

## Traffic Control

Wednesday, 07 May 2008

Last Updated Wednesday, 07 May 2008

There is a sociology at work whenever you ask for directions in a place with which you are not familiar. The New York System was explained very clearly to me by wirehead, who said (and I am paraphrasing):

New Yorkers have one thing in mind: they want their city to run efficiently. If you ask a New Yorker for directions, they don't mind answering, because it will help their city run better. If, however, you ask them for clarification afterwards, you are slowing them down, and the total efficiency of the system is compromised. Therefore, the way to ask directions in NYC is to ask one person, and nod politely but firmly at their answer, no matter how batshit insane it was, say thank you, and then move on to the next person, who hopefully will make more sense.

I have learned that Things Are Different on the West Coast. If you ask a local for directions here, not only will they walk away from whatever they were doing to gesticulate down the appropriate streets, but they will also engage anyone in range in spirited debate on the correctness of any directions, often in multiple languages simultaneously. They will, in fact, go into other people's businesses and pull them bodily into the street to verify their directions. This was to me epitomized yesterday by the East indian fellow bellowing in Spanish at the tiny Vietnamese nail technician who was waving wildly down the street and screaming incoherent syllables punctuated with "YOU SEE SECOND LIGHT! YOU SEE SECOND LIGHT!"

I'm afraid to ask for any further directions for fear I'll start a race war of some sort.