

INCREASING WALKING & BIKING

Kyle Lawrence // Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition // kyle@svbcoalition.org

Jenn Million // New River Valley Bicycle Association // president@nrvbike.org

Brantley Tyndall // Virginia Bicycling Federation // president@vabike.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transportation is Virginia's largest contributor to climate change. Virginia's traffic fatalities have grown dramatically in recent years to a 15-year high, including significant increases in bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities. Virginia needs a commitment to reducing transportation fatalities that focuses on vulnerable road users. This effort will require dedicated funding to build safer infrastructure for biking and walking, enacting policies and legal changes such as the Bicyclist Safety Stop and safer motorist overtaking, slower urban roadways, and expanding our active mobility networks for the 21st Century.

CHALLENGE

Virginia will not achieve its climate goals until walking and biking are safer and more accessible. In 2021, 968 Virginians died on the commonwealth's roadways, a 17% increase from 2019. Pedestrian fatalities reached 125 and bicyclist fatalities doubled in the last year to 16, the highest tallies for both in more than a decade.

Forty-three percent of people report the desire to ride their bicycle more,¹ but many lack safe and accessible places to ride. Nearly 200,000 Virginia households have no access to a motor vehicle and need to bike and walk as a part of their primary commutes.² As traffic fatalities continue to climb, Black and brown pedestrians are up to twice as likely to be killed.³

These issues cannot be addressed without added infrastructure, funding to build it out, and both policies and facilities that allow for biking and walking as safe transportation to where people need to go.

Virginia's dedicated trail budget is a great start to building out safe walking and biking facilities but falls short of making the transformative infrastructure changes to save lives and give people the freedom to walk and bike wherever they need to go. In order to stay safe and feel comfortable, people walking and riding bicycles need spaces that are physically separated from drivers. Furthermore, bicyclists need proven crash-reduction policies such as the freedom to yield at stop signs and to travel side by side in a lane. That last policy is especially important for parents who want to ride with their kids and shield them from traffic.

Virginia's vision for building active transportation infrastructure, its 2011 State Bike Plan, is outdated and needs to be updated to better connect and modernize the projects it is committing to build.

SOLUTION

Virginia needs a commitment to ending traffic fatalities across all agencies and policies. The safer our transportation network, the greater freedom we have to choose cleaner modes. It will take every level of government to achieve Vision Zero: a strategic action plan to lower traffic fatalities in Virginia to zero. Virginia's traffic fatalities have

continued to climb across the state, and ensuring a significant and continued decrease in these tragic losses of life will take a coordinated commitment at the state level.

In looking toward reducing traffic fatalities in Virginia, it is worth noting that nothing is safer for people biking and walking than physical separation from drivers, and protected and separated trails lead to negligible crash fatalities despite high trail use. The Custis Trail in Rosslyn and Virginia Capital Trail between Richmond and Jamestown saw over 3.5 million⁴ and 1.2 million⁵ trail users in 2021 and 2020, respectively; this level of use can be expected in regions across Virginia. To add to our existing separated trail systems in

the Commonwealth, we need increased dedicated funding for multi-use trails with a transportation focus. Localities need funding from all government levels to build solutions to combat increased traffic fatalities.

Additionally, 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. Two-abreast bicycling should be allowed whenever overtaking traffic is not delayed unreasonably. Allowing bicyclists and pedestrians more freedom to choose their safest course will go a long way toward ensuring safety for vulnerable road users.

Virginia's dated State Bike Plan and Complete Streets Policy should also be updated to incorporate inclusive trails, bike lanes, reconfigured roads, shoulders, and other safety and access measures. Planning connections of existing and future bikeways and walkways into useful networks is critical for transportation utility.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Commit the Commonwealth to achieving Vision Zero by 2050 - with a 50% reduction in road fatalities by 2035.

Maintain multi-use trail budget at \$41m annually (2022 dollars, adjusted for inflation), providing access to life-saving projects across the Commonwealth.

Update Virginia's 2011 State Bike Plan⁶ and 2004 Complete Streets policy.⁷

Pass "Safety Stop" and two-abreast/lane-control legislation, allowing bicyclists to reduce crash probability.