

DAILY NEWS

THE OP-ED PAGE

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Bikes are safe, it's cars that kill

By CHARLES KOMANOFF

FEW NEW YORKERS shed tears last month when Brooklyn's Community Board 12 voted down a proposed bike lane through Borough Park. If the bike lane issue registered at all, it was in the surreal image of Orthodox Jews condemning the prospect of "scantly clad cyclists" as an affront to their religious sensibilities.

The bike lane will probably come in for more bashing tonight when Borough Park residents gather at a town meeting with Mayor Giuliani. If so, the mayor would do well to steer clear of objections about biker garb and zero in on the more fundamental but misdirected safety concerns raised by Borough Park's City Council member, Noah Dear.

Dear says he opposes the bike lane because "our narrow streets are not conducive to bike lanes." This pronouncement is troubling not just for its indifference to bicyclists, but for its disregard of what makes streets dangerous.

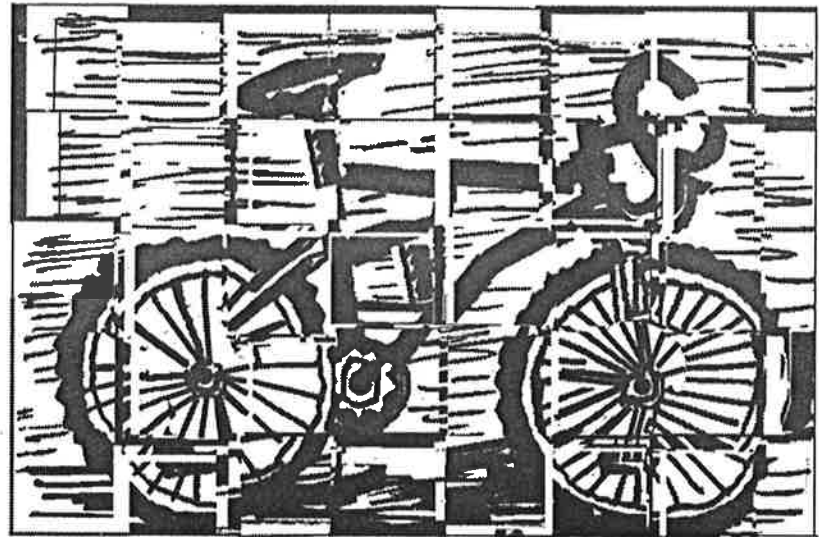
While the recent death of a pedestrian from a bicycle crash on an upper West Side sidewalk shocked the city — and rightly so — traffic dangers in Borough Park and throughout New York actually come overwhelmingly from motor vehicles.

Last year, 226 pedestrians were killed by motor vehicles in New York. None were killed by bicycles, save for an in-line skater who was spin-dancing with her boyfriend in Central Park when he lost his grip and she was thrown into the path of a cyclist.

In Dear's Council district alone, motor vehicles have killed at least 14 pedestrians over the past three years and injured hundreds more. In contrast, no pedestrian has been killed by a bicycle anywhere in Brooklyn in years.

Recent pedestrian fatalities in Dear's district include seven people older than 75, among them a 95-year-old man and three women in their 80s.

The elderly take longer to cross streets and cannot dodge cars and trucks that



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speed along roads and whip around corners. But there also was a teenage girl who died in 1994 when a school bus backed over her near the corner of 16th Ave. and 52nd St. At nearly the same site, a year later, an 86-year-old woman crossing with the light was killed by a turning dump truck.

Although pedestrian death sites dot his district, Dear never talks about his constituents' right to walk down the street without being run over. Rather than using his position as City Council transportation chief to push for traffic enforcement and "traffic calming" measures such as speed reductions on residential streets, Dear ridicules bicyclists who pose little threat.

As for the ill-fated Borough Park bicycle lane, city officials designed it to link Brooklyn's two great bicycle boulevards: the Shore Parkway path girding the Bay Ridge waterfront and the Ocean Parkway path between Prospect Park and Coney Island. Thousands of cyclists use these routes for the same reasons motorists drive cars — to get to

work or school, for a family outing or for a day in the fresh air. They deserve a safe connector route on Borough Park's car-filled streets.

Bike lanes improve safety for all. A common hazard, not just in Borough Park but in most city neighborhoods, is cars racing down narrow streets two abreast. Bike lanes cut down on speeding by discouraging unsafe passing and shifting the dynamics of traffic from dangerous one-upmanship to sharing the road. They foster cycling citizenship by giving bike riders a place on the street. Offering cyclists a safe stake in the traffic system also may be the most lasting way to curtail the maddening and dangerous practice of riding on sidewalks.

Stopping a bike lane in Borough Park may seem like quaint New York politics, but it's really another way in which motorist ideology mixed with local prejudice denies pedestrians and bicyclists safe access to streets and communities.

Komanoff, an economist, edited "The Bicycle Blueprint," a bicycling plan for New York City.