

Deputation to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee

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My name is Daniella Levy-Pinto. I come today as a private citizen to speak to you about my experience as a pedestrian who is totally blind. I get around Toronto independently with my guide dog, Angelo. A comprehensive road safety strategy may well make the difference between life and death for people like me.

I believe that we all agree that deaths of vulnerable road users on Toronto's streets are unacceptable. But if you are serious about the aspirational goal of zero fatalities, you also need to be serious about the commitments required to reach that goal. I respectfully ask this committee to make safety of vulnerable road users the paramount consideration.

The Road Safety Plan that was unveiled one week ago does very little to enhance my safety as a blind pedestrian. The plan is very vague about how it will increase safety for people with disabilities (beyond installing five accessible pedestrian signals per year that are welcome, but not sufficient).

People with disabilities are not even mentioned as one of the five emphasis areas of the plan, even though we are among the most vulnerable road users, along with children and seniors.

I will focus on one of the biggest concerns that blind and visually impaired people face: drivers turning at intersections, especially if they are allowed to do so on a red light, when the pedestrian has the right of way. Only in the last three months, I have had three instances of drivers making a right on red turn as I was starting to cross the road, when I knew that I had the right of way – using the accessible pedestrian signal. My guide dog saw the cars and stepped back, but the drivers kept on coming! They sped along, and perhaps they did not even notice me at the corner, I assume they were checking the upcoming traffic.

This has happened at an intersection right around the corner from where I live in mid-town Toronto and at the U of T campus, where I study. I cannot avoid those intersections.

The Road Safety Plan will implement the prohibition of right on red turns only at very few intersections, at specific times of the day. That will actually make things more confusing. How will that information be conveyed to vulnerable road users attempting to cross an intersection? As a totally blind pedestrian, how will I know when I may expect a driver to make a turn, even if I have the right of way?

Turns on red are also problematic for children and for seniors. How can children learn to cross a street at a light, when a car may just speed into their path? Unless a prohibition of right turns on red is implemented across the board (as NYC and Montreal among other cities have done), traffic lights will continue giving pedestrians a false sense of security. It is not humanly possible to be looking to two sides

at once, and drivers making turns are looking for the upcoming traffic, not necessarily for a pedestrian crossing at the light.

In 2013, the third most common type of collision was when "Vehicle turns right while pedestrian crosses with right-of-way at intersection": one in every seven pedestrian injuries in that year were the result of right turning vehicles (Toronto Traffic Safety Unit, 2013).

The piecemeal approach of the Road Safety Plan that you are discussing today does very little to enhance pedestrian safety equally across the city. Frankly, I don't want to be killed or injured by a distracted or inattentive driver. I don't want to be the victim who ends up getting an intersection singled out as being so dangerous that the City decides to implement the ban on the right turn on red, or for those roads to be made a pedestrian corridor.

According to the background of the Road Safety plan, approximately 90% of traffic-related collisions involve human error; aggressive driving and distraction from 2011-2015 was a factor in 66% of all collisions in which people were killed or seriously injured. I am extremely cautious – I always start crossing at the beginning of a cycle and I don't cross if I am not sure if it is safe. There is nothing more I can do to protect myself from drivers that may be trying either to bit the light or to take a turn quickly.

The Road Safety Plan recognizes aggressive drivers as a problem. It also expects that drivers will be attentive and follow the rules. The data suggest that they don't always: between 2008 and 2012, the majority of pedestrians (67%) had the right of way when they were involved in a collision; in contrast, only 13% of pedestrians and 12% of cyclists were inattentive at the time of a collision (Toronto Public Health, 2015). Of course, there is more at stake for pedestrians than for drivers, who have little to lose if they injure a vulnerable road user.

An approach based on the Vision Zero philosophy aims to eliminate preventable road fatalities by recognizing that people make mistakes. Vision Zero puts lives above driver convenience. As the proportion of aging people increases, so will the number of vulnerable road users. We need policies to minimize the consequences of human error, and the funds to implement the necessary infrastructure changes. Please do not settle for a plan that will stop short from keeping all pedestrians like myself safe. As elected officials, you have the opportunity to lead the City in the right direction, and the responsibility to stop preventable deaths in our streets.