

ADVANCING ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

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WHY IT MATTERS

As transportation remains Virginia's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, shifting how we travel by expanding opportunities for active mobility is essential to achieve climate goals, reduce other vehicle-related pollutants, enhance public health, and improve affordability for Virginia families. The environmental and economic cost of motor vehicles have become increasingly apparent as rising gas prices reveal the burden that car-dependency places on Virginians.

At the same time, however, safety concerns remain a justifiable barrier for those who are interested in active transportation but are hesitant to bike or walk. Traffic fatalities continue to be a leading cause of death in the U.S.¹ In 2025, 825 deaths occurred on Virginia's roadways. These deaths are not distributed evenly. Black and Brown populations experience traffic fatalities at more than twice the average rate.² Neighborhood disruption to accommodate highway construction and expansion, as well as proximity to constant air pollution, have also disproportionately impacted Black, Brown, and low-income communities across Virginia, resulting in limited mobility choice and long-term health impacts.

Most of this loss of life is preventable. Redesigning our road network with infrastructure that protects **vulnerable road users** is critical to reducing traffic fatalities and making active transportation a realistic choice. By investing in walking and biking infrastructure, Virginia can improve air quality, reduce **greenhouse gas emissions** and **fossil fuel** consumption, and decrease the environmentally destructive and community-disrupting expansion of highways. Shifting away from heavy reliance on automobiles is an important step in Virginia, as it would create a transportation system that is safe, accessible, affordable, and livable, for people of all ages and abilities.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Traffic fatalities in Virginia have decreased over 10% from 918 in 2024 to 825 in 2025.³ However, fatalities among vulnerable road users remained relatively unchanged, actually increasing slightly from 151 in 2024 to 153 in 2025.⁴ Lower design speeds and safety-oriented infrastructure, such as raised and high visibility crosswalks, protected bike lanes, and traffic-calming measures can increase safety for vulnerable road users. However, the **Virginia Department of Transportation's** \$8.8 billion annual budget continues to prioritize car-oriented design over safety design, often poorly maintains its existing active transportation facilities, and lacks a robust roadway reconfiguration program to cost-effectively retrofit active mobility

improvements.^{5,6}

Automated Speed Enforcement cameras continue to be one effective tool to address speeding and reduce crash severity and mortality. Speed cameras are currently allowed in active school zones, highway work zones when workers are present, and limited designated high-risk intersection segments. Recent legislation has added guardrails governing camera placement, transparency, and restricting the revenues to operating costs and traffic-safety improvements.

Virginia has yet to legalize the **Bicyclist Safety Yield**, which allows bicyclists to yield at stop signs and proceed when safe. The Safety Yield is recommended by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; it reduced bicycle-involved crashes by 23% in Delaware.⁷ Virginia also maintains excessive and ambiguous restrictions on riding two abreast that create unnecessary barriers to safe group riding, family cycling, and rider visibility.⁸

Virginia currently regulates **e-bikes** through a three-class system based on maximum power, speed and operating features.⁹ However, higher-powered and faster devices "e-motos" (those with motors producing more than 750 watts), including devices without pedals, are becoming commonplace, creating confusion and risk regarding their use on public highways. Virginia must clearly distinguish, regulate, and enforce the differences between such devices and lower-speed e-bikes as currently defined in the Code of Virginia to protect the accessibility of e-bikes while ensuring public safety.

OPPORTUNITIES

Achieving Virginia's climate goals will require a new emphasis that prioritizes active transportation infrastructure and safety. Dedicated funding for a connected statewide network of multi-use trails, protected bicycle facilities, and pedestrian infrastructure would make sustainable transportation options more accessible and appealing, thus reducing motor vehicle use and emissions.

To address the fact that transportation emissions are the largest source of greenhouse gases in the state, state and regional transportation plans should establish targets for reducing vehicle miles traveled and transportation-sector greenhouse gas emissions and invest in projects that meet these targets and provide sustainable, affordable, and equitable transportation options.

Virginia also has an opportunity to strengthen existing programs through a comprehensive update of the **State Bicycle and Pedestrian Policy Plans** (last

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revised in 2011 and 2016, respectively), and VDOT's **Complete Streets program**. The foundation of these plans could be clear commitment and implementation steps to reduce pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities to zero, including connected bicycle and pedestrian networks, multi-use trails, roadway reconfigurations that center safety, and equitable access to transportation options.

Reestablishing Virginia's Safe Routes to School pro-

grams is another opportunity to improve community health and wellbeing while building a culture of safe and active transportation in Virginia. These programs need stable, accessible funding, and support with a priority focus on school communities that have the highest need for safe biking and walking conditions.

TOP TAKEAWAYS

Achieving climate goals through active transportation requires extensive commitment to safety. Virginia's updated State Bicycle and Pedestrian Policy Plans should commit to eliminating pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities.

Incorporating measurable goals and strategies to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions in state and regional transportation plans—and investing in projects that help meet these goals—is necessary to meet Virginia's climate goals.

Experiences from other states demonstrate that policies such as the Safety Stop, riding two abreast, and informed regulation of e-motos can improve safety while supporting greater use of active transportation.

ENDNOTES

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9. *Virginia E-Bike Laws 2026: Sidewalk Ban, Licensing Rules & Classes*. <https://thecyclistchoice.com/resources/virginia-ebike-laws/>