

The purpose of the following report (one of six) is to orient readers to the professional skills and potential contributions of Local Government and Elected Leaders for advancing Vision Zero. These reports were produced by the 2022 – 2023 NC Vision Zero Capstone team at UNC-Chapel Hill and are the result of a sector-specific landscape scan and interviews with experts in the field.

# The Diverse Roles of Local Government and Elected Leaders in Achieving Vision Zero

## Introduction

Vision Zero is a growing movement throughout the United States to eliminate all traffic-related deaths and serious injuries and to ensure the safe and equitable mobility for all road users, no matter how they get around. This approach to transportation safety requires collaboration among diverse groups of professionals, working in collaboration with communities to ensure transportation decision-making is evidence-driven and equitable across diverse road users. The diverse groups and coalitions needed to support Vision Zero implementation include local traffic planners, engineers, policy makers, public health professionals, emergency responders, community members, and other key partners.

## The Local Government Sector

Elected and appointed local government officials, including mayors, city councils, and city managers, are the decision-makers in local administration and policies, and span a wide swath of disciplines and subject matter expertise. Elected officials set the strategic focus areas for a community, which may include setting priorities and communicating a vision for improving traffic safety. Officials have the ability to prioritize Vision Zero initiatives by allocating resources to hire administrative staff with expertise in road safety and related subject matter and prioritize safety-related projects within the municipality's budget.

“We hold the purse strings. We have the regulatory environment that we control. We have [an obligation] out there to help... keep people safe. We're, in some ways, at least one leg of the stool to get something done and make it safer for everybody. I think we're critical.\*”

– Local Government Official

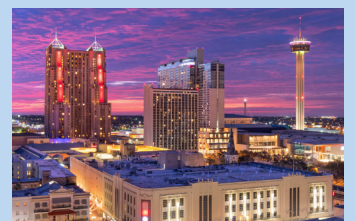
## Case Study #1

The City of Cambridge, MA converted two streets, Winthrop and Palmer Streets, into “shared streets,” which are smaller streets that provide pedestrians with the right-of-way and decrease vehicle through-traffic. Along with this new designation, both streets were improved with new paving and enhanced lighting to support greater accessibility. The Public Works, Transportation, and the Community Development departments; and community groups were involved in facilitating this change, which has improved accessibility for all modes of transportation.



## Case Study #2

In 2015, San Antonio Councilmember Shirley Gonzales championed the first Vision Zero initiative in the state of Texas. Beginning with projects focused on increasing safety at school crossings, Council Member Gonzales was able to increase community support for addressing road deaths with a focus on data-driven strategies equity in the city. She and her colleagues launched a Vision Zero initiative, created a city budget to reflect those values, and advocated for state-level policies to support safer communities.



# How Elected Leaders Can Support Vision Zero

## Leadership

- Incorporating Vision Zero and Safe System principles in strategic planning and as a community priority
- Collaborating with other leaders and elected officials at the state and federal level to support effective policies and advocating for policy change for safer road systems.
- Building community interest and engagement around road safety measures and equitable infrastructure

## Resources

- Funding programs emphasizing alternative means of transportation (e.g., e-bike rebate or library programs)
- Creating new local staff positions to coordinate Vision Zero initiatives

## Skills and Knowledge

- Collaborating with regional leaders to expand transit options and increase connectivity
- Enabling mixed-use and transit-oriented development
- Directing local staff to prioritize safe infrastructure projects (e.g., separated bike lanes, raised crosswalks) and increased access to alternative modes of transportation (e.g., sidewalk connectivity)
- Implementing a neighborhood traffic calming or school street program

## Local Policy-Making

- Passing policy changes that incorporate Vision Zero principles (e.g., lowering speed limits, no turn on red laws, updates to the Unified Development Ordinance)
- Expanding or improving transit connectivity
- Supporting land use policies that facilitate safer transportation (e.g., transit-oriented development)

## Budgetary Commitments

- Funding safety projects and programs that support alternative modes of transportation, such as e-bikes, scooters, and transit
- Hiring new staff to support Vision Zero initiatives
- Expanding sidewalk and bicycle lane connectivity
- Expanding local infrastructure projects

## Community Engagement

- Raising awareness of transportation safety and accessibility
- Hosting meetings, town halls, and “office hours” to speak with community members and address needs
- Collaborating with local nonprofits and community groups

## Case Study #3

In 2022, the Charlotte City Council in North Carolina approved a change to the neighborhood traffic calming program to support more widespread and equitable implementation of traffic calming measures. Prior to the change, the resident would submit a petition signed by 60% of the property owners residing within a certain distance of the proposed calming element. The Charlotte Department of Transportation is now responsible for communicating with residents about the pending traffic calming measure and will allow neighbors to notify the city of any opposition within 45 days from notification. The policy is intended to enable renters to seek traffic calming measures in their neighborhoods.



## Key Resources for Elected Officials and Local Government Staff Interested in Learning More About Vision Zero

- [Vision Zero Core Elements Summary](#)
- [Vision Zero Implementation Toolkit](#)
- [Moving from Vision to Action](#)
- [Safe Systems Strategic Plan](#)



“Local elected officials are mostly where it happens. That’s the government that’s closest to the people; the local levels where these decisions are actually made and implemented.\*”

– Local Government Official

\*Quotes have been edited for clarity; full quotes are available upon request.



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