

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: April 24, 2025

PREPARED BY: Chris Gerry, Senior Project Manager

SUBJECT: STUDY SESSION: PALM DESERT VISION ZERO STRATEGY

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive and file presentation on the Palm Desert Zero Vision Strategy.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

Federal Grant Program:

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Transportation began a new grant program known as Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A). This federal discretionary program was appropriated with \$5 billion over a five-year period (2022 to 2026). The SS4A Program funds initiatives to prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries.

The SS4A Program divides into two types of grants: Planning and Implementation grants. Planning grants provide funds to develop or supplement a safety action plan. Implementation grants provide funds to implement projects and strategies identified in Planning grants to address roadway safety problems. Applicants are only eligible to apply for Implementation grants following the award and implementation of Planning grants.

As part of this effort, the City of Palm Desert (City) was awarded an SS4A Planning Grant to develop the Palm Desert Vision Zero Strategy, including two key plans: (1) Safe Routes to School and (2) Safe Routes for Older Adults. Both plans evaluate pedestrian and bicycle conditions within a half-mile radius around strategic areas to identify opportunities for safety and mobility improvements.

This study session provides an overview of the Vision Zero Strategy and its key components. Staff will return to the City Council on May 22, 2025, with a resolution for adoption and the final draft versions of both plans. Councilmembers are encouraged to share any comments or suggested revisions prior to that date. The Planning Grant remains on schedule and within budget, with all grant activities required to be completed by the close-out deadline of July 31, 2025.

Grant Award and Activities:

In September 2022, the City submitted an SS4A Planning grant application for the Vision Zero Strategy to conduct planning and public engagement efforts aimed at reducing local roadway fatalities and injuries. The City's application requested \$970,000, including a \$250,000 non-federal share (local match). In July 2023, the City was awarded the full SS4A Planning Grant to develop the strategy, including the following elements:

- Safe Routes to Schools Plan: The plan provides a framework for improving safety and access for students walking or biking to school by identifying both infrastructure and programmatic strategies. It focuses on the areas within a half-mile radius of eight public schools serving Palm Desert students, assessing pedestrian and bicyclist conditions that may affect safe travel. The analysis considers school access patterns, roadway characteristics, traffic volumes, and collision history, with particular attention to student drop-off and pick-up periods. Community outreach played a key role in informing the assessment and shaping the resulting recommendations, which include site-specific improvements and non-infrastructure strategies related to education, encouragement, and school-based safety programs.
- Safe Routes for Older Adults Plan: The plan provides a framework for improving mobility and safety for older adults by identifying barriers and opportunities related to walking, bicycling, and street crossings in areas commonly accessed by older adults. It focuses on three study areas, each defined by a half-mile radius around key destinations for older adults, to reflect the typical walking distances for aging residents. The assessment evaluates pedestrian infrastructure, roadway conditions, and accessibility challenges, incorporating factors such as sidewalk continuity, intersection design, traffic speeds, and signal timing. Community input again shaped the evaluation and informed the development of targeted recommendations, which include infrastructure improvements and supportive strategies designed to improve safety, comfort, and confidence for older adult travelers.
- Public Engagement and Activation: Public engagement funding supported the launch of the *Very Important Pedestrian (VIP)* campaign, a locally branded initiative focused on improving pedestrian safety across Palm Desert. A professionally produced public service announcement filmed on El Paseo served as the foundation for the campaign's visual identity and messaging. The campaign aimed to raise awareness about safe pedestrian crossings at marked crosswalks and to encourage lower vehicle speeds around pedestrians. Supporting marketing materials were developed around the video and deployed citywide to reinforce safety messaging and promote active transportation.
- Investment Strategy: The Investment Strategy serves as an administrative tool that presents a flexible menu of infrastructure and programmatic options aligned with the goals of Vision Zero. Designed to support future grant applications – particularly SS4A Implementation Grants – it consolidates potential projects identified through the planning process and related documents. Rather than prescribing a fixed capital plan, the strategy is structured to adapt based on evolving grant criteria, funding availability, and community needs. Projects were evaluated and prioritized based on their potential to enhance safety, their technical feasibility, and their alignment with federal and state funding priorities.
- Dashboard and Monitoring Tool: This tool provides a centralized platform for presenting data related to roadway conditions, crash severity, and high-injury locations within Palm Desert. It outlines the purpose of the strategy, identifies the City's high-injury network, and summarizes crashes by type and severity. The dashboard also includes a toolbox of countermeasures and strategies developed through the planning process.

- **Project Administration:** Project administration funds supported City efforts to manage the grant, coordinate consultant activities, ensure federal compliance, and cover general overhead costs associated with project delivery.

Consultant Selection:

To implement the work outlined in the grant, the City released a Request for Proposal (RFP) in September 2023 and received three proposals by the submission deadline in November 2023. The City awarded a professional services agreement in January 2024 to Alta Planning + Design, Inc., in the amount of \$948,920. Alta was selected for their demonstrated experience with similar projects and their strong approach to public engagement. Their proposal also addressed the City’s request to include professional marketing and creative services to support the public engagement and activation campaign. The contract amount is consistent with the funding awarded through the Planning grant as well.

Future Grant Application:

Completion of the Planning Grant positions the City to pursue an Implementation Grant to support construction and programmatic initiatives outlined in the strategy. The next application deadline is in late June 2025, and the Planning grant deliverables must be approved by the City Council prior to submission. Staff will work with the Active Transportation Plan Subcommittee to review the scope of the application and prioritize eligible projects. For this upcoming cycle, \$580 million in federal funding is available, with an estimated 40 to 70 awards expected, ranging from \$2.5 million to \$25 million.

Legal Review:

This report has been reviewed by the City Attorney’s Office.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no direct financial impact resulting from this study session.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Safe Routes to School Plan
2. Safe Routes for Older Adults Plan