

The Usual Suspects

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It was a Sunday morning in July; the five cyclists, ranging in age from 26 to 45, were on their regular weekend ride. On this particular Sunday morning, they planned to ride from Kanata, on the outskirts of Ottawa, Ontario, to Pakenham, and back again, a round trip of about 57.5 miles.

They never made it out of Kanata.

Barely 3 miles into their trip, as the cyclists were riding single-file within a bicycle lane, a van angled into their lane as it passed the last cyclist, clipping her before continuing ahead, plowing directly into the remaining 4 cyclists.

The driver fled the scene.

The injured cyclists [were reported to be](#):

- A man in his late 30s, who suffered closed head injuries and showed signs of brain injuries. He also suffered a broken ankle, and was intubated by paramedics before being airlifted to hospital. He was unconscious on arrival at hospital and is listed in critical condition;
- A man, 39, who suffered a concussion and other closed head injuries. He was listed in critical condition but stable condition, and was undergoing surgery late Sunday morning. The man's father, Marcelli Wein, identified him as Robert Wein, a public servant and father of two. Wein is a triathlete who competed last weekend in a triathlon in Carleton Place.
- A 26-year-old woman, identified as Hilary McNamee, a social work student at Carleton University by her father. She suffered closed head injuries, and a possible hip or femur fracture. She was taken to hospital by helicopter and was listed initially in critical condition, then upgraded to serious condition;
- A 36-year-old man, who suffered minor head and leg injuries;
- A woman, 45, who suffered a broken arm and a possible dislocated elbow, identified by a friend as Cathy Anderson of Kanata.

A few hours later, the driver turned himself in to police, and was charged with five counts of failing to stop at the scene of a collision causing bodily harm.

Apparently shocked by the senseless carnage, Ottawa police decided to

address bicycle safety as a part of their Integrated Road Safety Program. The target of their bicycle safety campaign?

Cyclists.

Directing their attention at safety violations made by cyclists, Ottawa police ticketed 340 cyclists in August, and handed out 500 free bicycle bells. Additionally, police handed out hundreds of information pamphlets on safe cycling at intersections known to be a high-risk for collisions between cyclists and motorists.

Now, if cyclists are violating the traffic laws, they should be ticketed; the traffic laws are a commonly understood and agreed-upon set of rules that give everybody on the road some degree of assurance that other people on the road will behave in predictable ways. The greater the enforcement of the laws, the greater the degree of compliance with the laws we can expect, and thus, the greater the degree of predictability we can apply to the actions of others. It is this predictability that allows us to maneuver our vehicles in close proximity without crashing into each other. Traffic laws, and their enforcement, are a proactive attempt to prevent accidents before they occur, while lawsuits and insurance settlements are a reactive attempt to deal with the aftermaths of accidents after they occur. So in that light, it is not only "acceptable" to enforce the law, it is necessary to enforce the law, because enforcement is a vital component of the accident-preventing intent of traffic laws.

And thus, if cyclists are violating the traffic laws, they should be ticketed. And as should be obvious, and even more essential to road safety, motorists who are violating the traffic laws should also be ticketed.

All that said, didn't it strike anybody—anybody?—at the Ottawa Police Service that in rounding up "the usual suspects," they just might be targeting the wrong people? If they were truly attempting to develop an enforcement response to a shocking and horrific crash—and there's no reason to believe that they weren't sincere in their response—would it make any sense at all to target cyclists? After all, the cyclists injured in the crash were all law-abiding cyclists, riding in the bicycle lane, and run down by a driver who never hit his brakes, continued driving for another 400 feet as he hit one cyclist after another, and then with his victims laying critically injured on the roadway behind him, continued on his way as if nothing had happened.

And the best response the Ottawa Police Service can come up with is an enforcement action that targets cyclists? Really? That's it? That's the best they can come up with?

What about a stepped-up enforcement action against drunk drivers? What about stepped-up enforcement against reckless drivers? Against aggressive drivers? Against drivers who harass law-abiding cyclists? What about targeting the most dangerous violations of the law, like excessive speed, or red light running? Wouldn't any of these have been a more appropriate response than a program targeting the victims of this horrific incident?

Tellingly, while their attention was focused on cyclists, Ottawa police still managed to nab 500 drivers who ran red lights. 500. It's an impressive

number. But just imagine what the Ottawa police might have accomplished if they weren't so busy looking for cyclists with no bells on their bikes.