

September 15,

2014

To The Cambridge City Council:

I am writing in respect to Policy Order #11, concerning the use of truck side-guard protections.

In the past two years, five metro-area cyclists and pedestrians have been killed by right-turning trucks. Every one of them was preventable: a simple truck-bike or truck-pedestrian collision on a city street can break the vulnerable person's arm or leg, but death most typically occurs when the pedestrian or cyclist is thrown under the rear wheel and gets crushed. The presence of sideguards – inexpensive and easily installed screens or bars that keep the hit person from being pulled under the truck and crushed to death by the rear wheels – reduced side-of-truck pedestrian fatalities by 20% and bicycle fatalities by 61% after being mandated in the UK for nearly all trucks over 4 tons in 1986.

In the USA, a National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) study found an annual rate of about 100-120 pedestrian and cyclist deaths where first impact was against the side of a large truck; and that nearly half of all cyclists who were killed by a tractor-trailer collision had first impacted the truck's side.

Boston, Somerville, New York City, and dozens of other cities are beginning to mandate not only sideguard but also "front cross-over" and "right side blind spot" mirrors that let drivers see anything at least three feet tall within one foot of the vehicle anywhere across the front or down the right side of the truck. Some are also discussing the use of back-up or side-view cameras, proximity sensors, audiovisual alarms, and other underride-prevention devices.

Cambridge, a city where a wonderfully high percentage of people walk and bike, needs to join this process. Making trucks safer to the vulnerable people around them is a new and rapidly evolving field. However, rather than simply expanding the current 3-truck pilot to the planned 12 trucks, or copying the policy statements of another city mandating the use of sideguards, **Cambridge has a unique opportunity to be a national leader by setting up a two-year "Safe Truck" program of trying and rigorously evaluating the different methods and equipment that are now becoming available.**

The City Council should also instruct the Manager's staff to meet with local pedestrian and cycling advocates to discuss their needs and insights in this matter. In addition, they should explore ways to encourage, support, and share experience-based insights with voluntary efforts by local private and non-profit sector organizations and business to also begin implementing these kinds of safety enhancements.

I know for certain that if the City Council got behind this initiative, safety tech experts at Volpe and MIT would be happy to partner with the City.

The two-year goal should be both a set of state-of-the-art technical recommendations as well as a draft of a policy, ready for City Council discussion, that mandates the appropriate mix of methods and equipment not only for city owned vehicles and those of all contractors doing business with the city, but for all trucks driving in Cambridge.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Miller

92 Henry St.

18
LivableStreets Alliance 70 Pacific St. / Sidney Cambridge MA 02139 T: 617.621.1746 F: 617.716.2085 info@livablestreets.info livablestreets.info

18
LivableStreets Rethinking urban transportation