

Zero Problems

Transforming mobility by focusing on
becoming rather than avoiding

Chris “CJ” Johnson

My name is CJ and I’m the physical activity coord for the Hawaii State Department of Heath.

Some folks hear “physical activity coordinator” and assume I’m a physiologist or a sports medicine expert, but actually, my background is in transportation planning and mobility justice advocacy.



over the past several years the CDC's and DOH's strategy for promoting physical activity has shifted from primarily encouragement, to a heavy focus on the built environment and what we call Social Determinants of Health.

What we now understand is that where you live, its design, environmental and social factors, and the transportation system you depend on to connect you to healthy food, healthcare, education, jobs, worship, recreation and civic participation has a HUGE influence on your health outcomes.

Department of Health recently published our Healthy Hawaii Strategic Plan 2030 update and our physical activity goals and objectives are all based in the built environment and policy, or, as we call it in the plan "community design and access"

We're not alone in rethinking these connection and updating the strategies we're employing to reach population health.

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One of the best examples of how cities and states are reimagining public health, built environment and mobility is a campaign you may have heard of called Vision Zero.

It’s a popular brand at the moment. The State of Hawaii and 3 out of 4 counties have committed to Vision Zero in some form. So have scores of cities across the world.

In some circles its called “safe systems” approach. And in 5 years, we might call it something different. I think you’re already starting to see the brand lose some of its luster, nationally, but its core principles continue to gain support and urgency.

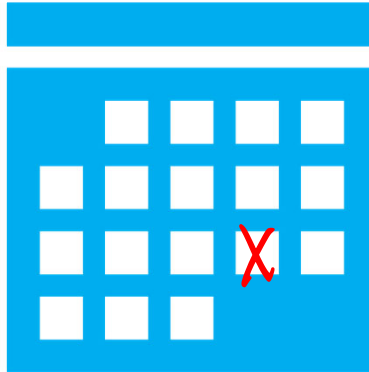
Vision Zero is often described as progressive or radical, but its core premise is simple and humane.

**Traffic deaths are:
unacceptable
avoidable
preventable**

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That's all.

And if that's true, then it stands to reason we should eliminate them, right?



vision zero is a systemic commitment to eliminate traffic fatalities by a set date.

So Vision Zero says we should.

It's a systemic commitment to eliminate traffic fatalities by a set date.

Thats all Vision Zero is.

So when I hear that Vision Zero is unrealistic or radical, I tend to respond with some historic context. Lets go back a hundred years.

NATION ROUSED AGAINST MOTOR KILLINGS

Secretary Hoover's Conference Will Suggest Many Ways to Check The Alarming Increase of Automobile Fatalities.—Studying Huge Problem



roads become insignificant by comparison with those caused by automobiles. The huge economic loss caused by street and highway accidents is set forth in a preliminary report prepared by the Committee on Statistics appointed by Secretary Hoover. On this subject the report says in part: "The economic loss due to these approximately 200,000 accidents in which personal injuries occur can probably never be known. Several estimates have been made. The most conservative is based upon the usual liability of \$5,000 per life and average of \$175 for each personal injury. "These two items, applied to 22,600



asserting them in the actual use of the highway in the presence of superior force in the shape of the omnipresent motor car? "It is usually only when in court at the post-mortem of an accident or of his own bodily post-mortem from such accident that the pedestrian is, so to speak, allowed to enjoy his legal rights. Most of us prefer not to fall victims as the price of such recourse. "Some time ago General O'Dryan was quoted as saying that 'most of us are still addicted to habits on the street which were suitable to the life of a generation ago when all vehicles were

In the early 1920s there was widespread panic about the sheer scale of motor vehicle deaths in the US.

At the time, there were many proposed responses, including requiring cars to have internal speed governors, banning them from city centers, stringent liability rules, transit priority policy and design

what we got instead was a PR campaign designed by an industry group called Motordom whos strategy to address traffic violence looked like this

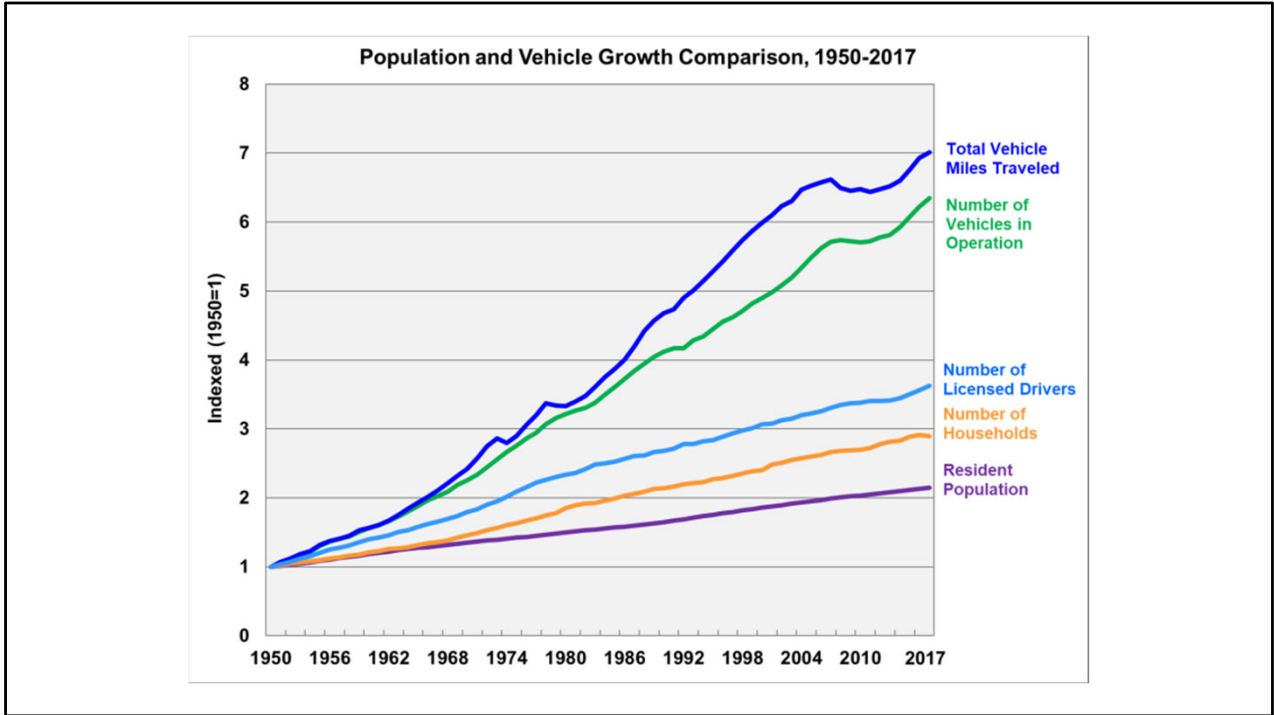


They invented the term, and the crime “jaywalking”.

Back then, “Jay” was a term akin to hick or rube, one who is unsophisticated about the fact that streets are for cars.

So this strategy amounted to changing the narrative of responsibility from this new threat from the actual, obvious and demonstrable hazard, to essentially making fun of and finger pointing at victims of traffic violence.

Whether you think strategy worked or not depends on what you think the goal was.



We've sold a lot of cars in the century since.

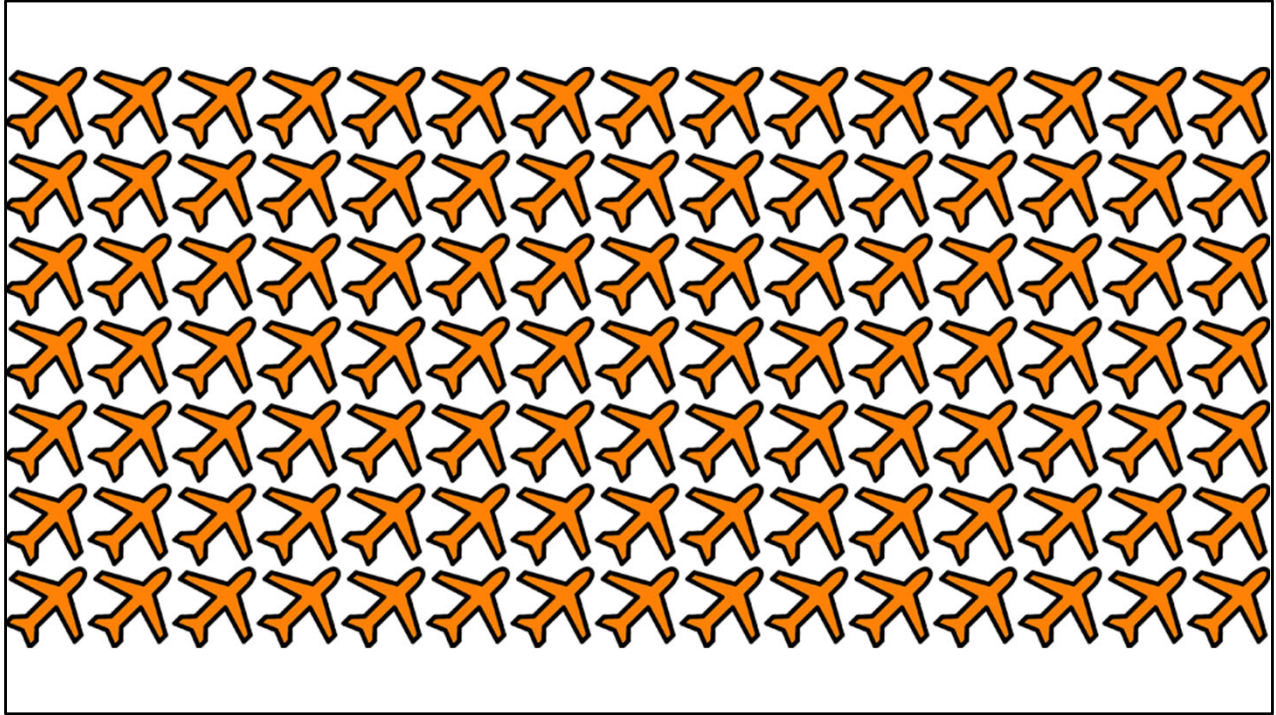
And a lot of oil



We've also transformed many of our communities to be staggeringly inhospitable to walking, wheeling and active living.

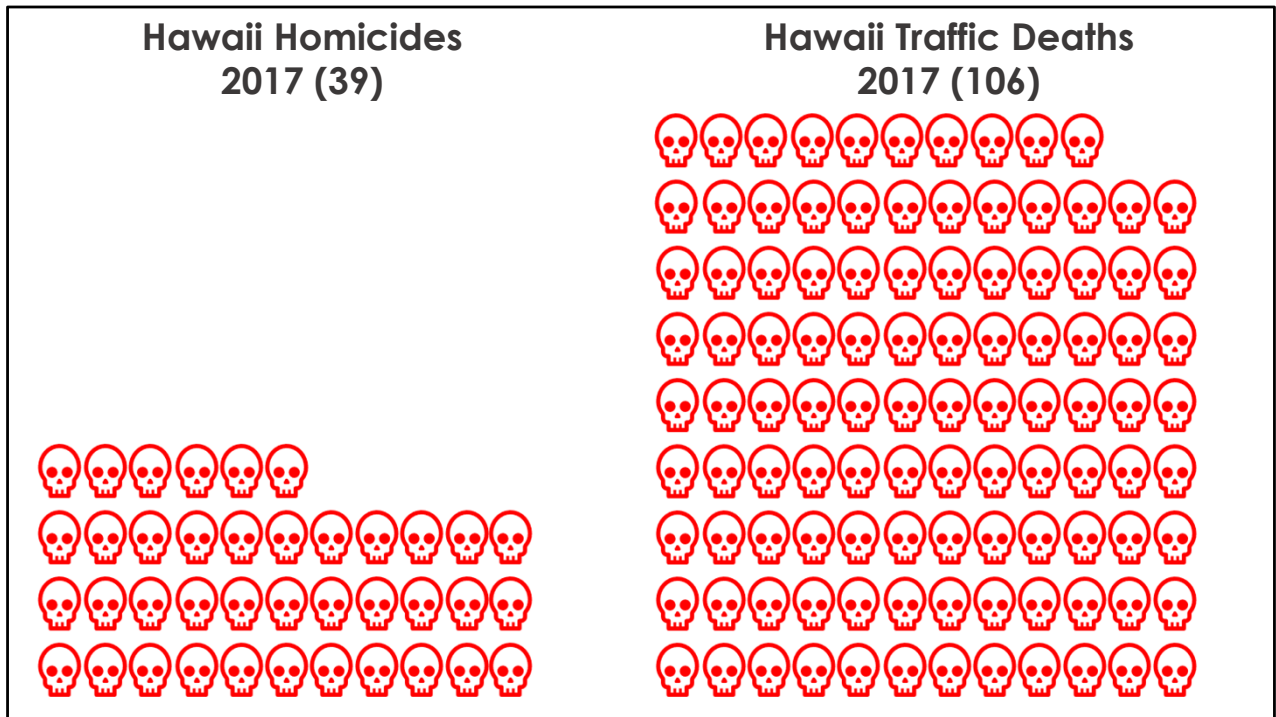
We've made automobility a requirement for full participation in most of America, including most of Hawaii.

On the other hand



Traffic crashes in the US kill the equivalent of a fully loaded 747 crashing with no survivors every 3 days.

We're better at launching people across the country in rocket busses than we are at designing cities where people get to work safely



It turns out we've also spent nearly a century rationalizing and normalizing traffic deaths as inevitable collateral in the name of progress and convenience.

the transportation system we rely on to connect us to needs and resources routinely carries a death penalty for even minor lapses of attention or judgment.

And we are, by and large, fairly complacent about that.

So complacent that asserting that...

**Traffic deaths are:
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preventable**

...traffic deaths are unacceptable, avoidable and preventable

Sounds to many people like a radical position.

Police: Alcohol believed to be a contributor in Kaimuki pedestrian accident

HPD says alcohol appears to be a factor in a crash that critically injured a 21-year-old pedestrian on Waiālae Avenue.
Monday, May 31st 2021 9:30 AM HST by KIIIV Web Staff

Police believe both the pedestrian and the driver were alcohol-impaired.



The Honolulu Police Department (HPD) is investigating a pedestrian accident that happened in Kaimuki Sunday.

HPD says alcohol appears to be a factor in a crash that critically injured a 21-year-old pedestrian on Waiālae Avenue.

The man was hit by a car while in the crosswalk.

Police believe both the pedestrian and the driver were alcohol-impaired.

Earlier this month there was a news story about a pedestrian fatality in Kaimuki.

The person walking was in a marked crossing and by all indications, had the right of way when he was hit by a drunk driver and later died.

The coverage went to some effort to inform us that both the pedestrian AND the driver were alcohol impaired.

But heres the thing:

Walking drunk is not illegal.



You can learn a lot about a city's commitment to the safety of vulnerable users by how safe it is to get home drunk.

And in fact

You can learn a lot about a city's commitment to the safety of vulnerable users by how safe it is to get home drunk.

and to understand why, you have to think about what we mean by vulnerable users:

Here are just a few examples



Wheelchair Users Are More Likely to Be Killed in Traffic Than Other Pedestrians

LINDA POON NOV 19, 2015

A new study raises concerns about street design and city accessibility.

By Dennis Oda, Star-Bulletin

Mark S. Edwards uses ski poles to boost his wheelchair over Honolulu curbs that block access.

In the US, people with disabilities- especially wheelchair users- are killed by cars at a significantly higher rate than the general public.

Hawaii's roads are deadliest in the nation for senior pedestrians



By HNN Staff | January 10, 2017 at 6:18 PM HST - Updated August 12 at 12:35 PM

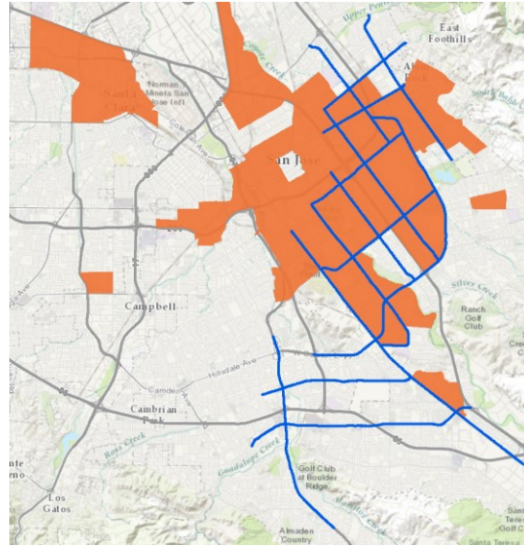
HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Hawaii roads are the riskiest in the nation to pedestrians 65 and over, a new report concludes.

The report released Tuesday from the National Complete Streets Coalition found that 42.2 percent of pedestrian deaths in Hawaii from 2005 to 2014 were seniors.

By comparison, 15 percent of Hawaii's population is 65 or older.

Here in Hawaii, older adults are dramatically overrepresented in our pedestrian fatality figures. They account for 15% of the population but over 40% of pedestrian deaths.

Figure 2: PSC and Communities of Concern



This map was created as part of San Jose's Vision Zero plan

In orange are communities of concern are census tracts with a concentration of both low income and minority households and also considers minority, limited English proficiency, zero-vehicle households, seniors 75 years and older, people with disability, single-parent families, and cost-burdened renters

And in blue, 3% of city streets that account for over 50% of fatal crashes.

You can see there is considerable overlap between the two.

Barriers, gaps and deficiencies that put intoxicated pedestrians at risk put vulnerable users with cognitive or mobility impairments, or who are low literacy or low English proficiency at heightened risk too.

We should not accept that a death sentence is an inevitable and routine consequence for people who have imperfect judgement as road users



Hawaii's roads are deadliest in the nation for senior pedestrians



We should not accept that a death sentence is an inevitable and routine consequence for people who have imperfect judgement as road users



The truth is, most US bike/ped safety campaigns and measures- in particular, the ones that place the burden on the victims- bike helmets, safety flags, promoting bright clothes, “jaywalking” and distracted walking crackdowns, even things like most of our exotic pedestrian overpasses- are actually not about safety. theyre about narrative. theyre about avoiding a truth that underpins the past century of transportation planning in the US

“we are complacent with an acceptable inevitable and routine amount of carnage from our transportation systems, and we are unwilling to invest in strategies and policies that will curb it because they are inconvenient to our entitlement to frictionless, subsidized car travel, segregated suburban land use, and ample free parking”

and to justify it, for almost 100 years now our social norming of liability when a vulnerable road user is harmed has been:

“the victim was not wearing a helmet/was listening to headphones/was wearing dark clothes/was walking while intoxicated/did not walk three blocks out of their way to a marked crosswalk/did not use the provided safety flags”

we have shifted the burden of responsibility so far onto the victim that the media, police, juries, legislators all start from an implicit bias that a vulnerable user has to take extraordinary measures to protect themselves and uses roads and streets at their own risk. and if they don't, they are routine collateral.

Historically, traffic safety was the responsibility of transportation and law enforcement agencies.

What vision zero reminds us is that media, public health, social services, schools, community and social services groups and public officials have to be actively engaged in safer systems that serve the needs of all users.



Reduce motor vehicle speed

Plan for complete streets and transit

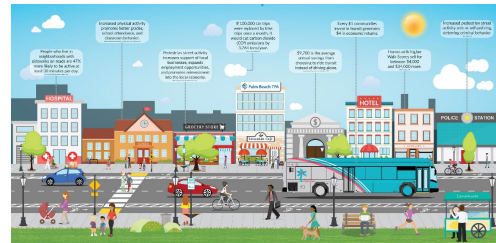
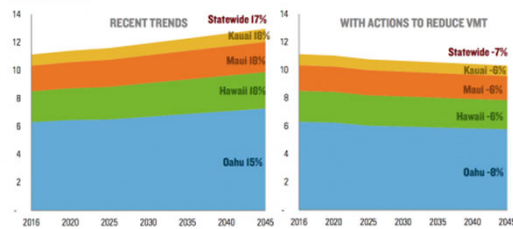


Figure 3.4: VMT projections by county, 2016-2045
Billion miles traveled



Progressive transportation demand strategies

From a planning and engineering perspective, there is not much mystery to the steps we need to take to cure traffic violence, right?

We can do the design or engineering work to put us on track. In fact the solutions the same solutions that were proposed and ignored 100 years ago.

Traffic crashes are the leading preventable cause of childhood death in the US, but not because we're bad engineers and planners or administrators.

Or because we don't have the technology.

The real problem is that we have not yet decided, unwaveringly, that traffic violence is a problem worth solving.

There's no tech, no enforcement strategy, no outreach campaign, no congestion mitigation plan that will result in mobility justice, that compel us to center the dignity and value of all users. Vision zero is a chance to put values at the heart of mobility.

Are we ready for Vision Zero?

So the road to zero, the path ahead is daunting.

Do we have a date? Do we have the coalition, do we have a shared language and vision?

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**We didn't get here overnight,
we're not going to solve it overnight**

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But as they say

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago

The second-best time is today.

