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Register, road test cyclists: Make 'em accountable

Sticker program helps deter thefts, ID those in mishaps

Bicyclists in New York may soon need a sticker to ride, if a city council member there has his way.

In a bid to rein in rogue riders, Eric Ulrich, a Republican from Queens, wants adult cyclists in the Big Apple to fork over a small fee and affix an ID tag to their vehicles.

Last Friday, Ulrich was reported in the New York Post as saying bike riders often scare the hell out of seniors and don't have proper identification on them when accidents happen.

"There seems to be a double standard when it comes to enforcing the traffic laws," he noted.

Predictably, this upset cycling advocates. But I agree with Ulrich that, in both Vancouver and New York City, cyclists are getting a soft ride and public safety is being compromised.

Let's backtrack a bit. Cycling is cyclical; it's gone in and out of fashion since the so-called golden age of cycling in the 1890s.

Now, with a pedal-pushing mayor in the driver's seat, Vancouver city hall has gone bike mad. It pumps out a stream of pro-cycle propaganda, including the claim that "cyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as drivers."

When the rubber hits the road, however, cyclists don't have the same duties as motorists. They don't have to take a road test, get a driver's licence, register and insure their bikes and display a licence plate or other ID. And I think they should.

I mean, if taxpayers have to pay millions for bike lanes, shouldn't operators of these vulnerable vehicles be required to have a rudimentary knowledge of our road rules?

As North Vancouver resident Anthony Buckland points out, anyone seems to be able to hop on a bike and behave as he or she sees fit.

"I have never heard of any cyclist anywhere in our local paper's reporting areas being stopped by police, charged with anything and being obliged to pay a fine or suffer other penalties," Buckland, a retired computer analyst, wrote to the North Shore News.

Vancouver Coun. Suzanne Anton of the Non-Partisan Association, an avid cyclist, told me Friday that a registration system for cyclists would mean "way too much bureaucracy." And Arno Schortinghuis, president of the Vancouver Area Cycling Coalition, said cycling is too worthwhile for barriers to be put in its way.

But what is more important than safety? Why do we licence everything from dogs to boats, but not bikes?

Newspaper records show compulsory bike licensing in Vancouver dates to 1938, and has fallen in and out of fashion ever since.

Former Vancouver council member George Puil remembers that, when he was a teen in 1945, his bike had to be registered. "It was a sticker that was put on the frame just behind the front wheel," he told me.

Puil, though, now says such a licensing system would be too costly. But the city of Madison, Wis., clearly doesn't agree with him. It says its bike-registration program helps in everything from theft deterrence to rider identification in case of an accident.

Vancouver cyclists demand to be recognized as full citizens of the road. They should earn that privilege, just like other road users.



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