have refuge from persistent exposure to traffic. People traveling impaired put themselves and others at risk on the road. Extreme behavior and disregard for others using the streets has become more commonplace.

A societal commitment to meet basic human needs and implement strategies to change current conditions are necessary to reach many of our shared goals, including Vision Zero. These changes require leadership, investment, and commitment from partners beyond PBOT.

Eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries is a City commitment and goal, but as a City we have focused the discussion on what PBOT does to change streets. We believe the City transition provides an opportunity to reengage City bureaus in Portland's Vision Zero commitment and integrate the Safe System approach to traffic safety as a comprehensive prevention strategy to save lives.

We appreciate your assessment and the time you have spent with PBOT staff in analyzing our Portland Vision Zero Two-Year Update (2019). We will continue to advance evaluations to ensure projects achieve safety outcomes, expand Portland's traffic safety camera program, and use diverse data sets to understand and respond to community needs.

Sincerely,

Priya Dhanapal
Deputy City Administrator
Public Works Service Area
City Administrator's Office, City of Portland

Millicent Williams
Director
Portland Bureau of Transportation
City of Portland



Office of the Deputy City Administrator
 Priya Dhanapal
 Public Works

Priya.Dhanapal@portlandoregon.gov
 1120 SW 5th Avenue
 Portland, OR 97204
 Portland gov

DATE: November 5th, 2024

TO: City Auditor Simone Rede

FROM: Priya Dhanapal, Deputy City Administrator of Public Works
 Millicent Williams, Director of Portland Bureau of Transportation

SUBJECT: Response to Vision Zero audit

This letter provides a written response to recommendations from the audit “Vision Zero: Portland Bureau of Transportation needs to systematically evaluate whether its safety projects reduce traffic deaths and serious injury crashes.”

PBOT largely agreed with the recommendations in the audit. We have taken many additional actions since the Vision Zero Action Plan Two Year Update in 2019 which address the issues raised in the audit. Our current Vision Zero Action Plan includes priorities directly tied to evaluation, delivery of the camera program and speed management as well as equity objectives. The audit was conducted on work and commitments outlined 3-5 years ago and work that took place during the peak of the COVID 19 pandemic.

The notes below summarize the current work related to each of the audit recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1	
<p>Create a plan that ties safety projects to expected outcomes to determine which get the desired outcomes and where Vision Zero efforts are most needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Plan should lay out systematic evaluation and continuous monitoring of completed safety projects. b. Results of evaluations should be used to assess effectiveness of project and if any alterations, in design or funding, should be implemented. 	
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities

Agree	Consistent project evaluations began in 2023, activities are underway and continuous
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Narrative for Recommendation 1

City Council adopted Portland’s original Vision Zero Action Plan in 2016. Since then, PBOT has undertaken two updates to the Vision Zero Action Plan, one in 2019 and another in 2023. This audit is a review of the 2019 update. The 2023 update reflects the progress we’ve made and the challenges we’ve faced in the seven years since city council adopted the original Vision Zero Action Plan. It sets the course for our work through 2025 and is directly tied to where PBOT can have the most impact on safety outcomes with available resources.

In the [Vision Zero Action Plan 2023-25 Update](#) we have two specific actions that are aligned with Recommendation 1 in the audit:

- Action 20: Develop project evaluation guide to support consistent PBOT safety evaluations of corridor projects on streets in the High Crash Network.
- Action 21: Evaluate all significant corridor projects on streets in the High Crash Network. Define roles and responsibilities for project development and delivery.

In 2022 and 2023, PBOT developed methodology and guidelines to ensure consistency in project evaluations. In 2023, the bureau started systematic evaluations of all significant projects on the High Crash Network. Many evaluations are [publicly available on Portland’s Vision Zero website](#).

Results of evaluations are discussed in project development, planning and maintenance prioritization and work planning. However, we do see an opportunity to discuss the findings of project evaluations wholistically to better inform annual and long-term investment strategies. In 2025, PBOT will begin an annual review of evaluation trends with Bureau leadership to inform future project development and any needed reinvestment in past project areas.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Install promised speed cameras using prior contract experience and established partnership with Portland Police Bureau to fully utilize speed cameras as tools that support safety. Implementation should also include more equitable educational opportunities and alternative outcomes for violators.

Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities
Agree	Activities are underway and continuous; current contracted cameras will be completed in early 2025

Narrative for Recommendation 2

We acknowledge that camera deployment has been slower than is desirable to support our safety outcomes. Even with numerous challenges, we have 37 cameras in operation or in construction.

Cameras are deployed through an agreement with a vendor. Our current vendor has struggled to provide the level of service that is outlined in the contract. Equipment has consistently been delayed and cameras have had back-end technical issues that have taken long periods to fix and become operational. To further enhance capacity, we are actively pursuing an additional vendor to streamline implementation, increase the number of cameras in operation, and provide flexibility if one vendor fails to perform.

PBOT has restructured program staffing and has created a position and hired a new program manager in August 2024 to support operations and expansion. This new dedicated manager will provide much needed capacity to advance the program.

Citing cameras in a busy and complicated right of way takes many months. For example, cameras need to be integrated with signal electrical boxes or have their own new power source. To build the base for the poles that cameras attach to, we need to cut into the pedestrian realm and have a traffic control plan for the construction – both of which are disruptive. Once cameras are in, we have seen an increase in knock downs, vandalism and neighborhood concerns about flashing and placement. Each one of these issues means we are working to establish cameras and get/keep them working multiple times for each location. As an example, we had a camera at new location that was been knocked down twice before it was even operational. This meant that for one location we had three construction cycles. With the additional, internal and external capacity summarized above, we are better positioned to address these challenges in the right of way.

Over the past year, PBOT and PPB have made it easier for people to access either low or no cost access to the traffic safety class which is available for first time offenders. People that have received a citation for the first time can opt to take a traffic safety class with a reduced cost and no impact on their driving record. For low-income people, there is a simple option to share proof of participation in any income assistance program for further reduced or no cost class.

PBOT will continue to research best practices for additional low-cost or non-punitive options for violators which prioritize education around the impact and dangers of speeding and disregarding signals.

RECOMMENDATION 3	
Ensure it accounts for other data sources that could help identify smaller-scale improvements that could have positive equity impacts.	
Agree or Disagree with Recommendation	Target date to complete implementation activities
Agree	Activities are underway and continuous

Narrative for Recommendation 3

PBOT assesses many sources of information to support equitable safety outcomes for people in Portland. We use both qualitative and quantitative data to inform safety investments. Below we have included some examples of work that provide opportunities to identify smaller scale improvements and sources of information that help us invest in ways that center racial equity and climate justice.

In 2023, PBOT conducted an analysis of the ten street segments on the High Crash Network that had the highest equity matrix scores and the highest number of Vision Zero traffic crashes. Through this analysis, staff detailed the contributing factors and the travel movements that led to each serious crash in the segment and identified low-cost interventions. The result is a list of more than 250 low-cost safety treatments that PBOT is delivering over the course of several years to target investments in communities where it's needed the most.

Over the last year, the Vision Zero team has restructured the work plan of a team member to focus on outreach, education, and support of communities disproportionately impacted in fatal traffic crashes. Currently this includes Portlanders and visitors who are:

- Unhoused/homeless
- Black
- Indigenous

With added capacity for outreach, the Vision Zero team can combine traffic safety data with direct community input to understand neighborhood level safety needs.

In 2023-24, PBOT's Vision Zero team partnered with two community organizations to develop a report titled, Beyond Traffic Safety: Building Community Belonging and Safety in Public

Spaces. The report documents community members' experiences and reflections on what personal safety means to them and ways government agencies and community-based organizations can engage to make public spaces safer. Link to more information on [Beyond Traffic Safety](#). This body of work supports a more wholistic view of safety for community and shines a light on small scale projects and/or programs that can be done in combination with large scale corridor work.

Opportunities for small scale projects that have positive equity impacts are also identified through other PBOT programs such as Safe Routes to School, 823-SAFE, Ramps by Request, Pedestrian Network Completion, and neighborhood-based planning efforts. These programs coordinate with Vision Zero to ensure we are addressing opportunities at all scales and on all types of streets to make safety investments.

Please contact: Dana Dickman, Safe System Section Manager at dana.dickman@portlandoregon.gov with any questions.

COPY:

Mayor, Ted Wheeler

City Administrator, Michael Jordan

Deputy City Administrator, Jonas Biery

Deputy City Administrator, Sara Morrisey

Deputy City Administrator, Mike Myers

Deputy City Administrator, Donnie Oliveira

Deputy City Administrator, Sonia Schmanski

Deputy Director - Planning, Projects and Programs, Art Pearce

Deputy Director – Transportation Operations, Wendy Cawley

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KC Jones, Director Audit Services

Bob MacKay, Senior Performance Auditor