

Cycling News

Filling in the Blanks:

City's Plan Must Focus on Main Streets, Protection and Enforcement

MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S commissioners have charted a new course, and this commitment to significantly improve cycling over the next three years is great news for the millions of cyclists and would-be cyclists in New York City. The NYC Departments of Health, Transportation, Police and Parks' new report, *Bicyclist Fatalities and Serious Injuries*, provides valuable real world information to show the way.

In September the Mayor's team announced a rough outline of what the City intends to do to improve cycling. But, the City's outline is scant on many salient details, prompting important questions from cyclists, advocates, community leaders and elected officials:

Where will the 240-miles of new bike lanes, routes and paths be built?

What types of bike lanes, routes and paths will be built?

How will cars and trucks be kept off the new lanes and paths?

Will the public awareness campaign coincide with improved police enforcement?

Though the City has yet to provide explicit answers to these questions and others, the correct answers are implicit in the Department of Health's study and in best practices from New York City and other large cities.

PREVENTING CRASHES = PROTECTED SPACE FOR CYCLISTS

At the Central Park press conference, the City's Transportation and Health Commissioners agreed that creating dedicated space for bicyclists is essential to improving their safety. *Bicyclist Fatalities and Serious Injuries in New York City* found that nearly all bicyclist deaths and injuries were caused by crashes with motor vehicles.

Dedicated cycling space and other changes to the built environment are paramount to preventing crashes. They cause a permanent change in drivers' behavior.

Cyclists need physically protected space on busy streets to stop motorists from driving and parking in bike lanes. On neighborhood streets, bicyclists (and pedestrians) need protected space and strong engineering like speed humps, raised intersections and sidewalk corner extensions to slow drivers. Striking public awareness campaigns and heightened traffic enforcement are important parts of crash prevention campaigns, but they are not in operation 24-hours a day, 365 days a year (see p. 9).

The City should develop self-enforcing bike lane and street designs that do not rely on police traffic enforcement to keep lanes clear of reckless drivers and double parked cars. Unfortunately, the NYPD cannot be everywhere all the time enforcing traffic laws that protect cyclists from motorists who drive and park in bike lanes, speed, cut off cyclists and open vehicle doors into cyclists' paths. When planning dedicated cycling space, the City must be mindful of the everyday reality of traffic enforcement, not ideal enforcement. Streets

that are engineered to protect bikers (and walkers) are at work preventing crashes every minute of every day.

CRASH CLUSTERS

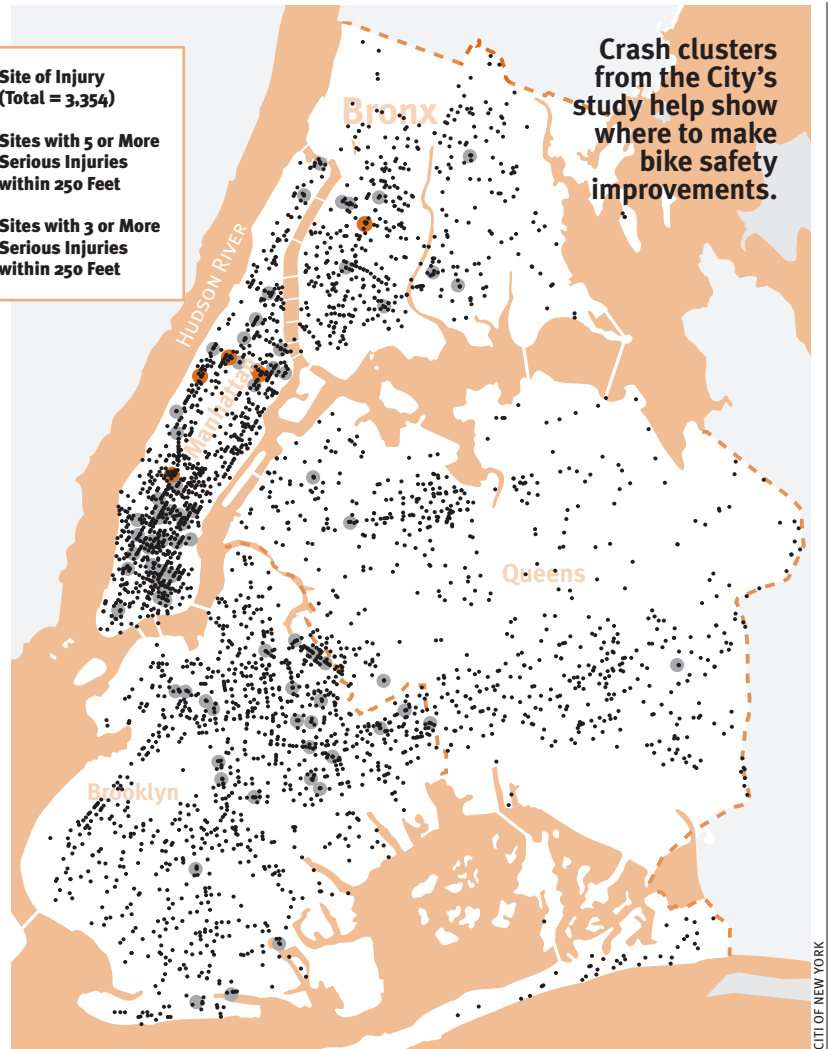
The Departments of Health, Transportation, Police and Parks study of cyclist deaths and serious injuries highlighted areas where over the 10-year study period several fatal or serious injury crashes occurred within a quarter-mile of each other (see above). Because these clusters are particularly dangerous locations where cyclists frequently ride, they should help the City

prioritize where to make safety improvements. Many connect to pieces of the existing bike network, like bridge and greenway paths, and to parks, jobs, schools and other popular destinations. Cyclists want to ride in these areas; they have to ride in these areas and it should be safe for New Yorkers to bike in them.

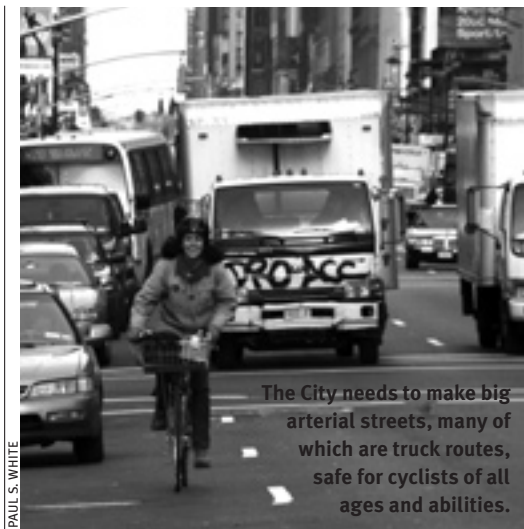
ARTERIAL STREETS & BIKE/TRUCK ROUTES

The City's study identified arterial roads as the most dangerous type of streets for cyclists and found that large vehicles, like trucks, are twice as deadly

- Site of Injury (Total = 3,354)
- Sites with 5 or More Serious Injuries within 250 Feet
- Sites with 3 or More Serious Injuries within 250 Feet



CITY OF NEW YORK



The City needs to make big arterial streets, many of which are truck routes, safe for cyclists of all ages and abilities.

PAUL S. WHITE



Houston Street is a prime candidate for a protected bike lane like the one shown in this rendering.

KARLA QUINTERO

to cyclists than small vehicles (see p. 5). Many arterials are “planned routes” in the City’s Bicycle Master Plan and many are also City-designated truck routes. To prevent crashes on these particularly dangerous streets that carry particularly dangerous traffic, the City should prioritize the installation of strong safety measures, like protected bike lanes and on-street greenways, on arterials and truck routes—e.g. Houston Street and Manhattan’s avenues, East 169th Street in the Bronx, Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, Hylan Boulevard on Staten Island and the LIE Service Roads in Queens.

Arterials are already heavily cycled routes. People want to ride on them because they are the most direct routes between points A and B, connecting residential, commercial and business areas, and schools, parks and cultural destinations. The high crash rate on arterials shows that cyclists need physical protection from the high volumes of motor vehicle and truck traffic that travel at high speeds. A standard bike lane—with only a six-inch wide stripe dividing cyclists and motorists—is not sufficient protection to prevent crashes.

Prioritizing large streets and installing protected cycling space would show the City’s commitment to making cycling an everyday mode of transportation and recreation for all New Yorkers. It would reduce crashes, spur more cycling and send the

important message: Cycling is too important to be relegated to side streets.

INTERSECTIONS

The City’s bike crash study also shows that the vast majority of bicycle crashes occur at intersections (see p. 5). To provide extra protection at junctions, the DOT should develop a toolbox of intersection-specific safety improvements for cyclists and install them where needed. Measures like colored bike lanes through intersections, advanced cyclist waiting areas at intersections (“bike boxes”), green light head starts for cyclists and sidewalk corner extensions improve safety at intersections because they give cyclists time and space advantages to establish themselves in the street, slow drivers and make them more aware of bike riders.

In its September 12th announcement, the City said it would “Conduct a pilot program of easily identified green-colored lanes to reinforce on-street striped lanes.” The DOT has been testing pigmented bike lanes since 2001, but only at curb-side locations and not through intersections. The City’s Bicycle Master Plan states that pigmented bike lanes give bicyclists “preferential status.” The city of Portland, Oregon found

Case study in protected cycling space: Houston Street

Houston Street is a prime candidate for protected cycling space. It is an arterial, a truck route and a planned bike route. Above shows a T.A. rendering of what safe cycling on Houston Street could be.

Manhattan Community Board 2, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, Councilmembers Alan Gerson and Rosie Mendez, Assemblymember Deborah Glick, State Senator Martin Connor, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez and 700 people who sent postcards to Deputy Mayor (and cyclist) Daniel Doctoroff support protected cycling space on Houston Street.

that drivers yield to cyclists in colored bike lanes 28% more often and drivers slow or stop when approaching a colored lane 23% more than normal. And, research from Europe shows that “bike boxes” reduce crashes at intersections by 35%.

ENFORCEMENT

The City’s study of cyclist deaths and serious injuries shows that human factors (e.g. driver or bicyclist inattention, driver speeding and failure to yield) contributed to nearly all fatal and serious injury crashes (see p. 5). Accordingly, City Hall must send drivers the clear message to be aware of cyclists and respect their right to the road. The public awareness campaign that the City and advocates are developing emphasizes this message. The awareness campaign needs to be accompanied by NYPD enforcement of dangerous drivers and “kamikaze cyclists.”

To target danger zones that need increased enforcement, and to help the DOT improve bike lane and path designs to make

them more self-enforcing, the Police Department should track motorist-bicyclist enforcement, specific summonses and crashes (similar to its existing Traffic Stat program) and publicly release this information quarterly. And, because large vehicles are disproportionately deadly to cyclists, both public awareness outreach and enforcement need to focus on truck, bus and other large vehicle drivers.

To put its plan into practice, the DOT will face some battles, particularly on those frequent occasions where protecting cyclists means less space for drivers. In mustering the political courage to meet these battles head-on, DOT would do well to treat safe bicycle routes as it does crosswalks: as non-negotiable safety improvements. In so doing, the DOT will find more allies than enemies, as shown by spring 2006 Tri-State Transportation Campaign poll that found that 64% of New Yorkers consider “unsafe conditions for people on bicycles” a problem worth addressing. □