

Where does N.J. rank among the best states to bike?



Bikes fill the racks at the Metro Park train station in Woodbridge. Bicycle advocates said NJ would be a more bike friendly place for commuters to ride to work in if a safe passing law was passed. (Larry Higgs | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

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on May 17, 2015 at 7:50 AM, updated May 17, 2015 at 7:52 AM

Thinking about commuting by bike to work to celebrate national bike month?

New Jersey is the 11th best state in which to pedal.

New Jersey just missed being named among the top 10 best states to bike in, as ranked by [League of American Cyclists](#). It's good news, but not great.

"The number one reason people don't ride in this state is road safety. Everywhere I go, the first thing I hear is, 'You can't ride around here, it's too dangerous'," said Cyndi Steiner, [New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition](#) executive director.

So **what kept New Jersey out of the top 10?** Laws to protect cyclists, specifically the lack of **a law requiring vehicles passing bicycles or pedestrians give them a wide berth**, she said.

A bill proposing something similar died in the state Transportation Committee last year after chairman and State Senator Nicholas Sacco, D-Hudson, didn't release it for a vote.

Currently, 25 states have such laws. Advocates have drafted a new bill, which Steiner said could answer concerns about the enforceability of the original proposal.

The typical New Jersey bike commuter is a young male, riding from a suburban home to their work place, using local roads and neighborhood streets to stay off busier arterial highways and county roads, she said.

Only 1.8 percent of commuters in the state commute by bike, said Dan Triana, a state Department of Transportation spokesman.

One of them is Stephen Machnowski, 43, who has commuted by bike for six years.

"I bike to the train at the Bay Street (Montclair) Bike Depot daily, rain or snow or shine. I've always been fortunate to have cycling as a component of my commute in the last three places I've lived," he said. "Biking to work is predictable, invigorating, and good for our environment."

If the numbers don't sound like much, drivers should consider the "one less car" slogan cyclists use.

"Our congestion levels have reached record levels, and the answer is right in front of us," Steiner said.

She cited a 2011 traffic congestion study that found a 1 percent drop in vehicle miles traveled could reduce congestion by 30 percent.

"So what took 10 minutes can take seven minutes to travel, there are significant benefits to getting those cars off the road," Steiner said. "If we make it safer for people to ride bikes, people who don't ride will benefit."

In 2014, 11 cyclists were killed in New Jersey in accidents, down from 14 in 2013. So far, two adult cyclists have been killed this year, according to state police statistics.

And there are towns and cities in the state making safer to commute by bike.

"In urban areas, **Jersey City is leading the way**, followed by Hoboken and New Brunswick," Steiner said. "They have the mayors and elected officials embracing the bike friendly concept. Economically, they're also seeing substantial gains."

Suburban towns such as Morristown, West Windsor and Montclair have made strides adding bike lanes and other infrastructure that encourages people to ride, Steiner said.

She used Morristown's South Street bike lanes as an example of how cars and bikes can co-exist without either commuter feeling squeezed for space.

There also have been setbacks.

An effort by mayors of several Monmouth County towns to get a network of bike lanes, which would allow cyclists to ride from the NJ Transit station in Red Bank to bike lanes the NJDOT is planning on Route 36, has been stalled by Monmouth County officials.

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