Provocateur

Why Not the Best for the Big Apple?

Why does New York City not use the best street designs for pedestrians and bicyclists? Why does the City of New York say “no” to traffic engineering that has been shown to save life and limb for decades elsewhere in the country and in Europe? Is not New York City a world leader? Indeed, are we not “The Capital of the World,” as the last mayor put it? Are we not the only city in the United States in which more people walk and take transit to work than drive, in which the majority of households are car-free?

How about it Big Apple? We should start saying yes to the full range of traffic engineering that national guidelines and engineering standards say work to encourage walking and cycling. Here are just some of those tools:

RAISED CROSSWALKS: An inexpensive device that is like a speed hump with a crosswalk on top of it. Raised crosswalks have been shown in numerous studies to reduce pedestrian injuries caused by turning motorists. They are perfect for slowing motorists turning off of big streets; London has used them extensively for this purpose. The United State’s own authoritative Institute for Transportation Engineers (ITE) says that they work and should be at least four inches high. New York City has installed raised crosswalks at busy crossings at 24th Street in Manhattan and Water Street in Brooklyn; they have reduced speeds there from an average of 33 mph to 22 mph. Status: The New York City Department of Transportation rejected four-inch raised crosswalks proposed by the consultant for the Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming project.

RAISED INTERSECTIONS: Similar to a big speed hump in the middle of an intersection. Raised intersections help reduce speeds, increase compliance with stop signs and reduce crashes with turning motorists, and are also recommended by ITE. The City installed one at the four-way stop intersection of Slocum Place and Stratford Road in Prospect Park South, Brooklyn. As a result, the number of motorists stopping at the stop sign increased from 64% to 89%. Status: Rejected by the City DOT when proposed as part of the Downtown Brooklyn Traffic Calming project.

CRASH RESISTANT BOLLDARS on sidewalks at corners with high pedestrian and motor vehicle volumes and a history of curb jumping incidents: Motorists jumping the curb injure hundreds of New York City pedestrians each year. The City DOT, Fire Department, Con Edison, Verizon and others use heavy steel bollards to protect Muni-Meter boxes, fire hydrants, electric boxes and phone booths. Likewise the State DOT installed heavy duty bollards to protect the pedestrian median refuge on the West Side Highway. Status: The City DOT refuses to install bollards that could protect pedestrians because curb jumping motorists could be injured. (This is the reason that New York City light posts are designed to break away when motorists crash in to them.)

BOLLARDS USED TO EXTEND SIDEWALK AND PEDESTRIAN SPACE: An inexpensive alternative to widening sidewalks is to use bollards to create safe pedestrian space in the street. The City installed attractive concrete bollards at 59th Street and 5th Avenue that reclaim space for pedestrians. Status: Rejected by the City DOT for use in Herald or Times Square, where pedestrians are “protected” from motorists by painted neckdowns and flimsy light weight plastic bollards.

ON-STREET PROTECTED BIKE LANES: In most places painted bike lanes are enough, but in very high traffic areas with parking problems, curbs or bollards work to keep motorists out. The City installed a protected lane on the west side of the traffic island at Herald Square that works well. Status: The City DOT refuses to install one on the east side of the same island where motorists drive and park in the bike lane.

TWO-WAY ON-STREET BIKE LANE: Cyclists have big problems getting through the heavy traffic near the East River bridges. The City’s current solution is to route cyclists blocks out of their way. A better approach would be to create two-direction bike lanes separated from traffic by curbs or barriers. The City installed a two-way lane from 155th Street to the Harlem River along Harlem River Drive as part of the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway. Status: It is unclear as to whether more are forthcoming. The City DOT had previously rejected all requests.
Thinking Big

A recent visitor from London says that cycling and walking around the center city there since congestion pricing was put in place is fantastically better. Transport for London, London’s Department of Transportation, reports that a 16% reduction in motorists entering the congestion pricing zone, which is roughly akin to Manhattan south of 60th Street, has produced more than a 50% reduction in traffic delays. This traffic reduction has also encouraged London to move ahead with a host of walking improvement projects, including widening numerous sidewalks and pedestrianizing the half of Trafalgar Square in front of the National Gallery; this is akin to transforming Broadway through Times Square into a car-free Times Square Plaza.

The lesson from London here is that reducing automobile use would do wonders for cyclists and walkers. Unfortunately, unlike the mayor of London, the mayor of New York City does not have the power to impose congestion fees. But he does have the power to ensure that future development and land use choices encourage more walking and cycling, and get people to leave their cars at home.

The mayor is challenging the public to think big about what it wants the New York City of the future to look like. For instance, what do we want in West Midtown? Might new office and apartment buildings and a football stadium be a better use of scarce land than a rail yard and low density development? Do we want the Atlantic Yards in Downtown Brooklyn to be undeveloped forever? These are provocative issues, and the mayor deserves credit for asking what New Yorkers want things to be like, rather than passively watching the city be molded by seemingly inexorable demographic, land-use and transportation trends. We agree with the mayor that people, not god and not trends, dictate how this city’s future will look.

So when the mayor looks about this great city, he should challenge himself to think about whether New York City will be a better place with more traffic or less traffic; more walking or less walking; more cycling or less cycling; better bus service or worse bus service. Given his support for East River bridge tolls, the Car-Pool Rule, the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway and Bus Rapid Transit, a good guess is that the mayor would like to see less traffic in the future. If so, he needs to convey this desire to his commissioners, whose work often consists of accommodating, and even encouraging, ever increasing traffic flow and car ownership.

Currently, key city agencies, like the Economic Development Corporation and Department of City Planning, foster development that generates tremendous car use. Big box stores in transit poor neighborhoods, like the proposed Fairway in Red Hook, Brooklyn or the Home Depots across Queens, encourage car ownership, driving and traffic.

Proposed residential developments in parts of Brooklyn and Queens with inadequate transit have been given variances or rezoned to have giant parking garages which city studies project will inject massive amounts of traffic into already strained neighborhood streets. Citywide, with few exceptions, traffic lights are timed to maximize traffic flow, and pedestrian and cycling improvements are forbidden because they may reduce the traffic carrying capacity of major streets.

What’s it going to be Mayor Bloomberg, more traffic or less; quieter, more bikeable and walkable streets or traffic jammed frustration zones? Your agencies are working towards a traffic filled future. Do you agree?
In November and December 2003, T.A. surveyed 1,006 metal construction plates in Manhattan. These are the ubiquitous “skid” plates contractors use to cover street cuts when they are not doing work. City regulations require all metal construction plates to be large enough to cover street cuts and to be firmly anchored, countersunk or ramped to prevent movement and rocking as well as provide a smooth transitioned with the street; plates must also have skid resistant equal to or greater than the adjacent road surface (DOT Highway Rules Section 2-11, e 10). In addition, contractors must stamp their name on the plates and post signs with their contact information at construction sites. During winter months, contractors must also post signs stating, “Steel Plates Ahead Raise Plow.”

But T.A. found that only 1.9% of contractors’ plates met all of the City’s requirements for skid resistance, anchoring and signage. Of the 1,006 plates T.A. inspected, 42.2% were properly anchored, countersunk or ramped, 33.9% had a skid-resistant surface and 14.1% of plates had proper signage indicating contractor name, contact information and construction dates.

When installed properly, plates protect the traveling public from falling in to street cuts. When installed improperly, metal plates can cause pedestrians to slip, cyclist to crash and motorists to skid. Crossing a steel construction plate during or after a rain shower or snowfall can be highly risky; a quick change of direction or stop can result in a crash.

The City DOT’s 107 Highway Inspection and Quality Assurance street inspectors need to pay particular attention to these requirements and crackdown on contractors who do not follow them. The inspectors check construction sites to ensure compliance with the Highway Rules. The inspectors issue fines of $400 for failing to cover a street cut, $400 for displaced plates, $1,000 for non-skid resistant surface and $250 for failing to post signage. The summonses are adjudicated by the City’s Environmental Control Board.

The City DOT could also restart its bicycling street inspector program, which was very successful in the early 1990s. Giving inspectors a bicyclist’s perspective would help improve safety. The bottom line is that the agency needs to get more street inspectors out to experience the shattered streets and issue summonses.
Cycling News

Thumbs Up to DOT’s New “Shared Lane” Bike Markings

In the spring of 2003, the New York City Department of Transportation tested a new “shared lane” bike route pavement marking on a six block stretch of University Avenue in the Morris Heights section of the Bronx. The new, six-foot high markings feature a bicycle symbol but no bike lane stripes.

The shared lane marking is an effective, flexible alternative to striped bike lanes and can be used to improve cyclist safety and make connections between bike lanes, greenways and bridge paths on streets too narrow for standard five-foot wide bike lanes. Last year, the San Francisco Department of Parking and Traffic surveyed motorists and cyclists about “shared lane” bike symbols and found that 80% of respondents understood the symbols to mean “share the road.”

(The six foot symbols the agency is using are too small to catch drivers’ attention.)

Chambers Street between Centre and West Streets is a prime candidate for shared lane markings. Chambers is the most direct cycling route connecting the Brooklyn Bridge and the Hudson River Greenway, and motorists should be aware that it is a heavily cycled street.

The City DOT should make shared lane pavement markings a permanent part of its cycling toolbox.

New Bike Lanes in Williamsburg, Downtown Brooklyn Still Waiting

In the fall, the New York City Department of Transportation installed new five-foot wide bicycle lanes on two popular cycling streets in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The northbound Berry Street lane runs 1.5 miles from Broadway, under the Williamsburg Bridge, to Guernsey Street near the north end of McCarren Park in Greenpoint. The northbound Manhattan Avenue lane runs 1.32 miles from Broadway in East Williamsburg to Engert Avenue, on the east side of McCarren Park.

City DOT officials say that the agency installed the new bike lanes to reduce chronic speeding by narrowing the travel lanes. When motorists see a bicycle lane and that the road is a little narrower, they tend to slow down and drive more carefully. The agency installed the new lanes without removing motor vehicle travel or parking lanes. As it wraps up work on the new Williamsburg Bridge bicycle and pedestrian path, the City DOT should install bike lanes and signs that alert cyclists about “shared lane” bike symbols and found that 80% of respondents understood the symbols to mean “share the road” and drive and ride cautiously. Berkeley, California uses thirty-foot tall bicycle symbols and arrows to mark “Bicycle Boulevards,” which are traffic calmed, priority cycling streets. The New York City DOT should use ten- to fifteen-foot tall bike symbols coupled with bicycle signs to encourage New York City drivers to share the road with bicyclists. (The six foot symbols the agency is using are too small to catch drivers’ attention.)

Chambers Street between Centre and West Streets is a prime candidate for shared lane markings. Chambers is the most direct cycling route connecting the Brooklyn Bridge and the Hudson River Greenway, and motorists should be aware that it is a heavily cycled street.

The City DOT should make shared lane pavement markings a permanent part of its cycling toolbox.

On Berry Street in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the DOT striped a bike lane to slow down fast drivers and give cyclists safe space to ride.

only speculate on where the plans are sitting within the agency’s bureaucracy.

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At the end of December 2003, the Hudson River Park Trust had removed all but one of the stop signs on the Hudson River Greenway from Battery Park to 59th Street as part of an out-of-court settlement between T.A. and the State Attorney General’s Office. The Hudson River Park Trust and the New York State Department of Transportation replaced the signs with new bicycle traffic signals alongside the path. For two years prior to filing suit, T.A. persistently urged the State DOT to remove the signs because they violated signage laws and were dangerous to passing cyclists. But agency officials said that they did not have jurisdiction and that the signs belonged to the Hudson River Park Trust, a city-state public authority. Finally, the attorney general, acting on behalf of the State DOT, was able to persuade the Hudson River Park Trust to remove the signs.

The Trust’s stop signs were a well intended but misguided attempt to reduce conflict between cyclists and motorists turning across the greenway. But the signs, which were positioned at head height, contradicted green traffic signals, caused crashes, blocked sight lines, were easily moved and confused both greenway users and motorists. The signs violated the requirements of the State Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices because they conflicted with traffic lights located at the same intersections, were placed in the center of the path and were not permanently mounted. The one remaining stop sign, at 22nd Street, is there because it is at an unsignalized intersection with four-way stop signs for greenway and motorized traffic.

The real solution to ending conflicts between turning motorists and greenway users is to install raised intersections at driveways. To its credit, the State DOT has done this at the Houston Street crossing; the agency should replicate the design along the path.

Noah Budnick (3)

North Jersey Leaders Call for GWB to River Road Connector Path

In November 2003, the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Borough of Fort Lee Council bolstered the calls of fellow New Jersey elected officials and civic groups by passing resolutions calling on the Port Authority and Palisades Interstate Park to build a half-mile greenway path between the George Washington Bridge bicycle and pedestrian path and “River Road” in Palisades Park, New Jersey. In November 2003, the Port Authority released a study, concluding that it is feasible to build the connector. With Palisade Park’s permission, the Port Authority could easily build the $370,000 path as part of an $86.6 million George Washington Bridge ramp project. This would make the narrow streets, steep hills and frightening traffic safer for the 1,600 cyclists who ride there each weekend day.

Second Manhattan Bridge Path Coming Soon

According to New York City Department of Transportation officials, the fully ramped, “bicycle only” path on the east side of the Manhattan Bridge is scheduled to open in July 2004. Brooklyn-side access will be on the northeast corner of Sands and Jay Streets, and Manhattan-side access will be on the southwest corner of Canal and Forsyth Streets. The agency needs to ensure safe access along Jay and Sands Streets in Brooklyn and direct routes for north and westbound cyclists entering Manhattan. Over the last two years, the number of bicyclists crossing the Manhattan Bridge has increased from 150 to 600 a day.

Parks Pursues Funding for Hudson Path Connector

According to New York City Parks Department officials, the pier connecting the Hudson River Greenway between 83rd and 91st Streets could be built within the next two to three years. The agency is aggressively pursuing funding to complete this missing link in the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway. Until the connector is built, path users will have to continue to detour inland on the extremely bumpy and crowded promenade in Riverside Park. The Parks Department estimates that rebuilding the bulkhead and constructing the 14-foot wide path could cost up to seven million dollars.

Write and ask the State Department of Transportation to construct raised crossings at every Hudson River Greenway path crossing.

Douglas Currey
Director NYS DOT Region 11
47-40 21st Street
Long Island City, NY 11101

TakeAction!
City Paying For Williamsburg Bridge’s Dangerous Bumps

In December 2002, the New York City Department of Transportation opened a popular new bicycling and walking path on the Williamsburg Bridge. 1,500 cyclists cross it each day. But twenty-six two-inch high metal expansion joint covers on the path have made the path hazardous for cyclists. Over the past year, bicyclists and pedestrians have stumbled and tripped over these bumps, damaged their bicycles and, for an unfortunate few, crashed and been severely injured. These bumps are clearly dangerous, and the City Department of Transportation needs to replace them with more gently sloping expansion joint covers.

Over the past year, despite written requests to remove the bumps from T.A., the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association (which noted that the bumps violate the Americans with Disabilities Act), the United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg, El Puente, Community Board 3 (Manhattan), Community Board 1 (Brooklyn) and State Senator Martin Malave Dilan, the only action that the agency has taken has been to paint the bumps yellow.

Bridge users are suffering because of the City DOT’s negligence. In June 2002, a cyclist crossing the main span of the Williamsburg Bridge’s south side path crashed on an expansion joint cover, fractured and dislocated her clavicle and broke three ribs. The agency used this same expansion joint design on the new sections of the bridge path it opened in December 2002. On two separate days in October 2003, two cyclists crashed on the new bridge path’s bumps. One fractured her jaw and suffered facial injuries requiring surgery. The other fractured his pelvis. All of these crash victims were regular bridge users, and all of them are suing the City.

The Williamsburg Bridge will be under rehabilitation until 2006, so the City DOT has ample time to instruct the construction contractor to change the joints to a smoother design.

DOT to Study Skyway From Brooklyn Bridge Path to Cadman Plaza

At a November meeting of Brooklyn Community Board 2’s Transportation Committee, New York City Department of Transportation officials announced that the agency has approximately $500,000 in Federal clean air funds to study building a “fly-over” ramp from Cadman Plaza to the Brooklyn side of the Brooklyn Bridge’s bicycle and pedestrian path. This study is the necessary first step towards actually building the ramp; the addition would improve bridge access for the 5,000 people who walk and bike each day over the city’s most famous East River span.

The proposed ramp would provide a safe and convenient alternative to the currently horrific bridge access at the mammoth intersection of Adams and Tillary Streets. The ramp would arch over the bridge’s motor vehicle traffic, stretching from Cadman Plaza East to the Washington Street stairs on the bridge’s promenade. Bikers and walkers would no longer be forced to contend with a dozen lanes of hurried, intersecting traffic at the bridge entrance.

In 1999, T.A. extolled the Cadman Plaza Connector as a potential boon for cyclists and pedestrians traveling to and from the Brooklyn side of the Brooklyn Bridge. At the time, the City DOT requested but failed to get $4 million in Federal clean air funds to study and probably build the ramp. The 1999 plan included converting a five-block section of Cadman Plaza East/Washington Street into a car-free plaza, including a separated bike path. Cadman Plaza East is now car-free from Sands to Tillary Street. However, it is unclear how the Emergency Management offices planned for the area between Cadman Plaza East and the Brooklyn Bridge will affect the design and construction of the fly-over.
Every year, T.A. grades New York City cycling conditions and government efforts to promote cycling. This annual report card is intended to provoke cyclists and government to work towards a better cycling environment. T.A. assigns two grades to eight “Bicycling Basics.” The first grade is for government efforts to improve cycling conditions. The second is our assessment of actual real life conditions. We give credit for cycling initiatives completed in the year of grading, not the years of hard work that came first. This year we have added a new feature: A public opinion grade based on 1,300 responses to our January 28th Web survey poll. For full survey results, see transalt.org/survey2003.

Progress: Momentum and Attitude

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This rough barometer grades public attitudes towards and government efforts to promote bicycling. This year, New York City cycling moved two pedals forward and one pedal back.

For the first time since the 1980 Kotch bike lane, City Hall directly backed a major cycling project. It paid off. The 32-mi Interim Manhattan Waterfront Greenway won widespread public praise. Despite the positive reception, though, New York City greenways remain poorly connected to bridges and bike lanes and are often crowded and chaotic. Similarly, the East River Bridges use hit a historic high, but access to the bridges remains inconvenient, confusing, and dangerous.

The New York City Department of Transportation striped a record 27 new bike lanes in 2003. Plus, the agency increased car-free hours in Prospect Park. The Parks Department worked hard to build and restore paths for the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway and the Department of City Planning produced new neighborhood greenway plans. The State Department of Transportation continued redesigning the Hudson River Greenway and developing greenways in the Bronx and Brooklyn. Yet, alas, another year passed without government action to create secure bike parking, the number one obstacle to everyday cycling. Finally, reckless cyclists, especially those riding on sidewalks, fueled anger towards bicycling.

T.A.'s 7th Annual Bicycling Report Card

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The overall cycling environment

How safe and congenial is it to ride and park your bike in New York City? The Interim Manhattan Waterfront Greenway has shown city cyclists the benefits of bike lanes that connect greenways to the street grid. But overall, conditions remain tough. There are few connections between bike lanes, greenways and bridges, and rush hour access to the East River bridges is tolerable only for seasoned riders. While the City DOT deserves credit for creating 27 miles of new bike lanes, few of the new lanes connect to major destinations, especially bridges and greenways. Also, city government loses points for its continued failure to help create secure bike parking, cyclists’ number one demand, or to publicize cyclists’ right to the road.

PROGRESS: Momentum and Attitude

(l-r) Mayor Bloomberg, NYC Parks Commissioner Benepe, Manhattan Borough President Fields, New York State DOT Commissioner Boardman, New York State Parks Commissioner Castro and NYC DOT Commissioner Weinshall at the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway opening.
In sum, cycling conditions in most of the city are still only tolerable enough to keep everyday cyclists riding and encourage the boldest non-cyclists to take to two wheels.

**SAFE STREETS**

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**BICYCLE LANES**

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The New York City Department of Transportation’s bicycle program installed an impressive 21 new bike lanes this year, totaling 27 miles of lanes. Nine of the new lanes connect to other lanes, greenways and bridge paths. The agency’s design innovations on parts of the Interim Manhattan Waterfront Greenway are especially encouraging. These innovations include a reverse flow lane at 24th Street next to the FDR.

European-style bike signals at Dyckman Street and 10th Avenue and a separated on-street lane at 135th Street and Harlem River Drive.

However, the agency needs to study these lanes seriously given that it has intently focused on bike lanes as its primary tactic to improve cycling. The City has not adequately measured cycling activity and crashes before and after it has installed lanes. Bike lanes may reduce speeding and overtaking crashes, or they may force cyclists into the dooring zone and make motorists more territorial—or both. Citywide, bike lanes are in poor shape. The busiest lanes have worn markings, unfilled street cuts and many metal plates.

In September, Mayor Bloomberg opened the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway. In an impressive display of what government can do for cycling when it wants to, City Hall deftly worked with the Parks Department, the City DOT, the Economic Development Corporation, the Department of City Planning and the State DOT to assemble three miles of new car-free paths connected by eight new bike lanes. Despite NIMBY opposition from core Upper East Side constituents, City Hall delivered the popular cycling attraction. But popularity has its price. In Riverside Park, a surge in bicyclist-pedestrian conflicts has angered the public, and users of the crowded Hudson River Greenway face dangerous turning motorists. Elsewhere, the Shore Parkway path is falling into New York Bay and the City has made little progress on the Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway. Unfortunately, T.A. had to sue the State DOT to get it to remove the illegal and dangerous stop signs from the Hudson River Greenway.
Reclaiming the Streets

Houston Street Rebuild
Once in a Century Chance for Greatness

The New York City Department of Transportation and Department of Design and Construction intend to spend $25 million to replace water and sewer mains and reconstruct Houston Street between Bowery and West Streets. The project is of great interest to pedestrians and cyclists because it will shape Houston Street for the next fifty to one hundred years.

At a raucous Manhattan Community Board 2 Traffic and Transportation Committee meeting on January 13th, over 100 people braved the biting cold to voice their anger about the pedestrian unfriendly design proposed for Houston.

Speakers were especially alarmed by the City’s call for left turn bays for motorists heading west on Houston Street, and its proposal to narrow medians and eliminate pedestrian islands at crosswalks. Many people made the point that this part of the plan was clearly aimed at increasing traffic capacity and speeds and would undercut pedestrian safety and encourage motorists to travel on local SoHo streets.

Media tips extended through the crosswalk provide a valuable refuge for pedestrians. As part of the DOT’s plan for Houston Street, many of these safe spaces would be eliminated for motorist turning.

However, the Department of Transportation plan does contain some good, including a center median with a high curb and flower beds similar to those on Upper Broadway in Manhattan. The median will provide planting beds and protect pedestrians from errant motorists. The plan also does a good job of rationalizing the complicated Houston Street and Sixth Avenue intersection, including widening the sidewalks between Sixth Avenue and West Broadway on the south side of Houston Street.

T.A. urges the City Department of Transportation and Department of Design and Construction to work with the community to make Houston Street a safe and inviting street that serves the community, not just drivers headed to the West Side highway. This is a once in a century chance to redesign the street for the better that no one can afford to waste. For T.A.’s full slate of recommendations, see transalt.org/testimony.

 Queens Blvd: Vigil, New Changes and Possible “Ambitious Projects”

In November 2003, family members and residents gathered at the second annual interfaith service at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Church in Forest Hills to remember victims of Queens Boulevard. While the number of injuries and victims on Queens Boulevard has dropped in recent years due at least in part to the New York City Department of Transportation’s recent safety improvements, the so called ‘Boulevard of Death’ still claimed victims this year, including two young women who were killed in July when a speeding driver launched his car on top of them while they stood on a median waiting to cross the street. Drivers have killed 84 pedestrians and injured thousands on Queens Boulevard in the last decade. As part of its second round of safety improvements on Queens Boulevard, the City is tackling the sections between the Long Island Expressway and Van Dam Street and from Union Turnpike to Hillside Avenue. Beginning in May, the City will implement a variety of safety improvements, including longer traffic signals, new striping on certain areas, curbside parking and no U-turn signs and more median fencing to discourage jaywalking. The City made similar improvements in 2001 to the section of Queens Boulevard between Union Turnpike and the Long Island Expressway.

While these are welcome changes that will improve safety, the Department of Transportation has also hinted at other “ambitious projects” to save lives on Queens Boulevard. These other projects should, at the very least, include sidewalk extensions and other engineering changes to traffic calm the motorists who speed along the boulevard. But to really change the equation, the City needs to rebuild the boulevard from the ground up. The City should recreate it as a true urban boulevard, with a wide planted median, no service roads and short blocks, crossed by local streets. An example of this pedestrian- and neighborhood-friendly boulevard design is Broadway in Manhattan north of 73rd Street. This big street enhances the community and still carries large volumes of traffic. Until it is fundamentally redesigned, Queens Boulevard will not be a good place to walk or to live, and drivers will continue to kill and maim pedestrians lost in its enormity.

WINTER 2004

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City Council’s Weak Vendor Box Law is Failing NYC Pedestrians

Only 20 boxes removed and half of owners continue violating law

New York City pedestrians are getting squeezed out of already scarce sidewalk space. Contributing to the problem is the continued proliferation of newspaper vendor boxes illegally clustered around subway entrances and crosswalks. The problem is especially acute in some of the most crowded parts of the city, especially the Upper East Side, Upper West Side and Downtown Brooklyn.

City Council’s Local Law 23 was meant to solve the problem by giving the New York City Department of Transportation the authority to regulate the placement and maintenance of vendor boxes on New York City sidewalks. However, at a November 2003 City Council oversight hearing, the City DOT released statistics showing that the law is not working. Despite having issued more than 12,000 warning notices and 2,073 summonses, the City DOT has only been able to remove 20 vendor boxes from city streets in the last year. To put this in perspective, T.A. counted 23 vendor boxes at just one corner on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. The agency also revealed that only half of vendor box owners complied with requirement to register and submit proof of insurance for their boxes.

At the hearing, T.A. urged the City Council to revise the law to ease the ponderousness of the current reporting and enforcement clauses so that the City DOT can immediately remove illegal vendor boxes. Currently, if the agency finds a newspaper vendor box in noncompliance with the law, it must jump through a series of bureaucratic hoops that can take a year or more to complete. First the agency must notify the vendor box owner to correct the problem. Then if the condition is not corrected, the agency can serve a Notice of Violation on the owner. Notices of Violation then go to the Environmental Control Board, an administrative tribunal that holds hearings and adjudicates various “quality of life” infractions of the city’s laws and rules. If the Environmental Control Board issues an order, the City DOT can remove the box.

The City DOT has recently hired five more news box inspectors, which is a good step towards getting this law back on track. Now the City Council needs to revise the law to allow the agency to do its job, and to get illegal vendor boxes off city streets.
Safe Streets

Daily News Gets Governor to Join Fight against Killer Drivers

Outrage that only 14% of killer drivers charged

T.A. APPLAUDS THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS for its “Save a Life, Change the Law” campaign to pressure the governor and state legislature to make killer drivers accountable for their actions. The campaign has already won a pledge by Governor Pataki and some legislators to reform state laws to make it possible to prosecute and convict killer drivers.

The News found that between 2000 and 2002, motorists killed 580 New York City pedestrians, but only 80 motorists were charged with a crime. Prosecutors interviewed by the News confirmed T.A.’s long-time assertion that state law makes it almost impossible for prosecutors to convict even the most reckless killer drivers. According to Brooklyn District Attorney, Maureen McCormick, under existing law, killer driver cases “are as heartbreaking as they are difficult to prove.” One victim’s son told the News, “If you kill someone with a car, you are in very good shape.” He is right. In New York, killer drivers who use the “Oops, I blacked out before my car jumped the curb at 60 mph” excuse are impossible to prosecute.

Governor Proposes Tougher Rules for Killer Drivers

Thanks to the Daily News’ “Save a Life, Change the Law” campaign, Governor Pataki is proposing a package of new laws with which to hold killer drivers accountable for their actions. T.A. supports measures to hold killer drivers accountable. As reported by the News, the Governor seeks to:

- Remove district attorneys’ burden of proving criminal negligence when a driver under the influence of drugs or alcohol seriously injures or kills someone, flees from a cop or violates traffic laws and has a history of infractions.
- Give consecutive sentences to drivers who kill or seriously injure more than one person, which means much longer stays behind bars.
- Boost top penalties for deadly hit-and-run drivers from four to seven years in prison. Licenses would automatically be suspended for drivers who flee the scene of a fatal crash.
- Crack down on unlicensed drivers by requiring them to be fingerprinted, making it harder for them to get new licenses under phony names.
- Revoke licenses of drivers who break traffic laws and kill or seriously injure another person in the process.

Observers believe that the new laws will pass the state senate but face stiff opposition in the state assembly, whose leader, Speaker Sheldon Silver, is a former defense attorney and deeply skeptical of pro-prosecution measures.

A Punishment to Fit the Crime

Is four years in prison sufficient punishment for a person who used his sports utility vehicle to mow down a law-abiding pedestrian, dragged his body for a block while speeding (possibly up to 100 mph) in a 30 mph zone, fled the scene of the crime, ditched the vehicle and took a bus to Atlantic City to gamble while his victim lay dead? T.A., Governor Pataki and the Daily News say no. The police department arrested Gurpreet Oberoi of Queens in January after he allegedly killed Peter Hornbeck on January 30th when Hornbeck tried to cross the street at 96th Street and Park Avenue. The Manhattan District Attorney added a charge of homicide after the investigators found that Oberoi had been speeding. However, even if Oberoi is convicted of homicide, he will only face up to four years in prison. Governor Pataki, who has publicly declared his support for tougher traffic laws, wants to increase top penalties for deadly hit-and-run drivers to up to seven years in prison. T.A. is encouraging the Governor and others to pass legislation that would give prosecutors the ability to prosecute killer drivers in a manner that reflects the horror of the crime.

The News found that between 2000 and 2002, motorists killed 580 New York City pedestrians, but only 80 motorists were charged with a crime.
How Much Safer is New York City for Pedestrians?

How safe is it to walk in New York City and how should we measure this? T.A., the press and government often consider the number of pedestrian fatalities as the most basic index of walking safety. The good news is that pedestrian fatalities in New York City decreased dramatically during the 1990s, from 365 in 1990 to an all-time low of 178 in 2003. The reduction in fatalities seems to be the result of better targeted police enforcement, especially since 1998 and the implementation of TrafficStat, the New York City Department of Transportation’s execution of big improvements at particularly dangerous locations and, possibly, improvements in medical response time and trauma care.

Another way to measure street safety is to look at the rate of pedestrian injuries. The news here is also good. There has been a substantial decline in pedestrian injuries, from 15,589 in 1990 to 11,616 in 2000; this is an impressive 33% decline when population growth is taken into account.

So why are we not cheering louder? First, cycling deaths and injuries have not dropped significantly since the late 1980s and early 1990s. Second, the everyday walking experience is still marred by speeding, reckless driving and dangerously disrespectful turning motorists. Finally, New York City remains downright dangerous when compared to other, similar cities. Twenty-eight percent more pedestrians are hurt or killed in New York City compared to London, an ethnically and economically-diverse city that closely resembles New York City in size, land use and transportation mix. In other words, 145 pedestrians are killed or injured annually for every 100,000 people in New York City, compared to 98 pedestrian deaths or injuries for every 100,000 people in London.

Editor’s note: In the last issue of Transportation Alternatives Magazine, we cited police department statistics for New York City pedestrian injuries in 2001 as 15,009. This total probably includes bicycling injuries, though we were unable to confirm this by press time.

New York City pedestrian injuries have clearly decreased, especially when adjusted for New York City’s 9% population growth between 1990 and 2000.
TAXI DRIVERS SET THE PACE ON CITY streets, and as professional drivers, should be the best, most courteous and safest drivers around. However, as several recent high-profile pedestrian crashes have shown, taxi drivers are often some of the most dangerous drivers. In 1999, the last year for which there are statistics, medallion cab drivers were involved in 16.2% of all crashes involving injury in New York City. Citywide, 4,478 people were injured by taxi drivers, including 1,005 pedestrians and bicyclists, 875 taxi passengers, 772 taxi drivers and 1,687 people in other vehicles.

In January, Transportation Alternatives issued a new report conducted by taxi expert Schaller Consulting on taxicab safety that examined crash records, the number of taxis involved in crashes and driver incomes. T.A.’s study found that there is a strong relationship between taxicab crash rates and driver incomes: Higher driver incomes are linked to lower crash rates. In other words, better-paid taxi drivers are safer taxi drivers.

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T.A. Study Shows Higher Fares Equals Safer Taxis

Mayor Wants 900 More Cabs

T A JANUARY 12TH NEW YORK City Taxi and Limousine Commission public hearing, T.A. called for further study of public safety issues and the effect of different levels of fare hikes before the Commission adds 900 new cabs to New York City’s taxi fleet. Currently, there are 12,187 medallion cabs on city streets. There has been a strong push to sell more taxi medallions to raise money for the city budget and because of complaints about rush hour taxi shortages.

T.A. remains concerned that more cabs will result in more crashes with pedestrians and bicyclists. Since cab drivers often start and stop in traffic lanes or crosswalks, they frequently endanger bicyclists, who risk being doored or picked off by a passing vehicle as they ride around the stopped cab. Additionally, the Taxi and Limousine Commission recommends mitigating the traffic impact of the additional medallions by re-timing traffic lights. Changing light signal timing may jeopardize pedestrian safety because it may create shorter crossing times and reduced opportunities for the installation of Leading Pedestrian Intervals.

Finally, economics show that a fare hike will reduce demand for cabs, increase their availability and potentially eliminate any need for 900 new cabs. The Taxi and Limousine Commission needs to assess what the impact of various levels of fare hikes would be on cab availability, driver and owner incomes and public safety. It is likely that taxi service and availability—and most importantly, safety—would all improve with a fare hike and without the sale of additional medallions.

How much traffic would 900 new cabs create?

The Taxi and Limousine Commission’s traffic consultant, Urbitran, says that 900 more cabs will not add much traffic, at least if traffic lights are re-timed. The firm reached this conclusion after conducting detailed traffic modeling as part of the City’s Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

But transportation analyst Charles Komanoff, using his own model, found that adding 900 cabs would be the equivalent of jamming 27,000 more cars everyday into Manhattan south of 96th Street and would produce costly traffic delays.
New T.A. Study Shows Midtown X-Walk Barricades Don’t Work

Transportation Alternatives released a new study in January that showed that the midtown pedestrian barricades and re-cessed crosswalks installed in 1997/1998 at 5th and 6th Avenues and 49th and 50th Streets encourage jay walking, do not improve pedestrian safety and do little to move traffic. T.A. recommends that the City restore corner crosswalks as well as Leading Pedestrian Intervals (a three second head start for pedestrians) during times when Thru-Street rules are not in effect.

In the spring of 2003, T.A. conducted detailed traffic and pedestrian counts at the intersection of 5th Avenue and 50th Street, where the barricades are installed, and, as a control, the intersection of 5th Avenue and 48th Street, which is un-barricaded. Analysis of the data showed that:
- The 50th Street barricades discourage pedestrian traffic—94% more people use the 48th Street north crosswalk than the 50th Street displaced crosswalk.
- The 50th Street barricades promote jaywalking, thereby endangering more pedestrians — 10.16% of people jaywalked at the 50th Street intersection, compared to only 5.42% at 48th Street.
- The 50th Street barricades are not expediting traffic—An average of 32% of motorists turn right off of 50th Street, compared to an average of 36% of motorists turning right off of 48th Street.
- The 50th Street barricades are not easing traffic congestion—on average, 128 vehicles travel from 48th Street through or on to 5th Avenue every 15 minutes. Meanwhile, only 112 vehicles from 50th Street are able to travel through or turn right on to 5th Avenue.
- The advent of the New York City Department of Transportation’s Thru-Streets Program in the Fall of 2002, which bans motorists from turning from 10 am to 6 pm on nine through streets from 36th to 60th Streets, takes away the main rationale for the barricades; they were intended to reduce conflict between turning motorists and pedestrians.

Given these findings, T.A. calls on the City to remove the pedestrian barricades at 50th and 49th Streets and 5th and 6th Avenue immediately, and install Leading Pedestrian Intervals. It is clear that these barricades are not working. In addition, the City DOT and the New York Police Department should extend a moratorium on installing any new pedestrian barricades until they have thoroughly studied the effects of the barricades on pedestrian behavior and safety and vehicle movement and congestion at each intersection where barricades are currently installed.

U.S. Pedestrians Losing Safety Battle

According to pioneering research published in a recent issue of the journal Accident Analysis and Prevention (Vol. 36, p. 295), a pedestrian struck by a motorist operating a sports utility vehicle is more than twice as likely to be killed as a pedestrian hit by a passenger car at the same speed.

Clay Gabler, a professor of mechanical engineering specializing in vehicle technology at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, teamed with co-worker Devon Lefler to investigate the risk to pedestrians from various types of large vehicles, including sports utility vehicles. So-called “light trucks and vans” comprise half of all passenger vehicles sold in the United States. Gabler and Rowan extracted information from four crash databases and found that a pedestrian struck by a person operating a large van is three times as likely to die as someone hit by a person operating a car traveling at the same speed. Pedestrians struck by a person operating a sports utility vehicle are twice as likely to die.

In their report, the researchers observe that reducing this danger would require a radical redesign of sports utility vehicles to replace their blunt front ends with sloping, more aerodynamic fronts. Lower, sloping hoods injure the legs of pedestrians in a crash, but blunt, front ends kill pedestrians through head and chest injuries.

According to Gabler, pedestrians in the United States are losing the safety battle: “Despite over 4,000 pedestrian deaths a year, there are no pedestrian impact safety regulations under serious consideration.” This is particularly troubling since the United States Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has undertaken widely publicized research about the risk that sports utility vehicles pose to other motorists.

The United States’ failure to protect vulnerable pedestrians and bicyclists concurrent with efforts to improve vehicle safety, compared to an average of 36% of motorists turning right off of 48th Street.
- The 50th Street barricades are not easing traffic congestion—on average, 128 vehicles travel from 48th Street through or on to 5th Avenue every 15 minutes. Meanwhile, only 112 vehicles from 50th Street are able to travel through or turn right on to 5th Avenue.
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SUVs Twice as Lethal to Pedestrians

Deadly Accessory

So-called “bull bars,” metal bars mounted on the front of the vehicle, are a growing and deadly trend in America and around the world. A 1998 study by Australia’s University of Adelaide found that the bars increase the danger in crashes between vehicles and pedestrians because they punch the body of the pedestrian away from and then under the vehicle rather than over the vehicle. The bars have caused numerous avoidable injuries and deaths. Pedestrians struck by a vehicle equipped with steel bull bars are seriously hurt or killed at speeds much lower than those that are usually fatal.

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Safe Streets

Automated Enforcement: A Key Part of the NYC Traffic Safety Puzzle

Transportation Alternatives has been a long-time advocate of automated traffic enforcement methods such as red light cameras, speed cameras and, now, bus lane enforcement cameras on New York City streets. Automated traffic enforcement is widely used around the United States and Western Europe and is proven to reduce traffic injuries, deaths and crashes. The side benefits of automated enforcement are that it enforces traffic laws without discrimination, frees up police officers for more serious crime prevention and puts the cost of the program on violators, rather than taxpayers. London uses hundreds of red light and speed cameras and recently began using 1,400 bus lane enforcement cameras; the city has a similarly sized population but only half the rate of pedestrian and cycling injuries and deaths as New York City.

Sheldon Silver Threatens NYC
Red Light Cams with Extinction

T.A. supports the New York City Department of Transportation, the New York Police Department and the Mayor's desire for more red light cameras for New York City, as do the city council, all five borough presidents and the state senate. But the red light camera program, which is sunsetting in the state legislature this year, is in danger of not being renewed—and ending altogether—because State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who represents the Lower East Side of Manhattan, does not like them. Last year, in the waning moments of the session, Silver stopped legislation to increase the number of New York City red light cameras from 50 to 75. This year, the City has asked the legislature to expand the program to 100 cameras and make it permanent. If Silver stops the legislation, the City's cameras will be removed and the program will be ended.

FACT: In the United States, red light cameras have been shown to reduce the frequency of crashes with injuries at the intersections at which they are installed by an average of 29%.

More Lessons from London: Bus Lane Enforcement Cameras

In 1997, London had a problem. It had one of the largest municipal bus systems in the world, with 6,500 buses carrying 5.1 million passengers daily. But 16,000 motorists were driving in bus priority lanes each day, slowing buses, discovering their use and causing massive gridlock along with $10 billion a year in externality costs to local businesses.

So in 1997, London started an aggressive bus lane enforcement camera program in which either a camera at the front of the bus or a stationary camera on the roadway took pictures of the license plates of motorists driving in the bus lane. The cameras work in much the same way as red light or speed cameras; violators trigger a digital photo of the license plate, which is stored and sent to a processing center. The City sends a $130 fine to the violator's home address. Today, 900 cameras on buses and 500 roadside cameras patrol the city's 700 bus lanes, issuing 100,000 summons each year. The program pays for itself and commuters are now saving an average of 10 minutes in travel time. Bus use is up 7% and reliability up 12.5% in the last year.

Birmingham, England, Sydney, Australia and Helsinki, Finland and other places now use bus cameras. Should they be used in New York City? Absolutely. New York City has the slowest bus service in America. Buses travel at an average speed of 7.5 mph and crawl along slower than 6 mph on some routes. While there are no numbers on how much bus delays costs New Yorkers a year, it is a fair bet that it as much or more than it was costing London.

A big part of the problem in New York City, as in London, is motorists driving in bus lanes. The New York Police Department issues approximately 10,000 tickets for this offense per year but police officers cannot be everywhere at all times. Automated cameras in New York City would help clear bus lanes, ease traffic congestion and, most importantly, make buses quicker and more reliable. T.A. and the Straphangers campaign will soon ask the state legislature to allow the City and/or the MTA to begin a bus lane camera enforcement program. If it works in London, it will work in New York City.
Prospect Park Speedway

T.A. finds average motorist goes 38 mph and only 7.4% obey the speed limit

A new T.A. study shows that Prospect Park’s loop drive is a haven for speeding motorists. The study was conducted in early December 2003 and used T.A.’s radar gun, the same model used by local law enforcement officials around the country, to measure the speed of 608 motorists on Prospect Park’s loop drive during morning and evening rush hours on four weekdays.

The study found that only a miniscule 7.4% of motorists were driving within the 30 mph speed limit, with an average speed on the roadway of 37.66 mph. Sixty-three percent of motorists were driving at speeds between 36 and 45 mph. Over two percent of motorists on the roadway were driving over 50 mph, with the highest speed recorded a scary 63 mph. The widespread prevalence of speeding on the drives is yet another reason that the City should ban driving in Prospect Park.

Even a small difference in speed is important because the severity of injury and chance of death increases exponentially as speeds increase. Studies have shown that at a speed of 30 mph, 40% of pedestrians who are struck are killed; but at 40 mph, 70% are killed.

The study was conducted during the annual period between November and January when there are no weekday car-free hours in the park. T.A. has long called this discontinuation arbitrary and unnecessary. Hundreds of non-motorists use the park during this period every day and they should not have to fight for space with motorists. When rampant, deadly speeding is added to the equation, then all bets are off: At a minimum, the police department should crack down on speeding on the park’s loop drive and the New York City Department of Transportation and Parks Department should institute year-round weekday car-free hours. Park users deserve a safe park in any season.

1999 Prospect Park Violent Crimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Driving Hours: 15</th>
<th>During No Driving Hours: 16</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Driving Hours: 3,965</td>
<td>Total No Driving Hours: 4,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving Hours/Crime: 264.33</td>
<td>No Driving Hours/Crime: 299.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Park Users Clamoring for Early Morning Car-Free Hours

You may not be out of bed yet, but at 6 am Central Park’s loop drive is alive with runners, walkers, and cyclists. Unfortunately, a relatively small number of motorists roaring around the drive at high speeds mar the park’s early morning charm. Park users say that they need relief from this loud, dangerous traffic. T.A. agrees and has been asking the Parks Department and Central Park Conservancy to increase weekday car-free hours to include early morning hours until 8 am as well as overnight hours since it is very unlikely that the police and Parks Department will close the park entrances in a timely fashion at 5 am.

Currently, Central Park is car-free from 10 am to 3 pm and 7 pm to 10 pm on weekdays between January 1st and Thanksgiving. Based on park user feedback, T.A. is advocating that the City expand car-free hours to 7 pm to 8 am, in anticipation of the park eventually being fully car-free.

It is easy for the City to expand car-free hours overnight and in the early morning: Traffic is very light but intrusive during these times. Traffic studies have shown that adding these hours would not result in congestion on surrounding streets. Councilmembers Miller, Moskowitz, Reed and Brewer all support adding car-free hours.
Sensible Transportation

NYC Subways and Buses Speeding Towards Budget Disaster

According to top MTA officials, New York City subways and buses are bleeding an ocean of red ink, which means that transit riders will face a double whammy of steep fare hikes and service cuts unless the state legislature comes up with big money. Katherine Lapp, the MTA’s Executive Director, told the legislature that the MTA will have a deficit of $688 million in 2005 and that this deficit will grow to $1.4 billion by 2007. Lapp said that state funding for the MTA has not kept up with the 40% increase in ridership since 1996.

The transit budget crisis is made doubly serious by both the fact that the state faces a $5 billion budget deficit this year and that the state budget is already busting records at $100 billion. So requests for more transit funding are not going to be met with much enthusiasm in Albany.

The MTA Debt Bomb is Exploding

According to fiscal experts, Governor Pataki helped create the MTA's budget woes by directing it to borrow tens of billions of dollars by issuing bonds (a form of debt) backed by rider fares. Historically, the MTA backed its bonds, which pay for capital improvements like new cars, new track and new signals, with toll revenue and state taxes. Rider fares paid for ongoing subway and bus service. This system ensured that, as ridership grew and fare revenue with it, the agency could increase service. It also meant that state taxes would help subsidize transit. Now however, the MTA must use more and more of rider fares to pay interest on the bonds, leaving less money for day to day service. Experts fear that the MTA now faces a choice among providing good service, keeping the existing subway and buses in a good state of repair or adding to the system by building new lines like the Second Avenue subway. And the budget situation could be much worse if interest rates go up. The MTA and transit riders have been very lucky that interest rates have been at historic lows.

City Subway and Bus Riders Get Shafted

Aggravating the woes of New York City subway and bus riders is the historically inequitable distribution of state transit aid. New York City MTA buses and subways move 84% of the state’s transit riders but get only 63% of aid. In contrast, Long Island Rail Road and MetroNorth move 5% of the state’s riders, but get 25% of state transit aid. Additionally, New York City transit riders pay nearly 60% of the cost of running the subway and bus system, whereas riders on the Long Island Rail Road pay only 44% and those on MetroNorth 54%; the national average is about 40%.

Transit advocates have suggested a number of new funding sources for city subways and buses. Foremost is the reinstatement of the commuter tax, which, this time, the MTA would dedicate solely to transit funding. Another option is imposing tolls on the City’s East River bridges or, better yet, congestion pricing in Midtown Manhattan. Unless the state legislature takes bold action, New York City transit riders should prepare themselves for less frequent service, dirtier subways and buses, more breakdowns and higher fares.

DOT/MTA and East Side Pols See Promise of NYC Bus Rapid Transit

Interest in the fast bus service known as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) continues to grow in New York City. Elected officials from Manhattan’s East side, transit advocates, top MTA bus officials, Assemblyman Peter Grannis and Councilman Phil Reed gathered to talk about BRT at a January 16th meeting co-hosted by Commissioner Iris Weinshall and NY State Senator Liz Krueger at the New York City Department of Transportation. The specific focus of the meeting was speeding up service on the M15 bus, which travels on First and Second Avenues. City Department of Transportation and MTA officials told the gathering that the agency would soon seek a consultant to help them identify and help design at least five good New York City routes for BRT service. The new service would likely feature bus lanes, bus mounted lane enforcement cameras and equipment that adjusts signal timing to speed buses.

New York City transit riders should prepare themselves for less frequent service, dirtier subways and buses, more breakdowns and higher fares.
**NEW JERSEY**

**NJ Lawmakers Fine Cell Phones Violators and Tighten Drunk Driving Laws**

New Jersey legislators wrapping up the post-election lame duck session tightened several traffic safety laws. The law makers established $250 fines for drivers who commit moving violations while talking on a hand-held cell phone. The legislature also finally adopted the federal .08 blood alcohol limit as the threshold for drunk driving; the federal government adopted the standard in 1998. New Jersey has foregone several million dollars in federal aid each year since 1998 because of its failure to act.

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**NEW YORK STATE**

**Gov's Construction Zone Speed Cams**

Buried in this year’s mammoth $100 billion state budget is a proposal by Governor Pataki to place speed enforcement cameras alongside highway construction zones. The cameras are budgeted to raise $3 million a year from 300,000 summonses. According to the governor’s office, 40 people have been killed and 1,700 injured in construction zones during the last three years. Both the state senate and assembly leadership have blasted the cameras and raised concerns about the privacy of dangerous drivers speeding through construction safety zones.

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**NEW YORK CITY MEGA PROJECTS**

**$2 Billion WTC Train Station Plan Wins Praise**

Architecture critics are using words like “spectacular” to describe Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava’s plan for the World Trade Center site’s new PATH commuter terminal. The station, which Calatrava designed to mimic the outstretched wings of a bird, is slated to open in 2009 and link 250,000 daily transit riders to 14 subway lines and ferry service. When completed, it will feature 60-foot see-through canopies and a movable roof that will open to the sky every year on September 11.

**2nd Ave Subway Rolling by 2012?**

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority says it could have part of the Second Avenue subway running by 2012. The inside word is that the MTA wants to start the project by building stops at 96th, 86th and 72nd Streets first. Trains then would curve west to 63rd Street and Lexington Avenue and south on express tracks underneath Broadway. The full length 2nd Avenue subway is intended to run 8 miles, from 125th Street to the southern tip of Manhattan, and cost nearly $17 billion.

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**LONG ISLAND AND WESTCHESTER**

**Suburban Bus Systems in Crisis**

According to transit experts, the bus systems for Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties are in crisis after five years of harsh reductions in subsidies by county executives. Add in the subsidized private bus fleets in Queens, which the mayor intends to stop supporting in 2005, and the regional picture for bus service is bleak. Emblematic of the situation is Long Island Bus of Nassau County, which is part of the MTA, though subsidized by the county. The company is considered to have excellent management and has accommodated sharply increased ridership while seeing its county operating subsidies cut from $26 million in 1999 to $8 million in 2005. But Long Island Bus can take no more. It has raised fares and chopped service to the bone. So if the counties refuse, who will pay for suburban bus service? The MTA? Where is the money to come from? Stay tuned.
**WANTED:** Events and Membership Director

Transportation Alternatives seeks a Director of Events and Membership to direct T.A.’s NYC Century Bike Tour, Bike Month NYC and other events, and sustain and increase T.A.’s membership through marketing and member acquisition. Other responsibilities include supervising a full-time Membership and Volunteer Coordinator and part-time data entry worker and developing and executing strategies to increase member giving. Currently, the Events and Membership Director also serves as the managing editor of Transportation Alternatives Magazine and City Cyclist. Please read the full job description at transalt.org/about/jobs.

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**Check out T.A.’s New Member Guide!**

NEW IN 2004: T.A.’s Member Guide, featuring information on Traffic calming Bicycling laws Member resources ... and more!

E-mail membership@transalt.org or call 212-629-8080 to request yours today. All members will receive a Member Guide when they join or renew their membership.

All T.A. members also get a New York City bicycling map, an attractive T.A. decal, a subscription to the quarterly Transportation Alternatives Magazine, discounts at 100 bike shops and services, a discount on T.A.’s NYC Century Bike Tour and fresh information about Bike Month NYC.

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**BIKE NEW YORK**

SUNDAY, MAY 2
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30,000 Cyclists Roll Out From Lower Manhattan!

Tour route takes cyclists through the five boroughs of NYC!
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Fun for the whole family and groups of friends!
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U.S. Drops to 9th in Traffic Safety

The United States, long the safest place in the world to drive and still much better than average among industrialized nations, is being surpassed by other countries. Even though the nation has steadily lowered its traffic death rates, its ranking has fallen from first to ninth over the last 30 years, according to a review of global fatality rates adjusted for distances traveled. If the United States had kept pace with Australia and Canada, about 2,000 fewer Americans would die because of traffic accidents every year; if it had the same fatality rate as England, it would save 8,500 lives a year. Many safety experts cite several reasons the United States has fallen in the rankings, despite having vehicles equipped with safety technology that is at least as advanced as, if not more than, any other nation. They include lower seat-belt use than other nations; a rise in speeding and drunken driving; a big increase in deaths among motorcyclists, many of whom do not wear helmets; and the proliferation of large sport utility vehicles and pickup trucks, which are more dangerous to occupants of other vehicles in accidents and roll over more frequently.

The New York Times

Global Warming More Real than Ever—Goodbye New Orleans!

According to the federal government’s top two climate scientists, there is no doubt that human activity is having a profound effect on global weather and climate. In December, Thomas Karl, director of the National Climactic Data Center and Kevin Trenberth, head of the climate section of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, wrote in the authoritative journal Science that, “Significant further (climate) change is guaranteed.” They add that, “The likely result of this change is more frequent heat waves, droughts, extreme precipitation events… wildfires, heat stress, vegetation changes and sea level rise.” The scientists recommend a long list of measures to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. However, the Bush administration has declared that any mandatory reduction in such emissions would be too damaging to the economy. But we have to wonder if even the most draconian emission caps would be more expensive than doing nothing and letting the ice caps melt and the sea level rise and submerge many coastal cities and towns, including New Orleans and most Pacific islands.

The New York Times

Guangzhou Launches Unique Citizen-Directed Traffic Enforcement Program

The Guangzhou, China traffic police have enlisted average citizens as partners in the fight against drivers who break traffic rules. For several months, the traffic department has offered RMB20 for photos of traffic violations that lead to successfully imposed fines. The innovative enforcement program, which tracks drivers based on vehicle license plates, was an initiative created by the head of Guangzhou’s traffic police.

Institute for Transportation Development Policy

Shanghai Plans City-wide Bicycle Ban

While other cities attempt to improve air quality, public health and congestion problems by encouraging cycling and restricting automobile use, one of the world’s most bicycle-friendly cities is banning them. Shanghai papers reported recently that the city plans to ban bicycles from all major roads in 2004, clearing space for private vehicles to ease the city’s mounting congestion. Police will also raise fines tenfold for such cycling infractions as running red lights.

Institute for Transportation Development Policy

Montreal’s Carfree Day

Montreal temporarily closed ten downtown blocks in a “symbolic attempt to combat pollution.” For more than five hours, the area in the heart of Montreal was quiet and the air was cleaner. Car noise was replaced with the sounds of bicycles, scooters and footsteps. Ste-Catherine Street, normally a traffic nightmare, looked more like a European-style pedestrian area. Montreal joined a thousand other cities around the world for Carfree Day and by so doing became the first Canadian city to hold a weekday car free day. Mayor Gérald Tremblay said, “You can make all the nice speeches you want about the Kyoto accord and sustainable development. In Montreal, we said: We’re going to change things.” Ridership on Montreal’s Métro rose by 10%, or 16,000 riders. There were the usual sour grapes, but nothing too serious.

Toronto Globe & Mail
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- Mountain Bike magazine, May 1998

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Mike Infranco

Occupation: Software Engineer (currently unemployed)
Neighborhood: East Village
T.A. member since: February 2002

How did you first hear about T.A.? When I moved into my new apartment, which faces the street, I suddenly had to put up with a lot of traffic noise. And although I'd always considered myself environmentally aware, it was only then that it really hit me how damaging auto dependence is. Additionally, the trauma and aftermath of September 11, 2001 inspired me to act locally to make the world better. So, I did a search online and discovered T.A.

What made you decide to volunteer? I wanted to be involved in the nitty-gritty of making things better. There's a satisfaction you get from hands on volunteer work that you just can't get by writing a check every year. I encourage every T.A. member to get out there and do something, even if it is just riding your bike! And it's so easy to volunteer.

What was the first volunteer project you worked on? I started out gathering petition signatures for the illustrious Car-Free Central Park Campaign.

What kinds of things have you done for T.A. since? Traffic counts, car alarm research, Operation Hazard ID, speed measurements with the radar gun, writing letters, loading, unloading and navigating the trucks for Transportation Alternatives' NYC Century Bike Tour, delivering City Cyclist magazines, putting up posters, valet bike parking, mailing parties … the list goes on. T.A. inspired me to do so many things I had never imagined doing, including testifying before the City Council!

What is your favorite aspect of volunteering for T.A.? Meeting all the different people who believe in this vision for a better city. Everybody is friendly and their energy is infectious.

You do so much for T.A., what has T.A. done for you? You mean, besides the free beer and cookies? Above all, being involved with T.A. has renewed my faith in the power of the individual to change things for the better. It's allowed me to expand my horizons and to meet some really cool and fun people. Plus, after a 10-year hiatus, I got back into cycling, and I love it! It's a great way to experience the city, and it keeps me sane and in shape.

What do you like about New York City and what would you like to change? I moved to New York from Southern Jersey to escape the isolation and numbness of suburban sprawl, so I was drawn to the city's energy and its sense of place—there's a “here” here. The overall thing I would like to change is reducing the number of cars. This should be the city's overarching goal because so many other great things can come out of it. We've got a long way to go, but it's worth fighting for.

If you could do any two things to improve New York City, what would they be and why? There are so many things, how can I choose?! Well, I would make motorists pay to cross the East River bridges and to enter Midtown and Downtown Manhattan, like they do in London; I’d use the money from this to expand and improve mass transit and bicycling conditions. I'd also build more affordable housing.

Volunteer Profile

NYCBikes

from $299, only at spokes & strings

built for the city
built for you

North Brooklyn’s premier bike shop announces that 5% of our net profits will go to Transportation Alternatives

Subscribe to the T.A. E-Bulletin at transalt.org
Bike to Transit

Going somewhere? Bring your bike. Use our listings of bicycle policies of area trains, buses and ferries. Detailed information of our full list is online at transalt.org/info/aboard.html.

**TRAINS**

**Amtrak** 800-872-7245, AMTRAK.COM. No permit. Bicycles travel only in baggage cars. You may put your bike on an earlier train and pick it up when you arrive (no tandems). Bicycles usually must be boxed. $5 fee each way. Roll-on service at most stops on “Adirondack” trains. Call for reservations.

**Amtrak (subway)** 877-382-8724. No permit. Be considerate and use ends of train cars. A few stations’ gates limit bike entry/exit at times.

**PATH** 800-234-PATH/201-216-6247, PATH.NJTRANSIT.COM. No permit. Roll-on service at most stops.

**Long Island Railroad** 718-558-8228, MTA.INFO. Need permit; pick up from Penn or Grand Central Stations. $5 one-time fee. Limit two bikes per car, four bikes per train. Wkdy OB: departing Penn Station 9 am-3 pm and 8 pm-7 am. Wkdy IB: arriving 10 am-4 pm and 7 pm-6 am. Wkends: see permit.

**Metro North** 212-532-4900, MTA.INFO. Need permit; pick up from Grand Central, window #27. $5 one-time fee. Limit two bikes per car, four bikes per train. Port Jarvis line—get NJ Transit pass. Wkdy OB: departing Grand Central 9 am-3 pm and 8:15 pm-6 am. Wkdy IB: arriving 10 am-4 pm and 7 pm-6 am. Wkends: see permit.

**NJ Transit** 800-777-3606/973-491-9400, NJTRANSIT.COM. No fee. Luggage bays on northern Jersey division.

**New Jersey Transit** 973-762-5100, NJTRANSIT.COM. No permit. Wkdy OB: departing Penn Station 9:30 am-4 pm and 7 pm-5 am. Wkdy IB: arriving 9:30 am-4 pm and 7 pm-5 am. Wkends: no restrictions. Holidays: see permit.

**NY Transit (subway)** 718-217-2000, NYTRANSIT.COM. No permit. Be considerate and use ends of train cars. A few stations’ gates limit bike entry/exit at times.

**NY Waterway** 800-53-FERRY, NYWATERWAY.COM. No fee. $1/bike.

**PATH** 800-234-PATH/201-216-6247, PATH.NJTRANSIT.COM. No permit. Roll-on service at most stops.

**Peter Pan** 800-343-9999, PETERPANBUS.COM. No fee. Travels in luggage bay. Box required.

**Staten Island Ferry** 718-815-BOAT, SIFERRY.COM. No fee. Enter at lower level.

**Greyhound** 800-231-2222, GREYHOUND.COM. $15/bike. Provide your own box or $10.

**MTA** 718-445-3100, MTA.NYC.NY.GOV. Seasonal on QBx1 over Whitestone Bridge.

**NY Waterway** 800-53-FERRY, NYWATERWAY.COM. No fee. Travels in luggage bay. Box required.

**PETER PAN** 800-343-9999, PETERPANBUS.COM. No fee. Travels in luggage bay. Box required.

**PATH** 800-234-PATH/201-216-6247, PATH.NJTRANSIT.COM. No permit. Roll-on service at most stops.

**Staten Island Ferry** 718-815-BOAT, SIFERRY.COM. No fee. Enter at lower level.

Cycling Accident Claims

Legal Counsel, Representation and Litigation

“Twenty years of cycling experience has made me painfully aware of the injuries caused by road accidents.”

My office represents fellow cyclists who have been injured by careless motorists. There is no charge to discuss your legal rights in any situation where you have suffered injury or damage. A fee is charged when compensation is obtained from the motorist’s insurance company.

For further information and complimentary consultation contact:

**Barton L. Slavin, Esq.**
(212) 233-1010

**212-947-7777**

**transalt.org/info/aboard.html**

**GET THE INFO!!**
The Brown family

Names
Nora Brown, 5; Sela Brown, 10; Hallie Brown, 12

Commute
N: Wherever the person in front is going.
S and H: We bike to soccer! We all ride up 10th Street from our apartment in Park Slope to Prospect Park where we use the bike path to get to soccer practice and games in the park and at the Parade Grounds. It takes us about 15 minutes.

Bikes
N: Hitchhiker II, attached to Dad’s bike.
S: Mountain bike.
H: Mountain bike.

Gear
N: Helmet
S: Helmet, bell and bike gloves for long rides.
H: Helmet, water bottle and biking gloves when I find them.

How long have you been bike commuting?
N: One-and-a-half years on a tag-along; before that, two years in a bike trailer
S: Since I was 5
H: 4 years

Why did you start bike commuting?
N: I wanted to!
S: Because my family did it and I wanted to be like them.
H: Our family bikes a lot and we got into it also.

Attire
N: Tee-shirt and shorts
S: Soccer uniform
H: Soccer uniform if we’re going to soccer or comfortable pants (not jeans) and a t-shirt.

Weather
N: I don’t bike if there is too much rain.
S: Spring and fall
H: Spring, summer and fall

Response from friends and schoolmates
N: They think my tag-along is cool.
S: ‘That’s cool’ or “you’re lucky” or “I like to ride bikes, too.”
H: My friends also bike.

Memorable experiences
N: Going really fast downhill.
S: We were playing soccer and it started pouring so we had to ride home in the rain.
H: Picking out my first mountain bike.

Best commute
N: Feeding the ducks along the way.
S: Riding over the Manhattan Bridge to Central Park.
H: The first time I made it up the big hill in Prospect Park.

Worst experience/commute
N: The attachment broke and I had to walk home while my Dad walked the bike.
S: I almost crashed into my sister and had to slam on the brakes.
H: Coming back home in the pouring rain.

Advice
N: If you’re on the back of the bike, you should look at the person’s bottom.
S: Make sure to where a helmet, because no matter how good you are, you can always fall over a surprising bump.
H: Bring a raincoat whenever you’re biking. Also, on hills, if you think you have to stop, keep going and reach for your goals.

Locking
We all use Kryptonite cable locks. Our mom carries them for us and then uses them to lock our bikes (together) to the fence at the soccer field.

Nora: They think my tag-along is cool. Sela: “That’s cool” or “you’re lucky” or “I like to ride bikes, too.” Hallie: My friends also bike.

H: I had a bike accident when crossing between lanes in the park, but the guy had just had an accident five minutes before and he wasn’t wearing a helmet.

Memorable reactions
N: I sing when I ride and sometimes people will say, “Hey, that girl is singing ‘Hairspray,’ or ‘How cute!’”
S: Once, when I beat my sister in a biking race, she tried to pretend she wasn’t trying.
H: When I got into that accident, the guy yelled, “This is the second one in 10 minutes!”
Letters

Letter Sent to Councilmember Provenzano about Bike Lanes

I read an article about the Hering and Yates Avenues bicycle lanes in a recent Bronx Times-Reporter and was disturbed by the anti-bike lane sentiment, part of which the paper attributed to you (whether correct or not). I am one of your constituents and I made use of these lanes (Hering and Yates Avenues) on a number of occasions this past summer when my dad was dying of West Nile Virus at Einstein Hospital. I feel so much safer using these lanes than on parallel Williamsbridge Road, where drivers illegally double park and make U-turns. I am sure you are aware of the difficult parking situation near this hospital. Some students and employees could (and do) bicycle to the hospital using these lanes instead of driving. People who live on these streets must realize that they are not private roads for their exclusive use. We all need to give consideration to each other, including people who ride bikes for convenience, health and energy conservation.

JEFREY SILVERBERG

Editor’s Note: As we went to press, the Bronx Times-Reporter reported that, at the behest of Councilmember Provenzano, City Hall told the City DOT to remove the bike lanes on Hering and Yates.

It’s No “Accident”

It would help a lot if the media, notably the “good, gray, New York Times,” stopped describing deadly motor vehicle accidents as “runaway car hits 3 pedestrians” or “the car jumped the curb to injure X pedestrians.” Motor vehicles are NOT sentient beings; they are pieces of heavy machinery that are operated by persons, most of them alert and responsible, but some of them totally concerned with getting their vehicle from one places to another as fast as possible, damn the consequences.

DICK NETZER

Editor’s Note: We agree. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration refers to motor vehicle collisions as “crashes,” not “accidents.” So should the media.

Fearing for my Life

I work as a bicycle messenger in Manhattan. I have daily run-ins with taxi drivers and other motorists that usually result in a shouting match, with me starting the shouting because I fear for my life when a car has violated my space. Of course I could get another occupation, but I don’t know what that would be. I feel fortunate to have a job at all. Do you have any literature that would explain how to ride more safely in the city or better yet, how to deal with motorized vehicles that give no respect to bicycles? Thank you for your efforts to make our city safer.

T J SAGER

Editor’s Note: Improving the safety of the cycling and walking environment through driver education and enforcement is a large part of T.A.’s work. We maintain an extensive “Cycling Resources” section on our Web site at transalt.org/info/cycling that includes tips on how to ride safely and react to obnoxious drivers. You will be glad to learn that, in response to our request, the Taxi and Limousine Commission added questions about safe driving around bicyclists to their mandatory driver’s test. T.A. has also worked with the New York Police Department to stage “Give Respect/Get Respect” events during which we give out mock tickets to drivers breaking the law.

Mayoral Support of Car Alarm Ban?

Why doesn’t Mayor Bloomberg support the bill to ban car alarms? It doesn’t make sense. Car alarms are a huge quality of life issue and banning them will only make the city more bearable place to live.

KATHLEEN McNAMARA

Editor’s Note: Good question. Please write to Mayor Bloomberg and City Council Speaker, Gifford Miller at City Hall, New York, NY 10007 and make the same points.

The Word on the Streets

Congratulations to Transportation Alternatives Magazine for being nominated for Utne Magazine’s 2003 Independent Press Award in the local/regional coverage category.

We encourage all readers to send us comments. E-mail info@transalt.org; mail to 115 W. 30th Street, Suite 2027, New York, NY 10001; fax 212-629-8334; or submit a comment through our Web site. We look forward to hearing from you!

Plagued by Pot Holes in Queens

I cycle from the upper west side to the end of Long Island. The pot holes between 114th Street and Main Street in Flushing, Queens are very severe and for much of the road there are no lights at all. I called 311 to report the problems on this section of the streets and they assured me that the problems would be fixed within ten days. Three weeks later, the pot holes and broken lights were still there. The area is seriously dangerous. Please let me know what can be done to bring this to the attention of the city. Thank you!

SUSAN EVANS

Editor’s Note: Send a letter with your 311 complaint number and the date of your call to Mayor Bloomberg at City Hall, New York, NY 10007 and ask for his help.

Preventing Killer Drivers

It is good that the New York Daily News is putting some pressure on lawmakers to address the flaws in existing laws about driv-

TWALEMA KHONJE

Editor’s Note: We agree that there needs to be more and better driver education. New York lags in the quantity of required driver education. On the other hand, you will be happy to learn that New York City is one of the few places in the country where right turns on red are banned.

TWALEMA KHONJE
Through newspapers, TV, radio and the Internet, T.A. pushes for better walking, bicycling and sensible transportation by influencing popular opinion, reaching new supporters and keeping our agenda in the public eye. In this day and age, mass media is the public town square, and “press hits” are the advocacy and political coin of the realm. The more press T.A. gets, the more we can influence the government to make streets safer and quieter, and better for walking and bicycling. Of course, T.A. also wins when our message is picked up and amplified by others, like when the New York Times editorialized in favor of banning car alarms and in support of the Manhattan Waterfront Greenway, and the Daily News spoke out for more red light cameras, completing the Hudson River Greenway and cracking down on killer drivers. Below are some of our favorite recent press clips.

“Hundreds of pedestrians killed in traffic accidents,” Newsday, November 9, 2003


“Great Greenway,” New York Sun, October 17, 2003

“Advocates say M23 bus is slower than chickens and penguins,” WCBS 880, November 13, 2003


“Prospect Park Neighbors Fight To Ban Cars From The Park,” WABC, April 22, 2003

“Mad as Hell Dept.: Cause for Alarm,” The New Yorker, January 5, 2004
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