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Letter to the Editor

The hidden benefits of Vision Zero

Some have asked, "how are we to judge Vision Zero?" Vision Zero has helped Europe to reduce traffic fatalities to less than half of the US level. However, the benefits are far broader than traffic safety. Here in Fremont, nearly three-quarters of the city budget is spent on police and fire. With what little money that it has left over, the city fixes potholes and plants trees.

Let's not be distracted by the trivial pursuit of shaving seconds off medical-response times. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of ambulance, fire and police services. How many more lives would be saved when cities become more walkable, through healthier transportation and recreation options? How many heart attacks and malignancies would be prevented?

Life expectancy in the US lags the developed nations of Europe, due in part to healthier transportation and universal medical care. We'd do well to toughen up, and get some fresh air. The American Heart Association recommends at least two and a half hours of physical activity per week for children and adults. Our children would learn self-reliance, independence and an appreciation for nature, if they walk or bike to school.

The backlash against Vision Zero represents a fear of change. According to The Guardian newspaper of the UK, some US cities haven't really improved traffic safety: https://bit.ly/387Ypj4. The controversy is also brewing here in Fremont, with complaints about time lost in traffic and road diets. Some motorists will never let go of their steering wheels.

Regardless, change is afoot. Our community has to cut carbon emissions, to address climate change. Building more non-motorized trails will be good for our health, and for the health of the planet. The successful examples in Europe demonstrate how pedestrian safety goes hand-in-hand with nicer, more-walkable neighborhoods.

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