

32. Traffic Fines Doubling

Municipal planners locally are considering more stop signs, doubling fines, and enhancing enforcement in yet another futile attempt to control traffic. Try bicycling alongside motorists aggravated by stop and go. You'll see they're *more* likely to get into accidents. This ragged action makes them crazy and less attentive. Prosecution is practically mythical. All due respect to police everywhere, for every violator caught, thousands aren't. In 20 years he'd never seen anyone come to a complete halt at the STOP sign on his urban corner even though there's also a SLOW CHILDREN sign as well as actual children playing. Tickets aren't given; signs are. Al considered keeping lists of violator license plates, and once a month forwarding latest to precinct house. That wouldn't work. Any kook could avenge imagined mistreatment by falsely accusing alleged bullies. Revenue from tickets doesn't come close to paying for installation and service of traffic devices. What good are they?

As a law abiding driver, he hadn't gotten a ticket in 3 decades over a half million miles driven, but what about all those who seem to have no regard of laws and the common good they represent? There are too few patrolmen to pursue and many more important issues to address. They waste time with traffic enforcement, although some felons are captured during stops. Frequently pulling motorists over would be more of a deterrent and example to others than issuing an occasional fine. What do fines mean? For most it's, "pay to avoid hassle" not "quell unsafe behavior". What they need are inflation based increases to fines, exponential increases based on number of offenses, and impounding of mo-ves among those who never learn. Yet bad attitude and infrastructure equally invite violations, so doubling fines becomes just more evidence of greedy, voracious oppression rather than concern for public safety.

Where's fact based management in putting up signs for every constituent who moans about speeders? Is one speeding motorist enough to add another sign? All this knee-jerk reaction does is litter neighborhoods with sign pollution and speed bumps, appeasement of chronic complainers but no deterrent. According to statistics, there actually seems to be fewer motoring accidents at uncontrolled, single lane intersections, more on curves, heavily controlled, multilane intersections, and rotaries. Planners should go out and see for themselves, monitor situations, get a closer look by biking around.

A state act recently passed put official wording on stuff bicyclists probably thought was already mandated. For example, defining terms, fining motorists for abusing bicycle lanes, and granting privileges to wheelchair users of bicycle paths. If nothing else, it acknowledges something must be done. But is adding more restrictions the proper response? In addition to entire set of motoring laws, his state expected cyclists to obey another 16 specific to them. Included are: Allow police to inspect your bicycle for safety violations; at night, use white front lamp, red rear lamp/reflectors; don't cling to vehicles; don't race, unless in a sanctioned event; new bikes must be stamped with an identifying number; one rider per seat; park so as to not impede other traffic; ride on shoulders single file or two abreast except where prohibited; signal turns by hand; stay right, except to pass; steer with both hands, not carrying articles; walk bikes on crosswalks, sidewalks, unless warned not to; wear approved helmets before age 16; yield right-of-way, or go as directed by control devices. Why were they even necessary? What were they responding to? Really, it was too much traffic, traffic flowing poorly, and tremendous anxieties unrelated to driving that made people reactionary. Traffic planners need a whole new 8-step program that, enacted in total, would actually make both biking and driving safer.

1) *Sayonara stop signs*: Instead of adding expensive traffic controls, often an distraction and eyesore, why not *remove* a lot of them? Having too many not only disrupts flow but obscures their meaning, *danger*. STOP signs used to warn that you're coming upon an unrestricted boulevard; red lights were to avoid long lines at points that cross a high speed lane. Why have 4-way stops at all? It's senseless. Motorist automatically assume the other guy will stop, and so shoot through; they speed through yellow lights between green and red. Statistically the most dangerous time is when you're accelerating or slowing; better to ride at a steady, moderate pace. Wherever drivers have to stop and go, not move freely, is where accidents occur, for example, when dodging speed traps or timing variable changes in red lights. Psychologists say constant reinforcement leads to inattentiveness, like a boy who cries wolf. Uneven enforcement increases hazards. Instead, make people *unsure* at intersections; this forces them to stay alert. Note how motorists behave at flashing yellow lights; they don't know what to do, so they automatically drive defensively. Leave only important signs and stoplights, some just flashing. There are better ways to control traffic. Rather than stop signs, which punish everyone, set up temporary digital cameras; any scofflaw who speeds through

neighborhoods could be caught, prosecuted and license revoked. If, afterward, speeding disappears, you can relocate camera and save cost. Cons and pros could be argued. Cameras are more efficient and proactive than stationing a patrol, and can be moved to wherever there's a problem, including monitoring isolated segments of bikeways, which promotes partial reinforcement, known to be more effective. It's already being done on a pilot basis. Some people worry that Big Brother is watching, invading their privacy. How you conduct yourself in public doesn't come under rights of privacy. Technically speaking, an intersection is a public place, so anyone could be watching, taking data, turning in plate numbers. Stop signs show that people are too lazy to do so, when simple vigilance and sworn complaints would be cheaper and more effective. At least a camera offers objective evidence, compared to witness hearsay.

2) *Divide and conquer*: Let motorists go unrestricted on interstates, conditions permitting, and therefore lure hot heads away from secondary roads where pedestrians and bicyclists go. When highway jams occur, impatient motorists divert onto local roads without slowing down. Yet quite a few still drive above 75 mph amidst mental defectives unable to manage 50 mph or find correct lane. "You mean I'm supposed to stay on right?" One bad behavior begets another. To use highways, you must be able to maintain a minimum of 65 mph. Instead of recklessly chasing speeders, pull over those in front of every traffic jam who block passing lanes, cause accidents, and restrict flow, so others won't have to pass on right or subsequently speed up to get out of way. Send them back where they belong. This may defy logic and Federal regulations, but patrols could passively ignore speeders and actively weed out road hogs and weavers. Issue special graduated licenses and town roadmaps to prohibit blue hairs, kids and repeat offenders from using interstates, for which they might be compensated by lower insurance rates. Sensible parents already instruct newly licensed youth to stay off interstates whenever possible. Sometimes highways can't be avoided, for example bridges without nearby alternatives. In those cases, planners could designate a special, separate lane for slow traffic.

3) *Nab Lane Violators*: Fine anyone caught consistently or repeatedly straddling solid white line. Infractions of this existing code are easier to catch than speeding; just look down a line, or embed sensors that trigger cameras to pinpoint offenders, record, and wire live nearby patrolmen. As much as bicyclists would like to have car tires sweep gutters, they just don't do so effectively.

Rather, they deposit more debris, along with unrestricted erosion from construction sites, which is supposed to be curbed with hay bales or other screens. Who wants some idiot yakking on a cell phone mowing him down? Furthermore, where are all those mandatory pedestrian crosswalks, as if motorists stop for them? They only repaint lines when they repave streets, once every quarter century. Towns need to refresh lines a little more often, a least every 5 years, as many have long since disappeared. As these white lines define a road's edge, they're extremely important to motorists, particularly at night and whenever visibility is low. This means a continuous line painting program, because no sooner than you're done you have to start over. Instead of paying bloated salaries of do nothing clerks, taxpayers ought to insist on more line painters, roadway repairers, shoulder sweepers, and trash pickers.

4) *Right a wrong*: Make sure all those applying for licenses definitely know right-of-way rules. Obviously, most don't. Rule: Whoever is going straight through an intersection without a traffic control has the right-of-way. Highways facilitate this, which is why taking them is often faster. Everyone else must wait and leave intersection open. This sometimes means you'll be stuck for what seems an eternity trying to get into a queue unless there's an approach ramp designed for graceful merging. When 2 cars meet and rule above doesn't apply, driver approaching from right owns the intersection, *except* when making a left turn. Use a turn signal in advance, a common courtesy, because nobody can read your mind. Besides, not using a signal means you're going straight, a wrong assumption that can get people killed. This avoids heartaches, and doing what you should makes driving more pleasant for everyone. If you approach from left or are taking a left, *wait* before entering intersection. This doesn't apply at rotaries where circling from left contradictorily earns you right-of-way; often they sensibly install YIELD signs at rotary entry points, rather than red lights or stop signs, which inhibit fluid merging thereby hiking risk of rear-enders. Not taking your right-of-way when applicable is confusing to others; don't wave others on as gesticulating for another reason might be misinterpreted. To urge along unsure motorists who do have right-of-way, you may flash your high beams, say, 3 or 4 times. To discourage others who don't, that's what your horn is for. A short beep is legal, but not long blasts for which you can be fined, although judge should waive fines in cases where beepers are warning cell phone users, so person on other side of call can be warned of what an idiot they are talking to.

5) *Fit Fine to Crime*: As an alternative to inadequate fines, put violators to work, as described. Sand, nails, glass shouldn't be in bike lanes. Perhaps convicts can simply choose: Either pay an exorbitant fine immediately or report for this community service within 3 months, as practical. Without completing service and obtaining a waiver, your license would remain revoked, and you couldn't register your car or renew your privilege. This would supply lots of labor, suitably angry youngsters with plenty of energy, for accomplishing these projects at little cost to taxpayer. Experiencing first hand how their transgressions effect communities will be an educational deterrent. Some innocent individuals already volunteer for such service, only to have their good efforts negated by thoughtless passersby who you can tell just came from closest fast food franchise also to blame for poorly designed, planet-unfriendly packaging. Base fines on driver's income or ability to pay. Let those with the most pay fines multiplied up to 20 times, a extra deterrent to fast luxury sedan and SUV drivers, usually the worst offenders, for whom a few hundred dollars is lunch. If base fine is \$200 and offender's income is over \$250,000 per year, apply the maximum penalty of 20 times, \$4,000. Then they'd think twice. Verify through state tax returns. Those in society who've gained the most should pay the most back when they do wrong. They should be setting an example. Sounds patently fair. Fines and taxes affect poorest the most. Some 10% of what little they make is sorely missed, whereas 10% of millions might seem a lot, but you can still live quite comfortably on the remainder. Of course, this group consists of lawyers and powers that be, so resistance to any such plan would be formidable.

6) *Assign a Sign*: Too few "intersection ahead" crosses or signs covered by trees provoke a question, "Whose responsibility are they: citizen, city or state?" If they must strew roadsides with them, at least keep signs legible. Curvy line signs and chevrons alert motorists to danger, describe unseen hazards. Seems as if some municipalities don't care if you're safe, only lust for ticket revenue. Sign makers will be looking for work after STOP sign abatement. Plaster NO PARKING ANYTIME along major thoroughfares and 1-way on almost every other side street. These are easier to impose. As both a bicyclist and motorist, he'd like it better if there were less chance of head-on crashes or being pinched off when vehicles inadvertently swerve into breakdown lanes due to oncoming moves or road hazards. Fewer traffic controls on main streets combined with properly designated 1-way side streets eliminate short-cuts that makes nearby residents eager for stop signs. This would

ease driving on narrow streets, include daytime parking for shoppers and overnight for residents, make space for bike lanes throughout communities, and quiet traffic patterns. Strip malls these days are specifically constructed so patrons park in front, which advertises they are open and vital. Used to be that parking was ample in rear of buildings, which didn't impact multiple use vehicle flow nearly as much. Urban planners need to rectify parking lot fiascoes through retroactive zoning ordinances.

7) *Update Archaic Road Design*: Hundreds of years ago, roadways handled carts and horses not high performance sports cars. Today speeders are looking for clear shots through side streets to avoid stoplights. Put a DO NOT ENTER or DEAD END sign half way up; they won't be back. Where not practical, separate sides of roads with jersey barriers or, better, islands where strollers and bicyclists can wait, or, best, pedestrian overpasses. Major shoulderless avenues that handle large volumes can be made more fluid and safer that way. Some 1-way streets have, over time, come to anchor stately neighborhoods whose residents wouldn't change a thing. Restrictive routing really cuts back on number of other signs needed. In newer plats, a 1-way exit onto a main street minimizes traffic for entire subdivision. But this must be done sensibly with return streets closely parallel, or you wind up with a giant circulator with interior dead zones. Wherever people don't go becomes a ghost town, businesses close, money doesn't flow, but that's fine for a residential community. Motorists avoid downtown areas where it's inconvenient to move around and park. On the other hand, waste places can become bikeways, or parking spaces if handled well, which means spenders return. Combining alternative transportation—bikeways, elevators, frequent bus loops, monorails, moving sidewalks, subways, and viaducts—with strategic free parking enables far more people to visit a congested area. A more efficient flow everywhere would decrease smog, encourage alternatives including bicycling, mass transport, and walking, and, thus, boost health and bust high medical costs and HMO premiums. Amazingly, just letting go a few signs, futile attempts at control, and wrong perceptions would benefit society in big ways. Small issues do affect the entire fabric of life, because everything is interconnected. Bicycling is not only a good way to observe such relationships, it affords time and improves brain chemistry for thinking. The more you pedal the more you pity oblivious, sequestered motorists.

8) *Vote for life*: Americans can accept decay or affect progress, waste money or willfully economize. But without concern and consensus nothing resumes equilibrium. This means political action. Demand an accounting from your local council; they're there only because you voted. Shouldn't politics be a vocation for the best and brightest? Here's a tip for candidates. Instead of promising cliché *change*, which could mean nothing or worse, promise *modest continuous improvement*. Promise gradual property tax reduction, pressure on absentee landlords and neighborhood nuisances who lower property values for all, support for law enforcement, and such things as are identifiable or measurable. Towns take big hits when state tax revenues shrink. If towns increase property taxes, homeowners want progress in return. Promise to establish a system for certified citizens to report missing signs, potholes, road debris and snarls. This is easy with cell phones and global positioning gear. Act quickly to correct. Promise substance over style, then deliver. This may distress do-nothing politicians, but you should eventually notice that towns are actually more livable or at least no worse during their term. Residents will again consider voting a duty and a privilege; latest polls now show 80% don't. Politicians got everyone to accept less because that's what they wanted. Politics is only about people and how they use power lent to them. It should not disgust citizens, rather be a pleasure when done well. Unless office holders are contributing to their entire constituency's interests, does anyone really need them?

Every intersection should represent another place to behave civilly, react gracefully, show you care about others. The extent of this problem is so great, Roman Catholic Pope issued a "Drivers' 10 Commandments", leading off with "Do not kill", and made a point to mention, "Roads as a means of communion, not mortal harm... an occasion of sin." Towards the bottom, an afterthought, "Protect the more vulnerable," which suggests bicyclists, although it doesn't specify them. In fact, bicyclists are again neglected, as if they didn't exist. He would have included, "Only drive when necessary," but didn't directly and personally profit from oil consumption, as does Catholic church, whose treatment of Bishop Illich over these issues should never be excused as shouldn't conveniently forgotten hypocrisies of Renaissance papacies. Compared to your own gold mine where you'd have to toil yourself, the misery of minions may even be preferable. Those made to needlessly suffer lay their anguish and assets for free before divinity. And sarcasm translates poorly from verbal to written words.

Studies from 1995 to 2005 into community sustainability show that the more motor traffic there is, the fewer friends residents have, particularly children. Nobody wants to be outside among area residents amidst fumes and noise. Some children surveyed had no friends at all. A Status Syndrome that directly affects health has also been demonstrated. In every hierarchy, nation, organization or society, those with the lowest risk are always at the top, while those with the highest risk are at the bottom. Cheat, kill, lie and steal to get ahead, because you'll live longer, according to them. Where's any sense of community in that? Without community, all you get alienation and crime.

Average citizens couldn't care less about public safety, road conditions, or whatever doesn't seem to directly inconvenience them. Bridges collapse elsewhere. FEMA has everything under control. Those who say, "Bike and shut up," miss the point of what life's all about, giving back in better shape what's been borrowed, enjoyed already, and still of use for another generation. People get the government, services, World they deserve because of their inaction and neglect. Leaving all this up to councilmen and developers, some of whom have no idea or unspoken motives, results in just so many more chances that you won't make it home tonight. Get involved like your life depends on it, because it does.

Yet this globe continues to spin and everything reverts to what it once was. Many words later, he realized you can't wait for someone else to arise, enact revisions, and force issues. It was up to him, alone if necessary. Gather facts, form petitions, get them signed, and harangue legislators to act; sue as a last resort. Was he willing to assume such a burden? Why bother? So someone not yet born *might* benefit? No, simply to make contact, make your own life more interesting, something better than sitting alone.

