

Protect pedestrians on N. Main

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It happened at night just one month ago. An 87 year old Providence woman tried to cross North Main Street at Doyle Avenue, was struck by a car and seriously injured. Attempting to cross at this poorly lit intersection, this slow moving, elderly woman had little chance to avoid the car in this zone of fast moving traffic.

Not unusual, of course, for a pedestrian to be hit by a passing car, but in this case the question has to be raised as to whether this accident could have been avoided: the answer has to be an unequivocal yes.

The scene of the accident is part of the old Randall Square area, one portion of the East Side project, the largest urban renewal development in the city of Providence. This newly renamed Moshassuck Square is the present scene of much construction and road building activity. This work, especially the Charles Street bridge and the rebuilding of North Main Street, has diverted an inordinate amount of traffic into the area and made driving and walking in this zone extremely hazardous, as numerous accidents attest. Yet nothing is being done to rectify the situation.

Charlesgate North, the 14 story high building for the elderly, is located on North Main at the foot of Doyle Avenue. Diagonally across the intersection is the University Heights shopping center, the most conveniently located shopping facility available for the residents of this 200 unit high rise. But try to get there from Charlesgate! It has reached the ludicrous

situation where some of the residents now fear the walk so much that they use the services of the transportation van for the elderly which makes infrequent trips during the week to that shopping center.

Although the problem is made worse by the current heavy stream of traffic in the area, throughout the entire three years of time that Charlesgate North has been occupied, there has never been adequate provision made for crossing these streets. A most pitiful sight to see is an elderly couple caught in the middle of the traffic and, fearfully, making their halting way across the street between the rushing cars, some of which may defer to them; most do not.

The problem was supposed to be resolved when the computer operated series of traffic lights in Moshassuck Square went into operation. Well, of course, months have gone by and the lights are still not working properly. Now, only the red lights blink and the drivers of the cars pay little attention as they go their merry way, avoiding crossing cars in a dodgem-like exercise and giving absolutely no due to the elderly pedestrians.

The situation will likely get worse now that the 199-bed Charlesgate Nursing Home has opened. Patients and staff alike will still have the problem of crossing this busy thoroughfare without adequate provisions being made for pedestrians. Without some help matters will even worsen as the subsequent 200 units to be built next to the nursing home are added to this complex for the elderly.

It is difficult to explain why this dangerous situation has not been alleviated because the solution seems so simple. Why not have a pedestrian push button to turn on red and yellow walking lights; at the least, until the construction is finished?

Why not have a policeman on duty at certain hours of the morning and afternoon to aid these people in crossing the streets? And if not a policeman, why not have a crossing guard as we have near our schools? Should there not be additional pedestrian marked crossings since the present one is poorly sited and little used leading, as it does, to a blank wall of the shopping center which people are unable to hurdle.

Any one of these measures is easily instituted, so why is it not done? The answer may lie partly in the fact that our traffic planners tend to think in terms of auto traffic rather than people traffic. But which is more important?

One of the joys of being a pedestrian in England is that once he steps on the "zebra" (a well-marked and illuminated pedestrian crossing), the pedestrian has the right of way, not the auto. As an English planner once told me, "The trouble with you Americans is that you build your cities for cars, we build ours for people."

With \$6.6 million of federal money coming into the city for major repairs on local streets, there will be other sizable disruptions of traffic patterns in the near future. But the point the traffic planners must remember is that the needs of the pedestrians should come first, and properly marked pedestrian crossings must have top priority as traffic is rerouted.

If the traffic planners would do their job now, then we would not have to observe "Little Joey" as he courageously crosses North Main Street, using his one good arm to maneuver his wheelchair through the traffic and up the hill to reach the shopping center.

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