



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senate Majority Passes Legislation to Improve Road Safety, Protect Bike Paths And Pedestrians

BRIAN KAVANAGH May 20, 2021

| ISSUE: [ROAD SAFETY](#), [BIKE SAFETY](#), [ROADS](#), [BIKERS](#), [PEDESTRIANS](#)



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(Albany, NY) Today, the Senate Democratic Majority advanced a legislative package to help prevent tragedies by making our roads safer, and making additional protections for bicyclists

and pedestrians. This package will require instruction on and improve bike and pedestrian safety, school bus safety, railroad crossing safety, increase penalties for endangering workers in highway work zones, and require charter busses to have commercial GPS technology. Additionally, this legislative package includes funding educational programs for safe roadways, and requires that any for-hire vehicle that uses a smartphone app needs to incorporate identification safety measures.

“Today, the Senate Democratic Majority is passing a legislative package that will improve safety on the roads for drivers, bikers, and pedestrians alike,” Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said. “Under my leadership, we will continue to invest in New York’s infrastructure and put forth policies like these that will make our roads safer for all who use them. I thank Senate Transportation Committee Chair Tim Kennedy and all the bill sponsors for putting forth this legislation that will help to save lives and prevent serious injuries.”

Senator Tim Kennedy, Bill Sponsor and Chair of the Transportation Committee said, “This comprehensive package of legislation advanced by the Democratic Conference prioritizes safety and accountability on New York’s roadways. I thank our Majority Leader, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, for continuing to drive forward a progressive transportation agenda that seeks to protect New Yorkers, and create more secure and sustainable communities statewide.”

The transportation safety legislation passed by the Senate Democratic Majority includes:

- Pre-licensing Instructional Program on Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety: This bill, [S.1078A](#), sponsored by Senator Andrew Gounardes, would require that bicycle and pedestrian safety laws are taught during the pre-licensing or “five-hour” course.

- **Share the Road Provision:** This bill, [S.4529](#), sponsored by Senator Pete Harckham, requires that all vehicles outside the City of New York allow for three feet of space when passing a bicyclist on the road. This is an updated mandate to better protect riders as the Department of Transportation constructs new and improved bike lanes throughout the state.
- **Road Worker Safety:** This bill, [S.3957](#), sponsored by Senator Timothy M. Kennedy, increases penalties for highway worker endangerment, and expands the work zone safety and outreach program to ensure that employees are involved in designing public education and outreach. It would also establish the Work Zone Safety Fund, which would collect 60% of all resulting fines and direct them towards work zone crash prevention measures.
- **Program to Address Wrong-Way Driving on the Interstate:** This bill, [S.982A](#), sponsored by Senator James Gaughran, seeks to combat the rate of drivers who travel the wrong way on the highway and frequently cause head-on collisions.
- **School Bus Safety and Education Program:** This bill, [S.4661](#), sponsored by Senator Kevin Parker, addresses the endemic issue of illegal school bus passing by implementing a public education program, as well as dedicating ticket revenues to a new school bus motorist education fund that would study the issues related to illegal school bus passing and implement proposals designed to prevent school bus passing.
- **Responsible Railroad Crossing:** This bill, [S.252A](#), sponsored by Senator Kevin Thomas, authorizes political subdivisions and certain public authorities to establish demonstration programs implementing railroad grade crossing monitoring systems by means of photo devices.
- **For-hire Vehicle Confirmation:** This bill, [S.3533](#), sponsored by Senator Timothy M. Kennedy, requires that any for-hire vehicle provider that connects rides by smartphone app establishes a coupling system between drivers and passengers to verify that

passengers are entering the correct vehicle. This responds to concerns about the abuse of car sharing services by those with ill-intent, which has resulted in homicides, assaults, and sexual assaults.

- Reckless Driving Prevention: This bill, [S.6202](#), sponsored by Senator Timothy M. Kennedy, makes it easier to prosecute and enforce misdemeanor reckless driving charges against drivers who cause physical injury or worse, and includes education components for prospective and current drivers.
- Commercial GPS Requirements in Charter Buses: This bill, [S.6321A](#), sponsored by Senator James Gaughran, requires that all charter buses registered in New York are equipped with a commercial GPS system. Currently, some drivers employ GPS apps designed for everyday commuter use. This technology does not suggest routes best suited for busses, which has resulted in numerous accidents-- particularly due to low hanging overpasses on parkways.
- First Responder Safety Zones: This bill, [S.1391A](#), sponsored by Senator John Brooks, authorizes establishment of first responder safety zones to protect first responders when they are attempting to use their vehicles to respond to an emergency, as well as requiring an additional duty to yield to first responders. This legislation is largely modeled off of school safety zones.

Bill Sponsor, Senator John Brooks said, "In emergency response situations, safety is always of the utmost concern. In the case of many volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies that do not have the benefit of traffic control systems, even arriving at the station for an emergency call can prove to be problematic and even dangerous to first responders. By enacting Fire Responder Safety Zones we are taking an important step in improving the safety and efficiency of first responders by ensuring that emergency vehicles

can quickly and safely move out of the station and onto the roadway.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator James Gaughran said, “Long Island's roadways are notoriously dangerous and today's legislation will improve road safety for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians. My legislation will help fix an unfortunately all too common occurrence on Long Island -- buses and trucks hitting low overpasses, like the horrific 2018 Southern State Parkway bus crash -- by requiring charter buses to have commercial GPS devices to navigate Long Island's roadways riddled with low overpasses. Charter bus companies must prioritize passenger safety and this legislation will stop preventable crashes like the 2018 crash.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Andrew Gounardes said, “This year is one of the deadliest years for traffic fatalities in nearly a decade. We know what changes we need to implement to ensure that no parent, senior, or person of any age lives in fear of crossing the street or riding a bike. By putting forth this comprehensive legislation, we’re taking bold action to hold reckless drivers accountable, ensure stricter enforcement of traffic crimes, prevent accidents from taking place, and empower us with the tools we need to help save lives across our city. Measures like increasing penalties for highway worker endangerment, requiring vehicles to give three feet of space for cyclists, and making it easier to prosecute and enforce misdemeanor reckless driving charges, are just some of the ways that we’ll make roads safer for all New Yorkers. I’m also proud to sponsor legislation that will teach pedestrian safety and bicycle safety as a prerequisite to obtaining a driver’s license. This will create a thoughtful road culture for drivers and pedestrians alike so that we all can feel safe in their travels.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Pete Harckham said, “With more motorists and cyclists sharing our roadways than ever before, we need to ensure everyone’s safety by necessitating a buffer zone when vehicles are passing bicyclists. The legislation I have sponsored mandates that motorists give cyclists a good amount of space on the road, with no exceptions, and just this

simple, common sense provision will save lives across the state.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Kevin Parker said, “As New York returns its students to in-person learning, the time is ripe for updated school bus traffic laws that will keep our kids safe. I am proud to sponsor legislation designed to reduce the number of school bus-related accidents, and bolster programs that will prevent these needless tragedies in the future. I stand with my colleagues in passing this life-saving package.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator Kevin Thomas said, “I am proud to join my colleagues in advancing legislation that will make roads safer across New York State. We have seen far too many unnecessary and completely preventable accidents, injuries, and fatalities on our roads. By increasing awareness of school bus and pedestrian safety, and introducing measures that will reduce reckless driving, this package of legislation makes our roadways safer for everyone.”

Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris said, “We must take serious steps to curb the epidemic of traffic violence in our state. Curbing the threats posed by reckless drivers and large vehicles is crucial, and I am pleased to join my colleagues in supporting this legislation.”

Senator Jamaal Bailey said, “The safety of New Yorkers and those who are on our roadways is paramount. This package of legislation works towards increasing safety on our roads, and strives towards ensuring that fatalities and injuries on our motorways are drastically decreased. The passage of these bills would allow for actionable steps to be used to curb incidents. Further educating the public on road safety, increasing the enforcement of reckless driving, protecting consumers through requiring that for-hire vehicles allow for riders to confirm the identity of their drivers, and protecting our children through seeking preventions to illegal school bus passing are important steps forward. Our first responders

and road workers must be held in the highest regard, as we create first responder safety zones and create outreach programs directed towards work zone safety. This legislative package is a great step in protecting those on our roads, and is representative of our continued effort to work towards a goal of safer roadways in New York State. I would like to thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart Cousins for her leadership, as well as Transportation Chair Tim Kennedy and my colleagues who sponsored the pieces of legislation included in this package.”

Senator Brian Benjamin said, “Keeping our streets safe must be a priority, and this package of legislation is a huge step towards holding reckless drivers accountable and protecting children from harm, especially around our schools. Students, cyclists, and all New Yorkers should have safe, protected space to walk, run, and bike without fear, and I hope to see my colleagues in the State Senate pass this package of common sense legislation into law.”

Senator Alessandra Biaggi said, “As more New Yorkers are turning to bicycling for daily transportation, we must ensure cyclists, pedestrians, and drivers are all equally respected and safe while on the road. This legislation will raise awareness of the dangers faced by cyclists and pedestrians and improve road safety for all New Yorkers. I thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for prioritizing this issue.”

Senator Brad Hoylman said, “Everyone who uses our roads, be it pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, or children heading to school, benefits when our streets are safer. I’m proud to vote for a road safety package which works to prevent reckless driving, protects first responders, and centers the safety of road workers. I’m grateful Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Senator Tim Kennedy, Chair of the Transportation Committee, are committed to improving road safety across New York State.”

Senator Robert Jackson said, “As New York continues to open up and we try to recover from the effects of the pandemic with the summer fast approaching, we must continue to find ways to keep all New Yorkers safe on our streets. The bills in this comprehensive road safety legislation have been proven to reduce road traffic injuries and fatalities. Today we take another step forward in forging a culture of road safety for all.

Senator Brian Kavanagh said, “This legislative package, designed to improve safety for bicyclists, pedestrians, as well as car drivers and passengers, is tremendously important for the residents of Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan whom I represent, and to all New Yorkers. Just this week, our community is reeling from the tragic death of a pedestrian in North Brooklyn, struck by a car as he crossed the street. As conditions improve in the wake of COVID-19, and more and more New Yorkers return to our streets, sidewalks, and bikeways, we must continue our work to help people share these spaces safely.”

Senator John Liu said, “As a frequent cyclist through city streets myself, I am aware firsthand of the need to improve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians alike. The bills that are part of the Crash Victims Rights & Safety Act will usher in bold reforms to make our streets safer and help prevent the fatalities and suffering that the Families for Safe Streets have endured.”

Senator Rachel May said, “As someone who regularly walks or bikes to work, I am pleased to support these bills to make our streets safer for all. Pedestrians and cyclists contribute to vibrant communities, and many people, including the very young, the very old, and all sorts of people in between, are unable to drive cars. When drivers understand how to share the road, all of us are better off.”

Senator Shelley Mayer said, “I am pleased the Senate adopted legislation that will improve

safety for drivers, passengers, bicyclists, and workers on our roads. As our economy reopens and our roads grow busier, these measures draw upon innovative technology, education and increased enforcement to ensure our roads are safe for all.”

Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick said, “Ensuring that our communities have safe roads and sidewalks is one of the core functions of government, and I am proud that the State Senate has provided record road funding this year, and has now passed legislation that will make our streets safer for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, and especially school buses and children.”

Senator Sean Ryan said, “The bills passed today include several common sense measures to make our roads safer for drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians, and roadside workers. As we create modern transportation policy it is important that we incorporate multimodal access and address the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists, who make up a growing portion of all commuters in cities throughout New York.”

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