



Alfonso A. Castillo

I've been covering transportation for Newsday since 2008. Each week I'll bring you insights about Long Island's dangerous roads, along with in-depth news, reporting and analysis from our newsroom experts. Reach out with tips, questions or suggestions at roads@newsday.com



Christopher Castillo, 14, poses a football behind a sign his parents requested. Credit: Newsday/Alfonso A. Castillo

If you drive down the street where I live in Valley Stream, in either direction, you'll come upon what my wife and I call "Christopher's signs."

I'm not sure our 14-year-old son, who was born profoundly deaf, was even old enough to walk, let alone play in the street, when we reached out to our local village government to request "Deaf Child Area" signs be put up near our home. But we knew one day they'd come in handy. And, boy, have they.

Around the time he became a teenager, Chris discovered sports, and he has since spent countless hours playing basketball and football in the street. With his cochlear implant processors on, Chris can usually hear well enough to detect the sound of an approaching vehicle. But some speedsters give kids playing in the street little time to react, and it's even worse for deaf ones.

I've witnessed my share of close calls and can only imagine how much more dangerous the situation would be were it not for those diamond-shaped, yellow signs giving drivers a heads-up that my kid may not hear the sound of their engine or the honking of their horn.

As dangerous as Long Island roads are for the average pedestrian, it stands to reason that they are considerably more so for those with disabilities. The limited studies on this topic bear that out. A 2015 Georgetown University study found that wheelchair users are a third more likely to be killed in pedestrian crashes than non-wheelchair users, with more than half those deaths occurring at intersections. In 2022, health journal *Health & Place* reviewed more than 60 articles and studies on pedestrian-motor vehicle collisions and found that "significantly higher risk of pedestrian collisions, injuries, and fatalities was consistently found among disabled people."

Michael Ring, vice president of Disabled in Action of Metropolitan New York, an advocacy group, spelled out just a few of the unique road safety challenges faced by people with disabilities: a lack of curb cuts on sidewalks that force people in wheelchairs onto busy streets, crosswalk timers that don't give nearly enough time for a person with a mobility issue to cross, cars illegally parking in handicapped spots, rideshare vehicles unequipped to properly secure a passenger in a wheelchair.

Ring said there are several ways that government can make streets safer for people with disabilities, like prohibiting cars from parking near street corners to maximize visibility, installing crosswalk signals with audio alerts and building curb extensions at cross walks to minimize the distance across a street.

Some might say, "Well, people with disabilities just need to be more careful." But, as Ring put it, "being more careful isn't an option" for some people living with disabilities, including those who cannot see, or hear, the dangers around them.

What's more, the Americans with Disabilities Act, signed into law 35 years ago this month, is all about trying to make it so that people with disabilities don't have to be "tried" or "tess" anything. At some point, it's incumbent on everybody else to do their part.

Readers speak up

Last week, I wrote about [the lessons Long Island could learn from Queens](#) on how to make roads safer. This reader believes Long Island street planners should cast an even wider net.

Unsafe roads are what we accept and tolerate. It becomes personal when we have a horrific experience. We want to avoid that. What we have doesn't have to be our future. As to the suggestion that we want to go slow as they've done in Queens so people can get acclimated — please suggest that people visit Canada, our neighbors. The problem doesn't exist there. I have family in Australia. What we see on the LE would lead to losing your income in Sydney. I want to live to spend time with my grandkids. Please continue to advocate for reasonable and humane behavior on our roads. Thanks again for taking up this cause.

— Arthur L. Popp, Melville

Do you know of other areas that are doing a better job than Long Island in keeping their roads safe? Let us know at roads@newsday.com.

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