

Dear Councillor membership of the Transportation Standing Committee,

I write concerning **agenda items 13.1.2 (Road Safety Annual Report)** and the **Information Item on adjusting signs and signals on main streets**. I have three specific requests:

- (a) the development of a Vulnerable Road User Safety Action Plan using external consultants
- (b) Interim urgent action to address increasing pedestrian incidents at signalised intersections, an issue which the Province of Nova Scotia can provide considerable support and expertise, and external consultant specialists.
- (c) further information and clarification from staff regarding their position rejecting protected signal traffic phasing. And then check their conclusions with an external engineering specialist.

I write to you with very great concern that key causes and locations of pedestrian and also cyclist/micro-mobility crashes clearly identified within the 2024 Road Safety Report are not proposed to be addressed in any systematic way that we reasonably expect and require with any severe public safety issue. Not only are they not proposed to be addressed, staff apparently outright reject such an approach in their reports:

1. An Implementation Plan for protected left-turn movements and protected right-turn movements at signalized intersections to enhance vulnerable road user safety was required as a **Key Deliverable within TPW's 2024 business plan**. It was not provided, with staff stating instead they would instead continue to assess each intersection but providing no commitments on which intersections they would adapt.
2. In the information item report on signs and signal adaptations to prioritise pedestrians on main streets, staff affirm again their position previously outlined in the prior staff report dated June 13 2022, which I will address later in this submission: *"Implementing protected-only turning phases to separate pedestrians from turning vehicles is not feasible at any of the signalized intersections within this dense, urban context based on the overall delay that would be experienced for all road users including transit and pedestrians. There would also be significant property and budget impacts associated with the infrastructure required to implement protected-only turn phasing."*

I again draw your attention to the outcome identified by staff's data analysis in our [Road Safety Plan 2024](#):

"vulnerable road users make up four per cent of overall collisions that occurred between 2018 and 2023, however they were involved in 22 percent of fatal and injury collisions. Vulnerable road users represent a diverse group of people with intersecting identities."

This risk of injury by all of us who most require safe systems, multiple times more than that faced by occupants of vehicles, is unacceptable and must be systematically addressed within an action plan which identifies the worst causes and locations of crashes and the countermeasures required to prevent them. I propose this must be developed by consultants, with a preliminary plan ready for approval and implementation by the end of the 2025/26 budget year.

Given the horrific level of incidents at key locations, particularly at signalised intersections, an interim systemic approach to addressing hazards must also start immediately, using external expert assistance. Our most vulnerable users of our unsafe systems cannot continue to shoulder the burden of life impacting injury and sometimes death.

Such an approach was even identified and required in our prior Road Safety Framework 2018, relating to a proposed plan to address the ten worst causes of pedestrian crashes, but the plan never developed. An interim urgent approach is required given the burden of the endangerment faced by children, people with disabilities and seniors - all of whom are disadvantaged cognitively, physically or both.

Recently, the [17th senior pedestrian fatality victim](#) since 1 January 2018 was struck and killed while using a crosswalk with the overhead lights activated. Yet we have not acknowledged why the [overhead amber flashing lights are not a safe system](#), and what is needed to adapt or replace them. Any regular pedestrian will confirm these overhead amber lights over multiple lanes are very dangerous. Disturbingly the crashes sometimes involve children and people with disabilities, such as on Gottingen Street.

a) Vision Zero policy/intent must be married with Vision Zero methodology

I brought to your attention recently the [progress made by Victoria in BC](#) - a 35% absolute overall reduction in injury crash insurance claims made since 2015. Vision Zero can work in Canada and it is untrue to claim that it can only work in specific locations which already have an advantage.

Neither is it true to state we must have a target based on population increase. Latest data from the Halifax Harbour Bridge Commission confirms vehicle numbers in 2024 continue to be lower than pre-COVID levels, per data available via Norm Collins or direct from HHBC. However if we

continue prioritising the movement of vehicles over the safety of people attempting alternatives to driving, that will of course change as we induce demand for driving.

Staff have consistently avoided to date grasping priorities of a clear policy approach set by Council since 2018 to adopt Vision Zero methodology and the safe systems approach. More than a philosophy or mere wishful thinking, Vision Zero requires us to examine key or the worst causes and locations of crashes and to implement engineering countermeasures to address them. It also requires us to orientate action according to the needs of those most impacted by unsafe roads and systems, not prioritise vehicular traffic flow aims.

We have steadfastly and consistently worked to address less severe or even safe locations by focusing efforts on residential streets and minor collectors, whilst denying the countermeasures we most need to be systematically applied. In the case of safe traffic control systems a system-wide or systemic approach required of Vision Zero is evident in other jurisdictions including for example by the Province of Nova Scotia, Montreal and Quebec City.

Our issues as vulnerable road users are specifically, as evidenced by the many comprehensive and outstanding incident data reports provided by staff, based on conflicts at intersections. Though speed is certainly an issue, as it is in all crashes, it is specifically errors and conflicts at intersections that need to be addressed, also ensuring drivers slow down and can see pedestrians crossing at our mid block crosswalks over higher speed arterials and major collectors.

We can see from this latest 2024 annual report from staff that pedestrian incidents at signalised intersections have not only increased again since 2022, they entirely involved pedestrians using marked crosswalks. A pedestrian struck every 6 days on average over 2023 (61 in total) while using a marked crosswalk at a signalised intersection is an unacceptable cost to victims, also the entire municipality as we continue to fail to support alternatives to car use. I bring your attention to some of the specific recent victims of these crashes:

- (a) a [young woman struck and seriously injured](#) recently by two drivers turning right at a signalised intersection in Cole Harbour,
- (b) a [mobility scooter user struck last August by a turning driver at a signalised intersection](#) near the Halifax Shopping Centre.

(c) a young child being pushed on a bicycle by their parent struck by a turning driver at a signalised intersection in Bedford - see [2023 Annual Road Safety Report](#), Attachment 2, page 1.

Victims include people who may be less easily seen due to a height disadvantage (consider children, mobility scooter and wheelchair users) or who may for cognitive and physical disadvantages be more likely to be harmed.

Serious, systematic efforts must be introduced very urgently to avoid this. Unsafe systems at the most dangerous locations for vulnerable road users is an immense cost especially in terms of those injured and sometimes killed, also for the municipality given unsafe systems for vulnerable road users at key locations do not support any movement away from car dependency and severe consequent congestion.

Though staff's data analysis in their 2024 annual report is yet again an outstanding effort, some of the outcomes are left unsaid. For example, the report confirms that just over half of the pedestrian incidents at signalised intersections involved drivers turning left. This means the driver would be turning left on a green light, a task we know results in a very high amount of error because the driver is looking for oncoming vehicles to judge a gap in traffic to make their turn.

We know from the excellent [video reports completed in 2020](#) that the driver yields late within the intersection behind the pedestrian, blocking all traffic and creating gridlock and exposing themselves to danger. Or does not yield at all, striking the pedestrian from behind them in the second half of the crosswalk.

I question how this unsafe system can possibly be optimal for traffic flow and safety of all users, and suggest comparative analysis is completed at signalised intersections which now have safe traffic control systems, such as Lacewood and Dunbrack.

The same applies for right turns - drivers start their turn and yield late (or not at all) often blocking the intersection because they yield inside the intersection right next to the pedestrian who is just commencing their crossing. Under Nova Scotian law, they cannot proceed until the pedestrian has completed their crossing, nor can they reverse.

We have seen the high injury network injury mapping for cyclists and pedestrians using police incident data and the regular reports long before adopting Vision Zero in 2018. We have not seen a Vision Zero approach to address the unsafe systems, despite some incredibly relevant

and persistent proposals and motions made over the years - removing right on reds where they present most danger to the public, implementation plan to prevent dangerous turning conflicts at signalised intersections, etc.

Request: We must grasp the nettle and develop a Vision Zero action plan addressing what is certainly a road safety crisis for vulnerable road users. Given staff have consistently advised we cannot systematically address the worst causes of crashes impacting vulnerable road users, an absolute requirement of Vision Zero, this must be developed by consultants. Please propose this and set aside a budget for it within our 2025/26 budget year.

b) Signs and Signals on Main Streets

Developing safe systems for pedestrians along our main streets is not optional. In fact we expressly commit to safe systems within our Road Safety Plan 2024. Our incident data analysis shows safe signal systems at intersections are a priority for our main streets, for example at Robie and Spring Garden Road, the intersections along Quinpool, Dutch Village Road and Alderney Drive. Even roads like Jo Howe are becoming effectively “main streets” due to the level of residential development and services along them, so intersections must be adapted accordingly.

Intersections are often wider along main streets, therefore a head start of a few seconds is a very limited advantage. Neither does our incident data support a conclusion that leading pedestrian intervals are making any real impact on the hugely disproportionate number of pedestrian crashes at signalised intersections.

Practically, leading pedestrian intervals work as follows:

- (a) Given the intersections with LPI's rarely prohibit right on red turns, drivers inevitably start their right on red turn from behind you as you step out, as shown [in this recent video in my neighbourhood involving a wheelchair user](#), who had to take swift action to avoid being struck by a driver turning right on red.
- (b) Drivers start their turn before you even get half way across, creating a perfect collision course in the second half of the crosswalk. What actually usually happens (if they see you at all) is that they move slowly towards you, blocking the entire intersection as they reach the conflict point with you in the second half of the crosswalk. I have no idea how this can possibly be beneficial for either traffic flow or safety.

Staff claim:

“Implementing protected-only turning phases to separate pedestrians from turning vehicles is not feasible at any of the signalized intersections within this dense, urban context based on the overall delay that would be experienced for all road users including transit and pedestrians. There would also be significant property and budget impacts associated with the infrastructure required to implement protected-only turn phasing.”

Please ask staff to clarify further. Given pedestrians cross at every cycle along main streets, drivers need to yield anyway until pedestrians have completed their crossing under Nova Scotian law, and cannot filter through as they cross.

A directional traffic light is simply assurance drivers do not drift into the middle of the intersection, yielding next to the crosswalk within the intersection and blocking traffic.

Protected phasing should therefore support what Nova Scotian law requires drivers to do anyway, but in addition prevents both vehicle/vehicle conflicts and vehicle/pedestrian conflicts caused by drivers moving into the middle of the intersection while not having a legal or clear route out of it.¹

Research and transportation guidance support an approach which uses protected signal phasing to eliminate vehicle/pedestrian conflicts:

- a) *“Vulnerable road user safety must be prioritized over vehicle movement in the selection of traffic control devices”*²
- b) *“Considering the substantial public health burden from road traffic crashes, conflicting traffic lights should be minimized to reduce risky vehicle-pedestrian conflicts that likely result in unwanted road injuries and deaths.”*³
- c) *“Sometimes the goal of safety has to override the goal of efficiency, and we think this is one of those times”* - Professor Hurwitz discussing his research concluding an “alarming”

¹ US Federal Highway Administration, Safety Evaluation of Protected Left-Turn Phasing on Pedestrian Safety, October 2018 [at page 2](#)

² Letter from the Institute of Transportation Engineers to the Federal Highway Administration, [5 May 2021](#).

³ David Schwebel and others, [research on left turning vehicle and pedestrian conflicts, April 2019](#).

level of risk to pedestrians when drivers are permitted to turn left at signalised intersections while pedestrians cross.⁴

- d) *“Infrastructure facilities and traffic control mechanisms that separate pedestrians from motor vehicles and enable pedestrians to cross roads safely are important mechanisms to ensure pedestrian safety”*⁵
- e) *“Transportation efficiency for neither motor vehicles nor pedestrians was improved at intersections with conflicting left-turning vehicle-pedestrian traffic lights. Road engineers and policymakers should reconsider the value of conflicting left-turning vehicle-pedestrian traffic lights at road intersections. Conflicting traffic lights cannot improve transportation efficiency, but increase risky conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. Considering the substantial public health burden from road traffic crashes, conflicting traffic lights should be minimized to reduce risky vehicle-pedestrian conflicts that likely result in unwanted road injuries and deaths.”*⁶

It is important to acknowledge the need for pedestrians to feel and be safe from moving vehicles through adequate traffic controls that provide safe separation from moving vehicles, especially for pedestrians with disabilities and age-related cognitive or physical disadvantages:

*“Can one legitimately add a few seconds of delay for a multitude of drivers and compare these with the suffering of seven anonymous pedestrians injured in 100 years? Even if such reasoning is commonly used, it seems a somewhat absurd device for making wise decisions. Surely the problem is not only that people are being injured but also, and perhaps primarily, that they fear being injured. Thus, to confine our thinking to the objective count of corpses might be too narrow a perspective, a scope that disregards the concept that people-and perhaps older persons in particular-wish not only to be safe but also to feel safe.”*⁷

⁴ Pedestrians at serious risk when drivers are 'permitted' to turn left, study says - by Oregon State University for Physics.org, [April 2, 2013](#).

⁵ Pedestrian Safety - a road safety manual for decision-makers and practitioners, [World Health Organisation](#) 2013.

⁶ Yi-Ling He, Ruo-Tong Li, Li Li, David C. Schwebel, He-Lai Huang, Qing-Yi Yin, Guo-Qing Hu, *Left-turning vehicle-pedestrian conflicts at signalized intersections with traffic lights: Benefit or harm? A two-stage study*, Chinese Journal of Traumatology, Volume 22, Issue 2, 2019, Pages 63-68, ISSN 1008-1275, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cjtee.2018.07.007>.

⁷ [1988 report by The Transportation Research Board](#) on Improving Mobility and Safety for Older Persons

Regarding delay to all users, this can be addressed with shorter signal cycles - the approach used in Europe to support vulnerable road users safety and perhaps also other jurisdictions in Canada:

*“Like Sweden, Germany uses shorter cycle lengths at signalized intersections primarily to accommodate heavy bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The maximum cycle length used is 120 seconds. Frankfurt routinely uses 90-second cycle lengths for its coordinated traffic signals. The use of short cycle lengths is also driven by the desire to minimize wait times for pedestrians and bicyclists”*⁸

How is this not possible here? The needs of people who walk and cycle are the exact same as they are in Europe - we have no special considerations here other than an even more urgent need to address a long-standing approach to traffic management which has caused substantial long term harm and deterred alternatives to car use, so impacting upon our health, financial and environmental sustainability.

Please request specifics from staff, also check their conclusions with an external engineering specialist - I have already provided details of potential professionals who can be contacted.

I do not claim to be an “expert” in road safety, however I do try to reference and refer to relevant sources of information and guidance. It is possible for non-expert road users to comprehend how safe systems work and why unsafe systems compromise their safety, and that experience is confirmed in research and guidance. For example, drivers frequently advocate for directional green signals as they recognise and experience the dangers of conflict.

With best wishes, Martyn Williams

⁸ US Department of Transportation, Signalized Intersection Safety in Europe, [December 2003](#)