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Denver Streets Partnership statement as Denver matches grim milestone for traffic fatalities

71 lives have been lost on Denver's streets this year

The Denver Streets Partnership is heartbroken and angered that a record 71 people have died as a result of traffic crashes this year in Denver as of November 3. Even one life lost to preventable traffic violence is unacceptable, yet more and more people lose their lives on our roads each year. We need leaders to step up now more than ever.

Since February 17, 2016, the day Denver officially [committed to Vision Zero](#) and the goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and serious bodily injuries in the City by 2030, 369 people have been killed on Denver streets. Predictably, many of these deaths were on Denver's High Injury Network—the 5% of Denver's streets where historically 50% of traffic fatalities have occurred. Many fatal crashes also involve drivers traveling at unsafe speeds, encouraged by dangerous street designs and inappropriate speed limits that prioritize vehicular movement over public safety.

We know where and why serious crashes happen. We also know how to prevent these tragedies from happening in the first place, and we have a moral obligation to do so. The fact that the number of people who die on our roads continues to increase year after year—leaving behind families, friends, and futures—reflects a lack of commitment to public safety at all levels of government. Government leaders at the local, regional, state, and federal level must lean in to the full range of proven strategies for addressing the carnage happening on our city streets:

- **Denver City Council should revise the municipal code to reduce the default speed limit from 25 to 20 miles per hour.** This change would immediately improve safety across the city, particularly on the “local streets” that make up 71% of Denver's street network. These are neighborhood streets where children should be able to play and neighbors should be able to gather without fearing for their safety. The Denver Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI) recently completed a study that confirmed the feasibility and safety benefits of making this change, and now is the time for City Council to act.
- **DOTI should act swiftly to also reduce speed limits on arterials and collectors where the default speed limit does not apply, and to reinforce safer speeds on all streets through street design changes.** Last year DOTI developed new “Complete Streets Design Guidelines” that enable street designs previously not used in Denver that have proven effective at reducing traffic speeds and increasing safety, such as speed humps, mini traffic circles, and diverters. To reverse the increasing trend in traffic fatalities, these designs should be implemented widely throughout the City, but so far DOTI has been timid in their deployment.

- **The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), Regional Transportation District (RTD), and DOTI must work collaboratively to dramatically improve transit service on Denver's urban arterials.** Many of the streets on Denver's High Injury Network are both transit corridors and state highways, such as Colfax Avenue and Federal Boulevard. Transit is one of the safest ways for people to move around the city, and encouraging people to choose to ride the bus by implementing improved service will go a long way toward eliminating traffic fatalities. Too often today the buses on these corridors are infrequent and unreliable, stuck in congestion along with single-occupant vehicles. Adding dedicated bus lanes and increasing service frequency would not only significantly boost transit ridership, but also help transform these streets from deadly highways into people-friendly main streets.
- **The federal government should regulate vehicle designs to better protect people outside of vehicles, not just vehicle occupants.** Nationwide, the alarming increase in the number of people killed while walking has been fueled by the [growing popularity of bigger trucks and SUVs](#), whose greater mass, higher front-end profiles and significant blind spots have [proven to be a deadly combination](#). The U.S. should follow the lead of the U.K. and E.U. where recent legislation required vehicles to include features such as speed governors and automatic braking technology that can be life saving for pedestrians.

Cities around the world are proving that dramatically reducing traffic fatalities is entirely possible when leaders take actions like those outlined above. The question is how many more lives must be lost before our leaders here in Denver and Colorado are willing to do their part. And with nearly two full months left before the year's end, what grim milestone will we reach in 2021 before we see action?

Denver's traffic fatality numbers are moving in the wrong direction. It's past time for the City to address this public safety crisis. Any life lost on our roadways signals failure. Zero is the only acceptable number of traffic fatalities.

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The Denver Streets Partnership is a coalition of community organizations advocating for people-friendly streets in Denver. Our mission is to reclaim Denver's streets for people walking, rolling, biking, and using transit, and to build safe, healthy, and equitable communities. Learn more at denverstreetspartnership.org.

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