

Economic Mobility Catalog: Case Study

Improving traffic safety: Hoboken, NJ



Justice & Public Safety



Housing & Community Development



Supportive Neighborhoods

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At-a-Glance



Summary

- While safe by national standards, traffic collisions continued to cause injuries and deaths in Hoboken. These collisions disproportionately affected vulnerable road users, like people walking or biking, and the city's most disadvantaged residents. With its population continuing to grow, putting more people on Hoboken's streets, the City needed to act to improve traffic safety.
- In 2019, Mayor Ravi Bhalla issued an executive order to launch Hoboken's Vision Zero initiative. As part of this commitment, the City aimed to eliminate all traffic-related injuries and deaths in Hoboken by 2030. Based on recommendations developed by its Vision Zero Task Force, Hoboken has made significant investments in improving traffic safety. For instance, the City lowered its speed limit from 25 to 20 miles per hour, and has introduced a variety of traffic calming strategies.
- Keys to Hoboken's success included effective community engagement, commitment from the city's political leadership, the use of pilot projects, the intentional inclusion of a broad range of stakeholders in the planning process, meaningful collaboration with county government, and its existing constituency of people who primarily walk, bike, and ride transit.
- Obstacles that Hoboken faced included public resistance to street improvements, the need to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching consensus on how to reduce the size of City-owned vehicles, and navigating resource limitations.

Results and Accomplishments

0 Since 2017, Hoboken has had zero traffic-related fatalities.	236 In 2021, the rate of traffic-related injuries in Hoboken was 236 per 100,000 residents, compared to 518 per 100,000 in Hudson County and 658 per 100,000 in New Jersey.	20 Hoboken lowered the citywide speed limit from 25 MPH to 20 MPH.
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- **No traffic fatalities in over five years:** As part of its Vision Zero initiative, the City of Hoboken committed to eliminating all traffic-related injuries and fatalities by 2030. Since 2017, no one in Hoboken has died as a result of a traffic collision. The rate of traffic-related injuries in Hoboken has also remained less than half of that in neighboring cities.
- **Large investments in safer streets:** Since 2019, Hoboken has aggressively invested in redesigning its streets to improve traffic safety. Key improvements include installing high-visibility striping at more than 300 crosswalks; “daylighting” over 130 intersections to improve sight lines at crossings; and installing 61 curb extensions, 10 rectangular rapid flashing beacons, 2 raised intersections, and 2 pedestrian refuge islands. In addition to these infrastructure improvements, Hoboken lowered the citywide speed limit from 25 to 20 miles per hour.
- **Receiving national recognition:** Hoboken’s Vision Zero initiative has received wide-spread recognition for its impact on traffic safety. This includes coverage from [National Public Radio](#), [Bloomberg](#), and [Streetsblog](#). In 2022, the Vision Zero Network [named](#) Hoboken as a national leader in Vision Zero implementation.
- **Inspiring action by other local governments:** Hoboken’s concrete actions and strong results have inspired other local governments to develop their own Vision Zero policies, including Hudson County, which includes Hoboken.

Overview



What was the challenge?

- **Crashes result in injuries and death:** While Hoboken had taken steps to improve traffic safety, 4,451 crashes [occurred in Hoboken](#) between 2014 and 2018, resulting in 376 injuries and 3 fatalities. These crashes disproportionately affected people walking and biking, who were involved in only eight percent of all crashes but 40 percent of those resulting in serious injury or death.

- **Addressing racial disparities in traffic safety:** Disadvantaged communities in Hoboken experienced a disproportionate amount of traffic violence. Between 2014 and 2018, the four Census tracts in Hoboken with the highest share of households in poverty accounted for one in three traffic crashes, despite including less than a third of Hoboken's population. This mirrored national trends, where, between 2016 and 2020, the rate of pedestrian fatalities in census tracts with a median household income under \$43,000 was nearly 74 percent higher than the national average
- **Increasing demands on mobility infrastructure:** Between 2000 and 2016, the population of Hoboken increased by 38 percent, a trend driven by an influx of young families. This growth meant more people walking and biking - many of whom were children - sharing Hoboken's roads with vehicle traffic.
- **Advancing existing local commitments:** The City of Hoboken had existing environmental, economic mobility, and public health challenges that it had committed to addressing.. For instance, the Hoboken Master Plan Reexamination Report committed the City to reducing its impact on the environment. Local leaders recognized that investments in safer streets would not only improve traffic safety, but advance these environmental, economic mobility, and public health priorities as well.

What was the solution?

- **Making a commitment to Vision Zero:** In 2019, Mayor Ravi Bhalla issued an executive order to launch Hoboken's Vision Zero initiative. As part of this commitment, the City aimed to eliminate all traffic-related injuries and deaths in Hoboken by 2030.
- **Taking a Safe Systems Approach:** Vision Zero is a strategy that aims to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries among all road users, including people walking, biking, driving, or riding transit. While traditional approaches to traffic safety focus on changing individual behavior, Vision Zero's Safe System Approach takes a holistic view that emphasizes improving systems, policies, and designs to lessen the severity of crashes.
- **Committed to change:** In 2021, Hoboken adopted its Vision Zero Action Plan. The plan commits the City to 108 actions aimed at achieving its goal of eliminating all traffic-related injuries and deaths by 2030. These actions focus on designing safer streets, lowering driving speeds, purchasing safer and smaller vehicles, encouraging safe behaviors, improving post-crash investigations and care, and making data-driven decisions.
- **Creating safer streets:** According to a 5-year crash analysis prepared for Hoboken's Vision Zero Action Plan, 88% of bicycle and pedestrian crashes occurred in crosswalks at intersections. Given this, the City prioritized investments that would improve safety at intersections, such as installing curb extensions, raised intersections, and pedestrian refuge islands. The City also took steps to lower vehicle speeds, not only changing the citywide speed limit from 25 to 20 miles per hour, but also implementing traffic calming measures, including narrowing lanes in order to reduce speeds.

- **Led by a Vision Zero Task Force:** The Action Plan was developed by Hoboken's Vision Zero Task Force. The Task Force included city council members, representatives from community groups, and representatives from relevant departments in city and county government. In addition to developing the Action Plan, the Task Force was charged with maintaining the initiative's website, coordinating City operations, conducting outreach to the community, and producing an annual report.

What factors drove success?

- **Existing support for traffic safety measures:** Hoboken had been investing in strategies to improve safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users for years before committing to Vision Zero. Since the public had previously benefited from these traffic safety measures, there was greater familiarity with and support for further investment through Vision Zero.
- **Strong community engagement efforts:** Despite restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited in-person outreach efforts, thousands of Hoboken residents provided input for the Vision Zero Action Plan. The Task Force kept the public informed through a dedicated website and regular email and social media communication. To collect community feedback, the Task Force conducted a community survey and created a WikiMap, which allowed residents to identify traffic safety concerns on a map of the city.
- **High level of support from city leaders:** From the start, elected officials and city staff made progress on Vision Zero a priority. Most prominently, Mayor Ravi Bhalla signed an executive order launching Hoboken's Vision Zero efforts, and City Councilmembers Tiffanie Fisher, Emily Jabbour, Michael Russo, Joe Quintero, and Ruben Ramos have served on the initiative's Task Force. By making these commitments, local leaders built the political will necessary to implement Vision Zero strategies.
- **Piloting potential safety improvements:** Before implementing permanent changes, Hoboken frequently installed low-cost, temporary traffic safety improvements. This approach allowed the City to roll out changes more quickly while it pursued the funding needed for more permanent designs. Additionally, the City leveraged pilot projects to test and build public support for more controversial changes before committing significant resources.
- **Including impacted stakeholders from the start:** The same strategies that make streets safer can also make them more difficult to navigate in large vehicles. Anticipating this conflict, Hoboken included its Department of Environmental Services, Fire Department, and Police Department on its Vision Zero Task Force. By making these stakeholders part of the decision-making process, the Task Force addressed potential conflicts early.
- **Collaboration with county government:** Many of Hoboken's high crash corridors and intersections are on streets maintained by Hudson County. Recognizing this issue, the County agreed to include a representative from its Division of Engineering on the Hoboken Vision Zero Task Force. Equipped with a better understanding of Hoboken's priorities, the County has begun implementing additional complete streets strategies as it resurfaces streets in Hoboken.

What were the major obstacles?

- **Pandemic slows progress:** The COVID-19 pandemic began shortly after the Task Force began working on the Vision Zero Action Plan. Due to public health concerns, many public outreach components of the planning process were adjusted. For instance, in-person walk and bike audits were replaced with virtual meetings and an online survey. These and other changes delayed the completion of the Action Plan from the fall of 2020 to March 2021.
- **Resistance to street improvements:** Implementing traffic safety measures often requires reallocating street space from motor vehicles to walking and biking trips. At times, some residents have resisted these changes, particularly when they involve removing street parking. While most Hoboken residents do not drive regularly, many own a car. To address these residents' concerns, the City conducts outreach when redesigning streets and encourages residents to use municipal parking garages.
- **Conflicting priorities on vehicle size:** As crashes involving larger vehicles are more likely to cause injury or death, the City set a goal to reduce the size of city-owned vehicles. Progress on this goal has been limited, as the City continues to work toward consensus on where smaller vehicles can be purchased without compromising the ability of city departments, like the Fire Department, to deliver services.
- **Limited city resources:** As a city of about 60,000 residents, Hoboken has limited staff resources to dedicate to Vision Zero efforts. This has made certain goals, like developing a large Vision Zero social media presence, difficult to achieve.

Timeline



DECEMBER 2010

Hoboken Develops Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

In 2010, the City of Hoboken published its Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which identified opportunities to improve the quality of walking and bicycle facilities in the city. While Hoboken made considerable progress between 2010 and 2019, unresolved items from this plan informed its Vision Zero Action Plan.

JUNE 2018

Hoboken Adopts Master Plan Reexamination

Hoboken's Master Plan Reexamination Report made recommendations on how the city should develop in subsequent years. It named the adoption of a Vision Zero Master Plan as a key element in building a more connected city.

JUNE 2019**Hoboken Publishes Complete Street Guide**

Hoboken's Complete Street Design Guide classifies the city's streets into a typology and provides guidelines on the appropriate design elements for each street type. The plan aims to improve safety, equity, the reliability and effectiveness of the transportation system, and more.

JULY 2019**Washington Street Redesign Complete**

Hoboken completes a \$19.5M redesign of Washington Street, a main commercial and transportation corridor. The redesign includes key traffic safety features, such as traffic signals with pedestrian countdown timers, concrete bump outs at corners, and more.

AUGUST 2019**Mayor Issues Executive Order Launching Vision Zero**

Hoboken Mayor Ravi S. Bhalla signed an executive order launching Hoboken's Vision Zero campaign. The executive order established a Vision Zero Task Force, which was tasked with developing an action plan for the city.

MAY 2020**COVID-19 Pandemic Open Streets Pilot**

Over the course of 4 weekends in May, the City closes 54 blocks to through traffic and 14 blocks to all traffic to give residents a place to recreate safely without worrying about vehicles.

JUNE - OCTOBER 2020**COVID-19 Pandemic Slow Streets Implementation**

Over the course of 5 months, the City implements "slow street" treatments on 65 blocks rotating across the city, with 8-15 blocks per weekend closed to all vehicles except local traffic. The City uses "quick build" techniques such as deploying movable barricades and signage to discourage vehicles from driving more than 5 miles per hour on these shared streets. The shared streets concept used for "slow streets" were ultimately less popular than the "open streets" but required less resources due to the enforcement required to restrict traffic from the blocks closed to vehicle traffic.

MAY 2020**Newark Street Safety Improvements Complete**

Informed by its Vision Zero efforts, the City of Hoboken installs traffic safety measures along Newark Street. These include curb extensions, a protected bike lane, a flashing crossing beacon, and more.

JUNE 2021

Summer Streets Program Announced

In partnership with the Hoboken Business Alliance, the City of Hoboken announces the return of its Summer Streets Program. As part of this program, Summer Streets blocks will be closed to thru traffic to improve pedestrian safety.

JULY 2021

Hoboken Adopts Vision Zero Action Plan

After completing research and public outreach, Hoboken's Vision Zero Task Force issued its Action Plan. The City Council subsequently approved the plan, committing the City to work towards its recommendations.

JULY 2021

Mayor Reauthorizes Task Force

When the City Council approved Hoboken's Vision Zero Action Plan, Mayor Bhalla issued an executive order reauthorizing the Vision Zero Task Force for an additional two years. The Task Force shifted its focus to advising city staff on action item prioritization and liaising with local stakeholder groups.

JULY 2022

Speed Limits Lowered City-Wide

After completing a speed study, Hoboken reduced speed limits from 25 miles per hour to 20 miles per hour city-wide. By lowering speeds, the City aimed to reduce the risk of injury or death from traffic crashes.

Implementation Process



How did leaders confront the problem?

- **Mayor commits to Vision Zero:** In August 2019, Mayor Bhalla signed an executive order launching Hoboken's Vision Zero campaign. Committing Hoboken to developing the "most ambitious" Vision Zero initiative in the region, the executive order established the city's Vision Zero Task Force and charged it with developing an action plan.
- **Forming the task force:** The Task Force consisted of community members, traffic safety and bicycle advocates, elected officials, and staff from multiple city and county agencies. Hoboken intentionally designed the Task Force to include stakeholders, like the Fire Department, who might be impacted by traffic safety measures.
- **Learning from other cities:** Working with an outside consultant, the Task Force studied how five peer cities approached their Vision Zero campaigns. The group aimed to learn about the traffic safety strategies these municipalities implemented, the challenges they faced, and how they approached public outreach and messaging.

- **Gathering data to inform priorities:** The Task Force conducted a crash analysis for a five-year period from 2014 to 2018. These data showed that crashes resulting in serious injury or death disproportionately occurred at intersections, and that these crashes were concentrated at six specific intersections. This insight informed the strategies the Task Force adopted in the Action Plan, such as its focus on improving the visibility of pedestrians at intersections.
- **Conducting public outreach:** While the COVID-19 pandemic constrained the Task Force's ability to conduct public outreach, it launched a community survey and an interactive, online mapping tool to better understand residents' traffic safety concerns. To keep the community updated on its progress, the Task Force shared updates through its website, an online dashboard, and email and social media.

How was the strategy designed?

- **Making Vision Zero a government-wide effort:** In designing its Action Plan, Hoboken recognized that eliminating traffic-related injuries and fatalities is a multidisciplinary effort. While the City's Department of Transportation and Parking and Division of Engineering lead its Vision Zero efforts, multiple other departments hold responsibility for key action items. These include the Mayor's Office, City Council, Police Department, Fire Department, and the Departments of Environmental Services and Community Development.
- **Leveraging street resurfacing to implement safety improvements:** Hoboken implements the bulk of its traffic safety improvements through street resurfacing projects. When prioritizing streets for resurfacing, the City of Hoboken considers not only the condition of the pavement, but factors like crash history and proximity to land uses that attract pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. By taking this approach, the City of Hoboken leverages its capital spending to continuously promote traffic safety. Additionally, this approach minimizes disruption by performing road maintenance and installing safety improvements at the same time.
- **Using pilots and provisional designs:** At times, the City of Hoboken was unable to make certain safety improvements to streets due to budget constraints, lack of political will, or public skepticism. As a work-around, the City has often invested in less permanent and capital intensive designs while these barriers were addressed. For instance, when funding for curb extensions was unavailable, Hoboken used flexible delineators and planters to prevent parking near crosswalks, improving visibility for all road users.
- **A focus on street design over enforcement:** Hoboken sees the need for regular traffic enforcement as a signal that greater education and safer street designs are required. As such, when enforcement is used, the Police Department focuses first on educating road users on the traffic violation, instead of resorting to punitive measures. Ultimately, the City aims to build its infrastructure so that enforcement is a backstop, not a primary means to achieving its Vision Zero goal.

How was the plan implemented?

- **Constructing Complete Streets:** With Vision Zero in motion, Hoboken continued implementing traffic safety measures as it resurfaced its streets. Most significantly, the City completed the redesign of Washington Street, a major commercial and transportation corridor, in July of 2019. The redesign included improvements like, traffic signals with pedestrian countdown timers, concrete bump outs at corners, and a bicycle lane. Additional safety improvement projects subsequently occurred on Hudson Street, at 11th Street and Willow Avenue, in Southwest Hoboken, and in other locations.
- **City departments take the lead:** The Task Force completed its Action Plan in July of 2021, and the City Council adopted it shortly thereafter. Hoboken's Department of Transportation and Parking and Division of Engineering led the plan's implementation. Based on funding and internal capacity, City staff developed proposals for how to sequence Vision Zero action items.
- **Task force advises and educates:** With its initial work complete, Hoboken's Vision Zero Task Force shifted its focus to providing feedback to City staff on the prioritization of action items and on educating community members on the initiative. To facilitate this work, Mayor Bhalla signed an executive order renewing the Task Force for two additional years.
- **Focusing on sight lines at intersections:** Based on the Task Force's recommendations, the City focused its efforts on daylighting intersections. Under this practice, the City installed plastic delineators, planters, or concrete bump outs to prevent cars from parking directly adjacent to pedestrian crossings. This strategy aims to reduce crashes by improving sight lines for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.
- **Lowering speeds city-wide:** In July of 2022, Hoboken lowered speed limits to 20 miles per hour on all roads within the city. As part of this transition, the City installed new speed limit signs, added "20 MPH" pavement markings at select locations, and placed speed radar signs along the municipal boundary. The City of Hoboken, the Hoboken Police Department, and the Hudson County Sheriff's Office also initiated a campaign to educate drivers of the reduced speed limit.

How was the approach funded?

- **Leveraging state dollars:** Hoboken's main source of funding for traffic safety improvements are state grants for transportation projects. When completing a roadway resurfacing project, the City also redesigns the street to include any necessary complete streets elements. This approach allows Hoboken to implement many of its safety improvements without using local funds.
- **Issuing bonds for large projects:** For its largest projects, Hoboken issues bonds to pay for costs beyond what state grants will cover. This approach is reserved for higher-impact projects that typically address streets where a disproportionate number of crashes have occurred.

- **Leveraging parking revenue:** Hoboken's Department of Transportation and Parking manages the city's municipal parking garages, street parking, parking enforcement, and parking permit program. Each year, fines and fees from these sources generate approximately \$20 million in revenue. The City reinvests a portion of this revenue into projects that advance its Vision Zero campaign.

How was the approach measured and refined?

- **Planning based on data:** When developing Hoboken's Vision Zero Action Plan, the Task Force analyzed the previous five years of available crash data. This analysis showed that crashes leading to injuries or deaths occurred most often at intersections. The finding led the City to focus its early efforts on improving sight lines at intersections and lowering the speed limit to twenty miles per hour city-wide.
- **Setting measurable goals:** As part of its Action Plan, Hoboken committed to 36 action items aimed at achieving its goal of eliminating all traffic-related injuries and deaths by 2030. To track progress, each action item is paired with a performance metric. For example, to measure the effectiveness of speed-reduction infrastructure installed along high crash streets, the City plans to collect before and after prevailing speed data.
- **Testing interventions with pilot projects:** Before permanently implementing a traffic safety improvement, Hoboken often tests its effectiveness as part of a pilot program. This is particularly common when a change would be expensive or controversial. For instance, Hoboken piloted a slow streets program, where traffic speeds and volume are limited, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to share the road with cars. When drivers began ignoring the speed and through traffic limitations, the City opted for other strategies to improve safety.
- **Targeting enforcement toward injury prevention:** Informed by the City's Vision Zero commitments, the Hoboken Police Department uses data to prioritize traffic enforcement on violations that most often cause serious injury. This has led the Department to emphasize enforcement around higher-risk activities, like speeding, over low-level violations that do not pose a large risk to the public, like biking on a sidewalk.
- **Tracking progress:** It has been relatively difficult for the City to track the progress of installing Vision Zero infrastructure over time due to staffing constraints. In 2023, however, the City released its first-ever interactive progress report to detail Vision Zero safety upgrades completed during the previous year.

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