Slide 1

Gary Roux (PVPC): Good afternoon, and I'd like to welcome everybody to the virtual public meeting for the Pioneer Valley Safe Streets project. This project is an exciting opportunity to enhance transportation safety in the Pioneer Valley region. Our team will be providing a brief overview today of the study process, and will be available for your questions and feedback.

Slide 2

Gary Roux (PVPC): We'll start with some introductions. The members of the team that will be speaking today will each do their own introduction. My name is Gary, I'm the Director of Transportation Planning here at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Hello, everyone! I am Nancy Dutta, I'm with VHB, and I'm the Deputy Project Manager for this project.

Kayla Northup (VHB): Hi, everyone. I'm Kayla Northup, I'm the project manager from VHB on this project, and then we also have Rob Nagey, who's the project director and principal on the project on the line, if there are any questions for him.

Leah Beckett (IMEG): Hi everyone, I'm Leah. I work for IMEG, and I'm helping lead engagement for this project.

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Leah Beckett (IMEG): I'm going to provide an overview of the format for our meeting this afternoon. It is being recorded. If you don't want to be part of a recorded meeting, please disconnect, and I'm going to suggest a few tips on how to best participate. I know many of you are familiar with Zoom, but here are a few tips just to navigate. If you have any issues with Zoom during the meeting, we have a technical support person to assist you. Her name is Cassandra, and her title shows her name as the technical host. Send her a message, or you can email her directly at Cassandra.J.Valcourt@imegcorp.com.

If you get disconnected at any point, there is a call-in number, which is listed on the screen. Feel free to join there. And if you want closed captions, click the button on your Zoom toolbar that says CC. If you do not see the CC button, click More, and then select Captions.

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Gary Roux (PVPC): In terms of a project overview, we wanted to start with giving you some information on the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Safer Streets and Roads for All program, and also a little bit about the Pioneer Valley region.

Slide 5

Gary Roux (PVPC): The Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization is the body in which approves federally funded transportation projects in Hamden and Hampshire counties. It's comprised of 11 members, 6 local elected officials, and also representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Western Mass Economic Development Council, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. This forum ensures a comprehensive process is followed to guide regional transportation investments.

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Gary Roux (PVPC): The Safer Streets and Roads for All, or SS4A, is a federally funded grant program included as part of the current transportation bill, the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act. PVPC applied for funding during year two of this program for development of a regional safety action plan and demonstration project. This safety action plan is a requirement of the SS4A grant program. And we'll identify recommendations and projects that will significantly reduce and eliminate roadway fatalities and serious injuries for all users.

Slide 7

Gary Roux (PVPC): The Pioneer Valley region is the study area for this project. The Pioneer Valley region encompasses the same region as the Metropolitan Planning Organization, Hamden and Hampshire counties, and the 43 cities and towns that comprise those two counties. It's a large region, approximately 1,200 square miles, and our 2020 census population was over 625,000 residents.

The plan will include all public roadways, with the exception of your limited access roadways, so your interstates, Interstate 91, Interstate 291, the Massachusetts Turnpike — those would not be included. And it will encompass the calendar years 2020 through 2024. As I mentioned before, fatal and injury crashes are really the types of crashes that we're looking to eliminate.

One of the pieces of this that is a little bit unique to our regional safety action plan is that the communities of Chicopee, Holyoke, Springfield, Ware, and Westfield have received their own funding under this same grant program. So, as a result, we can't specifically include them in this document — in other words, we can't duplicate the work they're doing. However, we want to make sure we're coordinating with them, and then from a regional standpoint, encompassing some of the same strategies that they're finding in their document, so that we can have it as part of this regional plan.

Slide 8

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Before we go deep into the presentation, I just wanted to start by outlining the project goal. Our end goal for this project is to develop a safety action plan for the PVPC region that fulfills all the requirements of the SS4A grant, and also acts as an actionable roadmap towards zero death and serious injuries.

And to get to that point from where we are today, we will go through a systemic process. Crash data is obviously going to be one of the core elements in the process. So, we will look into crash data, we will look into current infrastructure data, current policies, and also gather community input to understand where and why these crashes are happening. After that, the plan will outline the most effective strategies, with special attention to pedestrians, bicyclists, and other high-risk road users. After that, we will develop a prioritized list of safety projects that addresses the safety issues for this region.

This Safety Action Plan is meant to be a framework that you implement over the next several years. It will guide future investments, and it will also help PVPC and the communities pursue additional funding.

Slide 9

Nancy Dutta (VHB): The safe system approach. USDOT adopted a safe system approach as an effective way to address the risks in our complex transportation system. The Safe Streets for All grant is also based on this idea. So, what does this mean? This is a concept that says that safety is not just one person's responsibility. Safety is for everyone, and the responsibility is also shared by everyone.

The traditional traffic safety focuses on individual behavior — meaning, the idea is that if everyone follows the rule, the crashes will go down. But Safe System looks at the big picture patterns and builds in multiple layers of protection instead of relying just on perfect behavior. So, all the pieces that impact a crash, such as vehicle, road, speed, people, and emergency services, they all work as a protective layer for each other, so when something does happen, the outcome is not as fatal or life-changing.

Slide 10

Nancy Dutta (VHB): So, what to expect in terms of safety improvements? Based on crash data and community input, this project will implement proven safety treatments to lower vehicle speed, to reduce conflict points, and make it safer and more comfortable for everyone. And this, again, ties back to the concept of safe system. We will prioritize improvements that improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. So, think about safer crosswalks, better lighting, ADA accessible bus stops, more connectivity through sidewalks and crosswalks — treatments like that.

We will also look into other types of recommendations, such as speed safety cameras, which can be evaluated as well, and the goal is to address these issues as a system.

So, we are also going to look into existing policies and come up with ideas to update them so that safety is integrated into the policies from the very beginning.

Slide 11

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Right now, we are working on the existing conditions, and I have some preliminary data to share with you today.

Slide 12

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Starting with the fatal crashes — these are all the fatal crashes that happened in the region. Again, just to remind you, it's from 2020 to 2024. It does not include any freeways, and it does not include Springfield, Chicopee, Holyoke, Ware, and Westfield. And as you can see, it's pretty spread out through the region. There are very few towns that didn't see any fatality in the last 5 years.

Slide 13

Nancy Dutta (VHB): The next map is for speeding-related crashes. Speeding is one of the top concerns in the region. And if you just think that all of these tiny dots you see in the map is a crash that happened due to speeding — so that is very concerning.

Slide 14

Nancy Dutta (VHB): The last map is the vulnerable road user crashes. What do I mean when I say vulnerable road user? It means pedestrians, it means bicyclists, it means someone on a skateboard, and even a utility worker who is outside of their vehicle doing some roadside work. Basically, anyone who does not have the protection of a vehicle around them is considered a vulnerable road user.

And obviously, certain towns like Northampton, Amherst, and West Springfield do have a lot of blue crashes, as you can see. It's because they have a lot of colleges and other land use that generates a lot of pedestrians and bicyclists, and they also have a lot of infrastructure to support them. But one thing to notice here — you can see a lot of towns in the map that have no blue crashes. Now, that does not make them safe automatically. Ped and bike crashes are very tricky. They are severely underreported. And also, if people are not feeling safe walking and biking, if they do not have proper infrastructure, they're less likely to walk and bike. And as a result, we will see less crashes, but that is not a direct indicator of safety.

Slide 15

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Let's look into some crash trends. The total crash trend shows a steady increase from 2020 to 2024. Of course, 2020 and even parts of 2021 do not represent regular travel conditions. Even then, it is an increasing pattern. And the same trends were observed for fatal crashes and serious injury crashes. Both of them kind of

peaked in 2022, and then decreased a little bit, and seems like it was again starting to pick up a little in 2024. So, what all of this is telling us is that there is a need for focused intervention to reduce both crash frequency and severity.

Slide 16

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Next, we looked into where the crashes are happening. A lot of the crashes are happening on city and town roads, which is understandable, because we are not considering the freeways here. And almost half of the crashes are happening on road segments, meaning they are outside of the intersection influence area. But notice this — even though it's about 54%, if we consider fatal crashes, it's almost 76% of crashes are happening on segments, and about 17% are happening at intersections.

Slide 17

Nancy Dutta (VHB): We keep coming back to the vulnerable road user safety because this group is at disproportionately high risk of injury and fatality. This is a priority for USDOT, for MassDOT, and also for PVPC, to ensure that vulnerable road users are safe on roads. And in recent years, both MassDOT and PVPC have done a lot of work. As you can see, there's a decreasing trend for fatal and serious injury crashes — and that's great news. But we still saw 269 crashes in the region in 2024, which is still a high number. So, our work isn't done here yet.

Slide 18

Nancy Dutta (VHB): We also looked into what are the most common crash types, and single vehicle crashes are the most common, followed by rear end and angle crashes. Single vehicle crashes are often associated with speeding, and rear-end and angle crashes are often associated with intersections. Single vehicle crashes are also the top category for fatal crashes, which makes sense, because high-speed crashes often result in high levels of injury. But notice this — only 9% of all crashes are vulnerable road user crashes, but if you look at fatality, the second category is 17%, which is the vulnerable road user crashes. And this, again, just proves what I was saying in the previous slide. Pedestrians, bicyclists, and other vulnerable road users are always at a high risk.

Slide 19

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Just to give you an idea of how the towns are ranking within different issues — if we consider average annual crashes normalized by population, then Hadley, Granby, West Springfield, Plainfield, and Montgomery are the top 5 towns. If we consider just the total number of fatal crashes, then West Springfield is at the top, followed by Agawam, Ludlow, Wilbraham, and Northampton. For vulnerable road user crashes, we see our usual suspects: West Springfield, Northampton, Amherst, Agawam, and East Longmeadow. And this list is just for evaluating existing conditions

purposes — this is not a priority list. When we look into projects, we look at all the towns and come up with projects that represent everybody, not just a few towns.

Slide 20

Leah Beckett (IMEG): As we move into engagement, we want the community priorities to drive improvements, and the engagement work will be happening alongside the technical work that Nancy was just outlined that VHB is performing. A Safe Streets Plan works when it reflects how people experience their roads, whether it's driving, walking, biking, or taking transit.

Slide 21

Leah Beckett (IMEG): As we begin the existing conditions work, our focus is going to be on identifying where the safety needs are highest. The crash data review includes all public roadways, and the vulnerable road user data focuses on areas where people are walking and biking by excluding limited access roadways. The images here are examples from another community that wrapped a similar project up last year. Our data is still being evaluated, so you can expect to see a similar analysis on a regional scale for this project.

The data here helps us understand where risks are highest, but it doesn't tell us why those risks exist or what solutions will work best locally. Your input through meetings, pop-ups in the spring, and the digital mapping tool will guide practical and equitable recommendations.

Slide 22

Leah Beckett (IMEG): Over the coming months, we'll be offering several ways to stay involved — pop-up events, stakeholder interviews, and additional public meetings. Some of which are on here today, but we will be adding the events to the website as they're scheduled.

Slide 23

Leah Beckett (IMEG): One of the most important tools in the process is our digital mapping platform called ARNIE. The screenshot here shows that you can drop a pin on the map to share a safety concern or suggest an improvement. Specific locations are very helpful to us. Even if something feels small, like a missing crosswalk or poor lighting, please add your thoughts. The tool is open, and it will remain open through the project.

One thing to note is that we can accept pins in the five communities that are not participating in this study, because we are working collaboratively with them. But any suggestions to those 5 towns will not be included in our study findings — we will share them with those towns directly.

Slide 24

Kayla Northup (VHB): We're going to have a quick little breakout discussion.

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Kayla Northup (VHB): To break up the meeting a little bit, we want to see where people's thoughts are and get some feedback and have an open discussion. Feel free to drop any questions in the chat, or you can raise your hand and we can unmute folks. We want to start off with some of the questions here — no particular order, but: What stands out to you with this data, and why? Does this reflect what you see in your experiences as you're navigating your community in the Pioneer Valley region? And how would a successfully implemented plan enhance safety for you, specifically? So, feel free to raise your hand or drop any questions in the chat.

For me, personally, I found that the vulnerable road user crashes — even outside of the Springfields, and this all excludes those major urban areas that have their own independent plans — I found it still very surprising how high the vulnerable user crashes were in proportion to the fatal crashes.

Nancy, or Leah, or Gary, do you have any thoughts? This is from Danielle, she's with Strong Towns Northampton, the mobility team. The topic is of high interest to them. Can you create a chapter or something that breaks out Northampton at the end of this?

I think as we navigate through this process, this will be the first of a few meetings that we'll have. And we hope to have some kind of tool that PVPC will have on their webpage — a mapping tool that will help prioritize some of the projects, or possible projects, and some of the data. And all of that, I believe, Gary, will be made available on the website following the plan. This will be a public document.

Gary Roux (PVPC): But also, a component of this study was an update of a regional document that PVPC has been developing over the last several years called the Safety Compass. So that update will include specific information for all of the 43 communities in the region. And I believe that would have the information that you're looking for.

Alex Jarrett (Attendee): Hi, everyone. I'm Alex Jarrett. I live in Northampton, in Florence, and I just left the Northampton City Council — I was on for about 6 years. It does reflect what I see and experience in terms of those crash statistics being concentrated. I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that more people walk and cycle in Northampton than in other communities.

I just wanted to share how I feel about how this would affect me and my family — I cycle and walk and take public transit for almost all of my activities, and I have a fair amount of concern for safety. I feel like that concern has increased due to people becoming more aggressive, people being more distracted, and that combined with roadway design that primarily encourages folks to go fast. I would love to see funding and design that

allows us to shrink roadway widths and intersection sizes — slow people down as they get to intersections, slow people down in general.

And I'm curious — what are the most cost-effective ways to do that, given how limited funds are? And how do you approach the pushback, which we've certainly seen a lot of in Northampton when we've tried to implement safety projects — specifically, how do you address the concerns of people who say we can't interrupt traffic throughput, we can't slow down traffic? So, a bunch of ideas and thoughts out there. Get us started.

Kayla Northup (VHB): Yeah, no, that's great. I think a lot of municipalities and regions struggle with the same thing — that definite balance between safety and operations. A lot of the strategies that will come out of this plan won't just be engineering heavy; they will create opportunities for policy enforcement, even legislative changes, within towns and regions. And as part of some other plans that VHB has supported, we try to also provide the data-driven side of that — you know, for any engineering improvements, what is the benefit? What's the crash reduction? A lot of these improvements are very well studied across the country and across the world, so trying to leverage that information for looking at crash reduction — whether it's speeding countermeasures, reducing lane widths, crossing widths — taking the data and putting out things that are backed by that information. Gary, I don't know if you have anything to add from the Pioneer Valley side?

Gary Roux (PVPC): I think one of the things that we're excited about in the region is our partnership with MassDOT, which has resulted in MassDOT now putting forward lower-cost safety improvements. There are two programs I'm thinking of specifically. One is for the speed feedback signs — where you drive by and you'll see your actual speed. There's a program where MassDOT is partnering with communities to identify locations where more of these signs can be installed. MassDOT is providing the sign, and the community has to agree to basically maintain it. I think it's a necessary program to make people aware of their current travel speed, and it's something that, for a small investment, can have a profound impact just by getting people to consciously realize they're driving too fast.

Some of the others involve looking at potential intersections where you can convert a two-way stop to a four-way stop — also an opportunity to improve safety for a relatively low cost. It's these lower-cost safety improvements that I really think are the place to start, because you can get them done relatively quickly, and they can be implemented and maintained for much less than a complete intersection redesign. And I think it's the combination of getting these lower-cost improvements done and then programming the necessary major infrastructure improvements over time that will get us the best results out of this program.

Kayla Northup (VHB): Absolutely. Thank you, Alex, I appreciate it. Anything else on your end?

Alex Jarrett (Attendee): One of the challenges in Northampton is that we have a Complete Streets policy, but it's hard to have the money to implement every feature that is required by our policy. So that's a challenge, and I don't know if there are additional grants — I know that in Northampton, we seek out every grant that we possibly can. We also need to realize that when we touch a street to rebuild it, we're probably not going to come back to it for quite a number of years, and that is the time to redo it right. So it's frustrating that we often can't, and any kind of resources or policy changes that we can do to implement that would be great.

Kayla Northup (VHB): Certainly — a lot of that will be included as part of the plan to hopefully guide municipalities and help prioritize as well. Oh, great — Betsy has her hand raised; I'll ask her to unmute.

Betsy Johnson (Attendee): Hi, this is Betsy Johnson. I'm with Walk Bike Springfield, so I'm just here to sort of help with lessons learned and mistakes not to repeat. Our situation was that since Springfield was the deadliest community for pedestrians in Massachusetts for 2 out of the last 5 years, MassDOT decided to pay for our Safe Streets for All plan, and even put in for the implementation grant right in the very first year of the program. Springfield supposedly got — was one of 36 communities countrywide that got implementation money in its very first year.

The problem is that our plan was done with basically no community input. And what we're really finding is that one recommendation I'd offer is: it's not just about pop-ups and meeting with community members — make sure the police departments in all of these communities are involved. Our police department in Springfield is largely unaware of concerns about crashes and what their role is in being part of the Safe Streets for All objectives. Our police superintendent — I had to tell him what Vision Zero was, and his immediate reaction was, "That's impossible." So I would really hope that part of your community outreach and coming up with a plan is: how are you engaging other departments of each of these different communities beyond the DPW? And so that the plan — and you somewhat touched on this — is much more than just infrastructure changes.

And then the other problem we've seen is the infrastructure projects are in two different categories — roadway segments and infrastructure — and the two do not coordinate together. They've put a tremendous burden on our DPW to try to figure out how to coordinate them. And then, if the projects ever do get implemented — the third caveat is that the proposed budget for all of these projects submitted for the implementation grant was way too small. So who knows whether anything will ever get implemented. We're still not at the point where we have 25% designs for the different projects or any implementation schedule. So those are just some caveats that maybe everybody else doesn't have to end up with. You can learn from our mistakes — which is, we're at the point where, yeah, it was great that we're getting all this money, but it's nowhere near enough, and as a result, we're going to get half-assed projects. And as the person from Northampton says, unfortunately, once something is done to an intersection, it'll never be done again in my lifetime.

Kayla Northup (VHB): Those are all great inputs that we can certainly leverage as we navigate through this process. I think your point about integrating the police and emergency services is a big component, and something that — giving all stakeholders an opportunity to provide input and collaborate with us — so we're not designing something or creating a policy that can't be enforced or will pose challenges to emergency services. So, I appreciate that feedback.

Raul Irizarry (IMEG): Kayla, I can follow up a bit too on that, on the engagement side.

Kayla Northup (VHB): Sure, absolutely.

Raul Irizarry (IMEG): So, Betsy, I'm Raul Irizarry, I'm with Cassandra and Leah on the engagement part of this project. I think your point there — thank you for giving us those lessons learned — as far as reaching out to the police department, even the fire department: in our experience, those are conversations we need to have with them up front when we're talking about these projects, because they're going to be the ones out there needing to get from place to place and really engaging with the streets. Having them involved early on in this process is within our plan. Besides the pop-ups you mentioned and those stakeholder interviews, it is about meeting with those types of folks — fire departments, police departments — just so they know and can even get educated on what it is that we're doing. Appreciate your feedback there.

Kayla Northup (VHB): Does anyone else have anything they want to touch on? Anything that was surprising? Not surprising? If not, then we can kind of continue — there'll be time for questions also at the end. But if there are any questions as we go through, feel free to drop them in the chat, and either myself or one of the other team members will be answering them.

Hearing none, I think we can move on to part two. Thank you.

Slides 26/27

Nancy Dutta (VHB): Let's just talk a little bit about the Vision Zero commitment before we wrap up. This is a traffic safety initiative that started in Sweden but gained popularity worldwide pretty quickly. A lot of communities in the U.S. have already adopted a Vision Zero goal. It's built on data-driven decisions and collaboration between all road users and all stakeholders. It's a goal to create a transportation system where everyone — no matter whether they are driving, biking, walking, or taking transit — can travel safely every day. The resolution itself is a pledge from community leaders to achieve zero deaths and serious injuries within a certain time frame.

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Nancy Dutta (VHB): As you can tell, PVPC is committed to safety for all road users, and the MPO has adopted a Vision Zero resolution to achieve zero roadway fatalities and serious injuries by 2050. And this project is a framework that will help PVPC make

progress towards that goal. But again, safety is for everyone, so collaboration between PVPC, MassDOT, the communities, residents, and local businesses will all be very crucial for success.

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Nancy Dutta (VHB): So, what to expect next? Today, we are doing public meeting number one. We are also deep into crash analysis and identifying the high injury network for the region. Once that's done, we will start working on projects and strategies, and we will arrange another public meeting later in the project to update you. But our goal is to make this interactive — it's not like you're hearing from us today and then again a couple months later with nothing in between. Our team is going to do public engagement throughout this project, and your opinions and inputs will be a very important part that we take into consideration as we think about projects throughout the communities.

Because at the end of the day, this is your community, it's your roads, and it's your project. Our goal is to make sure that the final safety action plan reflects your preferences. And that is all from me. Thank you for giving us your time today, and I will hand this over to Gary.

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Gary Roux (PVPC): If you have questions now, we'll certainly entertain them. But if you think of something afterwards, we are still interested in hearing from you, and my email address is [gmroux@pvpc.org]. Please feel free to email me your questions and comments — I'll make sure I pass them along to the project team. But I'd also like to encourage you to visit the website set up specifically for this project, and that's also where you can access the virtual tool and give us information on specific locations and safety strategies that you'd like to see considered as part of this effort. So, are there any other questions before we wrap up today?

Thank you for participating. This won't be the last that you hear from us. We will be advancing this work, and we're really looking forward to interacting with all of you to put together a very comprehensive Regional Safety Action Plan.