



citystreets

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Pedestrian Barricades. The untold story.

Pedestrian. Any person afoot or in a wheelchair. --*Terms and definitions NY traffic law*

Say you're a doctor. Guy comes to you complaining of a headache. You do some tests and discover he's got a brain tumor. So you send him home with a bottle of aspirin. That's the kind of treatment New Yorkers' are getting from their Mayor, in the form of pedestrian barricades.

Now let's talk about the tumor. 40 pedestrians get hit by cars every day in New York City. 5 die every week. Seems like if barricades are going to be put up they should protect people from cars. Not to help cars speed around the city.

Mayor Giuliani has made the movement of motor vehicles a priority over pedestrian safety when the priority of any mayor should be the safety of people that use streets, not the movement of vehicles. Our mayor is also pitting "those who walk" against "those who drive", but everyone in New York is a pedestrian, as every automobile trip ends when the driver parks his car and walks the final steps to his destination. All of this would be silly for a child but for a mayor this should be grounds for impeachment.

Traffic problems can only be solved when the safety of pedestrians comes before the amount of cars that we push through an intersection. This is why the priority of all city agencies that deal with traffic laws and regulations needs to change. The proper priority of traffic needs to be:



1. Pedestrian Safety
2. Emergency Vehicles
3. Mass transit
4. Bicycles/ non motorized
5. Commerce
6. All other

(The reason why pedestrian safety comes before emergency vehicles is because it doesn't do any one any good if a vehicle hits a pedestrian while responding to an emergency.)

When the Midtown Barricades first went up, the mayor said it was to make it easier for cars to turn. Then he changed his story.

- At his Jan 11 News conference he said it would help emergency vehicles get to emergencies.
- At his Jan 12, conference he decided to go after jay-walkers.
- On Jan 13 he said "pedestrians need to learn to respect others" and that "they shouldn't mind having to go out of their way to help motorists"

Of the mayors three excuses, the only one with the slightest plausibility is the second: expediting emergency vehicles. Let's look at this issue a bit more closely. The mayor should be concerned about emergency vehicle response time. People do die in New York because ambulances get stuck in traffic behind cars --not pedestrians. So the way to increase ambulance response time is to get the cars out of the way.

A solution for this problem is long overdue. One obvious approach is to reserve a lane on each avenue in midtown for emergency vehicles and do the same on designated cross-town streets. A further improvement would be obtained if NYC invested in a more sophisticated signal system, so that vehicles responding to emergencies would be able change lights from red to green to help them move through the city when seconds can save lives. These are the types of solutions the mayor should be thinking about, not attacking jay-walkers.

But let's talk about Jay-walking.

In 1996 the NYPD issued 1.5 million summonses for moving violations but issued only 650 tickets to drivers for failure to yield to pedestrians in the crosswalk. Yet according to the cities own data 78% of all fatalities occur in crosswalks. So of course people jay-walk. It's the only real safe way to cross streets in New York.



Conclusion: If the mayor wants stop people from jay-walking he first needs to make cross walks safe by protecting people from turning cars, on every block in New York City?

The first step would be easy. A change in NYPD enforcement strategy from writing parking summons -- 7,000 a day. To issuing tickets to “Drivers who fail to yield right of way to pedestrians” --less than 2 a day.

Enforcement isn't the only solution.

There are engineering changes needed too. For example: add another cycle to the lights so that there is a true pedestrian signal. 4 way red for cars. 4 way green for people. This way people would be able to cross diagonally as well.

Another idea to make cross walks safe for pedestrians is to remove the ambiguities in our present signal system. Currently, a pedestrian signal flashes “walk” when the pedestrian is supposed to walk, and “don't walk” when the pedestrian is supposed to wait. But when people are in the middle of the street, often the pedestrian signal changes from a steady “walk” and starts to flash “don't walk”. Legally the pedestrian is allowed to finish crossing.

But here's the problem: What does the “don't walk” light mean to drivers? They interpret it to mean that nobody should now be in the crosswalk to impede their progress, and that they now have the right of way. The mayor sides with drivers. The law however, which the mayor recently swore to uphold, is quite clear. The pedestrian in the crosswalk has the right of way.

The solution to this dangerous ambiguity is to change the city's signal system. Instead of flashing the “don't walk” light. The “walk” light should flash instead. The “don't walk” light should not be lit until the corresponding vehicular red light is lit. Additionally, since pedestrians walk at different rates, the cadence of the flash should increase while its flashing so people can accurately judge the time they need to safely cross streets. This would indicate to pedestrians that the light is going to change soon, and to indicate to drivers that pedestrians are legally in the cross walk.



As far as the mayor suggesting that pedestrians should learn respect and shouldn't mind going out of their way is outrageous when you consider that the legal definition of pedestrian is: Any person a foot or in a wheelchair. To suggest that moving around the city should be made more difficult for americans with disabilities is not only morally wrong, it is legally wrong as well, as it is in violation of ADA(Americans with disabilities) laws, which were designed to help disabled people.

On the topic of pedestrian safety.

The biggest untold news story of 1997 is that the crime stats about street safety that the mayor reports to the public and is the basis of much of his popularity are incomplete at best. Actually they are an outright lie. The streets of New York aren't safe. Of the hundreds of pedestrian fatalities every year almost none of them are included in the mayors homicide or felony charts even though many of these deaths involve hit and run drivers.

If you hit someone with your car maybe it's an accident. When you leave them to die in the street it's no longer an accident, it's a crime. Our mayor doesn't see it this way. While this is politically expedient for him, it's not healthy for our city, as you generally don't try to solve problems you don't recognize.

This is why if we don't impeach our mayor for not upholding the laws designed to protect the residents of New York and knowingly endangering so many people, we at least force him to include pedestrian fatalities and injuries in the crime stats reported to the public about street safety.

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an organization committed to making streets safe.*