

Why I find it extremely hard to speak up against the private-interest speeding cameras (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

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End of last month, two important legal changes were made in southern Cyprus, and will come to effect soon. The first is the new law regulating bicycle use, and the second is a Ministry of Finance decision on how speeding cameras will be operated.

Starting from the latter, the Ministry decided that the way they are going to do it will be to leave it up to a private entity to finance, run and operate the whole thing, and collect the fines from drivers violating the traffic code. Obviously traffic fines even when they were the responsibility of the Police, have been horrifically flawed since they are optimising for increased cash flow. Add into that a private entity as the administrator, and the use of a digital system that builds a database of number plates and the locations they are sighted in, and the opportunities for privacy violations are hard to miss.

The bicycle use law approved in the Parliament introduces some penalties for car drivers who endanger cyclists, but for the most part it does everything possible to discourage cycling as a way to commute. The law introduces a ban on cycling on pedestrian side-walks (instead pushing cyclists on the road, if no bike lane exists, and let's face it, most of the time they don't exist), it prohibits cycling in a single row under most realistic circumstances, and introduces 1000+EUR fines for behaviours that cause no problems. The law is completely unbalanced in where it places responsibility for safe use of public roads, and if it were to be enforced, any progress made in reducing private cars for commuting will quickly be reversed. That is not to say that cyclists do not have any obligation to be responsible road users, but that car drivers clearly have way more.

So, where's the link?

This year we had a cyclist death every 2 months so far (often in hit-and-runs), and dozens more cyclists are injured in accidents involving cars. This has chilling effects on the use of bicycles as a way to commute. People who don't stop cycling all together, feel safer using the pedestrian side-walks at least. Should the law prohibiting bikes on side-walks be enforced, and cycling lanes do not magically appear overnight, a lot more people will stop cycling.

Because of this realistic threat to their life, a bike commuter finds it very hard to speak out against

traffic cameras when they see cars run red lights at controlled intersections and street crossings (at speeds of 80+km/h often) on a daily basis. A bike commuter finds it very hard to defend car drivers when the few stretches of bike lanes in their city are routinely used as parking spots. A bike commuter finds it very hard to take a principled stance against surveillance overreach when they see bike lanes that already exist being demolished to expand car lanes. A bike commuter finally finds it very hard to sympathise with car drivers, when car drivers overtake them without clearance, to make a left turn in front of them cutting their path and park on the corner of an intersection.

Solidarity is the people's weapon against legal overreaches. But I'm comfortable saying: "Car drivers, you first".

Bike commuters have almost no privilege on the road, only pedestrians are more vulnerable than them. The responsibility of making the roads safer for all without resorting to social control apparatuses falls on car drivers.

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