

Report: Traffic crashes in Boston resulting in less fatalities, but not injuries



(Boston MA, 06/17/18) A Massachusetts State Trooper photographs what's left of four cars that caught fire after a chain reaction accident on the expressway northbound shutting down the highway on Sunday, June 17, 2018. Staff photo by Matt Stone

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Traffic fatalities have dropped in Boston, but crashes causing injury have not, according to a new report that pushes the city to take further action, including fixing its lack of available crash data.

The Vision Zero Coalition annual report card for the city released Wednesday noted the decrease in roadway fatalities from 21 in 2016 to 10 last year. There were 14 fatal crashes in 2017, the report states.

But the number of bicyclists, pedestrians and people in cars injured stood at 4,367 in 2018 versus to 4,355 two years before.

“It’s a public health crisis,” said Stacy Thompson of Livable Streets Alliance, one of the main organizations in the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition, which is part of a national initiative to reduce injuries and deaths from crashes. “Four thousand people annually is not insignificant.”

The Boston Transportation Department said in a statement, “Our efforts have reduced by half the number of traffic-related fatalities in Boston, and pedestrian crashes have steadily decreased, strong indicators that the work we are undertaking is effective. In addition, with continued unprecedented financial commitments by Mayor Walsh, BTD has increased staffing levels to develop and implement innovative projects more quickly, and continue with our work to eliminate traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries on city streets in Boston.”

Advocates took issue with the fact that Boston doesn’t report its crash statistics to the Department of Transportation, as most other municipalities do. The current system the police department uses for crash reports isn’t able to submit data to MassDOT, according to the city. The police department is working with a vendor to fix that, a spokeswoman said, though no information was available.

Brendan Kearney of WalkBoston, a nonprofit involved with Vision Zero, said fixing that should be a top priority.

“If they’re not able to report this data, they are potentially missing out on funding for safety efforts,” Kearney said.

The city has crash data available on its site, but it’s not the official police data, a fact the advocates said makes it tough to get a full picture.

Eric Bourassa, transportation director for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, said his state agency sees it as a problem the city isn’t able to turn over its data.