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MONTCLAIR, N.J. (June 28, 2017) – Nearly 150 law enforcement officers in 50 police departments from seven New Jersey counties completed a one-day training course to help them understand how traffic law relates to bike riders. The course, funded by the NJ Division of Highway Traffic Safety, was taught by the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition and was held in locations in Atlantic, Hudson, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic, and Union Counties in May and June. The Morris Area Freewheelers Foundation funded the course for Morris County.

New Jersey law gives bicycle riders the same rights and duties as drivers of motor vehicles, but many police officers do not have the perspective of traffic from the bike rider's view. With their course, "Title 39: A Bike's-Eye View," NJBWC equipped officers with tools to be more effective in working with bicyclists as drivers. The course was designed to help officers also work with motorists, who often do not understand that bicyclists have a right to use the road in the same way that they do.

According to Les Leathem, Education Coordinator for NJBWC and creator of the course, "Many officers around the state aren't aware of how traffic looks to a bicyclist. They also don't fully understand the challenges bicyclists face in dealing with motorists. This is NOT a bike patrol course. This is about riding a bike legally on the roads, in traffic."

"This program really helps law enforcement officers understand what it is like to ride a bike on the road. Instead of seeing bikes as 'in the way,' the course helps officers understand that bicyclists are another part of traffic," said Arnold Anderson (Retired Detective), Community Traffic Safety Program Coordinator at the Essex County Public Safety Academy.

The course, developed specifically for New Jersey law enforcement officers, addressed the so-called 'Three E's of Traffic Safety': Education, Engineering, and Enforcement, in a classroom session. Officers then got on bikes and were put through various drills to learn maneuvers that help avoid crashes. Finally, they participated in a group ride that took them on a variety of roads ranging from low-speed, residential streets to major highways, to help them understand what it's like to be a bike rider on those roads.

"The road ride session was eye-opening, and the classroom discussion clarified much of traffic law for bicyclists. Talking about applying traffic law to bicyclists and motorists makes it easier to enforce," said Sergeant Mike Leming of the Manchester Township Police Department.

"The real power of this course is its dual approach: classroom discussion helps officers become more aware of the motor vehicle code as it applies to bicyclists. Then, getting the officers on bikes gives them a real taste of how the world looks from the saddle," said Mr. Leathem.

The course was created in consultation with police officers from around the state. Classes were led by Mr. Leathem, who is also a national coach for the League of American Bicyclists, and by police officers who are LAB League Cycling Instructors.

The New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition, headquartered in Montclair, is the only statewide advocacy organization for bicyclists and pedestrians. NJBWC is dedicated to protecting the rights and safety of New Jersey's bicyclists and walkers, promoting bicycling and walking for fun, fitness, and transportation, educating cyclists, walkers, and drivers about our rights and responsibilities, and connecting our communities with a smarter transportation system.

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