

VISION ZERO TEXAS

WE CAN END TRAFFIC DEATHS IN TEXAS



TEXAS LEADS THE NATION IN TRAFFIC DEATHS. WE CAN LEAD THE NATION IN ENDING TRAFFIC DEATHS.

Every day ten people die on our Texas streets and roads, each one a family tragedy. Here are reasonable steps the legislature can take in 2021 to end traffic deaths in Texas.

Safe Neighborhood Streets

Every kid in Texas deserves the freedom of a safe neighborhood. The Safe Neighborhood Streets bill could allow cities to set speed limits on residential streets to 20 mph and make the default residential speed limit 25 mph on otherwise unposted streets.

Stop for Pedestrians

The Stop for Pedestrians Bill would add the words “stop for” in three places in the Texas transportation code. Texas is one of the most dangerous states in the nation for pedestrians. Changing the language from “yield to pedestrians” to “stop and yield for pedestrians” can help save lives.

Consistent, Statewide Hands Free

The Hands Free Bill will provide a consistent, statewide standard that it is not acceptable to drive a vehicle in Texas with your phone in your hands. Consistent standards improve safety.

Safe Routes to School

In Texas, Safe Routes to School is a 100 percent federally funded cost-reimbursement program managed through the Texas Department of Transportation. We need a higher statewide priority on students getting to school safely, including new state funding.

End Drunk Driving in Texas

Although drunk driving deaths are decreasing, they still account for one in four traffic fatalities in Texas. We need a comprehensive approach to end drunk driving in Texas.

Dedicated Transportation Safety Funding

In 2019, the Texas Transportation Commission allocated \$300 million a year to end traffic deaths, almost doubling Texas safety funding for two years. The legislature should permanently authorize this “Road to Zero” funding and continue to support safety plans in every metro, urban, and rural TXDOT District.

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Safe Neighborhood Streets

Every kid in Texas deserves safe neighborhood streets to walk, bike, skate, scooter, ride in a car, use a wheelchair, or play in the yard.

Unfortunately, most of our neighborhoods are designed to encourage people to drive at speeds that can kill or seriously injure people walking, biking, or even traveling in cars.

While transportation safety in general must focus on freeways and major arterials where most of our crashes occur, more children are killed or seriously injured while walking and biking in Texas on our 30 mph streets than on any other type of street.

Parents are afraid to let kids play in their own neighborhoods, leading to decreased physical activity, and contributing to our obesity crisis.

City transportation officials know how to design safer streets so we all feel comfortable driving at safe speeds of 25 mph or less, but the Texas transportation code is hindering deployment of modern, safe residential streets.

Nationally, the transportation engineering profession has shifted the way we think about

the problem of speed and designing streets for safe target speeds. NACTO has called for slower design speeds for residential streets, and has recently been joined by AASHTO, with the new Green Book calling for using the concepts of target speeds to achieve safe streets.

The Texas Strategic Highway Safety Plan calls for using safe design speed strategies and for thoughtful processes for the Texas transportation engineering community to work through this complex shift in thinking.

What would this bill do?

The Safe Neighborhood Streets bill would lower the statewide prima facie speed limit on residential streets from 30 to 25 mph, allow cities to use 20 mph streets where they deem necessary, eliminate an impossible to meet reporting requirement, and reduce the need to use city funds to pay for duplicative signage and unnecessary engineering studies.

Secondarily, Safe Neighborhood Streets should be included in the need for increased statewide safety funding. Traditionally state transportation funding has neglected the needs of existing neighborhoods in cities. Part of fixing this inequity is focusing on retrofitting safe neighborhood streets for safe speeds.

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Stop for Pedestrians

Texas is one of the most dangerous states for pedestrians, ranked 8th most dangerous in the 2019 Dangerous by Design report by Smart Growth America, moving up a place in the wrong direction since the previous 2016 report.

In terms of total absolute number of pedestrian deaths, Texas saw the third largest amount of people dying while walking between 2005 and 2014, behind only California and Florida.

In 2017, 614 people died while pedestrians in Texas and 1,144 people suffered “suspected serious injuries” as pedestrians according to TXDOT. Every day about five pedestrians suffer death or serious injury somewhere in Texas.

Along with broader safety measures, the legislature must do something specifically to reduce pedestrian deaths in Texas.

Every kid in Texas deserves to grow up with the liberty of walking or rolling their wheelchair without risking their own death. Every college student or professor deserves reasonably safe accommodation for using crosswalks. Families deserve the closure of clearer legal outcomes to crashes involving pedestrians.

A simple step forward that was recently done in the State of Illinois is to switch from a “yield to” to a “stop for” pedestrians state. Not only will this change save lives across the state by establishing responsible behavior for vehicle operators, it will provide a cleaner legal framework for police and courts.

What would this bill do?

The Stop for Pedestrians Bill, HB 1289, would add two words in four places in the Texas transportation code, like this: “the operator of a vehicle shall **stop and** yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian crossing a roadway in a crosswalk.”

There are different sections of the code applying to different types of locations where a person driving a vehicle would have a duty to stop for a pedestrians. This bill would not change the general framework of where people are allowed to cross streets, though.

In places where pedestrians already specifically have the right of way and drivers must yield, the person driving will simply also be asked to stop before their vehicle actually impacts a human body. Fees and other legal consequences for not stopping would be the same as those today applied when a person operating a vehicle fails to yield to a pedestrian.

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Consistent, Statewide Hands Free

Distracted driving in Texas takes at least 400 lives and seriously injures at least 2,800 Texans every year. Establishing a clear, statewide agenda targeting the growing problem of distracted driving is essential to reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries in Texas.

According to the National Safety Council, about 26% of all crashes involve cell phones - a much larger portion than recorded in Texas data. If this ratio is correct, we are potentially underreporting distracted driving deaths by 55%, meaning distracted driving may contribute to around 900 deaths in Texas a year.

Distracted driving reform should include a **ban on driving while using a phone in your hand**, market solutions by insurance or phone companies, education and enforcement, and improvements in data collection and analysis. Like all traffic enforcement, hands free should be implemented through an equity lens to avoid profiling and focus on actually achieving safer streets and roads for all.

The State of Georgia adopted a consistent, statewide hands free law in July 2018 and is reporting an 11% reduction in total traffic fatalities statewide. Texans deserve no less.

Police officers in Texas have been reporting that texting bans are difficult to enforce, while enforcement campaigns in cities currently with hands free ordinances appear to be working to change behavior of the driving population.

What would this bill do?

The Consistent, Statewide Hands Free Bill, SB 43, will upgrade the texting ban passed in the 2017 session to a more enforceable, safe standard, outlawing driving while you are actually using your cell phone, unless you are using a hands free device, or can safely stop outside a lane of travel to take the call or text or update an app.

The bill would preempt local rules related to driving while preoccupied using a cell phone, creating a consistent, statewide established norm for any operator of a vehicle to follow wherever they are in the State of Texas.

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Safe Routes to School

In Texas, Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a 100 percent federally funded cost-reimbursement program managed through the TxDOT Traffic Operations Division (TRF). Projects are funded through a statewide competitive process.

The State of Texas needs to put a higher priority on Safe Routes to School, including programs to encourage local jurisdictions to take a comprehensive approach as has been done in the City of Austin. The State should ramp up to matching the level of Federal Funding for this program. And TXDOT should be empowered and funded to provide technical support to cities and counties to adopt best practices in Safe Routes to School.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 119 school-age children (younger than 19) were killed in school-transportation-related crashes, i.e., traveling to and from school, from 2003-2012. 42, or 35%, of those children were ages 5 to 7 years old when they died.

Moreover, more school-age pedestrians have been killed from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. than any other times of day

(NHTSA, 2014). It is not random that these fatal hours coincide with the start and end of school when school-age children are most prevalent on the streets.

Safe Routes to School seeks to prevent these tragedies and make it safe for school-age children to travel freely from home to school, especially on bike or on foot. The nationwide program aims to empower children with safe options to travel, encouraging biking and walking where and when safety does not present a barrier.

Some jurisdictions in Texas have gone substantially further than others in their work on Safe Routes to School, such as Austin, where voters dedicated a portion of the 2016 Transportation Bond to SRTS. Austin has developed a comprehensive assessment of safety issues and a list of potential improvements around every school in the city.

The legislature should support every city and county in developing similar capacity to support safe routes to all schools in Texas. State funding for Safe Routes to School should be a high priority and could be tailored to provide incentives for local governments to develop efficient plans and local funding to solve these issues for our kids.

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End Drunk Driving in Texas

Although drunk driving deaths are decreasing, they still account for one in four traffic fatalities in Texas, even though we spend about \$50 million a year on anti-drunk driving efforts. We need a comprehensive approach to end drunk driving in Texas.

Lowering the legal Blood Alcohol Content level from 0.08% to 0.05% would allow for most drivers to be able to consume at least 1 alcoholic beverage without allowing further impairment to remain legal.

The World Health Organization recommends BAC 0.05% as best practice and this law is in place in over 34 countries, affecting over 2 billion people.

The design of our suburbs, cities, and rural areas, including some local regulations also impact the decisions Texans make leading to the horrible decision to drive drunk.

The local zoning practice of minimum parking requirement for alcohol serving establishments means that we are requiring bars to make it easy to park for patrons who are very likely to drive home drunk. Similarly, lack of public

transportation access and safe sidewalks means that many feel they have no choice but to make the horrible decision to drive drunk.

There are potential improvements to our policies and rules around interlock devices. These devices on vehicles keep people from driving when they are intoxicated. In many cases, when someone is convicted of drunk driving violation, they are required to install such a device on their car.

However, there is apparently potential for streamlining the costs and regulations around this to ensure that all those convicted of drunk driving use these devices to protect us all. Interlock device attached to the ignitions of drunk driving offenders has been shown to reduce repeat offenses by two-thirds and should be used as much as possible.

We believe the legislature should pursue a suite of strategies to end drunk driving. The Texas Strategic Highway Safety Plan – which includes excellent suggestions for data-based proven strategies to address many safety issues brought up throughout this document – has an excellent suite of proposals for ending drunk driving at <https://www.texasshsp.com/emphasis-areas/impaired-driving/#strategies>

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