

BIKE CLUB ADVOCACY: FORWARD AND BACKWARD

The New York Cycle Club joined the NYC Bicycle Coalition when it was formed in 2005. The main goal in doing so is to bargain for better and safer cycling conditions in New York for all cyclists.

In May 2006, I represented the NYCC at the New York City Greenway Summit, sponsored by Transportation Alternatives. The summit brought together more than 100 government employees, elected officials, planners, and greenway advocates and users to discuss a wide array of greenway planning, development, and maintenance issues. It was a great opportunity for us to share information and learn about projects other organizations were working on.

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Another very successful event we attended was a transportation seminar sponsored by Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President, in October 2006. The keynote speaker was Enrique Peñalosa, the dynamic former mayor of Bogotá, Colombia. During his term, Mayor Peñalosa oversaw the city's transformation from the gridlock capital of the world to one of the most bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly cities in the world.

Recently, however, the NYCC's involvement with the bike coalition has been overshadowed by the New York Police Department's decision to rewrite the city's parade permit regulations. These rules now require groups of 50 cyclists to obtain permits in advance in order to ride together. This issue has almost put a halt to our advocacy activities in working for better and safer city cycling. What is the point of having a friendly environment to ride in, if you are unable to enjoy it freely and need a permit to do so?

In my opinion, the parade permit rule is frightening, and it raises numerous practical questions for me as a ride leader of the NYCC. How will it be implemented? If I lead a ride, do I need to make copies of the permit and provide each participant with one? What if more people show up than I have copies for? If only the ride leaders carry the permit, what if the group gets separated by changing traffic lights or people cycling at different speeds? Could police arrest riders who don't have a permit?

It's a shame that the time and energy our club has spent on opposing this new parade permit could not have gone towards more constructive goals—such as lobbying for the NYC Bicycle Master Plan, which was developed almost 10 years ago and has been only fractionally implemented so far.

Before the NYCC joined the bicycle coalition, I had never been involved with any such political advocacy. What I have learned so far is that every good organization has two faces—one smiling at you and the other barking at you. The smiling face of the New York City Council is friendly and working toward making New York a much more bike-friendly city. The other face has allowed the parade permit to be implemented, creating a very hostile cycling environment. Which one do you trust?

Regardless of what happens with the parade permit, the NYCC will continue to bargain for improved cycling conditions in New York. In the long run, I know things will work out fine, and our city will become one of the best cycling cities in the USA.

Annaline Dinkelman is an avid cyclist, longtime NYCC member, and ride leader. She is currently the advocacy coordinator for the NYCC.