

ROAD SAFETY BILL GOES BEYOND PROTECTING BICYCLISTS

By Andy Metzger

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, JUNE 13, 2017.....Boston University police responded to 336 incidents of pedestrians and bicyclists being struck by vehicles over the past five years through this April, according to a campus police officer who asked lawmakers on Tuesday to enact a series of reforms.

"As law enforcement we become increasingly alarmed by these numbers," said officer Brandon Stone, adding that during the same five-year period, B.U. police responded to 495 bicycle lane violations.

Advocates testifying on behalf of an omnibus road safety bill (S 1905/H 2877) emphasized that it is intended to protect more than cyclists and pedestrians.

Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition Executive Director Richard Fries said the Occupational Safety and Health Administration reported highway workers have the second most dangerous job in the country, garbage collectors are vulnerable, and 700 construction workers were struck and killed nationwide in 2015.

"We are losing tow truck drivers - one a week nationwide," said Fries, who also noted law enforcement officers killed in traffic deaths.

The legislation sponsored by Rep. David Rogers, of Cambridge, Rep. Jonathan Hecht, of Watertown, and Belmont Sen. William Brownsberger, includes a range of approaches to reducing road deaths, such as a local option for authorizing traffic enforcement cameras.

Charlie Ticotsky, the policy director at Transportation for Massachusetts, said the traffic cameras would need to be prominently marked and should be deployed to increase safety rather than maximize traffic ticket revenues.

The bill would also mandate that when drivers pass cyclists, people on horseback, utility workers and other "vulnerable road users" they keep a distance of three feet when traveling 30 miles per hour, adding another foot of clearance for every 10-miles-per-hour over 30. Fries said Massachusetts is one of only 10 states that require drivers to pass cyclists at a loosely defined "safe distance."

Steven Miller, who is on the board of the Liveable Streets Alliance, said the legislation would also codify some norms of bicycling that are not actually backed up by the law. Where a multiuse path crosses a road with a crosswalk, pedestrians have the right of way, but bicyclists are "not legally

covered by the safety of that crosswalk," said Miller. The bill would give cyclists the right of way at those crossings.

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