

PressRelease

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For Immediate Release:

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Walking is Not a Crime!

Pedestrians Put Foot Down to Protect Downtown Walkers

What: Pedestrian Rally and March
When: Wednesday, September 28, 2005, 5pm.
Where: Daley Plaza.
Who: Hundreds asserting their right to walk will rally and lead a march.

Foot traffic has long been a cornerstone of downtown Chicago. Imagine Michigan Avenue sidewalks without holiday shoppers. Imagine Buckingham Fountain, the museum campus, the lakefront, or Millennium Park without scores of pedestrians enjoying the view. And imagine the increased congestion of more cars clogging Chicago's streets. Imagine no longer.

If Andrew Velasquez, executive director of the city's Office of Emergency Management and Communications, has his druthers, walking won't be an enjoyable pastime for Chicago residents and visitors, but a criminalized activity, warranting fines and the watchful eye of the police.

In the September 22 Chicago Sun-Times, Velasquez identifies pedestrian traffic as a central cause of vehicle traffic congestion. He asserts the scales are "tipped too heavily in favor of pedestrians" and intends to confront the problem by "drafting legislation that would empower the city's 303 traffic control aides to ticket pedestrians, either for crossing the street outside the crosswalk or within the crosswalk but against the light."

"Pedestrians are being scapegoated for traffic jams caused simply by too many people driving," said Michael Burton of Break the Gridlock. "The bigger threat to Chicagoans is reckless drivers, not walkers. Resources would be much better spent enforcing car speed limits. Encouraging more people to bike, ride transit and walk is the solution, NOT the problem."

"I'm certainly not opposed to holding reckless pedestrians in check," says Ben Helphand, co-Chair of Logan Square Walks. "However, the notion that scales lean in favor of pedestrians simply doesn't hold up. On average 13% of traffic deaths each year in Illinois are pedestrians. Yet only 1 percent of federal surface transportation funds in Illinois are spent on pedestrian and bicycle facilities and safety. The Office of Emergency Management and Communications believes that drivers are 2nd class citizens in Chicago. The reality is the opposite."

The crackdown on pedestrians, combined with the City of Chicago Traffic Management Authority's closure of the Queen's Landing crosswalk, which provided pedestrian access from Buckingham Fountain to the lakefront, has pedestrians "seeing red." Hundreds will gather in Daley Plaza at 5pm on Wednesday, September 28. A short program will begin at 5:15pm, featuring pedestrian advocates, urban planners and perhaps even the Queen of England herself! At 5:30pm they'll strike out on a stroll around the loop. All those who enjoy the city of Chicago on foot are invited to join the critical mass.

The **Downtown Pedestrian Rally and Critical Mass** is being coordinated by Logan Square Walks and Break the Gridlock. More information at www.logansquarewalks.org or 773-252-4657 or 773-562-9942 (cell).