

# New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition says biking can ease transit woes

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*(Photo: Photo by Michelle Barlak)*

TRENTON – A statewide nonprofit organization that advocates for bicyclists and pedestrians said biking and walking can help New Jersey’s mass transportation issues.

New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition Executive Director Cyndi Steiner testified Monday before the New Jersey Senate Legislative Oversight Committee during a hearing intended to identify challenges facing the state’s transit system.

In her testimony, Steiner emphasized the integration of biking and walking as a “first-mile/last mile solution” that provides a cost-effective way to improving New Jersey’s overburdened, cash-strapped mass transportation system both now and in the future.

“Bicycling and walking extend the effectiveness and efficiency of the rail network at very low cost,” Steiner said. “The capital investment of adding bike racks to buses, bike storage to rail cars, and bike parking at transit hubs is a very small percentage of the overall capital cost of these items.”

Equally important, Steiner said, is the need to incorporate facilities for biking and walking on New Jersey’s streets to maximize transit connectivity.

“Building out our street infrastructure to accommodate biking and walking increase transit ridership,” Steiner said. “And make the system more efficient in several ways.”

Marty Epstein, owner of Marty's Reliable Cycle and board member for the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition, agrees that cycling can be part of the transit solution.

“Creating bike- and walking-friendly communities is an essential part of the downtown living experience,” Epstein said. “Many younger people rely on public transportation to get to work. The Midtown Direct train affects many communities in Morris County.

Epstein said he encourages communities to adopt “Complete Streets” policies to support cyclists-friendly streets leading to train station.

Given the trending demographic shifts, integrating active transportation will be vital to ensuring New Jersey’s future economic vitality, Steiner said.

“Today’s millennials, who will be tomorrow’s leaders, are choosing to live and work in cities and towns that provide transportation options such as mass transit, walking and biking,” Steiner said. “This generation is opting out of the car-centered lifestyle that saw their parents waste away hours per week trapped on congested roads, as New Jersey crept towards having the nation’s longest commutes. Millennials choosing communities that offer these options represent a brain drain for New Jersey if we cannot provide them.”

Steiner also spoke for New Jersey residents who depend on active transportation as their only link to mass transit options and bear the brunt of fare hikes and service cuts.

“Biking and walking enables many economically disadvantaged to reach transit, to complete their commutes,” Steiner said. “While fare hikes may cause many of us to dig deeper into our pockets, scaling down mass transit can cause personal upheaval for these individuals that those with resources cannot begin to contemplate.”

Also addressing the committee alongside Steiner were Tom Wright of the Regional Planning Association, Janna Chernetz of Tri-State Transportation Campaign, and Albert Papp, Jr. of the NJ Association of Railroad Passengers. Legislators present for Steiner’s remarks included Senator Robert Gordon (D-Bergen; Chairman, Legislative Oversight Committee), Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen), and Senate Minority Leader Thomas Kean, Jr., (R-Union).