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## Dangerous Streets

Posted by [West Side Spirit](#) on February 16, 2011 · [View Comments](#)

By [Megan Finnegan](#)

The Department of Transportation released 2010 data on traffic fatalities Feb. 7, announcing that the city has sustained a four-year low in vehicle-related deaths. But Upper West Side community activists say there is more work to be done to make streets safer for pedestrians.

Several advocacy groups submitted a proposal to the Department of Transportation last year to address problems of pedestrian safety along the 96th Street corridor, which encompasses streets between Riverside Park and Central Park on West 95th, 96th and 97th streets. There are many schools in this area, and local school officials and parents have been vocal advocates of increased safety measures from the DOT.

Amy Winarsky is a local resident pushing for more safety measures in the area. Her son used to go to P.S. 75, an elementary school on West End Avenue between 95th and 96th streets. She acknowledges that the recent installations of turning lanes has helped the area, but said the DOT has not gone far enough.

Winarsky wants the DOT to "create a physical structure that forces the drivers to carefully proceed past the school."

"The children have to be mindful of what the drivers are doing," she said. "It's inappropriate that little kids are being asked to be mindful when it should be the drivers following the law."

Winarsky echoes the thoughts of many concerned parents and citizens who observe the many factors contributing to a risky environment for kids crossing the streets around the school.

"I realize that they [the DOT] need to study and be mindful and that they're trustees of the public money, but in the meantime we have hundreds of little kids and two way-over-worked crossing guards. It's up the drivers to control themselves, and it's up to the DOT to make the drivers comply," Winarsky said.

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Council Member Gale Brewer has also recognized the issue, and has been working with the DOT for several years to improve conditions for pedestrians in the 96th Street area. "I'm not a transportation expert, but I can see it's a problem," Brewer said.

Tila Duhaime, of the Upper West Side Streets Renaissance Campaign, is happy that the ongoing conversation among neighborhood residents, activist groups, city government and enforcement agencies about pedestrian safety has evolved in the past few years. But Duhaime agrees that there are still areas in dire need of improvements.

"Ninety-sixth and Broadway stands out as a very bad one," she said. "Ninety-sixth and fill-in-the-blank is generally a bad intersection, but Broadway is the worst."

The problems besetting the area result mainly from cars entering and exiting the West Side Highway on the west and the 97th Street Transverse through Central Park on the east. Drivers often maintain highway speeds in this area, putting pedestrians and cyclists at increased risk.

The 20th Precinct identified intersections where vehicle/pedestrian crashes had occurred last year on the Upper West Side. There were a total of 20 accidents in 2010 (and an additional five accidents involving cars and bicyclists), none resulting in fatalities and all at different intersections, except for where 72nd Street meets Columbus Avenue, where there were a total of two. Safety advocates, however, say that there are many more factors to consider when determining the most dangerous areas on the Upper West Side.

Last year, the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives conducted research at several busy intersections around the city, and 96th and Broadway was one of the targeted spots. Eight volunteers stood at the intersection for eight hours and observed a total of 932 traffic violations over the course of that time, 350 of which were drivers disregarding traffic signals.

"The most common problem was red-light running," Kim Martineau of Transportation Alternatives said in an email. "We also analyzed crash data for this intersection between 1995 and 2005, and found 59 crashes total that injured 35 pedestrians and 24 cyclists."

Duhaime, who was one of the volunteers observing that day, said that ticketing and enforcement of traffic laws



72nd Street and Columbus Avenue is considered one of the most dangerous intersections on the Upper West Side. Photo by Andrew Schwartz



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can help alleviate the dangers to pedestrians, but that increased enforcement doesn't go far enough.

"As a long-term solution, we shouldn't be relying on the police to be the sole enforcement mechanism," Duhaime said. Her group advocates the incorporation of "self-enforcing designs" into city streetscapes, "changing the geometry of the streets so that it's harder to do the illegal moves."

Duhaime acknowledges that none of the proposed changes alone, such as removing a few parking spaces to increase drivers' sightlines, would make an enormous difference, and hopes that the DOT will make comprehensive updates that involve many small measures. She said that initiatives like curb extensions and the installation of high-visibility crosswalks will help keep pedestrians safer.

"If you do all of these things together in a concentrated area, it really changes the feel of the neighborhood."

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