

ZERO DEATHS SUCCESS STORY — PARTNERSHIPS

# Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force and Speed Limit Setting Report — California

## Key Successes

**The efforts of the California State Transportation Agency and its partners to form a Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force led to these partnership successes:**



Recruited numerous stakeholders to comprise the Task Force and Advisory Group from a diverse set of agencies and organizations.



Held Task Force meetings and an Advisory Group meeting to discuss and develop innovative ways to increase safety on California's roadways. The solutions and ideas developed during these productive sessions were incorporated into the final Report of Findings that was delivered to the Legislature.



Developed a report of speed limit setting findings which was submitted to the California Legislature in January 2020.

## Background

Motor vehicle collisions are a leading cause of unintentional injuries and deaths among all age groups in the United States. In 2017, approximately 3,600 deaths and over 14,000 serious injuries occurred as a result of traffic collisions in California, costing the State over \$53.5 billion. Twenty-six percent of the collisions were speeding-related, which included vehicle speeds that were unsafe for conditions or in excess of the speed limit.

This spurred the legislature into action and in 2018, the California Assembly signed Assembly Bill 2363. This Bill required the establishment of a Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force. The Task Force aimed to evaluate the ways in which speed limits are set in California, suggested alternatives to the current speed-limit-setting process (85th-percentile method<sup>1</sup>), and proposed policies to reduce traffic fatalities to zero. AB 2363 directed the California Secretary of Transportation to publish a Report of Findings following the conclusion of the Task Force activities and submit it to the Legislature.

## Implementation

The 24 stakeholders selected for the Task Force represented diverse constituencies, from State and local agencies, bicycle and pedestrian safety organizations, academic institutions, transportation safety advocates, labor organizations, and other experts. The creation of

<sup>1</sup> 85th-percentile speed is the speed at which 85 percent of free-flowing traffic is traveling at or below.





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Figure 1. Photograph. A meeting of the California Zero Fatalities Task Force.

an Advisory Group, made up of interested parties who are not members of the Task Force, helped to inform and advise Task Force members on traffic safety issues.

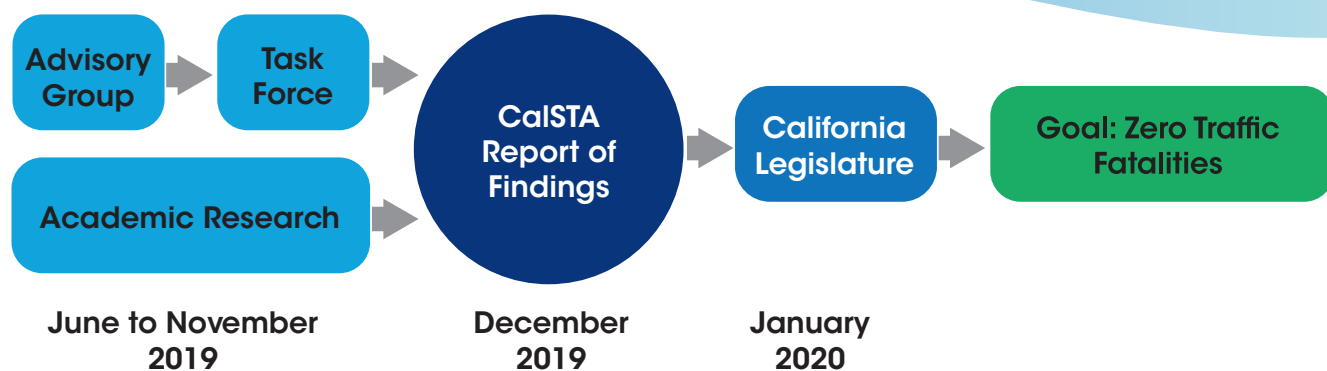
The Task Force held three day-long workshops like the one shown in figure 1. These workshops included presentations and discussions on the contributing factors to speed-related crashes in the State; enforcement, education, and policy strategies to manage speed; and current and emerging methodologies to set speed limits. The agendas and presentations from each meeting are available online: <https://calsta.ca.gov/subject-areas/enforcement-and-safety/zero-traffic-fatalities>. Lastly, the University of California Institute of Transportation Studies completed a Research Synthesis that helped inform the Report of Findings (figure 2).

## Outcomes

The California State Transportation Agency published its Report of Findings in January 2020. As directed by AB 2363, the Report of Findings addressed a number of topics, including existing and alternative speed limit setting processes, policies on local road speed reduction, roadway engineering recommendations, and other approaches to improving traffic safety and eliminating fatalities.

The report explained the history and assumptions behind the existing 85th-percentile methodology and the extent of its use across local, State, national, and international levels. In some countries, speed limits are based on the human body's tolerance to withstand impact forces from crash types likely to occur rather than the 85th-percentile speed. The report also found that the 85th-percentile methodology is also related to speed creep, driving up the speed limits on the roadway over time. The report recommends the development and implementation of a new roadway-based context sensitive approach to establish speed limits that prioritizes the safety of all road users.

The report discussed additional steps to reduce pedestrian and bicycle crashes and the overall number of fatalities. These included engineering countermeasures (curb extensions, chicanes, chokers, median islands, raised crosswalks, roundabouts), enforcement countermeasures, and educational countermeasures. The report also noted that local bicycle and pedestrian plans do not have an impact on the posted speed limit calculation unless they change an aspect of the roadway, such as traffic calming interventions, post-implementation.



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Figure 2. Graphic. Timeline for the actions of the Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force.<sup>2</sup>

**There are eight overarching themes in the California State Transportation Agency’s Report of Findings:**

1. Revise the procedure for setting speed limits to allow more flexibility for urban versus rural areas, the ability of agencies to adjust the limit via deviations, and traffic survey requirements.
2. Add more options for lower accepted unposted speed limit locations, specifically for business activity districts and school zones, to increase crash survivability for vulnerable users.
3. Review allocations of Highway Safety Improvement Program funds to contribute to the installation of engineering countermeasures.
4. Revise, consolidate, and clarify all documentation, resources, and guidance related to speed limit settings and highway design.
5. Develop and maintain a State safety monitoring program to identify and address crash locations related to speed and vulnerable users.
6. Investigate the role and impact of the Level of Service requirement for corridor improvements and be involved in the migration to vehicle miles traveled-based standards.

7. Consider a range of complex policy issues and engage impacted communities in the development of guidelines related to automated speed enforcement.
8. Develop a Statewide coordinated traffic safety campaign.

Ultimately, the Report of Findings represented the culmination of an extensive effort that brought diverse stakeholders from across the State. As the California State Transportation Agency and its departments implement the Report’s recommendations, it will draw on the Task Force’s technical expertise in order to achieve the goal of making the State’s roadways safer for all Californians.

**Funding**

The State of California funded the Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force.

<sup>2</sup> CalSTA. (2020). *CalSTA Report of Findings AB 2363 Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force*. CalSTA. <https://calsta.ca.gov/-/media/calsta-media/documents/calsta-report-of-findings-ab-2363-zero-traffic-fatalities-task-force-a11y.pdf>. Last accessed on February 12, 2020.

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