

Mayor Ted Wheeler
Prepared Remarks for Press Conference on Emergency Declaration
February 4, 2021

Effective immediately, I am issuing an Emergency Declaration to Prohibit Camping within High Crash Transportation Corridors in the city of Portland.

This is the first in a series of Mayoral actions that I plan to take to speed the City's recovery on a number of important issues.

Today, my focus is on an Emergency Declaration to prohibit camping in freeway and high crash corridors, effective immediately.

This past Wednesday, the Portland Bureau of Transportation released its 'Vision Zero' Traffic Crash Report for 2021. It tells a heartbreaking story.

63 individuals tragically lost their lives in traffic-related crashes in 2021.

That's the highest total in more than three decades.

Traffic-related deaths have increased each year since 2018.

As Mayor, I oversee the City's Impact Reduction Program, which is responsible for cleaning up unauthorized houseless camps on lands owned by either the City of Portland or the Oregon Department of Transportation.

In reviewing PBOT's report, I was keenly interested in how our houseless community—some of our most vulnerable residents—might be impacted by traffic-related deaths.

In total, 70% of our pedestrian fatalities involved an individual experiencing houselessness.

Our most vulnerable Portlanders are disproportionately affected by traffic-related injuries and death.

These are devastating losses of life. These are our neighbors, our sons, our daughters. They are our community.

We have continuously witnessed unsanctioned camping in clearly unsafe locations, sometimes jarringly close to roads and freeways.

You don't need to be a traffic engineer to sense that's not safe...

Now the traffic engineers confirm our instincts:

Of the 27 traffic deaths that involved a pedestrian, 70% involved an individual experiencing houselessness.

The findings from Vision Zero make one element easy to understand: we can no longer justify allowing our most vulnerable community members to be exposed to the dangers of camping in freeway and high crash corridors.

This emergency order does three things:

1. Prohibits camping along high-speed corridors.
2. Prioritizes the work of the Impact Reduction Team to post and remove camps in these areas.
3. It enables them to keep these sites free of camping with no right of return.

This order goes into effect at 3:00 today.

In the meantime, we will continue building on the good work underway by commissioner Dan Ryan with the Safe Rest Villages to fully realize his vision.

We will implement our partnership with Multnomah County to offer a safer alternative to camping in dangerous, high crash transportation corridors, and to help prevent the need for campers to set up other unsanctioned camps in new locations

While these efforts will modestly expand temporary shelter access with local and regional resources, we also need Oregon's Governor and State Legislature to prioritize funding statewide to address homelessness to provide for more shelter.

Portland is by no means the only city in Oregon facing this crisis; it's only the highest profile example.

The state must support Oregon cities and counties that are on the front line of saving lives, reducing conflict, and helping those who are in desperate need of additional housing.

I look forward to meeting with my fellow Oregon mayors from cities large and small to figure out how together we can get more help from State government.

I won't wait to act. As mayor I will use my executive authority to move us in the right direction in strategic ways like this emergency declaration.

There will be more to come.

Additional actions will improve the coordination of services to the unsheltered. They will improve the City's system for cleaning up Portland and keeping it that way to help address other key challenges that we face.

That's the end of my prepared remarks today, but it marks the beginning of my team's redoubled efforts to lead us to shared public safety and prosperity.