



27 March 2024

Re: The recent killing of a 4-year old child by a vehicle in Boston's Seaport

It was heart-breaking news that we heard of the death of a 4 year old girl, who was out with her family, in the Seaport district on Sunday evening. She was struck and killed by an F150 truck on the junction of Congress and Sleeper streets.

As the circumstances around the death remain under investigation, we do not know the causes of the lethal incident, and in many ways at this very moment, it does not matter: what matters is that it happened at all.

No one gets into their vehicle with the intent of killing another human being, yet this happens too often (approx. 40,000 times a year in the US alone), but these deaths on our roads (especially in cities) can be attributed to just a few contributing factors:
A lack of safe street design, aggressive vehicle design, and poor/distracted driving.

Taken together these factors are creating a deadly cocktail on our roads, and we should be saying "Enough is Enough".

If it was your 4 year old child, how would you be feeling today?

That it is not your child, should not lessen that feeling.

The first step in preventing any more of these road deaths, and moving towards VisionZero (remember that?) is the implementation of Safe Streets.

Safe Streets are safe for every road user, including vulnerable road users, and not just vehicle drivers, and the creation of Safe Streets is something that the City of Boston is directly able to control.

Safe Street design within the City of Boston simply needs to happen more quickly. We applauded Mayor Wu's Safety Surge, which started in 2023, but this death highlights that it cannot happen fast enough. Do we need to wait for a small child to be killed in every neighborhood or on every street in Boston, before they are implemented everywhere?

Speed is a major issue determining safety on our streets, and ultimately, the outcome of a collision between a pedestrian. We all know and see that speed limits are neither followed nor

enforced in the City, but excess speed is also encouraged by the lack of Safe Street design. In other words, we cannot just rely on the good nature of our neighbours to adhere to speed limits.

Safe streets require that drivers pay active attention to their driving, their surroundings, and regulate their speed accordingly. Simple, relatively inexpensive and passive measures which can be built retroactively on streets include, speed humps (which have been somewhat of a success in Roslindale), raised crosswalks, central street islands, and small chicanes or curb extensions, all of which breakup the straight (and speed-inducing) nature of our city streets.

One aspect that the City of Boston cannot control is the increasing size and aggressive design of vehicles being purchased in the US market¹. These larger pick-up trucks and SUVs are causing more environmental damage (and its associated health issues) as well as becoming more dangerous to other road users (both those in other vehicles and vulnerable road users!). Their aggressive design insulates drivers, severely reduces visibility from the driver's seat², and because of raised hoods makes them more deadly to other road users in an incident^{3,4,5}. Shockingly, these trucks and SUVs are now only a few inches away from the size of the US Army tanks which were used to defeat Nazi Germany in World War 2⁶.

These non-commercial vehicles do not fit in Boston, and should not be allowed to continue to endanger every other road or sidewalk user.

Other cities across the world have implemented restrictions on such vehicles for non-commercial use, be it complete bans (Paris) or Time-based or Fee-Based Zones based on vehicle weight/engine size (Florence, London), and Boston needs to consider this approach as a tool, in addition to creating Safer Slower Streets, to help control this increasing danger to all road users.

Currently the use of these excessively sized non-commercial vehicles is killing us and our children in a double-whammy: their increased emissions and their lethality on the streets.

We know how to control both aspects, and it is about time that we say "Enough is Enough".

Sincerely,

WalkUP Roslindale Board of Directors

About WalkUP Roslindale

WalkUP Roslindale, which takes its name from the international movement to foster "Walkable Urban Places," is a collaborative group of residents dedicated to making Roslindale the most walkable neighborhood in Boston. We advocate for a dynamic, livable streetscape and we support positive changes to our public and private built environment that strengthen walkability and other forms of active mobility as means toward better personal and public health, safety, social capital, economic development, and environmental sustainability. We are led by a steering group of about thirty residents and have nearly 1,000 additional supporters. More information about WalkUP Roslindale and our initiatives can be found at www.walkuproslindale.org.

We recognize that no single group of people can be said to speak for our entire neighborhood – instead, please take these comments as representing the collective support of our steering group members resulting from our mission and principles.

References:

- 1) <https://jalopnik.com/trucks-and-suvs-are-now-over-80-percent-of-new-car-sale-1848427797>
- 2) <https://www.consumerreports.org/cars/car-safety/the-hidden-danger-of-big-pickup-trucks-a9662450602/>
- 3) <https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/14/23960624/truck-suv-hood-height-pedestrian-death-report-ihs>
- 4) <https://theconversation.com/ever-larger-cars-and-trucks-are-causing-a-safety-crisis-on-us-streets-heres-how-communities-can-fight-back-206382>
- 5) <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240207-are-cars-getting-too-big-for-the-road>
- 6) <https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkboxzg/american-cars-are-now-almost-as-big-as-the-tanks-that-won-wwii>