



City of Cambridge

Consent Communication #11

IN CITY COUNCIL

October 17, 1994

VICE MAYOR RUSSELL

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Police Commissioner to obtain a report for the City Council as to what enforcement the Police Department is undertaking with regard to bicycle riders on City sidewalks and in the Cambridge Common.

In City Council October 17, 1994.

Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.

Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:- *D. Margaret Drury*

D. Margaret Drury,
City Clerk

(11)

Oct 2, 1994

Cambridge City Council
City Hall
795 Mass Ave.
Cambridge, MA, 02139

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Apparently, you did NOT even read
my letter of July 12, 1994 re the dangers
to pedestrians by lawless bicycle riders.

You apparently don't read the papers,
either, so I am enclosing some clippings
from the Cambridge Chronicle.

I would really like the answer to
this question: Why doesn't the City
Council have the Traffic regulations
pertaining to both bicycles and automobiles

enforced? There must be reason and
I should like to know it!

You prefer to care about senior
citizens, at least around voting time.

I don't think you care at all about
senior citizens or you would not allow
them to be frightened and intimidated
by bicyclists and motorists all the time.

By the way, not only senior citizens
are frightened by bicyclists.

Very truly yours

Louise E. Harrison

Copy to Robt Healy

Concord Avenue
Cambridge Chronicle
**More fearful
of cyclists than
second-hand smoke** 8/12/94

I was dismayed by the appearance of yet another anti-smoking article in the Aug. 4 Cambridge Chronicle. I wish the anti-smoking crowd would spend as much time and energy on other dangers to the public.

I am, for example, much more afraid of the Cambridge bicyclists who are terrorizing and intimidating everyone than I am of second-hand smoke.

I can't get anyone to do anything about the extreme danger to pedestrians posed by bicyclists who do not obey any traffic regulations at all. They ride on the sidewalks of Central and Harvard Squares, not slowly either. They never stop for a red light to allow a pedestrian to cross a street safely on a walk light. Often, one loses the walk light while waiting for the bicyclists to speed through illegally and arrogantly.

I suggest that all of your readers who feel threatened by bicyclists write to the Cambridge Chronicle and the Cambridge City Council.

LaVONNE E. DAVIDSON

Harvard Street

Road Grump of the Week

One more vote in favor of keeping bicycles off sidewalks. **Nicholas Churchill** of Essex Street notes the city traffic regulations prohibits riding bikes on these pedestrian ways. "This regulation existed for a good reason, he says — "people get injured, hurt, frightened, etc. ... by this mix of metal and pedestrian."

Yet in the five years Churchill has lived in Central Square, he says he has never seen this regulation enforced by a cop. "And believe me, the opportunities for doing this are numerous."

Churchill notes, while he is on the subject in a recent letter to City Clerk **Margaret Drury**, that bikers don't stop for red lights and fail to signal way too much of the time.

Not so naive as it may seem, Churchill acknowledges that cops may have better things to worry about, but wonders why they can't even say something to bikers "who zip by them on the sidewalk." When he asked one city official for an explanation, he "told me he liked seeing all the bicycles because they reminded him of a vacation he had in England... Another told me that officers who didn't enforce the regulation were probably new to the force and were shy... One person kindly sent me a thick copy of a study on the bicycle 'problem,' but the study did not explain why existing regulations were not being enforced by officers."

Churchill has an idea: "Perhaps the police could be given copies of this report and use them to smack the heads of those who ride on the sidewalk, ride through red lights, ride between the curb and buses, which have stopped to discharge passengers, and ignore traffic laws in general."

The 42-year-old man, who is on leave from work in Widener Library, had just one other question? Why is the problem so much less in Harvard Square?

(Footnote: While police and city lawyers told Churchill riding is not allowed on sidewalks, **Jane Kent** in the traffic department says bikes are allowed on the sidewalks except in designated business districts, which includes both Harvard and Central squares.)

Churchill's Chronicle 8/16/94

Road Gripe of the Week

As if bikers weren't bad enough, now walkers have to worry about roller-bladers. Many people are using these wheeled shoes for not just fun, but transportation as well, noted a concerned City Councilor Tim Toomey in a council order this summer. There have been numerous complaints, said Toomey, noting many bladers are "ignoring common courtesy and sometimes endanger the public safety." The danger is particularly bad in relation to small children and senior citizens. Thus, he wants the city manager to work with "appropriate city departments" (is there a commission for roller-blading?) and come up with some suitable guidelines.

Cambridge Chronicle Star 5/25/94

Council should ban sidewalk biking

Cambridge pedestrians may have become despondent upon reading the following footnote at the end of the Aug. 18, "Road Gripe of the Week" column:

"While police and city lawyers told [Mr. Churchill that bike] riding is not allowed on sidewalks, Jane Kent in the Traffic Department says bikes are allowed on the sidewalks except in designated business districts, which includes both Harvard and Central Squares."

The footnote fails to note that the only reason bikes are "allowed" on most Cambridge sidewalks is that no one has yet gotten around to dis-allowing them.

The last time I looked, Chapter 85, Section 11B of the Mass Bicycle laws banned sidewalk bicycling in business districts generally and specifically stated that a city may if it chooses extend that ban to any sidewalks within its borders.

I consider that an invitation to the Cambridge City Council to pass a municipal ordinance banning sidewalk bicycling citywide I urge it to do just that, at the earliest possible opportunity, with appropriate exceptions allowing for low-speed sidewalk bicycling by children 2 and under and for the possibility of a few sidewalks being posted as bicycle paths.

There is no reason why Harvard and Central Squares should have the only bicycle-free sidewalks in Cambridge. In what way are those squares different from, say, Kendall Square? First Street? Cambridge Street? Mass Ave. between Harvard and Porter? Where does Harvard Square end and Central Square begin?

The law regarding sidewalk bicycling can be neither changed nor enforced until everyone knows what the law is now and agrees on its implications.

Whatever the Chronicle can do to help get this issue out and get the public scrutiny it deserves, will be very much appreciated by hundreds of beleaguered Cambridge pedestrians.

Cambridge Chron
ASTRID DODDS
Wendell Street

8/25/94

Bikes ought to be licensed

Cambridge
9/1/94

Trumpets for LaVonne Davidson (Letters, Aug. 11). Lawless cyclists infest not only Cambridge but nearly all American cities. Police seem powerless if not complacent about scofflaws on two wheels who fly by under their noses mainly because they remain anonymous. I have yet to see a cyclist stopped on the sidewalk or in the wrong lanes on the street.

The remedy is simple if the city councilors and police could pull up their socks and apply it. Before World War II, every bicycle in Cambridge carried a license plate on its rear fender, for which the owner paid a modest excise tax every year and was thus duly registered. The police could then identify miscreants who ran lights or rode on the left side of the street or on the sidewalk. Violators were easily stopped, ticketed, and reprimanded or fined. The few unlicensed were pursued and ordered off the street or risked having their bikes impounded.

JOHN BOVEY
Chauncy Street

Learner's permit for training wheels?

John Bovey hit the nail on the head in his Sept. 1 letter when he cited bicyclist anonymity as a key obstacle to effective enforcement of bicycling laws.

He's right about that, but wrong about how simple it would be to fix.

Only the state can require the registration of vehicles (motor-driven or otherwise) and the licensing of their operators. Just as with cars, bicycle law enforcement will work only when the identity of the vehicle and the identity of its operator are a matter of public record. Part of the freedom one gives up in order to operate a motor vehicle is the right to remain anonymous. (As someone once noted, driver's licenses are as close as we come in America to national identity cards.)

Bicyclists have generally resisted giving up that freedom, just as early auto owners no doubt did when cars were novelties in which to take a Sunday drive.

I will know that bicycling has come of age in greater Boston when bicyclists clamor with one voice to be treated just like motorists in

every respect, including a statewide licensing and registration system.

Cambridge ASTRID DODDS
Wendell Street

9/15/94

Cambridge Chronicle
Lawless cycling
should cease *4/15/64*

I agree with previous correspondents, that fast bicycle riding on crowded sidewalks should cease. I walk near my home in constant fear that if I have to step aside I may be struck in the back by a speeding, soundless two-wheeler.

On the other hand bicycling as such should be encouraged. It is a healthful exercise that cuts down automobile traffic and consequently the noxious fumes that automobiles emit.

John Bovey's solution seems to me the best, that bicycle users pay a small registration fee and be given an identifying license plate that is clearly evident when they ride. If they break the rules they should be summonsed and fined. As Bovey observes, bicyclists, when not on the sidewalks, ride as frequently on the left side as the right side of the street and totally ignore red lights. I have seen one riding no hands and eating from a cup as he pedaled. Police cooperation and vigilance will be required. Rules are no good if they remain on the books unenforced.

ROBERT GORHAM DAVIS
Mass. Ave.

Common sense needed in traffic flow

The tempest about bicycle riding on Cambridge sidewalks is really about respect, not limited to bicycling, and should be no surprise to observers of human behavior.

One reason adults ride on sidewalks is due to the justifiable fear of being struck by larger vehicles. Most Americans, and almost all Boston drivers, have little or no respect for the fragile bicyclist, who in turn sometimes shows a lack of respect for the even more-vulnerable pedestrian. This seems more of a problem with younger bicyclists.

If people were always considerate of others, there would be no need for laws, police, courts or attorneys. That is not to say that passing a law will alleviate problems. Laws have not ended the human practice of homicide.

But, if bicyclists would slow to a walk when approaching pedestrians on sidewalks, there'd be less of a problem. Similarly, if vehicle drivers in the streets of Cambridge would be more considerate of bicyclists, there would be fewer bikers on the sidewalks. It is only common sense, something in short supply in this country.

Cambridge
Chronicle
9/15/94

ROY BERCAW
Porter Square

Consent Comm. # 11 *W-161*

Comm. from Lavonne E. Davidson, 287 Harvard Street, requesting ~~that~~ bicycle regulations should be enforced regarding bicycle riders on city sidewalks.

In City Council,

October 17, 1994

*Referred to the
City Manager
for a report.*

*Reply sent to City Mgr.
10/19/94 *de**