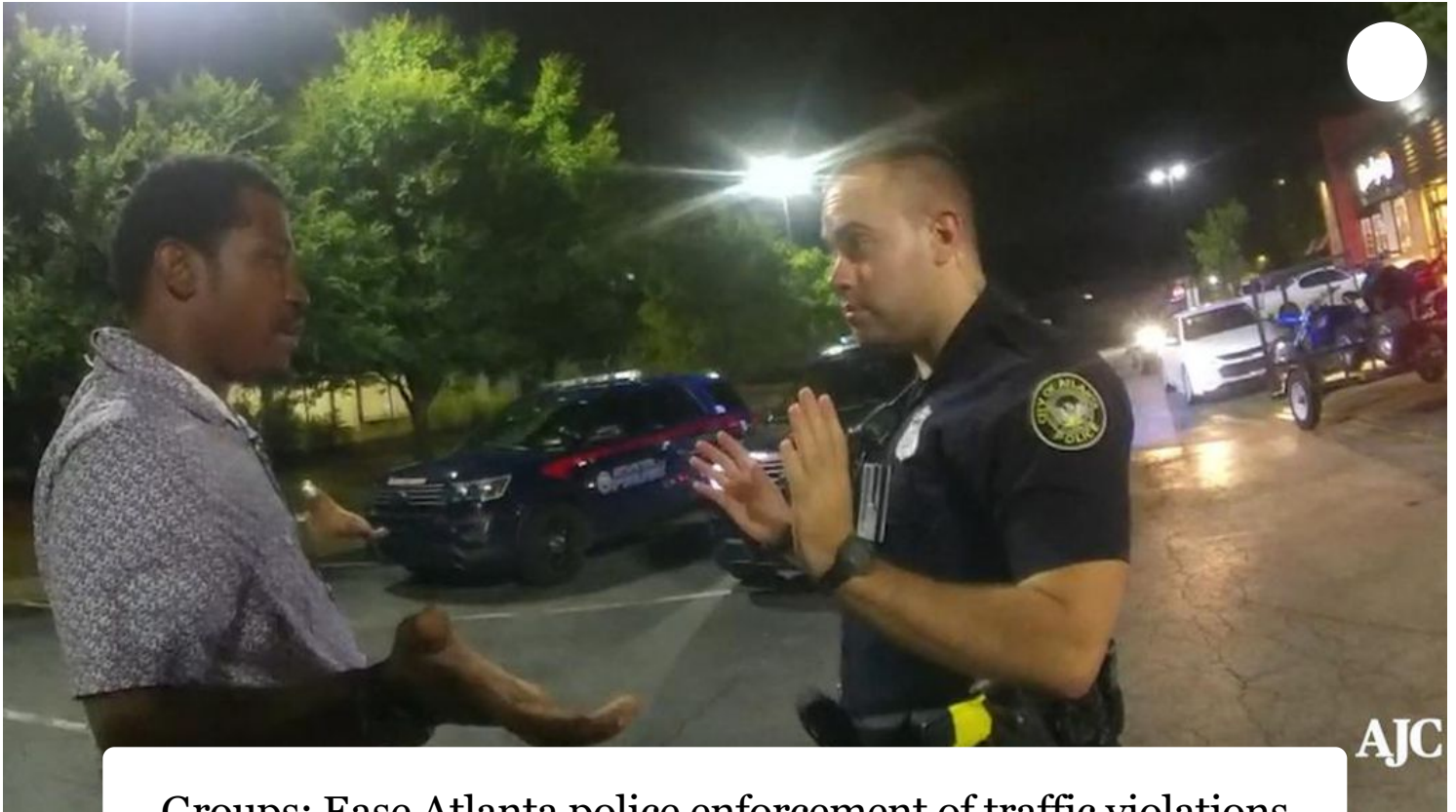


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Groups: Ease Atlanta police enforcement of traffic violations

NEWS | June 29, 2020

By Raisa Habersham, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

A coalition of Atlanta transit and equity groups are urging the city to remove law enforcement action as the primary traffic safety tool in order to reduce potentially deadly encounters with police.

Inspired by the police interaction that led to the fatal shooting of Rayshard Brooks, the letter signed by the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition, PEDS, TransFormation Alliance, and Georgia

Stand-Up, states that aggressive police enforcement of traffic laws make city streets less safe for black, brown, immigrant and indigenous communities.

“By eliminating police enforcement from the efforts to achieve zero traffic deaths, Atlanta will reduce potentially fatal or dangerous interactions with the police,” read the June 19 letter, which came a week after Brooks, 27, was killed outside a Wendy’s on University Avenue and part of the Vision Zero effort. Atlanta declined to comment.

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Atlanta passed its Vision Zero plan in April, which included reducing the speed limit on city streets from 35 mph to 25 mph. Vision Zero is a nationwide road safety program designed to eliminate the number of traffic fatalities.

Last year, 73 people — including 22 pedestrians — were killed in traffic accidents in the city, according to Department of Transportation commissioner Josh Rowan.

Brooks' shooting is one of the latest in a string of fatal police encounters involving Black pedestrians and motorists nationwide. These incidents have sparked ongoing protests against police brutality and renewed calls for police reform.

Atlanta Bicycle Coalition executive director Rebecca Serna said the group had researched Vision Zero and learned a big concern for Black communities was the use of traffic stops and other types of police enforcement.

“They knew from personal experience that didn't make the streets safer. It's no good not getting hit by a car if you're arrested and then shot by the police,” Serna said. “It doesn't keep you safe.”

Avid bicyclist Steven Cousins said he wants police to enforce certain laws such as sharing the roadway, but he doesn't want to see police harassment take place under the guise of Vision Zero, adding he's been pulled over and followed by police while biking “so many times I can't even give you a number.”

In many cases, Cousins said he's been questioned by officers: “Where are you going? Where are you coming from? Where did you get the bike from? Do you have a receipt for the bike?” — all questions Cousins said have been asked of other Black bicyclists who've been stopped by the police.

Georgia Stand-Up executive director Deborah Scott echoed Cousins' sentiments, adding the way to avoid this form of harassment is to decriminalize traffic laws and ensure communities have a say in what policing looks like in their neighborhood.

“Bikers live in communities and community leaders want to be a part of what happens in their neighborhood,” she said. “Let it be decided on a community level with stakeholders and leaders looking at an intersection in their neighborhood so that they can offer solutions.”

Scott said part of those solutions should include protecting human life and ensuring businesses aren’t negatively impacted. “For some of our neighborhoods, bikes are another transportation mode. We don’t want to over-police and over enforce bike lanes without making sure communities have a voice.”

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