

Why it's hard to punish drivers who kill pedestrians

By Henry Grabar, Salon

What makes it hard to walk in your city?

Is it the quality of sidewalks, buckled by tree roots and submerged in puddles, appearing and vanishing like a disused deer trail? The foreboding urban-renewal landscapes? How about the zoning requirements that set storefronts behind tremendous fields of permanently vacant parking spaces, or ban shops and cafes from residential areas? Is crossing the street a prohibitive inconvenience, a near-death experience? Or is it simply illegal?

Such is the legacy of a century of planning for automobiles. Enshrined in laws and codes, American urban design has made driving easy. As a consequence, it made walking hard.

But design is only half the problem. Less obvious, but no less consequential, was the legal shift through which society absorbed and dismissed the hazards of urban driving, exonerating individual drivers for crashes, even when they killed pedestrians. (In New York City, for example, 95 percent of traffic fatalities do not lead to arrests.)^d riding a bicycle) legally vulnerable.

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