

# The Land of 10,000 Crashes

## Five Strategies to Reduce Pedestrian Injuries and Fatalities in NYC



Hundreds rallied at City Hall this March to call on the City to reduce pedestrian crashes 20% by 2009.

GRAHAM BECK

each day. This level of danger does not have to be a fact of life in a big city. London has witnessed a 29% reduction in the incidence of pedestrian injuries from 2000 to 2005 as compared to a 14% reduction in NYC during the same five-year period. An important element of London's success has been to set national targets to reduce fatalities and serious injuries. Likewise, Chicago's Mayor Daley has launched a "Pedestrian

- A Police Department that too often fails to enforce existing traffic laws.
- A legal system that fails to prosecute drivers who severely injure and kill pedestrians and cyclists.

Dangerous streets negatively affect all New Yorkers every day yet there is no systematic citywide effort underway to improve pedestrian safety.

There are many interventions that have been proven to prevent the crashes that result in severe injury or death. With these interventions in mind, T.A. has drafted a comprehensive Pedestrian Safety Action Plan that includes a goal of reducing pedestrian crashes by 20% by 2009. Making safety improvements to the 100 most dangerous intersections in New York City could prevent 2,000 crashes and save dozens of lives and hundreds of serious injuries per year. The Action Plan includes the five points detailed in the box below.

City Hall has taken bold steps to combat trans fats, smoking and gun violence. It is now time for the City to take control of this pressing epidemic—one that New Yorkers shouldn't have to simply live with. In the wake of countless pedestrian deaths, victims' families, friends and loved ones, neighborhood organizations, civic leaders and T.A. are asking Mayor Bloomberg to adopt a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan. A citywide effort is necessary and possible to confront this public health crisis. □

**W**ITH 163 PEDESTRIAN FATALITIES in 2006, a person is killed nearly every other day on New York City's streets. If these killings were considered criminal, they would be the second most common homicide after gun shootings. Yet, less than one in five drivers face serious charges for killing pedestrians. Although these crashes occur at the same locations time and time again, the City has no existing program to systematically rectify these dangerous areas. These facts could not be more painfully apparent than to the families, friends and loved ones who have been left behind by crash victims.

Annually, over 10,000 walkers are struck, injured or killed by drivers within the five boroughs—that is almost thirty people hit

Advisory Council" alongside an unprecedented citywide traffic calming initiative.

New York City should be no different, and T.A. is working with families and friends of people who have died on our streets to raise awareness of these unacceptable and undeniably preventable deaths. We demand that Mayor Bloomberg and his administration take action to redress the city's mean streets.

At a March rally for pedestrian safety, T.A. brought together crash victims' families to speak publicly about their experience. Hundreds of community supporters and dozens of reporters listened to their stories of a broken system:

- Neighborhood streets that fail to protect the families that live there.
- Drivers who fail to yield to children walking home from pre-school.

## New York City Pedestrian Safety Action Plan

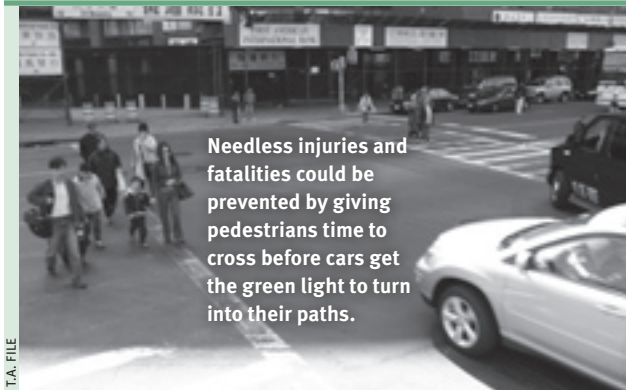
- 1 **Prioritize fixing the most dangerous streets and intersections and complete the build out of Brooklyn's Downtown Traffic Calming project by the summer of 2008**

Nicknamed the "Boulevard of Death," Queens Boulevard once had an average of eleven pedestrian fatalities per year. In the late 1990s the DOT applied pedestrian safety measures such as extended pedestrian crossing times and reduced speed limits along the corridor that significantly reduced fatalities to an average of two per year. Given the success of Queens Boulevard, why has the DOT not made similar improvements on dangerous streets throughout New York City?

Current crash data demonstrates that over 50% of all pedestrian crashes occur at just 10% of all intersections. By focusing improvements on the most egregious corridors in each borough, the City would make great strides in

reducing the number of injuries and fatalities.

While the DOT has pointed to the citywide reduction of fatalities over the last decade as evidence of their efforts to make streets safer, the reality is that the number of pedestrian injuries holds steady at over 10,000 per year. This is due to the fact that the DOT has only focused their efforts on a small number of the most fatal locations while failing to apply a more systemic solution that would apply to a larger number of dangerous streets and intersections throughout the city. Gathering and providing traffic injury and fatality data to community groups is crucial to ensuring the transparency and fairness of this process.



Needless injuries and fatalities could be prevented by giving pedestrians time to cross before cars get the green light to turn into their paths.

T.A. FILE

## 2 Adopt a street maintenance policy that prioritizes pedestrian safety measures by including traffic calming measures as roads are fixed and rebuilt

The City reconstructs 90 miles of roadway every year. By including the strongest pedestrian safety and traffic calming measures in this work as a matter of course, the City can save lives and keep costs manageable. Traffic calming improvements are the best long-term solution to prevent crashes and provide 24-hour enforcement. Including traffic calming measures for streets that are already being rebuilt will add very little expense to construction projects, and systematically yet gradually create a street network that is accessible and safe for all users.

## 3 Eliminate turning conflicts

Conflicts with turning vehicles are a leading cause of pedestrian injury and death. There are countless low-cost improvements that can be implemented immediately. For example, basic changes to traffic signal timing that gives pedestrians the walk signal and a few extra

seconds of car-free crossing time before motorists get to go, cost next to nothing and can be lifesaving. These “leading pedestrian intervals” should be mandatory at all locations where pedestrians or cyclists have been killed by a turning vehicle in the past year.

## 4 Extra protection for the most vulnerable New Yorkers including children, senior citizens and people with disabilities

There are long-term investments that will help position our city as the national leader on safe and accessible streets. The Safe Routes to School program is an excellent example of the DOT making valuable investments in areas frequented by our most vulnerable population: our children. The City must accelerate the planned

improvements currently in the works for the 135 schools now in the program and expand the program to cover all New York City schools by 2009. The City should also create and fund a similar program in areas with high concentrations of senior citizens and people with disabilities.

## 5 Criminalize and prosecute traffic fatalities

As if the shock of losing a loved one is not enough, families of crash victims must contend with the fact that a killer driver—oftentimes driving with a suspended license or with prior convictions—will leave the crash scene with little more than a “failure to yield” fine. The City and State must commit to strengthen laws and launch a serious public awareness campaign against reckless driving. New Yorkers can no longer tolerate pedestrian fatalities and severe injuries as mere accidents.

In order to hold drivers accountable for their actions, the “rule of two” requiring two traffic violations to prove motorists’ reckless intent must be removed. Higher penalties for hit-and-runs, a crackdown on unlicensed drivers, and extended license revocation will help reinforce the idea that these are not accidents but preventable crashes. To provide the necessary background and raise public awareness on these issues the City should publish a multi-agency study of pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries over the past decade similar to the one they conducted in 2006 for cyclists.

# Slow Down, Save Lives



**A**LTHOUGH THERE IS NO SIMPLE equation for safe streets, there are commonsense steps that can be taken to improve street infrastructure, increase enforcement and educate motorists, cyclists and pedestrians about safer transportation habits. Combating speeding cars and making all road users aware of the dangers brought on by speeding is a time-tested tactic that saves lives and has a ripple

effect on other dangerous driving behaviors. According to the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration, speeding is one of the most prevalent factors contributing to traffic crashes. In 2004 speeding was a contributing factor in 30% of all fatal crashes. Injury severity and fatality are both exponentially related to speeding: to borrow a tag line from a great series of Australian anti-speeding ads, “every K [kilometer] over is a killer.”

New York City streets are not immune to this threat: Speeding significantly contributes to the more than 10,000 pedestrian injuries and 160 plus pedestrian fatalities that happen on our streets each year. In the months ahead, Transportation Alternatives will be focused on raising public awareness about speeding in the City and working towards common sense solutions. Our efforts will begin in Boerum Hill and South Midwood in Brooklyn and

Hell’s Kitchen in Manhattan and expand to neighborhoods throughout the city. We will be armed with a speed gun, speed display board, media representatives and community members fed up with speeding. With these tools we will spread the message that speeding and dangerous driving are irresponsible, socially unacceptable behaviors.

We are also working with Elmhurst Hospital to jumpstart an anti-speeding ad campaign in central Queens where pedestrian/motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of admission to the trauma center. The campaign, “Speeding: There’s No Excuse,” which premiered on Staten Island in January 2006, is a hard hitting anti-speeding educational ad campaign that warns drivers of speeding’s deadly consequences. With the support of City and State elected officials the ads should be up in many languages and impacting driver behavior throughout the borough. □

**Take Action!**  
Is speeding a problem in your neighborhood?  
Email [streets@transalt.org](mailto:streets@transalt.org) and let T.A. know.