

D.C. crackdown aimed at protecting pedestrians– sometimes from themselves

By [Fredrick Kunkle](#)

May 16, 2017 at 6:28 PM



Pedestrians cross the intersection of North Capitol and G streets NE, May 16, 2017, in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Salwan Georges/The Washington Post) “Hey! Stop that van!” shouted the man in a brown T-shirt and cargo pants.

Police, detailed to the corner of North Capitol and H streets NE, complied.

“All of them need to wear a seat belt!” the guy yelled again.

And so the contractor’s van became a collateral casualty of a D.C. police crackdown Tuesday designed to protect pedestrians near Union Station.

And the guy in the T-shirt from Earl Campbell’s Sports Bar turned out to be Sgt. Terry Thorne, of the D.C. police department’s traffic division.

Thorne was playing the role of a pedestrian decoy in Tuesday’s Street Smart Safety Campaign to encourage drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians to obey traffic laws that keep everybody safe.

“We do roadway enforcement against everyone,” Thorne said. “We do not focus on any one” group.

Any driver who inched into a crosswalk while pedestrians were there or passed a Metrobus improperly was fair game. So were pedestrians who jaywalked– often with a smartphone stuck to their ear– but they mostly got a leaflet and a talking to. A bicycle courier appeared about to zip onto the sidewalk off H

Street until he saw a uniformed officer in a bright green safety vest and U-turned back onto the street.

Officer Linda Page, who was standing on the corner, was working as a spotter. When she saw cars or other vehicles violating traffic laws, she used a walkie-talkie to direct other officers in uniform to send the offenders to the curb.

“I was not offended at all,” said a man who was told to step back on the curb, oxblood-colored Oxfords and all. He declined to give his name but welcomed the effort. “I am so glad I didn’t walk across or I would have gotten a ticket.”

Police used hard diplomacy (issuing summonses) and soft diplomacy (telling people to stay on the curb and passing out leaflets on safety). A similar crackdown was conducted in Silver Spring at George Avenue and Fenwick Lane earlier this month.

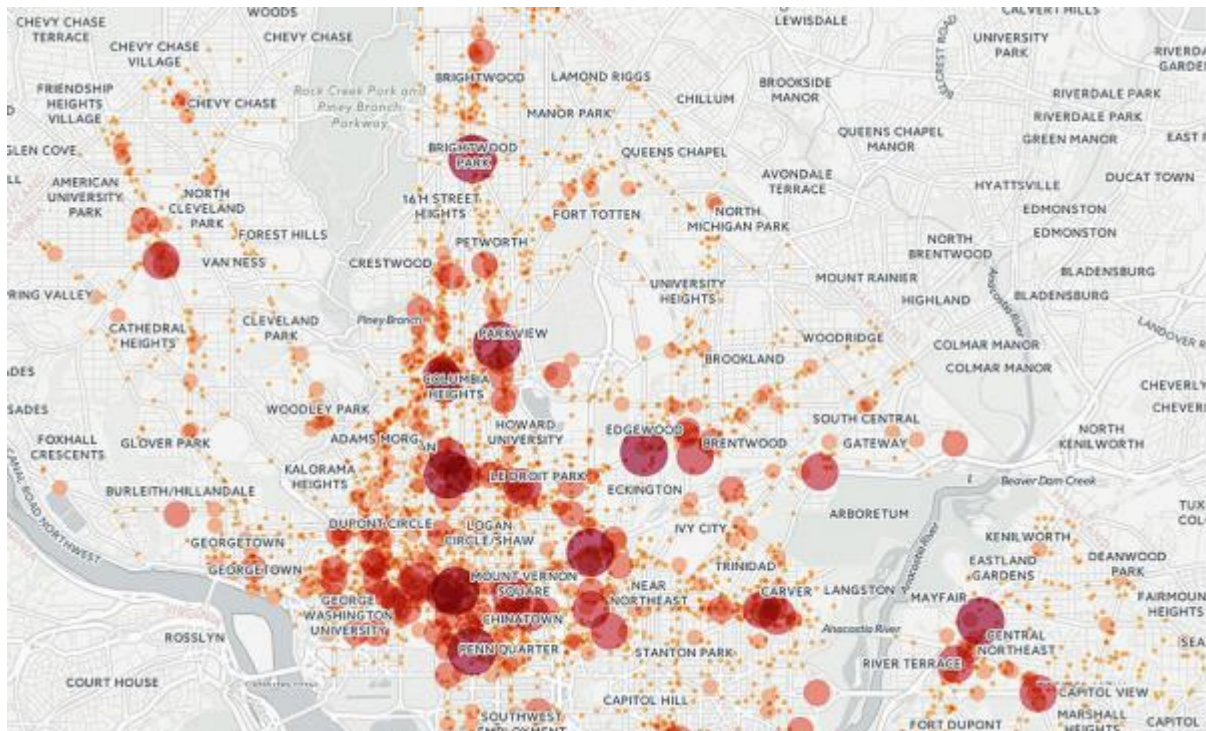


In this picture from the event on May 8, an officer with Montgomery County law enforcement crosses Georgia Avenue at the intersection with Fenwick Lane in Silver Spring. County police are trying to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety via a “Street Smart” program. (Photo by Michael Robinson Chavez/The Washington Post)

George Branyan, pedestrian coordinator for the District’s Department of Transportation, said about three pedestrians are hit every year at the intersection North Capitol and H streets, which is close to Union Station and the Government Printing Office. Of those, most were hit by vehicles that failed to yield while turning through a crosswalk, Branyan said. He estimated that about 15 tickets were issued in an hour or so.

The campaign comes amid city and regional efforts to reduce pedestrian fatalities. A [map](#) recently produced by a city law firm using open data from the

nation's capital offers a snapshot of where heavy traffic and poorly designed streets conspire to make crossing the street dangerous.



A map of pedestrian crashes in Washington shows the most dangerous intersections in the system. It may also be a reflection of the rising number of crashes caused when either the driver or the pedestrian is distracted by a smartphone, according to the lawyer whose firm commissioned it.

Branyan said he liked the interactive map — which is designed to highlight the frequency and severity of pedestrian crashes — but cautioned that it doesn't point out the riskiest intersections in the city, because the map is not adjusted by traffic volume. So it shows only those intersections that are dangerous and the most heavily trafficked overall. He said the riskiest intersections in the city, adjusted for traffic volume, are Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and Howard Road SE; East Capitol Street and Benning Road NE; and Minnesota Avenue and Benning Road NE.

Fifteen minutes after the police decamped, however, the intersection near Union Station returned to the choreographed frenzy of an urban street, and the obvious offenses by humans and vehicles started piling up: a car sped through the yellow on H Street eastbound, not quite clearing the red light signal; a black Saturn sedan stopped with its front wheels encroaching on the H Street crosswalk; a guy with a Redskins cap and a cane crossed against the

signal first on North Capitol Street and then again H Street, threading his way through traffic; and a bicyclist barely slowed before cruising through a red light across North Capitol Street.

The Street Smart Safety Campaign is coordinated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and funded by the District, Maryland, Virginia and Metro.