

Connecticut General Assembly Transportation Committee
Bicycle Safety Testimony
Hearing on SB 484
Feb. 11, 2015

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for inviting me to testify today about bicycle safety in Connecticut. I'm especially appreciative of your time given the momentous transportation issues that the Transportation Committee ... and the General Assembly as a whole ... are working on this session.

On the issue of bicycle safety, I believe you have the opportunity to potentially save lives now and in the future. There is a dangerous game of chicken being played by motorists and bicyclists on Connecticut's state highways.

Currently, Connecticut has installed yellow flashing lights at crosswalks where bike paths cross state highways. When bicyclists on a bike path come up to a road, they can press a button on traffic light pole to make it flash yellow. The flashing light is supposed to signal motorists that a bicyclist wants to cross the road.

Instead of stopping to let a bicycle pass, however, many motorists ignore the lights. In some instances that I've witnessed along the Farmington Valley Rail Trail, motorists actually speed up to pass through the crossing as quickly as possible. Motorists treat the yellow flashing lights much the same as they do at traffic lights they encounter at intersections: they slow down or speed up but do not stop.

I have witnessed several instances where bicyclists, believing that traffic will stop for the flashing yellow signal, have come frighteningly close to being run down. I believe it is only a matter of time before one or more bicyclists is struck by a passing car. I am especially worried about children who ride our bike paths.

I suggest that Connecticut residents - especially bicyclists - would be better served by the system implemented by Massachusetts. The Bay State has a similar system as Connecticut but with two important differences: the traffic lights at the intersections of roadways and bike paths constantly flash yellow until a bicyclist

presses the button to cross. Then, the lights start flashing red and the bicyclist is given a "Walk" sign much like pedestrians do in crossing streets in urban areas.

Because I often bike both in Connecticut and Massachusetts, I have found the Massachusetts solution to be remarkably more effective in stopping traffic, avoiding confrontations between bicyclists and motorists, and most important, to be considerably safer.

I urge you and your fellow members of the General Assembly to support legislation to change Connecticut's law governing bike path roadway crossings to mirror Massachusetts' system. Please appropriate the funds necessary to update the bicycle traffic lights found on state highways. Doing so may save lives.

Again, I want to thank you for your consideration of this important public safety matter.

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