vision zero FOR youth

Pueblo of Jemez honors culture and tradition by creating opportunities for safe walking and biking for children

SafeRoutes
National Center for Safe Routes to School

FIA FOUNDATION

AROUND THE U.S. AND WORLD, communities are committing to eliminating traffic fatalities and injuries, often as part of Vision Zero initiatives. Many cities are focused on improving safety along school routes and other places where children and youth walk and bicycle. In some places, youth are actively working with cities and other partners to effect this change.

Vision Zero for Youth recognizes that starting with youth can be the catalyst to build community support for Vision Zero, that Vision Zero should include a focus on youth, and that youth voices can play important roles in creating safer streets.

Vision Zero for Youth supports a Safe System approach to reaching zero serious injuries and deaths on roads. The Safe System approach is a shift away from a focus on the behavior of individual road users to a focus on changing the system to provide safer environments for all road users. Identifying and addressing areas with greatest risk for young pedestrians and bicyclists is integral to all of the components of Vision Zero for Youth:

- **INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS** to calm traffic, improve crossings, and provide safe spaces for all users.
- **POLICIES AND PROGRAMS** focused on core issues such as slowing vehicle travel speeds.
- Use of crash **DATA AND PATTERNS** to identify problems, assess risk factors, and apply solutions in a systemic way.
- **PARTNERSHIPS** with education, transportation, law enforcement, local safety and health organizations, community members, elected officials, and advocates.
- **ENGAGEMENT** of the community around a culture of road safety, with an emphasis on youth empowerment.

PUEBLO OF JEMEZ: 2025 VISION ZERO FOR YOUTH U.S. LEADERSHIP AWARD RECIPIENT

The goals of the Vision Zero for Youth U.S. Leadership Award are to give recognition for noteworthy road safety practices and inspire other cities to take bold steps to reach zero traffic deaths among children and youth. It is presented by the Vision Zero for Youth initiative, led by the National Center for Safe Routes to School with support from the FIA Foundation and the UNC Highway Safety Research Center. In 2025, the U.S. Award program was informed by the Award Committee with representatives from road safety organizations and government agencies including the Atlanta Department of Transportation, Composing Mobility LLC/Freedom to Move Youth Movement, COMTO, FIA Foundation, Federal Highway Administration, National Center for Safe Routes to School, Institute of Transportation Engineers, National Association of City Transportation Officials, New York City Department of Transportation, Safe Kids Worldwide, the Safe Routes Partnership, Toole Design, and others.

Cities recognized with Vision Zero for Youth U.S. Leadership Award have taken impressive action to improve walking and biking safety for their children and youth with the goal of building safer, healthier communities for everyone.

Past recipients include Arlington County, VA; Los Angeles, CA; New York City, NY; Fremont, CA; Lincoln, NE; and Seattle, WA. The Milwaukee Safe Routes to School Program received an innovation award during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To learn more about the U.S. Award, visit: **www.visionzeroforyouth.org/awards/us**.

Students painting jersey barriers. Source: PDTD

THE PUEBLO OF JEMEZ is a federally recognized tribe steeped in customs and pride. Traveling on foot is a tradition passed down through centuries. According to the tribe's official website, "Throughout history, the Hemish people have run for religious purposes, communication, health, travel, sport, war, hunting and to foster bonds between villages. Tribal men and women of all ages have participated in these running activities for generations."

The Pueblo of Jemez community wanted to create more ways for children to walk and bike in their community to promote health and wellness. The Pueblo of Jemez Planning, Development, and Transportation Department (PDTD) built long-range plans that laid out phased improvements to walking and biking infrastructure, reflecting desires voiced by community members. Next, the tribe proactively built partnerships within the community and also with state, local, and national partners, finding creative solutions and raising funds through diverse sources.

The Pueblo of Jemez has celebrated a string of successful safety projects. The most notable was the building of the Hemish Path to Wellness, a multi-use pathway connecting children and families safely to school and community centers along an otherwise busy state highway. Throughout these safety efforts, children contributed their voices, participating in the community activities and providing needed feedback.

It was this unique approach and leveraging one project for the next that most impressed the Vision Zero for Youth U.S. Leadership Award committee, which chose the Pueblo of Jemez as a 2025 award winner.

Students painting jersey barriers. Source: PDTD

Prioritizing, planning, partnerships

The Pueblo of Jemez, one of the remaining 19 Pueblo tribes of New Mexico, is home to more than 3,900 tribal members. Located about an hour north of Albuquerque, the Pueblo covers about 89,000 acres of land surrounded by colorful sandstone mesas. According to the Pueblo's website, "The people of Jemez cherish their ancestral customs and integrate their culture with modern society."

In the 1930s, New Mexico State Highway 4 (NM 4) was built, bisecting the Pueblo of Jemez community. The highway created school route safety concerns because children had to walk on narrow shoulders and cross the busy highway to get home from the school bus or from transit stops. Adding to these problems was high-speed traffic along NM 4, made worse by poor lighting and the lack of pedestrian infrastructure. Parents hesitated to let their children bike or walk near NM 4, limiting their mobility and outdoor activities. These safety concerns plagued the Pueblo of Jemez for decades.

In 2018 the Pueblo of Jemez saw an opportunity. The tribe made pedestrian safety a top priority while developing its **20-Year Long Range Transportation Plan**. Then in 2020, the Pueblo worked extensively with community members to develop a **Pedestrian Trails and Bikeways Master Plan**, which included a phased approach to addressing safety infrastructure improvements and securing funding for projects. The tribal outreach elements throughout these steps included community meetings, focus groups, and surveys.

"Tribal culture and values are at the heart of every safety improvement we make at the Pueblo of Jemez," said Vince Toya, Transportation Operations Manager, Jemez Department of Transportation. "Our approach to planning, development, and transportation is guided by the understanding that safety is not only about physical protection—it's also about preserving life, respecting the land, and maintaining balance within the community. Our safety improvements reflect who we are as a people. They protect not just our bodies, but our traditions, our environment, and our sense of belonging. Each project is an opportunity to live our values—caring for one another, honoring our ancestors, and walking in balance with the world around us."

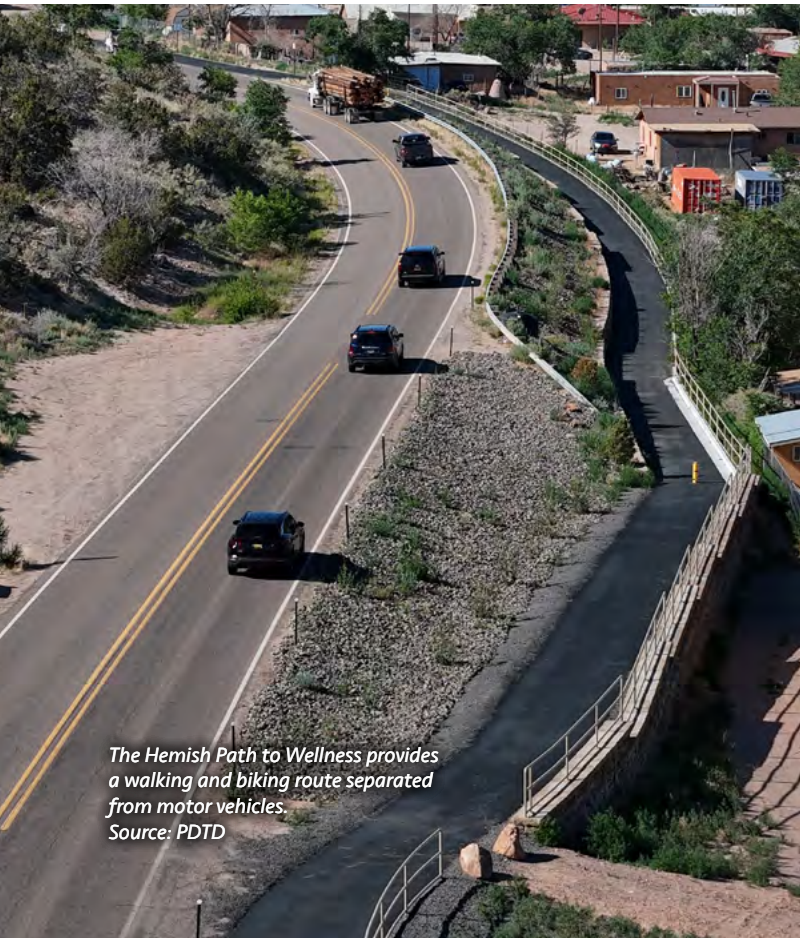
The cornerstone project that emerged during this time was the Hemish Path to Wellness, a proposed two-mile path to run along NM 4, providing a safer alternative travel route for walking and biking. As a proactive step, the Pueblo chose the location for the path based on high pedestrian activity and community-identified risks, rather than just crash history.

Hemish Path to Wellness

By leveraging partnerships, the Pueblo of Jemez Planning Development & Transportation Department secured multiple grants to fund the construction of the Hemish Path to Wellness. Grants came from sources including the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division, as well as federal Recreational Trails, Transportation Alternatives, and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Programs.

Also, from 2020 to 2022 the Pueblo collaborated with community members, engineers, and the New Mexico Department of Transportation to design the Hemish Path to Wellness, ensuring it reflected tribal cultural values while addressing the area's critical pedestrian and bicyclist safety issues. The intention was to build the path to connect vital community resources NM 4 had divided for more than 80 years. Planners designed the trail to connect the Pueblo's schools, community center, housing, and government offices, in addition to providing safe, accessible, and attractive bicycle and pedestrian facilities for people of all ages and abilities.

The trail was completed and opened in April 2024 at a total cost of $7.5 million. The two-mile, 8- to 10-foot-wide asphalt path provides school bus and transit access, improves crossings, and incorporates traffic calming features.



The Hemish Path to Wellness provides a walking and biking route separated from motor vehicles. Source: PDTD

"This trail is so much more than a project; it is healing for our community," said Toya during remarks at the Vision Zero for Youth Award ceremony, held during the 2025 National Transportation in Indian Country Conference. "For generations, the highway that cut through our Pueblo put our people at risk. Today, the Hemish Path has become a place of safety and reconnection for our youth and our elders. It is a source of joy and wellness for our community. It represents justice for our people."

Sheri Bozic, Director of Planning, Development, and Transportation with the Pueblo of Jemez said, "This project has been a major step in promoting active transportation and community wellness. It provides a safe, designated pathway for walking and biking that connects key areas within the Pueblo, supporting both physical health and cultural connection to the land. The path has become a visible symbol of our commitment to creating healthy, sustainable infrastructure for future generations."

Quick-build projects

The monumental Hemish Path to Wellness project was complemented by other focused efforts to improve opportunities for youth walking and biking in the Pueblo of Jemez. An example was a quick-build traffic calming project near Jemez Day School. The school, which serves around 140 K – 6 students, is located along Day School Road, where concerns had been raised about speeding and lack of pedestrian facilities. Students use two existing bike trails that exit onto Day School Road, highlighting the need for safer biking and walking conditions.

In 2024 the Pueblo received support for a project to address the safety challenges through the **National Center for Safe Routes to School quick-build minigrant program**. Pueblo leaders met with local traffic engineers to discuss implementing quick-build ideas on earthen roads, and generated creative solutions:

- Chicanes made of tires, traffic cones, and planter pots placed at the entrances to the two bike paths where they meet Day School Road, thereby reducing the width of the road at those points to calm traffic and give students a spot to check traffic before crossing.

- A walkway made of cinder blocks, planter pots, and reflective delineators created to provide a separate route for students walking to and from the school.
- A stop sign and dirt berm at the intersection of Day School Road and a nearby residential road designed to encourage drivers to slow down.
- Concrete barriers formed to protect the existing bus stop, providing space for students to load and unload from school buses.

Project leaders invited students to paint the jersey barriers, cinder blocks, and tires that formed the separated walkway, chicanes at the entrance of the two bike paths, and the protected bus stop. Partners, including Emergency Management, Education, Police, and Public Health departments and PDTD used the quick-build experience in their application to receive solar-powered radar speed feedback signs within school zones.

SHEEPS SPRINGS CIRCLE

In 2024, a project titled "Pedestrian Fatalities in Indian Country: Responding to a Crisis," received a $190,000 Road to Zero Community Traffic Safety Grant by the National Safety Council. The goal of the project, led by America Walks, in addition to Pueblo of Jemez, other tribes, and organizations, was to reduce vehicle speed in tribal communities.

This project culminated in an April 2025 **workshop in the Pueblo of Jemez**. Participants spent part of a day discussing pedestrian safety on tribal lands, traffic calming, the role of quick-build demonstration projects, and community engagement.

Then they went outside to engage in hands-on quick-building. The Pueblo of Jemez had designed the activity on Sheeps Springs Circle, a residential road where there had been speeding complaints. Several community members, including children, joined in the installation of the quick-build project, which included:

- Two "ladder crosswalks" using pavement tape.
- A protected walking path.
- Quick-build "aesthetics" that included planters and sidewalk chalk art.

Separated walkway formed from cinder blocks and delineators. Source: PDTD

Free bikes and helmets for kids

Pueblo of Jemez didn't focus solely on infrastructure improvements. Another identified gap in the community was that many children did not own bicycles. To address this, the Pueblo received a grant from the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division to purchase 260 bicycles and helmets for all K – 6 students residing on the reservation.

Then in spring of 2025, the Pueblo hosted pedestrian and bicycle safety education courses for each grade level. The courses were intended to provide children with the skills and knowledge to use their new bikes on the trails safely and confidently, promoting long-term behavior change.

Community reaction, future plans, and advice for other communities

The residents of the Pueblo of Jemez have shown strong support for the safety improvements and the roles children played in bringing them to fruition. "Community members have shared overwhelmingly positive feedback about youth involvement in walking and biking initiatives," said Toya. "Many express pride in seeing young people take an active role in maintaining their health, connecting with the land, and practicing safe and sustainable ways to travel within the Pueblo."

Bozic said, "The children love the trail and the bikes we have provided for them to use on the trail. It has been a great joy to witness them regularly out on the trail riding their bikes!"

Toya also reported on the reactions of the Pueblo's children to the changes: "They enjoy being outdoors, seeing familiar faces, and spending time with family and friends while walking or biking. Overall, children's feedback shows genuine enthusiasm and pride."

Moving forward, Bozic said that the Pueblo had received a second New Mexico Outdoor Equity grant to hold another Youth Outdoor Education and Bicycle Safety Program. Toya added that the Planning Development & Transportation Department planned to pursue more safety projects:

- **EXPANDING SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS PROGRAMS:** Partnering with schools to organize educational events and workshops to teach children safe walking and biking practices.
- **BUILDING ADDITIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS:** Seeking funding to extend the trail network and install more traffic calming measures, pedestrian crossings, and lighting.
- **CONDUCTING BICYCLE GIVEAWAY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS:** Distributing more bicycles and helmets to all K – 6 students on the reservation and incorporate safety education into the program.
- **ENHANCING DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS:** Strengthening the ability to collect pedestrian, bicycle, and crash data to better evaluate the effectiveness of safety measures and inform future planning.

Students practicing bike safety skills..
Source: PDTD

Award presentation at the National Transportation in Indian Country Conference.
Source: Hillary Mead

- **PURSUING POLICY UPDATES:** Updating traffic codes to improve enforcement of "No Parking" zones and address pedestrian safety.

Toya offered guidance to tribal and other communities aspiring to make similar safety improvements:

- Ground every project in culture and values.
- Engage the community early and often.
- Start small, show impact, and build momentum.
- Build strong partnerships.
- Focus on youth and long-term wellness.
- Plan for the future but celebrate the journey.

Bozic and Toya's remarks at the awards ceremony best capture what the future means for the Pueblo's safety efforts for children walking and biking:

"At Jemez, our children are our most precious gift. Their safety is our highest responsibility.

"This award honors not just their future, but our elders' wisdom, and the collective strength of our entire community. We are honored to accept this award on their behalf.

"And we know this is not the end. This is a reminder to keep building, to keep teaching, and to keep fighting for safe streets. Not just in Jemez, but in every Tribal Nation across this land."

Students practicing bike safety skills. Source: PDTD

COVER PHOTO: *Children and adults exploring their community by bike. Source: PDTD*

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