

Complete Streets offer a way toward zero fatalities

NJDOT promotes policies that enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety

By NJDOT Commissioner James Simpson

When the word “transportation” is mentioned, New Jersey residents for the most part think of cars and trucks or trains and buses and their daily commute. I have spent most of my adult life as a business owner, with locations in the Garden State. That experience has given me the perspective of a motorist.

After becoming Commissioner of Transportation, I relocated near Trenton to one of the most walkable towns in the state, where the freedom from relying on a car for shopping, dining, entertainment and the occasional train trip to the “Big Apple” is second to none.

As a pedestrian, I’ve seen first hand drivers speeding down local streets showing a lack of regard for pedestrians and bicyclists. I see the need for more Complete Streets. That means more and improved sidewalks, better markings at crosswalks to put motorists on alert, bike paths where needed, intersection improvements including countdown pedestrian signals and accessible curb cuts at crosswalks to accommodate the mobility impaired.

Last year, 141 pedestrians in and 13 bicyclists were struck and killed by vehicles on New Jersey roads. Through October 25 of this year, the pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities had reached 99 and 13, respectively. Of this year’s 112 fatalities, five of the victims were under the age of 18 and a total of 20 were under age 30.

That’s why we are promoting New Jersey’s award-winning Complete Streets policy, and why NJDOT is helping counties and municipalities learn what Complete Streets is all about and how they can benefit by adopting their own policies.

Our Complete Streets policy requires that all major NJDOT roadway projects in the future include accommodations for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users and

the mobility impaired. Any exceptions to our policy must be explicitly requested and justified. Pedestrians and high-speed interstate freeways are not a good mix, so we generally would not include sidewalks in such projects. The opportunities for desirable and safe improvements, however, are almost limitless.

The advantage of inserting a dialogue about all users at the earliest stages of project development is that it provides the designers and the engineers the best opportunity to create solutions at the best price. It is easier and cheaper to build it right the first time than to retrofit the project later.

A local Complete Streets policy raises awareness among residents, elected officials and the private sector. When projects are proposed, pedestrian, bicycle and transit accommodations are no longer an afterthought – they become an integral feature of the overall investment plan. Since NJDOT adopted its policy, 13 municipalities and one county have followed suit.

Through our Pedestrian Safety Initiative, we have invested nearly \$15 million since 2007 on building more than 33 miles of sidewalks. The importance of this initiative is evidenced by the fact that we doubled that program's budget in FY 12 to \$4 million.

The Christie Administration supports Complete Streets through a number of NJDOT programs and Local Aid grant opportunities. Safety experts in the Department are in the process of assessing high-risk areas on state highways and propose improvements under our Pedestrian and Bicycle Safe Corridor program. I am personally chairing a committee to reduce pedestrian fatalities at the state's 314 railroad grade crossings.

We are putting the final touches on a Complete Streets video and will be offering regional workshops in the spring to local and county officials to introduce the benefits of Complete Streets and how to design for it.

Seven different Local Aid grant programs administered by NJDOT have provided funding in recent years to counties and towns to help them invest in projects that improve safety and access for pedestrians, bicyclists and others who share our roads.

Like other parents in my community, I push a stroller with my two young children in it and frequently witness inattentive drivers who ignore crosswalks without stopping for pedestrians as the law requires. Every day I see how all of us can make our communities and our state even safer for those non-motorists who share the streets and roads.

Education, Enforcement and Engineering, which I call “E to the third power” or “E-cubed,” can and will make New Jersey safer for everyone. Motorists need to slow down and respect the law. Pedestrians and bicyclists must obey the rules of the road. I urge local governments to adopt Complete Streets policies and join us in this important effort to engineer safety into New Jersey’s road network. Together we will save lives.

###