

Letters

Traffic Justice

LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT—IN NEW YORK State, drunk driving resulting in a loss of life may result in life imprisonment, but bad or careless driving resulting in a loss of life is permissible. That's just not acceptable. The NYPD is overly lax in enforcing traffic laws. Please, start a campaign with the police and district attorneys to more aggressively pursue bad drivers.

CAMERON WILLIAMS

Dear Cameron,

The NYPD has dramatically reduced crime in our city and now New York can proudly claim the title of "the safest big city in America." But feeling safe is not just about feeling like you can walk down your street without being mugged. It's about feeling like you can cross your street without fear of getting mowed down by a reckless driver. The NYPD needs to step up its enforcement of traffic laws and prevent terrible crashes.

In Spring 2004 *Transportation Alternatives Magazine* ran an interview with veteran Brooklyn prosecutor Maureen McCormick, head of the Vehicular Crimes Bureau at the Brooklyn District Attorney's office. She stated: "Judges are much less likely to dismiss charges against sober, killer drivers than they were ten years ago. But many police officers, judges and prosecutors don't consider this 'real crime' until their first vehicular crime case. Then, they are awestruck by the devastation wrought on the family. They learn first hand that the victims are truly the innocent and the random."

We will continue to raise awareness in NYC that these crashes are not "accidents" but something that we can prevent with better engineering and enforcement of traffic laws against dangerous drivers by the NYPD. We will also be pressing the NYPD to lead by example by driving safely and not double parking in bike lanes or on sidewalks. On a national level we also work with the Traffic Justice Initiative (bikewalk.org/tji.php).

New York's Un-Friendliest

I'M WRITING TO ASK IF THERE'S ANYTHING Transportation Alternatives can do to get the NYPD to enforce the law against parking, standing or stopping motor vehicles in bike lanes.

Today, I was riding south in the bike lane on Second Avenue, and I had to swerve into

traffic around two cars parked in the bike lane. I flagged down a passing police car and asked Officer Gavin why he didn't ticket the drivers. He said that his job is "to catch criminals," so there was nothing he could do. I told the officer that the bike lane was installed to protect cyclists. In response, he said, "That's too bad. My job is dangerous, too." If the NYPD refuses to enforce the law against parking in bike lanes, T.A. is wasting its time when it lobbies the city to stripe new lanes, and the conflict between cyclists and motorists is likely to increase.

JOHN HUNKA

Dear John,

You absolutely did the right thing by flagging down the officer to alert him to the cars blocking the bike lane, endangering you and other cyclists. The response that you received is completely unacceptable. It is illegal to park and/or drive in bike lanes in New York City. Here are sections of the NYC Traffic Code that you may refer to in the future:

- §4-08 Parking, Stopping, Standing, no person shall stop, stand or park a vehicle whether attended or unattended in a bicycle lane.
- §4-11 Taxis, Commuter Vans, For-Hire and Certain Diplomatic and Consular Vehicles, picking up or discharging passengers shall not be made within a bicycle lane.
- §4-12 Miscellaneous, No person shall drive a vehicle on or across a designated bicycle lane, except when it is reasonable and necessary.

The Word on the Streets

Thank you to the many readers who send letters in response to *Transportation Alternatives Magazine*, the T.A. E-Bulletin or transalt.org. Feedback from readers is hugely helpful.

We encourage all readers to send us comments. E-mail info@transalt.org; mail to 127 W. 26th St. Ste. 1002, New York, NY 10001; fax 212-629-8334; or submit a comment through our web site. We look forward to hearing from you!

T.A. will definitely raise your concerns with the NYPD, but it is equally essential that the cycling public raise this issue as well. In the future, I would suggest that you get the officer's name, precinct and badge number and then write a letter containing the incident details (date, time, location, what happened, officer exchange). Address one copy of the letter to Mayor Bloomberg and cc: the precinct's commanding officer, Commissioner Ray Kelly and your City Councilmember. Address a second copy of the letter to the Civilian Complaint Review Board and cc: Mayor Bloomberg and your City Councilmember. Below are some mailing addresses that you will need.

You will find precinct addresses and Commanding Officer information here: nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/phone.html

- Raymond Kelly, Commissioner, NYPD, One Police Plaza, New York, NY 10038
- CCRB, 40 Rector Street, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10006

Call it a Truce

I PARTICIPATED YESTERDAY IN THE memorial ride for those 14 bicyclists and 134 pedestrians who died from motor vehicle collisions this past year. I participated in the event because I love to ride my bike, commute to work by bike when I can, and firmly believe that enhanced bike lanes and safety will make NYC a healthier, quieter, cleaner, and imminently more enjoyable city for everyone. I also participated because my doctor of nearly 20 years, Dr. Carl Henry Nacht, was killed last year while cycling on the Westside Greenway. Having missed the memorial service, I wanted to let his wife and family know how much I cared and how much I admire his wife's courage and work to promote bike and pedestrian safety. What struck me about the ride was how well the police handled several hundred cyclists meandering all day through NYC. Two police vans joined up with the ride at Houston St., when its numbers increased. When the vans appeared, at first, I shuddered. I have served as a legal observer for the Critical Mass rides on several occasions and have witnessed the seemingly inevitable build up at each ride of hundreds of police scooters, vans, cars, helicopters, orange

netting, etc. I have witnessed the police first appearing to escort the riders and then chasing and arresting them in an atmosphere of pandemonium. Until yesterday, I have harbored private doubts that perhaps the City's overwhelming force at Critical Mass events was justified and necessary for the safety of the public. The ride on Sunday demonstrated, to the contrary, that two police vans, following quietly and respectfully behind several hundred cyclists and politely 'corking' traffic when necessary to keep the group together, can easily maintain the cyclists' and the public's safety. Perhaps the Mayor and the Chief of Police have something to learn from the handful of street cops who so deftly helped memorialize the tragic loss of Dr. Nacht and the other cyclists and pedestrians who unnecessarily lost their lives.

BRADFORD D. CONOVER

