

BOSTON & BEYOND: STATEWIDE COALITION LAUNCHES IN MASSACHUSETTS

December 2, 2015 | by Carolyn Szczepanski (<http://visionzeronetwork.org/author/carolyn/>) | in Blog (<http://visionzeronetwork.org/category/blog/>)



(<http://visionzeronetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BCU-vigil-sun.jpg?0e8dac>)

A new Coalition will work to implement Vision Zero in Boston – and expand success across the state (Photo by Kyle Ramey)

In March, when Mayor Marty Walsh committed the City of Boston to Vision Zero (<http://www.cityofboston.gov/news/Default.aspx?id=20044>), it was a big victory – with a long backstory. And now that the policy is on the books in the state’s most populous metropolis, a coalition of advocates is expanding the narrative to include all of Massachusetts.

For years leading up to the Vision Zero announcement this spring, Boston advocates and city officials had been working to improve street conditions, not only for drivers, but for people who bike, walk and take public transit, as well. But, behind the scenes, they were also investigating the underlying safety problems, analyzing the array of factors that lead to preventable traffic deaths and injuries.

That collaboration among groups not only scripted the public and political will for Vision Zero in Boston. It also set the stage for the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition (<http://www.visionzerocoalition.org/about>).

Launched publicly on World Day of Remembrance last month (<http://visionzeronetwork.org/we-remember-and-we-stand-for-vision-zero/>), the Coalition became one of the first organized campaigns to focus not just on a single municipality but statewide. Their mission is innovative in its integration of different jurisdictions, aiming to advance implementation of Vision Zero in Boston and expand that progress throughout the state.



(<http://visionzeronetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BCU-vigil-group.jpg?0e8dac>)

World Day of Remembrance Vigil (Photo by Kyle Ramey)

Put simply, the goal of the group is two-fold. “We’re looking for implementation in Boston and adoption throughout Massachusetts,” says Stacy Thompson, Deputy Director of LivableStreets Alliance (<http://www.livablestreets.info/>), a Coalition member. “So where we’ve got commitment, it’s about implementation. Where there hasn’t been commitment, it’s about adoption.”

With a population of nearly 650,000 people, why not stay focused on the City of Boston? For members of the Coalition, thinking beyond city lines is an opportunity — and necessity.

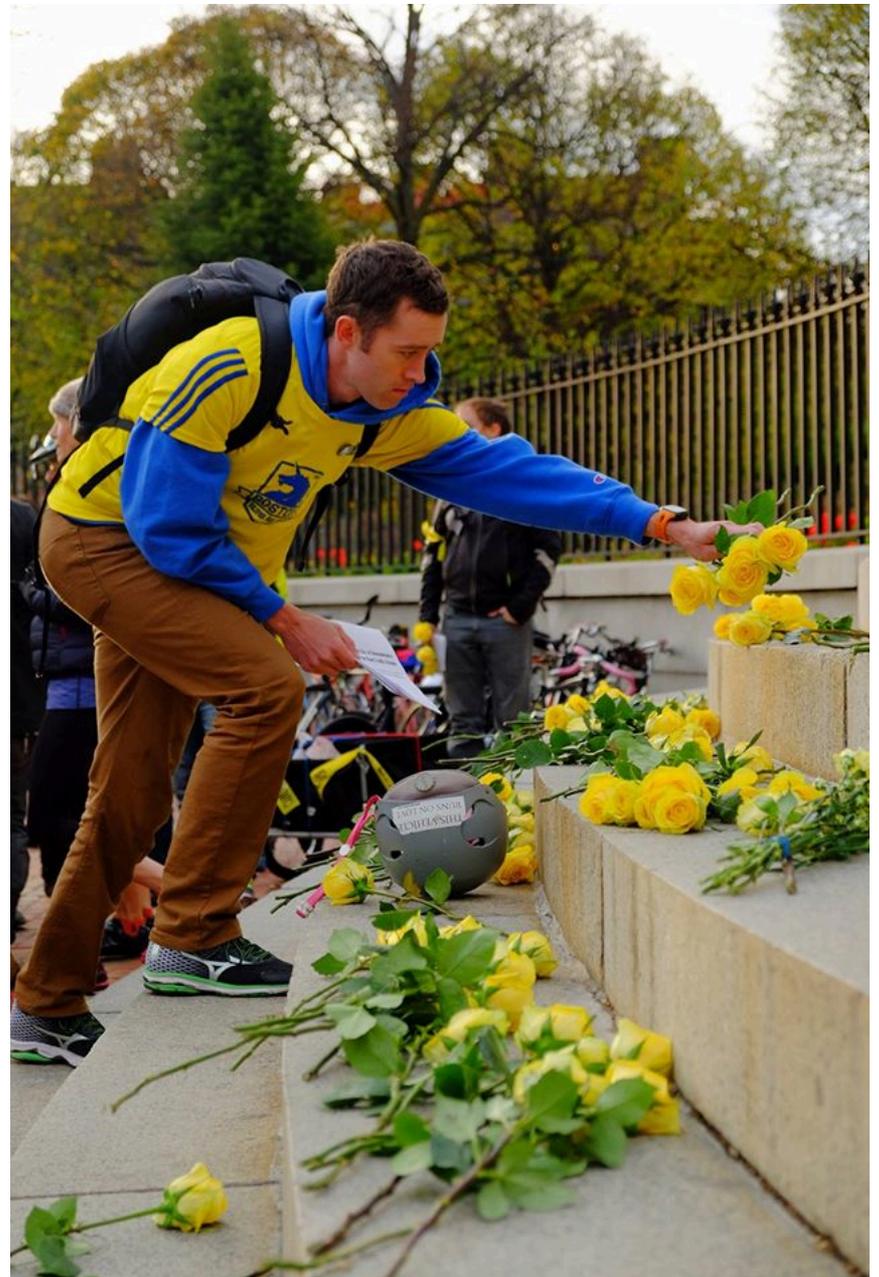
“We’re in a unique position in that we’re so much more than Boston,” Thompson says. “We have Cambridge and Brookline and so many other neighboring communities. So it’s not just how do we make progress in the City of Boston, but how do we get all these municipalities to talk to each other. People don’t see [the

distinction between] Cambridge or Brookline or Boston on their ride to work; it doesn't make sense to have the commitment in one town versus another town. For us, that means talking to a lot of cities and the state."

WalkBoston, another Coalition member, embraces that perspective, as well. According to Brendan Kearney, Communications Manager for WalkBoston, the organization has engaged with more than 100 distinct communities in its work. "The population of Boston grows significantly during the work day as workers commute in, so it's important that surrounding communities are considered and part of the conversation," he emphasizes. "Boston is much smaller in land area than other cities in the Northeast. Boston includes 48 square miles of land, compared to Philly at 143 and New York City at 305 square miles respectively. In Boston, surrounding communities are as much a part of the Greater Boston area transportation network as anything inside the city limits."

So it was fitting that the Coalition launched publicly on World Day of Remembrance, bringing together residents from across the metro area for a memorial ride and vigil. It also displayed the multi-stakeholder ethic that drives both the Coalition and the wider Vision Zero work.

"World Day of Remembrance was a platform to talk about issues that are traditionally about pedestrians and bicyclists in the context of all people," Thompson says. "It provided a platform for us to allow both victims of crashes and people who have lost loved ones in a traffic crash to have a place to mourn and to connect with other people and highlight that what happened to their loved ones wasn't an accident; it was preventable."



(<http://visionzeronetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BCU-vigil-brendan.jpg?0e8dac>)

WalkBoston's Brendan Kearney places flowers at the WDR vigil (Photo by Kyle Ramey)

The Coalition itself isn't strictly traditional in its composition, either; it includes both individual and organizational members. Emily Stein lost her father (<http://www.enddd.org/the-impact/howard-stein-61-ma/>) when a distracted driver struck and killed him while he was securing a load on his truck in Acton (about 25 miles outside of Boston) in 2011. For her, the Coalition embodies one of the most important tenets of Vision Zero: bringing allies together for a common agenda.

“Having the different modes of transportation – walking, biking, driving, and public transportation – is helpful for all of us to see other perspectives, and to know it's not one group pitted against another,” she says. “It's not that bikes are more important than cars or walking is more important than bikes; it's all of us working together and gaining a better understanding of how change can actually happen.”



(<http://visionzeronetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BCU-vigil-statehouse.jpg?0e8dac>)

The WDR vigil convened outside the Massachusetts State House (Photo by Kyle Ramey)

Combining forces hasn't just enhanced understanding; it's had significant practical impact, as well. "None of our groups have dedicated funding right now to work on Vision Zero, but we've all been finding ways to devote staff and volunteer time to work together and think bigger," Kearney says. "We've divided up responsibilities for the initial conversations about Coalition organizing structure, outreach to media, and creating Coalition website — and then have these smaller groups report back with recommendations to the larger group."

According to Thompson that structure has kept sometimes-unwieldy details from bogging down the high-level goal of the Coalition: to advocate on behalf of Vision Zero with a diverse but unified voice. "In working with the city, [the Coalition] has been effective because we're all coordinated with each other behind the scenes," Thompson says. "So when we reach out, we're speaking to the impact and the people behind all of those organizations with one single voice. Using that as leverage internally has been tremendously helpful."

Becca Wolfson, interim executive director of the Boston Cyclists Union, agrees. "The model that we're now operating under — some of us at the table with the City of Boston, helping them mold their Vision Zero policies, and all of us thinking together as advocates in our Coalition capacity — will hopefully create an accountability structure," she says. "And hopefully it allows us to continue to think big — 'How do we do more and better?' — and get the City and beyond on board."



(<http://visionzeronetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/BCU-vigil-becca.jpg?0e8dac>)

Becca Wolfson of the Boston Cyclists Union speaking at the WDR vigil (Photo by Kyle Ramey)

One of their first official steps as a Coalition, in fact, was a set of set of recommendations (http://www.visionzerocoalition.org/action_plan_letter_11-9-15) for Boston's Vision Zero Action Plan, currently in development. The public letter includes 20 specific asks in six areas, from Engineering to Equity. As Kearney points out, a strong plan in Boston will be vital for the safety of millions – but also a bellwether for the state. “We want to make sure it’s a good one,” he says of the plan.

Still, the Coalition is looking beyond the Action Plan, to other issues that exceed Boston's jurisdiction. “Many of the high-speed arterial roads that are some of the most dangerous for people walking, biking or driving in Boston aren't local roads – they're under state jurisdiction,” Kearney says.

And without a regional or statewide approach the progress in Boston could even be compromised. “There are a lot of policies that the City of Boston could implement, that would either be useless if the entire state or country wasn't involved, or can't be implemented without passage of state legislation,” Wolfson adds.

“For instance, the lowering of speed limits and implementation of speed cameras can’t happen without state legislation, and a statewide vulnerable users bill is important for safety statewide, as well.”

Thanks to the formation of the Coalition and the success of World Day of Remembrance, the public momentum behind that local and statewide agenda is visibly growing. LivableStreets Alliance has effectively engaged individuals with a simple storytelling campaign, providing small orange cards that say Thank you, Mayor Walsh for committing to Vision Zero and giving people the space to share why they want to see it implemented. “We’ve gathered hundreds of stories; people who have been hit by cars, kids saying my dad bikes to work everyday and I want him to be safe,” Thompson says. “When people are able to tell a personal story they feel much more connected.”



(http://visionzeronetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/11096418_10152851286403111_138589411495967507_n.jpg?0e8dac)

LivableStreets Alliance has gathered hundreds of cards with personal stories of support for Vision Zero

And, as the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition has shown in its organizational unity, making those connections can be the catalyst for change.

“Vision Zero is the best shot we have to engage the unusual suspects, including drivers,” Thompson says.

“It’s for people who don’t get on a bike or don’t consider themselves a walker. So many people and organizations are reaching out that aren’t traditionally into street design or policy. Almost everyone knows someone who’s been in a traffic crash and, more than ever, it’s important for all of us to step out of our comfort zones and leverage this as an incredible opportunity to widen our circle.”

Learn more about the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition at www.visionzerocoalition.org.

(<http://www.visionzerocoalition.org>) View the full set of pictures from the WDR ride and vigil here

([https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?](https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1286237231405930.1073741850.121393071223691&type=3)

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