

DESIGNING SAFER STREETS

Seattle's streets are getting safer. Over the past 10 years, the number of crashes has decreased 27 percent. This decline is great news, but even one crash is too many. Each one represents a personal, family, and community tragedy. With a goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2030, we are being proactive and redesigning our streets to make them safer and more complete for all users.

A Complete Street approach

Complete Streets is a design goal for all SDOT projects. It is a comprehensive review of safety, how a street functions and the quality of the streetscape (trees, street furniture, etc.).

On busier streets, one way to improve safety and keep traffic moving—is to turn a four-lane street into a two-lane street with a center turn lane. It also opens up space, providing opportunities for bike lanes, landscaping, widen sidewalks or more efficient transit. This type of design usually works well on streets with around 25,000 cars or less a day.

What are the benefits?

It might seem like changing the number of lanes would mean fewer cars could use the street, or that more congestion might occur. However, creating a turn lane in the middle allows vehicles to turn without blocking traffic; adding bike lanes creates more predictability; and a single lane of traffic helps manage drivers cutting in and out of lanes.



Other benefits to this type of change include:

Safer Streets for All. People drive closer to the speed limit. This is especially critical for people walking, traveling in a wheelchair, and riding a bike, as well as other drivers. When motorists move at slower speeds, they're better able to stop and prevent a crash.

Easier to Cross Streets. When people cross streets with four lanes they encounter a 'double threat.' This is caused by drivers in the inside lanes not seeing them. Redesigning the streets to two lanes makes it easier to cross.

Improved Bus and Freight Movement. Changing the road to two lanes usually means lanes can be a little bit wider. This makes it easier for freight and buses to travel.

Easier to Walk and Bike. Having a little extra road space means bike lanes or wider sidewalks may become an option. The more people are able to walk and bike the closer we are to being the walkable, livable city Seattleites want.



The results

The City of Seattle has transformed 36 different roads since 1972. We can confidently say that not only does redesigning our streets make them safer, but it keeps people and goods moving. The Federal Highway Administration agrees. A 2010 study looked at 30 redesigned streets in Washington and California and determined there was a 19 percent reduction in collision rate.

Seattle evaluates complete street projects about a year after changes are made to confirm they're working well. Here is a sample of results from recent projects:

