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Safe Passing Bill to Protect Bicyclists and Pedestrians Approved by New Jersey State Assembly Committee

By Krystal Knapp

The New Jersey Assembly Transportation and Independent Authorities Committee voted today to approve a four-foot safe passing bill at a hearing in Trenton.

The new bill, which was introduced during the committee hearing, calls for a “reasonable and safe distance between the motor vehicle and the bicycle or pedestrian of not less than four feet until the motor vehicle has safely passed the bicycle or pedestrian.”

Assemblywoman Grace Spencer (D-Newark), a sponsor of the legislation, introduced the new bill.

The League of American Bicyclists recently lowered New Jersey’s ranking as a bicycle friendly state, naming the lack of a safe passing law as one of the two major shortcomings for the state.

While New Jersey is a leader in the nation in passing complete streets policies, it has not been able to pass legislation that would protect bicyclists and all other vulnerable road users on the roadway.

The other key legislation that is missing is a vulnerable road user law, which would inflict penalties when there is an injury or death to a non-motorized user of the road.

“The newly combined bill represents the start – and it’s only a start – of significant improvement for cyclists and pedestrians in our state,” testified Les Leathem, the education coordinator for the New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition, at the hearing this morning.

According to the New Jersey State Police, pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities made up 27 percent of all road fatalities in New Jersey in 2013, making the state the second worst in the nation for such fatalities.

New Jersey is the only state in the Northeast that does not have a safe passing law for bicyclists and pedestrians. Pennsylvania, Delaware and New York each have one; Pennsylvania requires a minimum four feet, Delaware has a three-foot law, and New York has a general “safe passing distance” law.



Assemblywoman Spencer, a cyclist, has been an advocate for safe passing legislation for several years.