



# Staten Island Advance

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## After hit-run death of Wagner College student, Staten Island bicyclists say it's a jungle out there

By JOHN M. ANNESE

The hit-and-run crash that killed Wagner College nursing student Ronald (RJ) Tillman Sunday night shocked bicycle advocates on Staten Island, who called yesterday for tougher traffic enforcement and a better infrastructure for cyclists in the borough.

"It is horrible that things like this are still happening and my prayers go out to the victim's family and friends, said Nicholas M. Rozak of New Brighton, a cycling instructor at the Business of Sports High School in Manhattan. "Staten Island's political leaders need to understand the importance of safer streets; the other four boroughs have and are greatly improving street safety, where Staten Island seems to be moving backward.

"I ride my bike to work through Staten Island and Manhattan every day and the most stressful part is the 10-minute ride to the ferry from my house."

Rozak said the road culture on Staten Island must change — drivers need to be aware that they're sharing the roads with bicyclists, while cyclists should also be aware of the rules.

Too often, he said, Staten Island streets don't have signage directed at bicyclists, and the police are more likely to issue summonses for trivial offenses, like having a bicycle with no bell, than for more practical ones, such as when a cyclist goes against traffic or rides on a sidewalk.

"Car drivers on Staten Island seem to not have an understanding or respect for bikes and that idea is enforced by our political leaders and the city when they remove bike infrastructure instead of improving [it]," Rozak said.

Statistics from Transportation Alternatives' Web site, [crashstat.org](http://crashstat.org), shows the borough has seen four bicyclist fatalities between 1997 and 2009.

Most recently, in August 2010, a hit-and-run driver struck and killed a 17-year-old bicyclist on Jersey Street, but the driver's lawyer had claimed that the teen was firing a gun at him from the bicycle.

Meredith Sladek, of Stapleton, an avid cyclist and the Staten Island Volunteer Committee Chair for Transportation Alternatives, said she plans her routes carefully to avoid higher-traffic roads. She tends not to take Howard Avenue, she says, because typically she doesn't have reason to be in the area, and because it's "incredibly hilly."

Ms. Sladek said she'd like to see a better network of bike paths on the Island, and better NYPD enforcement of existing traffic laws.

"It's not 100 percent safe, but it's not crazy-dangerous Wild West," she said. "Staten Island is still a very cyclable borough. We just need to make a few changes."

As for Sunday night's crash, she said: "My reaction was just one of shock and horror and disappointment."