

VISION ZERO WORK ZONES



A successful Vision Zero program for Portland cannot overlook the design and enforcement of construction work zones.

BACKGROUND

Portland's streets are widely recognized as being safe and accessible for people walking and bicycling except when work on or adjacent to those streets interrupts foot and bike traffic. Vision Zero must guide the design of our work zones.

PROBLEM

Utility companies, private construction, and city bureaus interrupt the regular flow of our transportation network frequently enough that it has become a chronic problem. When this work interrupts motor vehicle access, safe, direct, and logical detours are designed and implemented. Walking and biking routes, however, are rarely given the same considerations. Instead, people walking and biking are left without clear directions, safe alternatives, and reasonable accommodation. In many cases, on-street parking and additional vehicle lanes are maintained while sidewalks and bike lanes are interrupted without warning. This misplaced prioritization suggests that work zone traffic control plans are not required to avoid or mitigate construction impacts to our bike and pedestrian networks. Despite the fact that the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) is responsible for our streets, the bureau does not dictate and enforce adequate standards for the work they permit in their right of way.

PROPOSAL

We call upon the City of Portland to pass a new ordinance requiring all city bureaus, contractors, and private parties to maintain a safe and direct bicycle and pedestrian network during any planned / non-emergency construction in the city right of way. No interruption shall be permitted without provision of a safe, logical, direct detour for vulnerable roadway users.

MATERIALS

We have compiled detour policies and guidance from various cities including San Francisco, Seattle, Washington DC, and Cambridge as well as the Netherlands and Denmark. These can be used to craft policies for the City of Portland.

A Vision Zero Work Zone ordinance should ensure the following:

1. Bike or foot traffic should not be rerouted if other space (such as on-street parking or additional vehicle lanes) can be repurposed to provide safe, continuous bike lanes and/or sidewalks.
2. When the bike or pedestrian network must be interrupted, a clearly-marked detour route immediately adjacent (i.e. requiring no significant out-of-direction travel or street crossing) must be provided.
3. Detour routes should be no higher stress than the ones they replace (e.g. a 4' bike lane is a higher-stress facility than a neighborhood greenway).
4. Long term stationary work zones should not detour pedestrians across arterial streets unless no other pathway is possible in order to protect the safety of pedestrians.
5. If the most convenient, shortest, accessible detour route requires crossing an arterial street anywhere other than at a marked crossing, traffic volume, traffic speed, visibility, and street width must be considered. If deemed necessary for safety, a temporary traffic signal or flaggers must be provided to facilitate that crossing, as long as those conditions persist.
6. Bicycle or pedestrian network interruption must only be permitted for the time it takes to handle the emergency, finish the upgrade or maintenance, or mitigate the extreme circumstances. If an established bicycle/pedestrian route is blocked to allow work to be performed but is otherwise safe to use, it must be reopened at times when work is not being performed (e.g. nights, weekends).
7. Work zone and detour signage should be modally-specific wherever applicable (e.g. "Road Closed Except Bicycles").
8. Signs notifying road users of closures, difficult connections, or detours should be placed far enough in advance for users to be able to choose an alternate route without backtracking.
9. Construction equipment, including signs are not to be placed in bike lanes or on sidewalks unless the bike lane or sidewalk is closed and proper action has been taken to mitigate that closure.
10. Detours should not direct auto traffic onto neighborhood greenways.
11. Detours, temporary sidewalks, and crossings should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and provide assurances that noise, lighting and detours are adequate for people of all abilities to utilize them.
12. When approving traffic control plans for work zones, the city must consider other existing (and pending) adjacent work zones and plan accordingly to ensure multiple detours or closures are not occurring at the same time on the same corridor.
13. The City must have a strict enforcement protocol in place to address work zone policy violations.

Here are some work zone practices witnessed within the last year. A successful Vision Zero Work Zone policy would ensure that these situations are addressed differently:

- **PDC / Gerding Edlen development at 60 NW Davis**
This project closed two pedestrian crosswalks at Naito Parkway. These are the only crossings between Waterfront Park and Old Town / Chinatown. The TCP / detour signage directed traffic either five blocks out-of-direction or, it would appear, over the Steel Bridge.
- **PBOT: Repaving of SE Division Street**
This planned maintenance work required that the road be closed to through traffic. That traffic was directed onto SE Clinton -- a neighborhood greenway that relies on low traffic volumes in order to function safely as a priority bike route.
- **500 Block of SW Stark**
Construction closed a downtown sidewalk. Heavy pedestrian traffic was forced to either walk in the street or cross it twice. On-street parking, through which a temporary walkway could have been routed, was maintained.
- **PBOT: N Vancouver and Cook Signal Installation**
Signs warning "Right lane closed ahead" were placed in the bike lane on N Vancouver.
- **PBOT: NW Broadway and Couch Signal Installation**
"Right lane closed ahead signs" resulted in law-abiding people on bikes leaving the bike lane and riding in busy traffic while those who ignored the sign found that work crews had coned-off a separate bike lane. The sign was only for cars.
- **BES: Going Street Sewer Project**
Despite "Road Closed" signs, people on bikes were usually welcome to ride through the construction zone but, at some times, it was too dangerous to do so. Signage made no distinction between the two scenarios.
- **"Goat Blocks" redevelopment (SE Belmont)**
Sidewalks on both sides of SE 11th are closed for two blocks. Two traffic lanes remain open.