

The Tenderloin sees the most pedestrians getting hit by cars. The city struggles to slow its streets down.

By Brianna Sosa

Michael Lukehart had been living on the streets of the Tenderloin on and off for about three years when he died. Michael struggled with drug addiction for half of his life, and his mother Debbie Lukehart said she had been expecting the call announcing his overdose for years.

When she was notified by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner that her son had instead been run over by a truck, she couldn't believe it.

"He didn't deserve to go out like that," Debbie said.

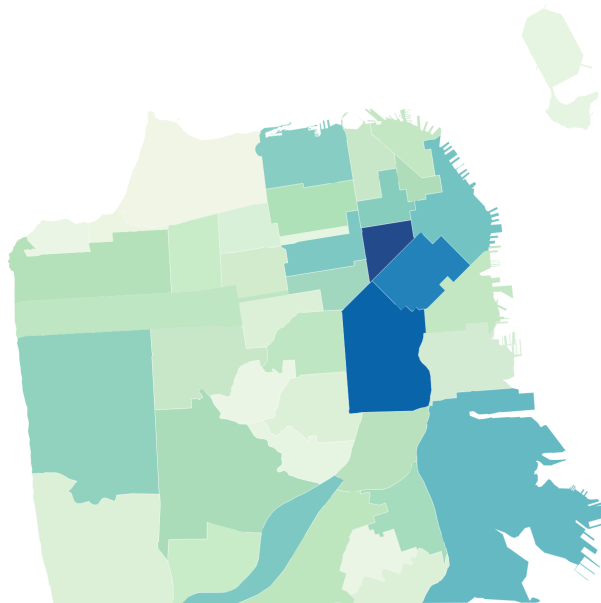
It was just after midnight on March 2, 2024, when Michael stepped onto Golden Gate Avenue. About a minute later, a truck ran him over. He died instantly.

Michael wasn't an anomaly. He was one of three Tenderloin pedestrians who died from a car crash that year, and one of three hit by a car in the neighborhood that week alone.

For the past five years, more pedestrians have been struck by vehicles in the Tenderloin than in any other neighborhood in San Francisco, yet its street design has made it difficult for the city to intervene and slow streets down.

Most of San Francisco's pedestrian-involved collisions are concentrated in the Tenderloin

Collision counts are from 2021-2025



Map: Brianna Sosa • Source: California Crash Reporting System (CCRS) • Created with Datawrapper

Speed is the number one issue when it comes to pedestrian traffic safety. "With increasing speed over like 15, 20 miles per hour, the risk of fatal injury to a pedestrian increases dramatically," said Julia Griswold, director of UC Berkeley's Safe Transportation Research and Education Center.

The SFMTA normally installs speed humps or traffic circles to slow streets down if residents complain of high-speed drivers, but the agency disqualifies roads if they are not residential or if they are on routes frequently used by buses or fire trucks. These requirements discount most of the Tenderloin's streets.

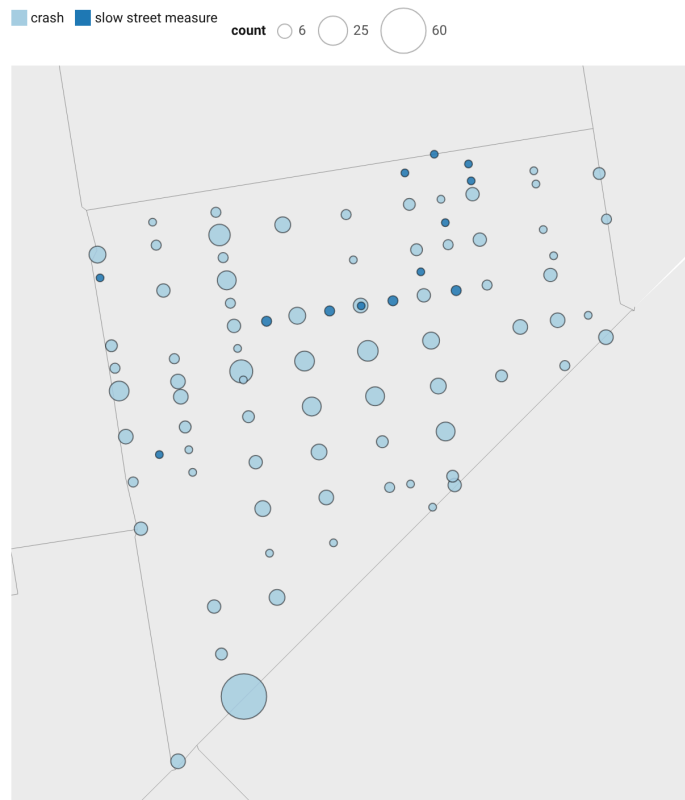
Since SFMTA's traffic calming initiative launched 25 years ago, the agency has installed 17 slow street measures in the Tenderloin - eight speed cushions, two speed humps, six raised crosswalks, and one left-turn measure that raises driver awareness of left-hand turns.

Allyse Johnson lives in the Tenderloin but spends much of her free time in the Sunset. She said there's a noticeable increase in the number of speed bumps or traffic circles she sees when walking outside of her neighborhood.

"I definitely see those a lot more often in the Sunset and other areas of the city, but I've never seen that in the Tenderloin," said resident Allyse Johnson.

17 measures is a relatively small amount compared to the number of slow street measures other San Francisco neighborhoods have received, but the larger issue is that the Tenderloin roads that received installments are not the ones where pedestrians are getting hit.

Slow street measures in the Tenderloin aren't located where majority of pedestrian-involved collisions occur



Collision counts are a total of the past five years
Map: Brianna Sosa • Source: California Crash Reporting System (CCRS) • Created with Datawrapper

Claire Amable, the director of advocacy for San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, said it is “really frustrating” that many of the Tenderloin’s streets can’t receive slow street intervention. She has been advocating for traffic safety in San Francisco for over a decade and said, “the denser parts of the city arguably are the parts that deserve slower streets.”

Since SFMTA can’t install speed humps, the agency has turned to “quick-build” projects that encourage safer driving without forcibly slowing all vehicles down. These initiatives typically involve removing lanes, adding paint or street signs, adjusting parking, or changing traffic signal timing – and in the spirit of their name, can typically be completed quickly. Five have been constructed in the Tenderloin.

Golden Gate Avenue, the same street Michael was killed on, is the site of a quick-build project. Since 2024, the entire block has been closed off to most cars during the day from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. to allow for a safe, clean space for residents to gather.

“[Golden Gate Greenway] effectively allows the same thing as a slow street, but only for 12 hours of the day, and also gave people an open space to provide direct services that were also really needed during the pandemic,” Amable said.

The project was implemented to work around the Tenderloin’s street limitations, but it also faces hurdles that are unique to the area.

After its construction, the Golden Gate Greenway became a hub for unhoused people to openly use and store drugs, according to Mission Local reporting in July of last year.

When Johnson walks to her work on Golden Gate Avenue, she sees “people kind of loitering, doing drugs out in the open. “[I’m] having to hold my breath so the fentanyl smoke doesn’t get in my face,” she said.

The project stalled after the city couldn’t deter unhoused people from gathering in the parklet. [SFMTA's project website](#) says it is “substantially complete”. Since 2024, there have been 11 pedestrian-involved collisions on Golden Gate Avenue.

For years, city officials and advocates have grappled with how to address traffic safety effectively without slowing streets down. In 2021, the SFMTA made the Tenderloin a 20-mph zone and created no turn on red regulations at over 50 intersections. The agency also installed 11 pedestrian scrambles, where cars stop in all directions, allowing all pedestrians to cross at the same time. Most recently, the SFMTA installed a speed camera on Turk street - a hot spot for collisions. The camera began issuing citations in August of last year.

Despite targeted city investment, pedestrian-involved collisions have remained highest in the Tenderloin for years.

Now, private citizens are stepping in. Billionaire Chris Larsen is known for making philanthropic donations in support of increased surveillance in San Francisco. In January, he announced he will contribute \$5 million to revitalize the Tenderloin’s Larkin street, which saw just under 20% of all collisions in the Tenderloin in the last five years.

The project aims to “stabilize the corridor and foster economic opportunity” through “enhanced safety coverage, expanded cleaning operations, and targeted business support,” according to the [project’s website](#).

While the initiative’s main focus is not traffic safety, it could be a natural outcome. Advocates have wondered whether traffic safety would naturally improve if other exacerbating issues were solved first.

“If we want things to be safe on the streets, then I think that that also means building housing...so that people that are living on the streets can get into housing,” said John McCormick, who volunteered for the advocacy group Concerned Citizens for Tenderloin Traffic

Safety three years ago. “I think that means an investment in public health to send people onto the streets that can help folks that are suffering and get them off of drugs so that they're not wandering into the streets and potentially getting hurt.”