

CHILD CRASHES: AN UNEQUAL BURDEN

A CASE STUDY OF MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES WITH
CHILDREN ON MANHATTAN'S EAST SIDE



TRANSPORTATION
ALTERNATIVES

Motor Vehicle Crashes with Child Victims Cluster Near Public Housing

Manhattan, East Side*

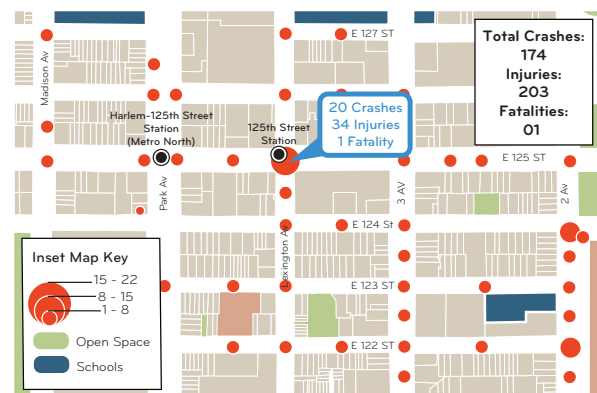
1995-2009

* East Side: Manhattan Community Boards 3, 6, 8, 11

Of the East Side's top ten intersections for motor vehicle crashes that kill or injure child pedestrians and bicyclists, nine are located in close proximity to public housing developments in East Harlem and the Lower East Side.

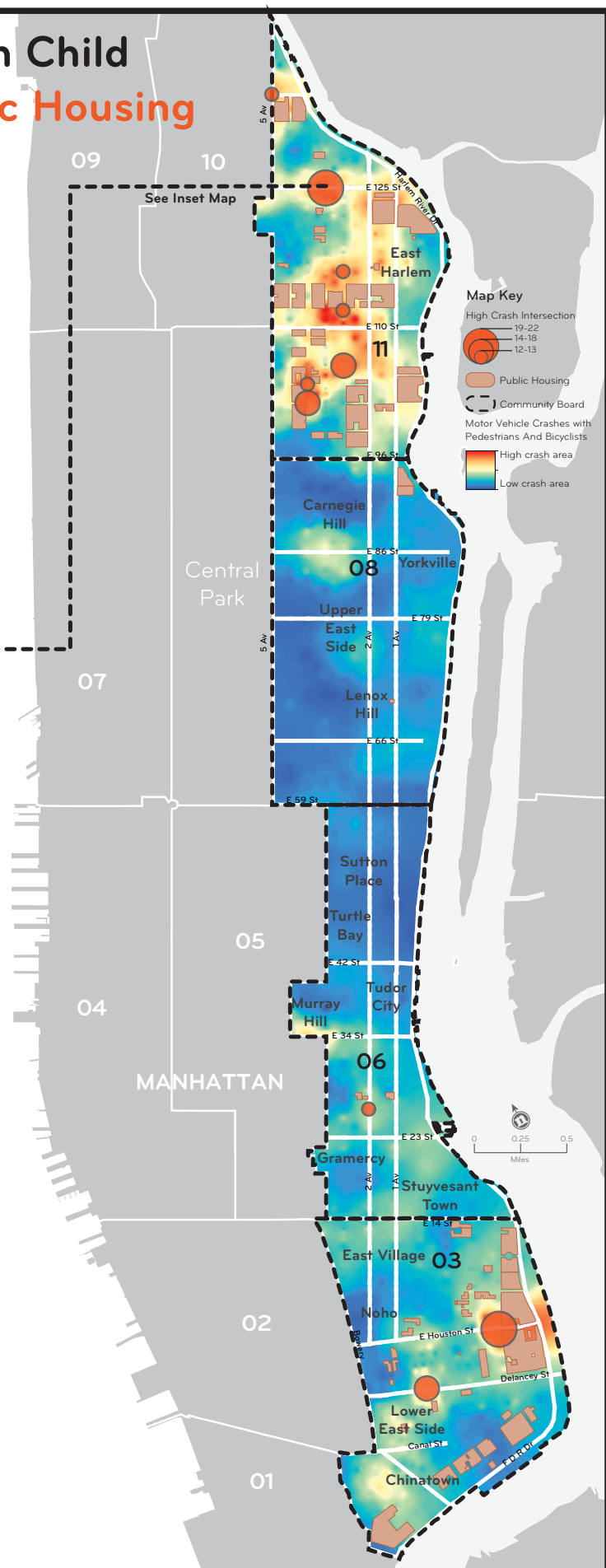
The worst intersection for child crashes in all of Manhattan is in East Harlem, at East 125th Street and Lexington Avenue.

Inset: East 125th Street and Lexington Avenue



Children under 18 make up about 30% of residents in both East Harlem and the Upper East Side. But in **East Harlem children** account for **43%** of crash victims, while **Upper East Side** children represent less than **15%** of neighborhood car crashes with pedestrians and bicyclists, a **three-fold disparity**.

*Child population data source: American Community Survey, Demographic and Housing Estimates 2007-2009



VISION ZERO

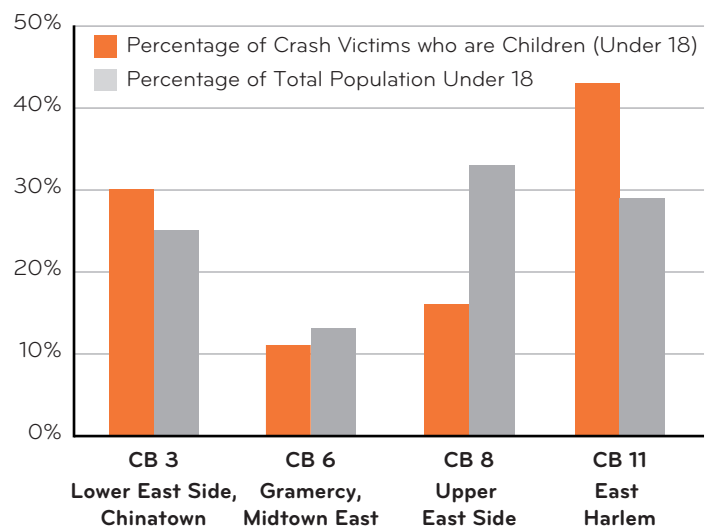
MOTOR VEHICLES ARE THE LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH DUE TO INJURY AMONG CHILDREN IN NEW YORK CITY;ⁱ BUT THE BURDEN OF THESE TRAGEDIES DOES NOT AFFECT ALL NEIGHBORHOODS EQUALLY. Particularly alarming: child crash hot spots on the East Side of Manhattan cluster near public housing in East Harlem and the Lower East Side. This is a grave injustice in neighborhoods that already bear child health inequalities in rates of diseases such as obesity and asthma.

A pedestrian or bicycle crash victim in East Harlem (Community District 11) is over three times more likely to be a child than in the neighboring Upper East Side (Community District 8).

In Community District 3 (Lower East Side/Chinatown), a person struck by a car is nearly two times more likely to be a child than a crash victim on the Upper East Side.

The worst intersection for child crashes in all of Manhattan is in East Harlem, at East 125th Street and Lexington Avenue.ⁱⁱ

Child Crash Proportion versus Child Population, East Side



WHY ARE CHILDREN IN LOWER-INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED BY CRASHES?

Reckless driving behaviors such as speeding and failure to yield account for 60 percent of fatal pedestrian and bicycle crashes citywide.ⁱⁱⁱ More detailed health and neighborhood research is needed to uncover the specific behaviors behind this disproportionate impact on low-income communities. Factors may include:

- Disproportionate driver speeding on arterial streets next to public housing
- Increased mid-block crossing behavior due to superblock layout of developments
- Greater density of children in public housing developments

And does this pattern of injustice hold citywide? If so, this may indicate a need for streets adjacent to public housing areas to be considered similarly to school zones (e.g., lower speed zones—even on arterials, increased traffic violation fines). Armed with better information about the causes of crash disparities, local citizen advocates can demand that city agencies work together to provide informed, targeted enforcement and design strategies to reverse this health crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) recently launched a campaign to “Make NYC Your Gym,” recognizing that streets are an accessible and free resource for New Yorkers—especially in under-resourced neighborhoods—to be active by walking and biking. But for healthy, active streets to be a reality on the East Side and throughout the five boroughs, the New York City Police Department (NYPD), the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) and DOHMH must work together to prioritize safer streets for walking and biking, especially for our city’s most vulnerable children.

At the request of East Side residents, the DOT is already installing life-saving improvements on First and Second Avenues from Houston Street to 125th Street. Design changes include pedestrian islands to shorten crossing distances, and protected lanes for bicyclists. But to bring the number of child fatalities and serious injuries down to zero, especially in our city’s most under-resourced neighborhoods, the NYPD must also make street safety a priority by enforcing speeding, red light running, and other reckless driving behavior. And better data from the DOHMH would inform DOT and NYPD priorities to address the crash causes among child pedestrians and bicyclists.

IMPROVED ENFORCEMENT TO PROTECT CHILDREN

To boost the effectiveness of NYPD enforcement of the New York City speed limit of 30 mph, the City should make use of speed cameras, a low-cost and proven technology that saves lives. Speed cameras are now in place in over 70 communities in the United States, and this solution is supported by the NYC DOHMH, DOT, and NYPD. State legislation is required from Albany in order to introduce speed cameras in New York City.

Existing legal tools such as Haley and Diego’s Law and Elle’s Law established penalties for reckless driving in 2010 in response to two tragic crashes that killed and injured young children who were walking on the East Side of Manhattan. But the New York Police Department has failed to make use of these tools to punish and deter drivers who cause injurious and deadly crashes.^{iv}

And NYPD summoning priorities fail to match the causes of crashes citywide. For example, the NYPD distributes fewer moving violations for speeding—the number one cause of fatal crashes in New York City—than for driving a vehicle with tinted windows.

BETTER DATA FOR TARGETED ENFORCEMENT AND DESIGN

To ensure that street enforcement and design changes respond to the true causes of crashes, DOHMH should partner with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and the NYPD’s Accident Investigation Squad (AIS) in a study to determine what neighborhood built environment factors, individual behaviors (by drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists) or socio-demographic influences may drive these neighborhood-based differences in child crash rates. This is fully in line with DOHMH’s commitment to decreasing community health disparities.

APPENDIX: VULNERABLE USER LAWS

Hayley and Diego's Law is named after four-year-old Hayley Ng and three-year-old Diego Martinez, who were struck and killed by a delivery truck that rolled onto the sidewalk in Chinatown. Hayley and Diego were walking hand-in-hand with their preschool class. Despite injuring 12 people and killing two children, the driver was not charged with a crime.^v

Elle's Law is named for Elle Vandenburg, who sustained traumatic brain damage in a car crash while walking to pre-school on the East Side of Manhattan. Elle was in a crosswalk on a green light. The driver was rushing parallel to her on a busy boulevard when he spotted a parking spot on a side street, so he reversed up the boulevard, through the crosswalk, and the wrong way down a one way street.^{vi}

In New York City over 13,000 pedestrians and bicyclists are injured or killed in crashes with motor vehicles every year, but in the vast majority of cases, the motorist remains free to get right back behind the wheel. To change that, Transportation Alternatives (T.A.) worked to pass Hayley and Diego's Law and Elle's Law, laws which went into effect in 2010. These laws created new penalties for "Failure to Exercise Due Care" under section 1146 of the New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law (VTL). Motorists found guilty of careless driving have to complete a driver education course and face fines up to \$750, jail time up to 15 days, and license suspensions up to six months—or a year for repeat offenders.^{vii}

Transportation Alternatives filed a Freedom of Information request in May 2011 with the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles and found that the number of applications of VTL 1146 has remained more or less steady for the last few years. T.A. estimates that there will be approximately 77 citations of the statute in 2011 based on a total of 32 citations issued as of June this year, while 97 tickets were issued under 1146 in 2010, 87 in 2009, and 92 in 2008. These statistics show that a year after these new penalties meant to protect New Yorkers went in effect, they are barely being applied.

REFERENCES

- i Fortin, P., Stayton, C., DiGrande, L., Yau, R., Hackett, M. & the New York City Child Fatality Review Team. “Report from the New York City Child Fatality Review Team: Understanding Child Injury Deaths,” New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (2011).
- ii Analysis of 1995-2009 data from the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles.
- iii Analysis of 80 contributing factors associated with crashes tracked by the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles from 1995-2009.
- iv New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, in response to Freedom Of Information request filed by Transportation Alternatives (June 3, 2011). See Appendix.
- v “First Anniversary Of Hayley And Diego’s Law Marks A Year Of Under-Enforcement,” Transportation Alternatives (October 13, 2011): <http://www.transalt.org/newsroom/releases/5485>.
- vi Vandenberghe, Heather Acheson. “A Mother’s Introduction to Elle’s Law,” Elle’s Law: www.elleslaw.org.
- vii “Drivers to exercise due care,” New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law § 1146: public.leginfo.state.ny.us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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