

Invest \$2 Billion to Save \$20 Billion: Washington's Main-Street Safety Moment



Every year, Washington pays more than [\\$20 billion for road crashes](#). It's past time to change that.

The Cost of Neglect – Lives and Money



Traffic deaths in Washington are at their highest level since 1990. Nearly half of all fatalities occur on state-managed corridors, many of which double as main streets running through cities and towns. These roads were built for high-speed travel, but now host homes, businesses, and transit lines, creating dangerous hybrid streets and roads. Fatal and serious injury crashes on these corridors are two to three times higher than on other state routes.

In 2022, traffic crashes levied a devastating cost on Washington. Estimates range from [over \\$20 billion](#) to a staggering [\\$42 billion in total societal](#) costs in 2022. This drain is equivalent to roughly 2.5-5.5% of the [state's 2022 GDP](#).

Misaligned Transportation Priorities

For decades, Washington has prioritized highway capacity expansion over the basic needs of safety and maintenance.

- **Safety is marginalized:** Despite being named a top priority, direct safety investment represents less than 5% of the state's biennial transportation budget.
- **Preservation is underfunded:** The state funds less than 40% of what's needed to keep roads and bridges in good repair, which translates to a \$980 million annual gap.
- **Costly consequences:** Ignoring safety and maintenance costs Washington far more in lost lives, hospital bills, and congestion than proactive investment ever would.

The Opportunity: Safety Investments Pay Off

When Washington invests in safety, the returns are extraordinary:

- **High ROI:** Studies from the Federal Highway Administration show systemic safety countermeasures yield 12:1 or greater benefit-cost ratios. WSDOT's own rumble-strip program demonstrates 22:1 returns, while national programs average 26:1.
- **Equity and access:** Safer corridors mean safer routes to work, schools, and transit, improving economic vitality and community resilience.



Investing \$2 billion over 10 years, just 10% of one year's crash costs, could return tens of billions in avoided losses.



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A State that Invests in Safety Invests in the Future

Ignoring safety costs far more than fixing it. Safer, multimodal main street highways can save lives, reduce long-term public costs, and strengthen local economies. Well-designed corridors improve access for everyone walking, biking, riding transit, or driving; support small businesses; and advance Washington's resilience and climate goals. Investing in safety is a fiscally responsible public investment and pays dividends in reliability, equity, and economic vitality.



Vision for the future of Division Street in Spokane by Ruby Boone.

Models across the country prove that targeted corridor safety investments work: they save lives, stimulate local economies, and create stronger, more connected communities. Colorado's [Revitalizing Main Streets program](#) invests in crossings, lighting, and walkability in towns large and small. [Virginia's Revenue Sharing Program](#) and [Pennsylvania's PennDOT Connects](#) align safety upgrades with local planning priorities, ensuring that state resources respond to community needs. Closer to home, Oregon's [Great Streets](#), Portland's 82nd Avenue project, and Vancouver's Upper Main Street Safety and Mobility Project show how corridor reinvestment can improve safety, access, and neighborhood vitality.

The proposed Megaproject for Safety builds on the evolution of [WSDOT's Main Street Highways initiative](#) and the statewide Complete Streets policy, both of which emphasize safety, access, and livability over vehicle speed.

What We Need

Washington needs to make a long-term commitment to essential safety improvements on main street highways, from lowering speeds, improving sidewalks and crossings, upgrading bus stops, to adding traffic-calming features.

We urge state leaders to elevate safety as a core investment priority and commit long-term, predictable funding for main-street safety corridors: about \$200 million per year over a decade for a total of \$2 billion.

We would also like to see safety investments coordinated with maintenance and preservation needs to deliver efficient, equitable corridor retrofits. Projects must empower communities to shape designs that reflect local needs, support small businesses, and deliver visible results in corridor transformation.

It's time to shift from more lanes to safer lanes. This is our moment to invest in the future.

Learn more and take action at transportationchoices.org/safety

Transportation Choices Coalition advocates for safe, sustainable, and equitable transportation for all residents in Washington State. For over 30 years, it has brought together businesses, labor, transit agencies, transit riders, and elected leaders to win transformative policies and funding.