



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

The Villager Progress Report: Taking control of traffic to increase street safety

BRAD HOYLMAN March 7, 2014

This fall, the principal of P.S. 41 in the West Village saw firsthand the dangers of New York City streets. In front of the school's W. 11th St. entrance, she witnessed an out-of-control taxi careen into a child and caregiver.

Such accidents are not uncommon on our streets. According to the New York Police Department, last year more than 16,000 pedestrians and cyclists were injured in traffic accidents and 178 were killed, many of these incidents occurring in my state Senate district. Last July, a driver jumped the curb in the East Village, killing one bystander and seriously injuring several other pedestrians. Just last month, an M.T.A. bus driver was killed when his bus was struck by someone driving a stolen truck at 14th St. and Seventh Ave. And in 2012, Jessica Dworkin, a.k.a. Jessie Blue, a fixture in the Soho community, died after being struck and dragged by a tractor-trailer at Sixth Ave. and Houston St.

There seems to be no end in sight to these tragedies. At the current rate, pedestrian deaths in New York City are on pace to surpass homicides this year. The good news is that the de Blasio administration has developed a bold strategy, the "Vision Zero Action Plan," to address this epidemic head-on with the ambitious goal of eliminating traffic deaths within a decade. The plan (available at nyc.gov/visionzero) is a unique interagency effort developed by the

Department of Transportation, the N.Y.P.D., the Taxi and Limousine Commission and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

The plan's 63 initiatives include: increasing enforcement against dangerous moving violations; increasing speeding enforcement at the precinct level; developing borough-wide safety plans; implementing safety engineering improvements at 50 intersections and corridors; implementing eight new neighborhood slow zones and 25 new arterial slow zones; installing speed cameras at 20 new authorized locations; issuing summonses to T.L.C. drivers identified by red-light cameras; creating a T.L.C. safety enforcement squad; ensuring all city fleet vehicles are equipped with technology that records speeding and other dangerous driving behavior; and conducting public health surveillance on traffic-related hospitalizations and fatalities.

Community interest in these measures seems high. A town hall forum on Vision Zero I sponsored last week with D.O.T. Commissioner Polly Trottenberg was packed with supporters from across the Senate district. Public support will be key, since both city and state action is required to enact many of the laws and regulations in the Vision Zero plan.

I'm proud to have introduced two of the bills necessary to fully enact Vision Zero. My first bill (S6651) would grant New York City home rule to set its own, lower speed limit. Reduced speed limits have been proven to reduce fatality rates and give pedestrians, bicyclists, motorcyclists and drivers increased response time. Under current New York State law, citywide speed limits in New York City cannot be set below 30 miles per hour by the City Council. My bill would amend the state law to give New York City home rule power over establishing its own citywide speed limit as low as 25 miles per hour.

The second bill (S6648) would require side under-ride guards for large trucks operating in the city to protect pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and smaller vehicles from sliding underneath them. Perhaps the tragedy that befell Jessie Blue might have been avoided had

the tractor-trailer that hit her had an under-ride guard to prevent her from being dragged under its wheels.

There are other bills on the mayor's Vision Zero state legislative agenda that I am co-sponsoring, including ones that would grant New York City full local authority over the placement and number of red-light cameras; increase penalties for driving with a suspended or revoked license; update state driver education to improve interactions with pedestrians and bicyclists; and (in legislation sponsored by Senator Daniel Squadron and Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh) crack down on careless drivers who injure pedestrians and bicyclists.

The most challenging piece may be the support from the state Legislature in Albany, where New York City's priorities sometimes fall victim to Republicans in the state Senate. There is much work to do but the effort will be worth it. In other U.S. communities that have tried Vision Zero tactics, the number of traffic deaths has fallen at least 25 percent faster than the national average. With so many lives at stake, as Mayor de Blasio said, there's "nothing more urgent" than getting Vision Zero right.

If you want to get involved in the effort to support Vision Zero, contact me at hoylman@nysenate.gov or call 212-633-8052.