COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Monday, May 14, 2017
10:15 a.m.

PRESENT:
COUNCILMAN CURTIS JONES, JR., CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN JANNIE L. BLACKWELL
COUNCILMAN WILLIAM K. GREENLEE
COUNCILWOMAN HELEN GYM
COUNCILMAN BOBBY HENON
COUNCILMAN AL TAUBENBERGER

BILL 170244 - An ordinance amending Title 12 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Traffic Code," by amending Chapter 12-1200, entitled "Traffic Control Devices," to require a report, recommendation and appropriate safety improvements regarding hazardous intersections...

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COUNCILMAN JONES: Ladies and gentlemen, this is a public hearing that's about to commence. This is the Committee on Commerce and Economic Development -- no. Actually, Public Safety. I am Chair of both.

But before we start, I want to recognize some young people that have taken time out of their school day to come down from John Barry.

Would you please stand up, and let's welcome them to City government.

(Applause.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: I would also note that I am an alumni of John Barry. And I gave them a picture of the old school that I went to in 19...

But thank you for coming down. I hope to come out to your school and maybe spend some quality time talking about what we do down here. So thank you for coming.

Okay. Ms. Williams, would you please read the title of the bill.

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THE CLERK: Bill No. 170244, an ordinance amending Title 12 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled "Traffic Code," by amending Chapter 12-1200, entitled "Traffic Control Devices," to require a report, recommendation and appropriate safety improvements regarding hazardous intersections; and by amending Chapter 12-1400, entitled "Penalties and Procedures for Violations," to provide for a reward program; all under certain terms and conditions; to prevent against incidents of pedestrian related deaths, particularly those caused by vehicles that unlawfully pass trolleys or fail to yield to emergency response vehicles.

COUNCILMAN JONES: I recognize the presence of a quorum in Councilman Taubenberger, Councilman Greenlee, myself, and Councilman Henon.

If I could, I'd like to take a minute to explain why this is important.

About a year and a half ago, a grandmother was with her grandchildren

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getting off the trolley, 15 trolley, at 56th and Girard. A person driving a vehicle ignored traffic laws, decided that they were going to go around that trolley, and in one heroic act, that grandmother pushed her grandchildren to safety, was hit by that vehicle. The individual did not stop, drug her a half a block, where she died.

What we in Philadelphia, this is not new or just germane to my district, but whether you talk about Roosevelt Boulevard or Henry Avenue, there are particular intersections, crossways that are dangerous not only to people in vehicles but pedestrians, bikers, people who are just trying to get from one point to another, and what we want to do with this bill is to begin to track it a little better, to be able to say if an accident happens on multiple occasions at a location, then we want to know why. We want to know is there something that we can do, whether it's to

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add a stop light, stop sign or speed bump, where appropriate, to create a safety assist through the Streets Department. So we're requiring them to tell us, report on when there are instances where a vehicle collides with another vehicle but, more importantly, when a vehicle collides with a biker or pedestrian and, in so doing, be able to do things, take into account for those issues and create common mechanisms that may well save lives.

So with that, Ms. Williams, who do we have to testify today?

THE CLERK: Christopher Puchalsky and Marge Chance.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

Good morning.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

MR. PUCHALSKY: Good morning, Councilman.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Please have a seat. State your name for the record

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and begin your testimony.

MR. PUCHALSKY: Good morning, Councilman Jones and other members of the Public Safety Committee. I'm Christopher Puchalsky and I'm the Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives at the Office of Transportation and Infrastructure Systems, otherwise known as oTIS, a division of the Managing Director. Deputy Manager Director Mike Carroll heads oTIS, which is charged with driving change through our transportation infrastructure systems. OTIS leads a portfolio of departments, including Streets Transportation, Streets Sanitation, and Philadelphia Water Department, to provide cost-effective quality services with a focus on the resident. I am here today to testify in support of Bill No. 170244 with the proposed amendments, a bill regarding hazardous intersections.

In 2017, oTIS led the creation of a Vision Zero three-year action plan,

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which has a goal of eliminating deaths and serious injuries by 2030. We believe that safety and human life are our first priority. Per the proposed amendments, a hazardous intersection is one where two streets on the High Injury Network, as designed by Vision Zero, cross. Identifying hazardous intersections and making them safe is an important part of achieving our goal. We support the bill with its proposed amendments and appreciate Councilman Jones and his staffer's cooperation in working cooperatively with us.

Specifically, this bill requires a report to be generated upon a District Councilmember's request after a collision involving serious bodily injury or death occurs at a hazardous intersection. We understand that the one-month turnaround time to provide a report to Council after a request has been made will be lengthened to 60 days, which we appreciate. We hope the

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additional time will be sufficient. Identifying the appropriate engineering, education, and enforcement needed to make an intersection safe in an equitable fashion does require considerable time and effort.

Thank you again for working with our oTIS team and for the opportunity to testify regarding this important issue. I'll take any questions you have at this time.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

Are there any questions on the part of the Committee?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: So you must have done a really good job. If they have no questions, then your testimony was succinct and to the point and they understood it. So thank you for your testimony.

MR. PUCHALSKY: Thank you very much.

COUNCILMAN JONES: How are you?

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Good morning.

MS. CHANCE: Good morning, Councilman Jones and other members. I am an AARP Pennsylvania. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Bill No. 170244 and to propose a few important amendments.

My name is Marge Chance and I'm an AARP Pennsylvania volunteer. My testimony today is on behalf of the more than 300 million AARP members and more than 1.8 million AARP members in the City of Philadelphia ages 50-plus statewide.

Bill No. 170244 will help the City of Philadelphia to take a positive step towards improving roadway safety by amending Philadelphia's Traffic Code to address hazardous intersections. We appreciate your attention to this critical issue.

Crossing the street should not mean crossing your fingers. Yet every hour, pedestrians and other users of our roadways are killed because a street

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crosswalk or an intersection is unsafe. Children, older adults, people of color, and low income are disproportionately the victims of these fatalities.

According to the January 17, 2018 blog post of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, 96 people were killed in traffic crashes in 2017, 40 of whom were pedestrians, three of whom were bicyclists. This is based on statistics provided to the Coalition by the Philadelphia Police Department. While this represents a decline from 2016, the number of deaths is still alarming.

For this reason, AARP fights for the adoption of the policies and code changes that support the concept of Vision Zero. Vision Zero has a strategy that prioritizes safety and coordination as important factors that contribute to safety, mobility, including infrastructure, law enforcement, and education. Vision Zero sets the goal of eliminating traffic deaths and serious

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injuries. It takes a multidisciplinary approach, bringing together diverse stakeholders, like traffic planners, engineers, police officers, policymakers, and public health professionals, to address a complex problem.

Bill No. 170244 supports the activities -- the objectives of Vision Zero. It charges the Department of Streets with identifying hazardous intersections, assessing the cause of collisions, and implementing a plan of corrective action to make our streets safer for those living and traveling in Pennsylvania.

AARP is pleased that the bill includes a specific timeframe within which the Council must adopt applicable ordinances that may be necessary to reduce the number of collisions in the vicinity of hazardous intersections.

We urge the Council to do the same and vote positively to adopt Bill No. 170244, with inclusion of the

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amendments previously mentioned. We commend our commitment to eliminating road fatalities and injuries on our streets and making Philadelphia a great place for all ages.

Sincerely, Marge Chance, AARP representative.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so much for your testimony.

In 2008 when I first came here, the first demonstration, the first protest that I experienced was up by senior citizens up by my five points, Belmont and Ford Road. In that area there might be five senior-assisted living facilities, many people that are there are in wheelchairs. So there was a giant intersection that separated then Pathmark and the center, and so without the light pedestrian button, they would go out on a green light, get halfway there, and it would turn red on them. And even when you are fully able to walk across the street, it's scary, but when

you're in a wheelchair trying to figure out do I go back, do I go forward, and all too often people driving cars aren't as polite as they should be. It was a scary thing. So we were able to work with them, and that's how I found out how much stop signs and stop lights actually cost, which was an interesting thing.

But thank you, because the same thing applies to our seniors who have to make that decision. And what was your quote? You said something in the beginning.

MS. CHANCE: What did I say?

COUNCILMAN JONES: You said something about pushing the button, good luck. Cross your fingers.

MS. CHANCE: Oh, yeah. What did I say? Crossing the street shouldn't mean crossing your fingers.

COUNCILMAN JONES: I like that. So we're going to use that, if you don't mind. That's a good quote.

MS. CHANCE: Thank you.

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COUNCILMAN JONES: Are there any questions?

Councilman Taubenberger.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Yeah. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, and thank you for your leadership on this issue on bringing this forward.

Ms. Chance, thank you very much for taking the time, and your testimony was rather complete. I do have one question, if it exists as far as statistics. You cited in your testimony that 96 people were killed last year.

MS. CHANCE: Yes.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Is there any sense on how many of them were senior citizens?

MS. CHANCE: Not to my knowledge. This information according to the January 17th, 2018 blog post of the Bicycle Coalition, 96 people were killed in traffic. I don't know about the individual statistics.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: It

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just would be, once again, another statistic that would help in some ways. It's not -- I'll tell you an incident that just recently coming home on Saturday, there was a senior citizen crossing at Frankford and Cottman, totally oblivious to -- I mean, I had the right-of-way, but I seen this person in the middle of the street. Well, I have enough sense to stop and I waved him on. He initially like complained to me. I said, well, please look at the light. It's green for me and red for you, and he got it and he actually apologized, but I still let him cross, the fact of the matter he was out there.

I'm not certain what we could do about it, but the fact is, we need to know about it, that people are just not paying attention the way they should. So, Ms. Chance, thank you for everything you do.

MS. CHANCE: Thank you for having us.

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COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you so much, Councilman.

Any other questions?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: Seeing none, I would just remind our young observers today one of the things that scares me is when they have the earbuds in their ears and they're not paying attention as they might want to do when they cross that street. That music might be good. It's not that good. Put safety first.

Councilman Henon.

COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you both for your testimony. I just wanted to applaud the Councilman who recognizes that in addition to public safety, there's a need to really gather some more data and be a little more precise when it comes to notification to the District

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Councilmembers who service the communities, many communities. We represent as a District Councilmember approximately 165,000 people, maybe 12, 13 separate communities and separately distinct and have different challenges. And my district borders on the west side Roosevelt Boulevard. I know oTIS and Streets have been doing an incredible job with trying to make sure that Vision Zero is a safe way to travel, both on foot and by bus, with new innovative techniques, and the City and the state are putting in a lot of money to take a look at that, and, again, the Councilman is recognizing this.

And you said that the Bicycle Coalition had 96 deaths last year. Well, for us the first thing I thought of, I mean, is obviously one is too many, but having more information and datasets to go along with that to see if there's a pattern, but that's why it's so important that oTIS and Streets and everybody

coordinating together for Vision Zero is critical to public safety, and I applaud the efforts and look forward to -- hopefully we don't get any data. The best case scenario is that we have no data to provide, but if we do, we can figure out ways to leverage resources to make sure that our communities are all safe, even if it is having a pedestrian crosswalk with the button, maybe in street painting for the intersections. But it's 2018 and everybody has engineered a much safer way to co-exist as we look for alternative solutions to your typical car transportation.

So thank you.

MS. CHANCE: You're welcome, but if needed, I can -- since we're in constant communication with Vision Zero, we could certainly get a better notation of the statistics for you.

MR. PUCHALSKY: I think we can try to -- we'll see if we can get some of those breakdowns by age group like

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Councilman Taubenberger asked for.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the presence of Councilwoman Gym to be a part of this Committee. She's early for also the second hearing, which we are thankful for.

Councilman Taubenberger.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Yes. Mr. Puchalsky, thank you again for being here. According to your data, you have a Ph.D. What is that in?

MR. PUCHALSKY: My Ph.D. is in urban transportation systems engineering.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Well, that's perfect for what you're doing, so thank you for your service.

Are the most dangerous intersections, are they posted anywhere that we could easily take a look at them?

MR. PUCHALSKY: They're not publicly posted, the most dangerous

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intersections, but we do have a public posting of our High Injury Network. That's the network of streets in Philadelphia that we believe based on the data are the most dangerous. It's 12 percent of streets. There's about 2,400, 2,500 miles of streets in the City of Philadelphia, and the Streets Department itself is responsible for 2,100 of those streets. It's the 12 percent of streets, the High Injury Network, that are responsible for over 50 percent of the deaths and serious injuries. So those are the ones that we're targeting for our initial -- for work in our initial three-year action plan.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Are most crashes, are they at intersections or they could be anywhere?

MR. PUCHALSKY: Most crashes are at intersections, yes. Most deaths and serious injuries do happen at intersections. Some do happen mid block, but most happen at intersections.

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COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Do you think at some point we could have a list of maybe the top ten, the worst ten?

MR. PUCHALSKY: Yeah. We could try to get that list for you.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Because the more knowledge that we all have, the more eyes are on it, maybe people will be a little more cautious. Maybe we will know and take a look at it, and sometimes it's interesting, ideas come from many places.

MR. PUCHALSKY: The more eyes we have on it, the better.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: And particularly people that are very familiar and live or work in the area or even walk across that street, they might be able to tell you much more than whatever would come out of a particular hearing if we could get to them. So I think the more information we could provide the public, the more helpful we could come with a solution.

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MR. PUCHALSKY: Yeah. The cycle of deaths and serious injuries is truly tragic. And there was a cyclist killed over the weekend on Spring Garden and there was someone killed -- two vehicles crashed into each other at Cottman and the Boulevard, I believe, last night.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: I met a woman recently from Drexel University. She was having a fundraiser on behalf of her son. In fact, I met her at a safe streets event. I looked in that woman's eyes and I could almost cry myself. She had but one child. He came here to Drexel University and he never came back. He died on a bicycle. That moved me beyond words. So the more we know, the better we can help humanity going forward, all of us.

MR. PUCHALSKY: Yeah.

COUNCILMAN TAUBENBERGER: Safety is everything.

Thank you very much for your

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testimony.

MR. PUCHALSKY: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN JONES: Before I recognize Councilman Henon, there was also a fatal accident down at the stadium, a motorcycle rider who tried to speed past a car, dangerous game of chicken, and it took his life. His parents had come into town to be a part of the game, and it's just -- so we have a responsibility as stewards to try to increase our knowledge, as Councilman said, but also dissuade bad behavior.

MR. PUCHALSKY: Yes.

COUNCILMAN JONES: And sometimes this isn't a question of stop lights or stop signs or speed bumps. It's bad decisions, and we have to be conscious of that.

Councilman Henon.

COUNCILMAN HENON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was sitting here thinking through community engagement and community involvement. The information

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for specific accidents or bodily injury or death unfortunately, that is extremely helpful, and the Councilman had talked about, Councilman Taubenberger, about educating the public. I think the public educates us, because I have extended office hours. I have a district office, so I'm in different neighborhoods all the time in addition to the community meetings, and traffic always comes up, and it comes up in various different ways. It's just not through the Bicycle Coalition or we want to add bike lanes. We need to change behavior and we need to stick with educating the public and listening to the public.

So I guess I'm wondering when we have a hazardous corner or intersection and it's been brought to your attention, maybe we should follow it up, in concert with the District Councilperson, to go out to the community and say, hey, these are some of the challenges. Just like we do when you add

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bike lanes, we go out and we said we're going to have bike lanes. We're going to have a little pattern shift and you're going to get used to it. And to be honest with you, right over in my district office, we have bike lanes, and it took me a little bit to get used to change my own behavior, but I changed and PGW came by and tore up the street a little bit and the bike lanes are gone. I'm like now, where are the bike lanes? But it's that kind of positive behavior change.

I have had people on the community just sat with me last week and they were talking about the timing of the lights, and sometimes when they have a pattern change in the lights, people try to hurry up and beat the light, and that's when the accidents happen, or unless they're on their devices and they're texting or not concentrating. They try to beat the light, because they know that three down the line it's going

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to be a little different, and nothing good happens when it comes to that.

But I would be interested, because that's what the community is saying to me. I mean, I had a gentleman talk to me about they're doing, what do they call, mode splits on the lights and then your timing of lights. He talked about it for about 20 minutes straight, how important it is, and he gave me a little different insight on people trying to beat the lights and how critical some of the timings are.

So the information that you gather really can result in just tweaks from here and a little from there to make things extremely safer on the low end, but I'm interested to see if we could possibly take back some of the findings if, God forbid, something happens again. I don't want to get any information from you. That means everybody is doing good, but not everybody adheres to everything and they try to get there three seconds

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quicker, and that's when accidents happen. One myself would be interested in taking that information to the community and getting their own feedback when it arises. So look forward to working with you in the future.

Thanks.

MR. PUCHALSKY: Yeah. We hope to roll out an education campaign this year to do some of that work and then follow it up with some enforcement efforts. I think, as you know, we don't have all the tools we'd like and there's a bill in Harrisburg right now to do a pilot for automated speed enforcement on the Boulevard, and timing the lights, like you said, is an important part so that people are encouraged to drive at safe speeds, but then not everybody still takes that cue, so some automated enforcement has been really successful in slowing down traffic in other places, and I think it's good if we try that here in Philadelphia.

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COUNCILMAN JONES: Thank you, Councilman.

Are there any other questions?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: I also know that there is a representative of the Streets Department here. Would you like to hear from them? He says he can testify or not. He's in support.

I think we're good. All right. Are there any others to testify on this bill?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: Seeing none, that concludes -- and thank you for your testimony.

That concludes our public hearing. We will now go into a public meeting to consider action to be taken on Bill No. 170244.

The Chair recognizes Councilmember Greenlee for a motion to amend the Bill No. 170244.

COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank

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you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the amendments to Bill No. 170244 be adopted.

(Duly seconded.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: It has been moved and properly seconded that amendments to Bill No. 170244 be approved.

All those in favor will signify by saying aye.

(Aye.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: All those opposed?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: The ayes have it and the motion carries. The amendment to Bill No. 170244 has been approved.

The Chair now recognizes again Councilman Greenlee for a motion on Bill No. 170244, as amended.

COUNCILMAN GREENLEE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill No. 170244, as amended, be reported out of this Committee with a favorable

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recommendation and that the rules of Council be suspended to allow for first reading at our next session of Council.

(Duly seconded.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: It has been moved and properly seconded that Bill No. 170244, as amended, be reported from this Committee with a favorable recommendation and further moved that the rules of Council be suspended to permit first reading of this bill at our next session of Council.

Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell is also here.

COUNCILWOMAN BLACKWELL: I was here. You weren't ready. Something is just not right about it.

COUNCILMAN JONES: She's in time for the vote. She's in time for the vote.

All those in favor will signify by saying aye.

(Aye.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: All those

opposed?

(No response.)

COUNCILMAN JONES: The ayes have it and the motion carries.

This concludes the business of the Committee on Public Safety for today.

Thank you.

(Committee on Public Safety concluded at 10:45 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the proceedings, evidence and objections are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me upon the foregoing matter, and that this is a true and correct transcript of same.

MICHELE L. MURPHY
RPR-Notary Public

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