

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 12, 2014

The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

While overall traffic-related fatalities have been declining in recent years, our most vulnerable road users—pedestrians and cyclists—have experienced an increase in fatalities. In 2012, 4,743 pedestrians were killed, or an average of one fatality every two hours. Also in 2012, 726 cyclists were killed on our roads. These pedestrian and cyclist fatality totals each represent a 6 percent increase from 2011.

Furthermore, we are concerned that conventional engineering practices have encouraged engineers to design roads at 5-15 miles per hour faster than the posted speed for the street. This typically means roads are designed and built with wider, straighter lanes and have fewer objects near the edges, more turn lanes, and wider turning radii at intersections. While these practices improve driving safety, a suspected unintended consequence is that drivers travel faster when they feel safer. Greater speeds can increase the frequency and severity of crashes with pedestrians and cyclists who are moving at much slower speeds and have much less protection than a motorized vehicle affords.

Because of these increasing fatality numbers among the most vulnerable road users, we request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate the trends and causes of these roadway fatalities and the challenges associated with improving pedestrian and cyclist safety. In particular, we are interested in information about the relationship between vehicle speed and roadway fatalities, and how roadway design speeds and other common practices may exacerbate this problem. Accordingly, we would like for GAO to examine:

- The trends in pedestrian and cyclist accidents (including causes of such accidents), fatalities, and injuries in the last decade.
- Challenges that states face in improving pedestrian and cyclist safety (including roadway design speeds and FHWA guidelines for road design), and the initiatives states have undertaken to address this issue. We are particularly interested in the effects of the common road engineering standard that sets speed limits at the rate 85% of drivers would use under regular conditions.
- The extent that federal initiatives and funds been made available to assist states in improving pedestrian and cyclist safety, and additional federal actions that may be needed.

Thank you for your consideration. For further questions about this inquiry please contact Matt Bormet with Mr. Larsen's office at 202-225-2605.

Sincerely,



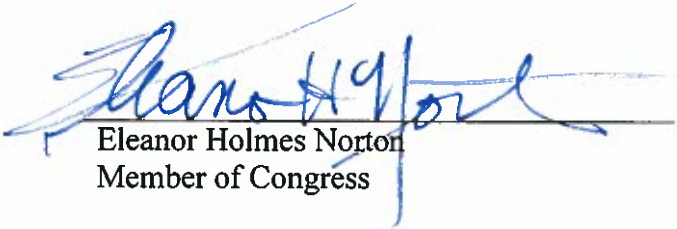
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Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



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Peter DeFazio  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress