



Seattle Office of
Inspector General

Safer Traffic Enforcement Workgroup:

Phase II Memorandum and Recommendations

December 11, 2023

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Safer traffic enforcement workgroup— phase II summary of work

The work described in this memo builds upon OIG efforts since 2021 to address concerns around low-level traffic enforcement by the Seattle Police Department (SPD).¹ This second phase of work continued a process of stakeholder engagement to foster conversations about ways to reduce potential harm and danger associated with traffic stops, and to generate recommendations that focus enforcement efforts on legitimate public safety issues.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) held the following series of meetings between July and September 2023 to discuss traffic enforcement in Seattle and possible recommendations for SPD policy:

- July 27, 2023: Traffic Stops Overview
- August 10, 2023: Increasing Compliance
- August 25, 2023: Data Collection
- September 7, 2023: Deprioritization

On October 5, 2023, OIG convened stakeholders for a roundtable discussion to coalesce the small group sessions and generate recommendations in those areas for SPD and City Council to create safer interactions for officers and the community. The meeting was facilitated by Anjelica Hendricks, professor and postdoctoral fellow at University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School.²

The stakeholder group involved in this initial stage of work included a wide range of individuals and organizations from the following (some in their individual or organizational capacity, as participants or observers):

- Fines and Fees Justice Center
- Seattle Department of Transportation
- Seattle Police Department
- Seattle Office for Civil Rights
- Vera Institute of Justice
- ACLU – Washington
- Seattle City Council
- University of Washington
- Community Police Commission

Roundtable participants discussed data collection, deprioritization of low-level traffic offenses, and non-enforcement alternatives for equipment violations.

1 [Diaz Request to Deprioritize First Phase Violations 1 9 22.pdf \(seattle.gov\)](#)

2 [Anjelica Hendricks • Faculty • Penn Carey Law \(upenn.edu\)](#)



Data collection

Participants discussed the long-term objectives for traffic stops data collection. Suggestions included: ensuring consistency of data, evaluating outcomes and compliance with current policies, and directing future policy. To achieve these goals, participants noted the importance of thorough and consistent documentation and the need for additional reporting requirements.

Issues related to SPD data collection and access to data were also discussed. SPD documents traffic stops in two ways. Most officers use paper tickets sent to Seattle Municipal Court for processing; a smaller number of officers use the electronic SECTOR system. SPD currently does not have access to paper ticket information as it is currently Seattle Municipal Court data, and roundtable participants underscored the importance of gaining access to this data for analysis and accountability. SPD is currently working on a process to access this data.

Deprioritization

Using a procedural justice framework, roundtable participants identified traffic offenses that drivers might be unaware of or may not be perceived by the public as legitimate safety concerns. Suggestions included tinting regulations³ and traveling over 300 feet in two-way left turn lanes.⁴ Certain roundtable participants indicated support for a general deemphasis on ticketing for equipment violations, noting these violations are best addressed through non-punitive measures designed to correct problems. Participants highlighted a provision in the proposed Traffic Safety for All bill (House Bill 1513 and Senate Bill 5572) at the Washington State Legislature allowing officers to conduct primary stops for equipment violations impacting roadway safety, noting the benefit of a similar policy in Seattle.⁵

Non-punitive enforcement remedies for commonly cited traffic offenses were also discussed. Participants suggested SPD work with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) to implement road improvements aimed at limiting unsafe driving (i.e., adding speed bumps to roads where speeding is common), issuing warrants by mail, and investing in a community grant fund.⁶

Grant fund

Roundtable participants expressed the importance of increasing compliance with equipment regulations through non-enforcement mechanisms. To address the undue impact of fines and fees on low-income drivers, stakeholders at the small group discussion recommended SPD and the City of Seattle implement programs to offer vouchers, education, and fee-offset.

- The voucher program would make equipment repairs affordable for all drivers by providing financial assistance for parts and repairs at participating businesses. Vouchers would be issued in two ways. Drivers would have the option to request vouchers, or vouchers could be issued by mail to the address associated with a vehicle's license plate.
- The education program would include courses to educate drivers on equipment regulations and local resources and offer workshops for repairing minor equipment violations.
- The fee-offset program would aim to mitigate debt-based license suspension resulting from failure to pay traffic tickets by providing fee-offsets for vehicle registration costs and license renewal fees.

3 [RCW 46.37.430: Safety glazing—Sunscreening or coloring. \(wa.gov\)](#)

4 [RCW 46.61.290: Required position and method of turning at intersections. \(wa.gov\)](#)

5 [HB 1513 - Washington State Legislature](#)

6 See, for example, SDOT's [Neighborhood Street Fund](#) (NSF) program. Since 2007, NSF has provided communities with the opportunity to propose and help prioritize transportation-related projects in their neighborhoods. The improvements in the 2022-2024 cycle are focused in geographic equity areas of the city and include new sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, bike connections, and intersection safety improvements.



The 2023-2024 Proposed Mid-Biennial Budget Adjustments was published on September 26, 2023, and did not include appropriations for the purposes identified above. Council is currently drafting a Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) to be included in the mid-Biennial Budget adjustments. The SLI will request the City form an interdepartmental workgroup to design an implementation plan for OIG grant fund recommendations if funding were provided in a future budget.

For more information, see the Grant Fund recommendations below.

Recommendations

The OIG and stakeholders worked together over a series of small group sessions and a roundtable to generate recommendations. These recommendations will hopefully create policy changes that will better serve the public and address systemic issues which lead to adverse and harmful outcomes for marginalized people. OIG will track the implementation of these, and past traffic stops recommendations. They are grouped by topic below.

Data collection

Based on stakeholder input at the small group discussion and the final roundtable, OIG recommendations for data collection center on defining a process for SPD to access SMC traffic citation data and to better document traffic stops moving forward. Specific recommendations include:

1. SPD should continue to work with SMC to obtain data on past traffic citations, including driver demographic information, vehicle description, stop location, and all actions associated with the stop.
2. SPD should continue to create and implement a process to allow ongoing access to SMC data for consistent data collection and analysis.
3. SPD should implement a standard electronic data collection process for all officers.
4. SPD should include the following metrics in traffic stops reporting:⁷
 - Make, model, and year of vehicle
 - Perceived demographic information of driver
 - Initial reason for stop
 - Duration of stop
 - Stop interactions, including:
 - Vehicle exits
 - Consent search requested and/or conducted
 - Contraband seized and relevant quantity
 - Handcuffing
 - Arrests
 - Primary and secondary offenses cited

⁷ This recommendation is based on best practices from other jurisdictions, the proposed *Traffic Safety for All* bill, and SPD Terry stop documentation.



Deprioritization

OIG compiled the following recommendations based on stakeholder input at the August 25 meeting and the final roundtable.

5. In line with the Traffic Safety for All bill, SPD should deprioritize certain non-safety related equipment violations (SMC 11.8) in favor of non-punitive solutions (see Grant Fund recommendations below).⁸ Officers may still conduct primary stops for equipment violations with a nexus to safety. SPD 16.232-POL should be updated to reflect this change.⁹
 - SPD should consider partnering with SDOT to innovate and implement street design improvements and other non-enforcement remedies for common traffic safety issues.
6. SPD should communicate traffic enforcement priorities to officers. SPD should consider focusing on categories of offenses to emphasize or deemphasize, rather than a list of specific offenses.
7. SPD should consider obtaining staff feedback to identify additional traffic violations or categories of violations to deemphasize.¹⁰

Grant fund

Stakeholders at the small group discussion recommended Seattle City Council include appropriations for a grant program in the budget to fund education and repairs for Seattle drivers, specific recommendations include:

8. Council should include appropriations for the implementation of a two-part grant fund. A two-part system will be both proactive and reactive and will be able to address the needs of the community:
 - **Proactive:** The proactive arm of the grant fund would provide for education for drivers regarding equipment regulations and simple repairs. It would also provide for “opt-in” equipment vouchers.
 - ▶ Council should consider including funding for repair workshops in partnership with local auto repair businesses and community college automotive technology programs.
 - ▶ Council should consider including funding for courses educating Seattle drivers on equipment regulations and local assistance programs. These courses should be accessible to all Seattle drivers. Council should also consider mandating the inclusion of equipment regulations and local assistance programs in driver’s education courses for new drivers.
 - ▶ Council should consider including funding for an “opt-in” voucher program allowing drivers to proactively request equipment repair vouchers rather than risking an SPD contact.
 - **Reactive:** The reactive arm of the grant fund would provide financial assistance for drivers with equipment violations to reduce debt from ticketing fines and fees.
 - ▶ Council should consider including funding for repair vouchers to replace tickets for equipment violations.
 - ▶ Council should consider partnering with community-based organizations engaged in anti-poverty work and with City agencies offering income-based subsidies to issue vouchers to low-income drivers.

8 [SMC Title 11 Part 8](#)

9 [16.232 - Traffic Stops](#)

10 [Exnovation vs. Innovation \(medium.com\)](#)



- ▶ Council should consider including funding for a financial assistance program to address debt-based license suspension through waivers for registration and license renewal fees.

9. Council should consider the most suitable entity under which to house the grant fund:

- The proposed *Traffic Safety for All* bill at the Washington State Legislature houses the grant fund under WDOT.¹¹ Council should consider whether SDOT has capacity to administer the grant fund.
- The City of Seattle has many programs for debt assistance. Council should identify whether any of these programs could incorporate the grant fund.

10. Council should consider including funding for a voucher system in the grant fund appropriations:

- Funding may be used to support the purchase of technologies capable of issuing warnings and vouchers to the address associated with a vehicle's plate.
- Alternatively, the funding could be used to hire additional personnel at the Community Safety and Communications Center (CSCC) to issue vouchers at the request of SPD officers.

Conclusion

OIG conducted meetings with a diverse set of stakeholders to address safer traffic enforcement in Seattle. The meetings resulted in 10 recommendations aimed at enhancing roadway safety for Seattle drivers by improving data collection and analysis, deprioritizing low-level offenses, and increasing compliance with equipment regulations. OIG will continue working with SPD, City Council, and other stakeholders to support implementation of the recommendations. This will include continued partnership with SPD to ensure access to reliable traffic stops data and comprehensive data analysis, work with City Council and other City departments to coordinate grant funding for equipment violations, and continuous review of traffic stop deprioritization efforts in other jurisdictions.