

THE TWO RIVER TIMES™

Bicycle Lanes at Standstill As Two River Mayors and County Fail to Agree

Written by The Two River Times. Posted in [Featured](#), [News](#), [Top News](#)

Tagged: [AAA Mid-Atlantic](#), [Bike Safety](#), [Cathleen Lewis](#), [Crossroads](#), [Cyndi Steiner](#), [Executive Director of the New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition](#), [Fair Haven Mayor Ben Lucarelli](#), [Regional Director of Public Affairs and Government Relations for AAA New Jersey Automobile Club](#), [Rumson Mayor John E. Ekdahl](#), [Tri-State Transportation Campaign](#), [Two River Council of Mayors](#)

Published on May 22, 2015 with [No Comments](#)



Area mayors continue to advocate for a designated bike lane along county roads through much of the Two River area. County freeholders, however, would like the responsibility and cost shouldered by the municipalities. Photo by Tina Colella

IN NEW JERSEY, only 0.3 percent of people bike to work; others believe it is “too dangerous,” said Cyndi Steiner, Executive Director of the New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition.

Steiner joined local elected officials and other pedestrian and cycling advocacy groups for a press conference last week in Fair Haven to outline their goals in improving safety for those who share the road with vehicles.

It was more evidence of a divide between the Two River Council of Mayors and the Board of Chosen Freeholders over the cost of bicycle paths that would traverse several towns. Neither side wants to bear the brunt of the cost.

Without bike lanes, cars drive too close to cyclists or simply do not see them, often speeding past and nearly clipping them, the press conference group agreed. In order to make transportation safer for both drivers and cyclists, Fair Haven Mayor Ben Lucarelli seeks to fund bike and safety transportation, which is at the “bottom of the list for funding,” according to Cathleen Lewis, Regional Director of Public Affairs and Government Relations for AAA New Jersey Automobile Club.

Lucarelli advocates, with Rumson Mayor John E. Ekdahl, for bike lanes on a number of county roads, such as Rumson Road and Ridge Road, where many cyclists travel.

A few other things Lucarelli and safe cycling advocates are looking to do is to include using the funding from the state Transportation Trust Fund to repair sidewalks and other smaller, local projects. Lucarelli has been working with advocacy groups to include cyclist information in driver’s manuals in local schools. The groups are also seeking the passage of the state safe-passing bill that calls for four-foot distance when driving next to cyclists, and to better educate children on bike safety.

That bill is currently languishing in the Assembly, according to Janna Chernetz, senior New Jersey policy analysis for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, one of the advocacy groups involved.

The AAA Mid-Atlantic is also contributing, offering roadside bicyclist assistance for the first time. As announced by AAA Mid-Atlantic news release, “in the event a bicyclist needs assistance, AAA will be ready to provide the same quality road service that has been offered to motorists for over 110 years.”

According to Chernetz, biking improves the economy by saving money, improves health by relieving stress, and improves the environment by reducing congestion. Funding the bike and safety transportation will promote safety for everyone on the road while “increasing the vibrancy of downtown,” Chernetz said.

The municipal money is tight, said Lucarelli, and funding would come from local taxpayers.

And that’s the rub.

Area mayors seeking county support for designated bike lanes through much of the Two River Area were dealt a blow by the freeholders’ recent decision.

The freeholders adopted its bicycle facility policy and guidelines, based upon one used in Ocean County, following an April 23 executive session that says the municipalities are responsible for studying and paying for proposed cycling paths.

“It’s very frustrating,” responded Rumson Mayor Ekdahl about the dealings with county government and engineering as locals advocate for the designated bike route along county roads.

Town engineers would be expected to prepare a plan “showing the design and layout of the bicycle facility” including lane widths, pavement markings and proposed signage along the route, meeting state standards, according to the county’s approved guidelines.

Once completed the plan would have to be forwarded to the county engineering department for its approval and that of the freeholders. The municipalities “will, at its expense, install or cause to install” the final project requiring the county engineer to sign off on it.

County Engineer Joseph Ettore estimated the cost of the project would be approximately \$15,000 per mile for striping and signage.

Ekdahl and Lucarelli have said recently this was a step back in their attempts to get the multi-town bike route established.

Ekdahl said this week he had told freeholders “This is the future,” encouraging people to get out of their cars and bicycle to work, school and for recreation and providing a safe lane for them. “You want to get out ahead of this. You don’t want to be the county that is trying to catch up.”

“We’re hoping the freeholders will go back and reevaluate the situation due to the fact that it’s impractical,” Lucarelli said, “because the county roads travel through multiple jurisdictions.

“We hope the freeholders will reconsider,” he added.

“If local roads will tie in with county roads that’s a good thing,” for cycling safety, said Freeholder Tom Arnone in response to the mayors’ assertions. “But there is a cost, there are issues. There’s a safety issue, cost and logistics. Safety being the most important.”



The county oversees and maintains roughly 1,000 lane miles, “And it’s difficult to meet all the local demands,” said Freeholder John P. Curley.

Lucarelli and Ekdahl have been spearheading a proposal that would have designated bike lanes, striped and stenciled, that would run along county roads starting at Red Bank’s border and continue east to Sea Bright and continue south to Monmouth Beach, making its way through Oceanport on the border of Long Branch, and making its way back through the towns, toward Red Bank. “It worked out to a nice loop,” Ekdahl said. “It seemed like a great plan.”

The concept won the support of the Two River Council of Mayors, an informal coalition of local officials who regularly meet to discuss issues of common interest. And Ekdahl said the mayors saw an opportunity given the county had just re-milled and repaved Rumson Road – with county officials agreeing to not complete the striping just yet – and are planning to work on Ridge Road shortly. Ekdahl and Lucarelli thought this would be the ideal time to start to get the lanes installed.

“This just seemed to just pop up,” Curley said.

“Our answer to that is we’re only advocating for this because these roads were just paved. We’re not to go back and start doing old roads,” Ekdahl said. “And that should be your policy going forward,” he said for the freeholders’ benefit.

Ekdahl said Rumson would consider paying for some of it. And Lucarelli said he would be willing to take this to his borough council. “That is something that is up for consideration,” he said.

However, getting all of the municipalities to offer financial support for a project that is intended for county roads would be difficult. And given the roadwork in the area at this point, "If we can't make it happen here then it's not going to happen anywhere else," Ekdahl said.

John Burton can be reached at jburton@tworivertimes.com or 732-219-5788.



CROSSROADS

A Series Addressing the Challenges Faced
by Pedestrians, Cyclists and Motorists Alike in Red Bank *Editors Note: The Two River Times is sponsoring an editorial initiative called Crossroads to find practical and proactive ways to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety throughout the Two River area. Post pictures and comments regarding positive or negative experiences with pedestrian and cycling.*