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New Jersey Drops 5 Places in the Bicycle Friendly States Ranking

Laws protecting cyclists cited as the main deficiencies within the state

Kicking off National Bike Month, the League of American Bicyclists has released its latest ranking of Bicycle Friendly States. In the annual assessment, New Jersey dropped from number 7 to number 12 nationally, while placing 4th in the northeast. Though the state held relatively steady in total points earned – only a 0.4 drop in total points from last year to this year– several other states increased their points, knocking the Garden State's rankings down five slots.

The Bicycle Friendly States ranking is based on a number of key indicators, including infrastructure and funding that provide on-the-ground bicycle facilities; education and encouragement of programs that promote cycling; and passage and enforcement of bicycle-friendly laws that make it safe and comfortable for people of all ages to ride.

The League named the lack of a Safe Passing Law and a Vulnerable User Law as the two most important shortcomings for New Jersey. While the state continues to be one of the leaders in the nation in passing Complete Streets policies at the municipal and county levels, it has yet to enact legislation to protect bicyclists on the roadway.

The good news is that, in a bi-partisan effort, New Jersey legislators have recently introduced bills focused on improving safety for pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable users of New Jersey's roads.

Senator Diane Allen (R7), Assemblyman Troy Singleton (D7), Assemblyman Herb Conaway (D7), and Assemblywoman L. Grace Spencer (D29) have sponsored bills in this legislative session to protect vulnerable users of the roadway by increasing penalties for motor vehicle violations resulting in serious bodily injury or death to pedestrians and cyclists. Assemblyman Singleton and Assemblywoman Spencer are sponsors of a safe passing bill which requires drivers to move over or slow down when approaching a bicyclist or pedestrian.

"In light of the recent report administered by the League of American Bicyclists, it is imperative, now more than ever, that New Jersey stand up for bicyclists and pedestrians on our roadways" said Assemblyman Troy Singleton. "It is my sincere hope that the Legislature will heed the League's

recommendation to implement a Safe Passing (A1600) and Vulnerable Road User Law and advance my bill, A958, which will accomplish this goal."

"We consider this announcement a call to state legislators to pass legislation that protects bicycle riders and pedestrians alike" said Cyndi Steiner, Executive Director of New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition. "While traffic fatalities among motorized users have dropped in recent years, the percentage of fatalities applicable to vulnerable road users has continued to rise."

"New Jersey's fall from number 7 to number 12 sends an urgent message to state legislators that they must act swiftly to pass this safety legislation" said Janna Chernetz, New Jersey Advocate for Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "Failure to do so continues to put the lives of bicyclists, and other users of New Jersey's roads, at needless risk."

In 2014, 2.8 percent of New Jersey Department of Transportation dollars were slated to go toward projects that make the streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists – an increase from 2.1 percent in the previous year. However, according to the New Jersey State Police, pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities made up 27 percent of all road fatalities in New Jersey in 2013. "With such a disproportionate amount of funding, the State should put more resources into these types of projects" said Chernetz.

"Overall, we still see a lot of opportunity to realize the huge potential of bicycling to promote health, economic development, and quality of life" said Andy Clarke, president of the League of American Bicyclists.

The League of American Bicyclists is leading the movement to create a Bicycle Friendly America for everyone. As leaders, the League's commitment to listen and learn, define standards and share best practices to engage diverse communities and build a powerful unified voice for change. Information the report card for New Jersey can be found at http://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/BFS2014_NewJersey.pdf. The complete state rankings can be found at <http://bikeleague.org/content/ranking>.

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