

TO: Secretary David S. Kim, California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA)
Director Toks Omishakin, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)
Commissioner Warren Stanley, California Highway Patrol (CHP)
Director Barbara Rooney, California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS)

FROM: Select Members of the Zero Traffic Fatalities Taskforce & Advisory Group (listed below)

DATE: May 22, 2020

RE: Action on CalSTA Report of Findings, Zero Traffic Fatalities Taskforce

Dear Secretary Kim, Director Omishakin, Commissioner Stanley and Director Rooney,

As public health and transportation professionals, researchers, community advocates and industry representatives in California, we laud leaders in the state for your rapid action to prioritize safety and health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including how we move about our communities. We appreciate that your agencies have focused attention on the alarming rise of unsafe speeds, including high visibility enforcement by the California Highway Patrol on state highways and increased messaging about unsafe speeds.

These unsafe speeds are endangering the lives of people during this already-challenging public health crisis. Notably, public health officials have also called for lower speeds in an effort to reduce hospital admissions resulting from serious crashes, adding to already overstressed public health systems.

We write to urge you to act now to continue to elevate public safety and health as paramount by systematically addressing a long-time and significant threat in our state: unsafe speeds.

All of us served as members (along with others) of the statewide Zero Traffic Fatalities Taskforce or Advisory Group that worked closely with CalSTA, Caltrans and other stakeholders in 2019 to develop the [CalSTA Report of Findings](#), released in January 2020. This Report recognizes the predominant role speed plays in the likelihood of traffic crashes occurring, as well as injury severity, risk of fatalities, and economic burdens. The Report recommends California employ well-established, data-driven strategies (many of which are in place in other states) to improve safety, especially for the most vulnerable road users, including those walking and bicycling, children and seniors, and people who do not drive.

In these extraordinary times, we urge CalSTA, Caltrans, CHP, OTS and partner agencies to expedite key recommendations in the Report (and detailed below) to ensure that California does not go back to “business as usual,” in which 3,600+ people are killed and 13,000+ people are severely injured each year in our state in preventable traffic crashes, disproportionately affecting vulnerable road users.

We can leverage this time of heightened awareness of public health to prioritize safety over speed in a meaningful, long-lasting way to better protect people in California long into the future.

THE SITUATION:

Unsafe speeds are a leading factor in an estimated one-third of traffic fatalities, according to the 2017 National Transportation Safety Board Safety Study, [Reducing Speeding-Related Crashes Involving Passenger Vehicles](#). This notable Safety Study recommends that states (1) update speed-setting standards to improve upon the traditional 85th%-approach with a Safe Systems-approach to factor in crash history, land use, and the safety of nonmotorized road users; (2) incorporate the Safe Systems approach in urban road design to strengthen protection for vulnerable road users; and (3) authorize the use of automated speed enforcement to focus on encouraging safe behavior; amongst other actions.

The Governors Highway Safety Association's (GHSA) 2019 report, [Speeding Away from Zero: Rethinking a Forgotten Traffic Safety Challenge](#), finds: "The only thing more shocking than the oversized role speeding plays in crashes, fatalities, and injuries is the fact that little has changed over time with regards to the footprint of speed in traffic safety, public and policymaker opinion, or even the menu of countermeasures being deployed."

And in the current environment of COVID-related stay-at-home directives, we are witnessing new, alarming high speeds traveled as there are fewer vehicles on the road. Conditions will change as stay-at-home directives are gradually loosened and the economy edges back.

The question is ***Can we improve road safety conditions rather than going back to business as usual with 10 people dying and hundreds severely injured each day on California's roadways?***

The answer is Yes. As the Taskforce Report finds, we do not have to return to unacceptably high numbers of lives lost and severely impacted in traditional traffic conditions, particularly people walking and biking, kids and seniors, people in low-income and other traditionally underserved communities. We do not have to burden medical systems and first responders, who are already stretched thin. We do not have to spend precious State funding on traffic crash responses. Notably, the State has saved \$40 million daily as vehicle trips have been reduced during California's shelter-in-place order, according to an April 2020 study by the Road Ecology Center at the University of California, Davis. And we do not have to endanger our community members while walking, biking, driving or taking transit because our roadway designs, policies and practices could more systematically prioritize safety over speed, as recommended in the Report.

THE SOLUTION:

The good news is that there are practicable, effective strategies to curb unsafe speeds, which are tested and utilized in other states and around the world, though not yet fully in California. And, fortunately, it does not take a lot of change to make a significant difference in safety. In fact, "a reduction of 3mph in average operating speed on a road with a baseline average operating speed of 30mph is expected to produce a reduction of 27% in injury crashes and 49% in fatal crashes," according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's [Countermeasures that Work](#) (section 3-7).

Such evidence-based, effective strategies recommended in the Taskforce Report include:

- **Advancing necessary statutory changes to allow local jurisdictions to reduce speed limits**, particularly on high-injury networks and in areas where people are walking and biking;
- **Offering greater clarity and support**, including in the form of updated engineering and design guides and training, to design, or re-design, roadways to encourage safe speeds with traffic calming and other engineering interventions, particularly focused on safety amongst people walking, bicycling, and taking transit;
- **Advancing necessary statutory changes to allow local jurisdictions to carefully leverage technology**, such as pilot programs of automated speed enforcement, to deter unsafe speeds.

We urge CalSTA, Caltrans, CHP, OTS and partner agencies to expedite implementation of these proven safety strategies, along with other promising solutions detailed more fully in the Report. And as Task Force and Advisory Group members who developed the Report, we stand ready to help in advancing these safety recommendations at this critical juncture.

Thank you again for your public safety leadership today and moving ahead. We are united to help our communities recover and move forward in a way that prioritizes the public safety and health of all Californians.

Respectfully submitted by the following:

Members of the Zero Traffic Fatalities Taskforce:

- **Seleta Reynolds**, General Manager, Los Angeles Department of Transportation
- **Daniel E. Mitchell, P.E.**, Assistant General Manager, Project Delivery & Operations, Los Angeles Department of Transportation
- **Kate Breen**, Director of Government Affairs, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency
- **Dan Landon**, Executive Director Nevada County Transportation Commission
- **Laura Wells**, Assistant Director, Department of Transportation, City of San Jose
- **Meghan Sahli-Wells**, Culver City Council Member
- **Offer Grembek***, Co-Director, UCB Safe Transportation Research and Education Center, UC Berkeley, Institute of Transportation Studies
- **Bob Prath**, American Association of Retired Persons, CA
- **Leah Shahum**, Director, Vision Zero Network
- **Esther Rivera**, Interim-Executive Director/Deputy Director, California Walks
- **Dave Snyder**, Executive Director, California Bicycle Coalition
- **Rock E. Miller**, Traffic Safety Consulting Engineer

Members of the Zero Traffic Fatalities Advisory Group:

- **Luke H. Klipp**, Special Projects Officer, Long Beach Public Works Department
- **Megan Wier**, MPH, Safe Streets Division Manager, Oakland Department of Transportation (2019 Advisory Committee serving on behalf of San Francisco Department of Public Health)
- **Jodie Medeiros**, Executive Director, Walk San Francisco
- **Megan Gee**, Senior Planner, Arup
- **Rachel Zack**, Policy Director, Remix
- **Sean Co**, Director of Special Projects, Streetlight Data, Inc.

(Title is used for identification purposes only, and my support for this does not represent the views of the university)*

cc: Elissa Konove, CalSTA Undersecretary and Task Force Chair

Stephanie Dougherty, CalSTA Deputy Secretary, Transportation Safety and Enforcement

Rachel Carpenter, Caltrans Chief Safety Officer