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

THERE IS TOO MUCH TRAFFIC
FOR BILLY TO WALK TO SCHOOL;
SO WE DRIVE HIM.
Elimination

- Eliminate exposure to the crash before it can occur

Substitution

- Replace with strategy that lowers injury severity in the event of a crash

Engineering Controls

- Make changes to how we design and operate the road system, vehicles, and programs

Administrative Controls

- Change the way people use the system through, for example, education, legislation, and policies.

PPE

- Personal protective equipment, e.g. motorcycle helmets, protective gear and helmets for motorcyclists

Most effective

Least effective
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

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

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.

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

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

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

“…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

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

Cyclists, Bikers
Pedestrians
Drivers, motorists, cars, vehicles
Buses
Trucks
**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**
- Stereotypes
- Labels or descriptions with implicit/explicit bias
Who?

**USE**

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

**AVOID**

Stereotypes
Labels or descriptions with implicit/explicit bias
What IS Transportation?

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

**AVOID**
- Alternative transportation (anything that isn’t driving)
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**

Nonmotorized transportation
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

Traffic congestion
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

Accident

The car hit the ___
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**

We’re doing less/more.
We’re improving the street.
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

We took the street from 5 lanes down to 3 and added bike lanes
It’s not a Road Diet....

**USE**
- (On next slide because a diet doesn’t give you much)

**AVOID**
- This road diet will slow drivers in the business district.
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**
- Pedestrian amenities
- Bicycle amenities
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

If hit by a person driving at:

- **20 MPH**
  - Person Survives the Collision: 90%
  - Results in a Fatality: 10%

- **30 MPH**
  - Person Survives the Collision: 60%
  - Results in a Fatality: 40%

- **40 MPH**
  - Person Survives the Collision: 20%
  - Results in a Fatality: 80%

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.
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## Safety

### Unacceptable trend continues

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018¹</th>
<th>2018²</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian fatalities</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bicyclist fatalities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total pedestrian and</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>bicyclist fatalities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total statewide traffic</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>fatalities² = 100%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Statewide percentage of</td>
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<tr>
<td>pedestrian and bicyclist</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>traffic fatalities</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2018: 30-year high

### Reduction goal²

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

Every 3 Days

Every 14 Hours

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

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

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.”
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.

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

The pedestrian was not in a crosswalk when she was hit by the car.
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?

You're going to have to change to fit into the system.

Or how about you change the system so we can all fit?

Could you please shovel the ramp?

All these other kids are waiting to use the stairs. When I get through shoveling them off, then I will clear the ramp for you.

But if you shovel the ramp, we can all get in

Clearing a path for people with special needs clears the path for everyone!
What Are We Building and For Whom?

Equality

Equity

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?

CLIMATE
SUMMIT

WHAT IF IT'S A BIG HOAX AND WE CREATE A BETTER WORLD FOR NOTHING?

- INDEPENDENCE
- PRESERVE RAINFORESTS
- SUSTAINABILITY
- GREEN JOBS
- LIVABLE CITIES
- RENEWABLES
- CLEAN WATER, AIR
- HEALTHY CHILDREN
- ETC. ETC.
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.

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

- 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 1. Transportation Glossary

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