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Bike Group to WW: Go Slow on 571

Downtown Princeton Junction's Route 571 has had three fatalities over the past 10 years — a senior pedestrian in 2004, another senior pedestrian in 2005, and a teenage motorist in 2006. What can we do to improve the safety of West Windsor's main street?

The proposed new design for Route 571, which includes a continuous two-way center left turn lane, the same 45 mph design speed, but no pedestrian crossing refuges, will make it even more dangerous. This straighter, wider, and more open design allows 30 percent more cars to go faster, since they don't need to slow for left-turning traffic, yet provides no place for crossing pedestrians, such as those seeking to go from the senior living facility to the new RiteAid, to wait safely in the middle.

Those senior pedestrian fatalities? Not even mentioned at the public design review in December, 2009.

AARP calls two-way center left turn lanes "suicide lanes," because they "increase the chances for vehicular conflict among all drivers," but especially for senior drivers, who may "have lower visual acuity and increased reaction times." This design might work somewhere with lower speeds, less volume, and fewer driveways, but not where our redevelopment envisions "a mix of pedestrian-friendly, village scale development."

A complete streets policy ensures that transportation planners and engineers consistently design and operate the entire roadway with all users in mind, including bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.

Portland, Oregon, is a leader in implementing complete streets. As a result, safety has improved six times faster than nationally, a decrease of 50 motorist and three non-motorist fatalities in 2010 compared to 1986.

In New Jersey, Monmouth County and West Windsor and Lawrence townships have complete streets policies. Mercer County's new mobility master plan element includes complete streets as a goal, but lacks key accountability features to make it actionable.

That township and county officials refuse to fix the Route 571 design by lowering the design speed and adding pedestrian refuges is unconscionable. Please ask your public officials and candidates if they support safer streets for everyone — implementing complete streets will make it happen.

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