

Last year was the deadliest year for pedestrians in Ottawa, with 23 vehicle collisions, 11 of which were fatal.

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Ottawa Police leave the scene after investigating a pedestrian being struck by a vehicle on Charlotte Street in Ottawa on Oct. 2, 2023. A woman in her 30s died. PHOTO BY TONY CALDWELL / POSTMEDIA

During the 2023 Race Weekend, my team organized a 'cheer station' at the intersection of Beechwood and Springfield avenues, around the 30-kilometre mark of the marathon. Knowing runners would be getting tired and the morning was already very hot, we blasted music, handed out water and high-fived participants as they passed.

A car pulled up to the intersection. Despite seeing the road was closed, it started inching toward the runners. We watched in horror as a police officer and other volunteers started yelling at the driver to stop. She finally rolled down her window and screamed back, "Open the street! I'm late for brunch!" Within two minutes the main body of runners past and she was safely escorted across the intersection.

This interaction is one of many close or dangerous calls that I either witness or read about in my inbox at least once a week.

Drivers turning right on red lights and not looking to the right as they don't fully stop. Cars parked in bike lanes in order to run a "quick" errand, forcing cyclists into busy streets unprotected. Drivers cutting through residential neighborhoods in order to avoid congestion at rush hour, thereby overwhelming roads, often near schools, not made to withstand that kind of traffic.

I was hit by a car while biking in the ByWard Market in August and fractured my wrist.

Even U.S. President Joe Biden's administration recently received more than 100,000 comments regarding pedestrian safety in the recent changes to federal traffic standards.

In search of solutions, in November I held an open house on traffic calming at a community centre in Vanier with City of Ottawa Traffic Services staff. Just hours before our event, a woman crossing Montreal Road was tragically killed. Maybe because of this, or other close calls downtown, I received over 200 comments and suggestions as to where to put traffic calming in 2024.

Despite all the red light and speeding cameras, awareness campaigns and action plans, 2023 was the deadliest year for pedestrians in Ottawa, with 23 vehicle collisions, 11 of which were fatal. Already in 2024, a pedestrian was struck and killed in a collision near the intersection of Bank Street and Heron Road.

It is even more frightening if you live in the suburbs, given that the deadliest of accidents happened outside of the core. The stats are so alarming that Ottawa Police had to release a statement asking people not to drink and drive or drive distracted.

The Ottawa Safety Council reports that most fatal collisions happen during rush hour and are 90 per cent preventable. Having on-street parking narrows a street, making drivers go slower. Adding trees to the right of way reduces speeds and boosts our tree canopy.

Quebec is introducing a maximum of 30 km per hour around schools and many neighbourhoods in Ottawa have done the same. The city of Paris is rolling out 200 school streets as part of its pedestrian safety plans.

These are all great starts, but we all need to collectively remember that our cars are not just for transportation. They can inflict damage and harm that can alter the course of a person and their family forever.

Since we are in the time of resolutions, I have some that I am begging drivers in the National Capital Region to make and keep in 2024. Slow down. Don't be the brunch lady. Put your phone away. Get a rideshare. Take public transit. Walk or bike. You will never regret getting to your destination safely.

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