

A close-up, low-angle shot of a blue bicycle on a paved street. The sun is low in the sky, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows. The background is blurred, showing trees and a building.

CRASH REPORTING TOOLKIT

2025



PALM BEACH
Metropolitan Planning
Organization



Mission

collaboratively plan,
prioritize, and fund the
transportation system.



Vision

a safe, efficient, and
connected multimodal
transportation system.

The Palm Beach MPO, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), understand that traffic fatalities and serious injuries are preventable, and are actively working together to eliminate them from our roadways.

“Road design and management should encourage safe speeds and manipulate appropriate crash angles to reduce injury severity.” - FHWA

“Florida has a long-standing vision of zero traffic-related deaths and serious injuries. Losing a family member, loved one, friend, or coworker to a preventable traffic crash is unacceptable. Because of this, eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries is the highest priority of the Florida Department of Transportation and its safety partners.” -FDOT

To learn more about roads in Palm Beach County, you can contact:

Palm Beach MPO - Info@PalmBeachMPO.org

Palm Beach County Engineering Action Center -

ENG-ActionCenter@pbc.gov

FDOT Design Office - FDOTCommunicationsOffice@dot.state.fl.us

WHY A CRASH REPORTING TOOLKIT?



Traffic crashes are a leading cause of preventable death in the U.S., particularly for people killed while walking. The language used to report crashes directly impacts public perception of our shared transportation system and our approach to solving these problems.

Much of the current language used in crash reporting, whether describing crashes involving pedestrians, bicyclists, cars, or transit systems like trains, omits important details and context, frequently leading information consumers to wrongly place responsibility on the victim.

Pedestrian 'displaying abnormal behavior' at intersection west of Boca Raton struck, killed

PALM BEACH COUNTY, Fla. — A 31-year-old pedestrian "displaying abnormal behavior" at the intersection of Palmetto Park Road and State Road 7...

UPDATE: Man fatally hit by driver while jaywalking near Leopard Street intersection identified

Bicyclist critically injured in Boca Raton crash was not wearing safety gear, PBSO reports

WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This toolkit is designed to help inform public perception of traffic crashes by sharing the tools needed to tell a more complete story of our roadways.

Included below are some groups that have a particular interest in the way crashes are reported.



Elected Officials:
Champion safety efforts and adopt policy to encourage safe systems.

Emergency Medical Professionals:
Enhance the response and care available to crash victims.

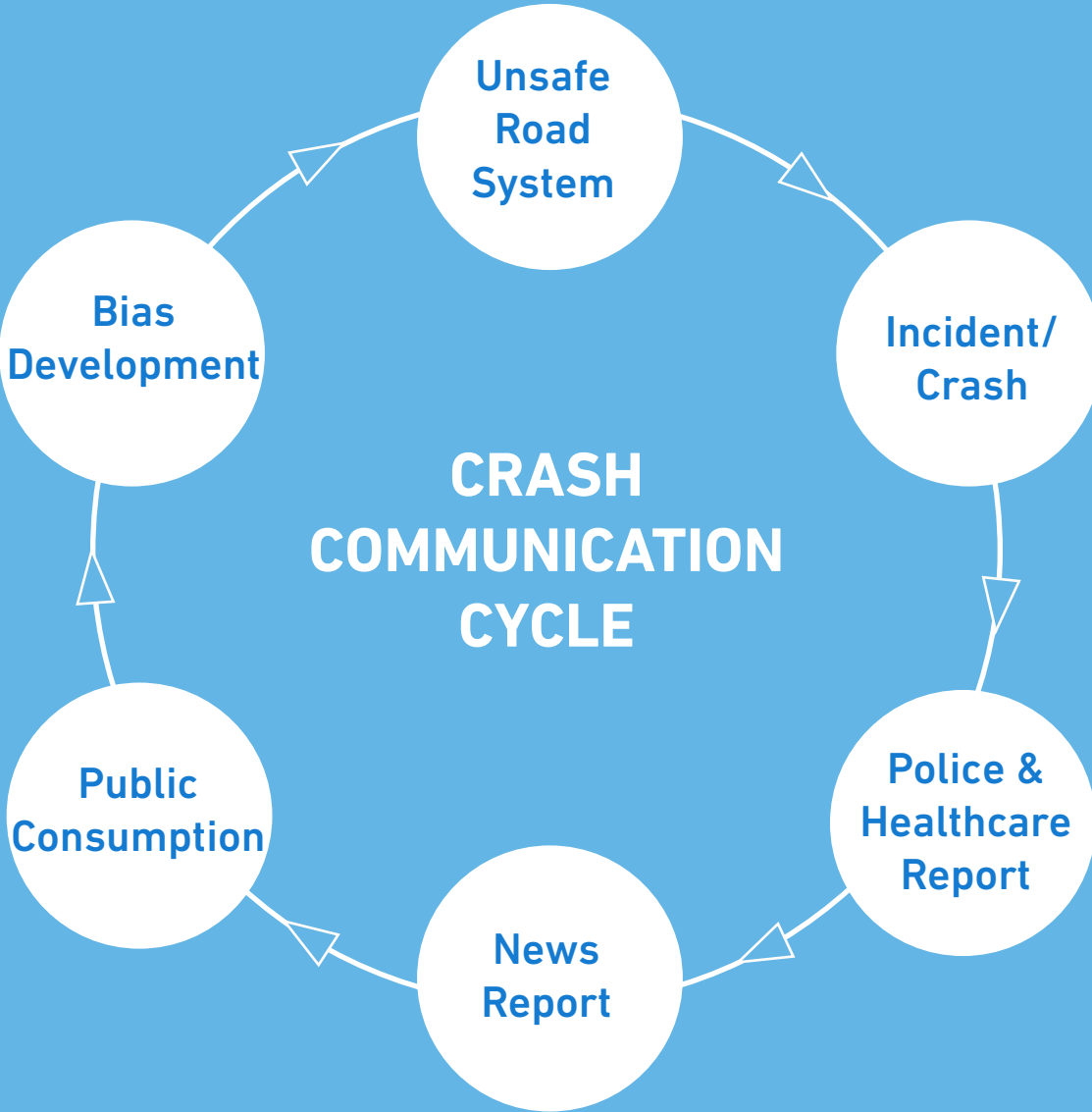
Information Distributors:
Publish accurate and informative data and stories related to crashes.

Planners & Engineers: Identify & advance policies and roadway designs proven to make streets and intersections safer.

Law Enforcement:
Enforce laws, responding to crashes and safety inquiries, reporting information.

THE LANGUAGE WE USE MATTERS

The language used to discuss crashes can shape public perception of crashes, creating bias that ultimately dictates how we design our roads.



CRASH REPORTING

Crash reports are key sources for media crash coverage, but the way certain details are emphasized places an undue burden on vulnerable road users. When such details are highlighted in media coverage, the narrative often unfairly focuses on vulnerable road users, while overlooking systemic issues like infrastructure design and driver responsibility.

The term vulnerable road user (VRU) is used mainly to describe those unprotected by an outside shield, such as a motor vehicle, as they sustain a greater risk of injury in any collision with a vehicle and are therefore highly in need of protection against such collisions.

Why this matters?

VRUs are more likely to be seriously injured or killed in a crash and should be protected against high risk situations.

Example: A crash report might mention that a bicyclist involved in a crash was not wearing a helmet or was wearing dark clothing. If the media highlights that detail in a headline, it can overshadow more significant factors such as a distracted driver, excessive speed, or the absence of safe facilities for all users.

Information Sources

When talking about a crash, it's important to collect all the elements of the crash from the beginning. Relying on a single source, for example a crash report, tells only some of the story.



Visit [PalmBeachMPO.org/
VisionZero](https://PalmBeachMPO.org/VisionZero)
for additional crash resources.

CRASH REPORTING LANGUAGE

By making small changes to language, we can have a big impact on how a crash is understood. Below are a few examples of how we can replace commonly-used language to provide a more neutral and comprehensive understanding of a collision.

Commonly Used Words/Phrases	Preferred Approach	Why
Accident	Crash	“Accident” implies inevitability. Crashes are preventable using a safe systems approach.
A pedestrian was hit and killed by a car.	A car hit and killed a pedestrian.	Increases blame for the focus of the sentence.
A bicyclist was hit and killed	A bicyclist was hit and killed by a car.	Obscures the role humans play in motor vehicle safety.

AVOID COUNTERFACTUAL STATEMENTS

Counterfactual statements describe hypothetical scenarios or events that did not actually occur but could have happened under different circumstances.

These statements suggest the possibility that a crash may not have happened if these factors had been different. Using counterfactual statements to describe a crash shifts the burden of the crash onto the vulnerable road user. Instead, focus on the verified facts of the crash itself.

Counterfactual Statement	Factual Statement	Additional Considerations
“The pedestrian darted into the street.”	“A person was hit crossing the street.”	How long would it take to cross at the nearest crosswalk? Is there a history of poor yield behavior on the street?
“If the cyclist had been more visible with reflective clothing the driver might have seen them in time.”	“A cyclist was hit by a car at night.”	Presence of street lighting, bicycle lanes, crosswalks. History of speeding, crashes, or other characteristics at nighttime.
“If the driver had been paying closer attention, they might have been able to avoid the crash.”	“A driver collided with another vehicle. Preliminary information indicates the driver did not react in time to avoid the crash.”	Roadway conditions (wet, dark, unlit), history of similar crashes in the area, change in roadway classification (urban to suburban, for example).

TELLING THE COMPLETE STORY

Crossing the street in Florida isn't as straightforward as one might think. There are over 20 different Pedestrian Traffic Regulations (F.S. 316.130) related to crossing the street, and there are even more scenarios to consider near Traffic Signals (F.S. 316.075). Knowing that the pedestrian has the right to cross helps inform reporting and discussions around crashes.

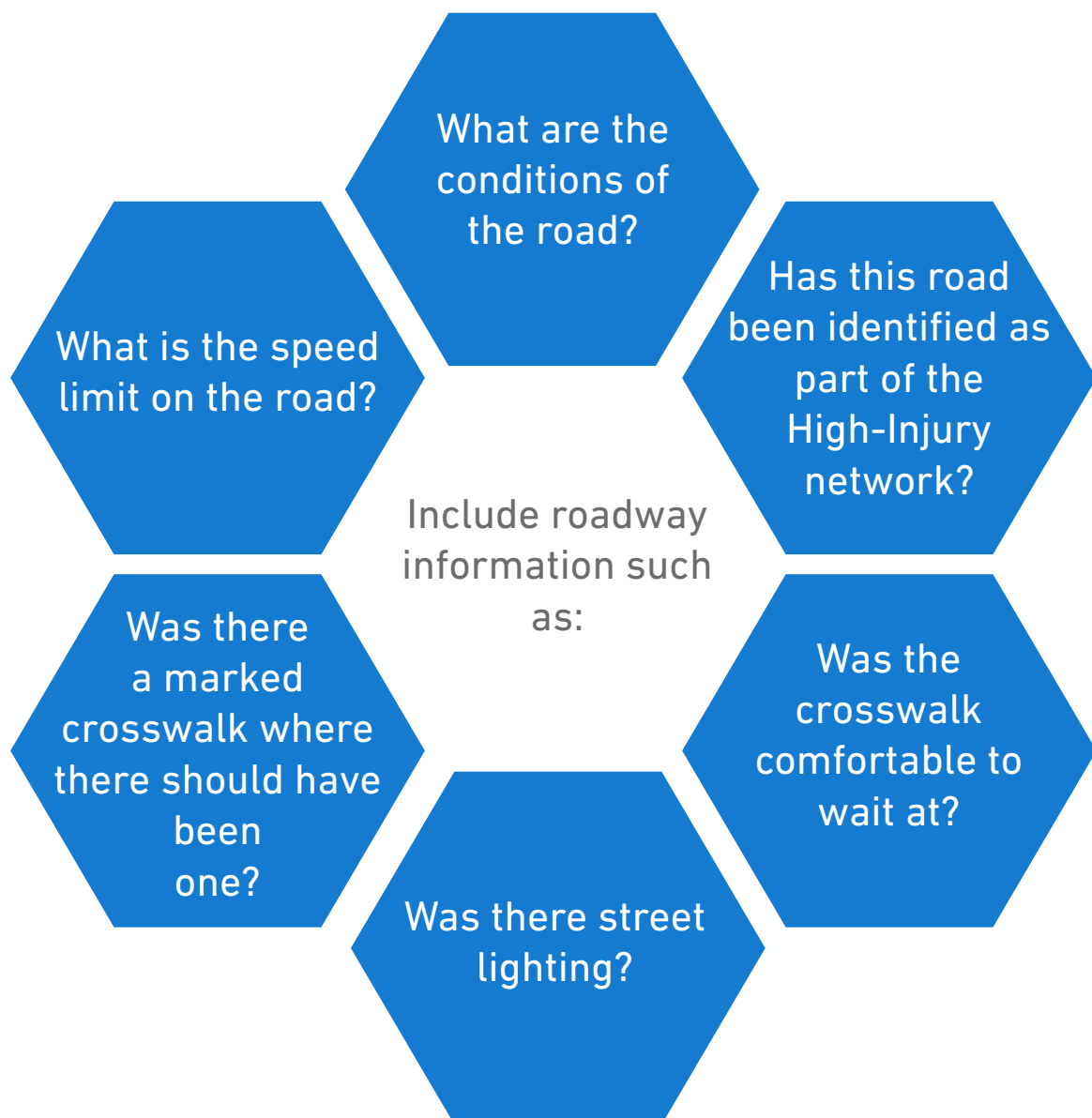
Helpful Resources

1. Know your Crosswalks
2. Target Zero Fact Sheet
3. Your Community Traffic Safety Team
4. Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Motorist Helpful Information
5. Electric Bicycle Safety Information



TELLING THE COMPLETE STORY

Many roadways where the most serious crashes have occurred have been identified for safety improvements. To find out if the road the crash being reported on is part of the TPA's High Injury Network , visit PalmBeachMPO.org/Map and click on "Vision Zero High Injury Network" then search the location of the crash to learn more about it.



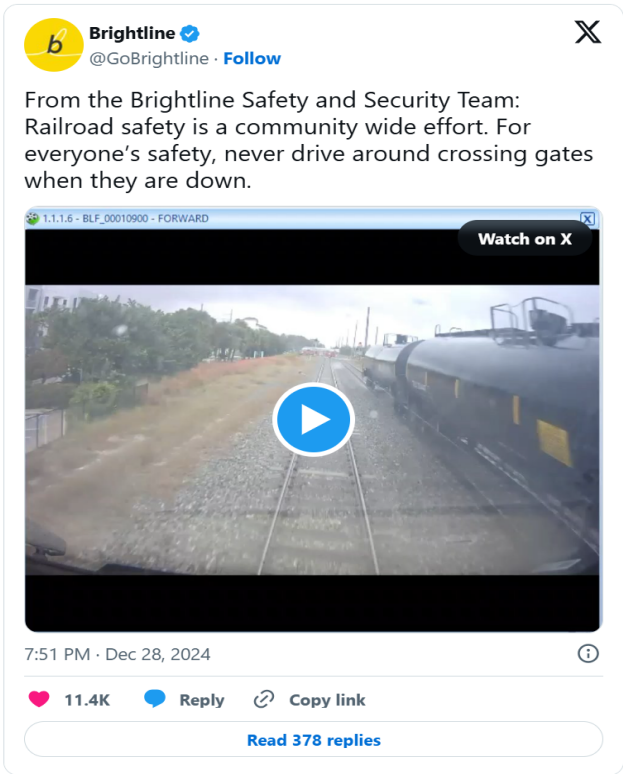
TELLING THE COMPLETE STORY

Below are examples of headlines that incorporate context, factual information, and specific details to offer a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the full story.

PBSO: Man, 68, drove under crossing gate before being struck, killed by Brightline train

A North Palm Beach man died after driving under the safety arms at Northlake Boulevard and into the path of a Brightline train, investigators said.

In response to the crash, Brightline released a video right before the moment of impact on X, which showed the fire engine apparently crossing the tracks while the guardrails were down.



"Railroad safety is a community-wide effort," the commuter rail said. "For everyone's safety, never drive around crossing gates when they are down."



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For more information,
visit PalmBeachMPO.org/VisionZero
or contact
Info@PalmBeachMPO.org