

December 17, 2009

## Activists take on clogged roads

By JANE ROH  
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Tired of complaining about congestion around here? A group of Cherry Hill residents is doing something about it.

Sustainable Cherry Hill, which promotes clean energy and waste reduction in the township, has a formed a task force to specifically address clogged roadways. The 10 or so volunteers say they are in a study phase, and they plan on becoming a visible presence before Mayor Bernie Platt at town council meetings.

"We are an advocacy group working with the township to make it a safer place for us to ride bikes, for us to be able to walk, take public transportation, and get cars off the road," said Barbara Berman, who led a meeting in the municipal building earlier this week.

Berman and the task force envision a time when the sprawling suburb will become more like small town, one that's safe to navigate without burning fossil fuels.

"We can all walk and ride our bikes in our neighborhoods but we can't get from one neighborhood to the next. It's evidenced by there being no bike lanes, no sidewalks, no shoulders," Berman said.

The volunteers say the upsides of reducing vehicular volume on the roads are obvious. Along with reducing pollution and easing commutes, there's the added bonus of healthier, more active residents.

The township is already looking at ways to improve foot and pedal traffic on busy Haddonfield Road. Calling themselves the Way to Go task force, these volunteers also want to make recommendations for roadways that are particularly hostile to cyclists and runners. One stretch that immediately comes to mind is Route 70, where speeding is the norm and may have contributed to two fatalities on Monday morning.

"With all the traffic that's there in Cherry Hill, there are areas of state highway that while technically bikeable, only a pro should be biking it," said Bill Ragozine, a former director of community development for the township. He is now the executive director of Cross County Connection, a nonprofit that works with the state and seven South Jersey counties to reduce traffic.

The task force is already learning about the nonliteral road blocks in their path. Roxane Shinn, who is also vice president of the Barclay Area Civic Association, was frustrated at the difficulty of compiling pedestrian and cyclist accident data.

"I just got a list of the date of the accident, the name of the person and these code numbers. I was looking for copies of full reports," she said at the Tuesday night meeting. She held up the handful of papers her OPRA request to the township had yielded.

"For them to give you copies of all of those reports would be a monumental task," said Scott Davis, a veteran of the Cherry Hill Police Department.

Davis, who was there as a civilian and not as a representative of the department, is an example of the kind of experience and institutional knowledge the group is hoping to pool in its quest for workable ideas. The task force also includes a procurement specialist and an epidemiologist.

Nicole Hostettler, the township's senior planner, is the task force's municipal liaison.

"I'm very interested in this so it seemed to be a good fit," she said. "They need to develop certain goals and agendas, and we're just here to help out in any way we can." Hostettler added that she sometimes commutes from her South Philly home via PATCO and her bike.

While just a fraction of the \$74 million Gov. Jon Corzine committed to a pedestrian safety program in 2006 has been disbursed, the state says progress is happening.

"We have built 60 projects, which include pouring almost 60,000 linear feet of sidewalks and include numerous intersection safety projects such as countdown signals and crosswalks," said Sheree Davis, coordinator for NJDOT's Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs.

Getting grants to secure improvements may be the easy part. Ragozine, Cross County Connections director, said Cherry Hill's car culture also needed to change.

"Part of the challenge is the mind-set with this region. The car has been king for a lot of years," he said. "People are seeing roads more congested and drive times increase, but the reality is they're very used to having their own vehicles."

Cross County, which gets state funding, works with counties, municipalities and citizen groups like Way to Go on alternative commuting solutions. New road work is being done with "much more sensitivity and alertness" to green transportation, he said, and it was just a matter of time before residents realize that ditching their cars every so often is doable.

"It's a challenge to make people understand that ride-sharing doesn't necessarily work for everyone or work every day," Ragozine said. "It's small steps." Reach Jane Roh at (856) 486-2919 or [jroh@gannett.com](mailto:jroh@gannett.com)

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