AARIAN MARSHALL TRANSPORTATION 07.05.16 7:00 AM

THERE ARE BETTER WAYS TO KILL TRAFFIC THAN LYING TO WAZE

COKADA/GETTY IMAGES

IT WAS DESPERATION that turned the people of Takoma Park, Maryland into liars. Strangers' cars filled their streets, crowding the quiet Washington, DC suburb with interstate traffic asylum refugees.

The suburbanites retaliated by firing up Waze, the navigation app they blamed for routing the unwanted burst of traffic their way. They began reporting fake car crashes, according to *The Washington Post*, to stave off commuters hoping to beat traffic by taking their—yeah, *their*!—streets instead of the usual, clogged thoroughfares. Similar complaints about Waze-directed traffic on usually quiet side streets have popped up all over the place, in San Jose, Vancouver, and the spiritual home of traffic, Los Angeles.

Lying to the system hasn't worked. When one person reports a crash and every other driver says the road is clear, Waze knows what going on—and suspends the ne'er-do-wells. And it's not apologizing. "These cities are pained because their populations have outgrown infrastructure built in the 50s," says Julie Mossler, the Google-owned company's head of communications. These are public streets, and navigation apps take advantage of them. Waze didn't invent cut-through traffic, it just propagates it.

If you're determined to calm your cul de sac, however, there are better moves than lying to an app. Cities around the world are already doing that, using what civil engineers call "traffic calming" techniques that force vehicles to slow down—or choose another route. These street design choices take cooperation from local authorities, and they're not dollar-store cheap. But they work. Listen up, Takoma Park.

Speed Humps

Pasadena, California, is a nationwide leader on traffic-fighting design techniques, and its big gun is the lowly speed hump. A council-approved regulation almost guarantees the things pop up three to four times on every 1,200-foot stretch of street, says Fred Dock, the director of the city's Department of Transportation. The real secret to traffic calming is to install them everywhere. Otherwise, navigation apps will find that extra bit of speed and exploit it ruthlessly. Of course, neighborhoods that get really into speed humps have to pay for them—about $2,500 a hump—and suffer their consequences, including wear and tear on their tires, brakes, and suspension systems.

Skinnier Streets

You've heard of the Atkins Diet and the Mediterranean Diet—get ready for the cake-friendly Road Diet. Road diets reduce the number of lanes on a street, using that extra space to widen sidewalks, create bike lanes, or insert extra strips of green. Studies show they slow down traffic and reduce crash frequency by up to 47 percent. That slowness makes residential streets unappealing to drivers fleeing congested arterials—and makes those who remain less likely to hit your kid on her bike. Another way to thin streets is to use "neckdowns", which narrow existing lanes at the entrance to residential streets. Tighter streets make drivers more cautious and aware, those these interventions can cost communities anywhere between $750 and $30,000 per mile.

Not This Way

Semi-diverters essentially slice intersections in half, only allowing one-way traffic to enter two-way roads. These $5,000 to $20,000 barricades can also be stuck on four-way intersections, to limit turn options. They are very, very good at throwing wrenches in street networks, which means fewer wandering cars will stumble upon

the affected roads. Plus, cities can plunk plants or even trees in the centers of these semi-diverters. Less traffic and more green: What more can you ask for?

Baby Traffic Circles

These small, round traffic solutions—reserved, really, for neighborhoods and not crazy-busy streets—force incoming traffic to slow and yield to whoever's already in the circle. For $5,000 and $15,000, they won't force cars to stop, but they will (you guessed it!) slow everyone down.

Burn It All Down

The other option is ugly. It's brutal. Don't do it, probably. But the absolute best way to reduce cut-through traffic is to transform your neighborhood into a grid. Cut-through traffic "is particularly a problem in areas that try to concentrate traffic onto a few major roads, but leave only a few other routes besides main arterials connected," says David Levinson, a civil engineer with the University of Minnesota. Streets arranged as connected grids, on the other hand, "tend to distribute traffic more evenly." That means that even if your neighborhood's fave arterial road gets shuttered, vehicles fleeing congestion will spread out across the area. No one road will bear the brunt of the nuttiness.

Tragically, there are no shortcuts to beating residential traffic. Instead of using your phone to sabotage Waze, try using it to call your local transportation commissioner.