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Pedestrians Must Mind Step on Lethal Boulevard

Shom Singh was in the United States on a visitor's visa, so perhaps the 69-year-old Indian man hadn't had enough time to appreciate fully the inherent dangers of crossing Queens Boulevard on foot.

That's sad. He was struck and killed Friday in Forest Hills after climbing over a mid-block pedestrian barrier that's supposed to discourage jaywalking.

There's no doubt that Queens Boulevard is safer today than it has been in recent memory, with the rate of pedestrian accidents and fatalities declining. Much of the credit goes to city officials who, among other things, increased pedestrian crossing time at traffic lights, installed three-foot-high pedestrian barriers on the center medians and allowed parking along the service road as a way to slow traffic.

The police presence has dwindled, however, which is understandable in light of the need to redeploy resources after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. There also is little hope of an overhaul of the poorly designed boulevard, on which 75 pedestrians have died since 1993; a redesign is the only way to make it as safe as possible.

So, now more than ever, the onus is on pedestrians, particularly the elderly, to contribute to their own personal safety when crossing Queens Boulevard. Officials could make modifications from now until some distant future day of redesign — but traffic-oblivious pedestrians would only undermine improvements.

Even if not fatal, the consequences of an accident can be debilitating. A pedestrian hit in Long Island City on Nov. 1 is still recovering at a local hospital. The man, 63, fought for his life for several days before his condition improved. He was crossing against the light.

Whatever's on the other side of Queens Boulevard can wait for the light to change. But many pedestrians, regrettably, don't get the message until it's too late.

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