Crash Analysis Studio – Session 14 Transcript

Introductory Trailer

Chuck Marohn: I want to give you two scenarios. Scenario number one a plane crashes. Scenario number two, two cars collide. In scenario number one, we pull out all the stops – we bring in the NTSB, we try to figure out exactly what went wrong. Scenario number two – we send out the cops, we sweep up the mess, and we go on our way.

John Pattison: If we, collectively – everyone on this call and the broader Strong Towns movement – if we do this right, we're going to save thousands of lives.

Edward Erfurt: Mayors and local council members want to do the right thing. They have the ability to solve it. We're going to help provide those tools for them.

Session

Tony Harris:
Okay. Hi everyone. I see we still have some attendees filing in, so I'm gonna give it just a moment before we get started here today.

Okay, well let's go ahead and begin. Welcome to the Strong Towns Crash Analysis Studio. We're glad that you're here. My name is Tony Harris and I am the action team coordinator at Strong Towns. And in a moment I will introduce you to the rest of our expert panel. But first, let's talk about why we're here. In 2022, over 40,000 people died in automobile crashes in the United States alone. 2023 data estimates that over 21,000 people died in automobile crashes. Just between January and June. Hundreds of thousands more suffer traumatic injuries during these collisions. And despite the best efforts of public safety officials, these crashes are still happening and they're affecting all of our lives.

There's a prevalent misconception that car crashes are called solely by mistakes that drivers make. Looking at your phone, changing the radio, drinking alcohol, speeding. When a crash occurs, the North American response is to send out law enforcement and insurance agencies to assign blame. We ask questions like, who made the mistake that caused this crash? And who should we blame?

The reality is that crashes are caused by multiple factors, not just driver error. When a traumatic crash occurs, we need to identify all the contributing factors and learn all we can from the experience so that we can reduce the number of deaths and traumatic injuries in our communities.

So what you're going to see today is a crash analysis studio session, drawing from the best practices of the medical profession. We've convened a panel to review a crash that happened in San Antonio, Texas. This was a car on car collision where one motorist was hit by another driver during a left hand turn.

So today I'll start by introducing you to our panel, then review the facts of the crash. And with our panel, we will assess the design factors that contributed to the collision.
I want to emphasize that our goal is not to assign blame, rather, our objective is to learn as much as possible about what happened and identify the many factors that contributed to this unfortunate event.

So I'm now going to introduce our expert panel for today. First we have Joey Pawlik, who is a native San Antonian and bike commuter transit user and Walker who is passionate about building a safer, more protected, connected and active transit network across San Antonio. Joey serves as the executive director of ActivateSA, a grassroots organization that advocates for a connected transportation network in San Antonio that is safe, equitable, and accessible for all users regardless of their age or abilities.

Joey's background is in constituent advocacy, community engagement, and transportation planning. Prior to ActivateSA, he worked at the Alamo area MPO, and Joey has a master of science in Urban and Regional Planning from UTSA and a Bachelor of Science in Sociology from Texas A&M University. Joey is also a Dwight David Eisenhower Transportation fellow. So welcome Joey.

Next we have Yamini Karandikar, a San Antonio resident who currently works in process improvement strategy in the utility industry. She sees the community experiencing accessibility and road safety challenges due to local development patterns.

And she's an advocate for change. She's also a member of strong towns and the strong town San Antonio local conversation leader.

And then next we have Alex Cruz, who was born and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico. He is currently 34 and has studied filmmaking and audiovisual arts. Currently he works as a fraud analyst for a large bank and Alex has had a wide array of past professional ventures including TV production, owning a restaurant, wedding photography, and filming real estate and automobile sales, community sustainability, justice and culture are just some of the drivers and motivators that have brought Alex here today.

And then finally, we have Edward Erfurt, who is the director of Community Action at Strong Towns. He is a trained architect and urban designer with over 20 years of public sector and private sector experience. Edward has a skilled eye when it comes to evaluating the safety issues posed by intersections, roads, and streets, like the ones that we are going to look at today.

So now I will walk us through the details of this crash in San Antonio.

And I believe you can see my screen now.

Okay, so let's begin with what we know. We know that vehicle A, a Toyota Highlander, was driving north on Old Grissom Road and prepared to take a left turn to head West on Grissom

Road. The driver of the Highlander believed that vehicle B was preparing to turn onto Old Grissom. Now, vehicle B, which was Lexus, is, was actually traveling east on Grissom Road and hit the Highlander as it pulled into the intersection. The crash occurred at 5:59 PM on May 12th, 2023, and there were no fatalities. When we looked at weather reports for this day, they told us that it was cloudy and in the mid-eighties in San Antonio that evening.

Now we've included a map here to show you the crash location. It's marked by the red pin near the middle of the visual.

And then on this next slide, we have zoomed into the intersection to try and give a better feel for what we're looking at here. So the Highlander is depicted as the orange rectangle traveling north off of old GSO into the intersection, and then the Lexus is represented by the yellow rectangle traveling east on Grissom Road. And then we outlined the approximate collision location in red.

So we know that the speed limit on Grissom Road is 45 miles per hour and the limit on Old Grissom Road is a little bit lower at 35 miles per hour. Now the crash report, when I read it didn't seem to indicate if witness statements were gathered. Those surveillance does seem unlikely at this location since there aren't any businesses or stores kind of around the intersection that would've had cameras or or video potentially running.

The crash report did tell us however that the damage severity for each vehicle was ranked at a four out of seven.

Now the crash report told us a few other things as well. It listed the primary factor as failure to yield during a left turn.

It also stated that neither party was listed as injured during the crash. And specimens for drug or alcohol usage were listed as none.

And then a little more on the site conditions for this collision location. Grissom Road at this particular intersection is a five-lane roadway, right? So there are two eastbound through traffic lanes and two westbound through traffic lanes. And then there's a center lane that's dedicated to turning for westbound traffic that's turning left onto Old Grissom Road. Now the intersection is unsigned. However, the city has funded a project to install a traffic signal at this intersection during 2024. And we had some representatives from the city provide us with design materials for this particular signal and we'll make those available with the other resources that we publish online after this session.

And then we also wanted to note that there are no crosswalks marked at this intersection at this time.

So our nominator Yamini and her colleagues gathered some photos and footage that I wanted to briefly share. So first we have a photo of the crash location looking east, right? And then I highlighted or outlined I should say, where we believe that the crash took place in red.
And then next we have a photo of the crash location, but from the opposite direction. So from this vantage point, we are looking west at oncoming traffic on Grissom Road. And then you can see Old Grissom Road is depicted on the left here behind this stop sign.

And then in this shot you can see some westbound vehicles turning left onto Old Grissom. And I believe that these pictures were taken by one of our volunteers between afternoon and evening. So this can kind of give us a better feel for what conditions might have been like at the time of day when the collision actually took place.

And then here we can see some eastbound traffic approaching the intersection of Grissom and Old Grissom.

And then these two shots show how traffic lines up at that stop sign on Old Grissom Road. So it seems like there could be potential for a lot of stop cars here.

And then these last two photos that we wanted to share, kind of point out what it's like to experience this intersection. So you can see on this top photo there's some signage that I believe may have been put up as memorials, and that's right in between Grissom and Old Grissom. And then on the bottom right, this is a still image that I pulled from a video where our volunteers were talking with a local, right? And this local pointed out that you can see rubble and evidence of damage done to cars at this intersection all the time and kind of held up this piece of debris as an example of that.

So we managed to gather measurements of the intersection as well. And you can see kind of based in this diagram, there's one sidewalk on the north side of the intersection that is five feet wide. And then as we're coming down the intersection, we hit these westbound lanes. The outer one is 15 and a half feet wide, and the inner westbound lane is 11 feet wide. That center turn lane is a 13 foot wide lane. And then the inner eastbound lane is 11 feet wide and the outer eastbound lane is 14 and a half feet wide. So the total width here adds up to 70 feet. Now the overall site looks like a suburban development pattern, right? There's a mixture of residential and commercial properties sort of in the surrounding area. And I'm gonna take us to a couple maps on the next slide to point out a few things that I think are relevant to just keep in mind, keep. So the crash location is located within what I would call like a rough diamond of three state highways and then interstate four 10. So in this left hand map here, you can see Texas 1 51, the 1604 loop, and then Texas 16 over on the right hand side and then interstate four 10 down here.

And then when we look at Grissom Road, it looks like it is connecting between 16 and the 1604 loop on either side, right?

And then also you can't see it on this map, but there are at least two elementary schools nearby the crash location as well.

And then finally, we managed to conduct a speed study at this location and it was conducted under, you know, typical free flow traffic circumstances, right? So there were 293 cars tracked during the study.

46% of motorists were found to be speeding beyond that 45 mile per hour limit.
And there were only five cars found to be going at 55 miles per hour or higher.
And then based on our calculations, 85% of drivers were traveling at or below 48 miles per hour.

So I'm going to stop sharing my screen and I would like to turn to our panel so we can talk through some of the factors that might be at work here. So Joey, if you wouldn't mind starting us off, you know, could you tell us what you think might have contributed to this crash? And if you have Google Street View available, you can feel free to screen share and point out specific things as well if you want.

Joey Pawlik: Sure, thanks Tony. So I think one of the easiest things to see is we were at the crash site yesterday too. Like you mentioned people at really high speed through this intersection or this area in general on Grissom Road. And with that being said, when you're at this intersection of Grissom and Old Grissom Road, the drivers, these cases have to make really risky decisions. And this is not even taken into account the pedestrians who are put at risk, who are also in this environment. As we saw yesterday and also the days before that we had been at the crash sites. And so I think, you know, in general, you know individuals, you know, drivers who are having to make a left turn or even a right turn from Old Grissom onto Grissom Road have to make a really risky decision because people are traveling really fast on and oftentimes speeding, going over the speed limits on Grissom Road.

And same for people who are turning from the westbound lane on Grissom Road onto Old Grissom Road. So either way it's until it's really scary being out there. And also, you know, and for drivers too, I'm very sure, and no Yamani, we were talking how it was scary for us even

getting outta that intersection yesterday. And I can imagine many folks who go through that every day. It's the same as well. And also when we were out there yesterday too, I noticed that a lot of people are running the stop sign, essentially they're at Old Grissom Road because they feel like they have to, I imagine in those cases they feel like they have to hurt and get outta that intersection to safely get onto Grissom.

Tony Harris: Great, thank you for for pointing that out. Yeah, I hadn't thought about people running the stop sign, but now that you mentioned it a as I'm thinking back to some of the videos that I watched earlier on, that might've been something that was evidenced there too. Great. Any other, any other thoughts in terms of factors, Joey?

Joey Pawlik: Sure. So I think you mentioned too, like overall lane width. The street is, you know, designed very wide and you know, it's, it creates essentially a highway for drivers to feel, you know, comfortable with driving fast and getting fast where they need to go. Or even as you'd notice on the photos you presented earlier, the map, the road also has a curve coming from the west going down to the east. And so also, you know, create some blind spots too. Maybe some drivers think that maybe the sun's in their eyes and or you know, something and they turn out and maybe they didn't see a driver coming, so there could be some sight line issues there.

Again, the l0ng width, the road overall is very wide I think. There could be also some aesthetic improvements too, in terms of maybe adding trees, maybe calm, the overall really stressful environment that the road creates. So there's, you know, some other elements that could also I saw initially that kinda create this hostile environment.

Tony Harris: Yeah, definitely, definitely. Thank you. Let's go to Alex next. Alex, can you tell me what you're seeing here in terms of contributing factors?

Alex Cruz: Yeah, so one more thing to add is that I'm literally a neighbor of, of the intersection. I don't think it has been mentioned. I live within 300 feet of that intersection. So one of the things that we notice constantly on top of the high speeds is also the traffic patterns and that blind curve the bend that Joey was mentioning definitely is a contributing factor.

The fact that Old Grissom is literally an old, an old road that is just narrow and underserved and, and underdeveloped creates bottlenecks in that, in that area. And that does generate some pressure for the people trying to get out of Old Grissom to rush into the intersection as quickly as possible every, so creating some risky behaviors in that, in that attempt to get out of the street as possible as quickly as possible because you know, it can get backed up a lot. There's also a lot of specialized traffic because we have a lot of schools and school buses constantly.

We have a quarry, a cement quarry right next door to that so that trailers and, and semis and things are coming in and out from the intersection, not the intersection but from c So that generates some sort of, of very unique patterns that in combination with high speeds. It, it's just, it's absolute recipe for what already happened. And now don't. A few weeks ago we had a, another couple crashes, fortunately, neither one of which were fatal, but just on Grissom again in different types of, or different versions of that intersection that we already have. It's not the only one Old Grissom and Grissom are it, it is a good example, but it's not the only one alongside of Grissom Road.

So it's, it's, it's a multifaceted thing that, yeah, it's mostly speed and how inviting for speed, we drive that all the time and it's very inviting for speed. It's, it's, it's enticing to speed on that, on that road.

Tony Harris: Yeah, thank you. I remember reading about a crash that happened, I think a few blocks away from this one, maybe in late 2023. But it's, it's interesting when you kind of look at a historical perspective, you know, what, what's happening with a, an environment where

speeding is definitely something that's taking place. Right. Yamini, can we ask you in terms of factors like what you're seeing here, what you think might have contributed?

Yamini Karandikar: Sure, absolutely. So like Joey, I was on site yesterday and I actually did have to make that left turn that that was part of a crash. And I, it was very stressful to be in that situation because you're trying to turn left across two lanes of traffic. Other people are trying to turn left into Old Grissom and then you feel cars piling up behind you. And so there's just like this really heightened stressful environment and you feel like you need to go quickly, but cars are going by 40 to 50 miles per hour most of the time and it's really hard to like judge distances and, and make sure that you're doing that turn safely.

So it's very stressful to like have to keep all this in, in my mind while like trying to make that turn. So we're asking drivers to do a lot of multitasking to, to navigate safely. There's just so much to to deal with there.

And then also I was like thinking of right of way, like I was like, is it my turn or does that left turn go first? And just like, there's just so much that drivers have to keep in mind here when, when making these terms we're really asking a lot. So I think that stress and pressure can definitely contribute to the factors there. And it's partially due to road design because people are going so fast it's really hard to like sneak in and make that turn and yeah. Yeah, it, it's also I think a little confusing for drivers because the lane widths vary so much, right? It's kind of a weird feeling when you're driving on the road and when, because there's like 11, I think it was 11 feet next to like 14 and a half feet and it just, it doesn't feel right,
Tony Harris: Right? It was between 11 and 15 and a half I think. Where was the range? Yeah.

Yamini Karandikar: Wow. Exactly. And when you think about our mindset of, okay, the, the left lane is for for passing, but it's narrower than the right lane, which is for not passing, it just kind of creates a weird mental struggle. I think it's kind of how it, how it felt to be there

Tony Harris: Be right. That's a really helpful perspective to keep in mind. I, I know there are certain places that I avoid, right? Because I experience them as a stressful driving environment for, for making turns or, or any other kind of navigation. So, so thank you for sharing that. Anything, anything further?

Yamini Karandikar: Couple other things. So further up and down gr some there are also a lot of access points, kind of what Alex alluded to. And so again, we're asking a lot of drivers to feel like they can go really fast because the road is so wide, but there are all these like neighborhoods where the only way they can leave their neighborhood is ome. So I'm assuming there's a lot of cars trying to navigate these complex environments at really high speeds.
I can kind of show what I'm, I'm talking about if that's helpful.

Tony Harris: Sure, yeah. If you'd like to pull it up, go for it.

Yamini Karandikar: Okay. Can you see my screen?

Tony Harris: Yeah, I can see it. Okay. So this is the, the intersection here. And so for example, if you see this Golden Harvest, sparrows Nest, this neighborhood, they can't get out of their neighborhood unless they get onto Grissom. And so there's additional like points of conflict that these drivers have to be aware of. So it's not just this intersection, it's like right after this one there's another one and then there's another one. So there's a few neighborhoods like this that I think here's another one here that they can't get out of their neighborhood unless they get on this like really high speed roadway.
Right? That's really helpful to have that illustrated out. Thank you.

Joey Pawlik: I think just adding onto to that point too, I think we've talked about the high speed in general on Grissom, but also, you know, I don't know if it's already been mentioned, but also just when people are having to turn, especially from Old Grissom, you're, and even the neighborhoods itself, like you mentioned, people are having to speed getting outta this

intersection so you're stressed about how, what, how am I gonna fit into this, you know, these different traffic windows, how am I gonna get out? So you often in that case feel like you need to gun your vehicle and get out here real quick, you know, creating unsafe conditions too, where what if you, what if you were able to, you know, lose control or something.
So that's also a high risk, you know, situation where not only are you trying to take your life in your hands, trying to get through different traffic, but also you're forcing yourself to have to speed to get out of those intersections as well.

Tony Harris: Right, right.

Alex Cruz: That is, that is something that well obviously I get to experience every day. Well when going to work or doing anything that we have to, that included with, it's a high traffic area for, for people going to gr some in certain times a day. Specifically as I mentioned and has been mentioned schools, we also have three or four churches with very large attendees, or not attendees themselves, but the at attend Yeah. Very large attendances and large parking lots. And during certain times a day it, they even have to bring in their own traffic calming measures and people, and they have the city, they, they need the city to step in for Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings because otherwise there would be just a exponential incidences or incidences And, and yeah, as you were saying, most of these neighborhoods are cul-de-sac designed in such a way that you can only get in on Grissom and out on Grissom and that's it.

So everyone who lives there has to experience that every single day.

Tony Harris: Wow.

Alex Cruz: And one other thing I wanna notice, like there are neighborhood, I guess there are like houses that are pretty close to this and I imagine I don't live there, but it must be really loud, it really

Alex Cruz: Have your map up. Can I have use of your map? Yes, yes. Okay.

Yamini Karandikar: It is very, very loud. It's as loud as a highway almost,

Alex Cruz: Right. I'm gonna see if I can, if I can mar if I can annotate.
So these right here, all these right here are houses. Oops, sorry. Which the, the backyards actually back up to Grissom directly only separated by a fence and then, and then the, the curb. So yes, okay. They're loud and we're always aware of my house. I mean it's somewhere around here. Not gonna be any more specific than that. So yeah, we get to experience that all the time. It, it is loud, it could be louder. We're not, it's not that terrible, but as I mentioned it's o our only way into life is here and here and that is it.

So it is, yeah, it's, everything has to go through that, through that street to go go in or out from, from, I wanna say a few thousand people in this area.

Tony Harris: Wow. Thank you. Thank you for that. Yeah, Yeah. These, these access points or conflict points are, are definitely interesting to think about. And to hear it from somebody that lives there is, is really powerful. And the noise, I, I also remember when I was watching some of the videos, struggling to hear commentary from you all. 'cause the cars were, were so loud in the background. Yeah. Okay. One more thing, one more thing

Alex Cruz: One more thing, one more thing For it real quick. We have about four trail heads along reason as well. You can see one here, you can see one right there. Cathedral, rock Park, a couple more further west and a couple more further east.

So there's also children traffic on off school hours as well by people trying to go on on on bike rides and, and hikes and things like that. That's also another thing that probably can be important to take into consideration is trying to protect our children.

Tony Harris: Yeah, absolutely. It's something important to, to keep in mind for sure. Okay. Edward, can we invite you in to, to speak on any factors that you're seeing? I'm happy to share my screen for, for maps if that's helpful.

Edward Erfurt: Yeah, I, let me reinforce some of the things that I agree with that, that the others have identified. Yeah. Grissom Road, I think we all are saying it is a high speed road. It's designed as such at strong towns. And, and when we look at what you all are saying with the residential neighborhoods and the urban patterns and limited access, this roadway is a highway system being asked to do local road work at strong towns. We coined this as a stroad, it's not a pretty stroad, but it is a street road hybrid.

So along this road there are some locations that are benefiting with traffic lights and some that are not.

When I look at the, as been described here on that roadway, the variable lane widths, this is not every lane of equal weight, this roadway prioritizes speed.

So the fact that you would have a, a smaller minor road coming onto it at a strange angle is a conflict and, and probably impacts the capacity of the roadway designed. They're two incompatible systems and we can see there's some other locations along the corridor where that incompatibility has been resolved with that traffic light and, but the traffic light stops the free flow of traffic.

So there's some contradictions in, in that system.

So and so quite a bit has been put into that the goal of the transportation system of Grissom. I, you know, I don't think that's achieving it in this area because it's designed for high speed through movement regardless of what it costs to build. And as we can see safety being prioritized below the movement of cars.

When I look at this intersection, when you all are describing from the experience, and I can see it in plan and we can see in the videos the confusion of drivers.

I don't know how anybody can safely make a left turn off of Grissom Road at this intersection because of the angle, the geometry of the intersection and being two lanes of through traffic coming in that direction. If somebody is in the curb lane, they will, and with the curvature of the road, the sight lines to know if there is a second car in the that passing lane, you, you can't see them.

So trying to make a left turn there, there are multiple opportunities for your line of sight to be blocked. Which again, as we saw, I think is a major contributing factor, the ability that somebody would turn left here, that the design is not safe for that. The, and that's where these ideas, and I think you all have described, and I really appreciate all of our local experts as, as you've explained, driving in the intersection that that urge to drive fast.

If you notice the geometries of this Old Grissom road is not at a 90 degree or close to 90 degree, that that large curve by the power station. Again, as you come up, you in your mind the physical space feels more like an acceleration lane onto a highway system than a neighborhood street, the neighborhood street with the controlled stop.

So when we see, see those pieces, even as the aesthetics of this particular environment, this is not the prettiest part of the neighborhood. You've got a giant industrial power station, you've, with all of its driveways and confusions, you've got access off of a quarry.

I think Old Grissom, you've got what, like a shed shop and a so sod farm. So there's some of those things there that are challenging in that area that have very limited opportunities for redevelopment. So in the development side, this is really all that it is going to be as, as, as Alex has, has shared with this, that this is not the only place that this happens along the corridor.

One of the officer observations I have is why is this road even there?

Hmm? Why is Old Grissom even like, why isn't it closed off?

When we look at the everything in the area, there are neighborhoods that have traffic lights. So Misty Way that neighborhood has of their two entry points at least has one traffic controlled entrance that allows for several hundred residents, if not more access onto their only lifeline. This this highway system of Grissom Road, the neighborhood, and I'm see if I've got my notes right on that, the Golden Harvest neighborhood and the quarry don't have that benefit Grissom road observationally. It doesn't make sense why that is there and why folks are not going to a safer crossing of this intersection up at Timber Path.

When, when you look at this like why anybody would make a left turn here or be allowed to, when, if you're making that movement to go to the north or that left turn, you really could just go up the road a little bit further and get to a full fully controlled intersection at a commercial node where there's dedicated turn lanes where highway to highway type systems, high speed, high capacity systems are, are meeting at a, at a like intersection.
When I hear folks say that they're confused at an intersection, this is where that I, I'm, I'm resonating with this idea of a road of incompatible systems.

I don't know why I am driving here. Type question as a driver, the last thing, the absolute last thing we want the driver to feel is uncomfortable and, and not confident in the condition of operating a vehicle.
Because in a highway environment, our response is not to stop, it's actually to go faster where we compound the safety of this situation. So there aren't, there's nothing there of friction at this intersection scene, no development around here, there i, the people on the trail heads are actually below the road. So you wouldn't see those, those pieces.

So that idea of confusing, I don't know if there's in the green book or any of the transportation books, a confusing section, but as humans, if we're in that environment, being really aware of that.

So as I'm looking at this intersection, I'm also compelled with, as you all are, are, are sharing the high speeds, the incompatibility of systems, the, we, we could do a calculation. I don't think it saves you that much time to make a left turn here versus going up to timber path. So why that is even there, and even if it was five seconds or 60 seconds more time, you know, pretty large amount of time when I think about these things, the safety factor, the crash factor, that that's a significant, that that's a concern for me putting people at risk, right? And all the compounding costs that go with that of bringing lifesaving equipment out, putting folks in that system, shutting the system down, limiting access. I suspect when there's a crash here, people can't get home.
So again, that, that type of piece. But yeah, I agree with what everybody else has shared and just put that insight of just, I'm confused as to why this road is even open or why it exists when you have such incompatibility of systems.

Tony Harris: Yeah, that's a really great way to, to phrase it and thinking about the, the trade-offs, right? Like five seconds for five seconds off my trip versus like the safety of other human beings, right? I know that's a little bit of a dramatic way to, to pose it, but also like accurate.

Edward Erfurt: It's a five, five second delay versus never making home alive. I mean I would be very, very bold in saying that because at the speeds, these are lethal speeds on this roadway, We're asking somebody to go from zero at a stop sign into a system that is at a lethal speed and we look at the speed tables. That's what that's been designed for. When we look at the lane widths on Grissom Road, it is designed for you for the posted speed for you to be able to pass somebody at the posted speed in a lane that's wider than the, the curb lane. So we're encouraging as a design site that additional speed because we're focusing on the throughput. And then on top of it, there is a continual center turn lane because nobody, none

of the engineers could make a decision of where cars should go for left turns to give the most free flow on this corridor.

Right? That's, those things are incompatible with a two lane, really almost rural roadway of Old Grissom coming into it. And we can see the intersection, all that extra asphalt is as a result. It's a, it's a symptom of this incompatibility.

Tony Harris: Definitely. Yeah, I think it was very fortunate that no one was severely injured or killed during this crash. Right. Yeah. Okay. Any further thoughts on factors before we move toward recommendations?

Okay, Joey, if you don't mind kicking us off again, you know what, when you're thinking about like what we've discussed today and kind of in the weeks leading up to this session, what would you recommend or ask people to think about with regards to making this intersection in this location safer?

Joey Pawlik: Definitelyy, I think there's a few different spectrums, you know, what are some short-term maybe modifications or even long-term modifications because you know, at this point, you know, it's excited that the city's proposing a traffic light that's, you know, maybe one solution, but what else could be done in the short term? And I think given in the short term, is there, you know, a restripe project that could be done to restripe this, the roadway to reduce the lane width or even in some cases maybe until that decision is made in terms of, you know, like Ed, what had mentioned too, like could the roadway at Old Grissom be closed or that's maybe a long-term decision, but even things like rumble strips, I'm wondering if, you know, on, on Grissom road speed until, you know, there's maybe a larger scale, maybe heavy infrastructure changes.

There could be elements like that because you know, right now, as we talked about the design, really the design of the roadway really encourages people to speed. And maybe that's

one element of, you know, rumble strips or something like that to have a short-term improvement to slow down drivers. Because again, like you talked, we talked about this crash and others, but like in the past five years there's been three fatalities near this intersection. And again, you know, one person seriously injured or dead from a crash is one too many. And so can we, you know, can cars abuse some rumble strips and instead of, you know, killing another person, I think that's, you know, just a viable solution.

Or even, you know, thinking larger, you know, beyond like a traffic light, maybe could we install a roundabouts, roundabouts have, you know, mixed results. Sometimes for pedestrians it could be safer, it slows down traffic, but maybe somebody who's visually impaired may have this issues get around it. But it could definitely help slow down traffic and you know, roads still there could help with that. Merging traffic as well.

And again, too, like we've, you know, a couple points are made to about the beautification or even adding more nature. I think that could be, those could be some solutions too. It's very wide open. Talk about the noise issues.

Very hot out there too. Luckily y yesterday was getting kind of warm out there. I can only imagine, you know, especially in the heat to the summer here in Texas it can be very hot. And that can be mentioned. There are pedestrians, there are cyclists who use this roadway. So in addition to making it, you know, safe, we should also be thinking how to make it more comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists. And if we make it safe and comfortable for them, we're gonna make it safe for everybody too, including motorists.

Edward Erfurt: Hey Joey, I have a question about those rumble strips. A as a a as a response to the speed, we've talked about the noise. So we know the cars that go faster, they're gonna make more noise. Usually the asphalt in warmer climates end up with more road separation. So you get the cracks in the road that lead that piece. My experience has been that the rumble strips make a lot of noise because it's so a driver could hear it in their car that's insulated with

the radio on while they're talking. And I don't know if you've had any experience with that when you're in with residential neighborhoods and whether that's a viable option to get drivers to go down without, in negatively impacting the surrounding properties.

Joey Pawlik: Yeah, I personally have not and like directly next to residential neighborhoods. But I think, you know, again, like what are, you know, maybe it's not rumble strips, but what are some other shorts and solutions that could be deployed, you know, within the next, you know, month or so.

So it's one of those, you know, possible short-term solutions. But I mean, you're right, it should be considered how much noise that makes or if, you know, maybe it does slow down track cars enough to where it does maybe have a reduction in noise in the area. So I mean, but yeah, it's very plausible to consider, you know, again, beyond just, you know, the number of crashes and speed, like are there elements that can reduce the noise from the street? So I think there's all, you know, like we're talking here today, what other metrics can we use to provide overall, not just safety, but even comfort for people on the roadway and then the local neighborhoods.

Tony Harris: Yeah, well put, thank you. Thank you. Yamini, anything from you with regards to recommendations that you've thought about?

Yamini Karandikar: Yeah, sure. So I'm thinking in kind of three timeframes. So I think sure in the immediate term, like as soon as possible related to what Edward was saying, is either convert Old Grissom into like a no through traffic road that's gonna prevent that left turn, but the businesses shouldn't have, you know, issues 'cause it's still, you can still go there, you just can't make that left turn or somehow make it so you can't make that left turn going both ways. So either, you know, turning it into a no through access, it shouldn't really add a lot of time. There are a lot of controlled intersections nearby that people can still access Grissom from.

So I would say that is the, the immediate recommendation.

And then near term, I think as it's been mentioned, this is a stroad, like a street road hybrid. And so the community should really decide what Grissom Road should be. Should it be a road, should we prioritize moving cars? Should we prioritize high speeds? Should we prioritize removing complexity or is it more like a street where we want to bring people here together to spend time and to build wealth. So the community needs to kind of come together and decide what they want it to be. And then, you know, long term start to make steps towards that. If it's going to be a road, we really wanna reduce access points and reduce the amount of intersections on the road.

If it's gonna be a street, then we really need to really, really slow down those feeds and create a sense of place where people come together and, and while these discussions are happening, it would probably be a good idea to, well, to narrow some of those lane width, like the ones that are 14 or 15, maybe you could do that with a cheap, like a, like just putting like a paint, like to visually narrow the lanes without actually narrowing it so that it feels a little cozier. So maybe like bringing that into to 12 or 11 feet just in like a visual sense of to slow down the speeds while all of these decisions are being made in the community.

So that's kinda my immediate near-term long-term recommendations there.

Tony Harris: Great. Thank you. Thank you. Alex, anything from you with regards to recommendations?

Alex Cruz: Yeah, more or less echoing what Yamini, Edward and Joey have been saying. So yeah, there's no functional purpose for Old Grissom to exist as it is essentially a shortcut. So it, there's no real good reason for it to, for, for it to exist other than the fact that there's two shops, a body shop and a like a shed shop and that is it. So what DNI was suggesting, I absolutely agree with that. We should start by planning towards shutting that through traffic.

I would suggest probably making it so that left turn from Old Grissom into Grissom should not be allowed. That's, I think that's the very first somewhat easy first step that is not really gonna affect Grissom at all and it should, should probably stop a lot of things. And midterm, I, again, I agree with what everyone else is saying here, probably some kind of speed reduction measures. It's well known that signage doesn't really help. Speed limits don't really help something as was Yamini and, and, and you were talking about something that is gonna psychologically, visually not invite you to just, you know, step on it

.

That's midterm, I guess and long term. I, again, with the me a hundred percent we have to decide whether or not this is gonna be a a just a through street, something that is there to get us from point A to point B or a community street or from a stroad to a street, right?

I, I would argue that we can, in, in long term, we can start thinking about narrowing down to just one lane bike lanes and preparing it for it to be connected with, you know, future rail transit and whatnot with, with San Antonio in general, right? Like prepare the, this stroad that has so much traffic for different modes of traffic, not just cars.

Tony Harris: Yeah. Thank you for highlighting the different modes of traffic component. I think that's something that's easy to, to lose track of, especially when we're thinking like immediate versus short term versus long term. Yeah. Great. Edward, any recommendations from you?

Edward Erfurt: Yeah, my, my first recommendation would be to close Old Grissom close it tomorrow. That can be done with Jersey barriers just as if, or, or barricades just as if a pipe had broken on the street. It, we can acknowledge this, that there is a safety issue here that would require many, many steps to do. This is the next smallest step that a community can do to ensure the safety of its citizens at this intersection where this happens.

If the political will isn't to do that because maybe the economics of the shed shop exceeds the life value of the people driving on the roads, then going out on Grissom and that center turn

lane remove, like immediately put a barrier in that section so that you cannot make a left onto gso and then on Old Grissom you wouldn't be able to make a left turn onto Grissom.

Tony Harris: So you're saying immediately close Old Grissom road off or put that barrier up onto Grissom Road? Am I understanding or…

Edward Erfurt: Yeah, in the center turn lane. Okay. Put a barrier right in the middle of the center turn lane.

It, you could do a temporary barrier that's beautiful, that would look like a planted island or you could do something in much more quickly with like, like we see construction cones and, and bears there removing the complexity. So every one of the turn movements move out of that, the those without closing the road and just restricting the left turns, there's still the concern of the right turn and getting the right turn out of Old Grissom on the Grissom because some of the things that we've talked about have been addressed because now you've removed the complexity of people making left turns. So a person making a left on Old Grissom to Grissom, they're not going to block the view of somebody trying to make a right turn on Old Grissom to Grissom.

But you still have this backup of cars, you still have very fast cars moving on Grissom Road. So it gets better but not resolved.

So, you know, when I look at with this, looking at those pieces, I, I think that the issues we see here are happening here because of the, the movements and confusion. But as everyone has described, this is something that is occurring up and down Grissom Road.

A very first next step is for a city like San Antonio that's adopted Vision Zero that has adopted a lot of other innovative transportation systems is from a political side to determine what the characteristic of that road is and make the affirmative decision that safety is the first priority.

So the through movement through that area should be a lower priority on the scale.

And I, and the temporary measures that we've seen in other communities that could be done here is one, definitely narrowing the lanes with paint and cones, taking that center turn lane and breaking that up so that it's not a continuous lane through, again, it's an optical narrowing component. So portions of that getting islands in areas from Golden Harvest to Misty way, that whole stretch, there's no need for those turn movements.

So, you know, breaking that up so drivers understand they're more focused in where they're at and getting the roadway designed so that the drivers Dr. Drive the ultimate speed we want. And I'd even throw out the question, looking at some of the road trip numbers on this road and knowing what has to be done with those intersections, with lights of stopping the throughput, maybe the city starts to look at this possibly being produced down right size to a two-lane road with some dedicated turn lights so that the, you take down, you, you start to get folks to drive the right speed. When we look at the spacing of traffic lights, the the thought that you would get up to the posted speed in a safe way without getting to a stoplight is, is although it, it, it's not within driver expectation.

So really looking at that from a long term and I I'm kind of curious with the group, the feedback from the group. We've talked about a lot of the contributing factors, the confusion at the intersection, the speeds.

I didn't hear any recommendations from this group about a light.

And, and since that is what is being, I my understanding is that there is a desire to get a traffic light there to address concerns if the panel had any opinions about that, if that addresses the contributing factors to this crash.

Alex Cruz: If, if I may add a light sounds like a band aid, it's not solving any problem, it is just, it, it would be stopping people there in that interception. But what about the rest? It's, there's no change or evolution in the way the motor is, is addressing how to drive through, through Grissom, which is the main issue how this chunk of infrastructure is designed for people to, even though they stopped at a, at a stoplight or, or a traffic light, they will go back to the same speeds anyway and encounter the same conflicts over and over and over again. So yes, you stop, you stop it here, but you open the floodgates in this other place.

So it's not changing any anything, it's, it's just they're gonna hold as they're gonna hold to cover another one. It's just not solving anything.

Edward Erfurt: I had a similar reaction to that. Joey, did you have a thought?

Joey Pawlik: Yeah, I think, I mean, it could help in some cases. Like it could help folks, you know, as long as Old Grissom could be open to help, could help folks, you know, make their left turns feel, you know, a lot safer. But I don't think it's gonna help solve the speed issue a lot. So I think that's where think the city may have recommended also maybe medians in some places, again to help calm the street. But I think, you know, there's still some other areas that we could be looking to improve or what other measures, like I said, even a a roundabout if possible or other means to help truly calm down the area because if you install traffic lights, do some other modifications, it's still going to encourage high speed traffic.

Unless we had talked about, you know, changing the lane width. I think even again like adding, you know, beautification along the corridor could be in the median or along the sidewalks and Right. The long term focus, like are we, you know, if there's a future bond projects, can we add in maybe a sure use path or you know, a protected bike lane because I personally, a lot of people we saw biking along this corridor or biking on the sidewalks, it's, you know, okay to do, but it's also technically illegal to do in the city of San Antonio right now. Right. And so there

needs to be a place we talked about earlier for more modes of travel and those folks to feel comfortable doing so, and also safe places for those people to cross the street.
So it could be good, but there should also be some other considerations as well.

Yamini Karandikar: I, I kind of agree with what everyone here is saying. A traffic light does sound like a bit of a band aid and an expensive band aid. I don't know how much they cost, but I imagine we could do a lot of traffic calming with, with that money potentially. Right. And then I also think, you know, I guess the city could try to match the lights so that you get greens, but then that kind of end up going really fast again. Or if they're not like matched, I don't know what the right terminology is, but if you go from like a green to a red, then people are gonna speed up really fast because it feels like you can drive 50, 55 miles an hour and then like slam on their brakes, right?

So Right. It's still creating this like really high speed and then like this like really harsh slowdown potentially with, depending on like how the timing is of the, I so I don't, it, it might be safer, it might not be. It's really hard to say and it just feels like a expensive band aid to me.

Edward Erfurt: Hmm. It, it's very expensive and I, I think that's what's been holding up the project. Hmm. And looking at things like if, if a shared use path or protected bike lane was something that was desired.

When I look at the street section, at least from two neighborhoods from Golden Harvest to Misty way, there's no need for a center turn lane. So all of a sudden you take that asphalt, that real estate that's no longer necessary, that could be put to a different, use the 15 foot travel lane if it was right sized for the speed that was desired for the road. All of a sudden we're talking about 10 feet of additional width that we're picking up. If we do that to all the lanes, it's even more that you could get just by reallocating the asphalt that's there today. And, and I think we've seen through strong towns, we've reported on this of communities around the country that have done this with a temporary measure very quickly and with paint, with cones,

whatever level of barrier that is comfortable for riders to that, that speed could be implemented very quickly for like, because it's materials we already have or paint that's very inexpensive probably for some of the, you know, of fraction of the cost of this type of light that doesn't quite get addressing the issues there.

Tony Harris: Hmm.

Edward Erfurt: So I, no, I really appreciate everybody talking through that.

Yamini Karandikar: And what I like about the idea of like the paint or low cost barriers is you can try it and it doesn't cost very much and then you can see if it works, right? Right. And if it does work, then you can make it permanent. If it doesn't work, you can try a different low-cost method so it's not like as permanent as a light and you can kind of iterate and learn from the process as well.

Edward Erfurt: I would I describe it to dig a little bit further? cause I'm, I'm right with you with this. This is the highest level of public engagement we can do. So by doing that experiment in the street, by putting things that are movable to see how it works, the people that are participating in that activity are the people that drive that road every single day. And these are not the folks that have the time to come to a meeting at City Hall at seven o'clock on a Tuesday or do a Saturday workshop, but we would see it real time and because it's temporary, it's okay if it doesn't work, right? We haven't, we haven't lost anything. If we jump to a major infrastructure project for hundreds of thousands of dollars and we put it in and three weeks later it doesn't work, crashes continue to occur, speed continues to to be high.
We've spent a lot of money on something that hasn't yielded a result that is making it a better place.

But yeah, I would really encourage the temporary stuff and I I'm glad that you all are excited about it being, being local to advocate for that.

Tony Harris: Yeah, absolutely. Any further thoughts on recommendations? I

Joey Pawlik: I think just in general, you know, a lot of things we talked here today, you know, the city of San Antonio is already making strides to, you know, we have our Vision zero goal here, the city where, you know, right. Making strides over time to reach zero fatalities in our city.

We've made measures over time, but I think this is one more element that the city, excuse me, and community partners can include as part of this process of, you know, if there's already a number of crashes, how, how can we talk about, you know, these short-term solutions? Like what does our playbook look like to, okay, we've, you know, we've had some crashes here or this, you know, this design, we've seen a trend that designs like this are, you know, cause high speeds and cause more crashes and that, you know, more fatal crashes are crashes that result in serious injuries, which again, serious injuries are just as impactful.

Somebody could be, you know, disabled for life because of a crash. And so it's, you know, just as important to consider to reduce all of those. So I think with that being said too, those recommendations that, you know, as we think about our vision zero processes here in the city too, how can we be more, you know, quick to react to, you know, reduce these impacts and keep more people alive.

So I think it's again, just like we're not reinventing the wheel here. We're just building on, you know, what other cities are doing and maybe things that we're already doing here than the city and to make it more deployable and how can we work with community groups. Like for us, you know, we're, we're out there, you know, checking the speeds ourselves and experiencing the environments through essentially these forms of street audits.

Like actually I say in strong towns, we went out in another corridor and use a online street audit tool to, with community members to, again, like we talked about earlier, that public

participation side. Like how do, how does the community feel about this? What other data points? You know, it could be crash data or other elements, but also like, how do we feel about this space? What, you know, talked about this earlier as well, other folks mentioned like, what do people wanna see for this space? So I think that's just, you know, more elements in how we can, again, rectify these issues and these areas that are already hotspots, but also how can we prevent future hotspots from happening across our city.

Especially as, you know, San Antonio is one of the fastest growing cities in the nation. There's a lot of people in cars, but we also love to see them in other modes. And so how is that, you know, getting, how is, you know, Alex mentioned that earlier too. How is that included as part of that process? And so

Edward Erfurt: Joey, I think that's great. I, I think a, a up and coming city like San Antonio, they need to abandon a mid-century response system. Mm. And really move into a modern, you know, you know, up to the date response system. And, and cities like Cincinnati and I think even Austin have rapid response teams. These are like three person teams that represent several departments at the city to go out. There's been a, there's been a crash, there's been complaints, we'll go out, we're gonna find what we can do with materials and resources available today in a place like Cincinnati, they have a cap of a few thousand dollars of what they could use in materials.

So they're real scrappy about finding stuff already in the yard, already in the back of the utility vehicles to go and see what happens. And their political leadership are giving them space to do that experiment. Everybody knows it's an experiment. We're gonna try it and see how it is. And that's 22nd century technology. That's the type of things that we would expect in, in any of the other things we do on our phones or on our computers. So really trying to get San Antonio there. I I, I'm confident with the folks at the city that, that this can happen. I'm confident with folks that are like on this panel that represent the community that you could do this and, and

be a leaders of the nation by working many, many times throughout the city at many, many locations to, to make our streets safer.

Joey Pawlik: And with that being said too, like you mentioned, like there's the know-how at the city, a lot of folks are very, you know, have the, the will and want to make the street safer. And knowing too, like groups like Activate SA and you know, working with strong town San Antonio and you know, strong towns national, like there is the support to make this happen to, you know, drive this forward to make sure we have these quick build solutions to, you know, help us in the short term. And then also, you know, you know, midterm and the long-term measures. So I think just, you know, again, that there is the support from the community because, you know, talking with other community, you know, members, folks that live nearby and more people want to, you know, feel safer.

People wanna feel, you know, more comfortable in their communities. Whether it's, you know, reducing that roadway noise or you know, reducing pollution from the streets. We wanna see a better, more vibrant, resilient, beautiful San Antonio. And that includes reducing all of this type of mess too. So again, there's that support to make this happen.
See, see Better change is there as well.

Tony Harris: Yeah, well stated, definitely. Anything further on recommendations before we move into our closing segment?

Okay, perfect. Well, I'm just gonna share my screen one more time and I wanted to offer some acknowledgements and thanks out to people who have helped make this session possible. So Alex Yamini, Joey Edward, thank you all for being our panelists today, being with us and participating Yamini, thank you for nominating this crash in the first place and helping to gather all the necessary resources and supporting us in our work along the way. Some other San Antonio community members, including city staff, Jack Turek, Sheikh Kenneh, who helped out

over the past few months, I think even as far back as maybe September when we were originally gathering materials.

Thank you to our sponsor for this event and anonymous donor and thank you to Strong Town staff who have helped us out with preparations and materials over the past several weeks. So you can find a recording of this session and all of our crash analysis studio sessions by going to strong towns.org/crash studio. And our next virtual studio session will take place on March 22nd, and you can find more information about that on our website as well. And then on our site, you can also find links to our free academy course for establishing a crash analysis studio in your own community. And if you're interested in having strong town staff, visit your community to co-host an in-person studio.

You can also find an inquiry form through our website as well. So I'm going to share that link that I set out loud into the chat for everybody before we wrap up here.
And I would just like to say, you know, on behalf of my colleagues and the assembled panel, thank you for watching this session of the Crash Analysis Studio and keep doing what you can to build a strong town. Take care.