



Words Matter: Recognizing and Addressing Modal Framing for Positive Traffic Safety Culture



#WORDSMATTER

 YOU GUYS ARE
NO FUN

Doing Our Job: Provide *Full* Facts, Framework

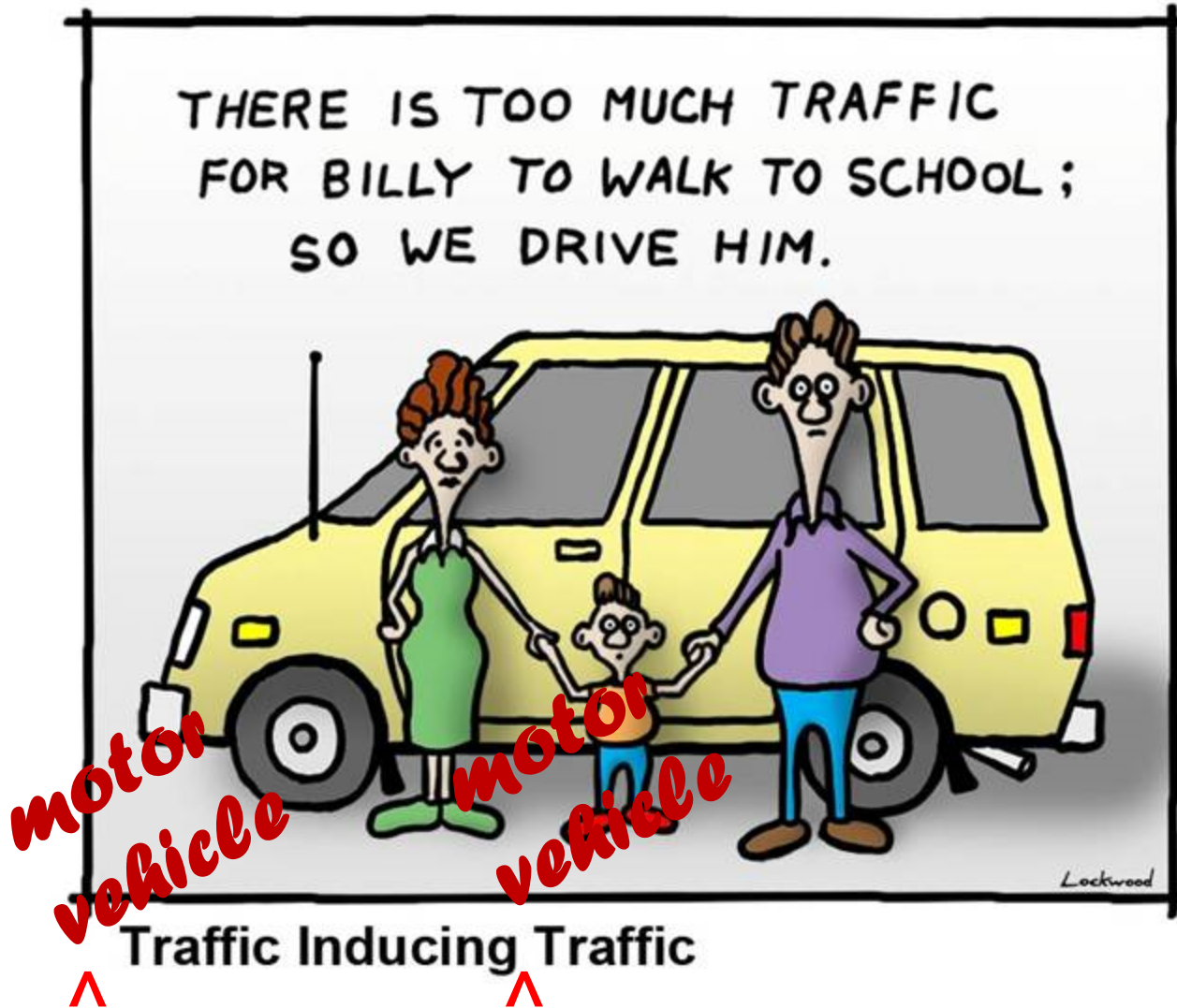
We shall be objective and truthful in professional reports, statements, or testimony and include **all relevant and pertinent information.**

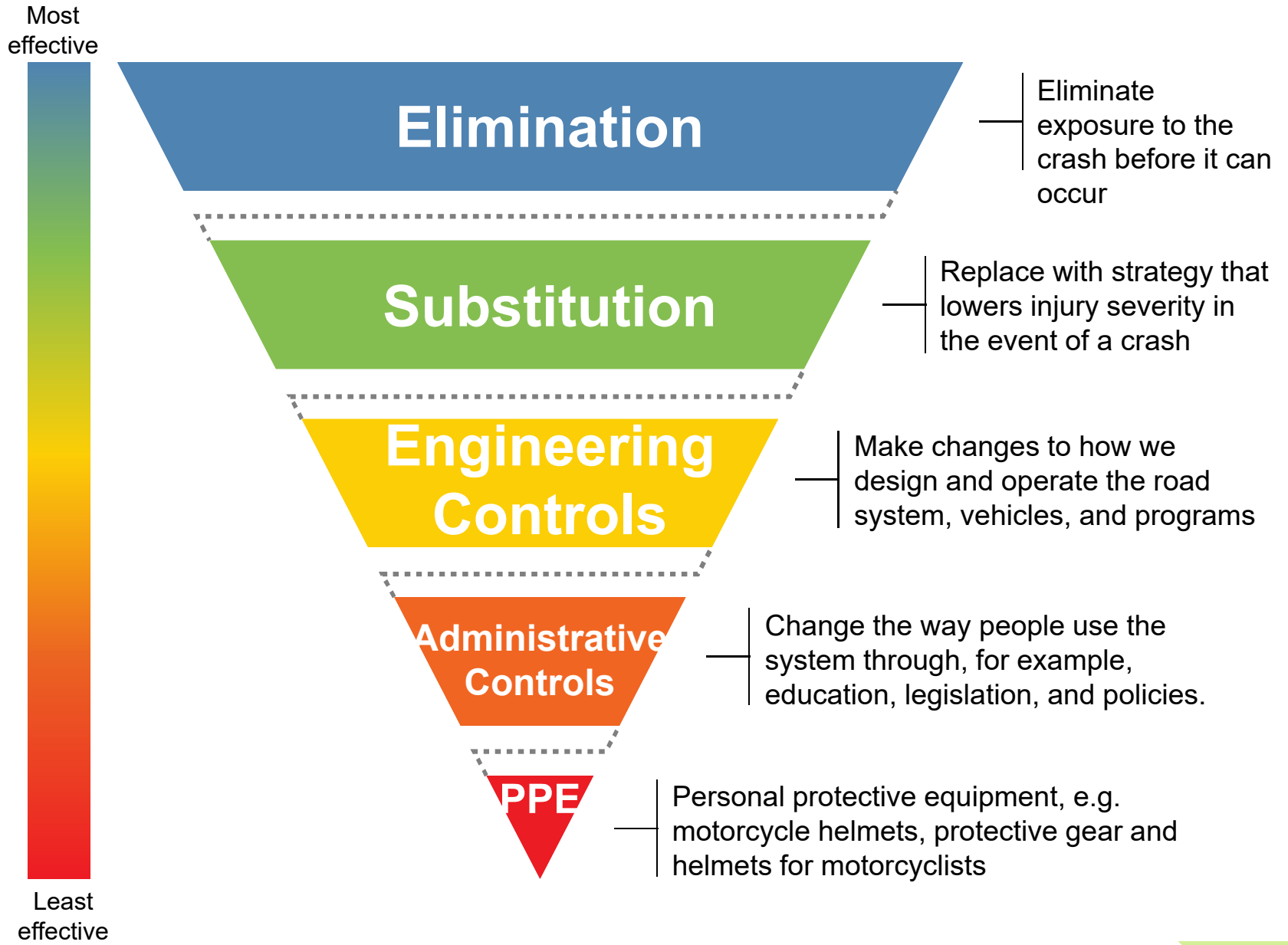
(ASCE Code of Ethics)

We shall provide **timely, adequate, clear, and accurate information** on issues to all affected persons and to governmental decision makers.

(APA Code of Ethics)

Providing Context: It's Your Job





How We Frame Issues Matters

- Electricity
- Water
- Technology
- Clothing



Focus Changes Based on Safe Systems + Kinetic Energy

Family of teacher struck and killed in crosswalk sues



Streetsblog USA
@StreetsblogUSA

This has got to be the worst example of reflexive victim blaming in pedestrian crashes EVER.

10 year old boy is hit and killed while *standing on the sidewalk.* Police: He was looking at his phone.



Out-of-control car jumps Brooklyn sidewalk, kills 10-year-old boy
The accident happened in front of a bus stop outside a seven-story residential building in the 16-hundred block of Ocean Avenue in ...
[abc7ny.com](#)

5:52 AM · Sep 11, 2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)

322 Retweets 949 Likes



The family of a Central Kitsap School District teacher who died after she was struck by a vehicle during an early morning run in March 2017 is suing Kitsap County, alleging it failed to "safeguard a dangerous crosswalk" where she was killed.

Amy Higgins, 50, a [teacher at Emerald Heights](#), was killed on March 17, 2017, at 5:40 a.m. while jogging. She was crossing Greaves Way in a crosswalk at Old Frontier Road when [Scott Brian Rehmus struck](#) her.

Though Rehmus exhibited no signs of impairment, a blood test found he had twice the legal limit of marijuana in his blood. Rehmus was found to be speeding and driving with a suspended license. He was sentenced to seven years in prison [after pleading guilty to vehicular homicide in October 2018](#).



Amy Higgins (Photo: Central Kitsap School District)

The lawsuit, filed on Oct. 14 by Higgins' estate and family members, names Rehmus, Kitsap County and Kitsap County Public Works. It said that Kitsap County Public Works had a duty to ensure that the crosswalk was "safe for public travel and use."

According to the suit, the crosswalk had "inadequate visibility and low contrast" and had "poorly planned illumination for southbound traffic." It alleges the county failed to maintain illumination of the crosswalk and that the crosswalk had "inconsistent markings." The suit says the crosswalk included no warning systems for pedestrians to alert approaching motorists of their presence.

Focus Campaigns Based on Positive Community Norms

- 90% of Town A residents believe streets should be designed to be safe for people of all ages and abilities.
- Nearly 90% of Town B residents believe it's unacceptable for anyone to be killed or seriously injured while traveling on their streets.
- A large majority of people in Town C (over 80%) believe that human life should take priority over moving drivers faster.
- Eight in ten Town D residents agree their streets should be designed to be safe for people using all modes of transportation.
- Over 70% of Town E residents believe deaths and serious injuries while traveling on their streets are preventable.

Positive Traffic Safety Culture

- Open with **shared norms**.
- Express **concern or problem**.
- Close with **hope and action**.



- While 80% of our residents agree streets should be designed to be safe for people using all modes of transportation, we have not yet provided crosswalk markings and lighting that give everyone the right infrastructure and information. If we commit to a program to prioritize and address crossings in high-need locations we can make our streets work better for all of us.

Framing Really, Really Matters

Status quo	Better practice	Effect of status quo
Accident: “Pedestrian killed in <u>accident</u> on Main Street.”	Crash: “Pedestrian killed in <u>crash</u> on Main Street.”	Obscures preventable nature of crashes
Non-agentive: “A pedestrian was hit and killed.” (no agent)	Agentive: “A pedestrian was hit and killed <u>by a car</u> .”	Obscures role of a human actor
Focus on pedestrian: “A <u>pedestrian</u> was hit and killed by a car.”	Focus on vehicle: “A <u>car</u> hit and killed a pedestrian.”	Increases blame for the focus of the sentence
Object-based language: “A <u>car</u> jumped the curb.”	Person-based language: “A <u>driver</u> drove over the curb.”	Obscures role of a human actor

[Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? Evidence from an experiment.](#) T. Goddard, K. Ralph, C. Thigpen and E. Iacobucci, Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, in press Nov. 2019

Framing Really, Really Matters

Status quo	Better practice	Effect of status quo
Counterfactual statement: “The pedestrian <u>darted into the street.</u> ”	Not included	Increases perceived blame for the victim
Episodic framing: Treats the crash as an isolated incident.	Thematic framing: “This is the tenth fatal collision this year.”	Prevents readers from connecting the dots between incidents and thus shifts attention to individual-level rather than systematic solutions

“...we find that editorial patterns significantly affected readers' interpretation of both what happened and what to do about it on nearly every measure.”

Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? Evidence from an experiment. T. Goddard, K. Ralph, C. Thigpen and E. Iacobucci, Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, in press Nov. 2019

A Good Example

NEWS > TRANSPORTATION

Getting There: Lighting up the dark spots on Spokane's roadways

Mon., Jan. 14, 2019



In November 1967, this view of North Monroe Street looking south from the North Hill "was a passageway of light through the snowy darkness during last night's first general snowfall," according to its original caption. When modern streetlights were installed on the road, it was called the "street of light" and "path of life" thanks to its increased safety. (Paul G. Pavlos / Spokane Daily Chronicle)

Describes context: "the data showed that most of these incidents happened away from intersections on stretches of roadway that lack crosswalks."

Cites recent research.

Think Like a (Good) Journalist + Public Health Analyst

- **WHO?** All modes every time; demographic analysis
- **WHAT?** Details, context, historic patterns
- **WHEN?** Land use, lighting, line of sight
- **WHERE?** Street design context, multimodal network connectivity, land use
- **WHY?** Infrastructure, traffic controls, land use, trends
- **HOW?** Active, not passive voice; full story

Who?

USE

- People using bicycles
- People walking and rolling (assistive devices, wheelchairs)
- People driving
- People using transit
- People moving freight (which you can do by bike—bicycle logistics growing in use)

AVOID



Who?

USE

- People who are just trying to get somewhere—like you and me
- People who rely on this mode of transportation to reach essential services
- Your friends, family, neighbors, colleagues

AVOID



Who?

USE

- Demographic analysis that highlights disparities in transportation equity and health equity that we can and must address

AVOID



What IS Transportation?

USE

- Transportation modes, choices*, options
 - *Not everyone has choices about modes—don't assume they do

AVOID



What IS Transportation?

USE

- Active transportation, walking and rolling (inclusive of people using assistive devices)
- AASHTO Council on Active Transportation draft definition: “bicycling, walking, using portable personal and assistive mobility devices, and other active modes”

AVOID



What?

USE

- Single-occupancy motor vehicle congestion (if that's what you're counting)
 - This is the wonky version—make this into plain talk and be clear who's included/not included

AVOID



Identify What Really Happens

USE

- Crash, Collision
#CrashNotAccident
- The person driving the car hit the _____
(#DriverNotCar; would you say “The knife chopped the vegetables” or “The ball was hit by the baseball player and made it to the left field fence”?)

AVOID



What/When/Where/How: Use the “For Whom” Test

USE

- Less or more **for whom?**
Improved **for whom?**
Maybe you’re just doing something **different**.
Measures may improve for some modes, not for others—**depending on what you value and measure!**
- Identify **specific changes for all modes.**

AVOID



ONCE YOUR
STREET IS **IMPROVED**, THE
CURB WILL BE RIGHT
HERE



More on the “For Whom” Test

USE

- After the road change we’ll have 5 lanes on this street; 2 are for people using bicycles and other personal mobility devices.
- Do you have sidewalks? “We have 7 elements of infrastructure here: sidewalks, bike lanes, and general-purpose lanes.”

AVOID



It's not a Road Diet....

USE

- (On next slide because a diet doesn't give you much)

AVOID



It's a Road Buffet!

USE

- This change in road configuration creates a “**self-enforcing street**”: One whose design helps people in cars drive at the appropriate speed for the activities present on these blocks.
- This change will help drivers see people crossing with more time to stop. Research shows this should decrease the number of crashes and reduce the severity of those that do happen, which is better for everyone involved.
- Protected bike lanes provide space for bicyclists separated from the vehicular travel lane and reduce all crash types.
- The floating bus island provides a transit stop and keeps transit and bicycling uses separate.

What: Infrastructure, Not Amenity

USE

- Infrastructure that provides space for people walking or bicycling; street design with structured spaces for all modes (if true)

AVOID



When

- **Pedestrian-scale** lighting in places where we can reasonably expect people walking/rolling
- Time of day
- Seasonal factors (early winter darkness, high tourist season, holiday shopping, summer vacation for schoolkids)



Where

- **Presence/absence**

- Mode-specific infrastructure
- Network connectivity
- Reasonably spaced crossing opportunities with markings, good lighting
- ADA accessibility
- Transit stops, access to multimodal connections (ferry landing, rail station, airport)
- Land use indicating PEOPLE

- **Historical patterns**

- Poorer neighborhoods have less infrastructure yet residents more reliant on walking, bicycling, transit

- **Type of facility**

- Proximity to high-speed corridors
- Arterials vs side streets
- Wide, straight road, how many lanes (wider/straighter encourages speeding)

Why



Source: Vision Zero Two-Year Action Strategy

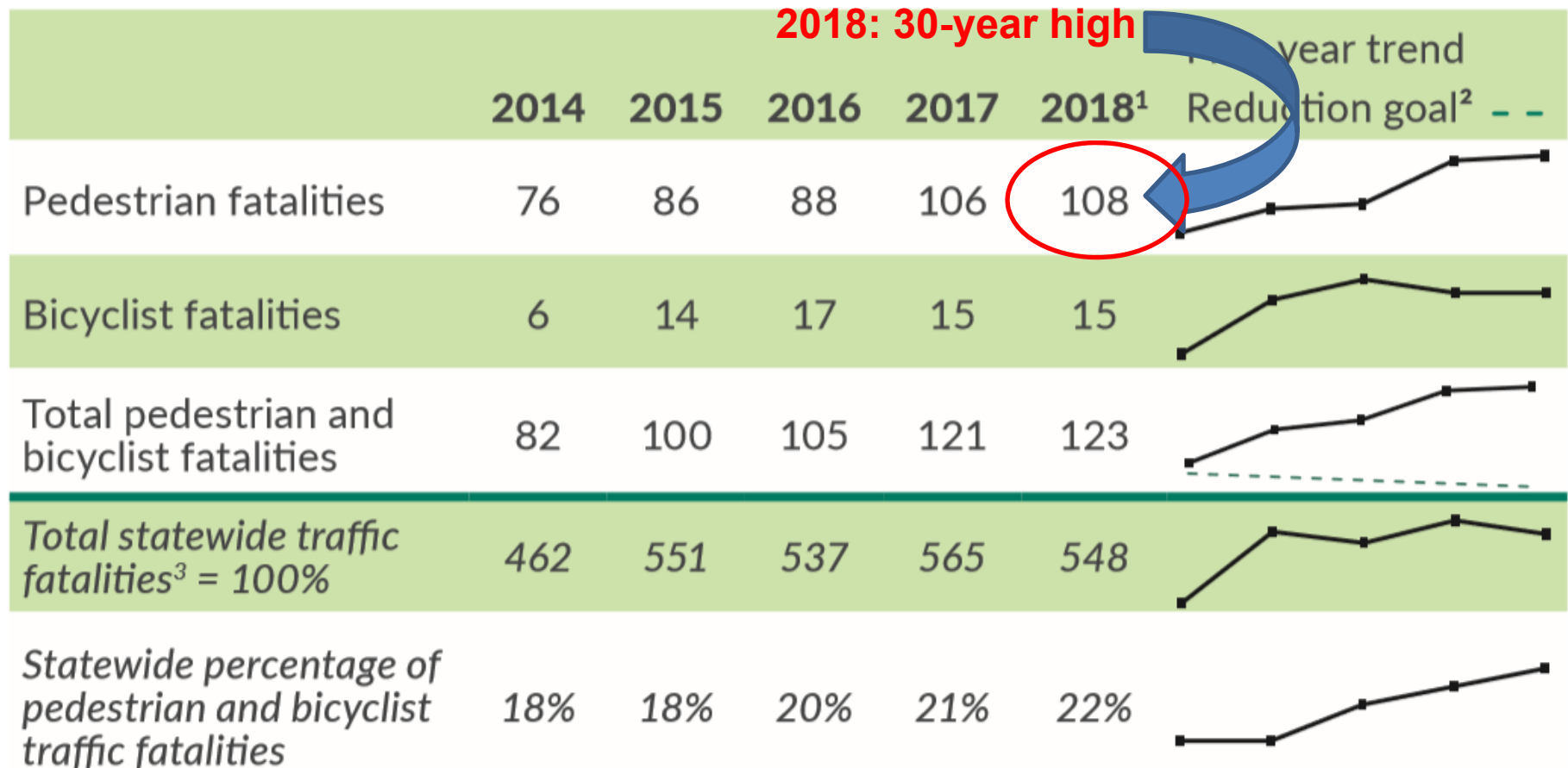
Why? Because the community wants it

- 90% of Town A residents believe streets should be designed to be safe for people of all ages and abilities.
- Nearly 90% of Town B residents believe it's unacceptable for anyone to be killed or seriously injured while traveling on their streets.
- A large majority of people in Town C (over 80%) believe that human life should take priority over moving drivers faster.
- Eight in ten Town D residents agree their streets should be designed to be safe for people using all modes of transportation.
- Over 70% of Town E residents believe deaths and serious injuries while traveling on their streets are preventable.

Safety

Unacceptable trend continues

2014 through 2018; Number of fatalities and percentage of total traffic fatalities



Source: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/publications/fulltext/graynotebook/gray-notebook-Mar19.pdf>

Putting safety in context: Frequency

Serious crashes: A daily occurrence

10 times
a day

10 times a day in 2018 a motorist collision involved someone walking or rolling.

Every
14 Hours

Every 13.65 hours in 2018 a motorist struck and **seriously injured or killed** someone walking or rolling.

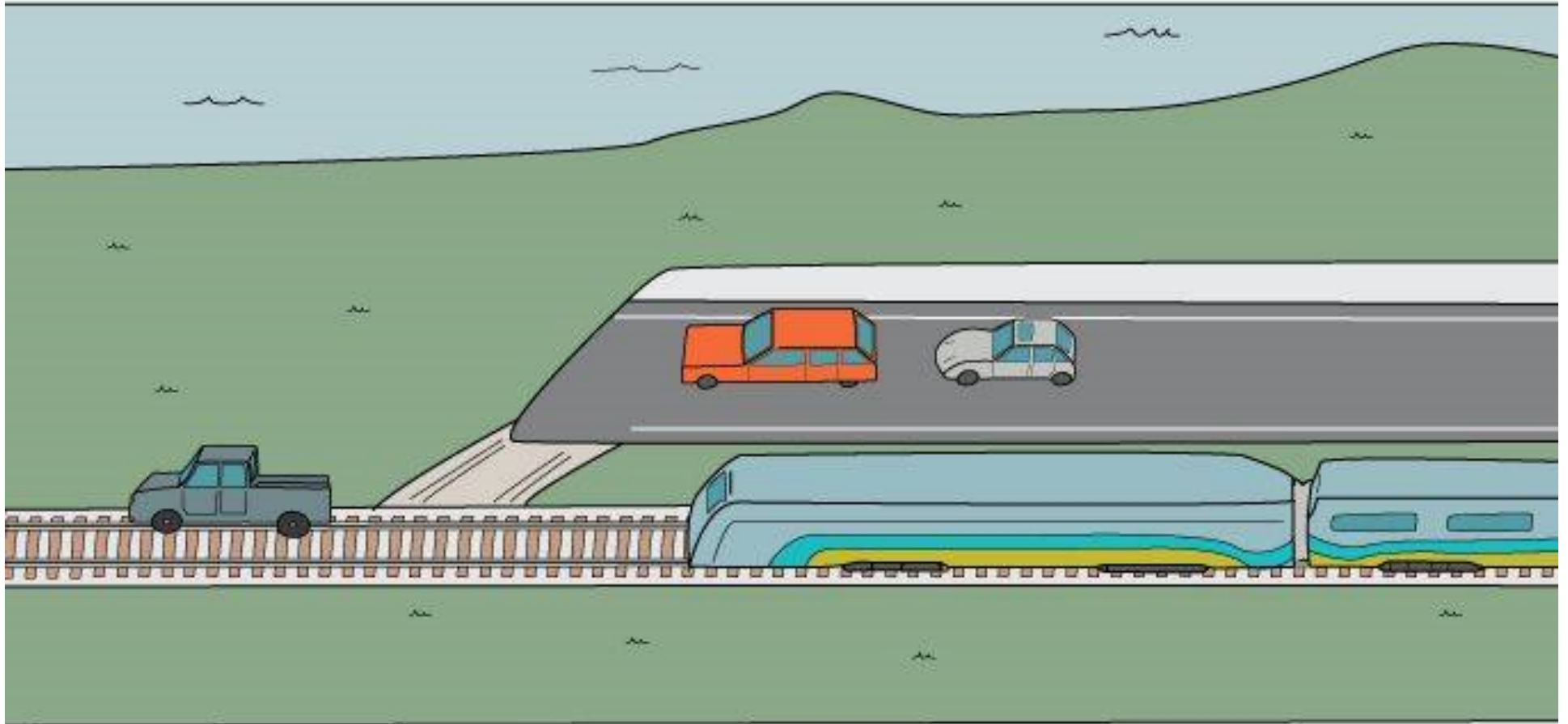
Every
3 Days

On average, a driver killed someone walking or bicycling **every 2.96 days** in 2018.

The Substitution Test Goes with the “For Whom” Test

- If you replace “motorist” with “people (walking/bicycling/taking transit)” is it true? And vice versa?
 - “This project will decrease wait time at this intersection **for people** [walking, bicycling, using wheelchairs/walkers].”
 - “We designed this road specifically to reduce the incidence and severity of injuries and fatalities **for people** [walking, bicycling, using wheelchairs/walkers].”
 - If I move impaired and run into you with the mode I use, will I seriously injure or kill you?

"DAMN, THE ROAD LANE ENDS AGAIN! I HATE SHARING THE TRACKS WITH THE TRAIN."



@STEVEPADAMS

STEVEPATRICKADAMS.COM

Cyclists eat, drink, text, smoke and fiddle with their radios while speeding around impatiently with their 25-pound vehicles. I'm still wary of them but the separated car lanes help.

I love separated car lanes! Cyclists don't run me off the road any more and I worry less about them not seeing me & killing me.



Lockwood

Separated Car Lanes Increase Comfort

How: The Whole Story

USE

- The driver hit the pedestrian who was crossing to reach a transit stop on a stretch of road that has no marked crossings, no pedestrian-scale lighting, five lanes, and a marked speed limit of 40mph. The bus she takes to work only runs once an hour there.

AVOID




It's a Story with Something for Everyone

USE

- We're making this street design work better for everyone so you can see people in time to stop
- Having visible, separated lanes for people on bikes makes the street work better for everyone
- We're all pedestrians; we all benefit

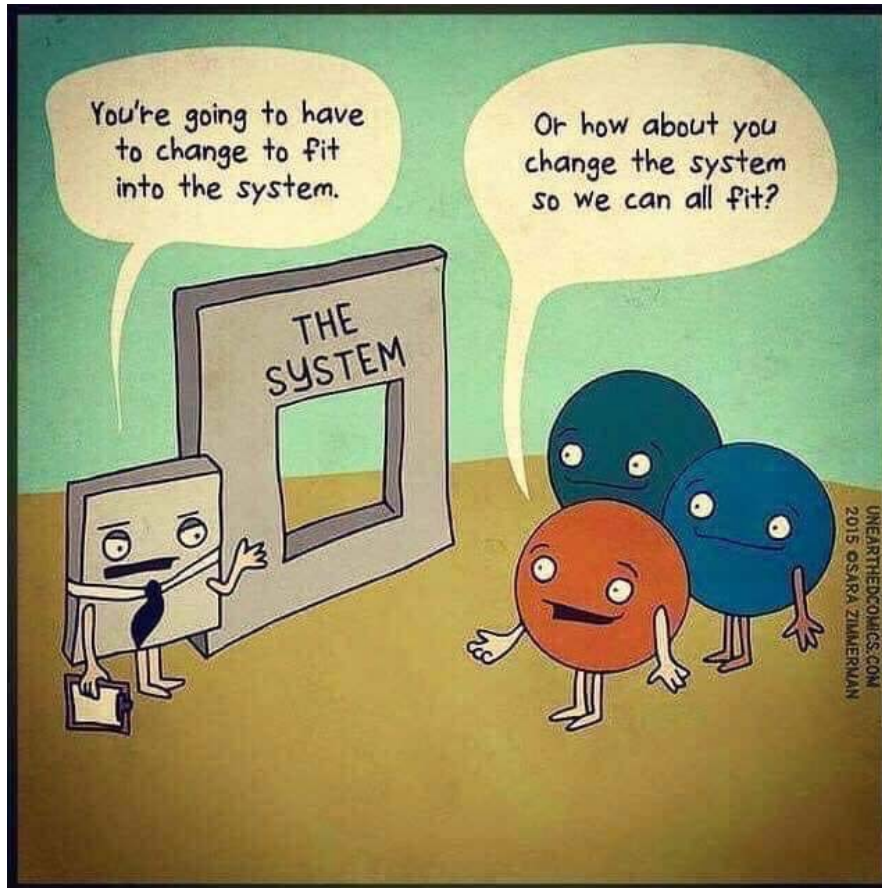
AVOID

- 
- We're adding this crosswalk for pedestrians
 - We're building bike lanes for bicyclists

Help Others Understand the Bigger Story

- I am unfamiliar with the details of this specific **crash (#CrashNotAccident)** in which **a driver struck someone (#DriverNotCar)**. However, I can say that this **not** an isolated incident. Today's crash is just the most recent in an **epidemic** of crashes that claim the lives of thousands of Americans each year.
- **Add local stats if you have an official source:** Totals, rates, how many on that street or at that intersection, your city's rate compared to cities of similar size in the state or compared to state average.
- **Turn the numbers into a meaningful comparison:** Frequency, location, other relevant context
- **Note the who/what/when/where/why/how** if you have clear, factual, up-to-date information.
- **Point out specific factors to examine *in order to tell the whole story*:** Speed, design, lighting, infrastructure, network, destinations

What Are We Building and For Whom?



What Are We Building and For Whom?

Equality



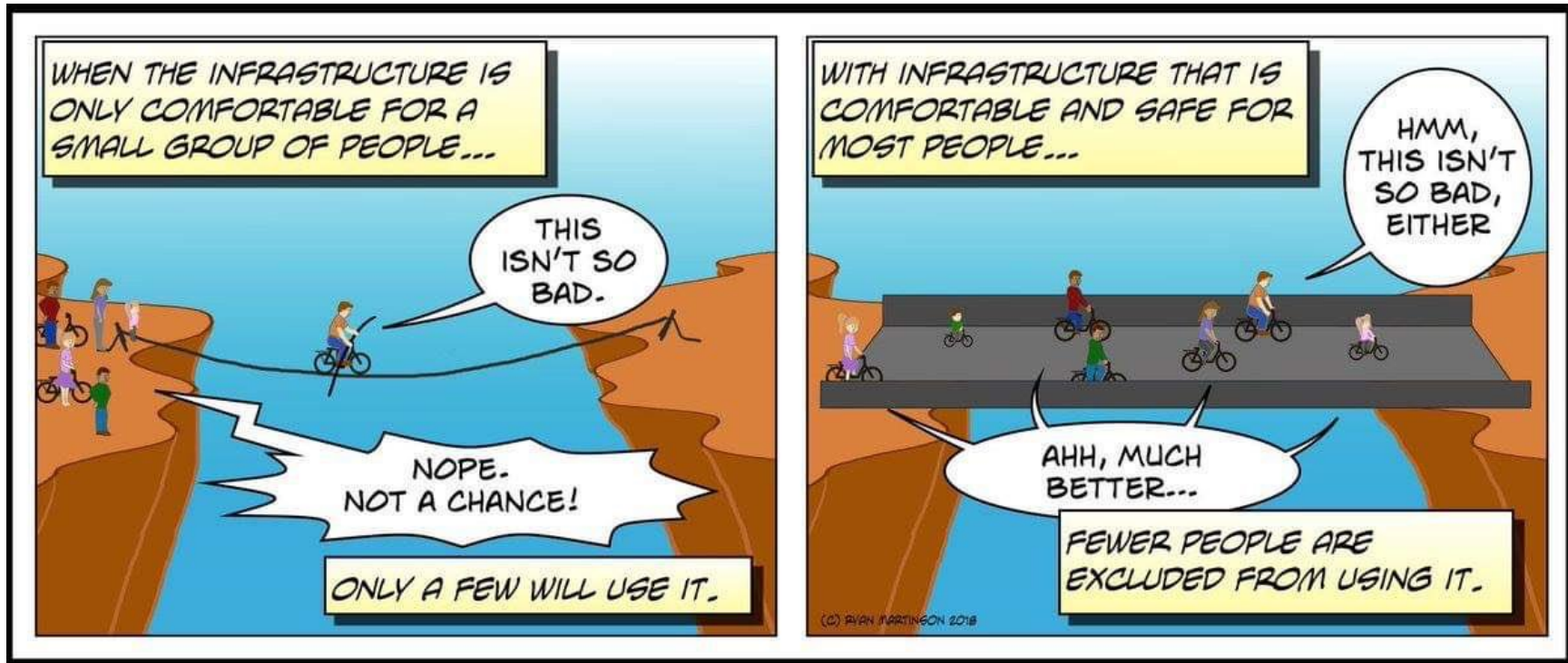
Equity



© 2017 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
May be reproduced with attribution.

[Graphic](#) by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

What Are We Building and For Whom?



Cartoon by Ryan Martinson in [ITE Canada Summer 2018](#)

Why Are We Building It?





Postcards from the Road

Keep informed on trainings, resources, and news from WSDOT Active Transportation Division and our partners.

BONUS: Mode-neutral usage tips included at no extra cost!

Sign up for the Active Transportation E-News and send your news for inclusion.

WSDOT Gov Delivery,
<http://bit.ly/WSDOTactive-eneews>
(capitalization matters)

On Twitter: Search for the #WSDOTactive hashtag. Barb's personal account: @BarbChamberlain

Food for Thought

- [Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? Evidence from an experiment.](#)
- [When covering car crashes, be careful not to blame the victim](#)
- [People are dying on our streets: Why is this happening and how can we talk about it responsibly?](#)
- [Conclusive Evidence: How the Media Fails Bicyclists](#)
- [How Coverage of Pedestrian Fatalities Dehumanizes Victims and Absolves Drivers](#)
- [If You Want to Get Away with Murder, Use Your Car: A Discursive Content Analysis of Pedestrian Traffic Fatalities in News Headlines](#)
- [Why we need to change the way we talk about traffic deaths](#)
- [What New York Should Learn From the Park Slope Crash That Killed Two Children](#)
- [TSU Researchers: Pedestrian Deaths Are Misunderstood, In Part Because Of Police And Journalists](#); presentation [Dying While Walking](#)
- [Editorial Patterns in Bicyclist and Pedestrian Crash Reporting](#) (handout from 2019 TRB paper; [full paper](#))
- [How smart language helped end Seattle's paralyzing bikelash](#)
- [Don't Say 'Cyclists,' Say 'People on Bikes'](#)
- [Aggressive Drivers See Cyclists as 'Less than Human'](#)
- ["Conversation with an Engineer" Xtranormal video](#)
- [Making the Case for Transportation Language Reform: Removing Bias](#)
- [Attacking the Language Bias in Transportation Engineering](#)
- [People for Bikes research on public perceptions of bikes and mobility](#)
- [Ableism/Language \(Usage guide\)](#)
- [A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health](#)
- [Three steps to better climate conversations](#)
- [How we see refugees could be changed by 'subtle shifts' in language, psychologists find](#)
- [ITE Canada Transportation Equity cartoon](#)

Media Coverage as Context

- [Conclusive Evidence: How the Media Fails Bicyclists](#): Bond & Scheffels, 2018: “Media coverage of cycling deaths consistently suggests that the deaths are acceptable and the victims were at fault, a new study shows.”
- [TSU Researchers: Pedestrian Deaths Are Misunderstood, In Part Because Of Police And Journalists](#): “The researchers examined news articles, finding them “jarringly” formulaic, often completely composed of the routine facts that are included in federal crash reporting forms. That can leave out details about the victim, and context about the quality of sidewalks and crosswalks, street lighting, other infrastructure and road conditions.”

Media Coverage as Context

- [Editorial Patterns in Bicyclist and Pedestrian Crash Reporting](#): Ralph et al., 2018:
 - “Local news coverage subtly, but consistently blames vulnerable road users for crashes. Media treat crashes as isolated incidents, and not as a systemic issue. These issues obscure potential solutions to curb VRU deaths.”
 - “The results reveal that local news coverage tends to subtly shift blame away from drivers and toward VRUs. Coverage almost always obscures the public health nature of the problem by treating crashes as isolated incidents, by referring to crashes as accidents, and by failing to include input from planners, engineers, and other road safety experts.”

Media Coverage as Context

- [When covering car crashes, be careful not to blame the victim:](#) Columbia Journalism Review, 2018: “The words we choose matter, and so do the ways we examine the actions of drivers, and the infrastructure and policy decisions of our cities and towns.”
- [How America’s Bike Helmet Fixation Upholds a Culture of “Unfettered Automobility”:](#) Angie Schmitt reporting in Streetsblog on research by Prof. Gregg Culver, 2018: “Culver says it’s a reflection of the dominant car culture. “The helmet fixation redirects attention away from the overarching problem of vehicular violence, assisting in its denial.”

Be Specific to be Clear and Complete—Then Check Again

Table 1. Transportation Glossary

Biased Word or Phrase	Suggestions of Objective Substitutes
Accident	Collision/Crash
Alternative Transportation	Active Transportation/Human-powered/ Non-automobile
Capacity	Maximum motor vehicle volume
Capacity deficient	Motor vehicle use predicted to exceed the maximum motor vehicle volume.
Demand	Use/Expected use
Desirable/Acceptable	Desirable (for whom)/Acceptable (for whom)
Undesirable/ Unacceptable	Undesirable (for whom)/ Unacceptable (for whom)
Efficient/Efficiency	Increase speeds/Faster
Enhanced	Increase/Reduced (depending on the subject)
Impact (noun)	Effect
Improvement	Modification/Change
Level of service	Queueing time at an intersection for motorists
Movements	Motor vehicle trips
Reliable	Predictable travel time
Road capacity	Maximum motor vehicle volume
Roadway	Street
Traffic	Motor vehicle traffic
Traffic demand	Motor vehicle use
Urban Freeway	In-city highway
Upgrade	Expansion/Reconstruction

- If you mean people moving in vehicles, say so
- Take it a step further: Where are you assuming that a concept only applies to people using motor vehicles?

Table source: Ian Lockwood, [“Making the Case for Transportation Language Reform: Removing Bias.”](#) ITE Journal (Jan. 2017)