Biking While Black: How Planning Contributes to Unjust Policing

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Biking While Black
How Planning Contributes to Unjust Policing

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Recent events highlight the dangers of police enforcement to Black cyclists

‘I’m sad, and I’m mad’: Killing of Black cyclist by L.A. County deputies sparks outrage, grief
safety as a planning objective
Cyclist fatalities have increased 38% over the last decade.

Source: FARS (2020). (% indicates proportion of all fatalities)
Black and Latino cyclists are overrepresented in fatality statistics.
Low-income/communities of color

Portland high-crash network (PBOT)

Chicago high-crash network (CDOT)
Police engagement is a central component of Chicago’s VZ plan.
Research goal

To what extent is overpolicing in communities of color driven by failures of planning and urban investment (using cycling as a case study)?
background:
cycling enforcement
“Illegal” behaviors are rational responses to planning deficiencies

- Cyclists generally prefer off-street, separated infrastructure
- But cyclists ride on sidewalks along high-traffic roads when no other infrastructure
- Everyone (using all modes) has broken a traffic rule

Image: New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition
Black cyclists have particular barriers and responses

Common barriers

- Crime/personal security
- Inadequate infrastructure
- Racial profiling

Image: New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center
Is policing the right safety intervention?

Sidewalk riding is generally riskier than riding most other places
- 1.8 to 16 times the risk of riding on road
- Comparisons mixed: more dangerous riding against traffic, as dangerous as riding on mixed-used paths with pedestrians
Is policing the right safety intervention?

(Traffic) policing is disparate, racist, and unjust

- Data from 20 million vehicle stops showed pervasive racial disparities
- In Chicago, bicycle citations issued twice as often in Black neighborhoods compared to others (56% of tickets in 2018)
- Discretionary stops (like bike ticketing) drive the racial bias in traffic enforcement; traffic injury responses and traffic safety violations do not
the study
Data gathering and processing

- Examined number of tickets issued per street segment
- FOIA request of CPD tickets issued for bicycle offences
  - Time period: January 2014 to December 2019
- Additional variables analyzed
  - Neighborhood sociodemographics
  - Street segment characteristics
    - Bike infrastructure
    - Street functional class
  - Neighborhood context
    - Police presence
    - Safety
Bicycle sidewalk citations issued

![Graph showing bicycle sidewalk citations issued from 2014 to 2019. The number of citations decreased from 3992 in 2014 to 1343 in 2019.](image)
Racial and ethnic distribution in Chicago
Each dot represents 75 people

Source: ACS 5-year data, 2013-2017

Bike injury crashes in Chicago

Source: City of Chicago
Citations per 1,000 residents
2017-2019

Racial and ethnic distribution in Chicago
Each dot represents 75 people

Source: ACS 5-year data, 2013-2017
results
Demographics

More likely

Less likely

Black (%)  Latino (%)

Asian (%)  In poverty (%)

Population density (log)  Employment density (log)

Odds of tickets issued

Less likely  More likely
Street characteristics

- More likely
- Less likely

- Arterial street
- Collector street
- Bike route
- Bike lane
- Separated lane

Bike route x Arterial
Bike route x Collector
Bike lane x Arterial
Bike lane x Collector
Separated lane x Arterial
Separated lane x Collector

Street length (km)

Odds of tickets issued

Less likely

More likely
Neighborhood context

- Serious bike crashes
- Serious crashes (all modes)
- Violent crimes per year
- Officers assigned (mean)

Odds of tickets issued

Less likely: 0.98
More likely: 1.00

Note: The diagram shows that serious bike crashes are more likely to result in tickets, while other variables show less likelihood.

Serious bike crashes:

Violent crimes per year:

Officers assigned (mean):

Serious crashes (all modes):
Takeaway: Clear associations between infrastructure, disadvantage, and policing

- Greatest incidence of tickets in Black neighborhoods
- Bike infrastructure on major streets lowered ticket incidence
  - But disproportionately absent from Black/Latino neighborhoods
- Safety not linked to enforcement
  - Instead linked to crime prevention strategies (CPD quote)
What can planners and policymakers do?

- Reconsider the role of enforcement in traffic safety
- Invest in infrastructure
  - But work in close collaboration with community members
- Be attentive to the intersections of identity and mobility
  - Needs differ across groups
  - Sometimes efforts fail to count the differences