

Establishing Vision Zero in New York City – The Story of a Pioneer

Ann-Catrin Kristianssen

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Abstract

Vision Zero was established in 2014 as the foundation of the New York City road safety policy. The purpose of this chapter is to understand why and how Vision Zero was introduced as well as by whom and with what tools. The chapter focuses on understanding this policy change in New York City and is based on a document study and 18 semi-structured interview with 19 respondents city administration staff, researchers, media, and NGOs. The analysis is made by

A.-C. Kristianssen (✉)

School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden

e-mail: ann-catrin.kristianssen@oru.se

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looking closer at the state of four aspects by the time of the establishment of Vision Zero – problem framing, policy formulation, political actors, and proposed solutions. This theoretical framework is mainly based on the work of John Kingdon (Agenda, Alternatives, and Public Policies. Little, Brown, Boston, 1984) and Michael Howlett (Public Policy Adm 34(4):405–430, 2019). The chapter states that there were several factors leading to the adoption of Vision Zero. First, the road safety problems were not as serious as in many other regions of the USA, but compared to other major cities in the western world, the fatalities and serious injuries in New York City were deemed unacceptable by politicians, NGOs, and the public. The imminent problem on the ground was further emphasized by several high-profile cases of child fatalities in traffic crashes. Second, the Vision Zero policy or philosophy was a coherent and above all a successfully tested policy based on a scientific foundation. The credit for introducing Vision Zero in the New York City context is given to non-governmental organizations such as Transportation Alternatives and Families for Safe Streets and specific public administrators in key positions. These actors were all searching for new solutions, and as the politicians placed road safety high on the agenda, a window of opportunity was opened to Vision Zero. In addition, politicians, with the support and pressure from NGOs, established a policy program based on Vision Zero, and this program further established a belief in Vision Zero as a credible way forward. There was and is criticism directed towards the policy based on equity and that Vision Zero risks strengthening discriminatory structures. The basic idea of adapting the physical infrastructure to accommodate human mistakes is challenging in many American contexts, but in a diverse city such as New York, this approach may be able to address equity, according to several respondents, if based on solid crash data. The Vision Zero in New York City differs from the original Swedish version in mainly two ways: the focus in New York on law enforcement and on the behavior of the individual road user.

Keywords

Vision Zero · Road safety policy · Policy change · Problem formulation · Policy formulation · Program formulation

Introduction

I do think that it was through our advocacy work that Vision Zero was brought to New York. (NGO 2)

It really was their advocacy that brought the urgency to this issue. [...] they came together and said enough is enough, so I think it has come from this urgency of wanting to change and then for New York, it really was just good timing. (NGO 3)

Mayor Bloomberg and his Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan they had really laid a lot of the groundwork for pedestrian and bike projects that would become key parts of Vision Zero. (City Administration 1)

In 2014, New York City adopted Vision Zero as a foundation for its road safety policies. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and analyze this policy change. Vision Zero, as shown in this handbook, is both a road safety philosophy and a policy program. When a philosophy or a policy program like Vision Zero diffuses from context to context, translations inevitably take place to fit the political, administrative, cultural, and infrastructural preconditions. Therefore, we can expect both unique and similar features in the New York City Vision Zero when compared to other Vision Zero programs. It is easy to assume that a policy change is made because the previous policies were bad or even absent, but the New York City Vision Zero was not introduced in a vacuum, as there were plenty of road safety initiatives and measures prior to the introduction. Various city departments worked according to specific road safety strategies in the city, but these measures had not delivered the safety that New Yorkers wanted. Besides recognizing the problem and identifying a possible policy, it is necessary to have the support of as many actors as possible in order to achieve change. This support can also provide legitimacy and resources. One way to gather support for a policy change is to set up a reliable policy program focusing on structures of implementation. Theories of social science show that a window of opportunity for policy change is opened when several factors align such as (1) an urgent problem discussed in broad layers of the society, (2) the emergence of a new policy addressing that problem seemingly better than the old solutions, (3) a political will and support, and (4) the development of a policy program showing convincing paths to success.

These aspects can also be referred to as process streams. John Kingdon (1984) presented his multiple streams framework (MSF) in his study on agenda setting in the USA, and the framework has been a frequent tool to study policy change. In his model, the problem stream, policy stream, and political stream must converge for change to happen. For instance, if you do not have political will, you will not have change. If you do not present a convincing solution, there will be no change and so on. The model was built on previous research (c.f. Cohen et al. 1972) and has since been modified by many researchers by adding, for example, an implementation or program stream (Howlett 2019). The analysis of the road safety policy change in New York City in this chapter is based on a model adding this fourth stream, the program stream, as there is often a need for a credible program of implementation in order to open the window of opportunity.

The overall purpose of this chapter is therefore to describe and analyze the development of Vision Zero in New York City by using a streams perspective. The following research questions are applied:

- What road safety problems are to be solved through the adoption of Vision Zero?
- What is the main content of Vision Zero in New York?

- What did the political process look like, and who were the political entrepreneurs contributing to the adoption of Vision Zero?
- With what program will the Vision Zero policy be implemented?

In addition, these empirical issues will be briefly compared to the Swedish original vision as well as discussing what can be learnt from the establishment process of the New York City Vision Zero. After this introduction, the chapter contains a theoretical discussion focusing on policy change and a multiple streams approach, and thereafter the New York City Vision Zero policy is analyzed by applying these streams. The chapter proceeds with conclusions and a discussion.

Policy Change

Changes in policies, political priorities, and organizational structures are common and a natural part of societal development. Some of these changes are smaller adjustments to already existing policies, while other changes are more profound and require both a longer period of implementation and more resources, as well as additional personnel. Some changes are made due to external shocks such as disasters or other serious events (c.f. Birkland 1997), and other changes occur without too much notice. When making policy changes in areas where you find particularly complicated issues, so-called wicked problems (Rittel and Webber 1973), the changes are sometimes inevitable but also multifaceted. It would not be wrong to refer to the number of people killed or seriously injured in traffic crashes each year as a wicked problem in terms of the complexity of the systems involved. That includes the difficulties of assessing how and when to reach the goal of solving the problem. But, at the same time, road safety initiatives all over the world aim to create a more systematic approach to the problem, to make it solvable. Related to this discussion, Vision Zero provides a new problem description, solutions directly related to the problem, and a vision on how to reach the stated goal (Belin et al. 2012; Kristianssen et al. 2018).

Levels of Policy Change

Policy changes are generally pursued to solve specific problems, and as problems differ, there are also different forms of policy change. Studies on policy change have focused on everything from incremental changes (Lindblom 1959) to more profound paradigm shifts (Kuhn 1962; Hall 1993), which has resulted in the identification of various taxonomies or levels of policy change. One commonly used description is based on four levels of change (Durant and Diehl 1989; Howlett and Cashore 2009). The first and second levels relate to incremental changes in “ordinary” policy development. One example of a first-level change is an adjustment in existing policies such as tax levels. A second level of change can be the introduction of a new policy for an old problem, for instance, a new policy for addressing problems of segregation without changing the overall problem frame. The third and fourth levels

of change focus on more structural or paradigmatic shifts but in different forms and speed. An example of a third-level change is a policy changing the direction of climate change policy and movement towards sustainability. A fourth level change is a paradigm shift, for instance, a completely new economic system. The diffusion of Vision Zero all over the world is described by some researchers and practitioners as a paradigm shift (Belin et al. 2012, Swedish Transport Administration 2018) because it is more or less a complete overhaul of traditional road safety measures and has the potential to lead to a decisively novel outcome. Based on what we already know about Vision Zero and its implementation in various contexts, it is more than an incremental change as it is directly aimed to change the way road safety policy and measures are perceived. Time will tell if Vision Zero constitutes a complete paradigm shift on all levels.

Multiple Streams

There are naturally many ways to study policy change, and the purpose of this chapter is not to make a full recount of all theories. The temporal focus of this chapter is on the Vision Zero adoption process in New York City. Who promoted Vision Zero, how was it presented, who brought it on to the agenda, and how was it received by both administrative personnel and the public? These questions raised in the chapter relate to Harold Lasswell's (1958) influential model of communication "Who (says) What (to) Whom (in) What Channel (with) What Effect." This model has been influential not only with regard to how policy processes are studied but also in relation to research on agenda setting. As the chapter is based on the adoption process, a focus on multiple streams can provide a fruitful framework for studying this policy change. The streams approach concerns how an agenda is set, the factors leading to changing the agenda, and the actors providing support and leadership. John Kingdon's well-known study from 1984 on agenda setting in the US federal system treated the three streams – problem, policy, and politics – as separate but at the same time interrelated channels. Kingdon's model was inspired, for instance, by the work of Cohen et al. (1972, 1979) who presented what has come to be known as the garbage can perspective. Their model is a break from rationalist models on decision-making, pointing to different flows where there is no way to know exactly how a process will perform. Cohen, March, and Olsen described four flows: problem, solution, participants, and choice opportunities. The model portrays the number of problems, solutions, and participants involved in everyday public decision-making but also that they are only connected when a certain choice opportunity arises. In Kingdon's model, the three streams are also seen as separate arenas, and this highlights the role of policy entrepreneurs connecting the streams. When the streams align, we find a window of opportunity where change can happen quite rapidly. This is a way to explain why, out of an abundance of existing problems and solutions, only some problems and a specific set of solutions end up on the agenda.

Kingdon's streams related to policy change and agenda setting have been used by many scholars through the years and further discussed and developed particularly in the last couple of years (c.f. Cairney and Zahariadis 2017; Howlett 2019). One of these

discussions has focused on the gaps in the streams model and the role of implementing specific solutions. According to Michael Howlett, a program stream based on implementation adds new potential to the streams model and will provide an opportunity in this chapter to separate policy design from a policy program perspective.

In this chapter, a four streams model, adding a program stream to the Kingdon model, will thus be used to analyze the empirical material. There are two main reasons for this adjustment. First, Vision Zero as a policy and road safety philosophy is connected both to solutions and to a broader policy program. Without a program perspective, there is risk of losing sight of one possibly important aspect of why Vision Zero became an acceptable policy solution. Having a clear program of implementation could enhance the chances of adoption. Second, the program stream adds other actors, particularly actors within the public administration, to the analysis of why and where a policy change takes place.

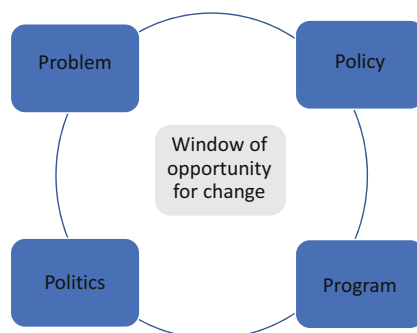
The Problem Stream

In Kingdon's study there are several routes for a problem to reach the agenda, and it is not necessarily the most urgent problem that ends up being prioritized. The potential for a problem to reach the agenda depends on the support and will of both actors with influence and citizens who experience the problem. A problem can arise as mentioned earlier due to serious events, but it can also be related to earlier known problems that many people can relate to. Whether a problem gets attention is often determined by the existence of convincing narratives that speak to emotions and sometimes the existence of prejudice (Kingdon 1984). Using the words of Carol Lee Bacchi (2009), it is a question of what the problem is represented to be. But a problem given plenty of attention does not necessarily stay in focus, leaving the window of opportunity open for a very short period. In the streams theory, a problem is more likely to receive attention if the problem is related to a convincing policy.

The Policy Stream

This stream in Kingdon's framework is based on solutions that solve specific problems, and there are often differences in opinion as to what solution is the best, among people with varying expertise, professional viewpoints, or political points of view. Another key aspect is that solutions are developed over time, often in lengthy processes of discussion, translation, transformation, and compromise. A policy thus needs multiple types of support and is ultimately evaluated based on its cost-effectiveness; its technical qualities; its acceptance among politicians, the public, and experts; and of course its ability to solve the problem. The question is how the sometimes fast-moving problem stream connects to the slower policy stream. According to Kingdon (1984), policy entrepreneurs play a crucial role in preparing and perfecting the policy to match the problem. Research on policy entrepreneurs has been further developed by many scholars (c.f. Mintrom and Norman 2009). In this chapter, the focus of the policy stream will be on policy formulation with policy solutions being dealt with in the program stream.

Fig. 1 A revised multiple stream framework



The Political Stream

This stream focuses on the phase where ideas are turned into political opinion and where policymakers turn policy options and solutions into actual policies and legal frameworks. This is where political maneuvering takes place, and for a problem to be addressed at a certain point in time, there must be a political will. Sometimes this process coincides with elections which may enhance the chances for certain problems to end up on the agenda (Cairney and Jones 2016). Sometimes this process is predictable, such as in the case of a big crisis, but it could also be related to other factors. Politicians can also actively collaborate with other actors such as NGOs in order to push for a certain idea, problem, or solution, forming so-called advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Weible 2007). At times competing coalitions arise leading to political conflicts in relation to various policy choices.

The Program Stream

The earlier mentioned modification of the multiple streams framework (MSF) focuses on adding an implementation or program perspective to the stream. Implementation is more commonly included as one of the policy stages in theories used to study the policy process. The program stream includes actors involved in the implementation process, such as civil servants and administrative officials, as they “...apply their knowledge, experience, expertise and values to shaping the launch and evolution of programs implementing policy decisions” (Howlett 2019, p. 420). Other actors can be active in this stream, such as private entrepreneurs and NGOs, through different form of co-production and collaboration. This stream will not be used in this chapter as a process perspective, but rather to study how the policy program of Vision Zero was presented by the time of the adoption of the vision (Fig. 1).

Research Design

This chapter focuses on the process of establishing the Vision Zero policy in New York City. It is part of a larger project also targeting policy process perspectives and equity issues. The purpose of the larger project is to map the development of Vision Zero in

the city from a historical, political, and administrative perspective. All these topics do not fit into one single chapter, hence the focus on policy change and mainly the period of the adoption of the vision. This chapter more specifically focuses on the main events leading up the adoption of the vision and the actors involved in this process as well as the policy and organizational developments in the immediate period after the adoption. This means that historical developments concerning road safety as well as current developments of the Vision Zero program are mentioned, but not included in a systematic analysis. One specific purpose has also been to briefly compare the Vision Zero program in New York City to other Vision Zero programs adopted in other contexts, such as the original Swedish version.

The chapter is based primarily on a content analysis studying policy documents related to Vision Zero in New York City using the theoretical framework as a sorting mechanism. The documents selected for the study are action plans, guidelines, reports, statements, and newspaper articles, and they represent the period when Vision Zero was established. This qualitative content analysis shows how the problem is framed, the contents of the Vision Zero policy, and what actors play key roles in the adoption process, as well as the proposed program in relation to the vision. Documents from the New York City administration and particularly the lead agency Department of Transportation (DOT) are selected for analysis, and documents from the NGO Transportation Alternatives have been particularly targeted as this organization is identified as the key and leading NGO in relation to road safety.

To fully grasp the role of various actors in the process of promoting Vision Zero and finally adopting this policy, an interview study has been performed. The purpose of the interview study is to add layers and explanations to the process of introducing Vision Zero. In 2019–2020, 18 semi-structured interviews were performed with 19 respondents. The respondents belong to four main categories working with road safety issues in different ways: (1) local public servants representing several departments within the New York City administration that play a key role in the development and work with Vision Zero, (2) representatives from various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both in the city and on the national level, (3) researchers, and (4) media. The views of politicians have been included in the form of public statements, interviews in the media, and other announcements. The interviews have been transcribed word by word and analyzed using the same theoretical framework but as stated with a particular focus on the process of introducing and establishing Vision Zero. The respondents are anonymous in the study and will be referred to as City Administration 1, 2, 3, etc.; NGO 1, 2, 3, etc.; Researcher 1, 2, 3, etc.; and Media 1, 2, 3, etc.

The questions focused on road safety work prior to Vision Zero; key actors in the process of promoting and establishing Vision Zero; policy documents and legal frameworks; the content of NYC Vision Zero; reactions from the public, administration, and politics; implementation process; organizational structure: Vision Zero task force; concrete measures; and challenges and opportunities.

This chapter is also designed to use the Swedish Vision Zero policy in a comparative perspective in order to describe the similarities and differences in the structure and content of the policy. A full description of the Swedish Vision Zero can be found earlier in this handbook.

Vision Zero in New York City

As many chapters in this handbook have shown, road traffic injuries and deaths are a global public health problem, and the statistics in the USA display a worrisome trend with a growing number of casualties, particularly among vulnerable road users such as pedestrians (US Department of Transport 2020). In 2018, there were 16 fatalities per 100,000 licensed drivers in the USA leaving 34,654 people dead. The typical fatality is a male motorist in the age group of 25–34 (NHTSA FARS database, accessed March 7, 2021). There are many actors who recognize the problem and work towards finding solutions, but the federal system imposes a number of challenges for the introduction of new policies on all societal levels, new legislation, and other types of innovations, such as vehicle improvement. Vision Zero and safe system approaches are fairly new policy directions for road safety in the USA, but the ambition to work with this approach has been introduced on the federal level, particularly through the Road to Zero strategy from 2014 and the successive campaign (National Safety Council 2014, 2021; NHTSA 2021; Vision Zero Network 2017; see also chapter on safe system in the USA for a comprehensive description and analysis).

Over 40 US states have joined the Road to Zero campaign (Vision Zero Network 2017) together with a large number of coalition partners on the local, state, and federal level (National Safety Council 2021, NSC, list of coalition partners, accessed March 12, 2021). There is a growing interest among states to discuss and incorporate the Vision Zero approach particularly as there is a Vision Zero movement also on the city level. The State of Washington pioneered the Vision Zero approach in the USA, launching their “Target Zero” in 2000, a decade prior to the adoption of Vision Zero in New York City. On the Washington State Department of Transportation website, we can read a well-known argument: “We have to ask ourselves: How many deaths and serious injuries are ‘acceptable’ on Washington’s roadways? How many of your family members would it be ‘acceptable’ to lose to traffic crashes each year? Ten? Five? Of course, the answer is none. Zero” (Washington State Department of Transportation 2021). The state of Minnesota was another early adopter as it introduced its Towards Zero Deaths program in 2003, focusing on a data-driven approach to road safety work (Minnesota Towards Zero Deaths website 2021).

There has also been a growing diffusion of Vision Zero on a city level, where New York City led the way in 2014, followed by San Francisco the same year. There was a flow of cities adopting Vision Zero in 2015 such as San Antonio, Fort Lauderdale, and Austin. Since then, more cities have followed at a rapid pace (see Vision Zero Network for updated map of Vision Zero communities; see also Gonzalez 2018; Reynolds and Gale 2016; Shahum 2016; Territo 2016). This process has also inspired cities around the world to consider introducing Vision Zero. When looking closer at the development of Vision Zero in New York City, it is important to remember that although it is part of a national policy diffusion process, it is also a big city, larger than smaller countries, at least in population, and therefore it is also a unique city. It is comparable to other large cities in a global high-income perspective but also an inspiration for road safety measures in large cities all over the world.

The Road Safety Problem in New York City

New York City was and is considered one of the safest bigger cities in the USA when it comes to road traffic safety (DOT 2010), and there were existing road safety measures well before the introduction of Vision Zero – most notably the ambitious goal set in 2008 to reduce the number of traffic fatalities in the city by half by the year 2030. Even though road safety measures had been in place prior to Michael Bloomberg becoming the Mayor in 2002, the Bloomberg Administration that lasted until 2013 is credited with placing road safety high on the agenda.

And it wasn't until Mayor Bloomberg started really focusing on sustainability and developing PlaNYC, the long-term sustainability plan which was released in 2007 that things started to change dramatically. [...] His innovation as a Mayor was the data-driven governance. (NGO 5)

PlaNYC was a strategic plan launched in 2007 to promote a broad agenda for a sustainable New York City (New York City 2007). It has been updated regularly and includes specific policies for road safety, particularly regarding pedestrians and bicycles. The Mayor brought Janette Sadik-Khan in as the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transport (DOT) where she remained until 2013. She is credited by the respondents as the one who made innovative changes within the DOT and introduced a new perspective concerning urban design and engineering. Another groundbreaking plan was the New York City Pedestrian Safety Study and Action Plan (2010). The Department of Transportation is, together with City Hall, the central actor in the establishment and implementation of road safety policies in New York City, limited by the jurisdiction of the state and federal level which we will return to later on in the chapter. For a more detailed account of the departments within New York City administration and DOT working with road safety, see the following comparative report from The Swedish Transport Administration (2018). These are just examples of the many initiatives taken during the Bloomberg Administration with regard to road safety. So if a progressive road safety policy was already on the agenda, what was the problem that was going to be solved by introducing Vision Zero?

According to the non-governmental organization Transportation Alternatives, the road safety problem in New York City should not be compared to the situation in other US cities, but rather to other large cities in high-income countries, such as Paris or London (Transportation Alternatives 2011). When doing that, New York City falls short, and the organization points to several specific problems. First, the many fatalities are a huge cost for the society particularly since the crashes are preventable. At the time of the introduction of Vision Zero, the overall problem was that too many people died or were seriously injured in traffic crashes, and the first Vision Zero Action Plan described it further:

... approximately 4,000 New Yorkers are seriously injured and more than 250 are killed each year in traffic crashes. Being struck by a vehicle is the leading cause of injury-related death for children under 14, and the second leading cause for seniors. On average, vehicles seriously injure or kill a New Yorker every 2 hours. (City of New York 2014)

Second, the city streets are not designed to prevent crashes. Third, speeding is a major problem, and the poor design does not help. Fourth, there is a widespread “culture of acceptance” when it comes to the number of deaths but also to behavior in the road traffic system. Fifth, the city organization working with road safety was not considered sufficient before the introduction of Vision Zero. Sixth, the same was said about law enforcement, particularly targeting speeding. Seventh, another problem was distracted drivers and driving under the influence of various substances. Eight, all the problems above tend to disproportionately affect vulnerable road users (Transportation Alternatives 2011).

These and many more specific problems are mentioned and discussed in the first Vision Zero Action Plan from 2014. In the foreword, Mayor Bill de Blasio calls for change:

Drunk driving and failure to use seatbelts, once commonplace, are now socially unacceptable. Today, we must bring the same concerted effort against dangerous and careless driving on our streets. Better designs and regulations are already making our streets safer, and we will expand these efforts. We will bring more resources to enforcement and public outreach. In Albany, we will seek control over the City’s speed limits and use of enforcement cameras. (NYC 2014)

The first road safety action plan from the new political administration under Bill de Blasio came in 2014 and, like the following action plans in the Vision Zero program, focused largely on upcoming measures and solutions. The document is a pledge to act, building on years of road safety work. The action plan is based on data provided by the Department of Transportation, and one key conclusion is that “dangerous drivers choices” (NYC 2014, p. 14) is a major cause of traffic crashes. There is furthermore a focus on problems with both physical and automated enforcement as well as insufficient legislation. Unsafe vehicles, both private and public, are also a problem, and the city administration also recognizes the need for improving street design.

If briefly comparing the problem descriptions at the time of the establishment of Vision Zero to the wording today, the problems are described using more or less the same language. Families for Safe Streets, which is a not-for-profit organization based on the engagement of relatives of people who have lost loved ones in traffic crashes, points to road safety problems such as reckless driving, problems of holding these reckless drivers accountable, and failure to construct safe streets (Families for Safe Streets website 2020). Their sister organization, Transportation Alternatives, recognizes the progress made based on the decrease in the number of fatalities from 2013 but argues that the city administration needs a much more holistic approach to the remaining problems and that many key problems are still not addressed (Transportation Alternatives 2018). The latest Vision Zero report from the city administration states that the number of fatalities decreased by 26% from 2013 to 2019 (City of New York 2020). If putting the problem into concrete numbers, in 2014, 259 people were killed in traffic crashes in New York City. In 2016 the number decreased to 231, and in 2018 it was 202 deaths (New York City 2020). In 2020, 244 people lost their lives in the New York City road traffic system (New York City 2021).

One problem that was not included in the overall agenda in 2014 was transportation equity, and this has become a major discussion, especially in relation to the

Black Lives Matter movement. It has become clear that transportation safety is increasingly discussed as a class issue. Several social movements are therefore calling on the city administration to adopt an equity perspective in relation to the transportation system (Transportation Alternatives 2017). The basic problem of inequity concerning road safety can be related also to areas such as environmental justice as some of the largest streets and boulevard with many serious crashes are located in poorer neighborhoods. These arteries have not yet been “engineered” properly which means that people in these neighborhoods have no choice but to use these roads, and, because their design encourages risk-taking and non-compliance with laws, these areas are also targeted by enforcement practices including both speed cameras and patrol interventions.

This community hasn’t received a safety project or a road-diet. So you need to make it safe, so there won’t be the need for this inequitable enforcement. So that is kind of the state of it now. We are data-driven, and the data does not consider black, male, female, whatever. It does not always take into account where the infrastructure is. (City Administration 9)

It is also important to see the equity in relation to vulnerable road users. There have been many discussions in the last couple of years about the safety of, for instance, delivery workers (Research 1, 2019).

Problem Entrepreneurs

For a problem to reach the agenda, there is a need for dedicated actors who constantly remind policymakers and the broader public of a certain problem. Transportation Alternatives is viewed by several respondents in this study as one of the key actors in producing information and creating opinion about traffic safety problems in New York City (Administration 3, 2019). The organization produces reports evaluating the progress of the city administration, holds numerous seminars, and pushes for a more holistic approach to both problem framing and solutions. In addition, organizations such as Families for Safe Streets have worked hard to present the faces behind the statistics. The organization was established in 2014 by families of traffic crash victims. One way to change opinions about problem has been the publication of a list of names of people killed in traffic crashes since 2014:

Since Mayor Bill de Blasio took office, more than 1,000 vulnerable road users – pedestrians, cyclists, e-bike and e-scooter riders – have been killed on New York City streets. These are their names. This is Mayor de Blasio’s legacy. (Families for Safe Streets, <https://www.transalt.org/vision-zero-fatalities>, accessed December 8, 2020)

These powerful statements are emotional, but the organization has also worked over the years to point to various concrete problems, such as poor street design, drunk-driving, unsafe vehicles, and so on. In addition, the problems were also identified by political actors as well as key administrative units, such as the Department of Transportation, in the years prior to the adoption of Vision Zero. As there were road traffic safety programs in place, there was a consensus between various actors concerning many of the problems. The question at that time was whether road traffic safety would become prioritized in relation to other urgent problems. We

know the answer by now, but we will return to a description of this process in the political stream section.

The Introduction and Development of the Vision Zero Policy

As mentioned earlier, Vision Zero was adopted in areas in the USA as early as 2000, and the policy or philosophy has diffused all over the world to cities, countries, and international organizations. The policy change in New York City was based on a worldwide search performed by NGOs, politicians, and administrators in New York City to find the best practices in relation to road safety. The Swedish Vision Zero has been recognized as a best practice based on its achievements related to the decrease in the number of fatalities and due to the construct of the policy.

Sweden's Vision Zero – that ultimately no one will die or become seriously injured in traffic – has been recognized by the World Health Organization as a best practice that should be replicated by other cities and countries that wish to achieve ambitious street safety goals. (Transportation Alternatives 2011, p. 39)

Transportation Alternatives, in their report *Vision Zero* from 2011, highlighted the content of the Swedish Vision Zero as a key to progress and ultimate success. They pushed particularly for the ethical foundation of the vision that no one should die or be seriously injured in the traffic system and also that there is no such thing as accidents, as crashes are preventable. This is also part of the Vision Zero presented by the city administration:

The fundamental message of Vision Zero is that death and injury on city streets is not acceptable, and that we will no longer regard serious crashes as inevitable. (NYC Action Plan, 2014:Foreword)

Another key part of the Vision Zero policy is that the construction of the transport system should be designed to manage the human factor that human beings – no matter how educated they are – will make mistakes. However, this human perspective is not part of the policy description of the city administration at that time. The report from Transportation Alternatives recognizes that this is a basic feature of Vision Zero, but states at the same time that: "... individuals often make a deliberate choice to engage in risky behavior on the roads, and too often this choice leads to death and serious injury" (Transportation Alternatives 2011, p. 21). Related to this perspective is the issue of responsibility, which is another key concept in the Swedish Vision Zero policy formulation. Road traffic safety is in Vision Zero a shared responsibility of all actors using the transport system. But the main responsibility ultimately falls on the system designer. This issue seems to be the most problematic to translate into a US context due in part to the notion of individual responsibility as interpreted in the US culture. Relaxing this responsibility is provocative for many US citizens. The description of responsibility follows another logic:

Those who operate vehicles in a dense and vibrant city like New York have a special responsibility to take care when driving. Reckless or dangerous driving that puts New York families at risk should not be tolerated. In order to crack down on dangerous driving, the City proposes legislation. . . . (NYC Action Plan 2014, p. 22)

This quote also recognizes the shared responsibility of a broad number of road users, and we need to keep in mind the impact on road safety from the transportation industry such as taxis and other transports. On the other hand, according to the Vision Zero responsibility chain, the ultimate responsibility falls on the system designer. If using a Vision Zero approach, one could say that if it is possible to drive recklessly, it is because the roads are not designed to prevent that and/or that the vehicles are not designed to take human mistakes and errors into account.

The Swedish Vision Zero is based on a scientific foundation both concerning the tolerance of the human body to violence and how that should influence the construction of vehicles, management of speed, etc. and how the development of the policy should be based on good quality data and research. The first perspective is not highlighted in the key documents related to the establishment of the New York Vision Zero. However, it is clear that the policy is based on a data-driven approach. “Data analysis informs every aspect of the City’s response to the Vision Zero challenge. The introduction of tools to better identify problematic intersections, corridors and driving behaviors and target resources is essential to success” (NYC Action Plan 2014, p. 16).

One perspective that is prevalent in the city administration’s interpretation of Vision Zero is enforcement and the use of both physical and automated enforcement such as speed cameras. Enforcement, as described in road safety terms in the USA, is less related to how safety cameras are used in the Swedish Vision Zero policy. In New York City, they are more related to enforcement than prevention. This is another example of the local preconditions and administrative culture in New York City. According to several of the respondents, New Yorkers demand enforcement and would be very hesitant towards a policy that relied only on infrastructure and vehicle safety (City Administration 5, 2020). Another difference, compared to Sweden, is the aspect of outreach and education. This is not seen as a vital part of Vision Zero in Sweden, but in New York City it is an integral part of the policy. Outreach and communication are key issues in making people understand the notion of shared responsibility.

Targeted outreach will complement enforcement and street design efforts and will spread the message that traffic deaths are preventable and that New Yorkers are responsible for safe behavior. (City of New York 2014)

If looking ahead to see what has happened to these aspects of Vision Zero, it is clear that the politicians and city administrators are dedicated to the ethical foundation of Vision Zero (NYC Vision Zero 5-year report 2019a). As New York has seen the number of fatalities rising at the end of the 2010 decade, it is also evident that the city administration recognizes the long-term commitment that is required to achieve

the goals. As the process has moved along, the notion of shared responsibility can be seen, for example, in the work of the Vision Zero task force and other collaborative efforts which we will return to in the program section. It is important to state that this chapter is not judging what is the best Vision Zero program, but rather to identify differences and point to learning aspects when it comes to interpretations of Vision Zero.

Policy Entrepreneurs

Vision Zero was promoted by a group of dedicated non-profit organizations, led by Transportation Alternatives, pushing for the adoption of this road safety approach in New York City. They produced reports including Vision Zero policy formulations and suggestions on how to translate the vision into a New York City context. Vision Zero was also consistent with a growing focus on sustainability and a shift away from a car-focused society. Key staff members of the city administration joined in, eventually bringing Vision Zero, with the Swedish version as a role model, to the political table. Politicians, city administrators, and social movements had been looking for best practice models for years, and they found it in the Swedish road safety work.

We found that Vision Zero had a very well-reputed brand and well-respected brand in policy circles. People knew what it was and believed in it. So we felt like that would be an advantage. (NGO, 5)

One explanation for various actors to come together to work with the same policy could be the circulation of staff, where it is not unusual for people to move from administration to organizations and vice versa. As Vision Zero was adopted, it was translated into a US and an urban context, and the contacts and exchanges with Swedish authorities were constant. This also led to a continued inspiration of specific Swedish Vision Zero policy solutions along the way.

The Political Process

As we have already concluded, the Vision Zero policy gained support among politicians, and one explanation is that the leading proponent of Vision Zero in New York City, Transportation Alternatives, began promoting and lobbying for change several years before the establishment of the policy. One way to convince the administration of such a change was to frame the city of New York in a global perspective:

...when we compare New York with its peer cities in other developed nations it becomes clear that the city's current goal is not nearly as ambitious as it can and should be. For instance, while New York strives to cut its traffic fatality rate in half in 23 years, Paris did the same thing in just six. New York is already more than three years behind the principal cities of other developed countries. [...] This report recommends that New York City become the world leader in street safety and commit to a zero tolerance policy for traffic fatalities, establishing an ultimate goal of completely eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries. (Transportation Alternatives 2011, p. 42)

It is interesting that the concept zero tolerance is used here as it is in many ways a total opposite to Vision Zero, as zero tolerance tends to be used in relation to enforcement, while Vision Zero is more related to preventability.

Another key to the policy change is that road traffic safety had been prioritized throughout many political administrations in New York City, and this administrative stability is described by the respondents in the study as a key factor in the adoption of Vision Zero (c.f. NGO, 3). From Rudy Giuliani through Michael Bloomberg to Bill de Blasio, the support for road safety measures has been evident. Another aspect of stability is that New York is a solid democratic city (as in the Democratic Party), and one respondent described the city as basically a “one-party city” (City Administration 2, 2020). Even republicans are portrayed as moderate democrats. This political stability is described as one important aspect of paving the way for a policy change related to road safety.

A fourth aspect and possibly the most important factor explaining the political support for Vision Zero is the mayoral election in 2013. In his political platform, mayoral candidate Bill de Blasio vowed to make road safety a prioritized policy area and Vision Zero the road safety policy. After taking office, his administration began working toward the adoption of Vision Zero and an action plan on how to organize and implement the new policy.

Although there was a consensus between organizations promoting Vision Zero, the city administration, and the political leadership, there was and is criticism towards Vision Zero as a policy. We have already touched upon the problems of equity that we will return to briefly in the program description, but there was also criticism from motorist organizations claiming that drivers of motor vehicles were described in unfair terms and that the rhetoric from Vision Zero proponents was offensive.

We are not opposed to the goal, what we are opposed to is how the goal was enacted. One of the main tenets of Vision Zero is that no matter what, the motorist is always at fault. That is one of our biggest issues. Besides that, it also costs a lot of money. (NGO 4)

The respondents in this study claim that there is also a criticism based on ideology. Vision Zero was and is seen by some actors as a product of liberal European ideas, challenging the choice of the individual.

There are two kinds of communities that tend to oppose what we are working on, they are either in opposition because they are just a lot more car-oriented than the rest of the city, right? So, in those communities, yes, we will get ideological pushback. And then, the other type of community where we tend to get pushback is more like [...] what you are doing is going to change my neighborhood for the worse. [...] Just a kind of general conservative idea. (City Administration 2, 2020)

Ultimately, there was a political will to change the road safety policy at that time, the policy had been introduced and marketed as a best practice from NGOs and from within the city administration, the political opposition was weak, and the Vision Zero spoke to interests already in play such as a growing bicycle and pedestrian

movement. Although these actors did not necessarily see Vision Zero in the exact same way, it was enough to pave the way for change.

...it was a combination of the media getting attention, the advocates mobilizing these victims. How can you look a mother in the face and tell her this is not important when she has lost her son. And then the political situation being ripe with that Mayors race. All of these things came together and that is honestly why I think it caught ground in New York. (NGO 3, 2020)

Political Entrepreneurs

The political entrepreneurs in this case were a coalition of actors from various NGOs, members of the city administration, and politicians willing to include Vision Zero in their political platforms. Many of the respondents in this study give credit to a few hard-working people at the social movements, and, in their opinion, Vision Zero would have looked different without the input of these key organizations. At the same time, the respondents also point to specific staff members within the administration who quickly saw the potential of Vision Zero and who accumulated more knowledge about the road to zero. These actors all used different tools to convince others of the opportunities of Vision Zero, and these tools consisted of everything from emotional stories from the families of victims to organizational benefits – all taking the city down the road towards zero. It is also worth mentioning that although many of the political, administrative, and advocacy voices aligned in support of Vision Zero, there are still institutions, such as the community boards, who were seen by many of the respondents as almost an obstruction to progress.

Having to go through each community board and who the community board is comprised of may or may not be representative of the population that is actually living there, which is, you know, often the case. (NGO 2)

The Vision Zero Program

We will now explore the program perspective of Vision Zero mainly as the plan was presented at the time of the adoption of the vision in the first action plan. When arguing for a new policy and in this case a new goal, you need to convince others that it can be done, and one of the tools for convincing others is a program on how to get there. The program includes solutions in the form of concrete measures; goals, both short and long term; and an organization to manage the implementation.

When Bill De Blasio ran for Mayor in 2013, he promoted Vision Zero as a road safety policy for New York City. His campaign promise was to work according to the ambitious new target to reach zero by 2023 (c.f. Gelinas 2014, 2020), and when taking office de Blasio maintained his support for the vision, although the time frame of the target changed when faced with the challenges of reality. By adopting Vision Zero, new frameworks were introduced regarding both organization and solutions.

Looking first at the organizational changes, the New York City administration had a road safety program in place for many years prior to Vision Zero. That also meant

that vital institutions were already in place, which is an advantage when making a policy change and adopting a new program. Several units, such as the Department of Transportation, had been working systematically for years collecting and analyzing data. The DOT is still the lead agency for systematically monitoring road safety and for implementing measures in the streets. One of the main new organizational features presented in the action plan of 2014 was the establishment of a Vision Zero task force.

The Mayor's Office of Operations will convene and coordinate a permanent Vision Zero task force, comprised of the key agencies and partners needed to implement and extend this plan. The Vision Zero task force will work to meet the goals set forth in this action plan, establish additional benchmarks, and report progress to the Mayor's Office of Operations. (NYC Vision Zero Action Plan 2014, p. 8)

Placing the leadership of the task force at the City Hall is a sign of both political priority and political control. This kind of governance structure relates well to the original Vision Zero perspective of shared responsibility. The composition of the task force, with its 15 members, is based on the involvement and interest in Vision Zero, and its broad representation showed that Vision Zero was expected to permeate many different policy areas. The Vision Zero task force consists of the Business Integrity Commission, City Hall, Department of Transportation, New York Police Department, Department of Citywide Administration Services, Taxi and Limousine Commission, Sheriff's Office, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Law Department, District Attorney's Offices, Mayor's Office Community Affairs Unit, Mayor's Office of Data Analytics, Mayor's Office of Operations, MTA, and the Office of Management and Budget (New York City, Vision Zero task force website [2020b](#)). The task force has also developed a number of working groups developing issues further. The task force is described as a key in the Vision Zero program.

Getting the right people around the table is key. [...] They are very committed, they are very passionate, and they are very creative in terms of how they are thinking about traffic safety and how they are working together to come up with you know, ideas that are outside the box. (City Administration 6)

The Vision Zero Action Plan from 2014 furthermore laid out the Vision Zero program, where every department was ascribed a set of more or less detailed solutions. There seemed to be a clear image of what a Vision Zero program should contain, and references are made to some of the pioneers in the world and in the USA. Nonetheless, the program still rests on quite traditional road safety aspects such as the three Es (enforcement, education, and engineering).

Vision Zero programs combine strong enforcement and better roadway engineering with improved emergency response and high visibility behavior campaigns to discourage dangerous behavior on roads and streets. In addition, Vision Zero-style policies raise the profile of traffic safety problems and help transform cultural attitudes toward traffic death and injury. Rather than accepting traffic fatalities as accidents, Vision Zero allows us – government agencies, industry groups, key transportation stakeholders and the public alike – to understand

traffic crashes as the result of a series of actions that can be changed or prevented through enforcement, education, and design. (New York City, Vision Zero Action Plan 2014, p. 9)

The program presented in the action plan concentrated on law enforcement, legislation, street design, city government practices, and dialogue and outreach. The program contained 64 specific measures related to each department working with road safety. It is an ambitious program, and all the measures were to be followed up by the Vision Zero task force (City of New York 2014).

Looking at the recommendations from Transportation Alternatives prior to the adoption of Vision Zero, the solutions and measures suggested are fairly similar to those in the action plan. The focus of the solutions suggested by the Transportation Alternatives is on the ethical aspects of Vision Zero, involving the public in various forms, partnering with the private sector, redesigning streets, speeding, and speed cameras, as well as reaffirming the key role of the Department of Transportation. Another key part of their suggestion for a Vision Zero program was the formation of stakeholder groups and coordination between all relevant city administration units. Transportation Alternatives called for an establishment of:

a hierarchy of new executive committees and working groups within city government to coordinate street safety initiatives across departments and agencies. These groups should include all city departments that have a stake in eliminating traffic fatalities and injuries. (Transportation Alternatives 2011, p. 41)

What differs is that the measures suggested by the Transportation Alternatives are less focused on the behavior of the road user.

When analyzing how the Vision Zero program is described in more recent years by the city administration, the difference is quite striking. The description of the Vision Zero program is more focused, as many of the earlier measures and reforms are in place. The focus is on collaboration through the Vision Zero task force, data-driven solutions, community outreach, and action plans directed at specific groups of road users (New York City, Year 5 report 2019a).

As mentioned earlier, one significant difference of the New York City Vision Zero as compared to the Swedish Vision Zero is the focus in the program on community outreach, education, and campaigns, although there are shifting opinions also in Sweden about the usefulness of campaigns. It is interesting to note that several of the respondents did not see this perspective as something that will directly correlate with lowering the number of deaths and serious injuries at least not in the short run, but that this kind of measure will hopefully create a common interest and a common safety culture which is important in a long-term perspective.

The current situation in New York has naturally been affected by the Corona pandemic, which has left an unwanted mark on communication patterns and on road traffic safety, as cars are more frequent in the current situation (Transportation Alternatives 2020; Gelinas 2020). The Vision Zero program has not come to a halt, but the respondents interviewed during the pandemic state that the financial situation is problematic and that planned measures will have to wait (City Administration 4 & 5). As the Vision Zero program depends on constant systematic

improvements, the road ahead is quite bumpy. In addition, the Vision Zero program has been criticized for not taking equity issues into account, and as social inequality is a major political issue right now, this is a growing discussion in relation to road safety measures (see chapter on criticism of Vision Zero). The city administration has been accused of allowing discriminatory structures of police enforcement to find their way into the Vision Zero policy and of targeting specific groups with manual enforcement through racial profiling. The city administration is also accused of not taking appropriate road safety measures in poorer neighborhoods (Research 1, 2019). The response from the city administration to these concerns is that they are cautious not to reproduce structural discrimination, and that the data-driven approach is neutral in this respect, and lead road safety work to the locations where crashes take place. This creates an opportunity to switch from manual enforcement to automatic enforcement (City Administration 6, 2020).

It is also important to mention that the progress in the Vision Zero policy program is also dependent on good cooperation with the state legislature which controls important statewide policies such as the permissibility of speed cameras. It is also vital to have a good cooperation with the federal government regarding national priorities and norms.

It is difficult because sometimes we rely on the data that is captured by New York State. And if we do not have access to that or we do not have a representative from the state, that makes our lives a lot more difficult. Policy-wise, speed cameras are very reliant on what legislators pass at the state level and if we do not have that understanding, then basically the whole speed camera program dies. (City Administration 8)

There are of course many more current programs and measures in place that could and should get more attention, but these fall outside the frame of this chapter and will be addressed by the project in other publications. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the adoption process. To sum up, there are many measures frequently mentioned in both text and in the interviews, and we have already mentioned the safety camera program which is seen as a both cost-efficient measure and a more equitable solution than physical enforcement. The New York City administration has been working intensively with updating the safety of its own fleet (New York City, Citywide Administrative Services 2021) often entailing quite complicated negotiations with the vehicle industry. One respondent used the following example to describe the challenge: “When Volvo sells a truck in England or Sweden it has a sideguard. When they sell that same truck in the United States, they take it off” (City Administration, 4). Other often mentioned measures include prioritized bus lanes especially on major arteries in Manhattan and protected bike lanes.

Program Entrepreneurs

The Vision Zero program presented by the city administration in its action plan from 2014 shows great similarities with reports and statements from NGOs advocating for the adoption of Vision Zero. Creating a convincing and full program is one way for

the city to gather support for Vision Zero. The main actor, working with the first action plan, was City Hall in collaboration with other city departments. The Department of Transportation was and is still a central actor in transforming policy into implementable measures and solutions. The respondents in the study also specifically highlighted the role of the former Transportation Commissioners Janette Sadik-Khan and Polly Trottenberg. The action plan from 2014 was related to the political platform of the new political administration, and looking at the yearly reports from city, it is evident that the Vision Zero program is constantly evolving. Collaboration and coordination among the large number of stakeholders, especially through the Vision Zero task force, have become a key feature. This organizational structure has also been exported to several other Vision Zero cities in the USA. We must not forget the role of NGOs such as Transportation Alternatives, Families for Safe Streets, organizations working with sustainability and research, and others, constantly challenging the city administration to do better as they ask for more Vision Zero, not less.

Analysis and Conclusions

As New York City already had road safety policies in place at the time of the adoption of Vision Zero in 2014, the question is what kind of policy change did we witness here? Was it an incremental change or something more profound, even paradigmatic? The change from a more traditional view of blaming the reckless driver to focusing more on street design and vehicle safety can be seen as a substantial change, at least in road safety philosophy. At the same time, there is still quite a lot of attention given to the recklessness of individual road users.

Problem Stream

Analyzing the framing and the construction of the road safety problem in New York City prior to the introduction of Vision Zero, it is evident that no actors found the number of fatalities and seriously injured acceptable. This was further strengthened by the deaths of several children in traffic crashes in conjunction with the period of the mayoral election. There was an opportunity to put the problem onto the agenda by both NGOs, politicians, and private citizens, and particularly by organizations such as Transportation Alternatives, who made sure that the issue was not forgotten. At the same time, there was public awareness of road safety problems, which made it easier to gain acceptance for prioritizing road safety.

Policy Stream

The Vision Zero policy had been promoted for many years by various NGOs, including bicyclist organizations, organizations working with sustainability, and organizations working towards a car-free society, and as road safety was already on the agenda, there was an opportunity to bring a new policy onto the table. Vision

Zero was described as a best practice with an ethical profile matching the description of the problem. As the policy was picked up by politicians, a translation took place to fit into the context. The initial focus on enforcement and drivers' behavior is a deviation from the Swedish Vision Zero but could be interpreted as a way to get acceptance for a shift to a new road safety philosophy. The process of formulating the policy was not connected to conflict, although there were critical voices.

Political Stream

The mayoral election in 2013 turned out to be a game changer for road traffic safety and an opportunity to promote an urgent problem as well as the solution. In more theoretical terms, the "political mood" was right, and there was an opportunity to make a strong emotional appeal. Being the mayor who would push the numbers down to zero is naturally appealing. In a progressive and liberal city, it did not hurt to partner with strong NGOs with a lot of expertise, not only about road traffic safety but also how to connect road safety to other aspects such as sustainability. To sum up, the political opportunity was there to promote the problem framing and the solution, as well as a broad coalition favoring Vision Zero.

Program Stream

The final question is whether Vision Zero was also accompanied by a convincing policy program. The Vision Zero Action Plan from 2014 presented a comprehensive program based on shared responsibility. A Vision Zero task force was to be created involving a large number of city administration departments and units. Every department received their list of responsibilities, and the program was more or less guided by the three Es – engineering, education, and enforcement. This rather traditional road safety program was combined with the ethical perspective of zero. The program presented was not aligned completely with suggestions from NGOs, but some of the key aspects, such as collaborative governance structures and redesigning the streets, were similar. The differences in program approach did not cause major disagreements, and perhaps one explanation is that programs can be changed, adapted, and modified as the process advances. We have seen that the program has changed over the years to adjust to new insights and work modes (New York City [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019b](#), [2020a](#)). The question here is whether we needed to add a program stream to understand the policy change. The answer is yes. In order to credibly promote a certain problem framing and a solution to that problem, there is a need for concretization. Inclusion of a program stream in this analysis reveals that the program presented by the city was convincing enough for that window to remain open.

Discussion

As New York City was considered a quite safe city in a US perspective in terms of traffic crashes, why was it necessary to change its road safety policy? This chapter has concluded that the number of fatalities and seriously injured was not acceptable to any of the actors working with road safety. NGOs focusing on transportation issues provided a platform for emotional stories of grief that had an impact on the view of the problem. Another explanation is that New York City, despite its low number of fatalities in a national perspective, was far behind other similar big cities in the developed world. This was possibly a motivation.

What Kind of Vision Zero?

Various NGOs and city administrative units had been searching for new methods, programs, and innovative ideas on how to make progress. Vision Zero was promoted mainly by NGOs such as Transportation Alternatives and was backed by considerable knowledge and a policy formulation. The impressive record of the Swedish Vision Zero policy program was used as an argument for change. The Vision Zero policy in New York City was and is not exactly the same as the Swedish version, but was translated to fit the New York context, and there is a growing convergence as well as constant exchange.

Vision Zero originated in Sweden in the 1990s, and the country remains a model for progress in traffic safety and the administration of Vision Zero initiatives. Over the years, Sweden has evaluated its progress in a way that serves to guide other nations and cities pursuing the goal of zero traffic deaths and serious injuries. (City of New York 2020, p. 22)

Politicians, particularly the Democratic majority, joined with NGOs and administrative units to adopt Vision Zero. The NGOs are today constantly working to promote more road safety measures, and they continue to call for more Vision Zero, not less. But they argue that Vision Zero has to be based on principles of equity, which is a growing concern among many NGOs. The link between the NGOs and the administration is facilitated by a movement of personnel between the two and reinforces mutual understanding.

The New York City Vision Zero policy program, based on a new road safety organizational approach, along with new goal-setting strategies and solutions, adds clarity to how the policy is to be implemented. The structure of the efforts has been praised by many NGOs, but at the same time, the measures are constantly scrutinized and evaluated. For instance, Transportation Alternatives publishes on a regular basis a report card where the key organizations are evaluated based on their performance and on how they work with the Vision Zero program.

Learning from a Big City Experience

What can we learn from the case of policy change in the New York City road safety program? One apparent aspect is the role of the civil society in promoting new ideas, in creating knowledge and expertise, and persistently holding public authorities accountable. This strategy can lead to both productive collaborations and constant improvements. Another interesting aspect is the construction of a constantly developing collaborative structure within the administration – the Vision Zero task force. Its organization and work modes are undoubtedly something to learn from when aspiring to adopt Vision Zero or other long-term policy commitments. This is one key aspect in the discussions among Vision Zero cities (c.f. Vision Zero Network 2020).

New York City is unique, and the Vision Zero journey of this big city has just begun, particularly in relation to the long-term ambition of reaching zero. This will not be done quickly, and reaching zero by 2023, as was an aspiration in the beginning of the process, is quite impossible. Vision Zero, like other road safety measures, demands patience and can be regarded as a wicked problem in several aspects. Vision Zero also requires a robust system of dedicated actors as well as a comprehensive program. The cultural differences between the various contexts where Vision Zero is adopted are necessary to take into account. The question is whether the New York City Vision Zero will be less effective by focusing more on law enforcement, outreach, and education than the original Swedish version. Time will tell what will be deemed the most efficient ways to work with Vision Zero, and the diffusion process will provide more and more cases to study. Maybe these new cases will provide new ideas and solutions further developing the original policy.

Cross-References

- [Adoption of Safe Systems in the United States](#)
- [Arguments Against Vision Zero: A Literature Review](#)

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