# Traffic Enforcement

Shifting Sheriff's Office Practices for Improved Traffic Safety

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In collaboration with:
Congolese Integration Network, Eastside For All, People Power
Washington, Transportation Choices Coalition, and with
contributions from Washington for Black Lives, a project of
Washington Community Alliance.
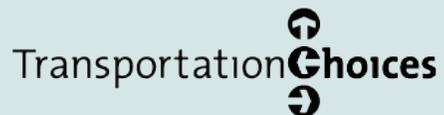
OLEO's Community Guidance Framework

- Community Guidance Framework Overview

- Key Takeaways

- Outreach Phase

- Research Phase

- Recommendations

- Conclusion and Questions

Traffic Enforcement

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November 2025

King County

OLEO
OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OVERSIGHT
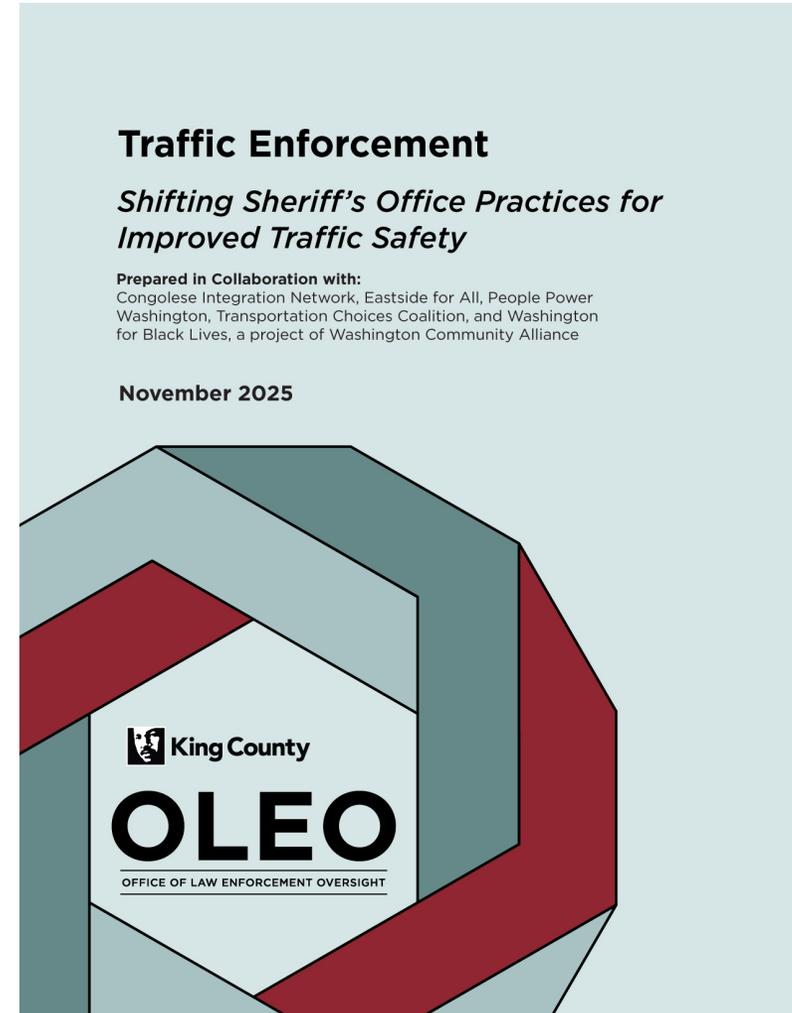
OLEO's Community Guidance Framework

- The CGF was developed in 2024

- Improves upon OLEO's policy review process by:
  - Incorporating community partners into every step
  - Increasing transparency with and accountability to partners
  - Responding directly to partners' priorities

| **1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
Recognize the Need for Policy Change	**Initial Policy Review**	**Determine Level of Community Guidance**	**Draft Policy Product**	**Communicate Impact & Evaluate Process**	**Community Education**

Key Takeaways

- Community members and Sheriff's Office deputies agree: speeding and aggressive driving are top traffic safety concerns in King County

- Traffic stops remain the most common encounter between deputies and community members, setting the tone for police-community relations.

- Despite the King County Auditor's 2022 recommendations, the Sheriff's Office continues to lack a department-wide traffic safety strategy or uniform data collection practices

- Prioritizing safety-related stops leverages limited law enforcement resources towards the most pressing concerns

Outreach Phase

Nov. 2024 – Jan. 2025
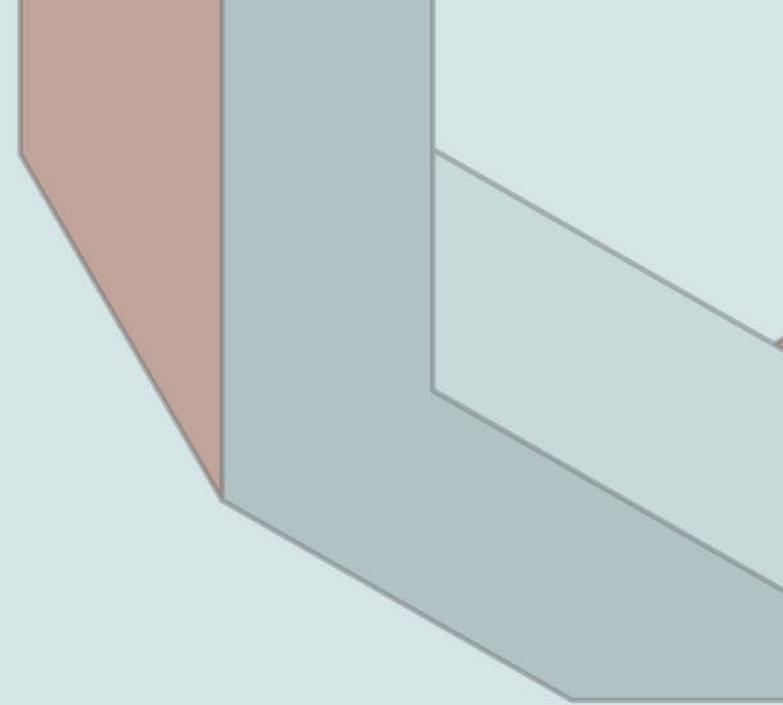
Methods

Traffic Safety Survey

- Developed and distributed by OLEO and community partners

- Collected nearly 200 responses between mid-November 2024 and early January, 2025

- Most respondents were White nondisabled women who did not speak a language other than English at home

Listening Sessions

- Two partners, the Congolese Integration Network and Washington for Black Lives (a project of the Washington Community Alliance) hosted listening sessions

- The demographic characteristics of listening session attendees was different from survey respondents: refugees and immigrants primarily from the Sub-Saharan region of Africa and single Black fathers in King County.

Findings

- Conducted both an online survey and in-person listening sessions between mid-November 2024 and early January 2025

- Both survey respondents and listening session attendees listed **speeding** and **aggressive driving** as top safety concerns

- Some feedback was contradictory: survey respondents called for increased police presence while listening session attendees prioritized limiting interactions with law enforcement.

- Vehicle maintenance was a low traffic safety concern for survey participants.
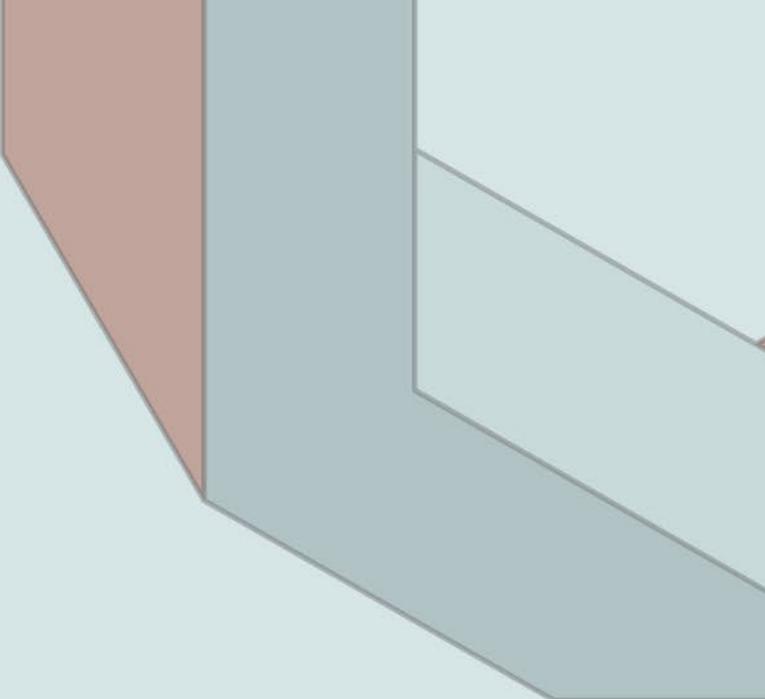
Research Phase

Feb. 2025 – Apr. 2025

Sheriff's Office Current Practice

- Interviews with Sheriff's Office personnel highlighted:
  - A lack of unified traffic safety strategy across the department
  - Significant deputy discretion

- The agency cannot consistently track specific traffic safety patterns and resulting law enforcement actions across the county

- OLEO conducted a review of Sheriff's Office traffic stop data from 2020-2024
  - Traffic stops declined throughout the pandemic, picking up again in 2023 and dramatically increasing in 2024.
  - Roughly two thirds of stops end in a warning.
  - Half of stops are for non-safety related violations.

Literature Review

- OLEO reviewed peer jurisdiction policies and peer-reviewed research to determine national best practices.

- Generally, shifts in traffic enforcement policy fall into four buckets:
  - o Prioritizing stops for safety-related violations
  - o Civilianization of traffic enforcement
  - o Increased automated enforcement
  - o Improved data collection practices
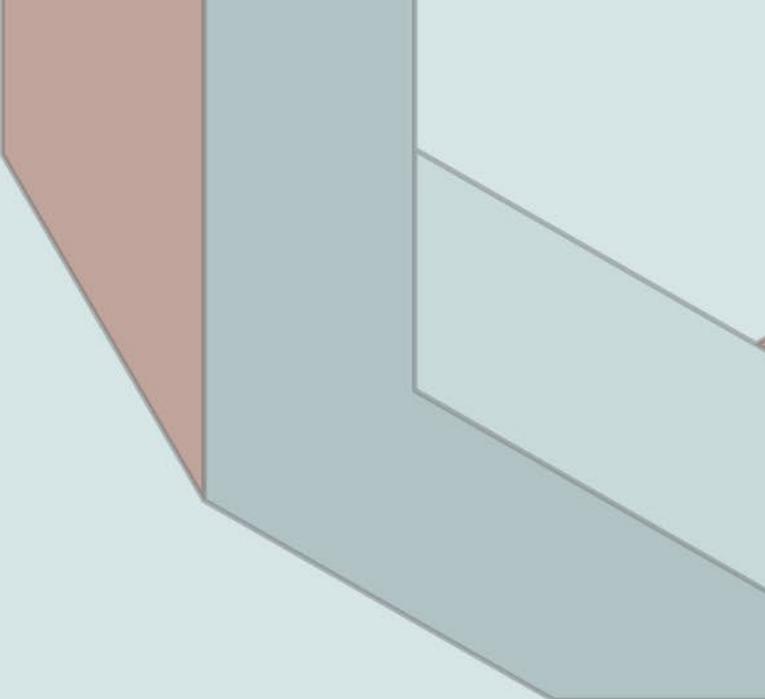
Developing the Recommendations

- OLEO presented research findings to community partners who gave input on which solutions seemed best fit for King County

- OLEO drafted recommendation language based on partner feedback
  - Due to conflicting feedback, multiple versions of recommendations were drafted for further input

- OLEO facilitated a group meeting where partners discussed recommendation options, negotiated changes, and approved four recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Revise policy guidance to prioritize enforcement of safety-related traffic violations, restrict non-safety-related traffic stops, and create a data-driven agency-wide traffic enforcement strategy.

1.1 Prioritize safety-related stops.

1.2 Restrict non-safety-related traffic stops.

1.3 Provide data-driven guidance to deputies to promote traffic safety.

1.4 Pursue non-punitive measures that address the root causes of traffic violations.

Recommendation 2

Limit questioning and prohibit consent searches during traffic stops to promote the rights of drivers and reduce racial disparities in enforcement.

2.1 Require deputies to limit the scope of their questioning during a traffic stop to the primary reason for initiating the stop.

2.2 Require deputies to immediately inform the driver of the initial reason for the stop upon first contact.

2.3 Prohibit "consent searches" during traffic stops.

Recommendation 3

Collect data for all traffic stops—including demographic data—and implement best practices for data collection, storage, and analysis to improve transparency and promote accountability.

3.1 Collect and analyze data for all traffic stops.

3.2 Collect and analyze traffic stop demographic data.

3.3 Streamline data collection practices.

Recommendation 4

If the Sheriff's Office is considering increasing automated traffic enforcement, King County should first commission an independent feasibility and equity study and require robust community engagement on the potential implementation of automated enforcement.

4.1 The Sheriff's Office should not pursue any new or additional automated enforcement until a feasibility and equity study can demonstrate a pathway to mitigate privacy and equity concerns.

4.2 Any future plans for implementing additional automated enforcement should be community-driven and aim to address the root causes of traffic safety concerns.
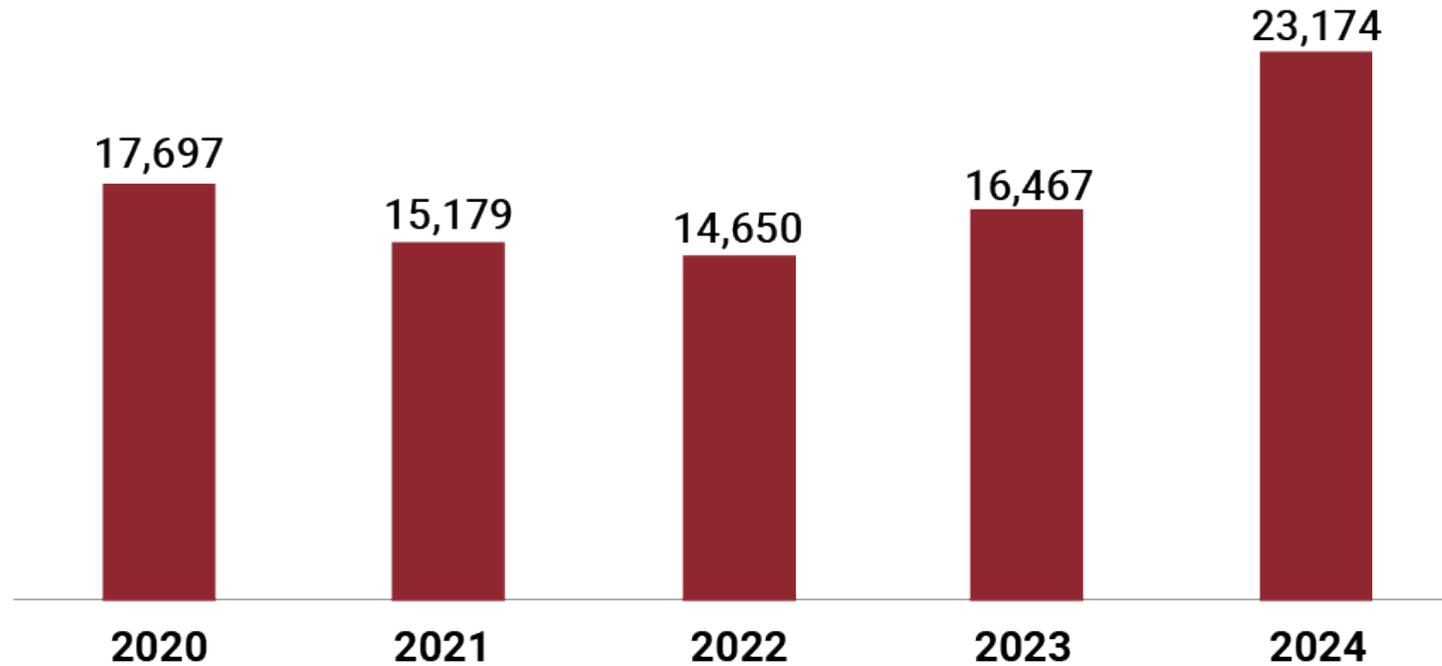
Next Steps

- The Sheriff's Office has received the report, is formulating a response, and has been in conversation with OLEO about the recommendations.

- OLEO will continue to monitor their response and will follow up with the Sheriff's Office, the County Council, and CACLEO six months after publication.

- OLEO continues to work on community-guided policy projects. If community members interested in getting involved, please contact our team at oleo@kingcounty.gov
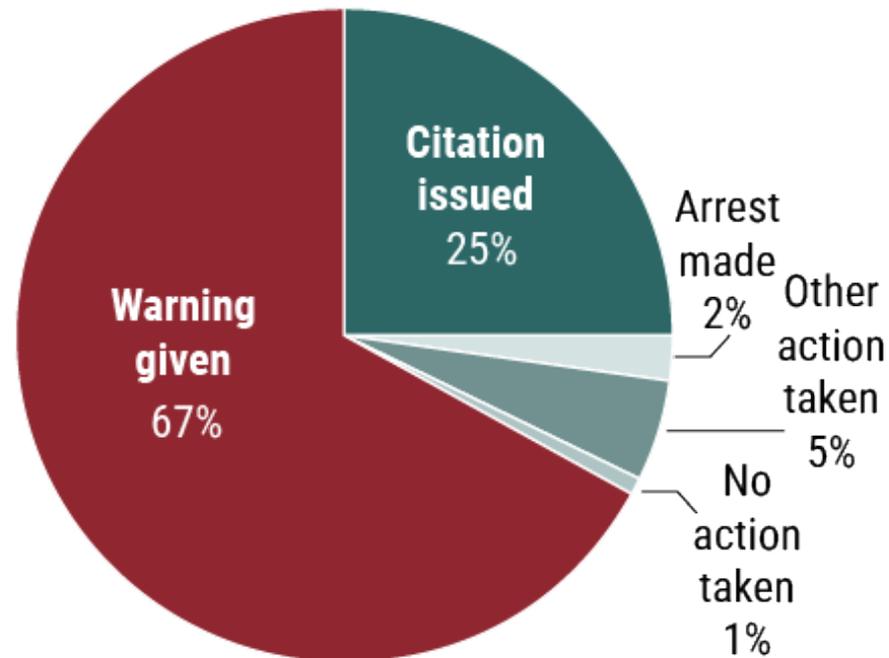
Thank you!

Questions?
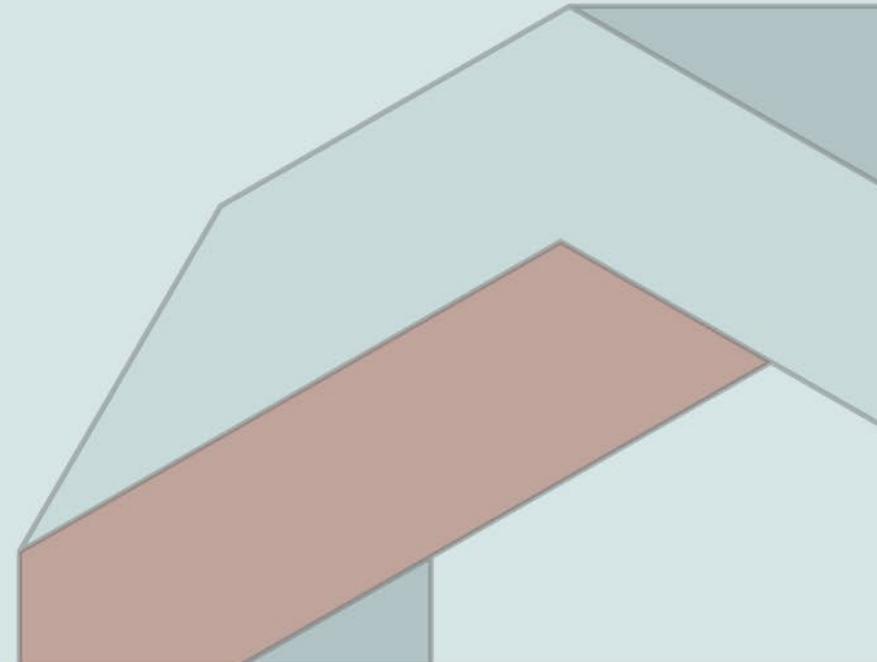
Sheriff's Office Current Practice (Cont.)

**Sheriff's Office Traffic Stops Increased in 2024
Compared to the Previous Four Years**

2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
17,697	15,179	14,650	16,467	23,174

Sheriff's Office Current Practice (Cont.)

Traffic Stop Outcomes Across King County, 2020-2024

- Warning given 67%
- Citation issued 25%
- Arrest made 2%
- Other action taken 5%
- No action taken 1%

Sheriff's Office Current Practice (Cont.)

Comparing Safety and Non-Safety Traffic Violations Across King County, 2020-2024

Jurisdiction	Safety-related violations	Non-safety-related violations
All Jurisdictions	48%	
Sammamish	58%	
Unincorporated King County	45%	
Burien	41%	
SeaTac	34%	

■ Safety-related violations ■ Non-safety-related violations