

## Act now to make Boston streets safe



Annie Farrell and Karen Shields pause Thursday, July 26, at a memorial for the victim of a fatal car crash in South Boston. Staff photo by Stuart Cahill.

By **BOSTON HERALD EDITORIAL STAFF** |

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Boston has a car problem — there are lots of them on the streets, and congestion has become a commuting nightmare. But it also has a driver problem, and here, things get deadly.

As the Herald's Sean Philip Cotter reported, after a car struck a child in her district last week, City Council President Andrea Campbell is calling for Boston to add more traffic-safety resources and adopt a better strategy for making neighborhood streets safer.

"We need to face the reality that people are dying not only from gunshots but also being maimed and being killed by vehicles," Campbell told the Herald. "We need to do something."

Last year, 680 pedestrians and 425 cyclists were hit by cars on Boston streets, according to a report by Massachusetts Vision Zero, a coalition that advocates for the reduction of traffic injuries and fatalities across the state.

Just last month, one woman died after she and another man were struck by a vehicle at Summer and Melcher streets in South Boston.

While some officials want to de-congest our roads through gas taxes and congestion fees, that won't do anything to get drivers to slow down, especially when they're trying to make up for time eaten up by clogged main thoroughfares. People who've driven around Boston long enough learn which back streets to zip through that let them beat some lights and otherwise jump ahead of gridlock.

Campbell said the city needs to shift resources over to the Boston Transportation Department's traffic-safety division. She said the BTD's Slow Streets program, which focuses on solutions on a block-by-block basis, works very well for the 12 neighborhoods selected, including five in her district.

But, she said, not enough is being done for the many other neighborhoods seeing cars fly down residential back roads.

Chris Osgood, Boston's chief of streets, said the city's working to "scale up" the resources in this department, adding it did so in last year's budget and hopes to do that again.

"Our planning and road safety teams have expanded dramatically," Osgood said. This is the sort of thing that should get taxpayer-funding priority — not Pike curve-straightening.

Theresa Latson of the Four Corners United Neighborhood Association said her group has met multiple times with the cops, the city and the Slow Streets coordinator, but to little effect. She said the area near Up Academy on Westville Street is of particular concern.

"We all say we want to make our streets as safe as possible, but we aren't given the tools to make our streets as safe as possible," Latson said.

"At the end of the day, I don't want to hear that we're doing our best — we can always do better," Latson said. "It's about stopping children from getting hurt."

City Councilor Ed Flynn, who represents South Boston and Chinatown, has called for a hearing on traffic safety on Nov. 18. Flynn told the Herald he's maintaining his call to further drop the residential speed limit to 20 mph from 25.

Changing speed limits is fine — if people adhere to them, and speeders, the kind who hit pedestrians, don't. And street safety is not a plan to "roll out" — all affected neighborhoods should get the tools they need, now. With the kinds of funding numbers transportation agencies are tossing around, the cash can be found.

What's at stake here is more than just a utopian vision of electrified trains — it's a 7-year-old boy being injured when a car hit him on Groveland Street in Mattapan last week.

He could have been any child, on any Boston street. No more.