

PORTLAND COMMUTING

'Time to slow down': Portland to blanket city with Vision Zero ad campaign

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Portland is debuting a new advertising campaign that will blanket the city with striking ads urging drivers to slow down. (Courtesy of PBOT)

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The Oregonian/OregonLive

Starting this month, Portlanders will see dozens of new billboards and advertisements plastered on the sides of buses across town urging drivers to slow down.

Television viewers will see a striking black-and-white, 30-second commercial with two people suspended in the air in slow motion, with purses, shoes and drinks floating through the air and chaotic sounds of brake. The stripped-down commercial shows a driver holding a wheel, but no vehicle.

The advertisement campaign, which Portland is calling "Struck," is built on the theme that two lives are fundamentally altered when a driver strikes a pedestrian or cyclist. The commercial ends with a narrator saying, "It's time to slow down, Portland."

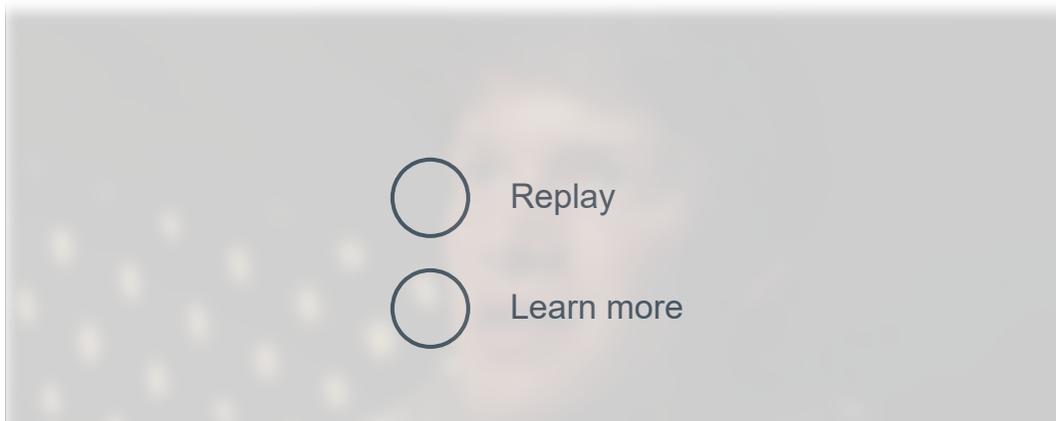
The advertising effort, part of the city's ongoing Vision Zero campaign to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries on city streets by 2025, was paid for by \$300,000 in marijuana sales taxes.

The marketing push comes as transportation officials are simultaneously taking down 900 speed limit signs on residential streets and installing about 2,000 signs marking the new 20 mph speed zones. Streets were blanketed with orange "20 is plenty" signs in recent weeks.

Nine people have died on Portland streets in 2018, including five pedestrians in 12 days last month.

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ADVERTISING



Leah Treat, Portland's transportation director, said the advertising campaign is an essential part of a three-legged approach to making roads safer for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Portland plans major safety improvements in east Portland and physical changes to larger roads, such as reduced speed limits and eliminating travel lanes to make roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Police continue to conduct speed traps to warn or cite drivers for dangerous behavior.

The third leg of the stool is education. "We really need people behind the wheel to change their behavior," she said.

If a car is traveling 40 mph and strikes a pedestrian, that person is eight times more likely to die, city officials say, than if the car is traveling 20 mph.

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Portland is blanketing neighborhoods with orange signs urging drivers to follow the new 20 mph speed limit.

One of the most dangerous behaviors, according to transportation officials, is unnecessary speeding. On average, 36 people have died in traffic incidents in Portland each of the past 20 years. Historically, speed has been a significant factor in 47 percent of those incidents, according to a city report.

"It's one of those things that's socially acceptable," said Dana Dickman, the city's traffic safety section manager. "People think it's OK to go 5, 10 miles over the speed limit, but it has a clear impact on the severity of the crashes and also the potential for crashes to happen."

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The city hired Borders Perrin Norrande, a Portland-based ad agency, to create its campaign.

Robert Thompson, the firm's executive creative director, said his team held listening sessions with family members who've lost loved ones on Portland's roads to fine-tune its message.

The team held other listening sessions with Portlanders from a wide swath of backgrounds. The message was the same: Portland is changing, and safety was a big concern on roadways and people were nervous. "We need something that has some teeth," the focus groups said.

Thompson said his team was most concerned about scolding drivers or using scare tactics. The basic theme came down to this: Traffic crashes leave two lives forever changed.

"We're proud that it delivers the message without being heavy handed," Thompson said in an interview.



Transportation officials will also roll out a 15-second version of the advertisement on social media and online.

Treat said the systemic changes underway in Portland will take years to pay off.

"The work doesn't happen overnight," she said in an interview last month. "We really need to invest [in roads]."

Romain Bonilla, communications director for the nonprofit transit advocacy group The Street Trust, said the city is taking positive steps but it hasn't gone far enough to spread the improvements citywide. The safety improvements planned in east Portland can't come soon enough, he said.



"We need to prioritize Vision Zero," he said.

Portland fully adopted a Vision Zero action plan in 2016.

Treat said there are optimistic signs, but it will take time. New York City saw its traffic fatalities fall in 2017 to 101 deaths, the lowest figure in more than a century.



Those changes came four years after New York adopted Vision Zero.

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