

# Making the Grade 2004

## T.A.'s 8th Annual Bicycling Report Card

**T**HE PURPOSE OF T.A.'S BICYCLING REPORT Card is to provoke and encourage politicians, government agencies and the public to make NYC safer and more inviting for existing and would-be cyclists.

T.A. assigns two grades to eight "Bicycling Basics." The first grade is for government agencies' and elected officials' efforts to improve cycling conditions. The second is our assessment of the reality on the street. We give credit for cycling initiatives completed in the year of grading, not the years of hard work that came first. This is the second year we include a public opinion grade based on 1,900 responses to our January 24th internet poll. For full survey results, see [transalt.org/survey2004](http://transalt.org/survey2004).



The DOT's new Manhattan Bridge biking path was a plus for city cyclists in 2004.

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### PROGRESS: Momentum and Attitude

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	B	B
CYCLING REALITY	B-	C+
WEB SURVEY	C-	C

**T**HIS ROUGH BAROMETER measures public attitudes towards and government efforts to promote bicycling.

In 2004, Mayor Bloomberg, with Parks Commissioner Benepe and DOT Commissioner Weinshall, reduced car access to **Central Park**—a boon to bikers and walkers alike. Though the Mayor maintained his hands-off management of the DOT's biking efforts, he set aside millions of dollars to build greenways and was the first Mayor to issue a Bike Month NYC proclamation. The DOT distributed more bike maps than ever (176,000). These successes were partially eclipsed by City Council's proposed bike licensing bill and

- A.....Top Effort/Top Condition
- B.....Good Effort/Good Condition
- C.....OK Effort/Acceptable Condition
- D.....Poor Effort/Unacceptable Condition
- E.....No Effort/Life Threatening Condition

the Critical Mass controversies.

The DOT's annual survey of bike riding counted more people pedaling on NYC streets, greenways and bridges than ever before, yet bridge and greenway access remained dangerous and inconvenient and bike lanes potholed and parked in. NYC's most common barrier to biking, lack of secure parking, went unsolved. The City Council's indoor bike parking bill gained support, but not enough to pass. Record bridge use did not prompt the DOT to remove the dangerous **Williamsburg Bridge bumps**. The Department of City Planning worked hard on new greenway plans, but interagency disagreements prevented their release. T.A., elected officials, Community Boards and the NYPD educated businesses about safety and the laws they must follow. Cyclists riding recklessly and on the sidewalk weakened support for biking. Finally, despite requests from all five Councilmembers around **Prospect Park**, so-called "Holiday" hours, which allow drivers access to the park throughout the week, were not eliminated.

### THE OVERALL CYCLING ENVIRONMENT

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	B	B-
CYCLING REALITY	C+	C+
WEB SURVEY	C-	C-

**H**OW SAFE AND INVITING is it to ride and park your bike in New York City?

In a few neighborhoods, well connected bike lanes, greenways and bridge paths made for easy navigation and safe biking. But overall, traffic conditions remained scary and most bridges, greenways and bike lanes disconnected. Accessing greenways and **East River bridges** at rush hour remained a daunting task for all but the most seasoned riders. Greenways greatly encouraged recreational riding, but the needs of everyday cyclists went unmet. City government lost points for its continued failure to solve the bike parking crisis or to publicize cyclists' right to the road and increase enforcement against drivers who endanger bikers.

At the end of 2004, cycling

conditions in most neighborhoods were still only tolerable enough to keep experienced cyclists riding and to encourage only the boldest New Yorkers to make bicycle commuting a new habit.

### SAFE STREETS

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	C+	C
CYCLING REALITY	C-	C+
WEB SURVEY	D+	D+

**N**YC STREETS ARE STILL dangerous. Speeding, dooring and failure to yield to cyclists are ubiquitous. Direct routes, like the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, Northern Boulevard in Queens and many Manhattan avenues are too dangerous for most bicyclists. In 2004, motorists injured 3,000 cyclists (a slight decline from 2003) and killed 15 people riding bikes (one more than 2003). Danger zones like Queens Boulevard in Queens and Herald and Greeley Squares in Manhattan are safer, but the City has not improved bridge and greenway access.

The NYPD's **TrafficStat** continued to inform traffic enforce-

ment. The DOT launched its **Safe Routes to School** program, which will improve safety for students and everyone traveling near the project's 135 schools. The DOT released the long awaited Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming plan; now community groups must push for its remaining improvements.

The State legislature extended NYC's red light camera program for five years, but did not increase the city's supply of 50 red light cameras (London has 600) or add speed and bus enforcement cameras. The City is still missing a media campaign, like London's "Kill Your Speed, Not a Child," to fully stigmatize dangerous driving.

### BICYCLING LANES

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	B+	B
CYCLING REALITY	C+	C
WEB SURVEY	C	C+

**T**HE DOT'S BICYCLING program installed 16 well connected bike lanes this year, totaling 10 miles. Nine lanes were added to the city's first neighborhood bike network in **Downtown Brooklyn**. 2004 was the first time the DOT striped new bike lanes in conjunction with a new bridge path. T.A.'s Brooklyn Committee and DOT's Brooklyn Office won a bike lane on **Brooklyn's 5th Avenue**. The DOT's first before and after bike lane study, of Oriental Boulevard in Brooklyn, showed that quality bike lanes increase biking and improve traffic safety. Analysis of cycling activity and crashes should become regular practice.

Citywide, bike lanes are in poor shape and disrespected by drivers. The busiest lanes have worn markings, potholes, unfilled street cuts and many metal plates. The DOT needs

to increase bike lane inspections and put their inspectors on bikes. The NYPD needs to increase enforcement against people driving and parking in bike lanes, especially new lanes. The DOT did not replicate any of the innovative bike lane designs in the interim Manhattan Waterfront Greenway—this is disappointing given their popularity.

### BRIDGES

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	C	C-
CYCLING REALITY	C	C
WEB SURVEY	C	C

**T**HE EAST RIVER BRIDGES are the backbone of the city's cycling network. East River bridge bicycle traffic hit a historic 4,400 daily crossings in 2004. The DOT opened a new path on the **Manhattan Bridge** and striped bike lanes to and from it. On the Manhattan Bridge path, the DOT ably cleared debris and snow but broken lights need attention. Cycling activity would be higher if, as with the Manhattan Bridge, all East River bridges connected to bike lanes and greenways.

Lack of a safe route to bridge paths is still a problem on the Brooklyn sides of the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges and the traffic saturated Manhattan sides of the Williamsburg and Queensboro Bridges. The dangerous bumps on the **Williamsburg Bridge** path caused 23% of bikers and walkers to crash, resulting in many broken bones and lawsuits. Yet, the City made no efforts to remove the bumps. The Port Authority's overnight closure of the George Washington Bridge to bikers and walkers is irrational and should be immediately reversed.

### GREENWAYS

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	B+	A-
CYCLING REALITY	B-	B
WEB SURVEY	B	B

**C**AR-FREE CYCLING IN NEW York City is creating many "greenway graduates," who account for the growing ranks of bike commuters.

This year, the Parks and City Planning Departments and State DOT planned new greenways and improvements. Parks finalized plans to lengthen Staten Island's South Shore greenway and is working with the DOT and local elected officials to reopen the High Bridge. Mayor Bloomberg set aside \$7 million for the **West 83rd to 91st Street** link on the Hudson River Greenway. The New Jersey DOT approved \$2 million to build a greenway between the George Washington Bridge and Palisades Interstate Park. Local advocates in Queens, the South Bronx and along the Bronx River and Brooklyn's East River led community planning efforts that earned political and financial support from local elected officials. The City's 311 phone system incorporated the city's greenways.

Education and enforcement efforts did not keep up with use. Bicyclist-pedestrian conflicts, drivers on greenways and bike traffic jams are frequent. On the Shore Parkway Greenway near Spring Creek, greenway users are forced to bike along the highway shoulder!

### PARKING

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	C	D+
CYCLING REALITY	D-	D
WEB SURVEY	D	D

**N**YC'S INCORRIGIBLE thieves make indoor bicycle parking, especially at work-

places, a necessity. **City Council bill Int. 155**, which would require all buildings to let their tenants bring their bicycles inside, garnered the support of half of NYC Councilmembers, the Manhattan and Bronx Borough Presidents and City Planning. The bill's progress is being held up by Housing and Buildings Committee Chair, Councilmember Madeline Provenzano. The Department of City Planning gets credit for requiring indoor bike parking in all new buildings in Downtown Brooklyn, though citywide action is needed. The DOT's CityRacks program installed 1,400 free bike racks (NYC still needs more). There was no progress on outdoor bike parking rules or secure bike parking at Penn Station and transit hubs in Lower Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn. Until New Yorkers are guaranteed indoor bike parking where they work and live, bike riding will only be a shadow of what it could be here.

### TRANSIT

	2004	2003
GOVERNMENT EFFORTS	A-	A
CYCLING REALITY	A-	A-
WEB SURVEY	C-	C-

**N**YC IS THE ONLY CITY IN the world where cyclists have 24-hour access to the subway system. Easy subway access helps cyclists escape foul weather and mechanical failures. Our online question must have misled participants, because, commuter rail aside, the **MTA/New York City Transit's** "common sense" bicycle policy is the best transit deal city cyclists have anywhere in the U.S. Token booth closures are an inconvenience, and fare hikes and service cuts lowered this year's grade, but easy subway access remains a boon to biking in NYC. □