

In praise of W. Windsor's two-wheelers

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Michael Mancuso/The Times Abdul Wiswall pedals his bicycle on Carter Road after leaving work (ETS in Lawrence) to head home to the Chambersburg section of Trenton, New Jersey where he lives. Wiswall is one of an increasing number of people who are commuting on their bikes.

While most of us are dependent on four wheels to keep body and soul together, some communities are moving toward two wheels — even two legs — to do the job.

Take West Windsor, for instance. West Windsor — that 26-square-mile township that grew up from a farming community sprawling between Hightstown, Route 1, Princeton Junction and Mercer County Park — was this month named a Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists. It's the first such award for New Jersey.

Congratulations, West Windsor. H.G. Wells would be proud of you. Not Orson Welles, who chose West Windsor's Grover's Mill for the Martian landing in his panic-causing 1938 War of the Worlds radio broadcast, but H.G. Wells, who said, "Every time I see an adult on a bicycle, I no longer despair for the future of the human race."

Yours, West Windsor, was a bronze award, which means that silver, gold and platinum still lie ahead. But you're up to it. You've shown your mettle in recent years by creating a bustling farmers market, transforming a defunct firehouse into a dynamic arts center and expanding your senior citizen center to a state-of-the-art facility.

The vision, organization, massive volunteer efforts and township commitment of these achievements are evident in this latest two-legged, two-wheeled success.

Central to this effort is the not-for-profit, all-volunteer West Windsor Bicycle & Pedestrian Alliance (WWBPA). Formed in 2006, it grew out of a committee of concerned citizens, which became a township task force that added walking and biking issues to the town's master plan.

Now a private organization, it has 400 members and a small core of steady volunteers.

"We work hard to encourage foot and bicycle access to shopping, parks, libraries and community services," says President Jerry Foster. "We believe that encouraging walking and biking lays groundwork for a better, healthier, happier, more integrated community."

Education is key to WWBPA's multi-pronged effort. "We educate the public in the joys and safety of

biking and walking,” says Foster. “We hold events and classes, train bike safety instructors, link with other organizations, partner with schools and encourage drivers to respect walkers and bikers.”

With other organizations, WWBPA has installed bike racks at the Princeton Junction train station (also lockers), the farmers market and the arts center (artsy, pastel-colored, bike-shaped racks). It awards annual scholarships to bike-savvy students and mounts Share the Road signs.

The WWBPA map of West Windsor, given away free, shows multiple-use trails, hiking trails and streets in green (with sidewalks on both sides), yellow (one side only) and red (no sidewalk).

WWBPA also actively advocates well-marked bike lanes, safe crossing lanes and continuous sidewalks. “We investigate and draw attention to problems and monitor implementation,” says Alison Miller, a longtime township activist and member of the original group that grew into WWBPA. “We prioritize improvements and take officials to the sites, working with them along the way to implementation.”

A recent improvement is a lighted, broad-striped midblock crosswalk connecting a residential area (Avalon Run) with the bus stop and shopping area across busy Clarksville Road. Another is a new sidewalk along Alexander Road in Princeton Junction.

This Saturday from 9 to 11:30 a.m. at the farmers market, WWBPA will conduct a Learn to Ride a Bike class for kids 4 and older. No old-fashioned training wheels here — instructors remove pedals to teach balance, then reinstall them for stopping and starting. Because the spring class attracted more than 50 kids (and two adults), this will be for children of WWBPA members. You can join on the website at wwbpa.org.

As I said, well done, West Windsor. Hey, Plainsboro, how about it? Sounds as though we have some catching up to do.

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