



208 W 4th Street, Suite 3A
Austin TX 78701

September 18, 2020

To: Dylan Matthews, Texas House Committee on Transportation
Re: Transportation RFI, Interim Charge 2 (safety)

Dear Dylan,

Walk Austin is a pedestrian advocacy organization whose mission is to make walking useful, safe, and enjoyable for all Austinites by collaborating with diverse communities and leaders to improve infrastructure, policies, and programs. Thank you for this opportunity to provide input with regard to the Transportation RFI, Interim Charge 2 (safety).

Safety should be a transportation network's primary goal. And yet in Austin last year, almost 90 people were killed and 550 seriously injured by vehicles. So far this year in Austin, almost 2,000 years of life have been lost on our streets. On the state level, Texas was ranked the 8th most dangerous state for pedestrians in the 2019 Dangerous by Design report by Smart Growth America. In terms of total absolute number of pedestrian deaths, Texas saw the third largest number of people in the US killed while walking between 2005 and 2014.

There are reasons for optimism that this situation will improve. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen non-driving transportation modes such as walking and bicycling skyrocket. More than ever, people are seeing that our streets can work differently and that making alternatives to driving safer and more pleasant will have greatly beneficial impacts. In addition, increasing attention is being paid at the state level to safety and real resources are being directed to creating a safer transportation system. This trend must continue and be accelerated.

As the Texas House Committee on Transportation considers dedicating further resources toward safety, we urge you to consider the following safety-related measures:

1. **Adopt a Safe Neighborhood Streets bill:** More children in Texas are killed or seriously injured while walking and biking on neighborhood streets than on any other type of street. A Safe Neighborhood Streets bill would allow jurisdictions to set 20 mph speed limits on residential streets, eliminate burdensome reporting requirements, and lower all neighborhood streets by default to 25mph.
2. **Pass a Stop for Pedestrians bill:** The Stop for Pedestrians Bill would instruct drivers to stop and yield for pedestrians, rather than merely yielding. The bill would add two words in four places in the Texas transportation code to read: "the operator of a vehicle shall stop and yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian crossing a roadway in a crosswalk."

3. **Pass a Crash Not Accident bill:** In 2017 1,617,597 people were involved in vehicle crashes in the Texas transportation system. In line with emerging nationwide best practices, a Crash Not Accident bill would replace all instances of the word “accident” in the Texas transportation code to “crash” to better emphasize the roles that design and behavior play in preventing crashes.
4. **Enact a consistent, statewide hands-free law:** Every year, distracted driving in Texas kills more than 400 people and seriously injures over 2,800. A Hands Free bill would provide a consistent, statewide standard prohibiting driving a vehicle in Texas while holding a phone.
5. **Expand funding for the state-level Safe Routes to School program:** According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, from 2003-2012 119 children were killed while traveling to and from school. The Texas legislature should support every city and county in developing safe routes to all schools in Texas.
6. **Support local towns and cities in creating Slow Streets programs:** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Austin and Dallas created “Slow Streets” programs to allow safe, socially-distanced exercise on neighborhood streets, with benefits extending far beyond the pandemic. The State of Texas should create resources to help and encourage more towns and cities to create such programs.
7. **Eliminate the 85th percentile rule:** This rule, which requires speed limits to be raised when 85% of drivers are exceeding the posted speed limit, forces jurisdictions to double-down on dangerous streets for all users. The 85th percentile rule should be eliminated and replaced with a safe systems approach to setting speed limits, such as the Federal Highway Administration’s USLIMITS2 system, as well as a design speed reduction requirement when too many vehicles are exceeding posted speed limits.
8. **Create a state level goal to reduce per capita Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT):** VMT is closely tied to safety; the more someone drives the more risk they’re exposed to and the more risk they are adding into the system for everyone else. The Texas legislature should create a goal with teeth (ie. provisions for what happens if the goal isn’t met) to reduce per capita VMT in Texas.
9. **Replace the Level Of Service (LOS) metric with VMT:** Using LOS to judge the mobility performance of roads has led to people spending more time in their cars, leading to more crashes, pollution, health impacts, and sprawl. LOS should be replaced by VMT so that any transportation project can be judged by how far it would induce people to travel.
10. **Create statewide urban and rural roadway design guidelines consistent with FHWA recommendations:** In their report, Flexibility in Highway Design, FHWA acknowledges that each roadway has a unique context and should be designed to facilitate safety, among other factors. One-size fits all roadway design has proven to be far too costly from a fiscal and social standpoint and ultimately reduces the utility of the roadway for all users. Roadways

should be designed for their specific context so that the maximum value can be realized by all users.

11. **Pass a Safe Passing statute for bicyclists:** A growing number of states require that drivers give at least 3 feet when passing bicyclists as well as other vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians or stranded motorists. Walk Austin joins Bike Texas and other groups in supporting a Safe Passing statute.
12. **Legalize Idaho Stops:** Bicycle injuries dropped 14 percent after Idaho passed its famous stop law in 1982 that allows bicyclists to treat stop signs as yield signs under certain conditions, which can also reduce congestion at intersections. Colorado, Delaware, and Arkansas have also recently passed similar laws and we call on Texas to be next.
13. **Fund a statewide Tourism Trails system:** For every \$1 spent on trails, society saves \$3 in health-related benefits. The Texas Bicycle Advisory Council has identified proposed routes for a statewide Tourism Trails system. This system should be funded and should cater for both bicyclists and pedestrians.

If enacted, these measures would significantly improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and for all other transportation modes. We hope you will consider the above. Please let me know if you have any questions on these proposals.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Greenfield', written in a cursive style.

Adam Greenfield
Board President, Walk Austin