



# Vision Zero Chicago Downtown Action Plan: Executive Summary





# Downtown: the heartbeat of Chicago

## The transportation hub of the City and beyond.

Every day in Chicago's Central Business District, numerous residents, commuters, and visitors walk, hop in a taxi or rideshare, take advantage of the City's bike network on their own bike or on a Divvy, or drive to reach their destinations.

100,000+  
residents

300,000+  
workers

100,000+  
daily Metra boardings

180,000+  
daily CTA rail boardings

4,000+  
daily Divvy bikes  
rented (2019)

— Bike facilities  
○ CTA/Metra stations  
— CTA/Metra rail  
■ Study area

# A hotspot for traffic violence

The Vision Zero Chicago Downtown Action Plan is a bold effort to improve traffic safety in Chicago's core.

## Severe traffic crashes happen more often downtown than anywhere else in the City.

A disproportionate number of the victims are people walking, who are more likely to sustain serious injuries when struck by a vehicle.

The Downtown Action Plan is one part of a citywide commitment to eliminate deaths and serious injuries from traffic crashes by addressing the most critical causes of severe crashes downtown:

- Drivers **failing to yield** is the most common cause of crashes that injure people walking or biking. These crashes happen most often at intersections.
- **Speeding** puts everyone's safety at risk and does not help drivers reach their destinations any faster.

3 people

are seriously injured or killed every week in traffic crashes downtown.

## The COVID-19 pandemic has made the problem of traffic violence downtown even more critical.

Despite fewer people commuting and driving into the area, there has been a dramatic increase in speeding and other dangerous driving behaviors during Chicago's stay-at-home order.

43%  
decrease in  
traffic volumes

14%  
increase in  
traffic speed



#### KEY RECOMMENDATION

## Lower the speed limit to 20 mph across downtown

Photo: Chicago Loop Alliance

#### KEY RECOMMENDATION

## Improve intersection signals and turning policies

Vehicle speed at the time of impact is directly correlated to whether a crash victim will live or die. **Lowering vehicle speeds will have the most immediate and substantial impact on traffic safety throughout downtown.**

### Safer speeds mean:

- More crashes can be avoided before they happen. The faster people drive, the less they can see of their surroundings and the longer it takes a vehicle to stop.
- When crashes do happen, they will have less severe consequences.

### Lower speed limits are already working in Chicago and around the country.

Chicago has enacted 20 mph speed zones around schools, parks, and neighborhood commercial corridors. On Milwaukee Avenue between Western Avenue and Division Street, lowering the speed limit led to 43% fewer drivers traveling above 20 mph.

Cities such as Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, Memphis, Boston, and New York reduced speed limits either in specific areas or citywide and saw decreases in severe crashes. After lowering speed limits in its city center, Seattle saw a 20% decrease in severe crashes.

### Driving 20 mph will not significantly change the time it takes to reach a destination.

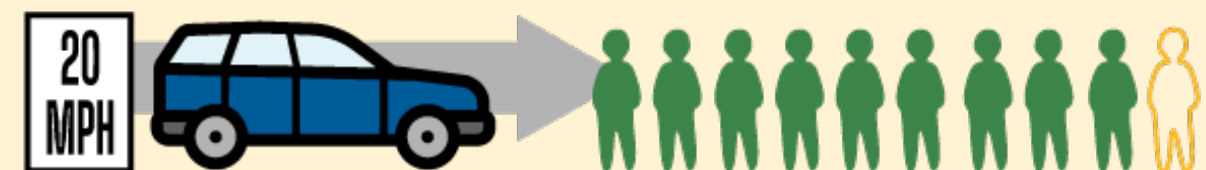
A 20 mph speed limit is designed to change the behavior of people driving so they travel at a consistent, safe speed throughout downtown versus speeding to the next red light. The City expects that the rate of those speeding 35 mph and above will decrease.

Updates to traffic signals and prohibiting turns on red throughout downtown would reduce conflicts at intersections and prevent many **failure-to-yield** crashes.

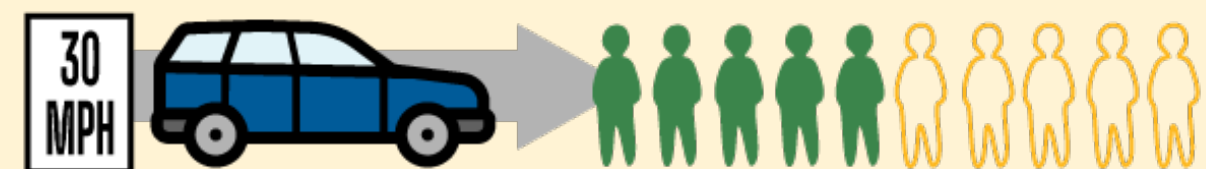
1. **Pedestrian countdown timers** give people walking information about when the light will change, allowing them to choose to wait for the next cycle if they will not be able to get through the intersection in time.
2. **Leading pedestrian intervals** give people walking a head start, making them more visible to people driving and therefore reducing the potential for conflicts.
3. **Eliminating turns on red throughout downtown** makes it more comfortable and safer to cross the street. As a person driving looks left for oncoming traffic, they may not see a person walking in the crosswalk to the right. While the person driving waits for a gap in traffic, they tend to pull forward and block the crosswalk.

### Speed matters:

If hit by a vehicle traveling at 20 mph, 9 out of 10 pedestrians survive.



If hit by a vehicle traveling at 30 mph, only 5 out of 10 pedestrians survive.

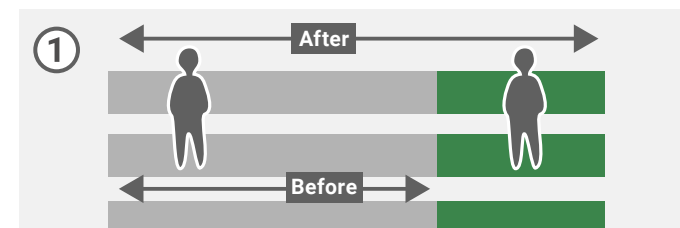


## KEY RECOMMENDATION

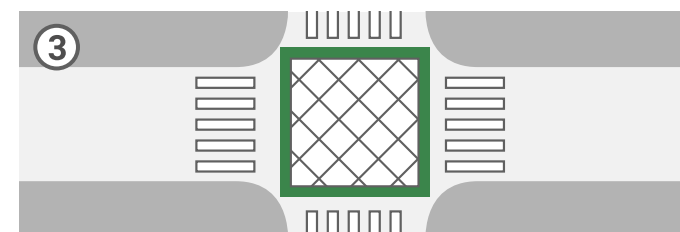
# Install safer designs at high crash intersections

Typically, improving safety at intersections is expensive and takes a long time. **By making fast and affordable design changes** where they will have the biggest impact, the Chicago Department of Transportation can better serve the diverse needs of people traveling through downtown, prevent crashes, and create more comfortable and inviting spaces.

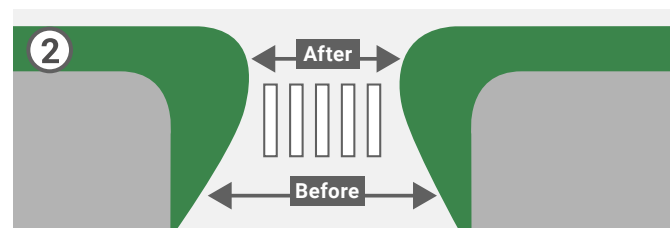
## New intersection design features:



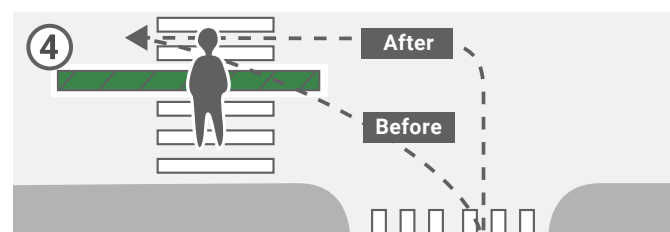
Wider striping at crosswalks expands space for people walking, accommodating crowds and allowing for social distancing at intersections.



Don't-Block-the-Box markings discourage vehicles from clogging intersections.



Shorter crossing distances make it easier to cross the street and mean less exposure to traffic.



Rubber speed bumps along an intersection centerline guide people turning left to do so at slower speeds and at safer angles.

**30**  
**intersections**  
already improved

## IMPLEMENTATION

# How we are getting it done

## An overview of the project development process:

1. Identify a location that needs safety improvements through analyzing data and listening to constituents.
2. Assess local conditions by observing current behaviors.
3. Develop a preferred concept that addresses safety concerns at that location.
4. Estimate the costs and find funding. Depending on the investment required, funding can be sought from local, County, State, or Federal sources.
5. Develop detailed designs and construction documents.
6. Install the designs.

## How you can help Chicago reach Vision Zero:

- Tell your elected officials that you support a safer speed limit downtown.
- Spread word about the safe intersection designs you see downtown.
- Take the Safe Driving Pledge at [visionzerochicago.org](https://www.visionzerochicago.org).
- Contact your alderman or call 311 if you see a traffic concern.

## Getting to Zero

Eliminating deaths and serious injuries from traffic crashes is a monumental task and will require varied approaches to change the circumstances and behaviors that cause severe crashes. View the full Vision Zero Chicago Downtown Action Plan to see the City's comprehensive approach, which includes:

- Adding more low-cost, high-impact **infrastructure** improvements at high crash intersections, large-scale projects on high crash corridors, and bike network expansion.
- Implementation strategies for **district-wide policies** including a summary of logistics surrounding the 20 mph speed limit change and guidelines for prioritizing intersections for signal upgrades.
- Traffic safety **awareness and education** about street design features.
- Expanded **education** for taxi and rideshare drivers, their passengers, and professional drivers.



Safety installations placed at high crash intersections throughout downtown.



## Downtown Task Force members:

### Chairs

Alderman Brendan Reilly, 42nd Ward

Joe Schwieterman, DePaul University

### City Agencies

Office of the Mayor of Chicago  
Chicago Department  
of Transportation (CDOT)  
Chicago Department  
of Public Health (CDPH)  
Chicago Police Department (CPD)  
Chicago Park District  
Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)

Business Affairs & Consumer  
Protection (BACP)  
Chicago Public Schools (CPS)  
Department of Cultural Affairs  
& Special Events (DCASE)  
Mayor's Office of People  
with Disabilities (MOPD)

### Elected Officials

Alderman Brendan Reilly, 42nd Ward  
Alderman Brian Hopkins, 2nd Ward  
Alderman Sophia King, 4th Ward

Alderman Patrick Daley Thompson, 11th Ward  
Alderman Walter Burnett, Jr., 27th Ward

### External Partners

AARP  
Active Transportation Alliance  
Ann & Robert H Lurie Children's  
Hospital of Chicago  
Art Institute of Chicago  
Business Owners and Managers  
Association (BOMA)  
Chicago Central Area Committee (CCAC)  
Chicago Cultural Mile Association  
Chicago Loop Alliance (CLA)  
Choose Chicago  
Consortium to Lower Obesity  
in Chicago Children (CLOCC)  
Columbia College  
DePaul University  
Friends of Downtown  
Gold Coast Neighbors Association  
Greater South Loop Association

Loyola University  
Magnificent Mile Association  
Navy Pier  
Near South Planning Board  
New Eastside Association  
of Residents (NEAR)  
Neighbors of West Loop (NOWL)  
North Dearborn Association  
Northwestern Memorial Hospital  
Northwestern University  
River North Business Association  
Roosevelt University  
South Loop Neighbors  
Streeterville Chamber of Commerce  
Streeterville Organization  
of Active Residents (SOAR)  
West Loop Community  
Organization (WLCO)



[visionzerochicago.org](http://visionzerochicago.org)