

Nearly 3 Million Voting Union Members Stand for Justice for Transit Workers



June 11, 2015

Dear Council Member:

All of our Brothers and Sisters in the Transport Workers Union Local 100 strongly support the goal of reducing traffic accidents, fatalities and injuries to the lowest possible number. Pedestrian fatalities may be at an all-time low - going all the way back to the days when horse-drawn buggies rolled along the streets as a major means of transportation – but we agree that the number of tragic accidents can, and should, be driven down even further.

We don't agree, however, that the answers include arresting, handcuffing and charging bus operators like common criminals for accidents that do not involve speeding, texting or some other form of demonstrably reckless behavior. We strongly urge you to consider the following facts and take note of the officials who have signed this letter as a sign of support for our position that the law needs to be corrected. This is not an either-or choice. Both pedestrians and civil servants can be protected.

FLAWED SIGNAL SYSTEM: Bus operators are given routes that require them to make left turns at extremely busy intersections with pedestrians, bicyclists and other motor vehicles. The city's traffic signal system will give a bus operator a green light to make that turn – while also giving a pedestrian a green signal to cross the street onto which the operator is turning. It's a recipe for disaster.

FLAWED BUS DESIGN: Buses have large driver-side mirrors and other significant obstructions that prevent operators from having a complete view of the street to their front and left. As the bus turns left, the “blind spot” obstructs an operator's view, and is absolutely detrimental to pedestrian safety.

FLAWED LOGIC: Advocates contend that before the “Right of Way Law” drivers whose vehicles hit pedestrians in a crosswalk got off with a “small slap on the wrist.” That may be the case with some drivers but not MTA bus operators. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has strict protocols involving pedestrian accidents. With or without evidence of recklessness, the MTA may reclassify the Bus Operator in a non-operating title, that often brings with it a significant loss of pay and seniority in the new title or the Bus Operator becomes a shifter, moving buses in the depot for storage, repair or deployment. If after a thorough investigation, there is a determination of fault, the Operator faces termination. There are many options to increasing the safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The most forceful and effective measure, we believe, is changing the traffic signal system. At intersections where a bus operator has to make a left turn - as dictated by his or her assigned route - the city should install a “left-turn only” signal that freezes all other traffic and pedestrians. No pedestrian or cyclist would receive a signal to proceed across the street until drivers in the left-turn lane have a red light and are ordered to stop. The city can also place traffic agents and police officers at intersections where bus drivers must make left turns.

Preventability: The advocates believe there is no such thing as an accident. They refer to accidents as “traffic violence” and all involved in such incidents as violent criminals. This is a ridiculously flawed notion. Bus Operators are committed to total preventability, but until they are provided with the proper equipment, and allowed to operate in a proper environment, accidents can and will continue to occur through no fault of the Bus Operator.

Apples and Oranges: The Mayor has stated that Bus Operators will be treated exactly the same as drivers of personal cars under Vision Zero. Bus Operators are in a class by themselves. They are the only class of worker that is forced into pedestrian rights of way thousands of times every day. No other driver operates under these circumstances, and in such a flawed system as described above.

The MTA can revise routes to minimize the necessity to make left turns and can turn to other bus designs where mirrors don't obstruct drivers' views. Pedestrian alert devices can be placed on every bus to mitigate against the dangerous blind spots. Fix the signal system. Fix the buses.

Don't blame the worker by arresting dedicated and law-abiding civil servants for tragic accidents that are accidents – and not the result of reckless behavior.

Sincerely,

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