

## Replace short auto trips by walking and biking

In my Newsday Business column of December 31, 2009, I wrote, "...the most significant contributor to highway congestion and main road traffic is the urban centre (cities and towns), because of the inability of the urban centre's internal roads to adequately receive and distribute traffic from the highways and main roads. Since most of the travel distance by auto traffic is short, there might be an opportunity to change the mode of travel from auto to bicycle and walking, and so reduce congestion. I know there is the primary concern within T&T of personal safety and security, as the pedestrian or the bicyclist is more vulnerable to the bandit. This is a valid issue, but I suspect that this impact will be substantially reduced when the numbers of pedestrians and cyclists increase. Then there is the issue of traffic safety..."

"According to the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), approximately 25 percent of all trips in the US are less than 2 km in distance, but almost 75 percent of these trips are made by auto; and ITE suggests that in many cases, these short auto trips could be replaced by walking and biking..."

"A pedestrian or bicyclist is always more likely to be injured in a crash with a vehicle. Therefore, walking and bicycling must be carefully planned for. Here in T&T it is almost suicidal to attempt to use a bicycle in our hazardous traffic conditions. There is no provision or safe accommodation for bicycles, and poor maintenance of walkways and footpaths. There is lack of bicycle and pedestrian planning, as well as training programmes in such a challenging environment that currently only favours vehicles, with absolutely no consideration for bicycles and almost none for pedestrians. Don't even talk about the elderly and other persons with physical disabilities!"

Raffique Shah, well-known newspaper commentator, and producer of local road run/walk activities for many years, responded to that article in an email to me on January 3, 2010. He said, "We first need, though, to change our people's culture towards accepting walking and cycling as being legitimate. This may sound strange, but it's true. As you know I have been involved in organising and promoting road running for 25-plus years. During that time I have seen the nasty side of motorists who simply refuse to accept someone running (or cycling) as being a legitimate road user. Unlike what obtains in most big-city-marathons (New York, London and dozens others) where the authorities close off roads for 4 to 5 hours while such races are staged, our Government has never (successive Governments) afforded us that all-important safety feature. So registered-marathoners have to jostle with trucks, maxi-taxis (worst offenders) and other motorists on race day. We've had several minor accidents (runners being hit by vehicles), but fortunately no fatalities.

"When I did road running, I had to continually look behind me to ensure I was safe from vehicles. It's almost as if those who become motor-bound, (hence unhealthy human specimens), are jealous of those who try to stay healthy and fit—so bounce them down! That's the attitude you encounter. Ditto for cycling, which I also did until I had a bad fall (dogs this time, not vehicles!). My beloved bicycle remains parked up because I do not feel safe riding it anywhere—even on my own short street. Those among us who walk, run or cycle risk our lives every time we hit the road.

"Cycling and walking paths are one solution. But for Governments that's not a priority, and motorists are almost sure to encroach on them. Governments prefer to spend

\$billions on free medication for those afflicted with lifestyle diseases (diabetes, heart conditions, obesity) rather than one-tenth the annual cost to promote healthy lifestyles through pro-active suggestions you made."

The next comment was from RCK. "The cycle thing is a good idea and it has taken a major foothold in Canada. But their only problem here is it is only practical for 4 months of the year when temperatures are liveable. They have marked cycle lanes (about 3 feet wide nearest the kerb). And bicycles are generally advised to use the 4-foot wide walkways. In T&T everything boils down always to the lowest common denominator—personal safety.

"All endeavours you can write about always come down to the rule of law and people's expectation of not being attacked like prey in the jungle. Any solution you can write about traffic or any problems in the society must always be predicated on the ability for law and order, respect for property and other rights—to prevail

The other comment was from AC. "I would also suggest some provision for bicyclist shelters which will be necessary in the rainy season. Perhaps our urban buildings can go back to the days of cantilever overhangs on the sidewalks."

With few exceptions, the sidewalks no longer have building canopies and other refuges to make the walk a pleasant experience.

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