

# COMMUNITY TRAFFIC SAFETY COALITION

of SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



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## CTSC Vision Zero Work Plan

### Fiscal Years 2024-2026

#### CTSC Vision and Mission

The Community Traffic Safety Coalition (CTSC) of Santa Cruz County envisions safe, accessible, and equitable transportation for all. The mission of the CTSC is to prevent traffic-related injuries and fatalities for all road users, with a focus on people bicycling and walking. The vision and mission of CTSC align with Vision Zero. Vision Zero is an international policy that aims to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for all.

To help achieve our vision and mission, the CTSC supported the cities of Watsonville, Santa Cruz, and Scotts Valley, along with unincorporated Santa Cruz County, in passing Vision Zero policies to eliminate traffic-related fatalities and severe injuries by 2030. The CTSC has adopted the Safe System Approach to help jurisdictions reach this goal more effectively. Many countries have adopted this approach to achieve Vision Zero, including the U.S. Department of Transportation (see appendix A for more information on the Safe System Approach).

#### Vision Zero Needs Statement

From our data analysis and community engagement, we know that traffic violence is a serious problem in our county. The high number of reported pedestrian and cyclist injuries and fatalities over the years is what led the CTSC to Vision Zero. As our coalition and community partners move to increase and enhance active transportation in our community, safety for our cyclists and pedestrians is more important than ever.

According to the most recent 2021 California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) crash rankings, Santa Cruz County ranked in the top 10 for 7 different crash categories compared to 58 similarly sized California counties. For the bicycle categories, the county ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> for the overall number of bicyclist injuries/fatalities and 6<sup>th</sup> for bicyclist injuries/fatalities for people under the age of 15. For pedestrian involved collisions, the county ranked 5<sup>th</sup> for overall pedestrian injuries/fatalities, 7<sup>th</sup> for pedestrian injuries/fatalities for those under the age of 15, and 10<sup>th</sup> for pedestrian injuries/fatalities for those ages 65 and older. Additionally, Santa Cruz County ranked 10<sup>th</sup> for injuries/fatalities among motorcyclists, and 7<sup>th</sup> for injuries/fatalities among vehicle drivers under the age of 21 that had been drinking ([CA OTS rankings](#)).

In comparison to 105 California cities in 2021, the City of Santa Cruz (in the north part of the county) ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> for the number of bicyclist injuries/fatalities. The City of Watsonville (in the south part of the county) ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> for the overall number of pedestrian injuries/fatalities and 7<sup>th</sup> for the number of pedestrian injuries/fatalities for people under the age of 15. In comparison to 76 similarly sized

cities, the City of Capitola (near the middle of the county) ranked 1<sup>st</sup> for the number of pedestrian injuries/fatalities for those ages 65 and older.

The [UC Berkeley SafeTREC's Transportation Injury Mapping System](#) (TIMS) shows the number of people killed or seriously injured in Santa Cruz County in the 3-year period from 2020 to 2022 increased slightly to 158.3 people on average as compared to 155.3 people on average from 2017 to 2019. Statewide trends for the same 3-year periods (2020-2022 compared to 2017-2019) also show an increasing trend for those killed or seriously injured in traffic related collisions from 16,890 to 18,573, respectively.

In review of local media reports during the six-month period between July and December 2023, CTSC staff documented a total of 19 traffic collisions involving serious injuries and/or fatalities. All but one of those crashes involved a motor vehicle. While the majority of fatalities and serious injuries occurred among vehicle drivers and/or passengers, one motorcyclist and two pedestrians were killed, and four pedestrians were seriously injured.

### Centering Equity

At its core, Vision Zero emphasizes that all people have a right to move about their communities safely. We cannot meet that goal without acknowledging and addressing racial and socioeconomic disparities in the transportation system. These disparities in transportation are evident across communities worldwide.

Throughout the nation, Vision Zero's data-driven analysis reveals a concentration of traffic safety issues that suggest racialized patterns of disinvestment and neglect. Between 2015 and 2019, the Governor's Highway Safety Association found that the rate of traffic deaths per 100,000 was 146 for American Indians/Alaskan Natives and 69 for African Americans compared to 58 for the total United States population ("[An Analysis of Traffic Fatalities by Race and Ethnicity](#)"). A study done by Dangerous by Design found that between 2016-2020, people of color, particularly Native and Black Americans, were more likely to die while walking than any other race or ethnic group ([Dangerous by Design 2022](#)).

Locally, we see that the impact of crashes is also not felt equally in our county. A study done by the CTSC in 2017 found that more than half of Santa Cruz County's fatal and life changing injury crashes occur on only 6% of our streets. More than half of these dangerous streets are located in low-income neighborhoods ([sctrafficsafety.org/visionzero](https://sctrafficsafety.org/visionzero)).

There is tremendous income disparity in Santa Cruz County. According to the 2018-2022 U.S. Census, 12.5% of Santa Cruz County residents were living in poverty while the median household income was \$104,409 ([census.gov/quickfacts](https://census.gov/quickfacts)). Santa Cruz County also has high rates of homelessness. The 2022-2023 Grand Jury Report stated that Santa Cruz County "has more homeless people per capita than anywhere else in California; some 2,300 of our residents are without housing" ([Grand Jury Report 2022-2023](#)). Because unhoused individuals often live in dangerous locations, most notably along high-speed roadways, they also shoulder a disproportionate share of traffic-related injuries and fatalities ([Casualties of the Streets, Austin American Stateman, 2015](#)).

The CTSC will continue to focus traffic safety efforts on communities that are disproportionately impacted by traffic violence, including lower-income areas and school districts, unhoused individuals, people of color, and migrant and seasonal farmworkers. We will utilize newly developed equity data tools, such as the [USDOT Equitable Transportation Community \(ETC\) Explorer](#) and the [Caltrans Transportation Equity Index \(EQI\)](#), to gain greater insight into the impacts of inequity on transportation in our county. Our coalition is now in its eighth year of Vision Zero work, and this plan will continue that work with an emphasis on equity into 2026.

### Vision Zero Work Plan Objectives and Activities for Fiscal Years 2024-2026

**GOAL:** Promote and support Vision Zero policies, task forces, and action plans in all jurisdictions throughout the county utilizing the Safe System Approach.

Currently, 4 out of 5 jurisdictions within Santa Cruz County have adopted Vision Zero. The City of Watsonville passed a Vision Zero policy in 2018, formed the Watsonville Vision Zero Task Force in 2020, and developed their first Vision Zero Action Plan in 2021. The City of Santa Cruz adopted Vision Zero in 2019. Unincorporated Santa Cruz County (“the County”) and the City of Scotts Valley passed resolutions in August 2022, and the County received federal Safe Streets & Roads for All (SS4A) funding in 2023 to develop new Vision Zero Action Plans for both jurisdictions. Watsonville is also included in the SS4A grant to update their Action Plan. The City of Capitola is interested in adopting a Vision Zero resolution as well.

The CTSC will continue to promote Vision Zero adoption and implementation within jurisdictions, with a focus on jurisdictions that have yet to fully adopt this approach. The CTSC plays an advocacy role in supporting the jurisdictions in implementing Vision Zero, as well as developing and maintaining collaborative relationships for other grant funded traffic safety programs that support Vision Zero. Unlike each of the county’s jurisdictions, the CTSC can neither create nor implement Vision Zero policies, task forces, or action plans (see Appendix B for more information on the CTSC’s roles and responsibilities).

The CTSC will maintain and enhance countywide Vision Zero collaboration and support across jurisdictions through the below objectives, which align with the 5 elements of the Safe System Approach: Safer People, Safer Roads, Safer Vehicles, Safer Speeds and Post-Crash Care.

#### Primary Objectives

**Safer People:** Encourage safe, responsible behavior by road users and create conditions that prioritize their ability to reach their destination unharmed.

- Continue the Child Passenger Safety (CPS) program to educate low-income parents and caregivers on properly securing young passengers in their vehicles and distribute car seats through CPS technicians when grant funding is available.
- Continue offering quarterly Bicycle Traffic School classes taught by CTSC staff’s League Cycling Instructors (LCI) to provide a diversion program for bicycle traffic violators and educate interested members of the public on bicycle safety.

- Continue the Ride n' Stride program to provide safe walking and biking presentations in English and Spanish to elementary schools and parent/caregiver groups throughout the county, with an emphasis on lower-income school districts.
- Coordinate the distribution of properly fitted bicycle helmets and reflective items at schools, community events, and through established helmet fit sites throughout the county, with a focus on communities lacking resources, such as unhoused persons and lower-income individuals and families.
- Maintain the [CTSC web page](#) to promote our traffic safety programs and Vision Zero efforts.
- Participate in the regional Street Smarts campaign to bring awareness and education about road safety issues to the public.
- Develop educational materials and meet with PIOs and the media to promote the use of the words "crash" and "collision" over ~~accident~~, to shift the public perception that these events are unavoidable to the reality that they are unacceptable and preventable.
- Provide educational materials about shared- and micro-mobility programs and options to the community.
- Collaborate with the County Substance Use Disorders Services (SUDS) programs on DUI/impaired driving prevention.
- Share timely traffic safety news, events, and PSAs on the [CTSC Facebook page](#) to generate greater awareness and understanding around traffic safety.
- Promote the [CTSC YouTube channel](#) that includes video playlists for bike safety, distracted driving, and child passenger safety resources.
- Offer educational materials in English, Spanish and indigenous languages spoken within the community (e.g. Mixteco, Triqui, and Zapoteco) when possible.
- Host events for elected officials and relevant government staff to experience traveling through the county using active modes of transportation.
- Develop questions for candidates running for office regarding safe and active transportation.

**Safer Roads:** Design roadway environments to mitigate human mistakes and reduce the chances of severe injury and death to facilitate safe travel by the most vulnerable road users (e.g. pedestrians and cyclists). The role of the CTSC is to support and advocate for local jurisdictions to design and build roadway improvements that increase safety for all road users.

- Assist in collecting all relevant crash and safety data (quantitative and anecdotal) when evaluating problem areas and traffic situations.
- Include community members and community feedback when jurisdictions are designing traffic safety systems.
- Incorporate systems-level changes that allow for consideration of project impacts on those using active transportation.
- Provide opportunities for community members and advocates to provide input to decision makers during planning stages of infrastructure projects.

- Advocate for planning and engineering efforts that incorporate a Safe Systems Approach, such as reducing speeds by narrowing travel lanes.
- Promote protected or separated bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Conduct or contribute to a crash data analysis focused on arterials for each jurisdiction.
- Encourage funding and land use planning that increases opportunities for more active and sustainable forms of transportation.
- Advocate for the Dutch model of roundabouts in place of signalized intersections to improve traffic flow and safety.
- Advocate for the implementation of traffic calming infrastructure (e.g speed bumps, raised crosswalks, bulbouts, street trees, and chicanes) to increase road safety.
- Advocate for Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons to increase pedestrian safety.
- Advocate for utilizing pop-up infrastructure demonstration projects prior to design and construction of permanent road improvements.
- Complete bicycle and pedestrian safety audits to proactively identify dangerous road locations that can inform jurisdictions of high priority areas for road safety improvements.
- Advocate for more visible roads at night through improved lighting and striping.

Safer Vehicles: Expand the availability of vehicle systems and features that help to prevent crashes and minimize the impact of crashes on both occupants and non-occupants.

- Provide input on local, state, or federal policies and designs that make vehicles safer, such as collision avoidance systems and connected vehicle technology.
- Keep informed about the latest car seat and vehicle restraint system safety technology and recall information.
- Advocate for appropriate safety measures, such as installing lateral protective devices (LPDs), also known as side guards, for local jurisdictions and private fleets with large commercial vehicles.
- Continue providing free car seats and car seat inspections to lower-income families through the CPS program to help ensure greater vehicle safety for young occupants.
- Advocate for improved safety features on large vehicles with limited visibility in the front of the vehicle.

Safer Speeds: Promote safer speeds in all roadway environments through a combination of roadway design, speed-limit setting, education, and enforcement.

- Continue the Trash Can Sticker traffic calming program to slow traffic on residential streets in the City of Santa Cruz and explore expanding the program to residents in other cities and unincorporated Santa Cruz County.

- Continue the PACE Car Sticker traffic calming program to interested residents in all local jurisdictions to slow traffic on residential streets.
- Implement creative projects to slow down traffic and reduce the potential for crashes to cause serious injuries and fatalities.
- Engage with the local government to address traffic speed issues that community members experience.
- Support projects that slow vehicle speeds and protect cyclists and pedestrians.
- Work with jurisdictions to acquire funding to implement temporary projects that slow vehicle speeds.
- Find research reports on effective measures to slow down drivers and share with local jurisdictions.
- Advocate for installing cameras at busy intersections to capture red-light running and speeding, especially at school zones and high-crash locations.

Post-Crash Care: Enhance the survivability of crashes through expedient access to emergency medical care. Enhance trauma support to crash victims and generate greater awareness of crashes and the impact they have on communities.

- Post online acknowledgements and response to lives lost and those severely injured.
- Maintain a current local database of serious injury and fatality crashes reported by the media and community members.
- Share quarterly crash reports with elected officials to highlight the magnitude of the traffic safety problem in Santa Cruz County.
- Involve multiple stakeholders, such as media and road safety advocates, to review factors that contribute to local serious injury and fatal crashes.
- Communicate with PIOs and the media to change the narrative around crashes to look past individual behaviors, avoid victim blaming, and include other collision factors, such as road design.
- Assist in identifying the built environment factors that impact crash dynamics and increase understanding that the designers of those systems hold responsibility as well.
- Work with law enforcement agencies to share local crash data and report on traffic citation trends.
- Assist jurisdictions in developing a plan to respond to fatal and severe injury crashes.
- Participate in the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims or other annual memorial events.
- Develop and explore resources to support families who have been impacted by traffic violence, including resources from Families for Safest Streets  
<https://www.familiesforsafeststreets.org/>

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- Reach out to crash survivors and individuals who have lost loved ones to hear their stories and engage them in generating greater awareness to humanize these traumatic experiences.

## Appendix A

### The Safe System Approach

The Safe System Approach incorporates the following 6 principles:

1. **Death and Serious Injuries are Unacceptable.** A Safe System Approach prioritizes the elimination of crashes that result in death and serious injuries.
2. **Humans Make Mistakes.** People will inevitably make mistakes and make decisions that can lead or contribute to crashes, but the transportation system can be designed and operated to accommodate certain types and levels of human mistakes in order to avoid death and serious injuries when a crash occurs.
3. **Humans are Vulnerable.** Human bodies have physical limits for tolerating crash forces before death or serious injury occurs; therefore, it is critical to design and operate a transportation system that is human-centric and accommodates those physical human vulnerabilities.
4. **Responsibility is Shared.** All stakeholders—including government at all levels, industry, non-profit/advocacy, researchers, and the general public—are vital to preventing fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways.
5. **Safety is Proactive.** Proactive tools should be used to identify and address safety issues in the transportation system, rather than waiting for crashes to occur and reacting afterwards.
6. **Redundancy is Crucial.** Reducing risks requires that all parts of the transportation system be strengthened, so that if one part fails, the other parts still protect people.

Unlike prior approaches that prioritize human behavior and place most of the blame on the individuals involved in a crash, the Safe System Approach works by building and reinforcing multiple layers of protection to prevent crashes from happening and minimizing harm to individuals when crashes occur. This holistic approach incorporates the following 5 objectives to achieve zero traffic deaths and serious injuries:

Safer People: Encourage safe, responsible behavior by road users and create conditions that prioritize their ability to reach their destination unharmed.

Safer Roads: Design roadway environments to mitigate human mistakes and reduce the chances of severe injury and death to facilitate safe travel by the most vulnerable road users.

Safer Vehicles: Expand the availability of vehicle systems and features that help to prevent crashes and minimize the impact of crashes on both occupants and non-occupants.

Safer Speeds: Promote safer speeds in all roadway environments through a combination of roadway design, speed-limit setting, education, and enforcement.

Post-Crash Care: Enhance the survivability of crashes through expedient access to emergency medical care. Enhance trauma support to crash victims and generate greater awareness of crashes and the impact they have on communities.





<https://www.transportation.gov/NRSS/SafeSystem>

## **Appendix B**

### **CTSC Roles and Responsibilities**

The coalition staff are employed by the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency (HSA) in the Public Health Division and are responsible for assisting the coalition in managing its operations, including coalition meetings, member communication, and community engagement, as well as work plan development, implementation, and evaluation. The coalition members and partner agencies actively participate in meetings and play an advisory role in fiscal management and strategic planning. Members and partner agencies take on specific work plan tasks as appropriate. Two coalition leaders (Co-Chairs) are elected by coalition members for two-year terms and are responsible for facilitating coalition meetings, providing expertise and guidance to coalition staff, and signing coalition letters.

CTSC will provide support, technical assistance, and resources to jurisdictions and the community to implement Vision Zero, as well as develop and maintain collaborative relationships for other grant funded traffic safety programs that support Vision Zero. The Coalition and staff are also committed to providing traffic safety programming that the community has relied on for many years, such as the Ride n' Stride education program, the Bicycle Traffic School diversion program, Bicycle Helmet Fit and Distribution Sites, participation in Bike/Walk to School and other community outreach events, Pace Car and Trash Can Sticker traffic calming programs, maintenance of the CTSC website at [www.sctrafficsafety.org](http://www.sctrafficsafety.org) and Facebook page, and traffic related injury and fatality surveillance.