



January 14, 2022

Lisa Judge, Inspector General
Office of Inspector General
PO Box 94764
Seattle, WA 98124-7064

Inspector General Judge:

First, I want to thank you for the on-going collaborative approach your office has brought to the Seattle Police Department. You and your team have proven to be engaged thought partners in how to improve public safety in Seattle, with a focus on equity and effectiveness. It is an example of how government and oversight can and should work.

As I stated in my prior letter on this topic, my interest concerning the traffic code is, and continues to be, rooted in concerns for public safety. I noted that SPD has been a partner with SDOT in advancing Vision Zero, and that we know that the “education” and “enforcement” prongs of the “E’s” of traffic safety are critical components of that initiative. Following our initial discussions, we reached consensus on de-prioritizing non-criminal, low-risk public safety traffic violations. We mutually agreed the best path forward was to convene a multi-disciplinary working group to ensure any changes made to enforcement policies were informed by as many perspectives as possible. As you note in your letter, SPD now records traffic stops in our records management system, which will provide better data, allow greater transparency, and drive evidence-based insight into those officer activities.

Your office assembled a cross section of our community — members of the SPD, the Seattle Department of Transportation, elected officials, the federal monitoring team, the Seattle Office of Police Accountability, public and private lawyers, and others — to come together to analyze data; city, county and state ordinances; and emerging reforms in other cities. I sincerely thank those stakeholders for their involvement and insight. This group reached consensus on a number of potential changes.

Overall, I am in complete agreement with the consensus recommendations and the need to de-prioritize low-risk public safety violations. While discussions will continue as we work through the traffic code, the Seattle Police Department will no longer treat the following violations as primary reasons to engage in a traffic stop:

- Expired or missing vehicle registration. *License tabs expired.* (Title: License and plates required) – SMC 11.22.070
- Issues with the display of registration plates. *No front license plate, a vehicle must have a rear license plate.* (Title: Vehicle license plates displayed) – SMC 11.22.080

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- Technical violations of SMC 11.84.140, such as items hanging from the rear-view mirror and cracks in the windshield. *Actual visual obstruction, such as snow, fog, non-transparent material, or shattered windshields, will be enforced.* (Title: Windshield obstruction) – SMC 11.84.140
- Bicycle helmet violations (KCHC 9.10.)¹.

These violations do not have a direct connection to the safety of other individuals on the roads, paths, or sidewalks. We know there are also reasons for concern that these violations may disproportionately fall on those who are unable to meet the financial requirements set forth by law. We also know there are ordinances behind each of these for a reason, which is why they can still be enforced, if there was another primary violation.²

The group also recommended ceasing primary enforcement for *all* equipment violations. I support this recommendation in principle, but only if there are viable options to address the equipment violation. For pedestrian and driver safety, we cannot allow vehicles with safety equipment issues to just remain in that status. SPD is working with others to identify a way for individuals to get safety equipment issues fixed, even when they cannot afford to do so.

I know, together, and with current and additional stakeholders, we will critically examine additional violations for consideration. I trust the same process will be in place to help ensure good intentions do not produce unintended consequences.

Thank you, your team, and the working group, again for the commitment to this work. I and the entire SPD remain strong partners in the work to meet the public safety needs of this city in a fair, equitable and effective way.

Sincerely,



Adrian Z. Diaz
Chief of Police
Seattle Police Department

¹ This Board of Health Code is being considered for repeal.

² The Department will refer a recommendation to the Seattle Office of Intergovernmental Relations to pursue amendment of RCW 46.37.410 to fully remove items hanging from the rear-view mirror as a citable offense and recommends that the Seattle City Council clarify SMC 11.84.140 similarly.