

# Vision Zero: Our 2022 Call to Action: The Way to Zero Traffic Deaths is on the Bus



*denver* STREETS PARTNERSHIP.org

# It's time to fundamentally transform Denver's transportation system.

## Our lives depend on it.

**The Denver Streets Partnership calls on the City of Denver, DRCOG, RTD and CDOT to prevent more unnecessary loss of lives by making bold investments in bus infrastructure and service.** Focusing these investments on priority corridors will generate high ridership levels, reduce our dependence on individual car ownership and, most importantly, save lives.

We have no time to waste. The alarming rate of fatal and preventable traffic crashes on our streets demands urgent action — a record 84 people were killed in Denver in 2022. **To achieve this necessary and beneficial transformation of Denver's transportation system, the Denver Streets Partnership calls on all levels of government to do their part and work together:**

- **The City and County of Denver** must continue to expand the miles of dedicated bus lanes on priority transit streets, particularly along the High Injury Network.

Denver must invest in short-term changes on these corridors that will improve the speed and reliability of bus service such as bus queue jump lanes (that allow buses to bypass other cars at intersections) and traffic signal priority (that ensure buses regularly receive green lights).

Denver must also continue to invest in sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic calming, and intersection redesigns that make it safer and more convenient for people to walk, bike, and roll to and from transit stops and for shorter trips within neighborhoods.

*The estimated cost to implement speed and reliability improvements on Denver's Bus Priority Corridors is \$200 - \$350 million.*

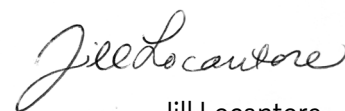
- **The City, DRCOG, RTD, and CDOT** must move swiftly and collaboratively to implement the vision for a comprehensive bus rapid transit (BRT) network laid out in the [RTD BRT feasibility study](#), [Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan](#), and the [Denver Moves Transit Plan](#). They must act now to take advantage of currently available state and federal transportation funding. They must reprioritize funds away from projects that will only increase cars and traffic on our city streets, such as the proposed widening of I-25 through central Denver.

*The estimated cost to build out a full BRT network within the City and County of Denver is \$1.6 - \$2.2 billion.*

- **RTD** should rebuild its workforce through fair wages and dignified working conditions, and **CDOT** should provide dedicated funding for transit operations so that adequate labor and funding is available to provide frequent, all-day bus service throughout Denver. In many states across the country, the state department of transportation provides 20-23% of the operating budget for local transit agencies, but RTD only receives 0.33% of its operating budget from CDOT.

*The estimated additional operations funding needed to support frequent transit service in the City and County of Denver is \$55 - \$60 million per year.*

The City and County of Denver pledged to end traffic deaths by the year 2030. It's time to fund that pledge.



Jill Locantore  
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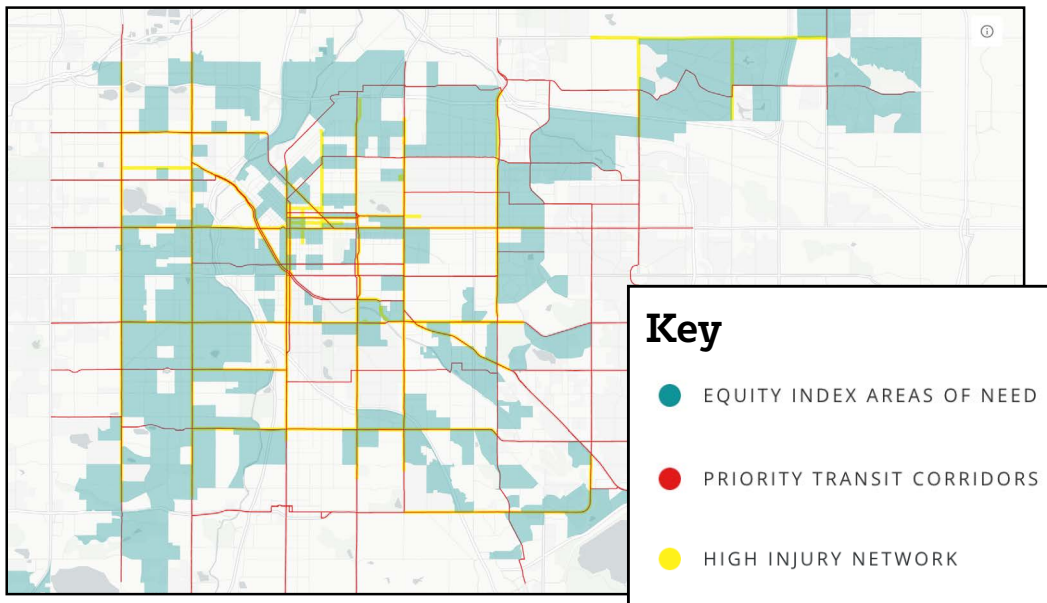




# Why the bus?

## Buses can save lives on streets where more people die of traffic violence

Most of the City's priority transit corridors are located on the High Injury Network, [the 5% of the streets where 50% of the traffic fatalities occur](#). These streets — including Colfax Avenue, Federal Boulevard, Colorado Boulevard, and Alameda Avenue—are designed like highways to move as many cars as fast as possible. Buses are a safer and more efficient way to move lots of people along these corridors. According to the [National Association of City Transportation Officials](#), “where a single travel lane of private vehicle traffic on an urban street might move 600 to 1,600 people per hour, a dedicated bus lane can carry up to 8,000 passengers per hour.”



With improved frequency, speed, and reliability of bus service, more people will choose to ride the bus instead of drive. The street will be able to carry more people to their destinations each day in a much safer manner compared to the status quo that is dominated by heavy car traffic.

Figure 1. Denver's Equity Index Areas, Priority Transit Corridors, and High Injury Network

## Better buses mean safer street designs, slower speeds, and more customers to local businesses

Street design changes that would make bus service faster and more reliable — and therefore a more attractive alternative to driving — would help transform these boulevards from dangerous highways into people-friendly main streets that generate more customers for local businesses and make them safer places to walk. For example, today on East Colfax, people on foot must typically traverse at least five lanes of speeding traffic to cross the street. The plans for center-running bus rapid transit (BRT) would dedicate two of these lanes for buses and convert a third lane into a median that serves as a pedestrian refuge. This would calm the remaining traffic and mean people crossing the street would only traverse one lane of traffic at a time.



Conceptual rendering of Colfax Avenue and Downing St. with BRT Implementation. Source: [Denver DOTI](#)

# Why the bus?

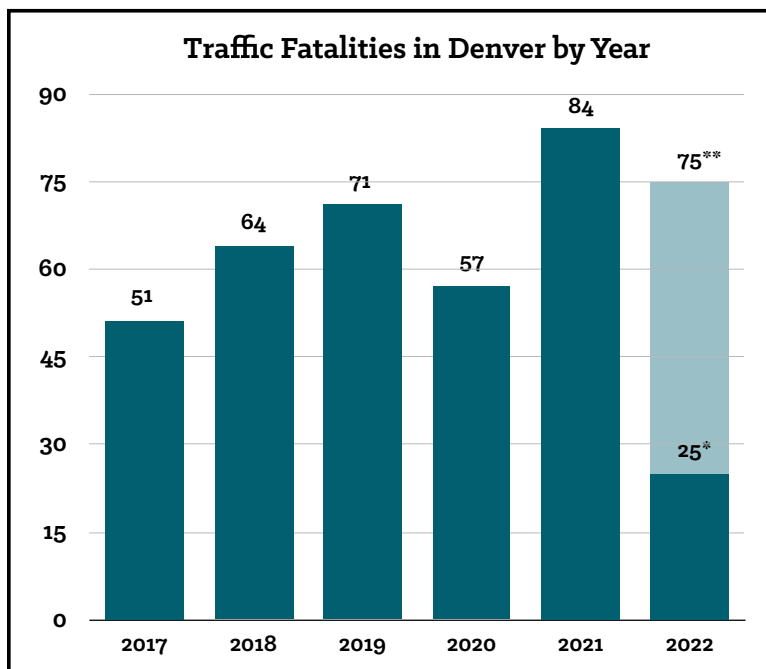
## Riding the bus is safer, and not just for bus riders

Even beyond street design changes that support transit service, riding the bus is inherently safer than driving. People driving or riding in cars are [66 times more likely to die](#) in a traffic crash compared to people riding the bus. One of the primary reasons buses are so safe is that bus operators are trained professionals. Bus drivers are much less likely than the general public to drive while texting, get behind the wheel while under the influence, or engage in other risky behaviors that contribute to many fatal crashes.

Here in Denver, RTD operators have an excellent safety record. None of the Denver traffic fatalities in 2021 involved an RTD bus. Only four of the 381 traffic crashes that resulted in a serious bodily injury, or 1%, involved an RTD bus. In Seattle, a city with a population similar to Denver's but that has invested in much more frequent bus service than Denver, only 31 people died in traffic crashes in 2021, compared to 84 in Denver.



**More people taking the bus also means fewer cars on the street, and that means we are all less exposed to the risk of a serious traffic crash.** April 2020 proved this when Denver issued stay at home orders: the streets were mostly empty of cars while still alive with people walking and biking as a safe way to get out of the house and exercise. For the first and only time since Denver committed to Vision Zero, not a single person died in a crash on our streets that month.



## Safer streets are just the beginning

Greater investments in transit infrastructure and service will also address many of Denver's other pressing problems related to climate change, air quality, affordability, and accessibility for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities.

Transit investments on priority corridors can also correct for long-standing inequities across our city: much of the High Injury Network is located in neighborhoods that historically have received less public investment and where residents have lower incomes and less access to vehicles.

Figure 2. Traffic fatalities in Denver.

\* Fatalities in Denver as of May 1, 2022

\*\* Projected fatalities by December 31, 2022

For full data, visit <https://denvergov.org/visionzero>

# Vision Zero in Denver

**In 2016, Mayor Hancock took the important step of declaring Denver's commitment to Vision Zero and the goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries.**

In 2017, the City developed the [Denver Vision Zero Action Plan](#) and named the year 2030 as the deadline for meeting this goal.

In the Plan, the City committed to these fundamental principles from the Vision Zero Network:

1. Traffic deaths and severe injuries are acknowledged to be preventable.
2. Human life and health are prioritized within all aspects of the transportation system.
3. Human error is inevitable, and transportation systems should be forgiving.
4. Safety work should focus on systems-level changes above influencing individual behavior.
5. Mitigation of speed is recognized and prioritized as the fundamental factor in crash severity.

The plan also identified more than 70 actions the City would take by 2022. Each year since the plan was first adopted, [the Denver Streets Partnership has issued an annual Vision Zero Progress Report Card](#) to evaluate the City's progress toward the street safety improvements outlined in the Action Plan such as building new sidewalks and bike lanes, implementing traffic calming treatments, and redesigning intersections.

While the City's overall grade improved somewhat over time — from a C in 2018 to a B- in 2020 — and completed projects have improved safety at specific locations, Denver traffic fatalities have continued to increase at an alarming rate and reached a new high of 84 people killed in 2021.

To reverse this trend and save lives, the City must move beyond small safety projects in isolated locations and refocus on transforming our community's entire transportation system. While building new sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic calming, and intersection improvements will continue to be important, transit improvements are an additional critical component that is often overlooked. **Buses are at the heart of the transformational change we need to achieve zero traffic deaths.**

**It's time for Mayor Hancock and the City and County of Denver to recommit to Vision Zero and engage intergovernmental partners to think bigger and implement solutions that will save lives and make our City a better place to live. It's time for Denver to back up its commitment to Vision Zero with dedicated funding and action commensurate with the crisis at hand.**

## Vision Zero Report Cards since 2018





For more:

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