

A community group dedicated to biking in Santa Monica and Climate Action Santa Monica. Working to make the City of Santa Monica a more sustainable, bikeable place to live, work and play.



May 9, 2017

Dear Mayor, City Council, City management and staff

With the number of crashes involving fatalities or serious injuries nearing double digits in just the last few weeks — the time is now to make a strong commitment to Vision Zero and a true meaningful investment in safer streets.

Santa Monica is not suffering alone in the current increasing epidemic of serious injuries and traffic fatalities. Nationally, almost 40,000 people die each year in traffic collisions, numbers are up everywhere including in our neighbor, Los Angeles. Many cities, including Los Angeles, are adopting proactive and aggressive campaigns to address this crisis and have proposed dedicating substantial Measure M money for this purpose. We are a community in Santa Monica and need to work together to keep our residents and visitors safe. We must progress beyond words on a page and create a proactive, transparent system with dedicated funding and actions toward this effort, if we truly want to succeed in reducing preventable traffic fatalities and serious injuries. One's life should be not put at risk for walking or riding a bike, especially when we are encouraging people to walk and bike for daily life, our health, and the environment.

"Managing speed," a new report from The World Health Organization [1], notes that excessive or inappropriate speed contributes to 1 in 3 road traffic fatalities worldwide. "Measures to address speed prevent road traffic deaths and injuries, make populations healthier, and cities more sustainable."

Speed increases the severity of injuries and chances of fatality in traffic collisions. The chances of a dying when struck by a vehicle at 20mph = 5% but increases to 45% at 30mph and a chilling 85% at 40mph! Please reflect on that for a moment — consider that although our posted speed limits (attachment 1) should be relatively safe for walking and biking - possible and actual speeds are often at or above 40mph (studies indicate that typically 40–50% of drivers go over posted speed limits). Add to that distracted, ambivalent and aggressive driving, and it becomes very dangerous for people walking and biking.

This is not just an enforcement problem. Coordinated efforts involving community engagement, safety campaigns, roadway improvements and city policy must work hand-in-hand with sustained equitable enforcement. This epidemic of preventable loss of life extends far beyond the individual victims themselves and forever impacts the lives of family, friends and our community. We must emphasize our value of human life above all other factors.

In the 50's, traffic deaths, individual and totals were openly published in the daily newspaper. Our current tendency is to bury this data, which dehumanizes these preventable deaths and injuries making them so abstract as though they are someone else's problem. They are our problem. With collaboration and openness and outreach we can begin to again humanize this growing epidemic and actively begin to implement real solutions.

With the 2 year budget soon to be approved, the time is now to demonstrate true leadership and real investment in the safety for our community with Vision Zero. As we lead the charge to reduce preventable traffic fatalities to zero in 10 years it will require transparency, leadership and real investment in the form of funding for dedicated staffing and coordinated safety infrastructure improvements. Vision Zero must be an

inter-agency collaboration that builds sustained leadership between elected leaders, City management, staff, city departments and agencies and the community.

It is essential we hire full-time staff (pedestrian safety coordinator recommended in the adopted Pedestrian Action Plan,) to take lead and coordinate Vision Zero and to fund improved safety infrastructure, like separated bike lanes, better crosswalks, and safer sidewalks. Changes in practice must institutionalize, catalyzed and guided with staff effort and focus. It is imperative that we use a data-driven process to implement strategies, evaluate our progress and institute adjustments as necessary. Los Angeles provides good examples with their recent Vision Zero Website (attachment 2). In addition to dedicated staff, outside consultants will likely be needed to assist in setting targets and identifying inter-departmental practices necessary for achieving meaningful success for Vision Zero.

Safe Routes to School works to encourage students to walk and bike to school - we know activity has been proven to increase overall health and learning. With an engaged active school like McKinley Elementary (top performer during the last 4 BikeIT WalkIT BusIT events) we can target improvements that serve many families. McKinley was identified as one of the most dangerous schools for Pedestrian Safety in California so funding in this corridor should be on the priority list. Let's create robust and connected safety corridors around all our schools. We must have dedicated staff to coordinate this effort.

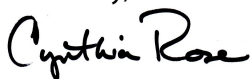
In addition to institutionalizing the creation of safer streets we should also be looking to adopt a robust Complete Streets policy and establish the long requested Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory committee that should include input on implementation of Vision Zero.

In Santa Monica we lead with initiatives like the Wellbeing Project that prioritizes human health and safety. In 1994, Santa Monica led with the Sustainability Plan that followed with the establishment of an Office of Sustainability and Environment and Sustainability Director (now Chief Sustainability Officer). Encouraging active transportation requires a Vision Zero policy and infrastructure that removes safety barriers to make it a viable choice for our community, and a staff framework to make safety real.

Santa Monica has a history of demonstrating leadership with commitment to the environment, reducing green house gas emissions, as the City encourages residents and visitors to use alternate modes of transportation like walking, biking and public transportation. With that there is also the obligation to keep us safe when we opt for these modes, whether out of necessity, for our health or for the planet. The climate benefits of bicycling and walking are significant and essential to confront our climate crisis. According to the Pacific Institute study, depending on one's diet, each mile bicycled reduces from 87% to 97% the CO2 emissions of driving. For every mile walked, there is a reduction of 77% to 95% of the CO2 emissions caused by driving. Getting out of the car to move about our community, however, to advance health and climate measures means little or nothing if safety is not also prioritized. As with sustainability, Santa Monica can lead on Vision Zero.

This letter is submitted on behalf of Santa Monica Spoke and Climate Action Santa Monica, Katherine King and Cris Gutierrez Co-Chairs

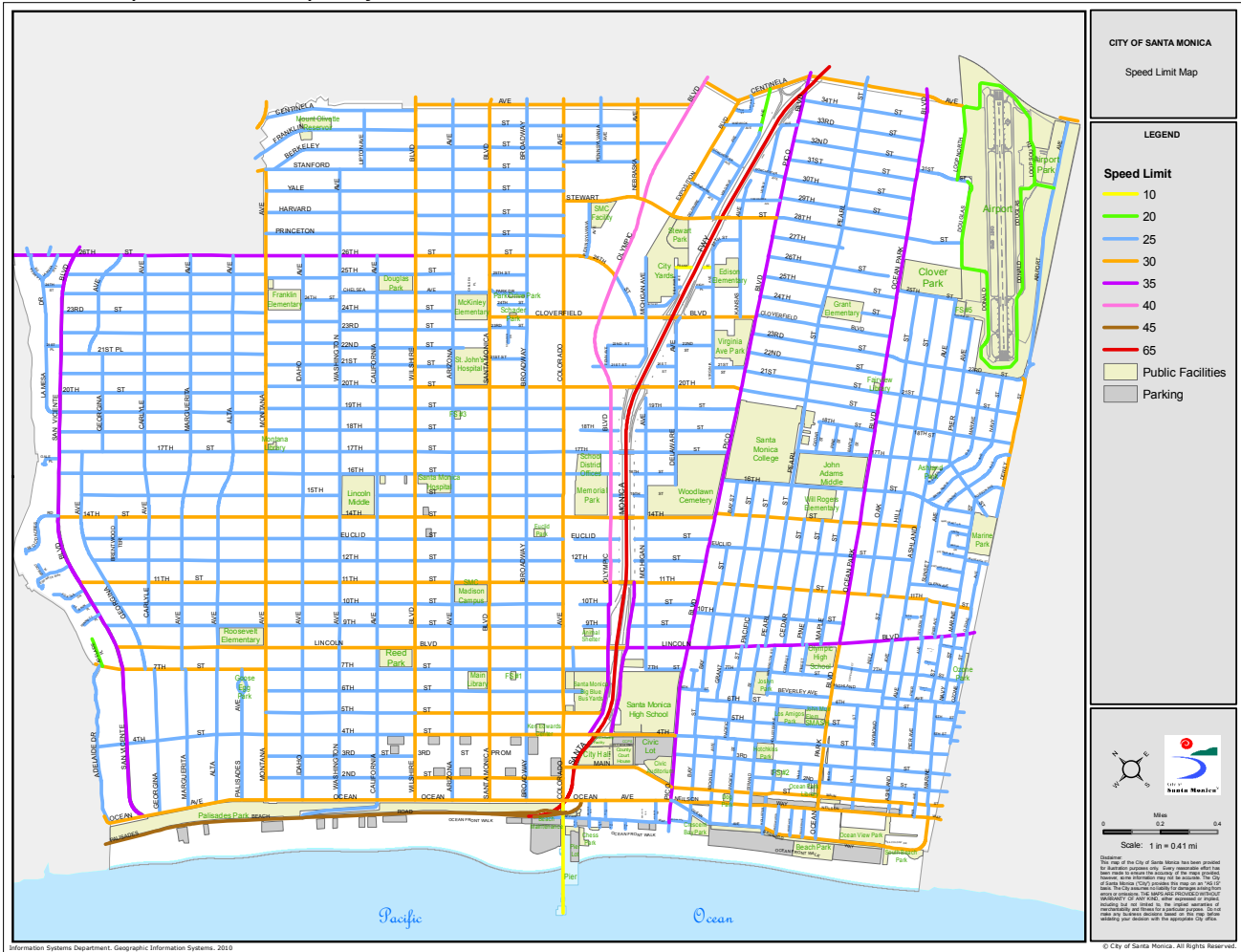
Sincerely,



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[1] Speed management key to saving lives, making cities more liveable  
 Attachment 1 - City of Santa Monica Speed Limit Map  
 Attachment 2 - LADOT Roadway Fatalities <http://visionzero.lacity.org/map/>

Attachment 1, Speed Limit Map City of Santa Monica



Attachment 2 Los Angeles Roadway fatalities Map

