

Fisher Insight



The Washington St. Road Diet project in Watertown, NY, reduced pedestrian accidents 90% in a busy corridor housing three schools.

TOWARD A FATALITY-FREE FUTURE FOR PEDESTRIANS

All of us can make our communities safer and stronger by heeding Vision Zero's bold mission

The recent numbers don't look good for those who regularly walk our city, suburban, or rural streets for work, school, necessity, or enjoyment.

In 2021, the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\) estimated](#) that the number of pedestrians struck and killed by drivers across the U.S. rose 13% from 2020 — to 7,342, or more than 20 per day. Pedestrian fatalities had already risen in the prior two years, and the overall estimate of motor vehicle crash deaths in 2021 spurred U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to declare a "crisis on America's roadways." Continuing that trend, [data from the first half of 2022](#) showed pedestrian fatalities increasing 2% over the first half of the previous year, and cyclist fatalities rising 8%.

Can you imagine a world in which we reverse course? Where the annual pedestrian fatality number doesn't just drop, but disappears?

[Vision Zero](#) dared to do just that. This bold movement, which originated in Sweden in the late 1990s and has been adopted as policy by a small but growing number of municipalities in the U.S. and worldwide, calls for the complete elimination of serious or fatal injuries from vehicle-pedestrian accidents. While human error may be inevitable and unpredictable, Vision Zero posits that our streets can and should be designed to accomplish this. And all of us with skin in the roadway game — designers, planners,

municipal project sponsors, policymakers, automakers, and community members — share responsibility to make it happen.

Aiming for Zero

The [Vision Zero Network](#), which helps communities elevate their efforts, officially recognizes more than 50 U.S. cities for adopting the philosophy, while others (such as [Ithaca, NY](#)) are getting on board.

But municipalities don't need to be signed on to Vision Zero officially to take action. In our experience as infrastructure engineers and transportation planners, we have seen communities make significant progress for pedestrian safety through programs driven by the same spirit.

For example, the City of Watertown, NY, engaged Fisher to conduct a study and provide design solutions for a high-volume corridor in which a high school, middle school, and elementary school campus generated significant foot traffic and unfortunately experienced a high pedestrian accident rate. Through a "road diet" that reduced the four-lane roadway to two traffic lanes plus a center turn lane and bicycle lanes, consolidation of crosswalks to strategic locations, and the installation of a rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB) at the main pedestrian crossing, the City reduced the vehicle-pedestrian accident rate near the school from 10 in three years to just one in three years, and it reduced the overall crash rate of the entire roadway 45%.

Safety by Design

Speed management is critical to reducing the potential for vehicle-pedestrian accidents as well as the severity of injuries when they do occur. Our team's extensive research on school zones and crashes showed that a pedestrian's survivability of a crash increases 80% when vehicle speed decreases from 58 mph to 23 mph.

That sobering statistic helps drive our team's heartfelt commitment as well as our planning and design work, including our research and design for a pilot program in the City of Syracuse, NY, to install speed humps and speed cushions in areas where speeding was flagged as a problem. The first 16 installations show they are working to reduce traffic speed, reinforcing the importance of design solutions that — unlike police presence, which certainly has significant value — can stay fixed in the same spot 100% of the time. Other design solutions include visual slow-down cues such as curb bump-outs, transverse lane markings, signage, and rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs).

Municipal policies also play a key role. Land-use planning, along with access management policies — which regulate the number and nature of vehicle entries and exits from a property — must keep pedestrian safety front and center.

And, as the saying goes, "knowing is half the battle." Education initiatives, whether grassroots or government-driven — such as the New York State Department of Transportation's ["See! Be Seen!" campaign](#) — promote widespread awareness that makes a difference.

A Shift in Mindset

By embracing the spirit and ideals of Vision Zero, municipal and regional authorities can create safe communities that are desirable to live and raise families in, resulting in long-term economic benefit.

To do so will take a systems thinking mindset — that is, we must acknowledge that responsibility is shared by all and that pedestrian safety is not just one piece of the transportation planning puzzle. Instead, it needs to be a priority for every piece, from state and local governments to transportation authorities, design and planning consultants, automakers, drivers, and pedestrians themselves.

Is it possible to achieve zero pedestrian fatalities? We won't know if we don't try.

How Fisher Can Help

In line with Fisher's Core Purpose of cultivating our gifts to create a legacy of infrastructure that improves quality of life, we are proud to partner with state and local governments on a wide range of pedestrian safety projects. Members of our Transportation team have achieved the Roadside Safety Professional (RSP1) certification, underscoring our commitment to this important endeavor.

Contact us to learn how we can help you make your community safer for all users of your transportation infrastructure.



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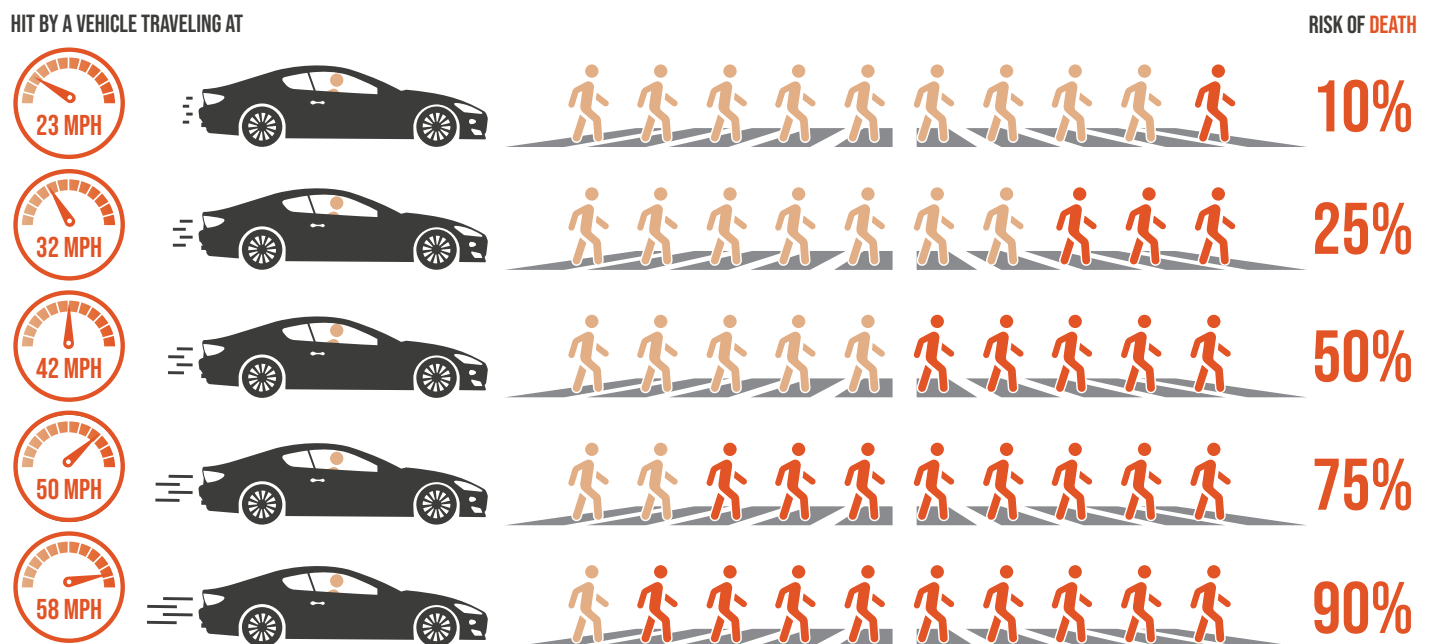
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Connect

SPEED'S RELATION TO SAFETY



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, "Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Death." <https://www.transportation.gov/NRSS/SaferSpeeds> | Accessed April 24, 2023.