

Pedestrian safety issue affected elderly and children in Chinatown

By Yanxuan Li 2019/12/19 Boston



Pedestrians in Chinatown feel unsafe due to heavy traffic and speeding cars. A woman spoke to high school students for a video at Harrison Avenue and Kneeland Street in 2016. (Image courtesy Asian Community Development Corporation.)

Traffic deaths for pedestrians and cyclists are the highest since 1990, according to [a report](#) released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. While Boston has a relatively good record on traffic safety compared to cities nationwide, there are still more than 20 fatalities and more than 200 serious injuries on the streets every year. Chinatown is one of the neighborhoods that [sees the highest number of pedestrian injuries](#).

“This has been a concern for Chinatown for several years,” said Arturo Gossage, a Chinatown resident of 12 years and treasurer of the Chinatown Resident Association (CRA). Gossage said the CRA wrote a

support letter to Boston planner for Chinatown to be a part of a traffic calming program. Two crashes referenced in the letter included **one pedestrian** who was dragged by a car into Dorchester from Chinatown, and a **2-year-old girl killed on Nassau Street** by an ambulance.

The city has launched traffic calming and road traffic safety programs to help prevent fatal crashes. In 2015, Boston adopted the **Vision Zero program**, a road traffic safety program adopted by cities across the country. In 2017, Chinatown was chosen for the **Neighborhood Slow Streets** pilot, a traffic calming program under the Boston's Vision Zero initiative. With the introduction of the program, the citywide speed limit was lowered to 25 mph. The city also added speed bumps on residential streets in Chinatown.

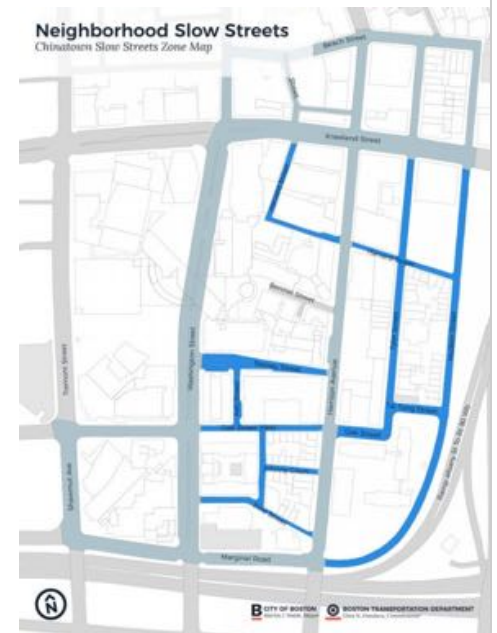
However, not all Chinatown residents are satisfied with the implementation of the programs. Some parents of preschoolers feel unsafe when they walk through downtown streets.

"I walk my children to Little Panda from Bay Village and find the crosswalk on Charles Street South coming from Melrose Street very unsafe. I've always thought there should be a traffic light there," said Carrie Cook, a Bay Village resident whose child attends Little Panda Daycare Center. "The problem is cars don't stop for the crosswalk, and often cars park on the left side of the road on Charles Street South right before the crosswalk. It's extremely difficult to even see the cars coming up Charles Street South from Tremont Street."

Pedestrian injuries are one of the leading causes of unintentional injury death among Massachusetts children. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, there were five pedestrian injury deaths per year among children 8 to 16 years of age from 2008 to 2012 in Massachusetts.

Cindy Liao, director of Little Panda, has heard many complaints about child pedestrian safety. "Our parents don't feel safe when they walk their children to our centers," she said. "For example, at some of the crosswalks in Tremont Street, where there are a lot of day care centers, we don't even have school district signs there."

Liao wanted more automated speed enforcement for traffic calming. "I was driving here every day without even knowing that the speed limit is 25 mph," she said. "I believe every car on Tremont Street



A map of Chinatown's zone for Neighborhood Slow Streets. (Image courtesy of the Boston Transportation Department.)

goes faster than 25 mph. There are no signs reminding the drivers, neither are there any speed cameras to detect the offenses. I think the city needs to implement the programs with more supervision and enforcement.”

Limited funding and staffing has delayed the progress of the Vision Zero program. According to [Vision Zero Coalition](#), a group to advocate for the implementation of Vision Zero in Boston, the city of New York spends about \$20 per person on Vision Zero program annually, and San Francisco spends \$75 per person annually. In comparison, Boston is spending less than \$5 per person.

Besides funding and staffing, the twisting roadways and heavy traffic caused engineering issues for construction.

“You know Chinatown is a busy neighborhood. There are a lot of things that are always going on,” said Stefanie Seskin, active transportation director for the Boston Transportation Department. “And the streets are old. When we start doing the actual engineering for our project, we ran into some oddities below the surface of our street that are not plainly fastened when they were first brought out. We also want to make sure that whatever we are building, it doesn’t create different problems. We want to make sure that we avoid the pipes and the streets still drain. So it’s to make sure all of those little details are right. That takes a little bit of time.”

Urban renewal reshaped Chinatown, making the streets crowded and increasing danger. Highway construction, including the construction of the Central Artery in the 1950s, the Massachusetts Turnpike extension in the 1950s and the Big Dig in the 1990s, razed row houses in Chinatown and turned residential streets into commercial areas.

The population of downtown Boston’s including Chinatown, the Financial District and the Leather District increased by 25 percent in 2010 from the 2000 Census. As streets become crowded, dangers at intersections and crosswalks also increase. Older adults, the disabled and parents with children are people most affected by streetscape changes.

“People treat these residential streets as if they’re mini-highways to the actual highways,” said Jeena Hah, Asian Community Development Corp. program manager. The nonprofit developer helped organize community support for Vision Zero in Chinatown and Hah coordinates the program.

“We acknowledge that these intersections and the streets were designed for cars, for the highway, and not really for the people who are actually living in Chinatown. There are a couple of challenges,” Hah said. “One is streets like a highway on which people race through. Two is there’s a high elderly population here and it’s hard to cross the street when the cars go really fast. Another challenge is there’s

Tufts here, and it has businesses and ambulance bays, as well as patients who might not be as mobile. These intersections are not designed for either.”

Warren Wong is a CRA member. He lived in Chinatown in the 1990s and moved out in 2000. When he moved back to Chinatown a few years ago, he was astonished by the changes in his neighborhood.

“Chinatown has grown to be a very densely populated place,” Wong said. “I used to see police patrolling at almost every crossing when I was in Chinatown, but now how many patrolling policemen can you see here?”

The lack of enforcement was a common concern among Chinatown residents and pedestrians. Parents wanted more guards at essential crossings in Chinatown where traffic signals are chaotic, or at crossings near elementary schools and child care centers.

After several crashes happened in 2016, Boston-area high school students produced a video on pedestrian safety in Chinatown.

Pedestrian Safety In Chinatown



Last month, the Vision Zero Coalition held a memorial vigil, calling on elected officials to pass traffic safety legislation. Their proposals focused on three pieces of legislation: a hands-free bill, a bill to reduce traffic fatalities and an automated enforcement bill, which would allow the city to install red light

cameras and speed cameras. Mayor Martin Walsh added \$5 million for transportation staffing and projects for fiscal year 2019.

“We are looking at a number of intersections that were pointed out to us by community members where they felt that it was hard for them to cross the street. We are finalizing designs for these crosswalks and hopefully we will be all set. We don’t want to run into engineering grading issues that we have run into before, but those should be set for construction starting next year,” Seskin said.



Some of the problematic intersections:

1. The intersection of Kneeland Street/Tyler Street. The traffic light is chaotic in the right yielding. The walk signals and the right-turn lights turn green at the same time. People are usually cut off by cars making right turns.

62 Kneeland St
Boston, Massachusetts
[View on Google Maps](#)



2. Nassau Street, where a 2-year-old girl was killed by an ambulance in 2016

Nassau St
Boston, Massachusetts
[View on Google Maps](#)



3. Tyler Street at the Asian American Civic Association. Cars parking on the street block the view of pedestrians trying to cross the street.



4. The intersection of Washington Street and Kneeland Street. The pedestrian countdown is too short for older adults, handicapped individuals and parents with baby strollers.

708 Washington St
Boston, Massachusetts
[View on Google Maps](#)



Google

[Report a problem](#)