

# RESPECT THE LANE, CLEAR THE PATH

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Office of the Manhattan  
Borough President

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## INTRODUCTION

After receiving numerous constituent complaints from motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer released this unscientific survey of bike lane safety in Manhattan. The data is clear: while bike lanes bring a tremendous benefit to New York City, misuse by all parties—motorists, pedestrians and cyclists—undermines their success.

Pedestrians blocking bike lanes was the most common infraction with over 741 observations during 22 hours of observation, including 240 at 36<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway. Additionally, over 275 occurrences of motor vehicle blockages were noted, including 50 taxi, livery and pedi cabs and 35 instances of city-owned vehicles blocking bike lanes.

Notably, locations with protected bike lanes were found to be half as likely to be blocked by motor vehicles and, on average, had about 30 fewer infractions. These findings indicate that protected lanes may provide a safer cycling experience.

The Borough President's survey found a range of bike lane abuses including:

- Unmarked Police vehicles in apparent non-emergency situations cutting through protected bike lanes, to circumvent traffic stopped by a red light.
- Motor vehicle encroachment and speeding through bike lanes. The bike lane at 145<sup>th</sup> and St. Nicholas Avenue was the most encroached, with 117 infractions surveyed.
- A school bus idling in a bike lane at 116<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue for 7 minutes
- At Grand Street and Bowery, wrong way bicycle traffic in the bike lane outpaced the correct use of the bike lane for a full hour.
- Pedestrian encroachment on bike lanes in the Herald Square area was rampant, with over 240 occurrences recorded during a two-hour period. Additionally, an observer noted a collision between a cyclist and a pedestrian in the bike lane at this location.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Data was compiled during morning and evening rush hours between October 5 and October 7 at eleven bike lane locations:

- Centre Street and Chambers Street
- Grand Street and Bowery
- St. Marks Place and Second Avenue
- 14<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue
- 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and Eighth Avenue
- 36<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway
- 77<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue
- 94<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbus Avenue
- 115<sup>th</sup> Street and Fredrick Douglas Boulevard
- 116<sup>th</sup> Street and First Avenue
- 145<sup>th</sup> Street and St. Nicholas Avenue.

Criteria for the survey were determined based on frequently received constituent complaints.

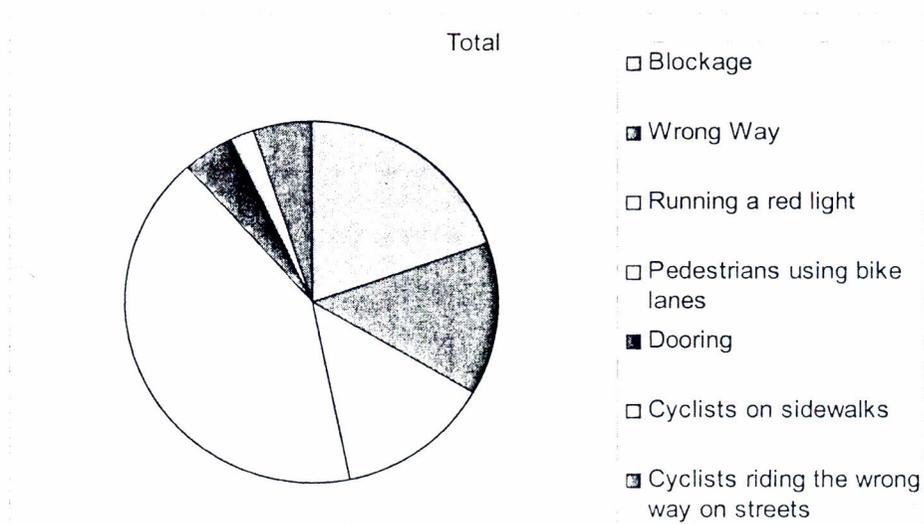
Surveyors recorded the following infractions:

- Bike Lane Blockages
- Pedestrian in bike lane
- Cyclist going wrong way in bike lane
- Cyclist running a red light
- Dooring (car doors observed opening into a bike lane)
- Cyclist riding on sidewalk
- Cyclist riding wrong way on the street

## FINDINGS

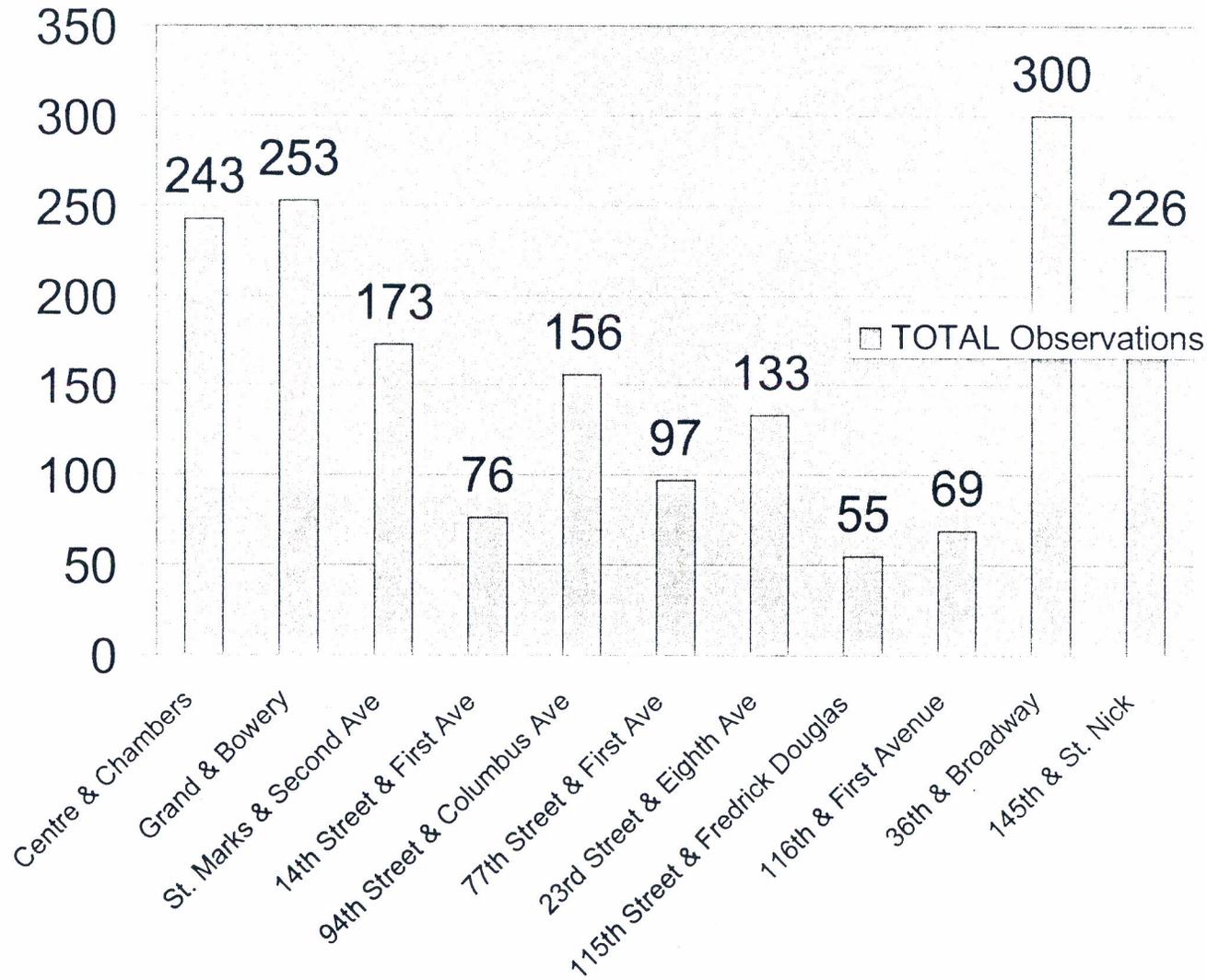
Over the course of a three day observation period, staff from the Borough President's office observed over 1,700 total infractions. **The highest infraction frequencies by location and the total number of infractions were:**

- **Bike Lane Blockages** – 117 infractions at 145<sup>th</sup> Street & St. Nicholas Avenue; 353 total infractions
- **Pedestrian in bike lane** – 240 infractions at 36th Street & Broadway; 741 total infractions
- **Cyclist going wrong way in bike lane** – 53 infractions at Grand Street & Bowery; 242 total infractions
- **Cyclist running a red light** – 100 infractions at Centre Street & Chambers Street; 237 total infractions
- **Dooring** – 19 infractions at St. Marks Place & Second Avenue; 77 total infractions
- **Cyclist riding on sidewalk** – 11 infractions at 94th Street & Columbus Avenue (tied with Centre & Chambers); 42 total infractions
- **Cyclist riding wrong way on the street** – 27 infractions at 77th Street & First Avenue; 89 total infractions



Of the 353 bike lane blockages observed, over 275 were motor vehicles. Of those, 18% were taxi or livery cars and 13% were city owned vehicles.

### Total Observations By Location



## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to reduce the number of bike lane blockages and improve cyclist safety, the Borough President is making the following recommendations:

1. **Increase enforcement against motorists who drive in or obstruct bike lanes.** Of the criteria surveyed, the most significant threat to bike lane safety is misuse of the lanes by motor vehicles. Surveyors noted dangerous obstructions ranging from cars double-parked in lanes to potentially life threatening incidents such as cars using unprotected bike lanes to pass other vehicles – and cutting off cyclists in the process. Currently, the fine for blocking a bike lane is \$115.

However, there needs to be significantly increased enforcement and ticketing of vehicles that abuse lanes. During the 22 hour survey period, over 275 motor vehicle blockages were noted but only two tickets were observed being issued.

The City should pilot a dedicated bike lane patrol. A bike patrol would strategically place traffic enforcement agents on bicycles to patrol bike lane blockages, improper cycling, and other infractions. Placing traffic enforcement agents on bicycles would allow for rapid responses to blockages compared to agents on foot. [Additionally, this policy change would provide agents with the same incentives to keep bicycle lanes clear as officers in police cars have to maintain traffic safety.]

2. **Enhanced street signage for cyclists, pedestrians and vehicles.** Observers noted some signage in their survey areas; however, ample room for improvement exists. Specifically, DOT should provide enhanced road signage to mitigate wrong way bicycling in bike lanes and on roads, motor vehicles traveling through or encroaching upon bike lanes, and additional yield to pedestrian signs.
3. **Taxi Cab Public Awareness Campaign on Dooring.** Dooring (the act of hitting a cyclist with an open car door) is one of the most frequent cyclist complaints. The sudden nature of these collisions creates an especially dangerous environment for cyclists as well as passengers exiting vehicles.

DOT has indicated that it plans to launch a public awareness campaign to address bike safety issues across the City. The Taxi and Limousine Commission should follow suit and launch a similar public education campaign in yellow taxis and livery cars in order to prevent injuries to cyclists caused by dooring in TLC vehicles.

4. **Reserve parking spots for deliveries along commercial streets to discourage potential bike lane blockages.** Currently, parking spaces adjacent to protected bike lanes provide parking on a first come, first serve basis. A lack of designated parking for deliveries exacerbates bike lane blockages. To remedy this problem, DOT should designate delivery only parking spaces in protected bike lanes with appropriately placed curb cuts to minimize the necessity to pull dollies and hand carts through bike lanes.

Bike lane blockages caused by deliveries are impossible to eliminate in most locations. However, this simple policy change could significantly reduce delivery blockages.

5. **Increase the frequency of Bike Boxes along bike routes.** Cyclists often report that for their own safety they must get a head start on motor vehicles at red lights. To address these concerns DOT has created Bike Boxes. Bike Boxes are marked traffic boxes at intersections along bike lane routes that provide cyclists with a safe waiting area ahead of cars during red lights. This simple change to the configuration of the streetscape allows cyclists to avoid existing dangers at red lights without putting themselves and others in unnecessarily dangerous situations. DOT should improve on this worthwhile initiative by painting the boxes so they are more clearly visible to cyclists and drivers. Where appropriate, all future bike lanes should include Bike Boxes.
6. **Where appropriate, DOT should strive to develop bike lanes that reduce mixing of cyclists, pedestrians and motorists.** The Borough President's survey found that protected bike lanes are half as likely to be blocked by motor vehicles. DOT should conduct their own analysis of the effectiveness of protected bike lanes and publish their findings. These findings should be included as part of a comprehensive community consultation process around the selection of appropriate locations for future bike lane locations.
7. **The City should make available data related to bike lane safety and conduct regular surveys similar to this study to ensure greater transparency and accountability.** Currently, the City does not collect or disseminate important statistics on bike lane incidents, including cycle-vehicle and pedestrian-cycle crashes. This data is necessary for policy makers, transportation advocates and concerned members of the public to measure whether our City's bike lanes are functioning at their maximum potential.



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