

# Successful Social Distancing Requires Safe Routes for People to Essential Services and Recreation – DC Families for Safe Streets

*by DC Families for Safe Streets*

Dear Mayor Bowser, DC Council Members, and Director Marootian,

DC Families for Safe Streets (DC-FSS) commends Mayor Bowser for issuing the District's [Stay at Home Order](#). If fully implemented, the Order stands to reduce the covid-19 transmission rate, flatten the curve, and save lives.

**In an effort to prioritize public health and safety, DC-FSS implores our leaders to pursue creative solutions that enable social distancing on our streets and ensure safe access to essential activities and vital recreation.**

Social distancing is fundamental to the Order's success. While some people can stay home, the Order acknowledges that many of us must venture out as essential workers to keep the city functioning and as families who need access to grocery stores, laundromats, meal locations for students and older adults, schools for distance learning packet pick ups, and open space for recreation to maintain overall mental and physical health. In addition, thousands of multi-family residences house ten of thousands of families without access to private green space. The existing dimensions of our densifying streets discourage social distancing and force people off sidewalks and into vehicular lanes to maintain prescribed personal space.

The reduction in vehicular traffic stemming from the Order offers a valuable opportunity for the District to temporarily reapportion street space to more effectively provide for social distancing.

At the same time, fewer cars on the roads invites speeding, the leading factor in injurious and deadly crashes. Since the beginning of DC's covid-19-related shutdown on March 16, over 500 crashes have injured more than 200 people. Each incident requires vital emergency personnel and resources.

At least 30 cities are rolling out a variety of options that the District may [consider](#):

- Philadelphia has dedicated [Martin Luther King Jr. Drive](#) to non-vehicular travelers for the foreseeable future.
- [Portland, Oregon](#) announced plans to close several parks to vehicles “to ... promote safe social distancing practices and discourage overcrowding.”
- In New York City, where [bicycling jumped by more than 50%](#) after [Mayor Bill de Blasio told residents](#) to “bike or walk to work if you can,” two [temporary emergency protected bike lanes](#) were created in Brooklyn and Queens, and [more are expected soon](#).
- The Twin Cities are [jointly reducing speed limits](#) on most city-owned streets.
- [Bogota, Colombia](#) added 13.7 miles of temporary, rush-hour bikeways to “decongest the bus rapid transit system and offer a safe transportation alternative.”
- Berlin, Germany has created two pilot bikeway projects in the [Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg](#) district.

- New South Wales, Australia, is [disabling buttons](#) used to request crossing signals in Downtown Sydney and [making them automatic](#).
- In the United Kingdom, over 100 transportation and public health [researchers](#) have called “on decision makers to protect the right to walk and cycle safely (from risk of infection and traffic injury) for those who are not symptomatic.”

How well we weather this covid-19 storm depends on how well we work together to creatively bring all of our resources to bear. Our street space is one of our most expansive, vital public goods. We should use it to quell the advance of this scourge.

DC Families for Safe Streets supports the District’s efforts during this unprecedented time and welcomes the opportunity to partner with others in this work.

Sincerely,

*The DC-FSS Steering Committee*

- Faith Hall and Christy Kwan, Co-Chairs
- Ameen Beale
- Greg Billing
- Aysha Ghadiali
- Rachel Maisler
- Helaina Roisman
- Matthew Sampson
- Sabrina Sussman
- J Swiderski
- Meredith Tomason

*Who is DC-FSS?*

*[DC-FSS](#) confronts traffic violence and its epidemic of tragic injuries and deaths. We advocate for life-saving changes and provide support to those affected by deadly crashes in our communities.*