



# Traffic Safety Practices in U.S. Cities

## Survey and Focus Group Results

# Project Team – Florida Atlantic University

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# Project Overview

- Motivated by programs like Vision Zero, cities have sought to develop safety practices that depart from conventional practice.
- The study sought to understand the current state-of-the-practice in addressing safety at the city level.
  - Survey of representatives of the 150 most populous US cities
  - Focus group of 10 leaders in traffic safety
- Key Questions:
  - How do cities conceptualize urban traffic safety?
  - How are they currently attempting to reduce traffic-related death and injury?
  - What tools and resources are used to advance safety?
  - What is the political climate that motivates safety efforts?

# Components

## 1. Survey

- Respondents were persons overseeing city safety programs from the 150 largest cities in the US.
- Web-based survey instrument
- Recruitment via email and follow-up telephone calls
- 74 completed responses – 49% response rate

## 2. Focus Group

- Held on October 30, 2017 at NACTO Annual Conference in Chicago
- Participants included 10 representatives from cities who have well-established Vision Zero programs

# Survey

- 67 Questions Focused on 3 Primary Areas:
  1. Transportation Planning and Project Development
  2. Education and Enforcement
  3. Administration and Leadership, including:
    - Mayors
    - City Councils
    - City Residents
    - Metropolitan Planning Organizations
    - Departments of Transportation

# Findings: Transportation Planning and Project Development

- 84% of respondents indicated that safety is an explicit policy goal in their long-range transportation plan, compared to only 64% of cities identifying congesting relief as a policy goal.
  - Nevertheless, these goals do not translate into project development processes:
    - 90% of respondents reported that congestion is a primary measure when evaluating project alternatives.
    - 55% of respondents identified safety as a concern for new projects, while 33% said it was a concern for 3R/4R projects.
- 90.5% indicated that they collect safety-related data, though only 62% indicated that they use this data to actively monitor safety performance.
- Most city safety programs related to pedestrians and cyclists. 95% of respondents reported having a bicycle master plan, and 88% reported having a complete streets program.

## Findings: Education and Enforcement

- Education and enforcement policies adopted pertain principally to conventional programs such as legal prohibitions against texting while driving (82%), DUI/DWI enforcement (85%), seat-belt enforcement (65%), and restrictions on cell phone use while driving (60%).
- Less than half of the cities have sought to modify speed or driving behavior through programs such as speed limit enforcement, crosswalk enforcement, or red light cameras.
- 81% reported the adoption of at least one Safe Routes to School program during the last 3 years,

## Findings: Administration and Leadership

- Mayors and City Managers were viewed as being particularly influential to safety, with 76% of respondents indicating that safety was a top concern.
- 73% of respondents also said Metropolitan Planning Organizations were supportive of safety, though only 55% said that the MPO prioritized safety over congestion.
- Comparatively, only half of respondents felt that the State Department of Transportation prioritized safety, and only 27% reported that DOTs prioritize safety over congestion concerns.
- Only 40% felt that their DOT supported projects focused on the safety of pedestrians or cyclists. Only 34% reported that their State DOT supported complete streets programs.



## Focus Group: Major Findings

- **Vehicle speeds** are viewed as the primary safety issue confronting cities.
- Crashes involving **pedestrians and cyclists** were regarded as being of greater overall concern than crashes involving multiple vehicles.
- Many participants noted that safety was a greater concern than **congestion**, which was regarded as a facet of urban living.
- Funding, and especially **long-term maintenance**, was viewed as a barrier. Cities have addressed the lack of capital from state sources by local capital investments, but are sensitive to the costs of funding the ongoing maintenance of new capital projects.