

**TESTIMONY PREPARED FOR THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND
TRANSIT, TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE, U.S. HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Addressing the Roadway Safety Crisis: Building Safer Roads for All

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Thank you Chair Norton, Vice Chair Defazio and Ranking Member Davis for inviting me to be here today and to speak with you about these important issues. I am Ludwig Gaines, the Executive Director of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, (WABA). At WABA, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, our mission is to empower people to ride bikes, build connections, and transform places. We envision a just, equitable and sustainable transportation system where walking, biking, and transit are the best ways to get around. Throughout our 50 year history WABA has strived to be resolute in its pursuit of these aims.¹ We do this through educational offerings and programming for youth and adults, advocacy, and through outreach, engagement and partnerships with diverse groups throughout the region. Our geographic footprint includes the District of Columbia, the City of Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax Counties in Virginia, and Prince George's and Montgomery County in Maryland.

My testimony today is informed by WABA's rich history and can and must-do spirit to educate, advocate and elevate issues such as transportation safety critical to our 8,000

¹ <https://waba.org/about/>

plus members, as well our regional and community partners. Our dedicated staff are daily on the front lines of the very issues we confront today. It is because of their work and our success that WABA is a recognized force for bicycling and multimodal forms of transportation.

My testimony also brings local transportation policy experience as a former elected Alexandria Virginia City Council member and member and past leader of multiple local and regional bodies dealing with transportation issues.² It is my goal to intentionally share a local and sober assessment of the current state of affairs, while offering guided and guarded optimism for the future.

I have five key points to emphasize today:

1. We Are Headed in the Wrong Direction

On the road to safer streets we are headed in the wrong direction. Nationally, after a decade of stagnating progress for traffic safety, 2020 saw a 23% increase in the fatality rate per mile driven. With the return of traffic to pre-covid levels, 2021 estimates show the highest number of traffic fatalities since 2005. The U.S. also lags behind peer nations in both overall traffic safety and in progress over the last decade.³ As one

² Ludwig Gaines has served on the Alexandria, VA City Council, Alexandria City Human Rights Commission (Chair), Alexandria City Planning Commission, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Transportation Planning Board, the Virginia Transportation Commission, COG Street Smarts Campaign (Chair), Capital Trails Coalition Advisory Board, COG Regional Policy and Development Committee (Chair), National League of Cities Public Safety Committee, and is past Board Member of the DASH public bus system in Alexandria, VA.

³ <https://www.wri.org/research/sustainable-and-safe-vision-and-guidance-zero-road-deaths>

study bluntly determined, “our streets are killing us unless we prioritize humans over cars.”⁴ This holds true both locally and federally. I will share specific examples of these shortcomings and opportunities shortly.

The alarming statistical rise is evident for the District of Columbia and D.C. Metro region as well. D.C., home to this August body, just witnessed in 2021 the deadliest year on DC roads since 2007.⁵ The District had a shocking 40 traffic fatalities in 2021. Half of the people killed in D.C. were not in a vehicle.⁶

More than simply statistics, those tragically killed lost what you and I may take for granted - a future, another day, another Christmas, a wedding, children, an education, a sports championship, another sunrise and sunset. Included in this group are young children such as 4 year old Zyaire Joshua⁷ and 5 year old Allison Hart⁸ run over by cars. Our most vulnerable victims on streets we are obligated to make safe for them.

There's opera singer, 24 year old Nina Larson⁹, and cyclist Jim Pagels¹⁰ who the day before his death by vehicle tweeted about the need for greater safety on our streets for cyclists. There's also Waldon Adams and Rhonda Whitaker¹¹, advocates for ending

⁴ <https://archive.curbed.com/2016/9/1/12737230/streets-traffic-deaths-pedestrians>

⁵ <https://dcist.com/story/22/01/07/2021-deadliest-year-dc-roads/>

⁶ <https://www.dcvisionzero.com/maps-data>

⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/child-struck-and-killed-by-a-vehicle-in-northwest-washington/2021/04/01/679f1078-9345-11eb-a74e-1f4cf89fd948_story.html

⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/12/12/traffic-fatalities-dc-pedestrian-bowser/>

⁹ <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/family-friends-gather-to-remember-24-year-old-struck-killed-in-adams-morgan/2885097/>

¹⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/pagels-bicycle-crash-washington/2021/04/12/ab7d689c-9b85-11eb-8005-bffc3a39f6d3_story.html

¹¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/pedestrians-killed-hains-point/2021/04/27/e6d13610-a6c7-11eb-8d25-7b30e74923ea_story.html

homelessness who died by vehicle at D.C.'s beloved Haine Points. There's Armando Matinez Ramos who was delivering food by bike when he was struck and killed by a driver that failed to yield¹². And, on June 2, 2022 - just last week - 18 year old Enzo Alvarenga (weeks from graduation) was struck and killed riding his bike on Old Georgetown Road in nearby Bethesda, MD. The very same road where in 2017, 17 year old Jacob Cassell was killed by a driver while riding his bike.¹³ Area residents for years have lobbied for redesign and make that roadway safe to little avail. All of these victims have stories that tragically and avoidably ended by motor vehicle. They deserved another sunrise and sunset. At the very least they deserved policies that protect and prioritize human life over a car.

2. People Walking and Biking are at a Disproportionate Risk

While fatalities among all categories have been increasing, fatalities among pedestrians and bicyclists have been increasing even faster than for all users—up almost 50% over the past decade. Pedestrians and bicyclists are among the most vulnerable road users locally and nationally, and the risk they confront is disproportionate to other road users.¹⁴

¹²<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/dc/community-gathers-to-honor-cyclist-killed-in-crash-while-demanding-for-traffic-changes/65-b3c60407-0413-4ac4-b252-e58de50f72d7>

¹³ <https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-magazine/march-april-2020/remembering-jake/>

¹⁴<https://scienceblogs.com/thepumphandle/2013/11/04/pedestrians-bicyclists-at-disproportionate-risk-of-being-killed-by-a-distracted-driver>

For perspective, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1.24 million die every year in crashes. 27% of all road traffic deaths are of pedestrians and cyclists.¹⁵ Recognizing the disproportionate risk pedestrians and cyclists face is a must first step in prescribing solutions and drafting policy to redress this compelling problem and keep people safe on our roads. That nearly one third of all D.C. pedestrian accidents for example, go unreported, not to mention incidents of near misses, demands a solution.¹⁶ Step one in this process is acknowledging that the bike and pedestrian deaths we experience are a direct result of prioritizing vehicles over humans that MUST change. Local and federal policies that fail to account for this reality contribute to, as opposed to help solve, this problem.

Regarding the federal role, here are few immediate examples worthy of immediate highlight:

- Federal regulations and guidance are often a barrier to building safer streets.¹⁷
 - In the DC region, this results in streets like New York Avenue in DC, Arlington Blvd in Virginia, or Georgia Ave in Maryland—massive, highway-style roads that are hostile to pedestrians, transit riders, and bicyclists. Streets that divide communities by forcing people to take their life in their hands just to cross the street.

¹⁵<https://wtop.com/dc/2021/10/study-says-nearly-1-3-of-crashes-involving-pedestrians-and-cyclists-go-unreported-in-dc/>

¹⁶<https://wtop.com/dc/2021/10/study-says-nearly-1-3-of-crashes-involving-pedestrians-and-cyclists-go-unreported-in-dc/>

¹⁷ <https://nacto.org/program/modernizing-federal-standards>

- Federal regulations and guidance at times have clearly failed to adequately address safety for people outside of cars.¹⁸
 - In the DC region, this manifests as it has everywhere else across the nation: the proliferation of larger, more powerful cars and trucks means that crashes are more common and more deadly.
- Federal infrastructure funding prioritizes highway expansions instead of transit and active transportation infrastructure.¹⁹ Highways are dangerous in their own right, but they also result in more cars and trucks on neighborhood streets, streets like Wheeler Road Southeast in DC, a school-adjacent street in a predominantly Black neighborhood, where, despite repeated pleas from the community for traffic calming and speed enforcement, drivers severely injured three children and killed one adult in the span of just two days last December.
 - The following projects are local projects that need funding but when completed will be examples for the nation:
 - Washington Union Station Expansion Project - The revised plan for the multibillion-dollar expansion of the station in D.C. will make it a multimodal premiere destination for the nation²⁰.
 - Pennsylvania Avenue Initiative - The proposed vision of this street in Washington, DC is set to transform the Avenue between the White House and the U.S. Capitol into a venue that celebrates its civic role and spirit of democracy²¹

¹⁸<https://nacto.org/2022/05/24/why-the-u-s-gives-monster-suvs-five-star-safety-ratings-and-what-you-can-do-about-it/>

¹⁹<https://nacto.org/2021/08/10/infrastructure-bill-reverses-climate-action/>

²⁰<https://www.federalcitycouncil.org/initiatives/union-station/>

²¹<https://www.ncpc.gov/initiatives/pennave/>

- Louisiana Avenue Protected Bike Lane - The planned facility along Louisiana Avenue and Constitution Avenue would connect Columbus Circle in front of Union Station to the Pennsylvania Avenue NW bike lanes about half a mile away. The link would create a connection, long-sought by the city and advocates, between the protected facilities through downtown, including 15th Street NW, and the Metropolitan Branch Trail that will eventually stretch to Silver Spring²².
 - This Protected Bike lane will allow staff and members of congress to have a safe route to work, and give visitors and residents of Washington, D.C. a way to commute through a connected city-wide network.

3. Driving is Inherently Dangerous: Design Matters

Engineering and behavioral considerations play a huge role that must be elevated in our discussions on traffic safety. The safe system approach to roadway design acknowledges that driving is inherently dangerous, therefore roadway design should anticipate the possibility of human error to reduce crash frequency and the severity of crashes that do occur.²³ Pedestrians and bicyclists must be viewed as equal participants in our transportation systems. WABA's recent survey of our membership made clear that safety is the number one consideration when considering whether to

²² <https://dcist.com/story/18/10/25/congress-is-holding-up-a-key-bike-l/>

²³ https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/zerodeaths/docs/FHWA_SafeSystem_Brochure_V9_508_200717.pdf;
<https://www.ite.org/technical-resources/topics/safe-systems/>

bike on local roads. Of note is that “since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, cycling has become an even more popular, resilient and reliable travel option, and pop-up bike lanes have been increasingly common in major cities around the globe. Between March and July 2020, 394 cities, states and countries reallocated spaces for people to cycle and walk more easily, efficiently and safely.” For busier streets, bike lanes need heavy-duty physical segregation. Protected lanes work²⁴ and while they come with a financial cost, that cost pales when we consider the cost inaction and indifference has had to date on human lives. And, it bears emphasizing that Bike infrastructure benefits people who don’t bike as well, such as pedestrians, e-scooter riders, transit riders, drivers and the community at large. We’ve witnessed these benefits locally.²⁵

4. Traffic Safety is an Equity Issue

Nationally, as the recent Governors Highway Safety Association report found, traffic fatalities have a disproportionate impact on several communities – people of color, people in low-income areas, American Indians, rural residents, and the elderly.²⁶ Traffic violence is the leading cause of death for teenagers, and one of the leading causes of death for people under the age of 44.

According to the Governors Highway Safety Association, “the traditional racial inequities that exist across the country seem to also be reflected very strongly in traffic safety

²⁴ <https://thecityfix.com/blog/4-ways-to-design-safe-streets-for-cyclists/>

²⁵ <https://www.kittelson.com/ideas/how-bike-infrastructure-benefits-people-who-dont-bike/>

²⁶ <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/Analysis-of-Traffic-Fatalities-by-Race-and-Ethnicity21>

data. These inequities can impact the kind of infrastructure improvements that minority-dominated communities benefit from, and this could possibly play a major role in the high number of traffic accident fatalities involving persons belonging to these communities.”²⁷ We see this happening in the District of Columbia, for example, with half of all traffic fatalities happening in the largely African American and resource deprived, Wards 7 and 8.

Solutions exist but they must involve community outreach, engagement, education and resources. WABA’s Zero Summit annually brings together stakeholders from across D.C.’s diverse communities to address transportation safety issues.²⁸ Strategic partnerships are also critical, and that is why WABA has partnered with Howard University on a District Department of Transportation (DDOT) grant to engage with residents in Wards 7 and 8 and to create a youth crash tracking system to provide data useful local decision makers that will lead to policies and funding to reduce the disproportionate number of incidents occurring in these communities. WABA, as an organization, has incorporated equity in all programming. And, lastly, WABA has secured the signatures to our equity pledge from over 50 local organizations.²⁹ In communities across the nation and DC region there are groups like DC Families for Safe Streets that know the issues first hand, have lived the challenges and are forging solutions forward. WABA is proud to partner with them locally because their input informs our advocacy.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ <https://waba.org/blog/2021/04/2021-regional-vision-zero-summit/>

²⁹ <https://waba.org/equity/>

³⁰ <https://dcfamiliesforsafestreets.org/>

Transportation equity is more than a catch phrase.³¹ It is an imperative in the formulation and delivery of solutions and resources to groups too often left out of the discussion.³²

5. This is a Solvable Problem: Road to Change

As traffic fatalities and crashes have been rising in the U.S., towns, cities, and rural areas across the Nation and around the world have improved traffic safety by redesigning roadways to reduce vehicle speeds, eliminating conflicts and dangerous turns, and separating vulnerable road users from traffic. Locally we've begun to see some movement after long and hard fought efforts. The only acceptable number of traffic fatalities is zero, and safe design has to be a part of the solution. Equity has to be part of the solution. Efficient resourcing to localities from states must be part of the solution. Bold and transformative leadership that reprioritizes people over cars has to be part of the solution. And, listening to and engaging with local advocates, those

³¹ <https://www.urbandemographics.org/post/transportation-equity-encyclopedia/>

³²Pereira, R. H. M., & Karner, Alex. (2021). Transportation equity. In R. Vickerman, *International Encyclopedia of Transportation* (1st Edition, Vol. 1, p. 271–277). Elsevier. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102671-7.10053-3>. According to Pereira and Karner, “Transportation equity is a way to frame distributive justice concerns in relation to how social, economic, and government institutions that shape the distribution of transportation benefits and burdens in society. It focuses on the evaluative standards used to judge the differential impacts of policies and plans, asking who benefits from and is burdened by them and to what extent. Questions of transportation equity involve both sufficientarian and egalitarian concerns with both absolute levels of wellbeing, transport-related poverty and social exclusion as well as with relative levels of transport-related inequalities. Ultimately, the study of transport equity explores the multiple channels through which transport and land use policies can create conditions for more inclusive cities and transport systems that allow different people to flourish, to satisfy their basic needs and lead a meaningful life. Transportation equity issues broadly encompass how policy decisions shape societal levels of environmental externalities and what groups are more or less exposed to them, as well as how those decisions affect the lives of different groups in terms of their ability to access life-enhancing opportunities such as employment, healthcare, and education. Equity is a crucial part of a broader concern with transport and mobility justice. The call for transport justice goes beyond distributive concerns, and yet justice cannot be achieved without equity.”

closest to the communities impacted, has to be part of the solution. A holistic approach. One that acknowledges shared responsibility and prioritizes people over cars will not only save lives, but alter for the better the transportation experiences of all participants.