

## **Safe Streets activists propose merger of city depts.**

By Colin A. Young, State House News Service

April 18, 2019

With key City Hall posts vacant or soon to be vacant, safe streets activists think now is the perfect time for Boston's city government to consolidate two departments into one and to more fully embrace the "Vision Zero" movement that is seeking to eliminate traffic, pedestrian and bicyclist crashes that result in severe injuries or fatalities.

In its annual progress report, the Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition said Boston has made good progress to reduce traffic fatalities -- to the point that having "zero fatalities by 2030 is achievable" -- but has seen a rise in crashes causing injuries and must do more to protect bicyclists and pedestrians.

The coalition noted that the city's commissioner of public works job is currently vacant and Transportation Commissioner Gina Fiandaca is due to depart for a job in Texas next week. They proposed that Mayor Martin Walsh "combine the Public Works and Transportation Departments into one, integrated agency."

The group said Walsh "made a significant increase in staffing and project funding for Vision Zero and sustainable transportation" in this year's budget, which helped make progress but also highlighted the need for better intragovernmental cooperation

between the city's transportation, public works, public health and police departments.

"There are still clear gaps in the integration of Vision Zero across departments, and this is slowing down the City's ability to act swiftly and efficiently on its Vision Zero goals," the coalition said.

Ten people were killed in traffic crashes on streets in Boston in 2018, the group said, a drop from 14 fatalities in 2017 and 21 deaths in 2016.

"The Coalition sees the drop in fatalities as a promising shift, but also acknowledges that any crash can be a life-altering experience, so we must continue to focus on strategies that reduce the overall number of injury crashes on our streets," the coalition wrote in a letter to the mayor.

Coalition members representing bicyclists said the findings of the annual report make clear the need for more infrastructure to keep riders safe on city streets.

"The fact that bicyclist crashes have continued to rise, even as pedestrian crashes have fallen, is evidence that we need to scale up safe infrastructure at a faster rate in order to make an impact on the number of crashes happening in our city every day," Boston Cyclists Union Executive Director Becca Wolfson said. Though biker fatalities went from 2 in 2017 to zero in 2018, the number of injuries to bicyclists rose from 391 to 425.

The coalition also said it supports a bill filed by Sen. William Brownsberger (S 1376), which would authorize red light cameras and speed cameras to be placed in certain locations if approved by local officials. The cameras would be able to record violations for speeding, failure to stop at a red light, illegal turn on red and failure to stop for a school bus, according to the coalition.

The bill would allow for a maximum penalty of \$25 per violation, but the violations "will not be counted as a criminal conviction and will not be made part of the operating record of the vehicle owner," the group said.

In its recommendations for the city of Boston, the coalition suggested that the City Council pass a resolution supporting the Brownsberger bill and "push the agenda on the topic of automated enforcement in the City of Boston."

The bill, which has 18 co-sponsors in the House and 6 in the Senate, has been referred to the Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security.