

The Boston Globe

After the NYC attack, should we worry about Boston streets?



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Bicycles and debris lay on a bike path after a motorist drove onto the path near the World Trade Center memorial Tuesday.

By [Travis Andersen](#) GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 03, 2017

Tuesday's deadly terror attack in New York City, where a man drove a rental truck down a bike path on the West Side Highway, killing eight people, highlights a new threat to cyclists, joggers, and others who traverse urban centers such as Boston.

With truck attacks becoming increasingly popular for terrorists aiming for maximum casualties, should Boston put up more barriers in spots that attract crowds?

Maybe not, advocates say.

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“If we look at every sidewalk as a potential place where someone is going to do something with bad intent, then we paralyze ourselves,” said Wendy Landman, executive director of WalkBoston, a pedestrian advocacy group.

She said security measures currently in place for large events in Boston, such as using garbage trucks to block entrances to major streets, make sense. But taking away precious real estate on city sidewalks, which are already hard to maneuver, by putting up permanent barriers?

That’s a no-go.

“As horrible as what happened in New York is, I guess we don’t see hardening the everyday environment as the thing that we need to do to make pedestrians and everyone else safer,” she said.

Richard Fries, executive director of the advocacy group MassBike, said bollards, short posts planted on a bike path, could be one option.

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At the same time, he said, bike paths are no more vulnerable than other places where people gather.

“The goal of terrorism is not to murder but to terrorize, to disrupt, to provoke,” Fries said via e-mail. “We started with airports, but everything seems to be a target: schools, malls, concerts, stadiums and now bike paths. Are we worried about bike paths? Perhaps. But rarely do they present a ‘target rich’ environment. And when they do bollards and such may be a wise installation.”

Transportation Alternatives, a leading advocacy group for cyclists and pedestrians in New York, called for more bollards after Tuesday’s attack.

“These life-saving bollards are already in place at some intersections . . . but are far from standard and for no good reason,” the group said Wednesday in a statement.

In addition, the group voiced support for “regulating and limiting truck and vehicle access to our city’s most crowded areas the same way that many European cities do for both safety, security and street efficiency rationales. An obvious opportunity for improvement would be to move deliveries that require large trucks to overnight hours when streets are not teeming with pedestrians and cyclists.”

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On Friday, however, Transportation Alternatives decried the decision in New York to install “dangerous concrete barriers across the Hudson River Greenway” in the aftermath of the attacks.

Paul Steely White, who heads the organization, said in a statement that “by installing these brutal barriers, Governor Cuomo is creating another safety hazard and actively discouraging bikers, walkers, and commuters from using one of the country’s vibrant public spaces. The 20 foot linear jersey barriers installed across the greenway by the Governor’s State DOT are particularly dangerous, as they are channeling two-way bike traffic into one lane, effectively putting north and southbound cyclists on a collision course. . . . We need to protect our public spaces without making them uninviting and difficult to use.”

Stacy Thompson, executive director of the LivableStreets Alliance, a Greater Boston advocacy group, said a number of things could improve safety in the Hub, including limiting when large vehicles can access streets, improving traffic signals and crosswalks, and installing more bollards.

The public, she said, should “take this as a wake-up call to do things to keep people safe in their everyday lives.”

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation, which oversees multiple busy thoroughfares in Boston, has no plans to make any specific changes after the New York attack, spokeswoman Jacquelyn Goddard said.

“MassDOT collaborates closely with law enforcement 24/7 and has measures deployed to spot possible suspicious activity,” Goddard wrote in an e-mail. “No additional steps have been implemented after NYC.”

Boston police, meanwhile, will be on high alert during the Veterans Day parade Nov. 11.

“We’re reminding our officers to be extra vigilant,” said Lieutenant Detective Michael McCarthy, a department spokesman, adding that bicycle and motorcycle units will provide an escort for the procession.

And the parade route, he said, will be “lined with police.”

McCarty also said there are “no immediate plans to add barriers to streets with heavy pedestrian traffic” on a day-to-day basis.

“For many of our larger planned events we have utilized blocking vehicles to ensure that certain routes and areas are protected from vehicles entering the area,” McCarthy said.

“We will continue to evaluate our plans and take the necessary steps to make those events as safe as possible.”

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