

December 6, 2005

Dear Mayor Destefano:

As concerned citizens of New Haven, we believe that one of the major threats to the quality of life in our city is the behavior of motorists on city streets. As any cyclist or pedestrian will surely agree, it is not at all uncommon to see drivers exceeding posted speed limits, running through red lights or stop signs, or failing to grant the right-of-way to pedestrians at marked crosswalks. As often as not, these infractions, even when witnessed by the police, go unchallenged. As a result, navigating city streets has become a dangerous enterprise. This is unfortunate since in most other respects, New Haven is a welcoming city for cyclists and pedestrians: the downtown area is small and flat enough so that walking and cycling are ideal means of transportation and even the outlying neighborhoods are close enough so that those who choose not to drive find it an easy decision to make.

Unsafe and aggressive behavior on the part of motorists and lax enforcement of traffic laws threatens this welcoming environment. As mentioned above, flagrant violation of red lights creates a dangerous situation for cyclists, pedestrians and motorists alike. Many drivers apparently do not understand or do not care about yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks. The objection might be raised that cyclists and pedestrians violate traffic laws as well; certainly that is true, but typically the danger created by errant people on foot and on bicycles is certainly smaller.

We would like to see the city more aggressively enforce existing traffic laws. We respectfully request that the police allocate more man-hours to this end and that some means of measuring progress be established. We also ask that this progress be reported back to us with measurable, metric data in 30 to 60 days. In addition, we believe that a concerted public awareness campaign aimed at educating drivers about the need to safely share city streets with pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists would help create a safer, more friendly environment. In a meeting over the summer between city officials and transportation advocates, two police officers expressed a concern that attempting to stop people from running red lights would be dangerous for the officers. While the safety of our public servants is an important concern, consider how much more vulnerable the typical cyclist or pedestrian is, especially children. That the police believe the streets to be unsafe is, in our eyes, a reason in support of more enforcement, not one against it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Elm City Cycling (elmcitycycling@yahoo.com), and concerned citizens of New Haven including Rob Rocke (rob.rocke@yale.edu), Bill Kurtz (mrwkurtz@aol.com), Matthew Feiner (TheDevilsGear@aol.com), and Sarah Perkin