

Editorial: Awareness, barriers needed in fight against terrorism by vehicles

The Daily Herald Editorial Board

Updated 8/18/2017 7:31 AM

hello

Nice. Berlin. Columbus. Jerusalem. London. Stockholm. London again. Charlottesville. Barcelona.

In just over a year, those nine cities and the innocent people within them have been the target of vehicular terrorism. Scores of people injured and tragically 135 killed.

A Transportation Security Administration report in May reported 173 people have been killed and more than 700 wounded in 17 ramming attacks in the last three years.

In many cases, these attacks were done in tourist areas that attract many pedestrians out enjoying a focal point of that city. Unfortunately, those areas are now attracting terrorists behind the wheel.

"No community, large or small, rural or urban, is immune to attacks of this kind by organized or 'lone wolf' terrorists," the TSA report says.

It begs the question: How do we guard against these kinds of attacks without disrupting our way of life, which is the ultimate goal of terrorist groups like ISIS.

According to a story in The Washington Post last month, New York City officials have been calling for the installation of more bollards, or vertical posts, to stop vehicles. In Las Vegas, the story said, 700 bollards are being installed along the Las Vegas Strip.

"Big cities are realizing they could have a mass casualty event on all four sides of an intersection at any time," said Rob Reiter, a pedestrian safety expert and a consultant for one of the nation's top bollard manufacturers.

In Chicago, after the Berlin attack at an outdoor Christmas market, police parked vehicles diagonally at the corners of Daley Plaza to block vehicular access to a Christmas market there.

All cities should be considering permanent barriers in vulnerable spots as the terrorist threat is not abating. But security experts also say it's incumbent on everyday citizens to always be aware of their surroundings and of any suspicious activity.

The TSA alerted the nation's trucking companies about the rising risk of rental trucks and hijackings and thefts for purposes of such attacks. That same report urged vehicle owners to report thefts or other suspicious activity promptly.

"The best time to stop an attack is in its planning stages," a recent article in the official publication of the International Association of Chiefs of Police stated. "Outreach should be done to truck rental outlets and commercial vehicle driving schools."

But awareness and security measures, while vitally important, also must be balanced with the fact that terrorists shouldn't be allowed to materially alter who we are and what we do.

That was the message from Spain's King Felipe VI on Wednesday: "All of Spain is Barcelona," he tweeted. "Las Ramblas (one of the city's top tourist zones, site of the attack) will return to being for everyone."