

June 19, 2014 BPAC Meeting Summary

The second New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Council (BPAC) meeting of the year convened on June 19th at the Bloustein School at Rutgers, New Brunswick. Participants included representatives from New Jersey Transit, the New Jersey Department of Transportation, various Transportation Management Associations (TMAs), Rutgers, and other organizations active in state transportation planning.

After welcoming remarks by Charles Brown of the VTC, the first order of business was to discuss ongoing plans to restructure how the BPAC works. For the past decade, the BPAC has functioned as a networking and information-sharing group. Meeting quarterly, attendees have discussed the latest updates on bicycle and pedestrian policies and projects from around the state. Starting last December, steps have been taken to see how to best restructure BPAC so that it can better serve NJDOT and help shape policy and planning for the state in the future. The goal is to transform BPAC to a substantive advisory function, and to do so, the best structure and membership must be identified.

Steps that have been taken over the past months have included looking at best practices from other BPACs around the country, and taking group input on the best way to move forward. At the meeting last week, Susan Blickstein reviewed the earlier discussion, and highlighted the additional recommendations that had been added based on those discussions. For example, the proposed structure has been expanded to include a representative from the NJDEP Trails Council, and an additional seat assigned to an advocate. One ongoing question is about the best structure for subcommittees. How many should there be, what subjects should they focused on, and how often should they meet are questions that still need answers. The goal is to have all the details finalized, and the new BPAC kicked-off by the end of the year.

After a lively series of discussion on additional thoughts related to the BPAC restructuring, Betsy Harvey of the VTC gave a presentation on the "Bicycling to Rail Stations in New Jersey: 2013 Benchmarking Report." The purpose of this report was to document commuter travel by bicycle to rail transit stations in the state. With the data in hand, researchers and policymakers will better be able to understand why people choose to bike and which conditions they encounter. This understanding can then help inform changes that would allow for more people to pick bicycling as part of their commute.

Data for this report was collected last summer, and it involved teams visiting 214 rail stations in New Jersey to catalog bicycling conditions. The stations included stops on all the rail lines in New Jersey, from PATCO, the River Line, and the Atlantic City Line in the south, to PATH, the Northeast Corridor and the Hudson-Bergen line in the northern part of the state. Assessments were made on bike parking availability and usage, as well as the type and condition of roads leading to the stations. Further, surveys and counts were conducted at 35 stations, and a focus group was assembled.

Betsy Harvey went over some of the most interesting findings from the study, including the train stations where biking was popular (Westfield and New Brunswick topped the list), the most common age group (34 – 44), and the sex of bicyclists (85% male).

Charles Brown then took the podium again to solicit ideas on the type of research which the VTC should conduct in the coming year. Suggestions included looking at the recent bike projects to catalog their effects on safety, how to best tie bike-share programs with new infrastructure, and looking into ways to better reach minorities and immigrants for both safety education and surveying.

Finally, the meeting closed with different members providing quick updates on bicycle and pedestrian related projects around the state, such as the status of the Middlesex County Master Plan, highlights from RideWise, and an update on the Camden County Bicycle Inventory project.

The next BPAC meeting will be held in September.