

## Advocacy Column

Sue Barker, NBW Advocacy Chair, [advocacy@nbwclub.org](mailto:advocacy@nbwclub.org)

### Important steps to take if you are in a bicycle-automobile accident

**A** recent interchange on the NBW list serve between members who have been hit by cars highlighted our tendency to pick ourselves up, check for injuries and, if possible, continue on our way. The common thread in these exchanges was that few ever reported the accidents to the police.

When motorists leave an accident scene that has not been reported to the police it is likely they do not realize the potential for serious injury and never give the incident another thought. Without an official report, the incident will not appear in local or state accident statistics, giving officials reason to believe there are few bicycle-automobile accidents on our roads. State and local officials who believe our roads are safe for bicyclists are less likely to pay attention to bicyclists' demands for safe streets.

It will be a great day when we no longer have to fear bicycle-automobile collisions. Until that day here is a list of steps to follow if you have an accident. The list was compiled with advice and direction from lawyer and NBW member Don MacManus.

1. Check to see if you are seriously injured and take appropriate steps to care for yourself.
2. Call the police to come to the scene to make sure the accident is properly reported.
3. Write down the name, address, and driver's license number of all cars involved in the accident
4. If you have a camera, or a cell phone with a camera in it, take pictures of the scene.
5. Get the name of the car owner's insurance company from the car's registration.
6. Get the name, address and phone number of all witnesses.
7. Write a description of any injuries you have and anyone else has.
8. Seek proper medical treatment.
9. When the police come, be courteous but cautious of your description of the accident. Remain objective.
10. When you get home write in detail how the accident happened. Describe damage to your bicycle, the car and anything else. Make a diagram of how everything happened.
11. If injuries to you or your bicycle are serious, contact an attorney to help you. Most attorneys will not charge to evaluate your case, but check first.



### Viva America Bike Tour

Bladimir Rodriguez is putting together a bike tour to Washington DC to commemorate the inauguration of President-Elect Barack Obama.

Date: January 14, 2009  
Depart from: Rhode Island State House  
Itinerary: Providence, RI to Washington DC  
Total mileage: 420 miles  
Average daily distance: 70 miles  
Type of group: Diverse  
Support vehicle supplied

Contact Bladimir Rodriguez: [intercontinentaltravel@hotmail.com](mailto:intercontinentaltravel@hotmail.com)

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# Striving for Equality

Mark Dieterich, Providence Bicycle Coalition

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**I**t's been a tough year for cyclists trying to make their way into and out of Providence from the East.

In October 2007, RIDOT (Rhode Island Dept. of Transportation) closed the Washington Bridge pedestrian walkway so they could continue the I-195 construction. Just a month later, RIDOT posted a reduced weight limit on the I-95 Pawtucket River Bridge. While cyclists don't use this particular bridge, any trucks over the weight limit are being forced to detour over the Division Street Bridge and cyclists using this route have been forced to deal with increased and bigger motorized traffic. Fast forward to June 2008 and RIDOT now has a construction project underway on the Henderson Bridge. Three commonly used cycling routes, all three affected by construction or closed at the same time!

The Providence Bicycle Coalition<sup>1</sup>, spearheaded by Bike-to-Brown<sup>2</sup>, started actively advocating for better consideration for cyclists during RIDOT projects, in November 2007, when we first heard rumors of our impending hardships. I'd like to provide you with a brief overview of our trials and tribulations, successes and failures, and a look at the future as cyclists strive for equality on our roadways. Should you be inclined to read a more complete detail of events, the entire saga is documented on the Bike-to-Brown website<sup>3</sup>.

This advocacy effort started with a letter from Bike-to-Brown, signed by a significant number of Brown University bicycle commuters, when we learned of RIDOT's plan to reduce the Henderson Bridge to a single travel lane in each direction. The letter reminded the RIDOT Director that they had already closed one bridge to cyclists, and asked for some minimal concessions during the Henderson construction project, including: repairs to the multitude of street lights that have been dark for years, extending the sidewalks on the West end of the bridge, mitigating the road flooding issues, installing "share the road" signs, providing debris and snow clearing on the sidewalks, installing additional speed limit signs, and providing suitable police patrols during commuting hours. Two months later, after receiving no reply from RIDOT, the Office of the Vice President for

Public Affairs and University Relations drafted a letter of support of Bike-to-Brown and sent it to the RIDOT Director.

Two weeks later, the sleeping giant awakes and Bike-to-Brown received a response from RIDOT. In this letter we learned that, assuming all goes well, the project would require two full construction seasons! More bad news. As for our specific concerns raised, RIDOT assured us they would continue sweeping and clearing debris as they had done in the past. Naturally, we wouldn't have raised this as an issue if we felt they had been doing a good job. They informed us the street lights would be dealt with as part of their statewide efforts, based upon level of need, but with no timetable for completion. Furthermore, they concluded by informing us that sidewalk maintenance is under the jurisdiction of the city or town in which they are located. However, for the interim, they did promise to clear snow and ice until they could determine appropriate responsibility for continued maintenance.



It would be an understatement to say we were underwhelmed by RIDOT's letter and overall commitment to alternative transportation, so we gathered a small band of representatives to attend the next State Transportation Committee (STC) meeting. On the agenda would be a request from RIDOT to require bicycles to use the sidewalk area on the Henderson Bridge for the duration of the construction. I truly believe the STC members were shocked to see a small crowd of people turn up at one of their meetings, raising concerns over something which they likely thought was going to be a formality. RIDOT started the session by presenting their case for why they felt it was necessary to restrict bicycle access during construction. Next, the STC members provided us with ample time to make our case, focusing on three fundamental issues:

- 1) The sidewalks are in terrible condition and simply end on the West side of the bridge; 2) exiting the sidewalks on the East side of the bridge is truly dangerous—cyclists may need to cross four full lanes of traffic without a light or crosswalk, and 3) the bridge railings are too low for RIDOT to legally recommend cyclists ride on the sidewalks.

The entire group continued to discuss various options for increasing the safety of cyclists. In the end, the STC members felt RIDOT had not done enough due diligence to warrant granting the restriction and the vote was tabled until the next meeting, allowing RIDOT another month to plan how they could better accommodate cyclists during the construction. We left this meeting feeling it had gone just about as well as we could expect.

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<sup>1</sup><http://bikeprovidence.org>

<sup>2</sup><http://biketobrown.brown.edu>

<sup>3</sup><http://biketobrown.brown.edu/?s=henderson>

One month later, we met again for the next STC meeting. This time, RIDOT brought a full complement of engineering plans and even a couple of project engineers. They presented a number of detailed street-level photographs, documenting many of the sidewalk issues we had brought to light. Clearly someone had taken time to examine the real problems we brought to their attention. The STC eventually voted to limit bicycles to using the sidewalk, whenever the roadway was reduced to 15 feet or less, with the understanding that RIDOT would:

1. Limit bicycles to the sidewalk only on the side of the bridge which has a reduced travel lane. Furthermore, only reduce the inbound or outbound traffic to a single travel lane at any one time.
2. Post extensive bicycle and pedestrian detour signs, so cyclists don't suddenly find themselves in a single travel lane with many cars.
3. Install "Share the Road" signs at all areas where cyclists will be exiting the sidewalks.
4. Install a crosswalk at the East side of the bridge, where cyclists may have to cross four lanes of traffic.
5. Uncover the primordial sidewalks. Yes, there were actually sidewalks on the West end of the bridge, covered by 3+ inches of sand, dirt and grass!
6. Maintain the entire length of sidewalk from Massasoit on the East to Patterson Ave on the West. This would include repairing certain sections of sidewalk where there are currently significant bumps/drops or broken pavement.
7. Mitigate the drainage issues as part of the bridge maintenance.

Overall, we were quite pleased with the concessions made by RIDOT.

Fast forward to the present day .... how has RIDOT done? So far, RIDOT has successfully adhered to promises number 1, 2, 4 and 5. Not all of these were accomplished without some pain. Initially, a sub-contractor for RIDOT incorrectly installed signs requiring bicycles to use the sidewalk on the side of the bridge without lane restrictions. It took over five weeks from when we initially alerted RIDOT to this mistake before the signs were taken down! It was three weeks after the construction began that the crosswalk was in place, finally providing some relief to cyclists trying to cross all those lanes of traffic. Only time will tell whether or not RIDOT honors the three remaining promises. It's looking rather unlikely that we will see any "Share the Road" signs or improvements to the existing sidewalks. Never fear, we will continue to remind them of their promises.

I'd like to leave you with some of the lessons I've learned from this almost year-long advocacy effort:

1. While I truly believe RIDOT had good intentions going into this project, almost all of the actual work is done by sub-contractors and these sub-contractors do not have to answer to the general public. From what I have witnessed, RIDOT is either uninterested or unable to convince sub-contractors to respond to issues beyond the normal scope of a project in a timely manner.
2. It is critical that more citizens and advocates start attending local and state government meetings. Had we not made an effort to attend the STC meetings, we wouldn't even have the concessions we are "enjoying" today. The meetings are typically during work hours, which can make them difficult to attend, but there are many of us. If we band together in an organized fashion, we can certainly make a difference.
3. State and local agencies are currently under huge financial burdens. While this does not completely let them off the hook, be reasonable with your requests. Try to think outside the box and come to the table with solutions; cheap ones whenever possible.
4. It's far too easy in this electronic age to opt for the easy way out and just send an email. While better than nothing, a signed letter and, whenever possible, an in-person appearance still carries far more weight.

In closing, I'd encourage everyone to find a cause they believe in and start advocating for it! You may not achieve complete success, but I can assure you that you will rest better at night knowing you've made the effort.

Until next time, keep the rubber side down and the wind at your back.

Mark

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# WELCOME

## New Members

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Theodore C. Bell, Coventry, RI  
David & Damaris Berner, Bristol, RI  
Enric Bourret, Providence, RI  
Keith Cabecesikas, Taunton, MA  
Paul De Guorcio, Newport, RI  
Mary Hocking, Raynham, MA  
Elizabeth Ar. Keith, North Dartmouth, MA  
Jeffrey L. Lykins, Bristol, RI  
Robert J. McCue, North Dartmouth, MA  
Joe Rodrigues, Riverside, RI  
Eric P. Taylor, Seekonk, MA  
Barbara Welch, Plymouth, MA