

## BMTS Article Digest November – December 2009

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This digest can also be accessed in the Reports Section of [www.bmtsonline.com](http://www.bmtsonline.com) or <http://www.gobroomecounty.com/departments/BMTS.php>.

Scott

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Take a look at the National Center for Bicycling & Walking's newsletter, **CenterLines**. You can also arrange to have it emailed directly to you.

See <http://www.bikewalk.org/newsletterarchives.php>

**CenterLines** is the bi-weekly electronic news bulletin of the National Center for Bicycling & Walking. **CenterLines** is our way of quickly delivering news and information you can use to create more walkable and bicycle-friendly communities.

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The Vestal Rail Trail was featured in the *Parks & Trails New York* most recent news letter.

See this link:

<http://www.ptny.org/pdfs/greenspace/greenspacewinter2009-2010.pdf>

Park & Trails is a great resource, and a great advocate for active lifestyles in New York State.

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November 15, 2009

## Idea has cyclists ready to rumble

Ken Valenti  
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Cycling advocates are scrambling to prevent the state from expanding its use of rumble strips etched alongside roads to rouse dozing drivers — but the Department of Transportation says it has not yet formed any such policy.

DOT spokesman Charles Carrier said the agency is looking at secondary roads for more rumble strips, but that officials are "in the very early stages" of considering a new policy and do not have one to propose yet.

He said rumble strips along secondary roads — two-lane rural routes such as Route 100 in Somers and Yorktown and Route 202 in Rockland County — have been tried in other states, leading the DOT to consider them here.

But, he added, "I can't stress enough" the department is far from recommending a definite policy.

"Safety is a primary concern of our department — ensuring the safety of not only motorists, but pedestrians and cyclists," he said.

The New York State Bicycling Coalition heard the DOT was considering expanding its use of the strips on secondary roads. The group has been writing to the DOT to oppose the idea. Jennifer Clunie, executive director of the organization, said they wrote to acting DOT Commissioner Stanley Gee in late October. She said the organization does not oppose

using the strips when warranted, such as on high-speed roads and interstates. But they create a danger for cyclists, she said.

Local cyclists joined the effort, a battle with which they are familiar. The Westchester Cycle Club has already sued the DOT for rumble strips installed along 4.4 miles of Route 100. They say the strips were not warranted, even by the DOT's own policies, and the ruts obstruct them on a stretch of road that had been among Westchester's safest and most desirable areas to cycle.

"It's a waste of public money, and it's caused several injuries," said David Wilson, president of the Westchester Cycle Club. "We're going to continue to fight this."

Carrier said if the DOT proposes a new policy, officials will talk to cyclists and other interested groups about the idea.

"We would not do this without soliciting that kind of public involvement," he said.

The Automobile Club of New York recommends that the strips be set "on a case-by-case basis," said spokesman Robert Sinclair. He said they have been "tremendously effective" in reducing accidents on thruways.

But he said the organization was also in favor of adequate shoulder space for cyclists. On a winding, curvy country road, he said, it often makes more sense to cut rumble strips down the center, rather than along the shoulders where cyclists ride. A side strip on such a road might not be as effective, he said.

"By the time the rumble strips have jostled you back to consciousness, you're probably already in a ditch or (up against) a tree," he said.

Steve Brehl, a cyclist from New City, said the strips present a problem when he encounters them.

"I see them every once in a while, but they're not something I run across all the time," he said. "When I do, they're not fun."



Opinion  
Richard L. Birch

## **A void paved over with concrete**

Posted: Nov. 7, 2009

My wife and I own an apartment in the European city where her parents came from. Almería's population is over 200,000, and it's been around for hundreds of years.

As a pedestrian, one is in constant negotiation with cars and scooters because the streets are jagged in shape, cramped, sometimes lacking in sidewalks - and teeming with life. Shop storefronts display dresses and shoes that would star at the Oscars. The window of a hardware store accommodates three centuries of door latches, from the rustic to the ultra-high tech. Every step has my head craning in one direction or another, even if it is to wave a car right through a stop sign as I slip around behind - faster and friendlier for both of us.

Arriving home from Spain, we drove through Milwaukee from Mitchell International Airport, and the eerie calm of sealing ourselves behind car windows settled over us; the "carness" of our life here spread out like a gray pall all around us.

Instead of people, conversation, shopping, eating and attending to business on the hoof, we were surrounded by access roads, parking lots, highways and bridges until we eventually passed under the shadow of the hulking three-story garage whose gloomy, and empty, cavern overshadows our magnificent art museum.

We Americans are all infrastructure - and no people.

Friends here are surprised that we don't own a car in Almería. There's no need, even though life there is pretty regular and not some outlandish eco-haven like Carmel, Calif., with its boutique clothing shops and celebrity clubs.

Everything we bought for our apartment in Almería we bought on foot. Plumbers, furniture stores, computer equipment and appliances are only a few minutes away. When we bought our washing machine, the owner's brother was waiting for us at our door, our washer on a handcart, even though we lingered for only moments on the walk home.

What's the cost for living our American way? It's not just the thousands of dollars for the second car, insurance and gas. We also have to support a lake of concrete around us - and gas, electric and sewer lines to stretch out past the near-vacant belts beyond the older suburbs. Property taxes in Almería on our condo are one-twelfth our taxes in Milwaukee, even though the value of the two homes is roughly the same.

One-twelfth. Oh, and they throw in free health insurance.

That's a lot of concrete, wire and pipes to keep up - and patrol. Milwaukee's close suburbs have residential streets that have room for two lanes of traffic going each way, plus both parking and turning lanes. Six lanes of concrete.

I was driving on a street like that recently - it's residential, so I was the only car in sight, although several white lines directed me around like I had a ring in my nose on the rare chance that a second car may venture into sight. Not so long ago, people's eyes grew large when a news announcer glowed about "six-lane super-highways" in Los Angeles. Now we have them to serve blocks where only a few houses stand.

Where are the people? Nobody is coming; nobody is going.

If we gained something for our money, I'd happily pay it. But I look south out the window of my downtown office and see streets and highways, of course. Plus parking garages, ramps, driveways, surface lots and street parking - not to mention the gas stations, auto-part stores and car washes.

Our cities (and Milwaukee still remains one of the most attractive) are dead zones with small pods of life barricaded between the elements that support the passage, storage and care of cars. In our most densely trafficked sidewalks, it is a hundred feet between businesses whose windows have a chance of being interesting to look in at while walking past. Throw in a bank or two and one has to take a taxi to get between shops where people congregate over a cup of coffee or buy a shirt.

No wonder we all drive.

Almería is modern enough to need cars. For the most part, cars brought into the city are routed to underground parking. As expensive as that might sound, what otherwise would be dead space at street level goes instead to businesses with apartments above, as well as an interesting collection of squares, parks and kiosks that are a part of every day's stroll.

Read this again: one-twelfth our property taxes.

Still, it's not about the money. It's about life. We stood on the street one night in one of America's few cities that are dense and walkable: New York City. A local television station was hosting a karaoke event. Tough-looking teenagers in floppy pants were singing along with suited Japanese businessmen, middle-aged housewives in sensible shoes, Orthodox Jews in yarmulkes, students in backpacks and a couple of tourists from Milwaukee. An older businessman waited at a crosswalk with me the next day, giving directions to a pair of young guys who would raise hair at the back of my neck if I ran into them on a lonely stretch. They thanked the older man and headed off. The businessman explained, "When you're on the street, everyone knows you have to deal with people. We're all in this together."

A more ominous view about our expansively concreted lives came from a Bulgarian programmer who has just moved here. Commenting about our infrastructure, America's glory and disaster, he said, "People who are separate are easier to control."

Malls are about the only public place in America where people aren't separate. Look around a mall, though - teenagers hang with their high-school friends, parents keep toddlers in the firm grip of their hands, bums sag alone on a bench, while walkers stride by in the world of their headphones. We're as sealed off from each other as first-class is from economy on a long and monotonous flight.

In non-American cities, you see grandparents sitting with teenagers or elegantly dressed women mixing it up in a café with workmen taking a lunchtime coffee or beer. I've often seen fathers reading to their young children. Right out in public - an act that would rank as deprivation here, when the tykes could be mesmerized instead by a video in the back seat of their Escalade or Tundra.

Almería is seven hours ahead of Milwaukee, and my wife happened to call me at what was 3 in the morning her time. She'd just gotten in from dinner and a concert (whole families are out at midnight; nothing about their crazy schedule surprises me anymore). She had walked home alone, though of course she was not actually alone on the street. I was just leaving for a friend's who lived some blocks away, past several alleys, garages and shuttered stores flanked by asphalt pads.

I drove.

*Richard L. Birch of Milwaukee is a business writer. Richard L. Birch of Milwaukee is a business writer.*

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## Policy change permits bicycling to school

Wednesday, October 14, 2009

By MAREESA NICOSIA, The Saratogian

SARATOGA SPRINGS — The school board made a long-anticipated move Tuesday evening to revise its transportation policy on biking to school, but the decision didn't sit well with parent and community advocates of the change.

In a unanimous vote, the board adopted a policy stating that elementary and middle school students can, with parent supervision and written approval on file, ride bicycles to school. The one caveat is that this is possible only if individual building administrators and school planning committees determine the "conditions under which bicycles may safely access school property."

The administration is set to develop rules on where and how biking to school can happen, depending on the varying needs of the buildings — and they range from central city schools with easy street access like Caroline Street Elementary to the far-flung Dorothy Nolan and Greenfield schools, which are on roads with higher speed limits.

The policy technically reverses previous prohibitions against biking to Maple Avenue Middle School and the elementary schools.

However, public comment after the vote from members of the Saratoga Healthy Transportation Network indicated that the change was far from what they'd expected.

"I'm really, really disappointed (with the board's decision)," said Caroline Stem, an SHTN member who sat on the Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee that recommended changes to the policy during the summer.

While she called the decision "a step in the right direction," she said it wasn't adequate because it merely transferred the authority to school principals' hands to decide if and how students can bike to school. Principals could decide that the conditions aren't right to allow biking at a certain school, Stem said, which would, in effect, accomplish little after months of work by the advisory committee and the policy committee.

"Basically, I don't see it as any change from the present," she said.

Janette Kaddo Marino chided the board for not being "progressive" with its decision and urged it to take the policy back to the drawing board.

"You're still involving yourselves in an area that's not your concern," she said, and indicated that her son, Adam, a middle-schooler with whom she bikes to school, wouldn't need written approval to do so.

Board member Frank Palumbo defended the board's course of action to revise the policy and emphasized that it acted with concern for students' safety foremost in mind.

"I know that there were a lot of people that thought we should just take action, and that was not appropriate," he said.

Ernest Gailor pointed out that the change now makes it possible for the district to apply for funding for Safe Routes to School.

"I think we're headed in the right direction," he said.

The Saratogian will provide further coverage of this story in the coming days.

URL: <http://www.saratogian.com/articles/2009/10/14/news/doc4ad538169b072333764680.prt>

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Sunday, Nov. 29, 2009

## Florida's Deadly Hit-and-Run Car Culture

By Tim Padgett / Miami

Ashley Nicole Valdes was a smart, pretty 11-year-old girl who often cared for her younger, mentally disabled sister while their single mother studied to be a paramedic. In January, while crossing the street to get to her home west of Miami, Ashley was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver in a pickup truck — and became a heart-wrenching symbol of South Florida's notoriously reckless car culture. "You see all these people getting run over and you ask yourself: What's happened to us as people here?" says Ashley's mother, Adonay Risete. "We need to get tougher and change attitudes."

This month, highway-hugging Floridians are seeing perhaps the most convincing evidence yet that they need an attitude adjustment. A study by the nonprofit Transportation for America in Washington, D.C., lists the most dangerous metropolitan areas for pedestrians, and the worst four just happen to be in the Sunshine State: Orlando, Tampa, Miami and Jacksonville. It may seem like an astonishing find, but it's not actually all that surprising: 490 pedestrians were killed by cars in Florida last year, the most in any state, and South Florida consistently ranks as one of the worst pockets for hit-and-run fatalities.

For an entire nation that has given the automobile far too much right of way, the TFA report, titled "Dangerous by Design," makes it clear that Florida is a cautionary tale. It's especially relevant during the current recession, when the U.S. is also looking to alternative transportation projects like passenger rail to

help jump-start the economy. "We're not saying paralyze traffic or penalize drivers," says TFA spokesman David Goldberg. "But we have to restore some balance in this country and fix this deadly situation, especially for the health and safety of our kids and senior citizens."

It's not just deadly in Florida. Each month, about 400 pedestrians are fatally cut down by cars across the U.S. — "the equivalent of a jumbo jet crash," Goldberg notes — and 76,000 have been killed that way since 1994, one of the highest pedestrian-death rates in the world. The root cause is simple: the thoughtless sprawl of modern urban and suburban development has created too much high-speed space for cars and trucks, and too little of it for walkers, cyclists and the kind of public transit that reduces dependence on cars. "Dangerous by Design" finds, for example, that less than 1.5% of federal transportation safety spending goes to pedestrian projects like increased sidewalk construction or cycling paths, even though pedestrians and cyclists account for 13% of all U.S. traffic deaths.

Nowhere does that culture look more extreme than in Florida, which has one of the most inadequate public transit systems in the U.S., as well as a dearth of sidewalks and bike paths. "As Florida's growth burst at the seams, there just wasn't planning for sidewalks or anything else pedestrian-friendly," says Glenn Victor, spokesman for the nonprofit Florida Safety Council in Orlando. "This study should be considered very closely as part of the argument for endorsing projects like light rail. It's an impetus for Florida to catch up."

And it's not too late for that to happen. One of the study's more interesting finds is that car-crazy regions that have begun to play catch-up, like Southern California, are also seeing fewer pedestrian deaths. Unreformed Sunbelt-sprawl centers like Atlanta and Houston round out the top 10 most dangerous cities; but Los Angeles ranks only 27th. "In L.A.," says Goldberg, "they've started to recognize that biking, walking and public transit are a big part of their future. It's a good sign that the pendulum is swinging back." One way states and local governments can bring that about, he adds, is by adopting so-called complete-streets policies that build new thoroughfares or revamp existing ones with more than just car usage in mind.

Even some parts of Florida are now embracing that approach. Lee County, which includes Fort Myers, passed its own complete-streets resolution this month after the TFA study was released. And to its credit, Florida's Department of Transportation has ramped up sidewalk-construction campaigns, which Victor says have been most impressive in school zones. Florida's cash-strapped school districts have had to cut back on bus service for students in recent years, forcing more children to walk to school — and prodding state officials to discover how little access those kids have to safe crosswalks and sidewalks in many Florida cities. (Miami drivers are also notorious for carelessly parking their cars on sidewalks near schools, forcing children into the streets.) The state's Safe Routes to School program has been a particular success in that regard.

What's still alarming in states like Florida is the frequency of hit-and-run deaths. Most U.S. counties see only a handful of them each year; but Miami-Dade County in the past decade has seen as many as 46, a good number of them taking the lives of children like Ashley. It's partly due to a mind-set that views

pedestrians as nuisances. To crack down on that way of thinking, Risete, Ashley's mother, has pushed for a number of measures in Florida — including the Ashley Nicole Valdes Alert System in Miami-Dade, which notifies the public (by cell phone for those who sign up for it) of the description of an alleged hit-and-run driver's car. (The driver arrested in Ashley's death is now awaiting trial.) Risete, 34, now a paramedic, has also got the county to install stoplights at the dangerous intersection where Ashley was hit.

As for Orlando, it's ironic that the site of Disney World — where inside the theme parks, at least, walking is king and monorail systems move visitors around so smartly — is America's most dangerous place for pedestrians. But that decidedly unsunny reality was driven home this month when a Massachusetts cardiologist in town for a medical conference died after being hit by a car while jogging.

<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1942986,00.html>

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December 2, 2009

## New parking rules designed to ease congestion around Homer Brink Elementary School

By William Moyer  
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UNION -- The town board voted Tuesday night to impose parking restrictions on several residential streets in the neighborhood around Homer Brink Elementary School in Endwell.

At issue was public safety, particularly on Winston Drive off Pruyne Street, which is the main road into and out of the school from Hooper Road, said Councilwoman Rose Sotak.

Some residents complained the thoroughfare on Winston is too narrow for fire equipment when school buses and other vehicles park on both sides of the street. Maine-Endwell district buses use Winston to wait for afternoon dismissal at the school, which has limited access to its front entrance.

The board unanimously agreed to impose a parking ban from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday on the east side of Winston for two blocks from Pruyne to Kemp Drive -- the closest blocks to the school.

Buses and other vehicles may park on the west side of Winston, but the parking ban along the east curb will keep enough roadway open for emergency vehicles to access the street, according to town officials.

"We listened to the residents," said Supervisor John Bernardo. "I'd hate to have a fire truck not be able to get through."

The school facility has limited parking -- only 95 on-site spaces for roughly 150 employees, said Joseph Stoner, superintendent of the Maine-Endwell school district. During school days, teachers and employees must park on Pruyne, which runs along the north edge of the district's property.

That forces buses to stage on Winston, the only other street in the neighborhood with convenient access to the building. That itself is not necessarily a safety issue, except when buses and vehicles park on both sides of the residential street.

"The district will adjust its pick-up and drop-off procedures, as well as its staff and visitor parking, accordingly," said M-E spokeswoman Brenda Potsko. "The district knows that parking in the area of Homer Brink is difficult, especially when there is a large school event taking place."

The town board also voted to ban parking all the time on both sides of Pruyne and Verna Drive at the rear of the school property, again for safety reasons.

The street is Pruyne in the east-west direction and then makes a sharp 90-degree-turn at the rear of the school property and becomes Verna Drive going north-south.

That's the site of the high school soccer field, and games there can add to the parking problems in the fall.

Stoner said the district might have some options to create additional on-site parking, but any project would take years to complete because it would require voters' approval.

"We understand the neighbors' concern -- we always try to work with them," Stoner told the town board. "On-street parking has been a necessity."

The restrictions and ban will be effective as soon as the appropriate signs are posted.

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