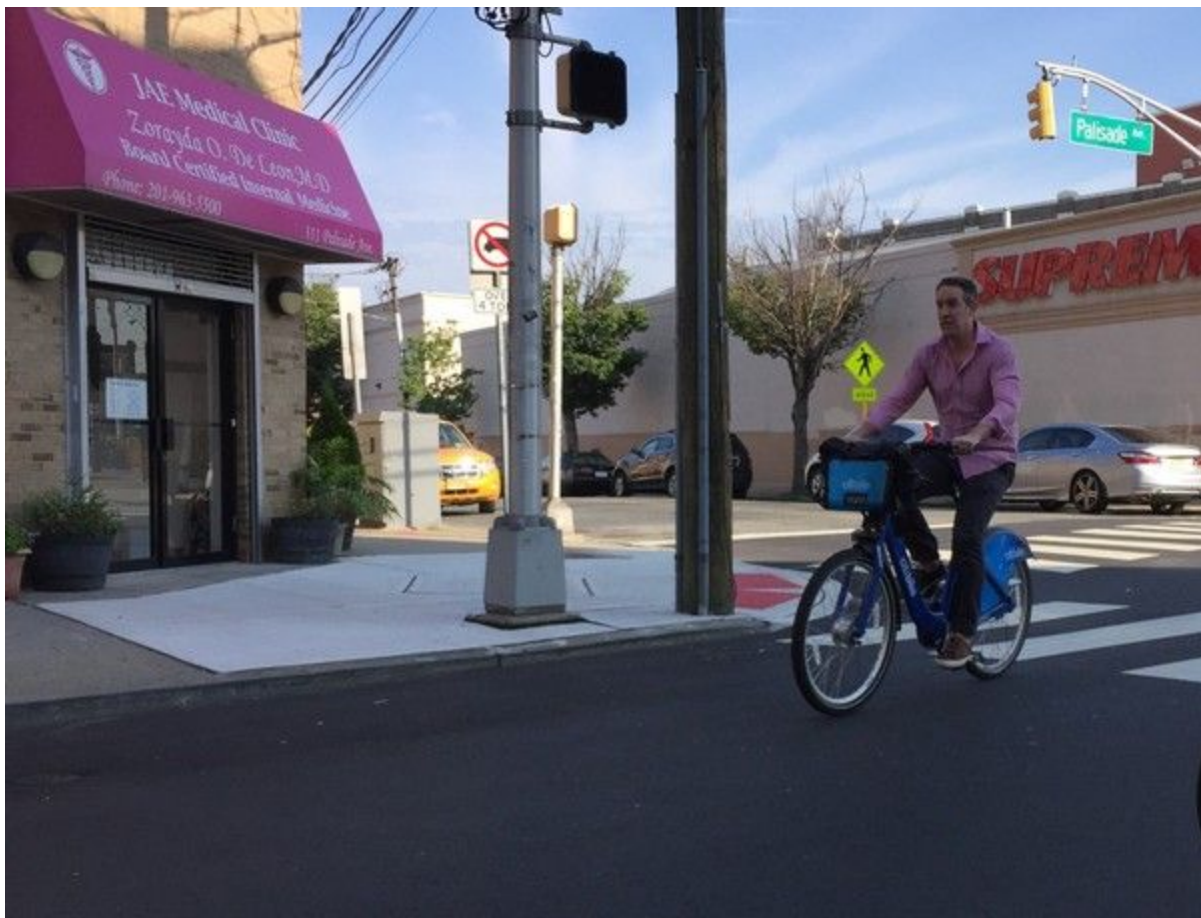# Why N.J. ranks among the top 10 bike-friendly states

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A Bike JC study of who rides CitiBikes in Jersey City, such as this rider on Palisade Avenue, showed most use it for commuting. (Larry Higgs | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com)

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When it comes to biking, New Jersey looks great on paper.

The League of American Cyclists ranked it the ninth most bicycle friendly state in the country.

On the street, it's can be a different story.

May is Bike to work month, designed to encourage commuters to try a two-wheeled commute. But a deeper look behind the bike friendly ranking shows the state falls down in building bike lanes and passing laws to protect cyclists, said the league and state cycling advocates.

"The state looks good on paper. The jump in ranking is because of the adoption of a bicycle and pedestrian master plan and a Bicycle Safety Plan in 2016," said Cyndi Stener, NJ Bike and Walk Coalition president. "This is policy over practice. We continue to build roads with one user in mind, car drivers."

While the state and some towns got high marks from the league for having Complete Streets policies, to design roads for all users, few follow them when streets are rebuilt, she said.

The state also lacks stronger laws to protect cyclists and pedestrians and better driver education about safe practices around bikes, the report card said. The state got a grade of zero out of a possible 25 points for laws that protect people who bike and walk.

Bills to mandate a safe distance for vehicles to pass bikes and pedestrians on roads have not been not successful. The state also lacks a law requiring drivers to carefully open doors to prevent hitting a cyclist, Steiner said.

Those are reasons why the state leads another list, the percent of traffic fatalities involving cyclists and pedestrians, she said. In 2017, the number of pedestrians killed in

collisions increased by 17 to 183 pedestrians and 17 cyclists were in the state, according to [State Police statistics](#).

The U.S. Census 2012-2016 Community Survey estimates only 14,185 people commute by bike in N.J., and 9,721 of then are in the 13-north and central Jersey counties served by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, said David Behrend, NJTPA spokesman. Census data undercounts cycling, especially if cyclists travel by bike to ride transit, he said.

"The person who bikes a mile to train station, they are considered a rail commuter. The numbers don't capture the full uses of bikes for commuting," Behrend said. "It's a challenge to capture that data to understand how people use bikes."

A [more accurate picture of bike commuting came from a study by the advocacy group](#) Bike JC. It found commuters made the majority of Citi Bike trips, riding between home and PATH stations in 2017. Last year, almost 300,000 trips were taken on CitiBikes in Jersey City, which increased 19 percent from 245,584 trips made in 2016.

Most CitiBike trips were made during weekdays and at peak morning and evening commuting times, the study said. Jersey City has a network of bike lanes and is working on [installing a protected bike lane on Grand Street](#) that Bike JC lobbied for.

Bike shares and lanes help encourage commuting, Steiner said. Hoboken, Weehawken and Bayonne also are part of [Hudson Bike share](#). [Asbury Park](#) and [Camden also have bike](#) shares.

State Department of Transportation officials are working to get better data about who's riding and where, to prioritize bike and pedestrian projects, said Judith Drucker, a spokeswoman. Programs such as Safe Routes to Schools and Transit also helps build bike infrastructure, she said.

"People not feeling safe while biking is the number one deterrent (to riding)," Behrend said.

Other bike commuters have to ride on dangerous roads, because they have no other transportation, Steiner said. Those riders are found all over the state, and they ride despite how safe or unsafe roads are, she said.

"These are the people seen on dangerous roads like Kennedy Boulevard, Route 1, Bloomfield Avenue and Black House Pike," Steiner said.

The states 2016 Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan shows bike use is concentrated in areas with high population density and high transit use, and is also highest among households with limited access to cars, Drucker said.

"That's an important step and it sets policies," Behrend said of the plan. "The challenge is following through on those to implement more bikeways and protected bike lanes."

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