StreetsWiki: Bicycle Crashes- Culpability

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Data on bicycle crashes appear to indicate that bicyclists, either by falling or disobeying road rules, are most often responsible for their own collisions [1, 2, 3] . However, legitimate questions have been raised about some of these data, and the seemingly slap-dash methods that police use to report crash circumstances.

Bicycle Crash Reporting Bias

The pedestrian and cyclist advocacy group Right of Way reviewed cyclist fatalities between 1995 and 1998. After reconstructing the crash circumstances, they found that "[a]lthough police blame cyclists for three-fourths (75%) of cyclist fatalities, in fact driver error was the principle cause in 57-66% of recent fatal bicycle crashes and at least a contributing cause in 78-85%" [4]. The main types of driver misconduct were found to be aggressive passing, turning into a cyclist's path, speeding, and running red lights/stop signs. The authors found little mention of cyclist misconduct in the police reports, even though the police insist that cyclist error causes most crash fatalities. Furthermore, attorney**Bob Mionske**, founder of the website Bicycle Law, asserts that "anti-cyclist bias is endemic in the police, the court system, and the media" [8].

Blog Reports

On bicycle-related blogs, cyclists report aggressive and dangerous driver behavior, and provide examples of drivers brazenly disobeying road rules (running red lights, for example) [5,6]. Angry drivers seem to particularly resent cyclists, while both drivers and public officials continue to lay the blame on cyclists [6,7]. A Streetsblog commenter, Brent, makes a thoughtful point: "If you take a 30 lb vehicle that accelerates to 15 mph and a 3 ton vehicle that routinely accelerates to 60 mph on city streets, the burden of responsibility for safe driving must ALWAYS be with the latter. Period." Yet there are others who insist, in the same comment threads, that they have witnessed bicyclists breaking the rules [7], putting themselves and others at risk.

Most significantly, culpability also lies with cities and communities that fail to provide adequate (or even any) bicycle accommodations on roadways. The debate about driver versus cyclist culpability would be quieted if streets were designed for cyclists and pedestrians as well, rather than giving cars

exclusive priority.

ALSO ON THE LIVABLE STREETS NETWORK

Streetsblog: The Vicious Cycle of Anti-Cyclist Bias

Streetsblog: Law Enforcement Bias and the Three Foot Law

REFERENCES

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[3] Tan, Carol. Crash-Type Manual for Bicyclists. Highway Safety Research Center, University of North Carolina.

[4] Komanoff, Charles and Michael J. Smith. NYC Bicycle Fatalities: Who's Responsible? (pdf) for Right of Way, May 2000.

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[6] 94th Precinct to Cyclists: Obey Traffic Rules. Streetsblog. June 26, 2007.

[7] Cyclists Throwing Selves Under Cars in Brooklyn. Streetsblog. August 20, 2007.

[8] The Vicious Cycle of Anti-Cyclist Bias. Streetsblog. March 5, 2008.

PICTURE REFERENCES

Pictures are cited in the order they appear above. Please keep citation style consistent.

[1] Photo courtesty of Flickr

[2]

FURTHER READING

Bicycle Law