



Puget Sound Regional Council

REGIONAL SAFETY SUMMIT: SUMMARY REPORT *JUNE 29, 2023*



SUMMIT OVERVIEW

PSRC identified safety as one of the primary policy focus areas in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) adopted in 2022. The RTP directs PSRC to develop a Regional Safety Plan, including actions, targets, and performance indicators. The action also directs PSRC to seek resources for regional and local planning and projects and, going forward, to use the Regional Safety Plan to help inform future regional and local planning, including the criteria used to evaluate projects for inclusion in the plan and to receive PSRC's federal funding.

To better understand expectations and goals for the Regional Safety Plan, for the first time PSRC held a Regional Safety Summit on June 29, 2023. Approximately 140 participants gathered at the Seattle Convention Center to discuss transportation safety issues, challenges, and opportunities facing the region.

The purpose of the summit was to bring together stakeholders – including elected officials, transportation experts, engaged citizens, agency staff and others – to foster a shared understanding of the state of road safety in the region and to advance the conversation on how we can best move the region forward to achieving zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways.

PSRC received a significant amount of feedback through the breakout sessions. Key themes that emerged include:

- Identify roles and responsibilities across all levels.
- Infrastructure improvements are expensive, and funding is short.
- Coordination and consistency across jurisdictions at the local, regional, and state levels is important.
- Context matters – there is no one size fits all solution.
- Safety means different things to different people.
- Develop a regional toolbox that can be scaled and contextualized.
- Acknowledge the array of challenges that we face.

Feedback received from Summit attendees will inform the development of a comprehensive, data-driven Regional Safety Plan that will follow a Safe System Approach for equitable and impactful progress on achieving the safety goals across our diverse four-county region.

The following provides a summary of the summit program and details on the feedback and discussions held throughout the day.



Safety Summit – Program Summary

Local Jurisdiction Showcase Tables

Throughout the day several of PSRC’s partner agencies (the cities of Bellevue, Lynnwood, Poulsbo, Seattle, and University Place) had multimedia showcase tables set up highlighting various safety-related projects and programs within their jurisdictions. These showcase tables provided attendees with the opportunity to engage with these cities and learn about their safety-related activities.

Morning Speakers – National Perspectives

The program began with a series of featured national speakers who are leading the charge for a Safe System Approach:

- **Scott Goldstein**, *Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy, USDOT*



Mr. Goldstein discussed USDOT’s National Roadway Safety Strategy. It sets a clear goal of zero fatalities on the nation’s roadways, adopts the Safe System Approach (SSA) as its guiding principles, and identifies priority actions and changes to existing practices that will have the greatest impact on transportation safety.

Mr. Goldstein highlighted several key principles of the SSA:

- Deaths and serious injuries are unacceptable;
- Humans make mistakes;
- Humans are vulnerable;
- Responsibility is shared;
- Safety is proactive; and
- Redundancy is critical.



- **Alex Schoening**, *Washington State Program Manager, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)*

Mr. Schoening discussed NHTSA's adoption of the key components of the Safe System Approach: *Safer People, Safer Roads, Safer Speeds, Safer Vehicles, and Post-Crash Care*. He then provided an overview of the fatalities, injuries and costs currently associated with crashes on the nation's roadways. He discussed NHTSA's programs for addressing highway safety, including their Vehicle Safety Programs, the Highway Safety Research and Development Program, and their Highway Traffic Safety Grants.

Mr. Schoening also highlighted NHTSA's commitment to equity through data analysis to identify populations overrepresented in the data and prioritize engagement with affected populations and communities.

- **Jim Hemphill**, *Senior Program Manager for Mobility Safety Strategy, National Safety Council (NSC)*

Mr. Hemphill began by discussing NSC's Roadway Safety Programs, including the Road to Zero Coalition, which is focused on achieving zero fatalities by 2050 and is comprised of nearly 2,000 members including government agencies, businesses, educational institutions, and other organizations.

He discussed the importance of centering victims and victims' stories when discussing traffic safety. He then provided an in-depth look at some of the key differences between a Safe System Approach vs. more traditional road safety practices, including:

- Proactively identifying and addressing risks vs. reacting solely based on crash history
- Focusing on survivability/preventing deaths and serious injuries over simply preventing crashes
- Designing roadways that anticipate human mistakes and reduce crash severity in addition to educating system users about unsafe behaviors

- **Leah Shahum**, *Founder and Director, Vision Zero Network (VZN)*

Ms. Shahum discussed the VZN, which she highlighted as not just a tagline or a program, but a paradigm shift and a different way of thinking about transportation safety. The focus is less on developing new technical solutions and



more on building public and political will for using solutions that have been proven to be effective.

She then discussed several critical key trends that the VZN is working to advance:

- Jurisdictions, DOTs, and other agencies across the country shifting to a Safe System Approach
- Focusing on managing speeds through safe street design, safe speed limits, and safe speed technology instead of just enforcing existing speed limits
- Elevating health equity, including addressing the strong correlation between unsafe roadways and areas with higher concentrations of communities of color and poverty
- Bringing about change quickly through demonstration projects and prioritizing quick-builds

Speakers Panel and Q&A

Kent Mayor and PSRC Transportation Policy Board Chair Dana Ralph moderated a panel with speakers Leah Shahum, Jim Hemphill, and Alex Schoening. The session began with several prepared questions directed at the speakers including:

- What have you seen from other cities and regions in terms of the most effective strategies and approaches to truly effect a culture change in our planning for safety?
- While there is no one size fits all solution, what are a few things that every jurisdiction can do – regardless of size or resources – that will improve safety?
- What do you see as best practices in engaging with communities on transportation safety?

The panel also addressed an array of questions from the audience regarding:

- Effectively engaging with historically underserved populations who are disproportionately impacted
- Balancing safety needs with competing priorities such as housing supply and freight movement
- Traffic safety challenges related to various issues such as vehicle sizes and speeds



**Please see “Speaker Highlights” under the Key Takeaways section below for a high-level summary including some of the key points made by the speakers during the panel discussion*

Lunch Speakers – National Perspectives

During lunch John Milton (*State Safety Engineer, Washington State Department of Transportation*) and Craig Helmann (*Director of Data, PSRC*) discussed key road safety data and equity trends. Their presentations emphasized several disconcerting trends.

Mr. Milton highlighted that at the state-level fatalities and serious injuries have been increasing since 2013. While there was a short plateau just prior to the pandemic, the numbers since its onset have risen sharply. He noted that pedestrian and bicyclist incidents have been growing at a faster rate than for motorists. He also highlighted that the majority of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries have occurred on city streets where the posted speed limit ranges from 25–35 MPH, with people of color and seniors being especially vulnerable.

Mr. Helmann then spoke about trends in the central Puget Sound region. He noted that while Seattle is one of the “safer” metropolitan regions in the country, traffic related deaths and serious injuries have been increasing for over 5 years, with a sharp spike since the pandemic. He also highlighted that traffic deaths in the region disproportionately impact people of color, especially American Indian/Alaska Native and Black communities.

Mr. Helmann concluded his presentation by providing data emphasizing that traffic safety is an issue across the entire region, including urban and rural areas, with nearly every jurisdiction in the region having had at least one roadway fatality or serious injury since 2018.



Breakout Sessions – Safer Streets and Safer People

The afternoon featured alternating breakout sessions focused on creating a dialogue and engaging with all attendees regarding improving safety at the local and regional levels. Pierce County Councilmember Ryan Mello and Port Orchard Mayor Rob Putaansuu facilitated and moderated the sessions. Each of the two rooms focused on a key component of the Safe System Approach, “Safer Streets” and “Safer People” (respectively). The sessions began with an around-the-room post-it note exercise where participants provided a broad array of feedback at four different stations, focused on the following questions:

- What are a few key takeaways you learned from the morning speakers?
- What is the most pressing safety issue in your community?
- What is one thing you want to see your city/town/county government do to improve safety?
- What is one thing you want every individual in your community to do to improve safety?

The second half of the breakout sessions included an open dialogue where participants were able to communicate regarding what they would like to see included in, and achieved through, the upcoming Regional Safety Plan.

These sessions were designed to provide PSRC staff an opportunity to hear attendees’ thoughts regarding various aspects of traffic safety, and to receive valuable input for developing the Plan.

Key Takeaways

General Comment Themes

PSRC received a significant amount of feedback through the breakout sessions. Key themes that emerged through the discussion are provided below:

- **Identify roles and responsibilities across all levels.** Several comments emphasized that, as we all move forward on this work together, it will be critical to identify the expectations, roles and responsibilities for each of the key stakeholder groups involved in improving traffic safety across the region. These include: the federal government, the state, local elected officials, planners, engineers, communities, individuals, etc.



- **Infrastructure improvements are expensive, and funding is short.** Participants noted that while there is a lot of funding currently available for implementing projects that improve safety, it still is not sufficient to meet the need across the region.
- **Coordination and consistency across jurisdictions at the local, regional, and state levels is important.** Several comments highlighted the importance of working together and collaborating across agency lines, with an additional lens of providing a uniform experience for users of the transportation system. This is an area where participants felt that PSRC, through the Regional Safety Plan, could help to encourage and foster that consistency throughout the region.
- **Context matters – there is no one size fits all solution.** Participants emphasized that every jurisdiction, every location, and the situational circumstances around every crash are different. This is why there are a range of solutions and proven safety countermeasures that can be applied depending on the specific issue and situation being addressed.
- **Safety means different things to different people.** When discussing transportation safety, everyone has their own priorities and their own vision. Walkability was cited as an example of a safety concept that can mean different things to different people, depending on an individual's age or ability, as well as the location of the infrastructure.
- **Develop a regional toolbox that can be scaled and contextualized.** Participants stated that PSRC should develop a regional toolbox of solution sets that are flexible enough to be scaled up or down depending on a jurisdiction's size and contextualized depending on the circumstances at different locations.
- **Acknowledge the array of challenges that we face.** There were several comments on the importance of acknowledging the various challenges associated with improving traffic safety in our region, including legal concerns, lack of sufficient funding, the pressures that come with being a fast-growing region, and others.

Speaker Highlights

PSRC asked participants to discuss what they took away from the morning speakers. Provided below are a few of the key highlights from the presentations that attendees identified:

- **How we transition from a more traditional approach to a Safe System Approach.** While the term "Safe System Approach" has become increasingly prevalent in



recent years, attendees felt that the speakers did an excellent job of really fleshing out and visualizing the key differences between a more traditional traffic safety approach and the Safe System Approach.

A few examples of those differences include: focusing on preventing deaths and serious injuries instead of crashes; designing for human mistakes instead of focusing primarily on improving human behavior, and; sharing responsibility for the performance of the system instead of simply pinning responsibility on the individual on an incident-by-incident basis.

- **Everyone has a responsibility – but “shared” responsibility does not mean “equal” responsibility.** Speakers emphasized that while everybody has a role when it comes to improving traffic safety, the responsibilities are not necessarily the same for everyone. Upstream decisions made by policymakers and engineers impact the decisions users of the system make on the street. In addition, even among users of the system, car drivers, truck drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists all have different responsibilities when it comes to preventing fatalities and serious injuries.
- **It’s time to take action.** Leah Shahum highlighted that while planning is a critical part of the process, planning alone will not get the job done. We know what works and we know what we need to do – now is the time to make the investments and do it.

Issue Highlights

Below is a sampling of some of the important safety issues identified by participants:

- **Speeds – manage speeds, not just speeding**
- **Growth and increasingly dense development is happening along high-speed corridors**
- **The need to build out and separate pedestrian and bicycle facilities from vehicular traffic**
- **Recognizing that many crashes happen at intersections and involve crossing issues**
- **An increase in distracted driving and distracted walking**
- **The need for continued and new driver training and education**



Next Steps

This high level summary of the Regional Safety Summit and key feedback from attendees, along with the speaker presentations, will be posted on PSRC's website at <https://www.psrc.org/our-work/safety>. A summary of the event was provided to the Transportation Policy Board and Executive Board at their July meetings. Staff is now working to build from the feedback provided during the Summit and develop the scope of work for the upcoming Regional Safety Plan. It is anticipated that the draft scope of work will be presented to PSRC's boards and the Regional Safety Plan launched in the Fall of 2023. Additional opportunities for engagement will be provided as development of the plan moves forward.

