

Improving Pedestrian Safety in Richmond through Vision Zero Strategies





Acknowledgments

The Richmond Advocacy & Support Committee (RASC) is an ongoing project of the Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition. The RASC is a network of low-income Richmond residents who came together in 2017 to learn self-advocacy and leadership skills through studying issues around poverty, then speaking out about issues that are important to them. Their motto is “Our Voices Matter.”

This RPRC project, *“Improving Pedestrian Safety in Richmond through Vision Zero Strategies,”* has engaged network members directly in hands-on learning around research, planning, organizing, and delivering a pedestrian safety survey and interview process with target populations.

From May 2022 to March 2023, the project team learned and practiced leadership skills such as community outreach, public speaking, data analysis, media relations, and civic engagement.

Team members receive a certificate of completion for 50 hours of volunteering as a project assistant. They each receive a modest honorarium for the hours of time and lived experience expertise they have put into the project.

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Introduction

This report presents the results of the Richmond Poverty Reduction Coalition (RPRC)'s yearlong research initiative on *Pedestrian Safety*. Recommendations for advocacy, policy, and further collaboration on the research and development of a Richmond Vision Zero Road Safety Plan proposal accompany the RPRC's next steps for continued network engagement.

Background

The Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee (RASC) and Transportation

The RPRC has identified transportation as a key strategic area of poverty response since it began hosting forums for community voices in 2001. Transportation is equitable when we recognize that some populations, like families, the elderly, or people with disabilities, for example, face more difficulties when leaving their homes to participate in public life and civil society.

The Richmond Advocacy and Support Committee (RASC) is a network of low-income Richmond residents practicing self-advocacy and leadership skills with the support of the RPRC. In 2017, the RASC documented, through expressive script writing and filming, one of the fundamental perspectives of this project. It is through the RASC's own critical experiences that we seek to privilege all road users.

The tension between driver efficiency and pedestrian safety is a current topic in Richmond community discourse, as headlines like *Why are walk signals changed?*ⁱ, *Too many near misses with cyclists*ⁱⁱ, and *Richmond residents confused by city sidewalks*ⁱⁱⁱ are published in the *Richmond News*.

Harmonizing transportation within the Richmond community is an interwoven and complex issue requiring innovation.

Road Safety Strategy and Vision Zero

The City of Richmond has demonstrated an ongoing and committed response to traffic losses. In 2019, the Public Works and Transportation department reviewed the top 20 collision-prone intersections and the proposed long-term changes to those intersections are to be completed by 2024. The city also has an established relationship and cost-sharing partnership with TransLink for road infrastructure^{iv}, and very recently, the Richmond city council agreed to lower speed limits for some residential streets^v. This approach of focusing on the built environment and policies that influence road-user behavior is one component of an effective and high-level, early adoption of Vision Zero^{vi}.

Vision Zero is a recognized and widely adopted movement that seeks to reduce traffic fatalities and serious collisions benefiting many places in the world. It is embraced by both Canada's and BC's Road Safety Strategies. The BC Road Safety Strategy highlights the incorporation of different perspectives and viewpoints as a pillar of its Vision Zero framework^{vii}. Working collaboratively on public health is a strength that the RPRC can contribute to the approach that Richmond is currently utilizing to realize safer roads.

Project Goals

This phase of the RPRC's Pedestrian Safety research sought to:

- Engage Richmond pedestrians to gain insights, observations and common-sense solutions to assist in preventing altercations between automobiles and people
- Identify public education opportunities for drivers and pedestrians on safe road-sharing behaviors
- Present recommendations to the city's internal departments that can lead to safer, more sustainable, and more equitable planning decisions
- Consider the suitability of advocating for Richmond to develop a Vision Zero plan

Research Objectives

The RASC team contributed collectively to the survey design and the research activities. Through meaningful community engagement, the team conducted interviews and recorded the responses to their questions. The intended outcome of which was to describe:

- The norms and experiences of being a pedestrian in Richmond
- The relationship or power balance between drivers & pedestrians
- The tendency for low-income individuals to walk, cycle, or use transit

This research precedes the understanding of what strategies will be useful in preventing pedestrian fatality and injury.

Preliminary Research

According to ICBC's public tableau website, the top 3 contributing factors in collisions involving fatal victims in BC since 2017, are speed, driver distraction, and impaired driving, consistently in that order^{viii}.

The data describing Richmond road victims specifically shows that the number of pedestrian fatalities dropped from a high of 5 in 2017 and stayed low until 2020 with 3 victims per year^{ix}, meaning that Richmond could already be meeting a Vision Zero target of continuous downward trends in fatalities and injuries.

The public ICBC data confirm what would be intuitive to the topic, such as that the winter months are twice as deadly for pedestrians than the rest of the year, and that the age range for victims skews toward the elderly. We found that the number of fatal collisions at intersections or between intersections (as in, between blocks), is evenly split, as well as the ratio of male to female victims^x.

Considering non-fatal collisions, the most current ICBC data cites over 50 collisions in Richmond in 2020 – about one a week^{xi}.

These facts guided our survey's questions to focus on people's understanding of signs and rules of the road, how people tend to use the intersections, including cell phone use and jaywalking, their experiences sharing the road with drivers, and the perceived attitudes of those drivers.

Our Survey Results

Member organizations of the RPRC network welcomed our research team at their regularly scheduled programs to survey the clients that they provide services for. Below is a breakdown of how many personal interviews we completed at each social service provider, for a total of 109 interviews.

RPRC Member	Number of Participants
Richmond Food Bank	20
Richmond Services of Greater Vancouver	7
Richmond Centre for Disability	10
Kehila Society of Richmond	9
Richmond Family Place Society	6
Richmond Mental Health Consumer & Friends Society	25
Richmond Advocacy & Support Committee	5
Richmond Women's Resource Centre	12
Partner Community Agency	
Pathways	11

Population Sample Findings

Of these 109 people, 73% stated that don't drive as their primary mode of transportation, confirming that this network does represent pedestrians. Even among the 27% who said that they primarily drive to get around Richmond, 20% said they also use transit at least once a week.

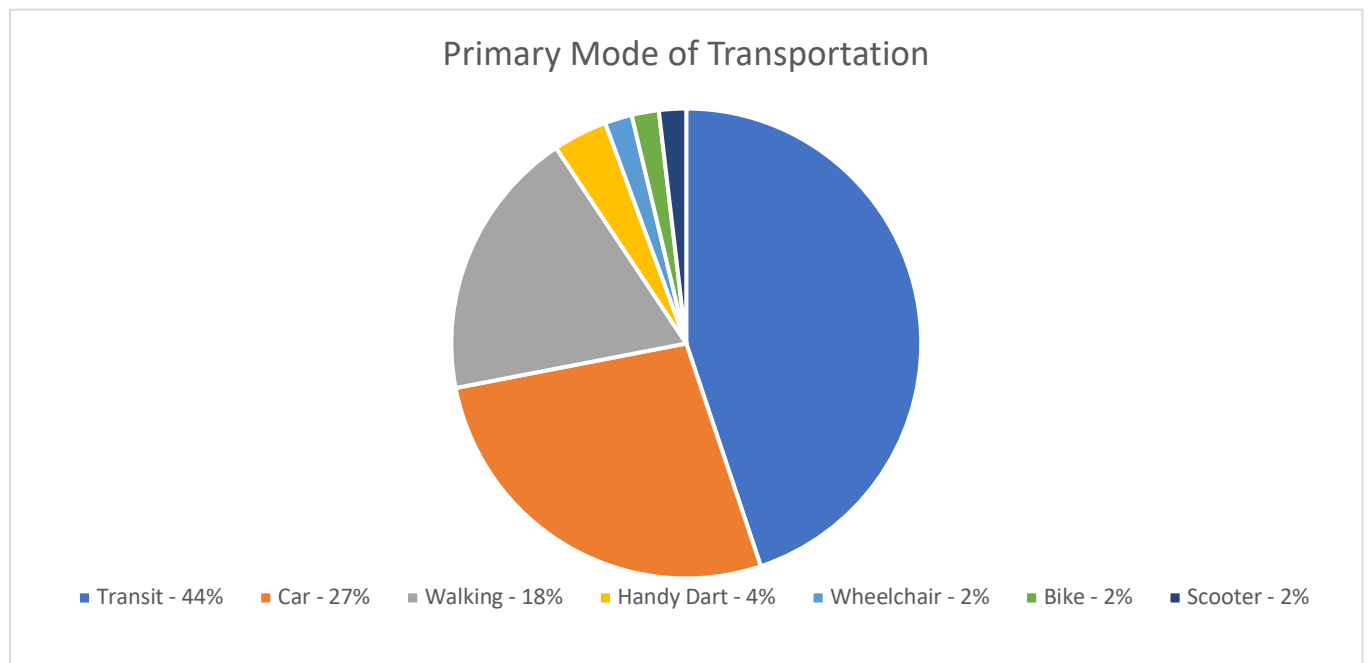
Overall, 20% said yes to having physical barriers, and 18% of the whole group said that they regularly push a stroller or walk with children while commuting in Richmond. We interviewed an undisclosed, yet significant, number of immigrants & refugees, and people with introductory levels of English to understand what matters regarding pedestrian safety were important to them.

Views on Drivers

When asked to rate the perception of Richmond drivers' level of respect for pedestrians on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most respectful, a third of all the people we asked gave a 1 or a 2 out of 5. We heard words like 'entitled' and 'bullying' in descriptions of Richmond drivers who have shown a real lack of concern for pedestrians or self-awareness of speed.

When explicitly asked if the cars in Richmond make our pedestrians feel rushed or unsafe even when they have the right of way, 60% said yes and included comments about how close cars in the intersections get to them and the nervousness and fear that this causes. These themes were heightened in stories regarding close calls with cars experienced by wheelchair users and mothers who got lost navigating the freeway intersections.

In the worst cases, we heard of people who were caused to fall down, or who were hit, by cars. We know that inching forward aggressively or not even stopping before turning while people are still crossing are technical fouls that do not need to happen.



One of our survey questions asked if there is a difference between checking your phone as a pedestrian crossing the road and as a driver behind the wheel. Interestingly, whether people said *yes* or *no* to this question, all the reasoning behind their answers cited the vulnerability of pedestrians in collisions with cars, and the preventability of such accidents.

Views on crosswalk and sidewalk use

*“Only when I cross the street with a family member with disabilities
do I notice that the time given is not enough.”*

We received feedback which describes the needs of road users that aren’t being met. 68% of the people we talked to said that there are intersections where they don’t have enough time to cross. We asked them which intersections specifically and the answers all cited intersections known to have had incidents involving pedestrians in 2020.

Other responses regarding crosswalks can be used for educating the public. For example, comments point out that the *walk* and *stop* signals don’t use the universal green for go and red for stop, and this can be confusing. Newcomers may not understand that when the hand signal is flashing, you still have time to walk.

We asked people what they did when they got to an intersection where the hand signal had just started to flash and 24% said that they speed up to get across, while 61% said that they stop and wait to cross because they aren’t sure if they would make it in time.

Also, 41% either said they didn’t know or got the answer wrong when asked what side of the road one should walk on where no sidewalks are provided.

As Richmond is known for its diversity and multiculturalism, the RPRC sees the opportunity in creating in-person, engaging presentations that would help explain and make these designs more intuitive and understandable, and therefore, more inclusive and sustainable, while conducting further research on a systems-approach to Vision Zero that would work for Richmond.

Next steps for the RPRC

1. Develop and deliver a public safety education workshop resource for pedestrians and drivers.
2. Continue highlighting voices through community engagement to design road safety promotional material.
3. Liaise with the City's transportation department to share data and expand connections with pedestrian populations, thereby applying an equity lens to city work.

Recommendations

Representing the direct feedback of the community in our survey findings, the following are possible courses of action that we recommend to Richmond City Council, and these are all things that the RPRC and the RASC committee will be willing to provide further details on.

1. Assemble a working group to prepare a Vision Zero proposal with representatives from public health, city departments, law enforcement, and the school district.
2. Increase efforts to enforce the pedestrian's right of way.
3. Promote awareness campaigns that highlight pedestrian vulnerability and inspire ownership of pedestrian safety.
4. Examine opportunities to advocate with ICBC and TransLink for safer and more sustainable policies.

Conclusion

This inquiry into pedestrian perceptions in Richmond explores the ways that community members can contribute to public road safety. The RASC committee, with the approval of the transportation department, has applied a framework for civic engagement around Vision Zero principles and recommends that the council support the development of a holistic strategy for city road safety plans.

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- ⁱ Yu, J. (2022, May 19). *Why are walk signals changed?* Richmond News.
- ⁱⁱ Cheung, T. (2022, July 10). *Too many near misses with cyclists.* Richmond News.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hui, V. (2022a, July 29). *Richmond residents confused by city sidewalks, says poll.* Richmond News.
- ^{iv} Hui, V. (2022b, August 4). *Richmond receives \$4.7M funding from TransLink for road upgrades.* Richmond News.
- ^v Rantanen, M. (2023, February 2). *City gets rid of 60 km/h zones.* Richmond News.
- ^{vi} Parachute. (2022). *Indicators of a Vision Zero Community.* [Infographic]. <https://parachute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Indicators-of-a-Vision-Zero-community.pdf>
- ^{vii} Province of British Columbia. (2016). *BC Road Safety Strategy: A collaborative framework for Road Safety.* https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/driving/roadsafetybc/strategy/bcrss_2025_final.pdf
- ^{viii} Insurance Corporation of British Columbia. (2022b, Nov 23). *BC Fatal Victims by top contributing Factors.* https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/icbc/viz/ContributingFactorsPublic_0/FatalVictimsbyContributingFactors
- ^{ix} Insurance Corporation of British Columbia. (2022c, Nov 23). *BC Fatal Victims by year by month by role by age range.* <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/icbc/viz/FatalVictims2/FatalvictimsbyYearbyMonthbyrolebyAgeRange>
- ^x Ibid.
- ^{xi} Insurance Corporation of British Columbia. (2022a, 23 Nov). *BC Crashes Involving Pedestrians.* <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/icbc/viz/BC-CrashesinvolvingPedestrians-/PedestriansDashboard>

