

From: [Drew Dara-Abrams](#)
To: [Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft](#); [Malia Vella](#); [John Knox White](#); [Tony Daysog](#); [Trish Spencer](#)
Cc: [City Clerk](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] transportation safety on 12/7 council meeting agenda: 7-A, 7-B, 7-C, 7-D, 7-E
Date: Monday, December 6, 2021 10:56:17 AM
Attachments: [image.png](#)

Dear Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Councilmembers,

I am writing to strongly support adoption of the Vision Zero Action Plan and associated plans and budget for 2022 and beyond. I would also like to comment on how related items on tonight's agenda can concurrently improve the safety and quality of Alameda's transportation network:

7-A Vision Zero Action Plan and 2022 Budget

It's appropriate to see the VZ Action Plan paired together with a concrete set of projects and budget proposed for 2022. I hope you all will vote to pass both resolutions tonight.

Getting to the true safety of "zero" deaths and serious injuries on Alameda's roads may take years and effort — as represented by the target date of 2035 — but rapidly reducing risks for everyone by redesigning infrastructure and making related policy and programmatic changes is within reach in the next handful of years.

Bad news about traffic safety in Alameda is there are so many physical design features, city policies, and behaviors by all of us that lead to potentially dangerous driving. This is also the good news: there are many "levers" the city and residents can all choose to use to lower the chances of deaths and serious injuries on our streets.

Thanks to diligent work by city staff and consultants, this Vision Zero Action Plan has the breadth and the depth needed to effectively address many causes, direct and indirect, of traffic deaths and injuries. This plan learns from what has worked and what has failed in other American cities that have adopted their own Vision Zero plans (many of which, like San Francisco's, were adopted 7+/- years ago and are unfortunately not on track to meet their targets of eliminating traffic deaths within 10 years).

Alameda's original draft did over-correct by setting a target date of 2040. (Sure was depressing to stand around at one of the outreach events and chat with other concerned residents about how many Alamedans might be hit on streets in the period of 19 years!) Thanks to staff for listening to this feedback — but more importantly, thanks to staff for also submitting to City Council an appropriately aggressive plan for 2022. Both ends of the Vision Zero timeline matter: setting a target date that is inspiring but achievable *and* beginning with sufficient commitment and budget across all the city departments to make substantive progress on the most dangerous infrastructure, policies, and behaviors.

One suggestion: Federal dollars are coming for transportation improvements, particularly to support the "safe systems" approach, "complete streets," and projects that promote equity through transportation. **How can the City of Alameda be ready to apply for as many of these funds as possible? What are the bottlenecks to having "shovel ready" projects? If the bottleneck is staff time, please hire more or bring on more consultants. If the bottleneck is cross-departmental communication, please direct the City Manager to prioritize this.** Given the large infusion of funds by the "Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill" and discretion Secretary of Transportation Buttigieg and his staff have been given, this is a unique opportunity for the City of Alameda to improve the safety

and quality of its transportation network. Please go get that funding and use it, on behalf of Alameda's residents of today and tomorrow.

7-B Signalized Intersection Access

What an unfortunate contrast with the Vision Zero Action Plan. With all due respect to the city's traffic engineers and Transportation Commission members, they have presented you with a Catch-22: They think it's unwise to provide pedestrians the same experience at intersections as drivers, because if there's an unneeded WALK cycle with no nearby pedestrians, the motorists will sit, emit more CO₂, and maybe get so mad they just run the red light.

But why do the WALK lights have to be on so long? Because post-war American intersections are very wide to provide multiple thru-lanes and turning lanes for motorists. The WALK cycle must stay on longer than a typical green car signal, to allow a pedestrian to get all the way across all that pavement.

It's even worse near senior living centers, where WALK cycles are often made longer as a token effort to enable slower walkers to cross. Therefore, all the more reason — per the traffic engineer's logic — that these long WALK cycles must only happen when a pedestrian has pressed a “beg button” in advance of the light changing. Pressing the button during a green car cycle isn't sufficient — it has to be pressed in advance.

Note that the “beg buttons” are often attached directly to the posts used to support traffic lights, which may already be offset from the sidewalk. Meaning further walking for the potentially elderly pedestrian.

Take this example. It's between the Marina Village Shopping Center (to the east) and Independence Plaza, a senior living complex. I believe it's also where Augusta Collins, aged 69, was killed while crossing on foot in 2015. The WALK cycle is now extra long, but pedestrians and cyclists are most always waiting, since they didn't arrive at the right time to press the “beg button.” (For cyclists, they have to get off their bike and walk down a slope to reach the posts where the buttons are attached.) The extended WALK cycle time just put lipstick on the pig of an intersection that is no more accessible or safer than before.



The full solutions for intersections like these are to reduce the distance pedestrians must cross, or to redo the entire intersection as modern roundabouts (which have much shorter legs for pedestrians to cross). While those types of changes are out of scope for this specific policy, a good traffic signal policy should still somehow reflect this broader context of what actually makes intersections accessible for all users.

Please take the staff recommendation for “1. Construction of new traffic signals should have crosswalks marked on all legs” and send the rest of this policy back to the drawing board.

7-C Slow Streets

My family has used and enjoyed almost all of the Slow Streets. First as places to walk (novel places to go during the doldrums of last year!) and now mainly as pleasant routes to ride our bikes across town.

The temporary barricades aren't the ideal method to slow traffic everywhere. Many intersections where Slow Streets cross larger arterials could also use re-thinks. But that's what makes this a good experiment: the city is now well positioned to decide what features to retain and what to change.

Please continue the program so that the city can transition these routes to more permanent status as part of the Active Transport Plan. These are exactly the type of projects the city should be primed and ready to submit as “shovel ready” to transportation funding agencies, at moment's notice.

7-D Roundabouts

Alameda may not need quite as many roundabouts as the Indiana town featured in The New York Times article that the Mayor emailed around, but modern roundabouts are a good “tool” to add to Alameda’s “traffic toolkit.”

To use this tool properly does require expertise. For example, the City Council’s most recent discussion of the Central Ave Safety Project turned into an exercise in literal hand-waving about the

proposed modern roundabout at Sherman/Central/Encinal. The fact that electeds asked staff and consultants to dig into the appendix to pull out design alternatives is perhaps representative of the homework everyone needs to do to successfully deploy the tool of modern roundabouts in Alameda. Good to see staff presenting City Council with a productive way forward on this topic.

7-E Automated License Plate Readers

I was surprised to read in the staff report that APD already has vehicles equipped with ALPRs, but they aren't currently in operation. For all the repeated calls for ALPRs, I didn't realize the city already had this technology at hand.

This suggests one potential solution: Just install big fake cameras at Alameda's bridges and tubes. I'm only half kidding. ALPRs seem to have an almost totemic significance to some in Alameda. However, that focus on the solution of cameras at city limits does not make for good decision-making.

To my knowledge, more people in Alameda have been killed in recent years by drivers speeding than by other forms of crime with the culprit then fleeing town by get-away car. **Please broaden the focus of this topic from using ALPRs to "catch bad guys" at city limits to encompass automated camera enforcement, including speeding, in appropriate locations around the city.**

Just as there is much homework to do to effectively deploy modern roundabouts, the City of Alameda must do even more preparation before deploying fixed automated camera enforcement. (To wit: BuzzFeed's reporting in 2019 on APD's unauthorized use of facial recognition software.) By broadening the focus of ALPRs to also encompass roadway safety, I hope the city can have more productive discussions about the role of automated camera enforcement in public safety.

Thank you for helping to make Alameda streets safer for me, my family, and everyone else who lives and works in Alameda.

Sincerely,
Drew Dara-Abrams
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