

Dangerous Traffic Incident

In late June two bicyclists had a dangerous close call with a vehicle while they were riding in the bike lane along Highway 58 in Pine Knoll Shores. When the town was advised of the incident, Mayor Ken Jones submitted the following letter to the editor of the *Carteret County News-Times*. Some thoughts from one of the bikers follow the reprint of the mayor's letter.

As our little island gets more and more crowded, a recent incident in PKS highlights the need for everyone, residents and visitors alike, to take extra precautions on the highway and to respect the rights of others. One morning this week, two female cyclists from PKS were finishing up a 26-mile bike ride at about 8:30 a.m. when they were almost hit head-on by a speeding white pickup truck passing a line of cars at an excessive rate of speed. The truck pulled into the oncoming lane and into the bike lane on the opposite side of the road, nearly hitting the cyclists. The incident happened so fast the cyclists were unable to get any information on the truck other than the fact that it was white. They are hoping someone in the line of cars that was passed witnessed and reported this reckless driving episode.

Now we approach the July 4th weekend and peak tourism season. It is especially important for everyone to show awareness for the safety of others. Bikers, joggers, walkers, children, adults and mothers with baby strollers all use the crosswalks and shoulders of Highway 58, inches away from traffic sometimes traveling in excess of the 35 and 45 mph maximum speed limit. Drivers, cyclists and pedestrians need to be aware of their vulnerabilities, obey the rules, slow down, and exercise some common sense before we have a tragedy.

Comments by Cheryl Smith

My friend Maureen Young and I were the two cyclists who nearly met our demise in the incident mentioned in Mayor Jones' letter above. We, along with many others, can be seen mornings cycling up and down the island as we try to stay in shape or, in our case, train for the one-week, 442-mile Cycle NC Mountains to Coast bike ride.

Obviously, cycling on the island becomes more stressful as traffic picks up during peak tourist season. A few questions I am commonly asked:

1. *Aren't you nervous with all the traffic?*

Yes, that is why I wear bright clothing and have a flashing red light on the back of my bike and a flashing white light on the front, constantly check my mirror, remain exceedingly alert to my surroundings, try to ride during less busy hours and follow all rules of the road.

2. *Why are cyclists sometimes in the same lane as cars?*

There are several reasons you may see a cyclist not riding on the shoulder:

- To avoid sand, gravel and glass in the bike lane. Unfortunately, along many parts of the island, this is a common scene due to gravel and sand driveways that flow out into the road. All of these substances can cause a tire blowout or cause the cyclist to fall—and he or she could fall into traffic.
- To avoid obstacles such as trash cans and yard waste that are frequently put in the bike lane
- To avoid walkers and joggers also using this narrow piece of road
- To avoid cars parked on the shoulder
- To avoid being hit by a turning vehicle (at intersections or lights).

2. *Why don't cyclists ride on the path in Emerald Isle and Atlantic Beach?*

Cyclists who are riding on Highway 58 are typically riding 18-20 mph. Riding at these speeds on the path would be dangerous to the pedestrians, strollers and children who are leisurely using the path.

3. *Isn't the road for cars, not bikes?*

The *North Carolina Driver's Handbook*, published by the NC Department of Motor Vehicles, states: "Bicyclists usually ride on the right side of the lane,

but are entitled to use the full lane. . . . Drivers wishing to pass a bicyclist may do so only when there is abundant clearance and no oncoming traffic is in the opposing lane. When passing a bicyclist, always remember the bicyclist is entitled to use of the full lane." Visit ncdot.gov and click on "Driver Manuals" to view a copy of this handbook.

4. *So what can be done to ensure safe roads for everyone?*

- Slow down and appreciate cyclists' vulnerability. It might take you 30 seconds longer to arrive at your destination but if you hit a cyclist, you are going to be very late for your appointment.
- Give cyclists as much room as possible, just as you do a policeman at a traffic stop. More than 20 states have passed laws requiring motorists to give bicycles on the roadway three feet of space. Remember that the cyclist is trying to stay out of your way, but obstacles at times make this very difficult.
- If you live on Highway 58, consider cleaning off gravel, sand and glass in front of your residence.
- Do not text and drive. After all, this is the law.
- Look before you exit your car. Cyclists are terrified of being "doored."
- Do not ever blow your horn at a cyclist. It is extremely startling. I was once riding with someone who had an accident and broke an arm due to the blaring horn of a passing car.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) campaign "Watch For Me NC" says that "[e]ach year more than 2,400 pedestrians and 960 bicyclists are hit by vehicles in North Carolina, making North Carolina one of the least safe states in the US for walking and bicycling. On average, about 160 pedestrians and 20 bicyclists are killed each year in the state, representing about 12% of all traffic fatalities that occur on North Carolina roads. In collisions with cars, pedestrians, in particular, have a lot to lose. Those hit at 40 mph have an 85 percent chance of dying." Visit watchformenc.org for more information on this program.

As a young professional with a child who is a full-time resident, I, too, have time constraints when trying to get to work, catch a plane or get my 9-year-old daughter to school or gym practice, but I know during the peak tourist season to leave 10 minutes early as I might have to stop at a crosswalk, slow for a cyclist, or it might take forever to turn left onto Highway 58.

With the nation's obesity and health problems, I think we all should be motivating and applauding those who are outside exercising, whether it be walking, cycling or just trying to get to the beach. In fact, if more people would bike or walk to the beach, our beach parking lots wouldn't be overflowing.

So let's all watch out for each other. Here's to a happy and safe season for everyone.

This Month's Puzzle Solutions

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