

The Boston Globe

Mayor Walsh says pedestrians, cyclists need to take more responsibility



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Bicyclists on Commonwealth Avenue in 2012.

By [Steve Annear](#) GLOBE STAFF MAY 16, 2017

Some bicycle and pedestrian safety advocates aren't pleased with comments Mayor Martin J. Walsh made on Boston Public Radio Tuesday.

During a live interview with the station, Walsh said pedestrians and bicyclists need to do their part to help reduce and avoid fatal and nonfatal crashes with cars in the city by more closely following the rules of the road.

Walsh said that pedestrians, specifically, need to keep their heads up while walking down the street, take their headphones off, stay within the crosswalks, and obey traffic lights.

“You can’t be running across the middle of the street. You’ve got to understand — cars are going to hit you,” Walsh said during the interview, [which was broadcast live from the WGBH Studio at the Boston Public Library](#). “People need to be more cognizant of the fact that a car is a car.”

Walsh said the same goes for cyclists, who are often criticized by drivers if they ride through red lights or stop signs.

“When you’re riding, a car can’t stop on a dime,” he said. “And a bike can’t stop on a dime, so people need to understand that. All of us need to understand that we need to coexist together on the roads of our city, and on the streets of our city, and we need to stop running across the street and we need to start following the rules. The rules of the road are there for a reason.”

Even before he made those statements, Walsh seemed to know it would elicit some type of reaction, due to the sensitivity of the subject matter.

“This is where I’m going to get myself in trouble right now on this show,” Walsh told the show’s hosts.

Earlier this month, a 29-year-old cyclist was killed in the Back Bay by a hit-and-run driver.

Shortly after the interview, bicycle and pedestrian safety advocates called out Walsh for what they say were misguided and misinformed statements that placed the blame for crashes on those who are most vulnerable on the streets.

“Boston’s clueless Mayor . . . blames bicyclists, Pedestrians for lethal crashes,” [Steve Bercu](#), president of the Boston Cyclists Union, said on Twitter.

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Boston's clueless Mayor @Marty_Walsh blames bicyclists, Pedestrians for lethal crashes <https://shar.es/1R1Uia> via @wgbhnews

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Mayor Walsh Says Bicyclists, Pedestrians Share Blame In Accidents

"People need to be more cognizant of the fact that a car is a car," Walsh said. "A car can't stop on a dime."
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He added, "People keep dying on Boston's streets because pedestrians wear headphones and need education? You've got to be [expletive] kidding me."

In an e-mail to the Globe, Becca Wolfson, the group's executive director, said they were "extremely disappointed to read and hear the interview" with Walsh, which was published on WGBH's website shortly after it aired.

"After people walking and biking have been hit and killed by people driving cars, people are quick to ask 'Were they wearing a helmet? Were they wearing headphones, or looking at their phone?'" Wolfson said. "And in reality, we should be asking whether the driver was speeding, or whether they were distracted and on their phone. The answer is often yes."

Wolfson said the city has a responsibility to make the streets safer, and is instead blaming victims.

Stacy Thompson, executive director of LivableStreets Alliance, which strives for better biking, walking, and public transit in the Boston area, said to the mayor's credit, he cares about data and numbers.

But, Thompson added, if Walsh were to take a look at data collected by his staff, "he would see that the vast majority of people injured while walking and biking are children or older adults," and not necessarily people listening to their headphones and trying to dodge traffic.

"It's your grandmother, your child, your best friend — not a stereotype," Thompson said.

Thompson said Walsh's comments conflict with the administration's Vision Zero goal, which aims to eliminate serious traffic crashes in the city by 2030.

"This is a step back," Thompson said.

[StreetPAC Mass](#), which describes itself as an independent political action committee that works to elect officials who want to bring changes to the streets, also weighed in on the subject.

In a tweet, the group said that the mayor's comments on air were "irresponsible."

"Drivers were responsible for all 22 fatalities on Boston streets in 2016," the group claimed.

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Irresponsible statements from @marty_walsh.

Drivers were responsible for all 22 fatalities on Boston streets in 2016 <https://shar.es/1R1Uia>

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