

the New York

city cyclist



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TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

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LIGHT GOES ON IN CITY HALL: STEP AWAY FROM MOTOR TRAFFIC TOWARD CLEAN AIR

The Department of Transportation is considering placing limits on motor traffic in New York City. The result could be improved conditions for bicycling, as well as stronger mass transit.

This new and unfamiliar focus comes with the approach of a December 1987 deadline to meet federal air quality standards. New York State faces a possible loss of several hundred million dollars in federal transportation grants unless carbon monoxide and ozone levels are reduced sharply. In addition, the spectre of gridlock is haunting city transportation officials. Under present trends, by 1995, ordinary traffic will reach the extraordinary levels of the 1980 transit strike. As we approach permanent gridlock, DoT is discovering what cyclists experience every day: street space in Manhattan is yet another finite resource.

Pollution "hot spots" have become the telltale sign of both air pollution and traffic congestion in New York City. These are locations where pollutant concentrations persistently exceed so-called "healthful" levels. Persistent hot spots in Manhattan include 59th Street between 5th and Madison; 42nd around 3rd; Broadway at 37th, and John Street (near Fulton). New ones are being found through environmental monitoring for real estate projects in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens.

Until recently, the Koch administration tried to attack pollution hot spots with measures to make traffic move faster. The assumption was that if traffic moved, vehicle exhaust would decline. But the strategy was self-defeating. Faster traffic turned out to mean increased capacity and, ultimately, an influx of more motor vehicles and increased traffic congestion. As a result, DoT appears to have concluded that only by constraining capacity -- limiting

the actual number of exhaust pipes entering, idling and moving about the city -- can air quality be improved.

Ross Sandler, the new Transportation Commissioner, has offered the Mayor and the public a "menu" of possible measures to reduce motor traffic. Although some of the measures are still aimed at removing impedi-

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ments to traffic flow, it's likely at least one entree directed at reducing traffic volume will be tried. DoT's suggestions include:

- > Congestion Pricing: Charging a fee, perhaps \$10/day or \$200/month, to enter a specified area, such as Manhattan south of 60th St.
- > Restrict Entries by License Plate: odd/even days, for example.
- > Restrict Single Occupant Cars: fifty-four percent of the cars entering Manhattan bring 2.4% of the people, i.e., only 34,000 people create half the auto traffic. This restriction would only apply to vehicles entering across the East River.

(continued on page 7)

CYCLING CRACKDOWN: THE POLICE SPEAK

TA Treasurer Louis Avitabile met recently with NYC police officials to get their view on the crackdown on bicyclists. The officials, all assigned to the NYPD Traffic Division, were Inspector and Commanding Officer Thomas Ryan; Capt. Charles Campezzzi, Commanding Officer of Manhattan Traffic Area; and Deputy Inspector and Executive Officer Larry Merryman. Following is an edited transcript of the interview.

TA: As you can see from the Safe Cyclist Code in our last newsletter, TA is as anxious as everyone else that bicycling be safe for everybody. But our constituency is cyclists, and we're concerned about over-zealous enforcement.

Ryan: We were advised that there was a demonstration at City Hall today by messengers complaining that we are harassing them. [Ed. Note: See related story, this issue.] Which is a good indication that we got their attention.

TA: How many tickets are you giving out to cyclists?

Ryan: This year, from January 1 to October 26, we issued 17,347 summonses to bicyclists. From January through October 1985 we gave out 5,553. So our ticketing has more than tripled.

TA: Which sections of the city are you targeting?

Merryman: The whole city is receiving extra emphasis concerning traffic violations by bicyclists. But the main emphasis is where the main problem is, and that's Manhattan.

Campezzzi: My area covers Battery Park to 66th St., river to river. We've taken those accident statistics that indicate those places that are accident prone, and we've concentrated our enforcement efforts at those locations.

TA: One area our members complain about is the Queensboro Bridge, where coming off the bridge you have to go against traffic, and so you get a ticket.

Campezzzi: I don't see why they have to go against traffic. They can walk to a certain point and ride the rest of the way. There are signs indicating walk from there to the next sign. Then they can go with the flow of traffic.

TA: What response do your officers get when they issue tickets?

Campezzzi: Of late, we're getting people telling us that we're harassing them. But we're not experiencing much difficulty. We're trying to be as equitable as we can in issuing summons.

Ryan: One thing you must understand: The enforcement effort is targeted toward those violations that we have found to be profoundly involved with accidents. This includes passing red lights, riding on the sidewalk, going against traffic, failing to give pedestrians the right of way. These violations by bicyclists are the most

serious.

TA: Are you monitoring the enforcement program for results?

Ryan: Yes, very carefully, and it seems to be successful in reducing accidents.

TA: What types of fines are levied?

Ryan: We don't have information as to the amount. New York State puts out a fine schedule. It's up to the judge to dictate the amount. It can be more or less than the amount on the ticket.

TA: Are the fines being paid?

Ryan: We have no knowledge about this. It's handled by another agency. [Ed. Note: Sources in NYC Transportation Dept. tell us about 10% of fines are paid.]

TA: Are any specific groups being targeted?

Ryan: No. The police are directed to pick up bicyclists that are riding recklessly and can cause accidents.

TA: Bike messengers are complaining that they're being harassed. Is this so?

Campezzzi: No. If the messengers are getting more tickets, it's because they may be the ones causing more violations. The idea of the program is to prevent accidents, and those riders that cause accidents are ticketed. We're not trying to zap bicyclists, but to prevent accidents.

TA: Do you feel the program has had an impact?

Ryan: Yes, judging from the response. We've had positive statements from the Community Boards, the Lighthouse [representing the visually impaired], organizations interested in safety.

TA: Why was the program initiated?

Ryan: In response to the number of accidents. By the way, according to our figures the bicyclists are the main beneficiaries of the program. After all, in an accident between a car and a bike, you know who will come out worse. We've managed to almost halve the number of bike/motor vehicle accidents [from 5,024 reported accidents in Jan.-Oct. 1985, to 2,629 in Jan.-Oct. 1986. Reported injuries from such accidents are down from 4,512 to 2,335, and fatalities from 23 to 7, according to the officers' figures].

TA: Is there a special section of the

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

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Transportation Alternatives is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing cycling in NYC through civic activity.

CITY CYCLIST

EDITOR: Jennifer Sonsini
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Louis Avitabile

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Traffic Division devoted to issuing tickets?

Merryman: No, in general all traffic officers are involved in the problem. If we have a special accident situation then we may assign one or two men in that area.

TA: How would you place bicyclists as a threat in the overall city traffic picture?

Campezzi: They are almost as lethal as a car. I wouldn't want to get hit by a bicycle, especially if it's going at 25 mph.

TA: Is the danger equivalent to a car going through a red light?

Ryan: In the Manhattan area we see a definite reduction in cars going through red lights. We have issued many more tickets this year.

Merryman: Our society functions because people observe the laws and can operate freely. Anxiety develops among groups when the rules are broken.

TA: How about putting the bike enforcement officers on bicycles?

Ryan: We now have officers operating on foot, motor scooters, cars, trucks, copters and boats. If it proved efficient we would do it on bicycles. But the scooter is better and doesn't cause fatigue.



TA: It might give the officer an idea of what the cyclist faces.

Merryman: The police officer is there to enforce the law. This is especially so when the action is dangerous. He does not need to know the feelings of the cyclist.

TA: Do police patrol the bike lanes to keep them free of vehicles?

Campezzi: You have a point there. We have given out over 5,200 double-parking tickets in my area in just 4 months.

TA: To function successfully in New York City, a bicycle rider may go through a red light but with caution. What's your feeling about that?

Merryman: That can be dangerous. It's like motorcyclists passing vehicles between lanes. They say "Hey, what's the use of owning a motorcycle if I can't do this in a traffic jam." Yet it's a serious cause of accidents.

TA: What last word would you give to bicycle riders?

Ryan: We're only interested in improving safety in the streets for everyone. Enforcement is only part of the program. Education is also very necessary. For that we're looking for all groups to help us, especially the bicycle-riding public. They're the ones most affected by accidents.

BIKE TRAFFIC UPDATE

Our update in the October-November City Cyclist erred on several counts. Here's the scoop:

FINES

For running red lights: \$60, with no increases for repeaters. Red light violations for cyclists, but not other violations such as wrong-way riding, go into the Dept of Motor Vehicles' computerized records. Bicycle violations do not levy points on driver's licenses, although non-payment of "red-light" tickets may result in suspension of license.

More ticket hot spots: Coming off the Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan; and approaching Union and Madison Squares, especially into Union from 5th. Note that the regular precinct police are not ticketing us. Tickets are given by police in cars marked HWY which are likely to be parked in bike lanes.

Ticketing continues.

UNITE FOR THE RIGHT TO BIKE JOIN TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

George Washington Bridge: Cyclists receive warnings and an occasional \$65 ticket for riding instead of walking their bicycles. Protest (if you haven't already) by writing to:

Steven Berger
Executive Director
Port Authority of NY/NJ
One World Trade Center
New York, NY 10048.

Press the Port Authority to reverse its ban and enforcement against riding bicycles on the bridge. The walkways are ample, and there is a separate walkway that can be used by pedestrians concerned about proximity to bicycles. Remind the Authority that its overtime spending on police activities is up \$2.3 million in the first 9 months of 1986 (vs. same period 1985 -- NY Times, Nov 5, page B3), and that unproductive anti-bike actions are inconsistent with the Authority's "strenuous efforts to reduce costs." (Ibid.) Please send us copies of any correspondence.

Manhattan Bridge: Bicycle and Pedestrian path will be reconstructed as part of the current renovation contract to restore the bridge.

Will we have to wait until both sides of the Williamsburg Bridge have gaping holes, or until someone is injured due to negligent disrepair, before the surface of the path is restored?

TA Readers: Have you been ticketed or harassed? Intercepted by buses, fumes, potholes? Let us know. Write to TA, 2121 Broadway, Room 204, NYC 10023.

CYCLING TO SAFETY

by Carl Hultberg

From the 1940's to the early 1970's, not many people bicycled in NYC. In New York, as in most U.S. cities, the mighty auto had reigned supreme since the 30's when GM and others dismantled the trolley car industry, turning city streets into a virtual race-track and displacing bicyclists, pushcarts and the last remaining horsedrawn vehicles.

It was not until about 15 years ago that the most daring cyclists and joggers were able to start retaking the streets for human-powered use. In the 1980's our numbers grew and in our wake came skaters, skateboarders, chair riders and others. During this period Transportation Alternatives, under the leadership of Charlie McCorkell, pushed the city to adopt bike lanes. Like other such gestures coming from the present city administration, this experiment was half-hearted and short-lived, giving the concept of marked roadspace for cyclists an undeserved bad reputation.

The Messenger And The Machine

Still, these were heady times as NY cabbies and truck drivers first ignored then learned to live with bicycles. During this period no one did more to pioneer the cycling presence on city streets than the bike messenger. Fearlessly these pursuit-styled riders provided a new high-speed service, conveying letters and light parcels through the gridlock. To the cycling community the messenger was a point man out there in the flying metal carving out a niche for all of us. To many truck and cab drivers the messenger came to be respected as a fellow professional doing a similarly difficult and important job. Bike messengers became role models for many younger riders who would struggle to keep up and emulate their style and equipment.

As a vanguard for the bike movement the messenger took us from the fringes to the center lane. Unfortunately, as in many social struggles, some people got hurt in the process. Many of them were cyclists who crashed because they were unseen or unheard. Some were pedestrians who were hit in the street while crossing with and without the green light or when coming out from between parked cars. These accidents are still occurring, sometimes with tragic consequences, and will continue until transportation is dealt with on a human scale.

In the course of becoming New York's fastest, the bike messengers have to some degree had to adopt a tough self-image. This is no doubt natural. Delivering messages by bicycle in NYC is a fast-paced, extremely dangerous job with a largely young male workforce. The macho image or road warrior mentality does function to protect the rider against the motorized world where an aggressive style is often the best defense. But woe to any pedestrian whose

reflexes or sense of judgment aren't operating at that level of intensity.

The Sounds of Safety

Of course, messengers are only one discordant group among many -- other cyclists and pedestrians fighting for turf, and the all-powerful, all-demanding motor vehicilists who have it. But the crackdown is here, and messengers are being busted while other cyclists are feeling the heat. What is to be done? To begin with, we need an intensive public education program to familiarize New Yorkers, especially pedestrians and bus drivers, about the need to respect cyclists' rights. However it is just as important to accept that messengers and other cyclists traveling at speeds over 15 mph should be required to have some sort of sound warning for pedestrians.

The bicycle is an amazingly agile and fluid form of transportation. It is also almost silent. The very qualities that make it so attractive to the rider make it potentially threatening and dangerous to pedestrians in crowded high-speed situations. Like it or not, there are many people out there walking on two feet who know nothing about cars, trucks, buses or motorcycles except that they make noise. Add to this many people's poor eyesight, lack of depth perception and inability to judge speed and you begin to understand what a problem bicycles can be, especially for elderly pedestrians who don't even drive, let alone know how a cyclist behaves.

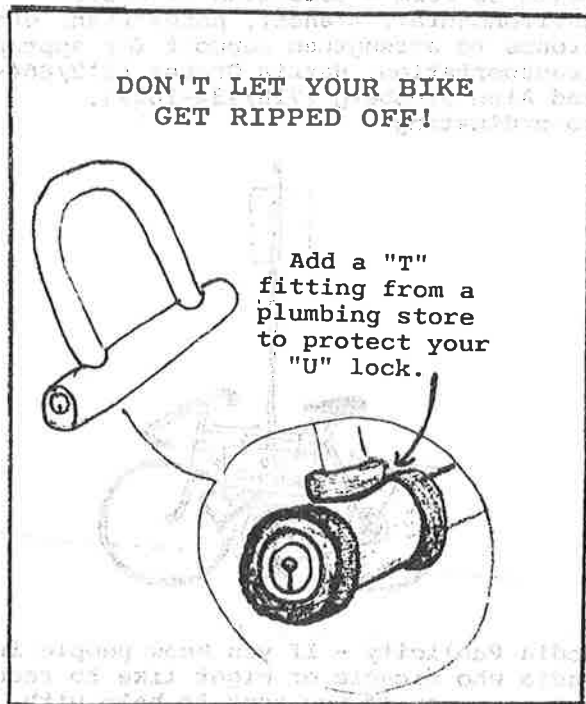
Bells are not popular among professional riders, while whistles were considered so offensive by the citizenry that their use has diminished. Adam Purple, who relied on bicycle power to create the Garden of Eden in the Lower East Side, has cow bells hanging from his handlebars that ring as he rides. That's one solution. Sometimes we have to be ready to abandon some notions of cycle fashion to sustain survival. It might not be made of titanium by Campagnolo, but a simple bike bell or even a passive wind-operated sound device which grows louder at higher speeds should be a requirement.

Speaking of necessities, the current image of the brakeless courier on a 17 lb track bike (all the more silent - no free-wheel!) is certainly counterproductive. Even Mercury himself had brakes. Brakes may not be necessary equipment on the velo track, but on crowded city streets where the often thoughtless pedestrian plods they are certainly worth their weight.

The Safe Cyclist's Code

Current selective enforcement policies create a climate of harassment for cyclists while ignoring flagrant violations by cabs, buses and the like. Until traffic codes and enforcement practices are brought into line with cycling realities, a positive step for messengers and other city cyclists would be adoption of a realistic bicycle safety code such as the one suggested by TA that swears off wrong-way riding and calls for yielding

to others' right-of-way (see Oct.-Nov. "City Cyclist"). Not only would this demonstrate to the population at large the intention of cyclists to get their riding styles under control; it would also help build solidarity with pedestrians. Contrary to current belief, the cyclist and the walker are natural allies, and only through mutual effort will they be able to return the streets to safe human use.



Exploitation Alternatives

The time has come to demand that the messenger companies assume their share of responsibility for hazards to and by messengers. The present pay-per-message-delivered system encourages messengers to ride as fast as possible. An alternative would be a straight daily or weekly salary for riders. This would probably run into opposition from the messenger companies, the businesses served and even the cyclists themselves. But it would mean that messengers could ride more slowly, less recklessly and still make top dollar based on experience.

Do the messenger companies insure their riders and their bicycles? According to the Independent Couriers Association, some companies don't even pay Workman's Compensation. Eliminating the irresponsibility and fly-by-night nature of much of this industry would go a long way toward improving bike messenger self-esteem and competence. Why shouldn't messenger companies be required to test the skills of their riders and the safety of their equipment, just like any cab or truck company? Perhaps it will take an enforcement effort that impounds messages instead of just punishing bikers to get

these companies to clean up their act.

A far better way would be to build a more cohesive messenger industry through a strong professional cyclists' union. A side benefit could be joint pressure on clients to provide entry into their buildings and/or secure bike parking.

A major impediment to reforming the messenger industry and organizing cyclists in general has been the fiercely independent lone wolf mentality, so prevalent in bicycling. This has created difficulties in getting large-scale cycling organizations going in NYC in the past and has made cyclists easy prey for the well-organized forces of the motoring madness. Groups like TA and the ICA are now doing effective organizing in the city. By supporting these organizations, city cyclists can help protect their interests and create new alliances.

The Paralysis of Speed

In the midst of the present controversy lies an attempt to blame the city cyclist for all the sins of the motoring world. Look at almost any city in Europe, Asia or Africa and see cyclists, motorists and pedestrians coexisting. The cars and trucks often don't travel as fast. Many items are delivered by bicycle or cart. No one in their right mind would attempt to commute through the crowded streets one person in one large car. Our infatuation with speed has created the danger. The death-defying bike messenger can only operate in the fast lane because the fast lane exists. Do we need hurtling 2-20 ton vehicles threatening human life on every corner? Do we need stretch limos and high-speed cabs more than we need room to cycle safely in this city?

A good start would be to retime traffic lights to bicycling speed. This would slow down motor and messenger traffic, allow cyclists to stop for lights without being unreasonably delayed, and give pedestrians more time to cross. Retimed lights could be inaugurated on avenues with designated bike lanes and, if successful, copied on other avenues. Eliminating parking on one side of every street and avenue would free up a lane for use as a bike or bus lane protected from encroachment by a barriered bike path where pedestrians would know to expect cyclists.

Any creative solution which results in the elimination of 1/3 to 1/2 of motor traffic in NYC would vastly improve the quality of life for pedestrians and cyclists alike. Add to this the replacement of current acid-rain producing taxis, buses and light trucks by light rail transport and electric vehicles which operate at slower speeds, and then we start to see sanity.

Don't say it can't be done. It's already been said. It has to be done and the brave men and women cyclists who hold mere inches in the streets today will continue to advance this cause until it happens. Cyclists (and pedestrians), unite!

UNITE FOR THE RIGHT TO BIKE

JOIN TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

TA DEFENDS CYCLING ON WINS

Back on August 29, "All-News" AM radio station WINS broadcast an editorial criticizing "errant bicyclists -- especially those bike riding messengers." Cyclists, said WINS, ignore traffic laws, endanger the public, weave in and out of traffic, run red lights, ride on sidewalks and smash into pedestrians. Applauding the police crackdown, WINS said "It's about time they [the police] went after those two wheeled terrors. They're worse than the motorist who weaves in and out of traffic or runs a red light."

These comments burned us up, particularly the notion that an auto or truck running a red light is less dangerous than a bicycle! TA director Gail Boorstein fired off a reply, which WINS accepted for airplay. The one-minute taped response, read by Gail, was aired 8 times on Friday, October 3. Here's what Gail said:

"The tens of thousands of bicyclists in New York City want cycling to be safe for everybody. Like everyone else, we want fewer pedestrian-bike collisions. But for that to happen, everyone who uses our streets has to play fair, not just bicyclists.

"Many pedestrians don't realize how hazardous they can be to cyclists. Riding a bike in Manhattan means dodging jaywalkers who think nothing of stepping into the path of law-abiding cyclists. For every bike rider running a red light, there are many more jaywalkers blocking a cyclist's right-of-way.

"But New York's real traffic problem isn't bikes or pedestrians. It's the cars, taxis and trucks that occupy over 95 percent of the road, forcing cyclists and pedestrians to fight each for the rest. Does it make sense to attack bicycling while ignoring the noise, danger and crowding caused by motor vehicles? Transportation Alternatives doesn't think so.

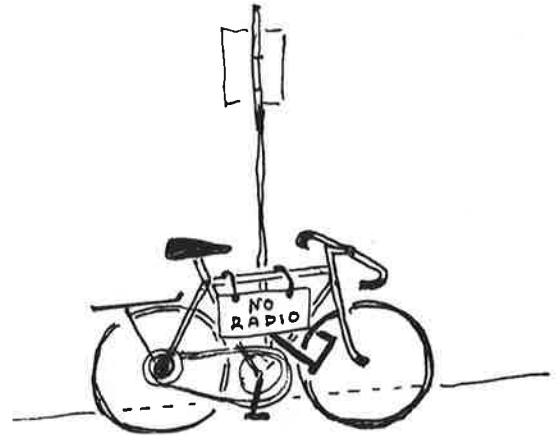
"We call on bicyclists and pedestrians to respect each other's rights. We also call on City Hall to improve mass transit and control motor traffic to make our streets safer for everyone."

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

THE RIGHT TO BIKE is the theme of our new brochure. To help add to TA's ranks and strengthen our cause we're counting on our members, that's you, to distribute them with a few words about TA to cyclists around town. Hopefully some were enclosed with this newsletter. If this failed we'll send them next time. If you're ready and waiting to go into action please call or send a SASE and we'll send you some leaflets to distribute. And if you want more, let me know. Cyclist-to-cyclist contact is our most effective organizing tool.

Bike Shops - We've laid out a plan to reestablish contact with bicycle shops throughout the five boroughs. Can you help by chatting with your bike store folk, or by keeping a display stocked with TA literature, or by designing a display? Lucille Lebovitz (212/673-5937) is coordinator.

Coalition Building - First steps have been taken to form a coalition of cycle, environmental, transit, pedestrian, etc. groups to strengthen support for appropriate transportation. Harris Graber (212/864-8156) and Alan Ginsberg (718/934-1627), co-ordinating.



Media Publicity - If you know people in any media who bicycle or might like to receive our news, or if you want to help with publicity please contact Pat O'Hare (212/759-7029).

Newsletter - An active newsletter committee has been formed and should have met while this issue was in the mail. If we missed you and you're interested in joining, or if there's a particular article you'd like to write please call TA at 212/866-7489.

Map - Where are you all who received route mapping packages for TA's NYC bike map? If drawing on the map seems intimidating, you can write out your routes and we'll draw them, but please let me hear from you so I at least know who has the maps and your general territorial focus. Thanks.

All are welcome to participate in the mapping project. If you want to ride to check out a route (your choice of borough), or you would like to do research about bike access to other transportation modes, call TA at 212/866-7489.

BUILDING A BIKE MAP LIBRARY

DELAWARE VALLEY COMMUTERS BIKE MAP: Includes bike routes for Philadelphia and surrounding areas including Camden, NJ. Shows scenic routes, no-bike and hazard zones, bike shops, hostels, campgrounds. For info, write Greater Philadelphia Bicycle Coalition, PO Box 8194, Phila. PA 19101.

CYCLISTS PROTEST HARASSMENT OF MESSENGERS

Several dozen bicyclists picketed City Hall at a lunchtime rally Thursday, Nov. 6, to protest police harassment and ticketing of bike messengers.

The rally was organized by the Independent Couriers Association (ICA) and endorsed by TA. Members of both groups carried picket signs ("Unite for the Right to Bike," "Stop Harassing Cyclists," "Don't Shoot the Messenger"), and explained to the press and passersby how all street users and traffic overcrowding create unsafe street conditions in the city.

The ICA was formed in 1984 to fight plans to require bike messengers to wear uniforms and carry I.D. cards. Since then, the group has worked to advance messengers' rights vis-a-vis indifferent (and sometimes exploitative) employers and an increasingly hostile city administration.

TA's appreciation of the physical and social dangers of bike messengering doesn't include endorsement of dangerous bike-riding habits. However, TA recognizes the positive contributions of messengers to the driving public's awareness of commuting and recreational cyclists. (See related article, "Cycling to Safety," this issue.) TA particularly applauds the ICA's efforts to win a fair and safe shake for messengers and other bicyclists.

The ICA can be contacted at P.O. Box 3137, NYC 10027 (212/662-4513).

DECEMBER BIKE RIDES

A TA CHRISTMAS SPECIAL!

Sat., Dec. 20. Santa's Workshop. 30 flat miles. Get to see Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus and all the TA elves. Dress warmly & bring a light, 'cos it's cold and dark at the North Pole. Meet: 7 pm., St. Patrick's, 5th Ave. & 50th St. Rain cancels, snow doesn't. John Benfatti: 212/431-3315 days.

APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB RIDES, courtesy of the bike committee. Please remember, what the leader says goes! Be on time, bring spare tube and/or patch kit. And have fun!

Sun. Dec. 7. Bike Belle Souviers. 50 miles. Find the Lost Lagoon. Moderate terrain, some hills. Bring lunch. Steady rain cancels. Meet: 9:45 am, Park Ave So. & East 16 St. Charles Morris: 212/447-3281.

Sun. Dec. 21. Bike Westchester Historic Farms. 46 miles, moderately hilly. Bring lunch. Steady rain cancels. Meet: 8:45 am, Park Ave So. & East 16 St. Charles Morris: 212/447-3281.

MORE RIDES IN THE SPRING. Check Feb.-March "City Cyclist" for info.

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