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Pedestrians, bikers hold rally for safer streets at City Hall

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Surrounded by bikers wearing yellow in solidarity with the dead, onlookers listen to a speaker call for faster action, at the Streets Are For People rally Thursday evening in City Hall Plaza. PHOTO BY CAROLYN KOMATSOULIS/DAILY FREE PRESS CONTRIBUTOR

To protest for safer roads for pedestrians and bikers, approximately 100 Boston residents rallied at City Hall Plaza Thursday evening in the “Streets Are for People Rally.”

The rally, organized by the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition, aimed to express solidarity with victims of traffic accidents and to call on Boston Mayor Martin Walsh to recommit to Vision Zero, the group’s initiative to rid the city of fatal crashes by 2030, Vision Zero member Becca Wolfson said at the beginning of the rally.

“We’re here today ... to be in solidarity with those who have been impacted in crashes and to remember those who died in traffic crashes, especially within the last year,” said Wolfson, who is also the executive director of the Boston Cyclists Union.

Boston City Council President Michelle Wu said at the rally that “having safe streets is an active choice,” and government policies are fundamental to safety.

“This is a choice,” Wu said. “We as a city, we as policymakers, have to really affirm and recognize the fact that crashes are not just a matter of luck or being unlucky.”

Since the beginning of the year, 13 pedestrians were killed in crashes, which is higher than the past six years' annual numbers, Wu said.

"Each and every one of my colleagues voted for lowering the speed limit and really trying to slow down traffic," Wu said. "Everyone on our side is on board. We just have to be realistic about making it happen fast."

The Chief of Streets, Transportation and Sanitation, Chris Osgood, said at the rally that the mayor supports the group's efforts, and traffic accidents should not serve "a test of courage" for residents to walk, bike and drive around the city.

"We're learning how to move faster ... at a pace that matches the velocity every one of us here feels," Osgood said. "I got to say that together, and it's only going to be together, we will eliminate roadway fatalities in the city."

Christopher Graham said his adopted teenage son, who was waiting to cross the street with a bicycle, was killed last year in Dorchester following a chain car crash.

"Crash from not only a drunk driver, but this person was high ... going almost 100 [mph]," Graham said. "And the message is, 'Look twice.' Whether on bike or driving, take a second look. Don't get on the phone."

Several people who attended the rally said the government should pay more attention to the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists and public transportation riders.

Ethan Fleming, 39, of Acton, said cars are troublesome, especially in causing traffic jams and parking difficulties.

"I used to live in the city, and I do a lot of business in the city very commonly, and the bike is my preferred form of transportation, followed by public transit," he said. "I'm a very strong believer in the idea that people who get around by bike or by walking or by public transit have to be higher priority than those who are getting around by their own car."

Jessi Flynn, 38, of Cambridge, said she was hit by a car door three years ago as she was biking on the road.

"I was hurt and the streets scare me still," she said. "I want to help make the changes to make it a better place."

Brendan Kearney, a Vision Zero member, said he hopes the rally can propel improvements to the city's commuting safety standards.

"The city staff needs more funding and more staff to actually achieve the goals that they want to make our city safer," he said. "I expect to get some more momentum with this and really just rally more people around the idea that the city can be safer."