

INCREASING ACCESS TO BIKING & WALKING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every trip in Virginia starts off on foot. Walking and biking are important modes of transportation on their own but prove even more critical as first- and last-mile connections to rail and transit. Most Virginians don't walk or bike as much as they would like because our infrastructure does not allow them to do so. Biking on our roads often feels unsafe and pedestrian fatalities have surged across the Commonwealth over the last decade. The General Assembly needs to dedicate funding and enact policies that not only keep Virginians safe while walking and biking but actually expand access to these two healthy, affordable, and sustainable ways of getting around.

CHALLENGE

Virginia will not achieve its climate goals until walking and biking are safer. As transportation investments continue to be made in rail and transit systems, Virginians need safe ways to access these networks while reducing their carbon footprints.

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Forty-three percent of people report the desire to ride bicycles more¹ but many are limited by safe cycling infrastructure access. Additionally, there is a high percentage of low-income families who rely solely on walking and biking for transportation. Pedestrian deaths per billion vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in Virginia increased in 2020, although car traffic was reduced overall, highlighting a need for safer infrastructure.² As road and pedestrian fatalities continue to climb, Black and brown pedestrians are up to twice as likely to be killed.³

Virginia's dedicated trail budget is a great start but falls short of making major infrastructure changes that will save lives by physically separating people biking and walking from drivers. Furthermore, bicyclists need the proven crash reduction benefits from having the freedom to yield at stop signs.

Virginia is one of four states that regularly denies crash victims damages and recourse due to our contributory negligence law, which states a party to a crash found to be even 1% at fault is not entitled to damages that would cover medical bills. This especially impacts the pedestrian and biking communities, particularly those of low-income populations or populations of color, who must go to great, sometimes impossible, lengths to prove their innocence. These populations are also the least likely to be insured or be able to pay expensive medical bills.

SOLUTIONS

Increased funding for multi-use trails with a transportation focus

Nothing is safer for people biking and walking than physical separation from drivers. Localities need funding from all government levels to build solutions to increased traffic fatalities.

Allow bicyclists and pedestrians more freedom⁴ to choose their safest course

The Safety Stop, which allows bicyclists to yield at stop signs, was shown to contribute to a 23% reduction in bike crashes at intersections in a Delaware 5-year study.

More e-bikes

According to the Federal Highway Administration, automobiles are used for 46% of trips under three miles. E-bikes help to break the cycling barrier for people of different physical abilities and fitness levels. E-bikes also provide the benefits of access to employment, education, and utility that cars do at a small fraction of the upfront price and maintenance costs.⁵ However, the upfront cost of e-bikes remains an additional barrier.

Equilibrate access to post-crash damages

Join 46 other states in replacing contributory negligence with comparative negligence, allowing financial coverage comparable to fault for injured parties in a crash. Medical bills for an injured pedestrian struck while in a cross-walk shouldn't be denied because of "1% fault", which could be arbitrarily determined related to things such as the lighting or time of day.

A commitment to ending traffic fatalities in Virginia across all agencies and policies

The safer transportation, the more freedom we have to choose cleaner modes. It will take every level to achieve Vision Zero, a resolution to lower traffic fatalities in Virginia to zero.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase annual multi-use trail budget to \$20 million, providing access to life-saving projects across the Commonwealth.

Enact "Safety Stop" policy, allowing bicyclists to reduce crash probability.

Establish an e-bike rebate program, increasing access to transportation for all, e.g. a 30% rebate, up to \$450, on the purchase price of a qualifying e-bike.

Enact a Comparative Negligence policy for vulnerable road users, removing barriers to damages and increasing medical coverage for injured pedestrians and bike riders.

Commit to reaching Vision Zero by 2050, with a 50% reduction in death by vulnerable road users over 2009 levels by 2035. Focus on our most vulnerable, prioritize reducing speeding, and increase dedicated walking and biking infrastructure.

