

June 2020

Budget Changes for Vision Zero: A Pandemic-Related Blip or a Backpedal?

The Executive Budget includes some modest changes to one of the de Blasio Administration’s signature programs—the Vision Zero initiative. Although the changes result in small expense budget reductions in planned spending, the budget still assumes major increases in spending for Vision Zero over the next few years. Planned capital commitments are also expected to continue increasing, reaching a peak of \$473 million in 2025.

Launched in 2014, the Vision Zero initiative aims to reduce the city’s traffic-related injuries and fatalities through both targeted engineering interventions and promoting a culture of safe driving throughout the five boroughs. Vision Zero is a multi-agency effort spearheaded by the city’s Department of Transportation (DOT), which has managed over 90 percent of the funding to date. DOT’s role focuses on redesigning streets and intersections, improving pedestrian and bike infrastructure, and increasing public awareness. Other key participants include the police, finance, fire, sanitation and citywide administrative departments, as well as the Taxi and Limousine Commission. While the police department and sheriff’s office (which is housed within the Department of Finance) have a direct role in the enforcement of traffic safety laws, the other agencies participating in the initiative manage large vehicle fleets and have committed to increasing the safety of their drivers and vehicles.

From 2020 through 2024, the de Blasio Administration’s latest budget plans for DOT includes \$647 million in expense funding and \$850 million in capital funding for the Vision Zero initiative. (All years refer to city fiscal years.) This combined \$1.5 billion in planned spending constitutes a 31 percent increase over what DOT spent on Vision Zero (adding expense and capital funding together) from 2014 through 2019. Over the same period (2020 through 2024), the budget plans include Vision Zero funding in agencies

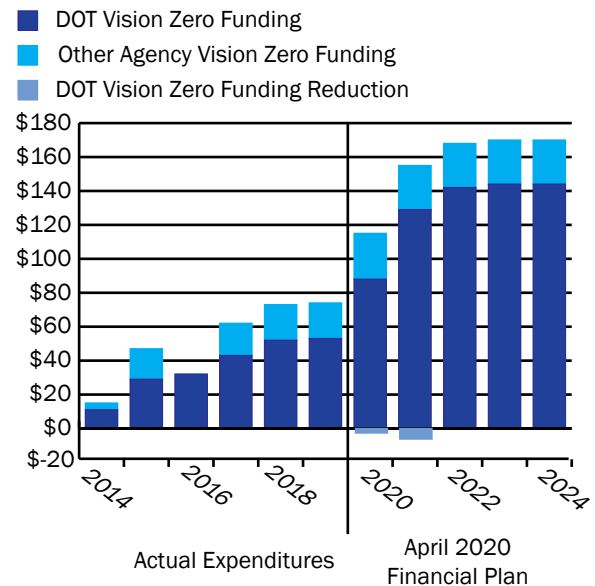
other than DOT of \$130 million in the expense budget and \$7 million in the capital budget.

DOT Vision Zero in the Expense Budget

Expense budget funding for the Department of Transportation’s Vision Zero projects was reduced by a total of \$10 million in 2020 and 2021 in April’s Executive Budget—nearly 20 percent of the total expense cuts planned for DOT under the Citywide Savings Program. These declines in funding, largely attributable to the immediate fiscal impact of

Despite the Pandemic, Department of Transportation Expense Funding for Vision Zero Expected to Increase By \$41 Million in 2021

Dollars in millions



SOURCE: IBO analysis of Fiscal Year 2021 Executive Budget and Financial Plan Through 2024

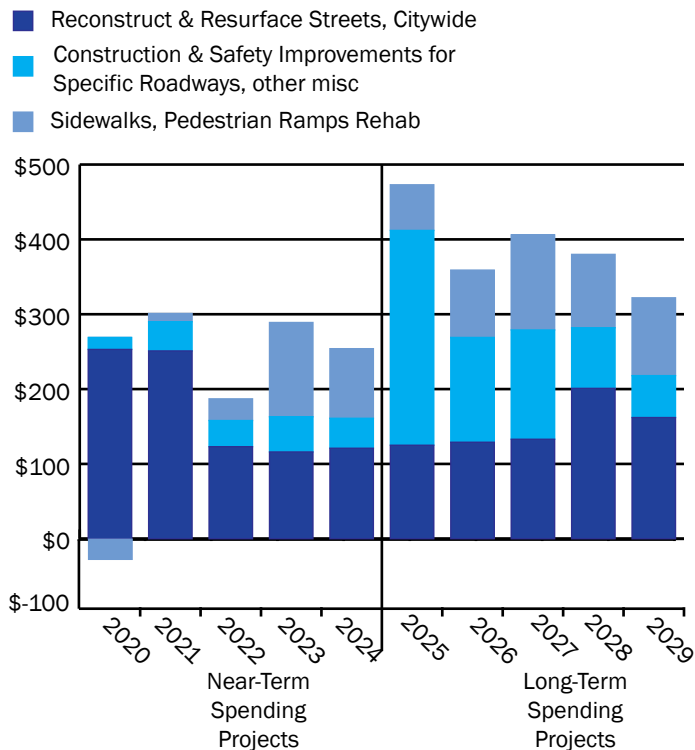
NOTE: Other Vision Zero agencies include the Departments of Citywide Administrative Services, Correction, Finance, Telecommunication and Information Technology, Sanitation, Fire, Police, Parks, and the Taxi and Limousine Commission.

New York City Independent Budget Office



\$3.2 Billion in DOT Capital Funding Is Planned for 2020-2029, Fueling Plans for Future Vision Zero Projects

Dollars in millions



SOURCE: IBO analysis of April 2020 Capital Commitment Plan
New York City Independent Budget Office

the Covid-19 pandemic, are comprised of \$4 million in cuts for various street improvement projects such as painting street markings, a \$3 million reduction in planned spending on protected bike lanes, and \$3 million in cuts to related public awareness campaigns.

From 2014 through 2019, DOT installed over 100 miles of protected bike lanes, including more than 21 miles completed in 2019 alone. Prior to the start of Vision Zero, from 2007 through 2014, DOT created just 30 miles of protected bike lanes. DOT released the Green Wave Cycling Safety Plan in July 2019, which called for the expanding the city’s protected bike lane network by 30 miles a year, although those plans are currently on hold due to the pandemic. The Vision Zero initiative also includes a public awareness campaign, with print and media advisories, community-based training and related social gatherings. With social distancing orders in place, the community outreach component of the city’s efforts to market Vision Zero, along with any associated overhead, is also suspended.

Expense budget reductions totaling \$10 million this year and next are quite small in comparison to the nearly \$210 million that the Department of Transportation spent for Vision Zero projects from 2014 through 2019 and the \$217 million

that remains budgeted for Vision Zero projects in 2020 and 2021. Given the size and scope of these reductions, these cuts are unlikely to undermine the de Blasio Administration’s immediate or long-term objectives for Vision Zero.

DOT Vision Zero in the Capital Budget

DOT’s Vision Zero projects in the capital budget—reconstructions, street lighting enhancements, and the “Great Streets” program—increased by \$145 million in the April 2020 Financial Plan, bringing the new total for 2020 through 2024 to \$322 million. This includes a total increase by \$9 million across 2020 and 2021, and \$71 million added to 2024 for safety enhancements along Northern Boulevard in Queens. Similarly, \$66 million for 2021 was added to the capital plan for phase B of safety improvements along 4th Avenue in Brooklyn, increasing the overall capital funding for the 4th Avenue project by 38 percent.

Looking longer term, IBO has identified 27 highway construction and safety improvement projects that feature enhanced pedestrian and cyclist safety. The city plans to provide total funding of \$3.2 billion for these projects from 2020 through 2029. Fifty percent of this funding (\$1.6 billion) is to reconstruct and resurface streets citywide. Another 28 percent (\$887 million) is for construction and safety improvements to specific roadways, such as \$96 million planned in 2025 for phase 3 of the reconstruction of Queens Boulevard. The remaining 22 percent (\$711 million) is for sidewalks and the rehabilitation of pedestrian ramps.

While long-term spending for these capital projects (2025 through 2029) exceeds projected spending in the near term by roughly 53 percent (\$672 million), we should note that capital funds in the near term (2020 through 2024) tend to be priced out to match specific projects and contracts. Moreover, spending in the near term is much more likely to proceed as planned, while funds well into the future serve more as placeholders. It will be up to a future Mayor and City Council to decide whether to continue these planned funding levels in the later years of the capital plan, although much remains in the works presently.

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