

# INTEGRATING THE SAFE SYSTEM APPROACH IN THE HIGHWAY SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

# ALASKA

## CASE STUDY

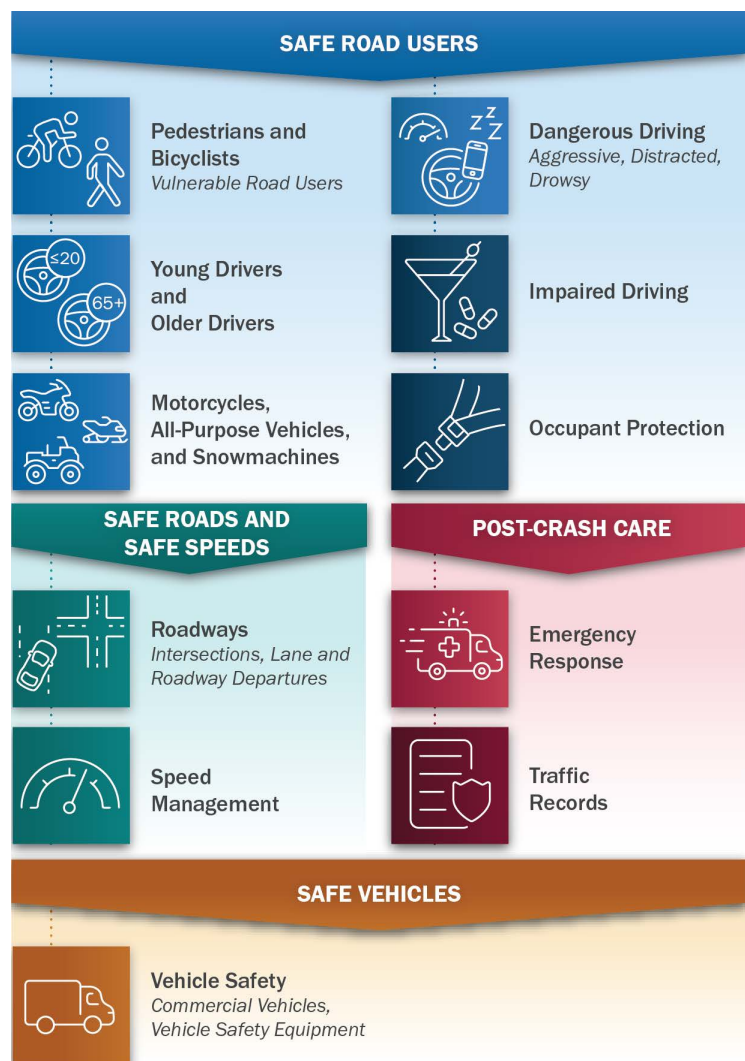
Alaska's [2023–2027 Strategic Highway Safety Plan](#) (SHSP) defines the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) mission: “Improve the safety of all surface transportation users throughout the State through effective and equitable solutions using a Safe System Approach” (SSA). Alaska’s SHSP is organized by four SSA Emphasis Areas and eleven Focus Areas that direct attention and resources toward the State’s most prevalent traffic safety challenges (figure 1).



## NOTEWORTHY PRACTICES

**REDUNDANCY IS CRUCIAL.** In October 2023, the Alaska DOT&PF reformed their organizational structure to develop the Traffic, Safety and Operations Unit, which falls within the Data Modernization and Innovation Office. By moving the Alaska Highway Safety Office, the Traffic Safety and Engineering Division, and the Transportation System Management and Operations/Intelligent Transportation Systems Division under one unit, these cross-functional teams can help the Alaska DOT&PF break silos, enhance resource sharing, and better align decision-making. The reorganization promotes coordination across different divisions’ initiatives and projects, ensuring that safety efforts are intentionally redundant, rather than unintentionally duplicative.

**RESPONSIBILITY IS SHARED.** The Alaska Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) benefits from strong cross-disciplinary collaborations to promote safety for all road users. For example, the diverse group of stakeholders in the SHSP Focus Area Teams share the responsibility for implementing over 65 actions across all Safe System elements. Focus Area members represent DOT&PF engineers and planners, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the Alaska Department of Health, the Division of Motor Vehicles, non-profit safety organizations, bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups, law enforcement, media, fire departments, emergency medical services, towing operators, tourism, and universities. Most recently, the Alaska DOT&PF expanded their collaboration with the Alaska Department of Health by signing a Memorandum of Agreement to support active and safe use of the transportation system across the State.



Source: Alaska SHSP.

**Figure 1: Infographic. Alaska 2023–2027 SHSP Emphasis Areas and Focus Areas.**

The SHSP sets clear expectations and responsibilities for all SHSP members working to implement the plan, including for the following groups of people:

- » Executive Committee
- » Steering Committee
- » Tribal Advisory Committee
- » Emphasis Area Leaders
- » Focus Area Team Leaders
- » Focus Area Team Members
- » Action Champions
- » All SHSP stakeholders

This accountability helps participants understand and meet their roles, sharing the responsibility to proactively create a Safe System. The SHSP also provides stakeholders with a shared language to discuss safety issues.

**DEATH/SERIOUS INJURY IS UNACCEPTABLE.** One advantage of adopting the SSA within Alaska’s safety processes is its ability to broaden traffic safety understanding beyond transportation practitioners. The Alaska DOT&PF has successfully engaged a wide variety of stakeholders including the media, community advocates, rural communities, and businesses—in addition to engineers and law enforcement—to promote a shared responsibility. Outreach and engagement emphasize the fundamental principle that no death or serious injury is acceptable on Alaska’s roadways. The SHSP also established the Tribal Advisory Committee to engage with Alaska Native residents, ensuring that Tribal transportation needs are reflected and addressed within Alaska’s highway safety projects. At present, 19 members representing 10 Tribes and affiliate organizations meet three times per year as part of the Tribal Advisory Committee.



## UPCOMING/IN-PROGRESS INITIATIVES

**SAFETY IS PROACTIVE.** Alaska DOT&PF is developing and implementing a statewide [Complete Streets](#) policy, working proactively toward Safe Roads and Safe Speeds. Alaska’s Complete Streets approaches apply a range of integrated safety elements based on community needs and context to develop a system that is safe for all road users. The DOT&PF conducted a series of workshops with stakeholders including local and tribal governments, MPOs, and community members to develop the policy. These workshops included discussions of what makes a road “complete” for various user groups and funding opportunities such as HSIP. The workshops also described upcoming walk audits of selected locations and projects, including routes where HSIP projects are in development.



Source: Alaska DOT&PF.

**Figure 2: Photograph. Complete Streets policy workshop in Bethel (Alaska).**

**HUMANS ARE VULNERABLE.** The Alaska DOT&PF is deploying a research project to identify ancillary benefits of HSIP projects to nonmotorized road users, who are more vulnerable to crash impact forces than motorists. The project evaluates crash data and HSIP projects to determine if HSIP project types other than the “Pedestrians and Bicyclists” improvement category may have excess improvements for vulnerable road users. Alaska DOT&PF is considering how its HSIP project scoring and prioritization process may consider these additional benefits to vulnerable road users, which are not currently captured by using Crash Modification Factors. Expected to be completed in 2025, this research project supports both Safer Roads and Safer Road Users.

For more information, please visit <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/zero-deaths>.

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