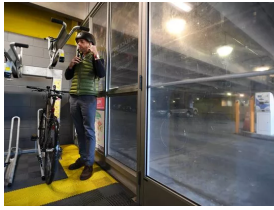


# Bike depots connect cyclists to mass transit

**Owen Proctor**, Staff Writer @OwenProctor1 Published 6:05 a.m. ET March 31, 2017 | Updated 14 hours ago



(Photo: Michael Karas/Northjersey.com)

When Dan Helmick stepped off the train on a recent rain-soaked evening, his next ride for home was close, secure and dry.

Helmick parked his bicycle at Bay Street Station's bike depot, which the New Jersey Walk and Bike Coalition opened in October 2014 in Montclair.

The organization's second depot opened on March 24 in Bloomfield's Glenwood Avenue Garage, steps away from that town's NJ Transit train station. A third one is scheduled to open late summer in Elizabeth's Midtown Garage. The group has discussed potential future installations at Morristown, Ridgewood, Rutherford, Summit and the Port Authority's Journal Square in Jersey City.

**CYCLING:** [Coalition opens second Bike Depot in New Jersey \(/story/news/transportation/2017/03/27/coalition-opens-second-bike-depot-new-jersey/99600920/\)](/story/news/transportation/2017/03/27/coalition-opens-second-bike-depot-new-jersey/99600920/)

**TRAINS:** [Bloomfield plans to overhaul station in 2017 \(/story/news/essex/bloomfield/2017/01/11/bloomfield-intends-overhaul-train-station-2017/96402308/\)](/story/news/essex/bloomfield/2017/01/11/bloomfield-intends-overhaul-train-station-2017/96402308/)

Walk and Bike Coalition Chairman Brian Stolar, founder of The Pinnacle Cos. in Montclair, came up with the depot idea for New Jersey.

"There are very few of these in the country, but they're not uncommon in Europe or Japan," he said.

U.S. transit villages, with residences in close proximity, are growing in popularity. Stolar had wondered about commuters living farther away but within walking or biking distance.

A train station or bus terminal's parking garage, which usually has an unused corner space, appeared to be the most viable option, he said. Such garages are also an affordable consumer choice, because there's usually a waiting list for long-term car parking, he said.

"It puts development, pedestrians and transit together," Stolar said. "For the municipalities, a bike depot is a smart thing for them because it reduces traffic."

Traditional outside bicycle racks are available for free parking at Bay Street Station, but commuters will not necessarily store a nice bike there, coalition Executive Director Cyndi Steiner said. The outside two-wheelers typically are what she called "station bikes," inexpensive or worn out. Cyclists with those bikes are likely less concerned about rust and vandalism, she said.

Bike depot customers with higher-end bikes weren't commuting to the train station before, Steiner said. "It opens up a whole other segment of bike riding to the public," she said.

The depots provide safe, secure and weather-protected parking and storage. Cyclists receive a key fob that gives them access to the enclosure.

## Starting place

Stolar envisioned Montclair in Essex County as a good place to start.

Steiner found Michigan-based Duo-Guard Industries, which manufactures shelters for bus stops, designated smoking areas and bicycle racks. The coalition provided specifications for an enclosed bike depot.

She then helped secure funding through the Partners in Health Foundation, based in Montclair, and Sustainable New Jersey. Partners in Health promotes health-conscious activities, while Sustainable New Jersey seeks environmental solutions, both obtainable goals via bike depots.

Partners in Health provided \$14,000 to the coalition, and Sustainable New Jersey granted \$20,000 to Montclair, with the Walk and Bike Coalition paying the remaining \$3,000. The coalition oversees the project management, including hiring installers and setting up the controlled access and security camera.

The coalition maintains the Montclair depot for about \$175 a month, Steiner said. To help offset expenses, the group sells advertising on the depot's front, also visible from the garage's car entrance and exit. Rates are about \$50 a month per panel, she said.



Dan Helmick leaving the Montclair Bike Depot. “I always have a dry seat,” he said, thanks to the indoor space. (Photo: Michael Karas/Northjersey.com)

The coalition rents the space for \$1 per year from the township.

The Montclair bike depot features 24 horizontal racks, lockers and a tire pump station. It's near capacity, Stolar said.

Members pay \$20 monthly or \$220 annually. There is also a universal membership of \$30 for use of multiple bike depots.

“I always have a dry seat,” Helmick said on his way home.

He moved from the city to Montclair five years ago not having much biking experience. With the garage waiting list and the cost to park a car, he started riding a bike to the station, parking at an outdoor rack. His bike was vandalized a couple of times, he said.

When the bike depot opened, the decision was easy to protect his \$800 Specialized bicycle, the 44-year-old money manager said. Exercise, affordability and energy conservation also influenced his decision, he said.

Helmick rides his bike 2 miles each way between his home and the station. "It's an important part of my daily routine, and I look forward to it," he said, adding that he now rides a little bit with his children on the weekends.

Before using the bike depot, Montclair resident Elizabeth Salvatore and her husband, Matt, lived at the Bay Street apartments next to the station. However, when they moved to a house in town, bicycles solved the problem of the garage waiting list and a 30-minute walk to the station.



Dan Helmick heads for home after leaving the Bike Depot at the Bay Street Station in Montclair. (Photo: Michael Karas/Northjersey.com)

"I think the bike depot is a tremendous benefit for commuters," Elizabeth Salvatore said in an email. "After parking my bike at one of the open-air bike racks at Bay Street a few years ago, I had my tires stolen, so knowing my bike is secure while I am at work is really important."

Stephen Machnowski takes a little longer ride from his home in Verona.

"I find it rewarding to get in the exercise and fresh air," the former bus commuter said. "There are experiences you could only have biking or on foot, such as stopping for a flock of wild turkeys or a family of raccoons."

"There's something civilized about stopping on your bike for a pedestrian in a crosswalk, and having them thank you in person, because unyielding drivers just fly through unaware," he said.

## Expansion

Partners in Health contributed \$25,000 of the \$32,000 for the bike depot in Bloomfield's Glenwood Avenue Garage, Steiner said.

The Walk and Bike Coalition operates the depot jointly with the Bloomfield Parking Authority, which rents the space to the group for \$1 a year. The parking authority also provides the lighting and surveillance for the enclosure.

The Bloomfield depot has 38 racks, both horizontal and vertical, and features a repair station for minor bike maintenance.

Members pay \$15 monthly or \$165 annually. As with Montclair members, a \$30 universal membership is available.

Happy Bloomfield residents include Marty Epstein, owner of three Morris County bicycle shops.

"Bloomfield is on the cutting edge of sustainable living. Future generations are looking for communities with these amenities," the coalition board member said. "The last commuter mile is the hardest to accomplish. This completes that last mile."

The depot also allows commuters to "stay, dine and shop" in the Bloomfield center with no worries, Epstein added.

Teka-Lark Lo, a member of the cycle advocacy group Velo Bloomfield, said she's been looking for bike-friendly endeavors in Essex County since moving from Los Angeles.

Farther south, the Elizabeth Development Corp. will provide the \$40,000 for the bike depot in its Midtown Garage, Steiner said. Once opened in late summer, it will accommodate about 62 bicycles, she said.

Morristown Council President Stefan Armington attended the Bloomfield depot's ribbon-cutting. He said the Morris County seat is considering a 72-rack bike depot off Lafayette Avenue, across from its train station. The project would need NJ Transit approval, he said, adding that there may be financial assistance from Morristown Medical Center.



**Bike JC President Patrick Conlon and Morristown Council President Stefan Armington check out the bike depot's repair stand in Bloomfield's Glenwood Avenue Garage. (Photo: Owen Proctor/NorthJersey.com)**

Bike JC President Patrick Conlon, also in attendance, said he has met with Steiner to discuss a possible bike depot at Journal Square in Jersey City.



"This is the future — the oldest things around, walking and riding a bike," Essex County Freeholder Brendan Gill said at the Bloomfield event.

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Sign up for a bike depot membership at [njbwc.org/bikedepot](http://njbwc.org/bikedepot) (<http://njbwc.org/bikedepot>).

Want a bike depot in your community? Email Cyndi Steiner at [info@njbwc.org](mailto:info@njbwc.org).

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