

# Thoughts on the city council meeting on 26 February 2026, re: pedestrian safety, and potential next steps

## Many people care deeply about the issue of pedestrian safety

Strong opinions were expressed by several councillors on the [Public Works and Infrastructure Committee \(PWIC\)](#) and also by delegates to the meeting (William van Geest (Ecology Ottawa), Chris Hircock (Vision Zero), Amanda Brown, Marko Miljusevic (Strong Towns Ottawa), Sandra Stec (Centretown Community Association and the Council on Aging), Jacob Krich, Alex Gill, and Florence Lehmann (Bike Ottawa)).

At one point, 83 people were watching the Youtube live stream of the meeting.

## Reckless drivers are a problem

Many people spoke about their experiences with reckless drivers, including:

- drivers turning right who look left for oncoming traffic while accelerating right, without any awareness if there's a pedestrian in the crosswalk,
- drivers turning left who look ahead for oncoming traffic and then accelerate left, without any awareness if there's a pedestrian in the crosswalk,
- drivers turning in either direction who see a pedestrian crossing legally but fail to stop completely, continuing to approach so the pedestrian must dodge or be hit,
- drivers who fail to obey stop signs.

It was reported that seniors feel unsafe walking in Ottawa, including because of lowered mobility to evade drivers. Seniors are also slower to heal. Parents and grandparents talked about children feeling unsafe walking even just three blocks to school, especially because of how large cars and trucks are now. There are studies about how hard it can be for the driver of a modern-day truck to see a child, and how long it takes large vehicles to stop.

[According to the Ottawa police](#), there were 17 collisions involving pedestrians in the first six weeks of 2026. [City staff's report on right turns on red \(RTOR\)](#) shows 180 "fatal and major injury collisions" involving "vulnerable road users" over a three year period, meaning more than one per week:

**Table 2 - Collision Data Summary (2019 to 2022)**

<b>Collision Descriptor</b>	<b>Cyclists Involved</b>	<b>Pedestrians Involved</b>	<b>Total Vulnerable Road Users Involved</b>
<b>Fatal and Major Injury Collision</b>	59	121	180
<b>Collisions involving vehicles* turning left</b>	17 (~29%)	23 (~19%)	40 (~22%)
<b>Collisions involving vehicles* turning right</b>	12 (~20%)	5 (~4%)	17 (~9%)
<b>Collisions not involving a turning movement</b>	30 (~51%)	93 (~77%)	123 (~68%)

\* Motorized or non-motorized vehicles

City staff's report does not include information about minor collisions, which could include collisions that result in concussion. It also does not include information about near misses; city staff said logging these would require specialized equipment / consultants. However, pedestrians attest near misses are common and create fear and should be counted. More people driving and fewer people walking affects individual health, societal health, and planetary health.

## **Refusing to change policy because drivers might not comply is a bad argument**

City staff's report suggested there was little point to changing policy given the expectation that many drivers would fail to comply. In response, delegates and councillors got sarcastic about the purpose of legislating. City staff ultimately indicated that drivers potentially refusing to comply with the law was not among the more serious of their objections to policy change.

Enforcement of the law is always a challenge; it is not a reason to accept a dangerous status quo.

## **Banning RTOR is under-inclusive as a solution**

City staff pointed out that there are already 115 intersections where RTOR is restricted, and that about 90% of collisions with vulnerable road users do not involve a driver turning right.

This is not to say that the other 9% of collisions aren't worth addressing as part of Vision Zero / Policy 6-4 (?) / the Transportation Master Plan / the Road Safety Action Plan, but it does mean that banning RTOR is under-inclusive as a solution.

Even councillors and delegates arguing in favour of banning RTOR specifically stated that it would not be a complete solution to the problem of drivers hitting and threatening pedestrians.

City staff pointed out the fact that if cars are prohibited from turning on red, they will necessarily have to turn on green, when pedestrians are crossing. The risk of collision is shifted, not eliminated.

Many pedestrians already find Ottawa drivers impatient / threatening about sharing time on a green light. Drivers admitted that they already get honked at by other drivers if they don't turn fast enough (for example because they're waiting for a pedestrian). There is every reason to assume that driver impatience and recklessness towards pedestrians will increase if the only time drivers can turn is on the green when pedestrians have a right to cross.

## **Blanket policy or by dangerous intersection?**

An open question is whether safety-related intersection policies should be implemented throughout a defined area or only at identified dangerous intersections.

The city has data about which Ottawa intersections are the most dangerous. Some intersections may be completely fine with current intersection policy.

Speakers noted there is additional mental load for drivers when different intersections have different rules. Trying to read small signs at intersections about what days and hours a turn is permitted is stressful.

Trying to remember which rules apply in which areas also creates mental load. Ottawa is not like Montréal, where the island creates a clear boundary.

## People like “leading pedestrian indicators” (LPIs)

LPIs are where the signals are programmed to give pedestrians / people on bikes a few seconds’ headstart before cars are allowed to go at an intersection. The idea, expressed by speakers at the meeting and by city staff in their report, is that this improves safety for vulnerable road users because they’re more visible and not competing with cars.

## It’s not really clear what’s happening with this file

A surprise motion was introduced that seemingly said “the status quo is fine.” Some councillors objected, including because there had been no notice of this motion and its consequences were unclear. A more senior city official (?) got added to the meeting to answer / deflect questions. Eventually the motion was withdrawn.

It could be that the issue of pedestrian safety is considered on hold until a PWIC meeting in 2027 about the Road Safety Action Plan.

## Ideas to move forward from here

### 1. Investigate “exclusive pedestrian phases”

“Exclusive pedestrian phases” or pedestrian scrambles or Barnes dances mean that either cars go or pedestrians do. Same as with LPIs, it would reduce the risk of conflict between vulnerable road users and fast-moving, heavy vehicles driven by reckless and impatient drivers.

This would address city staff’s concern about shifting the risk of collision to green lights, because there wouldn’t be a green light phase when pedestrians had to compete with cars.

This policy might be more consistent with Vision Zero than banning RTOR; requests for data on the relative safety of these two policy approaches have been unsuccessful.

This policy is unlikely to be significantly more expensive to implement than banning RTOR.

This policy would not be contrary to the Ontario Traffic Manuals (mentioned by Ariel Troster’s assistant Jacob Kaplan to the Dalhousie Community Association’s mobility committee). [Book 15 of the Ontario Traffic Manual](#), “Pedestrian Crossing Treatments” (pp 44-45), says exclusive pedestrian phases “are normally required only where the volumes of crossing pedestrians are extremely high.” Saying something is “normally required only where” is different from saying something is “prohibited except where.” Also, it does not appear that a definition of “extremely high” volumes has been established. Also, it’s not clear how / whether the Ontario Traffic Manuals have the force of law. Finally, the manuals note potential safety improvements: “Exclusive pedestrian phases can reduce the risks associated with turning traffic as all vehicular movements are stopped during the pedestrian phase.”

## 2. Put up posters asking people in Ottawa to report near misses

The city seems unwilling to investigate the frequency of near misses. Posters could be put up at intersections, inviting pedestrians to report when a car or truck nearly hits them. This would improve data and also increase engagement around the issue.

## 3. Survey people in Ottawa about their thoughts on “exclusive pedestrian phases”

A report about “exclusive pedestrian phases” in Toronto and Calgary contains the following table at page 18, “illustrat[ing] the level of support for pedestrian scramble phasing by various age groups and gender”:

Table 10 - Level of Support by gender and various age groups

Age Group	Toronto		Calgary	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 18	100	100	NA	NA
18 – 25	96	95	72	74
26 – 45	86	81	88	80
46 – 55	91	82	92	58
55 +	89	89	81	71

This suggests the potential for broad public support in Ottawa as well. A councillor, the city, or an interested organization could survey respondents about this potential policy change.

It might be interesting to ask respondents whether they are primarily drivers or pedestrians; it may be that neither category of road user is eager to compete with the other. It might also be interesting to ask which ward respondents are in (central / suburban).

Prepared by CKirkby

Ward 14 pedestrian tired of having to flail arms and yell to avoid getting hit