Cycling News

Benepe, Weinshall, Frieden, Scagnelli (L-R) in Central Park.

GRAHAM BECK

City Promises 240 Miles of Bike Lanes, Paths and Routes by 2009

Mayor Bloomberg's top commissioners announced an ambitious plan this September to dramatically improve cycling conditions in New York City and encourage more New Yorkers to bike. The announcement coincided with the release of *Bicyclist Fatalities and Serious Injuries in New York City*, a multi-agency study of the last decade of bicycle crashes (see p. 5). The City's pledge, a direct response to the Bike Safety Action Plan put forth by the T.A.-led Bike Safety Coalition, represents a huge step forward for cycling in New York City.

At the press conference unveiling the plan, DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall, Health Commissioner Thomas Frieden, Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe and NYPD Chief of Transportation Michael Scagnelli announced that by September 2007 work will be underway to add 240-lane miles of new bike lanes, routes and paths by 2009. This will represent a 50% increase to the City's current bike network. The commissioners also announced a host of new bike encouragement and safety initiatives (see box).

At the press conference, Transportation Commissioner Weinshall stated, "The data demonstrates cyclists need more safe places to ride and DOT will be working to provide them."

The NYC Department of Health's collaboration with the DOT and Parks and Police Departments is an important sign that City Hall understands the vital role that safe streets and traffic have in preventing injury, encouraging active transportation and improving the everyday public health of New Yorkers. Indeed, bicycling is key to preventing and combating obesity (53% of New Yorkers are overweight or obese), diabetes (affects three-quarters of a million New Yorkers) and heart disease (the number one killer in New York City). In addition to reducing traffic congestion and its associated costs, cycling cuts air pollution, good news for the one million New Yorkers with asthma.

Safe streets and improving the built environment are critical to promoting cycling because, as Health Commissioner Frieden remarked, "All [cyclist] deaths are preventable, and each one is a tragedy…Engineering solutions are more likely to be effective [at improving safety] than urging people to change their behavior."

The City of New York's new plan contains strong words of support for cycling. The deeds that follow it will measure the City's commitment, as Commissioners Benepe, Frieden, Kelly and Weinshall note in their introduction to the crash study, "to increase bicycling and improve safety." ❑

For a complete list of City bike initiatives see:
nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/episrv-bike-report.pdf (pages 32-34)

ACTION STEPS

New initiatives to promote biking and improve cyclist safety announced by the City of New York on September 12, 2006:

Bicycle Infrastructure

- Complete 200 miles of bicycle facilities (bike lanes, routes and paths) over the next 3 years on city streets.
- Complete 40 miles of greenways in City parks over the next four years.
- Conduct follow-up analyses to the City's bike crash study to understand locations that have disproportionately high fatalities or injuries in relation to exposure. Study these locations for possible safety improvements.
- Accelerate the placement of outdoor bicycle parking racks citywide.

Motorist/Bicyclist Awareness

- Launch a public awareness campaign for both motorists and bicyclists to increase awareness and make clear bicyclists' right to the road. This campaign will be conducted in collaboration with elected officials, community partners and transportation advocates (planning began winter 2006).

Motorist Awareness

- Provide materials on bicycle awareness to new driver education and remedial traffic school programs.
- Work with driving associations such as AAA, the American Trucking Association, the Truck Load Carriers Association and Teamsters Local 16 to increase awareness around bicycle safety issues.

Bicyclist Awareness

- Introduce programs to supply free bicycle helmets and helmet fit instructions to all interested bicyclists in New York City.
- Develop a video documentary that depicts the dangers associated with failing to obey traffic laws while riding a bicycle.
- Collaborate with community partners, transportation advocates and schools to increase promotion of helmets and other protective gear (such as bells, lights, mirrors and bright clothing), and to increase awareness among parents and children about the mandatory bicycle helmet law for children under 14.
- Work with associations of bicycle riders, including delivery and messenger services, to improve bicycle safety among working cyclists.
- Develop a hands-on bicycling skills and safety instruction program to be added to after-school and summer camp programs run by the Parks Department. Participating children will practice riding bicycles and wearing helmets properly and will receive certificates upon completion.
- Increase participation in the Queens Star Track youth track cycling program for children nine to thirteen years old, located at the Kissena Velodrome. Consider development of an indoor fitness and nutrition component during winter months. Support participation in track bicycling competitions for advanced cyclists.

Investigation and Enforcement

- Train more DOT accident investigation staff to ensure that all transportation fatalities are investigated in a timely manner.

Legislation

- Support legislation to increase the fine for motor vehicles that park in bicycle lanes within city parks.
- Explore the utility of legislation as a means to increase helmet use.

Improve Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting of Bicyclist Injuries

- Train healthcare providers to better document contributing factors in medical records.
- Add a question on bicycle use to the NYC Department of Health's annual population-based telephone survey of adults to better enumerate bicycle riding and monitor trends.
- Reconcile bicyclist death information among the Department of Transportation, NYPD and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene on a quarterly basis, to better ascertain the annual number of bicyclist fatalities.
- Conduct a follow-up examination on bicyclist fatalities between 1996 and 2005 using Office of the Chief Medical Examiner files to identify additional factors contributing to fatal bicycle crashes including the clinical impact of head trauma, occupational risks and risks specific to children.
- Consider conducting bicycle counts more frequently, and extend it to additional boroughs.
- Submit a proposal to the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles to modify the recording of bicycle crash information on the police accident form. Such a change may lead to improved, more standard documentation of bicycle crash information.

City Releases Comprehensive Study of NYC Bike Crashes

Among findings: Big streets and trucks are particularly dangerous for cyclists

In September, the City of New York released its first-ever study of bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries. The study, led by the NYC Department of Health in collaboration with the Departments of Transportation, Police and Parks, examined 3,687 bicycle crashes that occurred between 1996 and 2005.

In addition to the Action Steps (see p. 4), the City's examination of bicycle crashes and its acknowledgement of study shortcomings demonstrate that City Hall is finally taking bicycling seriously. The study was requested in the July 2005 Bike Safety Action Plan, which was presented to Mayor Bloomberg and his commissioners by T.A. and a coalition of 20 city cycling organizations. Hopefully, it is the first of annual reports that inform City agencies and help them make bicycling an everyday transportation option for all New Yorkers.

In identifying several "clusters" of bicycle crashes the study clearly shows the DOT where to prioritize its placement of the new bike lanes and paths. Other study findings inform its "Action Steps" such as increasing public awareness among motorists and bicyclists, working with truck drivers to prevent crashes and encouraging helmet use to reduce injury severity.

The study, limited by incomplete crash data and cycling statistics, could not estimate cycling risks. Accordingly, it includes an Action Step to improve data collection. The City lacked information on bicycling volumes, frequency and routes, motor vehicle volumes, helmet use and injury type, contributing factors, traffic violations and street design (other than the presence or absence of bike lanes). Improved data collection will shed more light on crashes, as well as prove how serious and lasting the City's efforts are to understand crashes and deploy effective countermeasures.

Among the most important study findings, the City found:

- **Nearly all bicyclist fatalities (92%) were caused by crashes with motor vehicles.**
- **Most bike crashes (89% of fatalities and 70% of serious injuries) occurred at or near intersections.**
- **Although there are many more miles of local roads, more than half of fatal bike crashes occurred on arterial (large, four lane) roads.** Arterials make up 10% of NYC roads, yet 53% of fatal crashes occurred on them. The study did not break down serious injury crashes by street type. T.A. analysis shows that most injury crashes also take place on arterials (*T.A. Magazine*, winter 2005).
- **Although they make up only about 15% of vehicles on NYC roadways, large vehicles played a role in almost 32% of fatalities**. Large vehicles (trucks, buses) are twice as deadly as small vehicles (cars, taxis and even SUVs).
- **The study identified crash clusters with three or more fatalities or serious injuries within a quarter-mile during the 10-year study period.** The clusters blanket Manhattan south of 59th Street, as well as Manhattan's Lower East Side, East and Upper West Sides, Harlem, Washington Heights and the northern end of Central Park. There are also crash clusters in Coney Island, the southeast corner of Prospect Park, Flatbush, East New York, Ocean Hill, Bushwick, Park Slope and Downtown Brooklyn, in Hunts Point in the Bronx and dotted across the central and south Bronx and eastern Queens (see map p. 6).
- **Human factors on the part of motorists and bicyclists were the most common contributing factor to bicycle crashes, contributing to 94% of fatal crashes and 95% of serious injury crashes with known factors.** The study sorted contributing factors into human, vehicular and environmental factors. The most common human factors were driver inattention, bicyclist inattention, driver speeding, bicyclist failure to obey traffic signals and bicyclist crossing into a vehicle's path. According to the study, "Contributing factors do not assign blame" and are used "to understand the actions that may have played a role in the crash."

Advocates reviewed the City's contributing factor analysis and compared it to analysis by Right of Way (see box below), which examined bicyclist fatalities between 1995 and 1998 for *The Only Good Cyclist* (2000).

The City's study noted that, "it is important to remember that in some fatal crashes the motor vehicle driver's recollection of the crash is the only one available, which may bias these findings to show more bicyclist errors compared to motor vehicle driver errors." The study continued, "Because both the bicyclist and the driver are available to recount the events leading up to the [serious injury] crash, the assignment of contributing factors for serious injuries might be more accurate than among fatalities. However the large amount of missing information makes this difficult to confirm."

Despite these discrepancies, the City's report is a welcome correction to the Police Department's long-held and oft-cited conjecture that "bicyclist error" is the sole contributor to 75% of fatal crashes.

- **The vast majority of on-street fatal bicycle crashes occurred outside of bike lanes and paths.** Only one fatal crash with a motor vehicle occurred when the bicyclist was riding inside a bike lane; this crash occurred during car-free hours in Prospect Park. The study did not analyze serious injury crashes for the presence of bike lanes.
- **Though head injury may not have been the primary injury resulting in death, the study found that 74% of cyclists fatality struck by vehicles suffered head injuries.** Researches could verify helmet use in 59% of fatal crashes, and in these crashes 3% of cyclists were wearing helmets when they were struck. Researchers could verify helmet use for 32% of the serious injury crashes between 2001 and 2003, and in these crashes 13% of cyclists were wearing a helmet; the study did not analyze injuries by type.
- **Most bicyclists who died were men (91%).** Males aged 45–54 had the highest death rate by age. Among children aged 5–14, the death rate for boys was more than five times higher than for girls. **Queens had the highest child bicyclist death rate**. ❑

Human Contributing Factors	Serious Injury Crashes City's analysis, 1996-2003	Fatal Crashes City's analysis, 1996-2005	Fatal Crashes Advocate's analysis, 1996-1998
Bicycle factor only (e.g. bicyclist inattention)	13%	42%	20%
Vehicle factor only (e.g. speeding)	35%	20%	44%
Bicycle & vehicle factors	6%	36%	36%
No factors documented	45%	3%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Download the City's full report:
nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/episrv/episrv-bike-report.pdf

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?

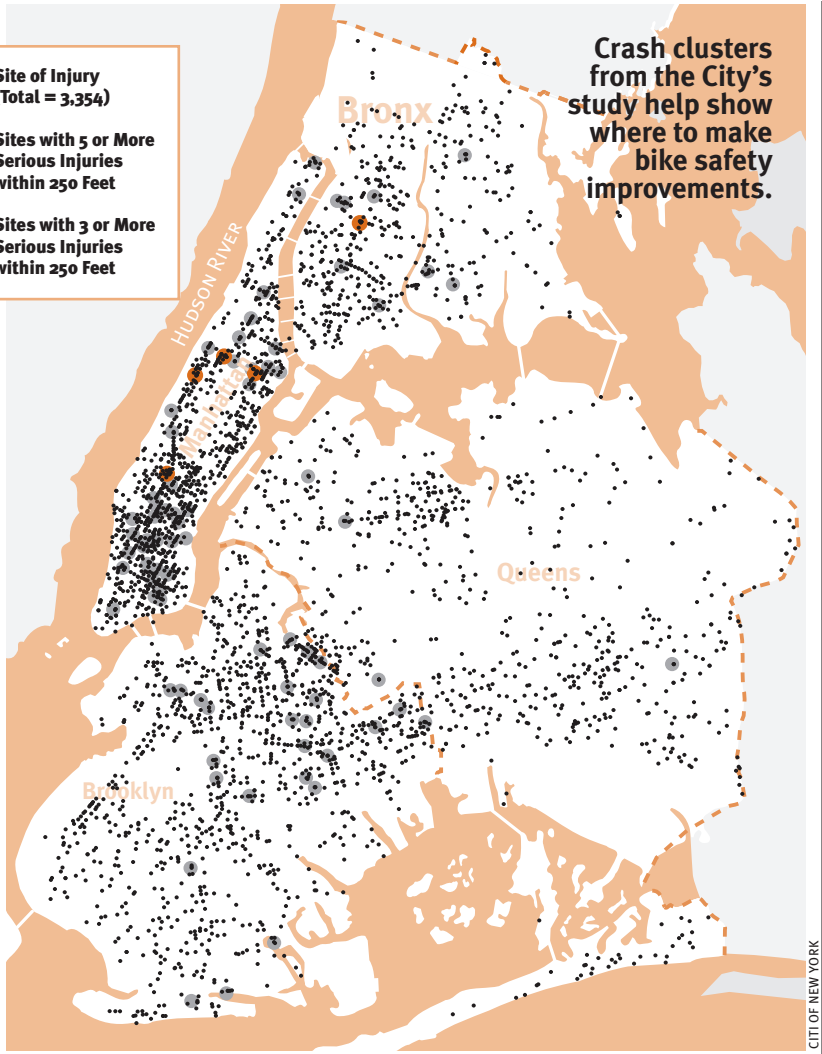
How will cars and trucks be kept off the new lanes and paths?

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).



CITI OF NEW YORK

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.

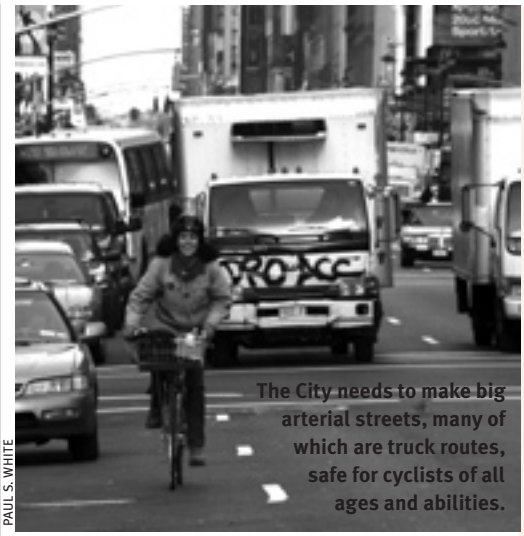
CRASH CLUSTERS

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

Cycling News



PAUL S. WHITE

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

KARLA QUINTERO

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

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.

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 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

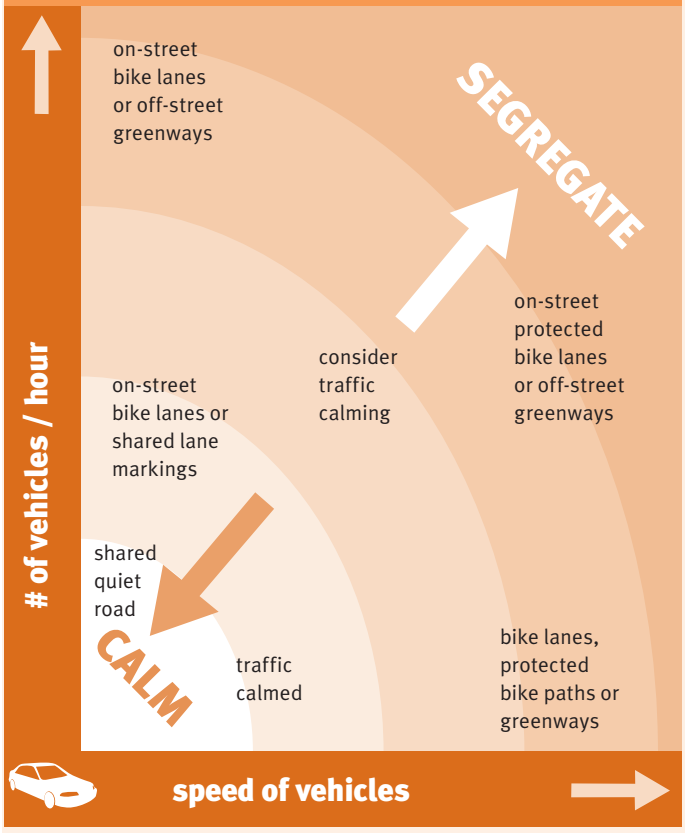
The City's study of cyclist deaths and serious injuries shows that human factors (e.g. driver or bicyclist inattention, driver speeding and failure to yield) contributed to nearly all fatal and serious injury crashes (see p. 5). Accordingly, City Hall must send drivers the clear message to be aware of 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. ❑

Cycling News

London's "Cycling Design Standards" recommend improvements based on motor vehicle volumes and speed.



London Standards for Bicycle Lane and Path Design


Segregated and colored bike lanes at intersections protect London cyclists.

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

In 2005, London Mayor Ken Livingston and Transport for London (London's DOT) published "London Cycling Design Standards: A guide to the design of a better cycling environment." The guide includes an ample toolbox of cycling improvements, from traffic calmed residential streets to protected on-street bike lanes to intersection design and bike parking and signage. These design standards are applicable to a wide array of streets and traffic conditions, provide detailed guidance on when to use different bike lane, route and path designs (see chart on left), outline a process for public involvement and review and, thus, streamline, from both a design and political perspective, the process of implementing bicycle improvements.

New York City, which is similar to London in size, density, diversity, car ownership and mass transit use, should study the "London Cycling Design Standards" and develop locally-specific standards for developing and implementing bicycle improvements. A "New York City Cycling Design Standards" guide would standardize and expedite City government's installation of new bicycle improvements and could ensure that every improvement is well-designed to protect cyclists, prevent crashes and encourage cycling. ❑

Download the "London Cycling Design Standards" at: tfl.gov.uk/cycles/company/standards.shtml

Where Will All the Bikes Be Parked?

New bike lanes and greenways will encourage more New Yorkers to bike, yet where will all of these new cyclists park their bicycles?

The lack of secure indoor bike parking is already the number one obstacle to New Yorkers who want to cycle to work but do not, and it is simply not safe to park a bike on the street for any extended period of time.


Indoor bike parking is key to encouraging cycling

NOAH BUDNICK

Improving street safety will increase the number of daily cyclists. City Hall and City Council must also protect the property of these cyclists, by ensuring they can securely store their bikes in their offices and while riding around the city.

Action Steps the City announced in September include:

- Investigate opportunities to incorporate requirements into the zoning for indoor bicycle parking in new buildings, as well as during substantial renovations.
- Accelerate the placement of outdoor bike racks citywide.

However, these efforts will only benefit a slim minority of New Yorkers who currently bicycle or who want to bicycle for transportation and recreation.

The City must require buildings to allow tenants to bring their bicycles inside and store them in an out of the way space in their office, and it must also allow New Yorkers to park their bicycles at City-owned sidewalk fixtures (so long as they do not block the sidewalk).

Few cyclists or would-be cyclists are lucky enough to work in buildings where owners understand that bikes are no different from hand trucks, strollers and other freight that goes in and out of buildings every day. Bicycles, in and of themselves, neither violate building nor fire codes. Bicycles do not affect a building's insurance. Building managers and owners do not take control or possession of bikes at any time and are not liable for them.

Every person who wants to bike for transportation and for recreation needs the City's help to overcome these everyday barriers:

- Current New York law allows building owners to completely prohibit their tenants from bringing bicycles into their buildings.
- There is only one bike rack for every thirty-five cyclists, and the NYPD uses the City Administrative Code to justify seizing, without prior notice, any bicycle parked at a signpost, lamppost, parking meter or other City-owned sidewalk fixture.
- Some 60,000 bicycles stolen every year in New York City and only 2% are recovered.

If a tenant bikes to work and has extra space in their office in an unused cubicle or storage room, their building should let them bring their bicycle from the street into that space. If you want to park your bike at an out of the way sidewalk fixture, you should not worry about whether or not a thief or the NYPD is going to abscond with it. ❑

TakeAction!

CONTACT your City Councilmember and ask them to take action to create commonsense bicycle storage rules.

Look up your Councilmember at: nyccouncil.info/constituent

Cycling News

Automatic for the People

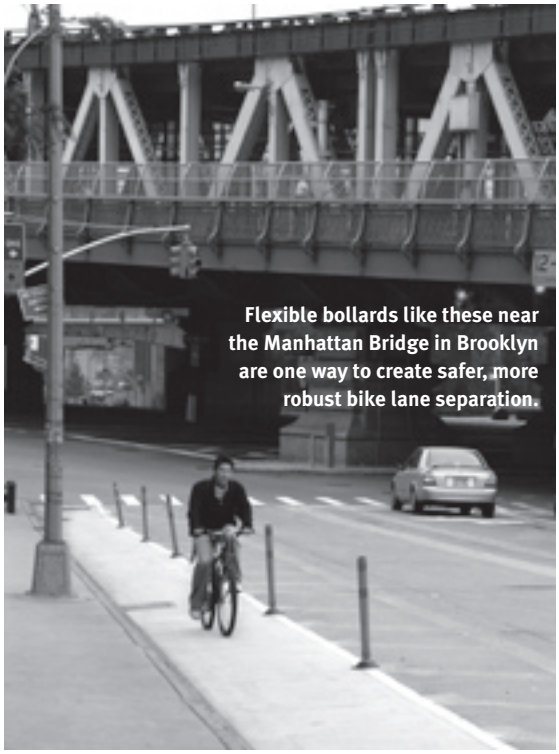
The City is, at long last, reapportioning streets to favor walkers, bikers and bus riders. But what good are pedestrian plazas, bike lanes and bus lanes if scofflaw motorists routinely drive and park in them? And who wants to bike or walk when reckless and speeding motorists are running rampant?

Traffic enforcement in New York City is so bad that it can legitimately be called a crisis. Speeding is out of control and unchecked on all city streets. For example, the speed limit on the Central Park loop drive is 25 mph, but for the past three years, T.A.'s annual survey has found an average speed of 37 mph. Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer recently released a study exposing virtually zero enforcement of "block the box" rules. And T.A.'s recent study "Above the Law" finds that the worst illegal parkers are police officers themselves. Despite piecemeal crackdowns on illegal driving and parking behavior, the NYPD, burdened by protecting New Yorkers from the gamut of threats from violent crime to terrorism, is not upholding basic traffic laws.

Clearly, there is room for the NYPD to deploy more traffic enforcement officers. A more cost and human-resource effective strategy, however, is to design and manage streets so that they are more self-enforcing, and require less police presence to function lawfully and efficiently. While these self-enforcing strategies are not perfect, they would serve to shoulder enough of the enforcement burden to allow officers to get ahead of the problem and focus on the most egregious infractions.

Lane Separators

At present, the Department of Transportation usually uses a mere painted line to separate bus and bike lanes from regular traffic lanes. In a perfect world, this would be enough to keep motorists out, but in reality this painted line is often seen more as a "suggestion" than a rule. In a welcome shift of policy, the DOT has started creating some new protected bike lanes with concrete jersey barriers to keep motorists out, e.g. the new on-street greenway on Brooklyn's Tillary Street connecting to the Brooklyn Bridge bike path. The problem is that there is nothing in the DOT's arsenal for the majority of cases where a concrete barrier—most often because of the need to maintain curb access for delivery vehicles—is overkill. To better protect the city's increasing supply of bus and bike lanes, the DOT should follow the lead of other big cities and begin testing an array of flexible and affordable "soft" separation devices, such as raised lane markings, flexible bollards (which can be spaced to allow access to the occasional purposeful vehicle), or low, mountable curbs.



PAUL S. WHITE

Flexible bollards like these near the Manhattan Bridge in Brooklyn are one way to create safer, more robust bike lane separation.

Traffic Calming

The effectiveness of low-cost traffic calming devices such as speed humps and "pinch points" is well-established. By forcing motorists to slow down at all times of the day and night, such devices are always on duty. The DOT is still too reluctant to deploy traffic calming devices, for fear of angering motorists or causing traffic back-ups. When it comes to traffic calming, the DOT's policy is too often "study and stall". Witness the Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming Project, which is 10 years old and still several score traffic calming devices from completion. Instead, the DOT should shift the burden of proof, making traffic calming devices like speed humps and curb extensions the rule, not the exception. Moreover, the DOT should expand its "tool box" of traffic calming measures to include more aggressive treatments such as speed tables, and deploy them not just to slow down traffic, but to keep big trucks off residential streets.

Another underused traffic calming device is the bollard, 3-foot tall posts that stand sentry on sidewalks in front of almost every phone booth and fire hydrant in the city, but have not yet been widely deployed to protect pedestrians and keep cars off the sidewalk.

Elsewhere in the world, cities make standard practice of using bollards to narrow turning radii, reduce speeds and prevent parking on sidewalks. In New York City, bollards are looked at as dangerous to vehicle drivers and passengers. These perceived dangers contrast decades worth of data which support the use of bollards to make streets safer.

Enforcement Cameras

There are encouraging signs that the state legislature—whose approval is required to deploy automated enforcement cameras—is getting over its unfounded phobia of automated enforcement. Earlier this year, both the Assembly and the Senate approved an expansion of the number of New York City red light enforcement cameras from 50 to 100. But with over 12,000 intersections citywide, many more are needed. And in addition to red light cameras, New York City could desperately use bus lane, speeding, and truck route enforcement cameras, all of which have proven effective in other big cities.

Applied individually, any one of these strategies would drastically improve street performance and public safety. Applied together, these automatic traffic enforcement strategies would utterly transform New York City streets. The only thing standing in the way is an irrational fear of inconveniencing or angering drivers. ❑

Take Action!

TELL Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver that to keep our streets safe and efficient, NYC needs automated traffic enforcement

WRITE to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and tell him that New York City needs red light, speed and bus lane enforcement cameras:

Sheldon Silver, Assembly Speaker, 250 Broadway, Ste. 2307, New York, NY 10007

speaker@assembly.state.ny.us

Cycling News

A New Champion for Cyclists


Mary Beth Kelly addresses the crowd at T.A.'s NYC Century Bike Tour. She rode with family and friends in her husband's memory.

MIKE PIDEL

Mary Beth Kelly is a psychotherapist, activist, mother and recent widow. Her husband, Dr. Carl Henry Nacht was killed this summer as the couple cycled together on the Hudson River Greenway, returning from dinner. Ms. Kelly was at her husband's side when he was struck by a NYPD tow truck and thrown into a second, illegally parked tow truck. Now she is speaking out about the need for safer conditions for cycling in New York City.

How long have you lived in New York City? 30 years

How long have you been a cyclist? Since I learned to ride a bike, probably since the age of 5.

How often do you ride? 4 or 5 days a week.

You've been through a terrible tragedy, and you still ride, in fact you rode in the T.A. Century this year on what would have been your husband's birthday. What made you get back on your bike and start riding? Missing it. Knowing that it is such an important part of my life that I couldn't let my fear or anxiety about it be what determined it for me.

What advice do you have for others who have been in a crash or seen a loved one hurt or killed while riding? Don't over-generalize from the sadness or tragedy or trauma of those events to the bicycle in general. There are many factors in something like a crash occurring. It can be healing to face your fears and feel your own strength rather than living in the shadow of what scares you.

By focusing on the environmental [factors] that contributed to what happened to my husband it has helped me channel some of my grief and my anger into something that is constructive and positive that goes beyond my personal loss to preventing future loss. And towards improving the quality of life in this urban environment, in this City that my husband and I both adored.

Other families of cyclists who have died, like the family of Liz Padilla, who died in Brooklyn in 2005, have spoken out about the need for safe streets for bike riding. Do you feel the need to be outspoken on this issue? Did you and your husband speak out on it when he was alive? We were active within what we felt we had the time and energy to influence. We both rode our bikes to work and encouraged others to do so. We took our kids to bicycle friendly cities in Europe and showed them how wonderful getting around by bike could be. We also always participated in the T.A. Century, I remember my son was six the first time he did it. I can remember going to lobby about getting cars out of the Park in the late 70s…Before we had kids we were more active. But then we had kids. Two careers, two kids, things happen. Life happens!

Now, I think the Chinese symbol for crisis is the combination of two characters, one for danger and one for opportunity. The danger here is obvious, the question is now what to do with this opportunity. It feels like there is an opportunity here to not have this end with Henry's death, but to have something to continue to live, to grow, to flourish which would be very gratifying to me, and I think to our children too.

How has your view of cycling changed since your husband's death? I'm much more leery, I'm hyper-vigilant. I am extremely conscious of all the places where there is danger for cyclists because the city is not committed to ensuring our safety. Just like any other uncommitted relationship there are decisions made and actions taken based on that ambivalence. For example, there is a path but it's only four feet wide and there are taxis pulling into it and parked cars opening their doors into it. Or there is a car double parked in the bike lane and you're on a bike and you have to pull out into the traffic to go around them. This is dangerous enough but drivers also tend to vent their rage at cyclists as though you are the sole reason they are being slowed down. It can become very unpleasant and that unpleasantness is something I have much less capacity to absorb now. It can reduce me to tears or it can ignite my own rage and I don't want to be in either of those states when I'm out in public. I don't want to be in either of those states anyway, but particularly not when I'm out in public!

Do your kids ride? Is it safer now than when they were growing up? Absolutely they ride. I think in some ways that it maybe safer then because the streets are so much more congested now…I think people on the streets are angrier now because of the congestion.

The City's recent study of cyclist fatalities sites "driver inattention" as the most frequent motor vehicle contributing factor in cyclist deaths, what can the City do to, in your opinion, to make drivers pay attention to cyclists? Build the bike lanes wider or create buffers for them so that the awareness of the presence of the bike lane and the safety of that bike lane will encourage more people to ride, and the more people ride, the more people in cars become accustomed to looking for bikes.

The driver who hit your husband was an NYPD tow truck driver, how would you like to see the NYPD and other government agencies lead by example in safe driving around bikers (and walkers)? One, they shouldn't abuse permits to take their cars into places where cars don't belong. The driver of the truck who hit my husband was one factor in his death, but he was thrown into a second NYPD tow truck which was parked where it said "No Parking Anytime." There seems to be a flaunting of entitlement, if you drive a city vehicle that you're above the law, that you can drive it and park it in a manner that the ordinary person wouldn't [ever get away with].

I also think that the police should give summons much more frequently to drivers who act aggressively towards bicyclists, towards pedestrians, that block a crosswalk when the light is changing or make a turn into a crosswalk and intimidate people who might have wanted to cross. [Other cities have laws against this.] We need to create a heightened sense of safety among pedestrians. Right now we have a heightened sense of danger.

We have to have a paradigm shift in thinking about cities and who they are here for and to take back the city from the mentality of the city from the Robert Moses type of planning, type of tyranny that we're living under right now and we don't even realize it. It's like being in a totalitarian state and thinking you're in a democracy. We don't even realize how tyrannical the automobile has become in our lives. ❑

This is Not Your Father's DOT

City Hall Gets Strategic About Using NYC's Limited Street Space

Since the advent of the automobile, the New York City Department of Transportation's traffic engineers have owned the streets. While others—urban planners, strategic and business planners, landscape architects etc.—have had some say in how streets are designed and managed, the DOT traffic engineer has ultimately decided how space and signal priority is divvied up among vehicles, pedestrians, bus riders and cyclists.

Because the traffic engineers' primary job is to keep vehicular traffic moving as quickly as possible, the DOT has more often than not vetoed or delayed progressive proposals to do more for bicyclists and pedestrians and bus riders.

New York City's traffic engineers' performance benchmark has always been "level of service," a measure of how fast vehicular traffic moves. Because a foot of street space or second of green light taken from vehicles can sometimes slow vehicles, in 2005 the agency only rolled out three miles of bike lanes and delayed much needed pedestrian improvements around city schools for fear of compromising the all-important level of service.

T.A. and other transportation advocates and experts have long asserted that the traffic engineers' myopic focus on vehicle speeds—while serving the short term needs of drivers—hurts the city by encouraging more and more driving while keeping the most efficient road users in the transportation ghetto.

In transportation departments throughout the nation and the world, this approach has been replaced by a more holistic one that places primacy on other modes of transportation. Many DOTs have even gone so far as to adopt a "mode switching" policy of supplanting car trips with bike, foot and bus trips. At the New Jersey State DOT, for example, where this new paradigm has taken hold, the traffic engineers now share power with transportation planners who measure transportation performance less in terms of how easy it is to drive, and more in how easy it is to bike, walk and take the bus.

KIT HODGE

Ryan Russo, right, was recently appointed Director of Street Management and Safety.

Now New York City is following suit. As shown by a recent series of unprecedented policy and personnel shifts, City Hall is adopting a new and much more progressive transportation agenda.

Leading the Change:

Dan Doctoroff, Deputy Mayor
Early this year Mayor Bloomberg added the DOT to Doctoroff's oversight portfolio. Insiders say that immediately after taking the reins, this regular bike commuter began pressing hard for bus, bike and pedestrian improvements. Deputy Mayor Doctoroff is rumored to have had two recent meetings with Enrique Peñalosa, former Mayor of Bogotá, Colombia and international champion of green transport and livable cities.

Iris Weinshall, DOT Commissioner
The longest serving current agency head, Commissioner Weinshall was appointed under Mayor Giuliani after a string of scandals at DOT. After proving herself by taking control of the city's most dysfunctional agency she is now, in her sixth year, beginning to reform it.

New Players:

Steve Weber, Director, Strategic Planning, NYC DOT
The DOT's Department of Strategic Planning did not exist until this summer when Weber was hired to run it. Since then Weber has been hiring a staff of six to eight planners to work with the Mayor's office on a set of new medium- and long-term goals for the DOT. Weber formerly served as the DOT's Lower Manhattan Borough Commissioner, where he oversaw the implementation of the most progressive streetscape improvements in the city (e.g. the installation of "bike bollards" that both protect pedestrians and provide bike parking) Weber is known to possess a unique mix of vision and can-do tenacity. These traits may be due to Weber's early stints with both the military and visionary architect Paolo Soleri.

Ryan Russo, Director, Street Management and Safety, NYC DOT
Ryan Russo is an avid cyclist and graduate of UC Berkeley's famed Urban Planning program. Before his recent promotion to Director of Street Management and Safety, where in addition to bicycle and pedestrian projects he also oversees the Safe Routes to School program, Russo worked as DOT's Downtown Brooklyn Transportation Coordinator. There he led numerous traffic calming projects and the creation of the city's most cohesive neighborhood bike network. In a recent StreetsBlog interview, Russo laid out part of his vision: "I'd like to improve the interconnectedness of the bike network and make sure the network works at key connections like we did on Tillary Street and we'll be doing on Sands Street in Brooklyn." For the full interview with Russo, go to StreetsBlog.org.

Rohit Aggarwala, Director, Long Term Planning and Sustainability, Mayor's Office of Operations
"Rit" as he is known to colleagues and friends, is charged with drafting the City's long term plan and making sure that it doesn't just sit on a shelf but is, in his words, "operationalized." Aggarwala has four degrees at Columbia University—a BA in '93, MA in '98, MBA in '00 and then a Ph.D in history with Kenneth T. Jackson, former board member of Transportation Alternatives and a leading proponent of car-free parks. According to a former student quoted in the Columbia Spectator: "Rit is a natural leader, a brilliant speaker, and a charismatic politician. He has an amazing ability to remain objective no matter what his personal views are on a subject."

Rachel Weinberger, Senior Policy Advisor for Transportation, Mayor's Office of Operations

Dr. Weinberger, a sometimes cyclist who works under Rohit Aggarwala, spends her Tuesdays teaching courses at U Penn on transportation methods, land use and planning. She recently completed a parking policy evaluation for Philadelphia and a street management framework for Lower Manhattan. Rachel recently attended a private reception for Enrique Penalosa, where she spent some time chatting with Commissioner Weinshall. ❑