



2018 Complete Streets Case Study

Asbury Park, New Jersey



About

This report was developed by the New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center of the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

The Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) is a national leader in the research and development of innovative transportation policy. Located within the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University, VTC has the full array of resources from a major research university on transportation issues of regional and national significance.

The New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center (BPRC) assists public officials, transportation and health professionals, and the public in creating a safer and more accessible walking and bicycling environment through primary research, education and dissemination of information about best practices in policy and design. The Center is supported by the New Jersey Department of Transportation through funds provided by the Federal Highway Administration.

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Figure 1. Bicycles parked along Kingsley Street, in Asbury Park.

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Figure 2. Rainbow crosswalk installed in 2018 across Asbury Avenue.



Figure 3. Bicycle and pedestrian bridge over Sunset Lake.

Introduction

In 2009, the New Jersey Department of Transportation adopted a Complete Streets policy, which defined a Complete Street as one designed to provide safe access for all users by implementing a comprehensive and integrated multi-modal network of transportation options. The benefits include increased safety for all users, connections between origins and destinations, and the promotion of healthier, more livable communities. Since the policy's adoption, Complete Streets has built momentum throughout the state. As of December 2018, eight counties and 149 municipalities have followed the lead and adopted their own local Complete Streets policy (Figure 4).

Established and laid out before the automobile, Asbury Park was built for active transportation. Even with the growth of the automobile, bicycling along the shore has always been an attractive activity. Many people who never touch a bicycle in their day-to-day lives are more than happy to rent a baby blue beach cruiser and spend time meandering past Victorian homes on the way to a seafood dinner on the boardwalk. To accommodate the demand for safe bicycling by both residents and tourists, the municipality has taken a series of steps to make Asbury Park a community of Complete Streets.

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center, part of the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University, has developed a series of case studies intended to highlight Complete Streets leaders in New Jersey. The purpose of this report, funded by NJDOT, is to highlight Asbury Park's Complete Streets policy and accomplishments. The report is based on findings provided in interviews with municipal staff and local advocates. Speaking with both groups gave greater insight into how Asbury Park has become a local leader in building safer streets.

The report begins with a summary of key findings followed by background information on historical, demographic, and land use data collected from county and Census documents. This information is essential to understanding the context of Complete Streets in Asbury Park. The report then explores the history of the Asbury Park Complete Streets policy, including how the policy was developed, promoted, and implemented. Successes and challenges are then highlighted for the benefit of other communities looking to implement Complete Streets and a number of next steps provide readers with insight into the policy's future. This report will serve as a valuable tool for engineers, planners, elected officials, and advocates who want to move forward with Complete Streets in their communities.

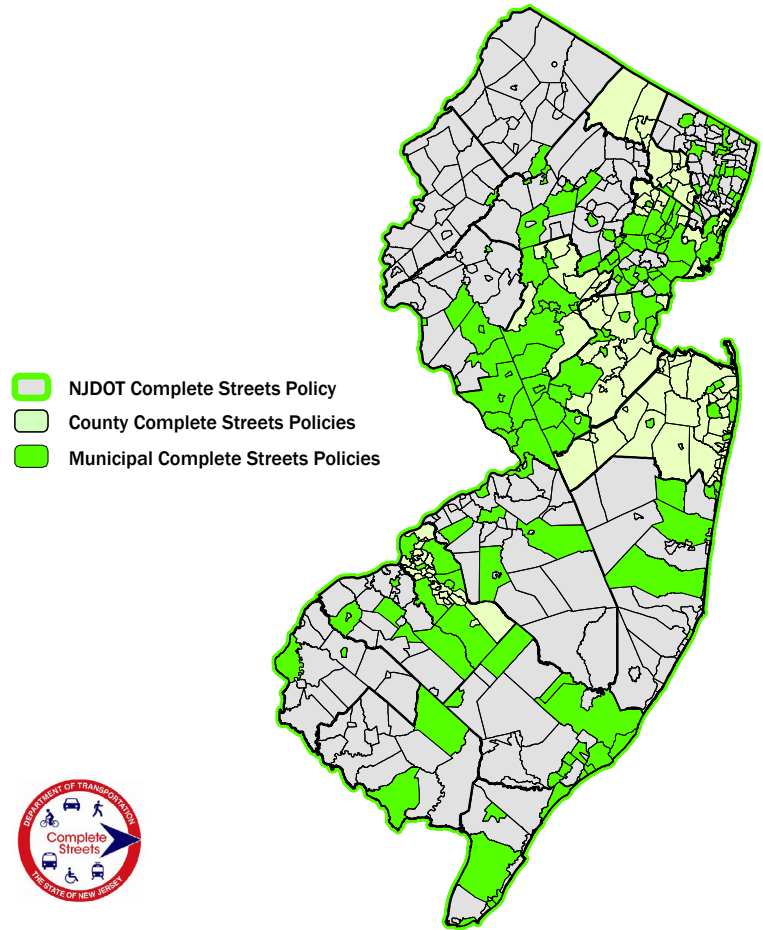


Figure 4. Map of New Jersey's Complete Streets policies

Complete Streets in New Jersey

New Jersey is a national leader in the campaign to complete the streets. According to the National Complete Streets Coalition, New Jersey ranked 1st nationally in terms of local policy adoption in addition to NJDOT's award-winning internal policy.

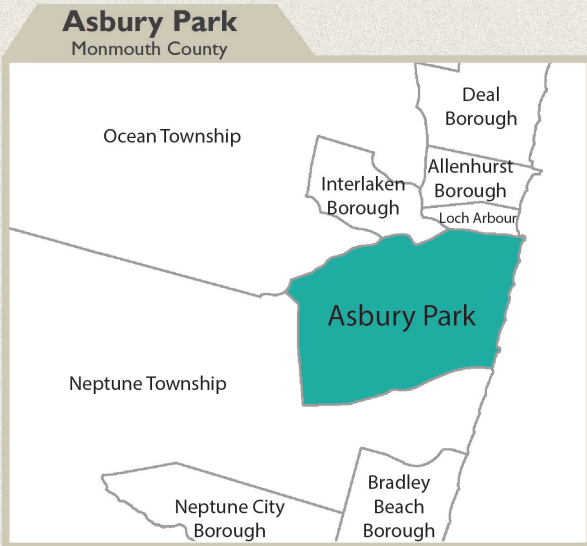
- 1 statewide award-winning policy
- 8 out of 21 counties have a policy
- 148 out of 565 municipalities have a policy
- 43% of New Jersey residents are covered by a municipal Complete Streets policy
- 57% of New Jersey residents are covered by a county Complete Streets policy

As of January 9, 2019



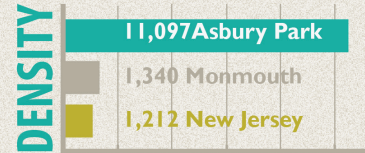
Asbury Park, New Jersey

Background Data, 2017



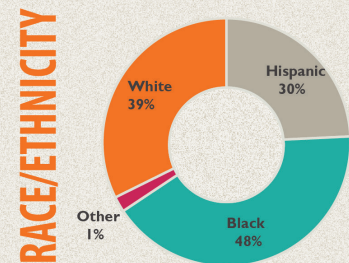
Population

15,850
RESIDENTS

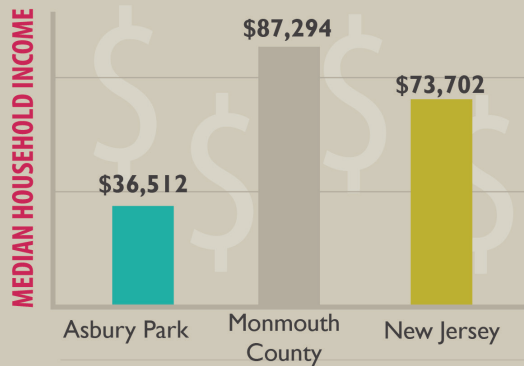


MEDIAN AGE
35 Yrs

That is 8 years younger than the county and 4.5 years below the state average.

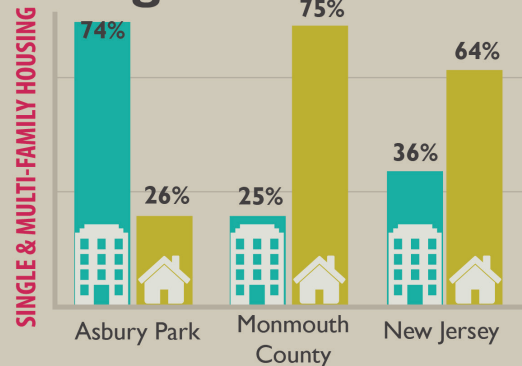


Economics



\$4,831 RETAIL SALES PER PERSON

Housing



Transportation



Commute Mode



Slightly over half of residents commute alone in a car

The proportion of carpooling is

2X HIGHER

Than Monmouth County

Asbury Park
24.3 minutes



Monmouth County
34.1 minutes



Key Findings

1. Tourism: With a beautiful beach, lively boardwalk, and energetic downtown, Asbury Park is a regional summer destination. As with many New Jersey shore towns, this popularity puts parking at a premium. Through careful management of parking meter prices, the creation of a bike share system, and the beautification of sidewalks, the city has handled the parking crunch by encouraging the use of other travel modes while reinvesting parking revenues into transportation programs.

2. The power of advocacy: Asbury Park is fortunate to have a large group of residents looking to improve their city. The Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition is a testament to the transformative change dedicated individuals can have in their community. Events such as PorchFest, Better Block, and Asbury Park Alive! are proud success stories from other local groups.

3. Good management: Transportation is incredibly complicated, and a transportation manager within city hall is integral in ensuring that all the city departments work together to plan, design, and implement complete streets.

4. Successes:

- Pedestrian safety at intersections with high-visibility striping, clear no-parking areas, and signage
- Managing parking to minimize congestion caused by cruising and to bring in revenue for safety projects
- Zagster bike share program, downtown bicycle parking, and jitney service to provide mobility options
- Route 71 road diet
- Strong Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan to pave the way forward on future projects

5. Challenges:

- High demand for parking during the summer months
- Skepticism about the need to redesign streets that haven't changed in decades
- Ensuring safer streets and mobility options reach all residents, especially lower income families

6. Next Steps:

- Continue to add high-visibility crosswalks and other safety measures around the city including mini-roundabouts
- Expanding the bicycle and pedestrian network using the recommendations from the 2019 Plan for Walking and Biking
- Expanding bike share and adding e-scooter share
- Address speeding concerns on residential streets (#slowthecars)



Figure 5. Colorful crosswalks near the boardwalk on Ocean Avenue.

Background

History

Asbury Park, New Jersey, is a compact shore town located in Monmouth County. Encompassing only 1.4 square miles, Asbury Park is bordered by the Villages of Loch Arbour and Interlaken to the north, Ocean Township to the west, and Neptune Township to the west and south. With 11,092 residents per square mile, it is the densest municipality in Monmouth County, and approximately nine times denser than the New Jersey state average. The city's population was estimated to be 15,850 in 2016, a decline from the 16,116 counted in 2010, and slightly less than the peak of 17,366 reached in the 1960 census.

The city was founded in the 1870's by James A. Bradley, who planned a resort community with wide streets, light industrial manufacturing, attractive residential communities, and resort attractions. In the early 20th century, it was the first municipality with a sanitation system along the North Jersey Shore. The New York and Long Branch Railroad (now a part of NJ Transit Rail) began servicing Asbury Park in 1875, bringing visitors from North Jersey and New York to the downtown area and newly-built boardwalk. In the 1920's, Asbury Park cemented itself as a regional destination with the construction of the Convention Hall, Paramount Theatre, Carousel House, and expanded boardwalk attractions.

Along with the railroad, Asbury Park is also well-connected to the rest of the State through the Garden State Parkway which opened in 1947. Unfortunately, while the Parkway allowed drivers to more easily access Asbury Park, it also improved access to destinations further south. Suburban developments in Monmouth County weakened the retail sector in the city by providing new competition. This economic decline was one factor that helped spur riots breaking out in 1970, which resulted in the destruction of the West Side shopping district.

During the next two decades, the city experienced a continued period of decline and decay. Many notable establishments along the beachfront were shut down as the city began to confront a serious crime problem. Crime and decay led to other problems, with the New York Times declaring the city as "one of the worst drug meccas in the state" in 1996.

Asbury Park's fortunes began to reverse in the early 21st century, thanks to a burgeoning artist community downtown that was led by a growing and vibrant gay community. Investments in many historic buildings and the development of new housing on empty lots have improved Asbury Park's image in the region. Tourism has returned, and the city has become one of the most popular communities in the area for summer beachgoers. Thanks to tax revenue brought in by these developments, the city has been able to reinvest in its infrastructure and plan a multi-modal transportation network that serves the needs of long-time residents, new arrivals, and tourists.

Demographics

Asbury Park ranks 14th in population in Monmouth County, which is home to fifty-three municipalities ranging in population from 66,522 in Middletown Township to just 194 in Loch Arbour. The municipality is majority-minority, with forty-eight percent of residents identifying as Black, and thirty-percent as Hispanic of any race. This racial makeup is significantly different from that of Monmouth County as a whole, where 82% of residents identify as White, and just 7% as Black. The population skews younger than that of the county and New Jersey, with a median age of 34.7 (Table 1, Table 2).

The city's household median income is less than half of the county's, and per-capita retail sales are less than one-third of the county's sales. Only 22% of the city's residents have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, while 43% of the people in Monmouth County have attained a bachelor's degree or a higher degree in education.

Single-family houses account for only 26% of the city's housing stock, compared with 75% in Monmouth County. Eighty percent of the homes in Asbury Park are occupied by renters, almost an inverse of the County where seventy-four percent are owner-occupied.

Table 1. Comparison of population and housing

Metric	Asbury Park	Monmouth Co.	New Jersey
Land Area (sq miles)	1.4	468.4	7,355.5
Total Population	15,850	627,532	8,915,456
Population per sq mile	11,092	1,340	1,212
Retail Sales per Capita, 2012	4,831	17,519	15,079
Total Households	6,756	232,868	3,195,014
Persons per Household	2.31	2.67	2.73
Median Age	34.7	42.6	39.5
Median Household Income	\$36,512	\$87,297	\$73,702
Persons Below Poverty Line	31%	8%	11%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	22%	43%	38%
Owner-occupied Housing	20%	74%	64%
Median Home Value of Owner-occupied units	\$320,300	\$387,500	\$316,400
Median Rent	\$1,089	\$1,273	\$1,213
Single-family Housing	26%	75%	64%
Multi-family Housing	74%	25%	36%

US Census Bureau, 2017

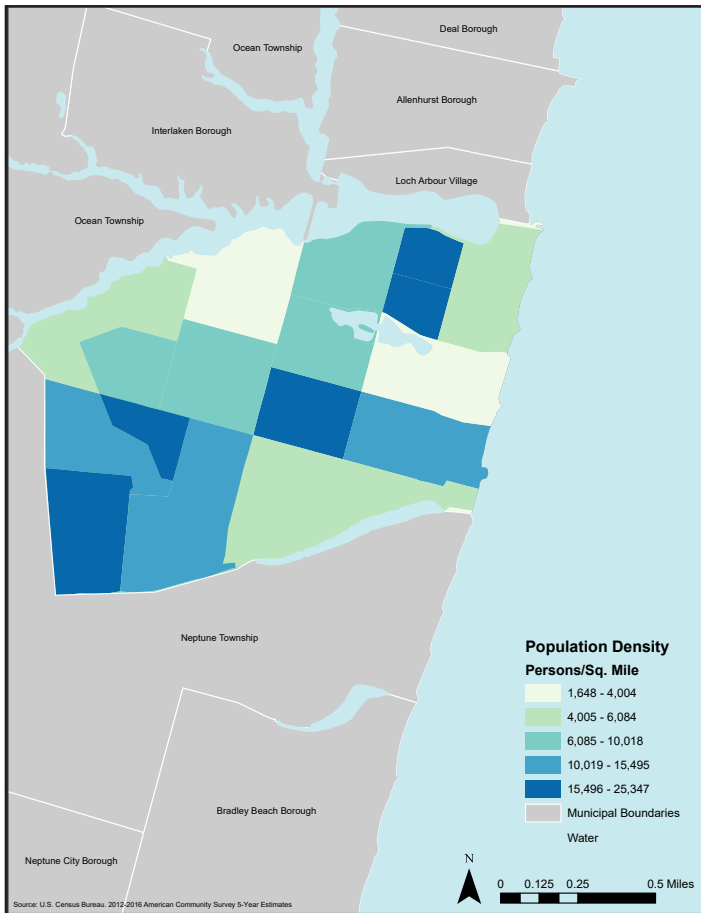


Figure 6. Asbury Park Population Density Map

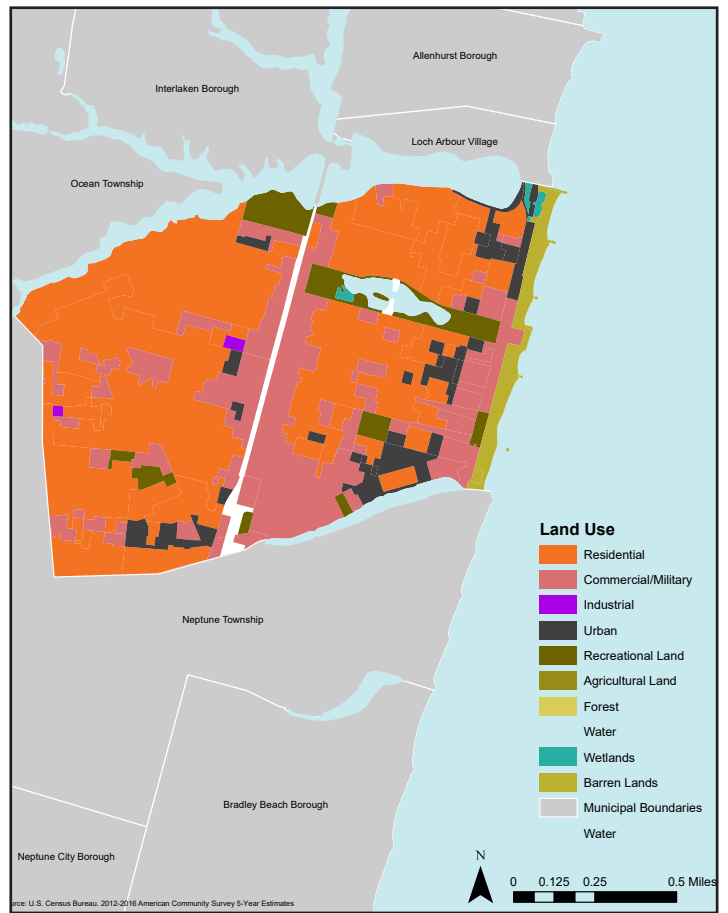


Figure 7. Asbury Park Land Use Map, 2016

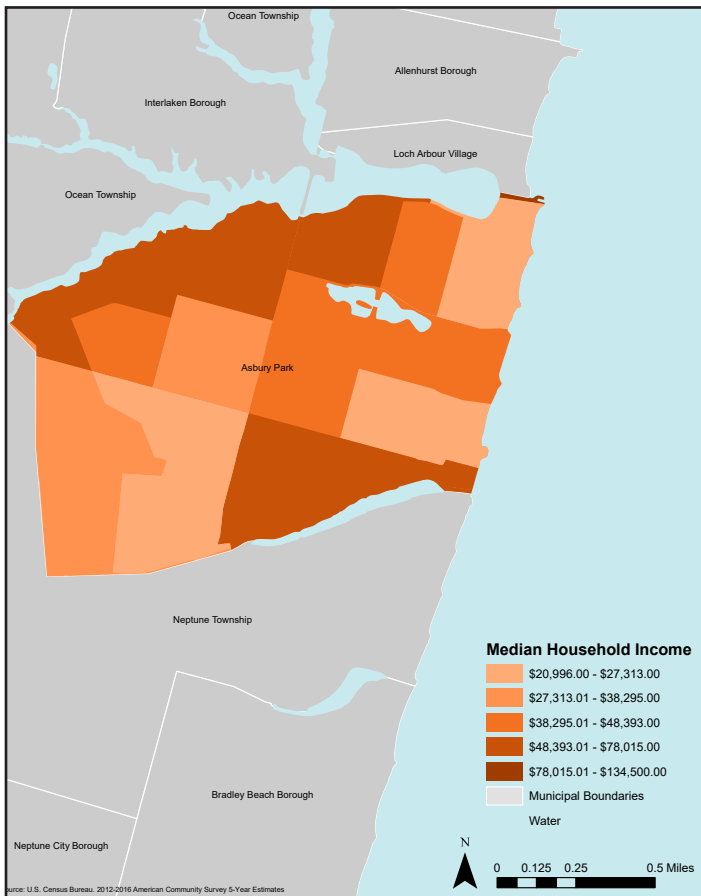


Figure 8. Map of median household income in Asbury Park

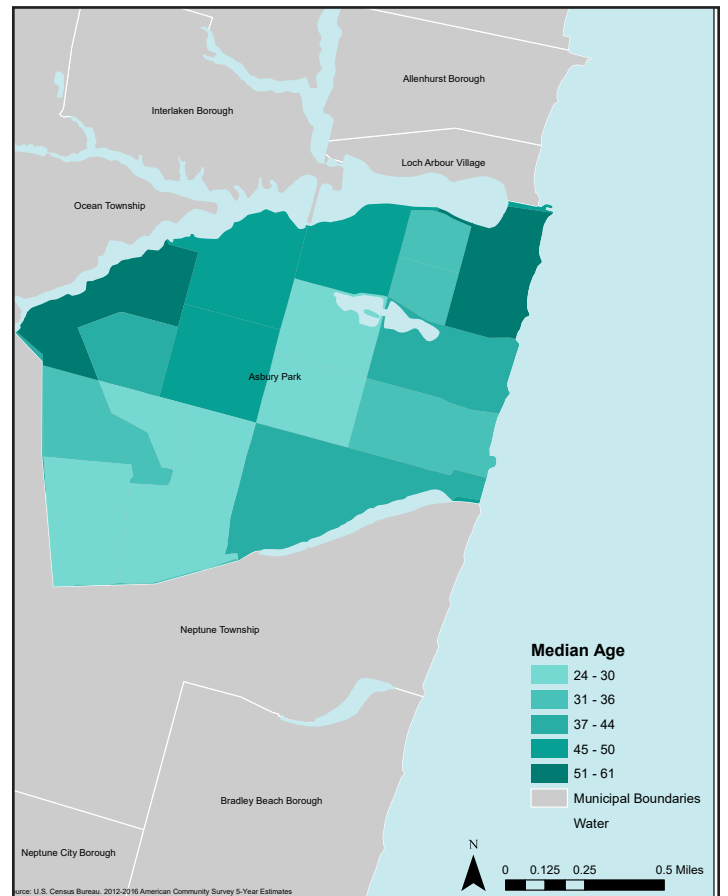


Figure 9. Median age of residents in Asbury Park

Transportation

Asbury Park's demographic context plays an important role in guiding its travel trends. With close to 32% of individuals living below the poverty line, it is not a surprise that carless households constitute more than a quarter of its population, a rate four times higher than that of the county. As such, alternative modes of travel other than driving alone are widely used by the city's residents. Driving alone contributes to fifty-five percent of work commutes, a much smaller share than in the county where that mode is used by seventy-eight percent of commuters. Carpooling to work, on the other hand, is done almost twice as frequently in the city compared to the county. Because of its high-density and highly walkable environment, walking accounts for a significant proportion of work trips. This is especially true for those working downtown and along the boardwalk, where parking is very limited. However, unlike many other shore towns in New Jersey, bicycling to work is not very prevalent (Table 3).

Asbury Park is bisected by New Jersey Transit's North Jersey Coast Line and Route 71 (Main Street), which runs parallel to the railroad. Route 71 serves multiple coast communities, extending from Brielle to Eatontown. Within Asbury Park, Route 71 is a major commercial corridor. Additionally, it serves as the access point to Cookman Avenue, which is lined by popular bars, restaurants, boutiques, and thrift shops, and thus is a major destination. Asbury Park is also well-connected to the rest of New Jersey thanks to the proximity of the Garden State Parkway, Route 18, and Route 35. All three motoring routes are easily accessible via Asbury Avenue, which begins at Cookman Avenue by the boardwalk and crosses Route 71.

The Asbury Park Train Station connects the city to other major destinations in North Jersey, including Red Bank, Rahway, and Newark, before terminating in New York City (Figure 10). The station is located on Main Street, bounded by Memorial Drive, Bangs Ave and Springwood Avenue. The train station also serves as a transportation hub for other travel modes. NJ Transit bus lines 830, 832, 836, and 837 make use of a bus depot and provide service to the surrounding communities. Additionally, route 317 provides service into Philadelphia. The station is also served by taxis, jitneys, area shuttles, and the Zagster bike share system.

Non-automotive modes of transportation, particularly bicycling and walking, are at the forefront of Asbury Park's many revitalization and redevelopment programs. In 2017, Asbury Park was approved as the 33rd Transit Village in the state by the Transit Village Inter-Agency Task Force. Taking advantage of its high density and high walkability, the city is committed to creating a walkable, bike-able, transit-friendly and livable community for its residents.

Table 2. Comparison of race and ethnicity of residents

Metric	Asbury Park	Monmouth Co.	New Jersey
White	39%	82%	68%
Black or African American	48%	7%	14%
American Indian	1%	0%	0%
Asian	0%	5%	9%
Some other race alone	9%	3%	6%
Two or more races	2%	2%	3%
Hispanic or Latino	30%	10%	19%

US Census Bureau, 2017

Table 3. Transportation to Work

Metric	Asbury Park	Monmouth Co.	New Jersey
Drove Alone	54.8%	75.8%	71.7%
Carpooled	14.5%	7.4%	8.1%
Public Transit	9.5%	7.9%	11.2%
Bicycle	1.5%	0.6%	0.3%
Walk	9.8%	2.0%	3.0%
Worked at Home	3.5%	5.1%	4.1%
Other	6.4%	1.3%	1.5%
Vehicles in Household	\$36,512	\$87,297	\$73,702
No Vehicles	28.4%	7.2%	11.6%
1 Vehicle	45.0%	30.0%	34.4%
2 Vehicles	20.8%	39.7%	36.2%
3 or more Vehicles	5.8%	23.0%	17.8%

US Census Bureau, 2017



Figure 10. Asbury Park Train Station.

The Complete Streets Story

Asbury Park passed a Complete Streets policy in 2015, where the city proclaimed that the “Mayor and Municipal Council wishes to implement a Complete Streets policy through the planning, design, construction, maintenance, and operation of new and retrofit transportation facilities.” The timing of this policy was critical: Asbury Park was experiencing a renaissance, which meant new businesses, new housing, and thousands of visitors arriving in cars and by train. It was time to reimagine how Asbury Park moved around.

Managing Multi-Modal Transportation

Without transportation, there is no city. A municipality’s transportation network can be described as the spine of the body, holding the entire city structure together, and dictating the interactions between land uses and residents. The transportation network is also likened to a body’s circulatory system, as it is how people and goods are sped around the city, reaching every corner. A badly maintained system can result in complete failure.

Yet even with this critical importance, many municipalities take their transportation network for granted, and fail to account for how the various modes of travel interact. In many municipalities, a variety of departments tinker with the system independently – engineering might reconfigure lanes, planning might dictate the construction of a new sidewalk, the department of public works may decide on striping, a parking authority may set meter pricing, and police are responsible for enforcement. While this broad delegation of duties and responsibilities can maintain a system, it is rarely an efficient way to plan, coordinate, and act. The end result is a disconnected network of sidewalks, obsolete parking regulations, missing bicycle facilities, and inconsistent enforcement. Such a haphazard network does a disservice to residents and visitors who want to travel safely and efficiently.

Asbury Park municipal planner Michele Alonso knew that business as usual would not be able to support the changes Asbury Park was experiencing. Through her previous experience as a planner in Jersey City and Newark, she knew that Hoboken had created an innovative role within city government to coordinate the transportation network. In 2015, Michele proposed the creation of a new position to Mayor John Moor: Transportation Manager.

Mayor John Moor’s roots in Asbury Park stretch as far back as 1888, when his great-grandparents moved to the city. As a lifelong resident of Asbury Park, and a 31 year employee of city government, the current mayor knows the city better than almost anybody else. He can point out where the trolleys used to run, the business history of individual buildings, and even the specific size of sewer pipes running under each street. With his many years in the Department of Public Works (DPW), the mayor was keenly aware of the transportation challenges facing the city, and supported the recommendation. According to Mayor Moor, “(Complete Streets) were on the radar – but there was so much stuff on the radar, they never would have been addressed without the position.”

The person tasked with the new Transportation Manager role would be responsible for the management of all municipal transportation and parking services in the city. This would include the parking utility, pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, safety, traffic control, signage, and striping. Additionally, the new hire would coordinate transportation matters with the county and state governments – including on projects such as the proposed redesign of Route 71. For the first time, the entire transportation network would be viewed as one interconnected system working together for the city. For example, the Transportation Manager works with the city planner to review design plans to ensure that they meet street design standards and include the required Complete Streets components.

“Any town that wants to do this and do it right should have a transportation planner – it’s so important” – Mayor John Moor

In October of 2016, the new role was filled by Michael Manzella, a lifelong New Jersey resident with a master’s degree in transportation planning and an undergraduate degree in engineering. The position was to be funded using revenue from the parking utility, which had experienced rapid growth as additional visitors descended on the city every year.

Paid Parking

The new transportation manager quickly got to work. His first order of business was to bring order to the city’s parking schemes (Figure 11). The goals were to facilitate turnover near businesses, provide space for day-trippers near the beach, and ensure that local residents were able to access their homes. All of these demands had to be balanced with an eye on how the streets were being used by other travel modes. Juggling these demands is a formidable challenge; according to Mayor Moor, “you’re always going to disappoint someone.”



Figure 11. Asbury Park parking meter.



Figure 12. Zagster Bike Share station.

One of the first charges of the new position was to evaluate the residential permit parking program, which exists to ensure that residents have a chance to find a space without competing with summer tourists. To manage demand among visitors, meter fees were modified so that they vary between different sections of town, and different parts of the year. For example, downtown meter spaces cost as little as twenty-five cents an hour in the winter, and two dollars an hour during weekends in the summer. The city also added the ability to pay by phone app, and in 2019, moved to a pay-by-plate system, so payments are tied to a vehicle instead of a space. By regulating parking in this manner, Mr. Manzella hopes to decrease the amount of drivers circling for a spot, which will reduce congestion and frustration. The city has also managed to add parking while simultaneously improving safety. On 8th Street, back-in angled parking was introduced. While this style of parking is uncommon in New Jersey, it is proven to be safer as it maximized visibility between all modes.

Pedestrian Safety

Managing parking demand through user fees is a proven model with a significant bonus: extra revenue beyond that needed to support the parking utility becomes available for the municipality to spend on related transportation needs. This revenue windfall has allowed the city to pay for the striping of high-visibility crosswalks at forty intersections during 2018. Another new addition to the city has been the use of hatched striping near intersections, as parking is not allowed within twenty-five feet of a crosswalk. This striping makes it clear that parking near crosswalks is illegal, which in turn increases visibility and safety for pedestrians. Revenue from the parking program has also allowed Asbury Park to purchase seventy-five new in-road “Stop for Pedestrians in Crosswalk” signs. The city prioritized intersections where there had been a collision in the previous three years, and then locations with high pedestrian traffic (Figure 13).



Figure 13. New high-visibility crosswalk, hatched no parking zone, and additional stop sign.

Bicycle and Scooter Share

Asbury Park wants to make it easy for residents and visitors to move around the city without a car. One strategy was the launch of a small Zagster bike share system in 2017, which now includes eight stations and forty bicycles (Figure 12). Three stations are installed along Ocean Avenue, with another three located downtown, including one at the train station. An additional station is located on the west side, on Springwood Avenue, and the last has been placed on the northern side of the city. The idea is that residents and visitors can use Zagster to easily move between each section of the town, without having to drive. Of course, tourists can also pay three dollars an hour to simply ride a bicycle for fun. Residents are better off paying thirty dollars for an annual pass, which allows for unlimited two-hour rides.

Currently, the system is entirely funded by private sponsorships and user fees, however, the city handles the contract with the bike share company. Asbury Park entered into a three-year contract with Zagster to handle all operations and maintenance on the system, including processing user payments through a phone app, and replacing a bicycle if it is vandalized or stolen – something that has not yet happened. That company charges a single fixed fee per station, each year. In New Jersey, Zagster also operates in Princeton Township and Morris County.

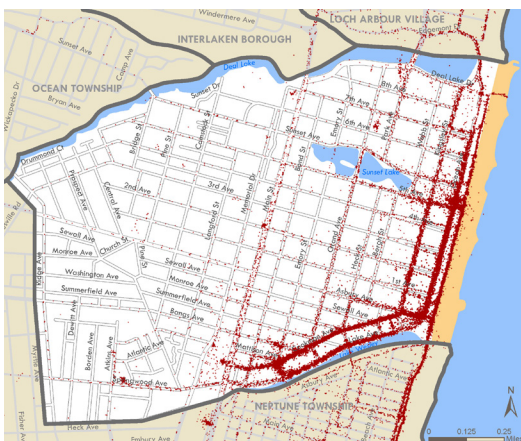


Figure 14. Map showing bike share usage (August - October 2017) Source: Asbury Park Plan for Walking and Biking 2018

In 2017, the system saw over 5,500 rides. Peak usage was observed on the fourth of July, with close to 100 rides on that date. One interesting finding is that over thirty percent of the rides were to destinations outside Asbury Park, which indicates the potential for an expanded regional system (Figure 14). For 2019, Asbury Park hopes to find additional sponsors to allow the Zagster system to grow. Additionally, the city will be creating a framework to allow for dockless e-scooter companies to serve the city. This might include the creation of “micro hubs” where users would park their scooters.

Jitney Service

Asbury Park recognizes that a range of options are needed to serve the transportation needs of all residents and visitors. To assist those who cannot walk or bicycle longer distances, the city has put in a regulatory framework to allow jitney services to operate around town. One company, The Scooter Dudes, operates fixed-route service on two lines, charging \$3 per ride. Another company called “The Free Ride” uses neighborhood electric vehicles that can be flagged down to deliver riders to any location within a fixed area. As the name implies, the service is free to users, as it is funded through advertisements.

EZ Ride, a Transportation Management Association, manages a program called Ryde4Life in Asbury Park. This program subsidizes the cost of transportation for medical visits and grocery store trips for eligible low-income residents who are 18 years or older. Those who qualify for the program pay a \$15 annual fee and receive a 50% discount on rides provided by Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Lyft and Uber. Seniors who do not have a smartphone can call EZ Ride Coordinator to request a ride in real time. Additionally, grants have been used to provide completely free rides, with the hope that additional sponsors can be found to continue providing free rides for low-income seniors.

Car Share

In 2019, Asbury Park hopes to become the second city in New Jersey to launch an electric car share program. Aimed at residents without cars, the program will place six electric vehicles and their charging stations at three locations around town. Residents will be able to rent the cars for a few hours to expand their ability to move around the region. The city also hopes that households with multiple cars decide to give one up knowing that a rental car is available nearby to serve their needs. The city will monitor usage to see if it can be expanded in the future. An additional benefit of this program is that the new charging stations can be used by visitors driving their personal electric vehicle. The only cost to the city for this program is the dedication of six on-street parking spaces to support the system.

“We’re always the first shore community to try something new like bike share, or car share – and neighboring towns are catching on” – Mayor John Moor

Bicycle Parking

Over the past two years, Asbury Park has added a large amount of bicycle parking to provide improved access to local businesses. The city installed over forty individual racks throughout the city in 2018 along with three on-street parking corrals (Figure 15). The firm which manages the boardwalk, Madison Marquette, also recently installed forty-four new racks along the boardwalk (Figure 16). In the future, the city plans to add additional bicycle parking on the west side of town.



Figure 15. Downtown on-street bicycle parking.



Figure 16. Bicycle parking along the boardwalk.

Grassroots Activism And Community Events

“Music does bring people together. It allows us to experience the same emotions. People everywhere are the same in heart and spirit. No matter what language we speak, what color we are, the form of our politics or the expression of our love and our faith, music proves: We are the same.” – John Denver

Music has always been an essential part of Asbury Park. Sixty years ago, on Springwood Avenue, jazz, gospel, and soul could be heard every night from a number of famed clubs and bars. On the waterfront, the Convention Hall attracted the biggest names in the business. Today that musical legacy is alive and well in coffee shops, jazz clubs, and even in major festivals held on the sand. Music brings people together, and perhaps this is why Asbury Park has such a vibrant community of individual activists working to build a stronger city.

The Better Block Initiative

Formed in 2010, the Asbury Park Better Block Initiative brought together a group of community organizers and property owners to demonstrate how a commercial block could be revitalized. Each year, the group demonstrates how a walkable and bikeable city can strengthen the community and support local businesses. In 2017, the group added semi-permanent improvement to the intersection of Springwood Avenue and Borden Avenue. High-visibility crosswalks were striped in the form of piano keys to celebrate the music history of the avenue while improving pedestrian safety. The new crosswalks surround a mural which brightens up the intersection and slows drivers down. Additionally, shared-lane markings were striped to remind motorists to look out for bicyclists on the roadway. The mural and crosswalks were unveiled along with a temporary parklet, bicycle safety demonstrations, local vendors, and of course, music.

PorchFest

In 2017, a new annual tradition was brought to Asbury Park: PorchFest. Organized by the Asbury Park Homeowners Association and Interfaith Neighbors, PorchFest borrows on a concept originally started in Ithaca, New York. It is an annual music festival where local musicians set up on residential porches throughout the city and people gather to listen. The concept is made possible by the walkable nature of the municipality, as participants walk (or bicycle) from home to home to listen to a wide range of bands.

Asbury Park Alive!

In 2016, the Alliance for a Healthier Asbury Park was created with the goal to improve the health of local residents. With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the New Jersey Health Initiative, the group set their sights on ways to promote healthy lifestyles and active living in the city. On May 4th 2019, after nearly a year of planning, they hosted an open streets event called “Asbury Park Alive!”

Open Streets events allow people to walk, run, dance, skate, bicycle, and more on local roadways. For a few hours, cars are banned so that people can take to the streets and engage in healthy activities. Additionally, the event serves as a way for people to get to know their community, and to reimagine how public spaces can be used. In New Jersey, the New Brunswick Ciclovía has been a popular event held three times a year since 2013. Asbury Park’s first open streets event included 1.25 miles of car-free roadway, two dozen activities, live music, and hundreds of vendors and volunteers.

EZ Ride

EZ Ride, a New Jersey Transportation Management Association, has been active in supporting bicycle and pedestrian safety in Asbury Park. They have worked with local schools to offer bike and pedestrian safety presentations, bicycle rodeos, walk and bike to school days, and education campaigns. The group helped to restart the Mayor’s Wellness Committee, and has worked with NJTPA to promote safety through the Street Smart NJ campaign. The work done by EZ Ride has allowed local schools to earn New Jersey Safe Routes to School Gold awards and to apply for state and federal grants to further improve safety.



Figure 17. Piano-themed crosswalk on Springwood Avenue celebrates the musical history of the city’s west side.

Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition

Coming Together

The seeds for the Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition (APCSC) were planted as far back as 1996, when Kerri Martin founded Second Life Bikes, a youth “earn-a-bike” program and community bike shop currently located in a large space on Main Street (Route 71), just steps from the municipal complex and train station. In this space, shared with High Voltage Café and Grocery, youths aged twelve to eighteen can work for fifteen hours to earn a bicycle, while learning practical job skills (Figure 18). As an avid bicyclist working with children, Kerri was familiar with the challenges involved with bicycling in an urban environment. However, although she assisted with events such as bicycle rodeos and community rides, she did not consider herself a bicycle advocate.

Across town, a group of neighbors had come together after meeting on Nextdoor.com, a distance-based social network intended to connect nearby residents. The neighbors started having meetings to talk about ways to rewrite a local ordinance regarding limitations to bicycling on the boardwalk. It was through these meetings where Doug McQueen and Polli Schildge met.

Like Kerri, Polli did not consider herself an advocate – although she is an avid bicyclist who frequently commutes between Asbury Park and Red Bank, a distance of fourteen miles each way. Her love of bicycling spread to her family to the point that one of her children took up cycling professionally and another embarked on a career with the US Department of Transportation. While this passion for bicycling had granted her a front-seat view of the incomplete nature of most New Jersey roadways, she had yet to use her experience for change.

Of the three Doug McQueen was the most attuned to the nuances of Complete Streets. Although his day job consists of captaining Boeing jets for United Airlines, Doug had previously found time to complete a Masters of City and Regional Planning at Rutgers University. It was through this program where he learned about good urban design and the importance of safe and accessible public spaces. As a pilot, Doug has been fortunate to visit cities around the world, where he has been able to see a wide range of examples of innovative bicycle and pedestrian design treatments. Using this firsthand knowledge, he was able to quickly pull up comparative examples relevant to Asbury Park.

While the three highly motivated individuals were interested in bicycle and pedestrian safety, they spoke as individuals. This changed late in the summer of 2015, when after two years of discussions with Asbury Park, the New Jersey Department of Transportation announced the cancellation of a proposed Complete Streets road diet project on Route 71 – a project that was set to transform the gateway into Asbury Park. This project, discussed in detail in the Projects section, was planned to reimagine Main Street as a roadway safe and accessible for all users, including the roadway directly in front of Second Life Bikes. The project proposed reducing the roadway from two-lanes in each direction to one lane in each direction paired with bicycle lanes and a bi-directional center turn lane.

This startling development motivated the individuals to jump to action and work together to save the plan.

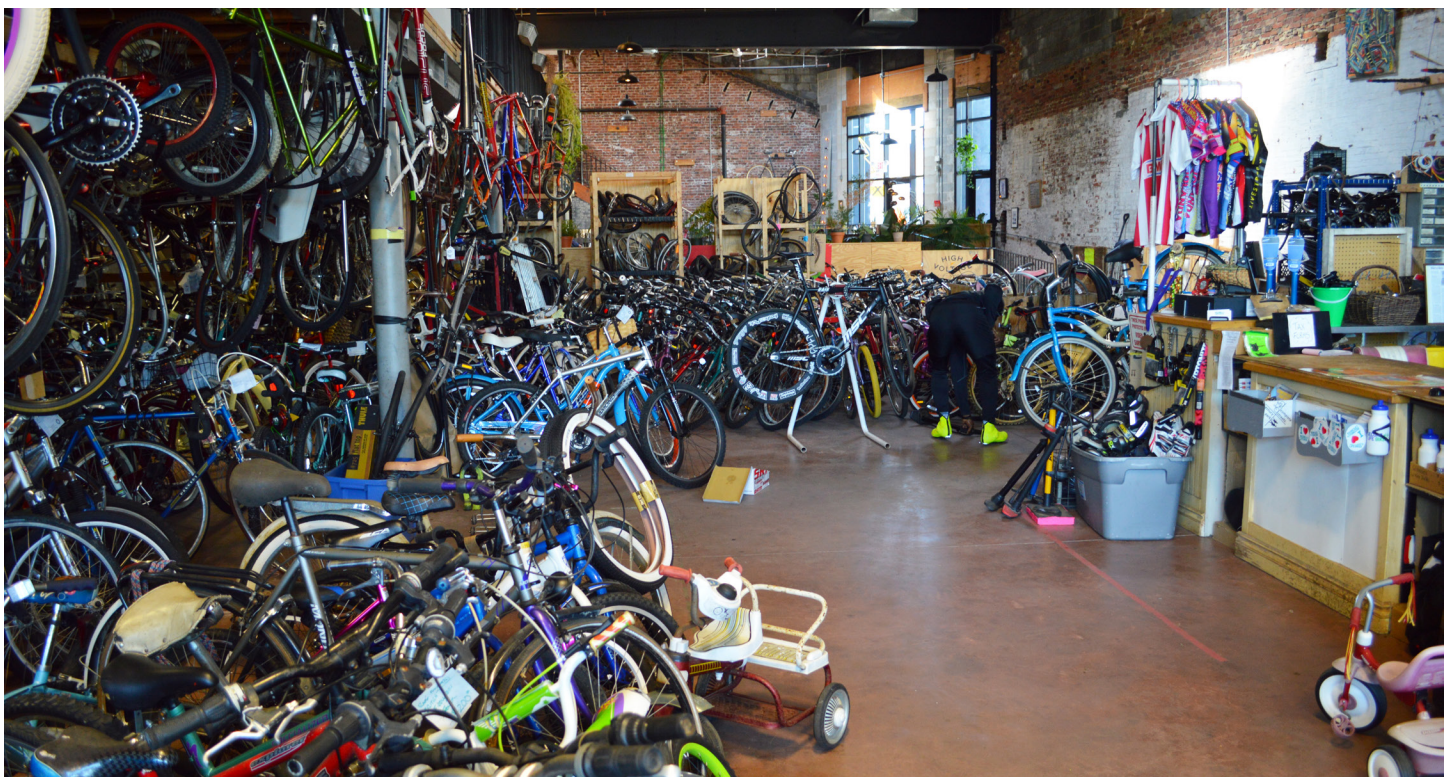


Figure 18. Second Life Bikes, with High Voltage Cafe visible in the back.

Building the Coalition

How do neighbors transform from concerned residents to powerful advocates? According to Doug, “we didn’t know the right things to say to the right people.” Fortunately for the group, they had a wealth of knowledge at their disposal online, thanks to the numerous blogs and social media accounts maintained by bicycle and pedestrian enthusiasts around the country. Polli credits the enormous library of information published online by advocates every day as a major source of inspiration and knowledge for her and the group. With some technical savvy, Doug created a website for the newly formed Coalition, and set the group up with their own social media accounts to give them a voice in the discussion. Through these channels, the members of the Coalition could curate and share the information most relevant to Asbury Park, including the proven benefits of road diets.

Armed with a platform, the Coalition needed an effective strategy to reverse the Route 71 decision. The group turned to the regional experts: the New Jersey Bike and Walk Coalition (NJBWC), led by Cyndi Steiner. Active since 2009, the NJBWC had a proven record of accomplishments under their belt, including advocating for the Complete Streets rebuild of Route 35 just down the shore from Asbury Park. Described by the Coalition as their “mother hen,” Ms. Steiner helped the group define their focus, structure their advocacy, and meet with the right stakeholders. By providing the Coalition with a crash course in effective advocacy, Kerri, Polli, and Doug were able to act quickly and effectively.

“We were the squeaky wheel.”

Fortunately for the group, Asbury Park already had the base for a bicycle and pedestrian friendly community. The compact size, limited parking, and high percentage of zero-car households meant that most residents understood the value of further improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. In that regard, the group was able to find allies to assist with their push to bring back the Route 71 Complete Streets project. These new friends showed their support in a number of ways, including lending space for events, donations that were used as door prizes, and discounted or free catering.

Changing Minds

Of course, some opposition did exist, which is why the plan had met disapproval from the municipal government and some local media outlets in the first place. Asbury Park Mayor Moor even declared the cancellation as his “finest victory,” and yet three years later, with the project back on, the same mayor is excited to see the Complete Streets project under construction.

According to Doug McQueen, knowing the best way to respond to critical question is key. In that area, the group stumbled at first, which resulted in a local weekly newspaper branding them as “wild eyed fanatics” on the front page. It took practice to ensure that the right message was being delivered in the right way to the right people. By fully educating themselves, and taking advice from Cyndi Steiner, the group could craft responses that did not antagonize their critics. For example, they suggested avoiding saying that the project was a “no brainer,” as that phrasing sends the message that anyone not in love with the proposal is lacking a brain.

An additional tip given by the APCSC is to always “keep it positive.” As the topic of Complete Streets emerged on the Nextdoor website and other social media outlets, the advocates would encounter skeptical posts, especially the sentiment that what worked elsewhere would not work in Asbury Park. According to the advocates, the best response was to “just lay the facts down” and to avoid “rolling around in the mud.” Data was critical, and the team was armed with the crash and speeding history of Main Street, along with data showing the positive effect that the road diet would have on those problems. One set of concerns was raised by the fire department, who were nervous that removing a traffic lane would cause congestion and hurt response times. In this regard, the advocates presented data from other municipalities who had implemented a road diet without hurting fire response times.

Not all the work was done online. The Coalition set up individual meetings with every single city official, where over a cup of coffee, disagreements about Complete Streets could be hashed out. These individual meetings helped to show the officials that the advocates weren’t just online cranks, but were real concerned residents who wanted to make Asbury Park a better place. The group used the same strategy with their media critics, including the editor of the newspaper who had branded them as fanatics. These meetings resulted in a notable shift in tone from these outlets.

APCSC also used marketing to their advantage. The group printed flyers with “#slowthecars,” which were distributed around the city.

The work the coalition did in educating residents on Complete Streets was effective. During an electoral debate, it was clear that every candidate had taken the time to learn about Complete Streets, understand the terminology, and appreciate the benefits.

Future Plans

Although heavy construction was well underway on the Route 71 project as of fall 2018, the advocates know that their work is not done. Even though residents and local businesses will benefit from the improved walking and bicycling conditions, some of those improvements will come at the expense of drivers, who are set to lose some parking spaces, and will be forced to slow down. According to Doug, “it’s change, and people don’t love change,” which is a sentiment that does ring true for any project in any city. Through their research, the group is aware that the response to change may come in the form of “bikelash,” and Kerri is ready, stating “we should be prepared for that response from some businesses.”

The success with the Main Street project didn't cause the group to disband. Instead, they continue to work together, but with a broader focus on how to make Asbury Park a better place for walking and bicycling. The group has started a #SlowTheCars campaign, to bring attention to dangerous speeding along residential streets in the city. The group also worked hard to promote the 2019 Plan for Walking and Biking. Aside from providing extensive feedback, the group used their connections within the community to promote the public process, and ensure as many voices as possible were included.

Other activities the members have been engaged with are group rides and bicycle events. For example, the group hosts a monthly community bicycle ride, which are free and open to all. The group is also brainstorming ways to purchase and distribute bicycle lights to city residents. Many service employees rely on bicycles to commute to the bars and restaurants in the downtown area, but few use lights when they ride home at 2am.

During the Sea.Hear.Now festival, the city strongly encouraged attendees to arrive by transit, bicycle or ride share. The Coalition assisted by supporting a bicycle valet, where attendees could leave their bicycle and know it will be safe. The valet was a success, with over a thousand bicycles parking during the festival, and no congestion reported on local roadways. As the festival drew attendees from all over New Jersey, many of the bicyclists had arrived by train. This experience supported one of the group's talking points: Asbury Park doesn't have a parking problem, it has a mode-choice problem.

Their current goal is based on transportation equity, which they define as moving people safely throughout the city. Before they can tackle that goal, they must decide the best way to organize the group to guarantee longevity. One model, used by Transportation Alternatives in New York City, relies on a membership model to raise funds to support the group's activities. An idea the group is weighing is to expand the Coalition into an organization that supports complete streets along the entire Jersey Shore. This is valuable because transportation relies on a complete network, and safety cannot end at municipal borders. Fortunately, there are already complete street champions along the coast, and bringing them together could prove transformative.



Figure 19. Outdoor dining on Cookman Avenue.

Projects

Route 71

In Asbury Park, State Route 71 – also known as Main Street – plays many roles. As a state route, it is an important traffic corridor connecting a series of shore towns. As a main street to Asbury Park, the roadway hosts the transportation center, city hall, emergency services, and many local businesses. For most of the last century, its role as a traffic corridor has taken precedence, which in turn has given the corridor the unfortunate standing of dividing the town into two. With four lanes of traffic, street parking, minimal pedestrian accommodations, and nothing for bicyclists, Route 71 has been the model of an incomplete street (Figure 20).

In the early 2010's, plans were being developed to rebuild the corridor. The sewers below the asphalt were in desperate need of replacement, and the traffic signals were long obsolete. With a new focus on bicycle and pedestrian safety, NJDOT announced that the roadway would receive a traditional road diet with \$19 million in improvements. Such a road diet would involve rebuilding the corridor to allow for one lane in each direction, with a center turning lane and bicycle lanes added in the newly reclaimed space. This proven model increases safety for all roadway users, by ensuring that every user has a safe and dedicated space. Traffic counts showed that the new configuration could support traffic without causing congestion. Additionally, 18 traffic signals would be replaced and sidewalks would be rebuilt to be ADA compliant.

Unfortunately, a few years had passed after the plan was developed, before funding was available to begin the capital project. Asbury Park was rapidly changing, and those changes extended to the administration. With funding finally secured, NJDOT was ready to quickly begin construction, but the announcement was met with anger from Asbury Park. To the new administration, it appeared as if NJDOT was mandating a major change without any consultation or outreach with the municipality and community.

Asbury Park had many concerns that they felt hadn't been addressed. One primary concern was that the traffic counts used in the original model were not taken over the summer, when the city is flooded with tourists driving to the beach. To address this concern, NJDOT conducted a new round of counts in July of 2016, which did show that the new configuration would support summer traffic. An additional concern raised by the city was potential delays for emergency response services. To that end, NJDOT promised that all new signals would come with emergency preemption technology.

Still, some additional details had to be worked out. A dispute arose between the city and NJDOT over the reconstruction of the sidewalks and the quantity and placement of trees. Even after heavy construction began, the city was concerned that contractors were failing to provide temporary accommodations for pedestrians during the construction. In late 2018, Asbury Park was still trying to convince NJDOT to add a protected bicycle lane along Deal Lake in the place of an unneeded center turn lane, and to modify the length of bus stops. Fortunately, most of the points of contention have been addressed, and all parties are eagerly awaiting the final delivery of the project in early 2020.

The road diet is not the only improvement planned for Main Street. In 2017, Asbury Park was awarded \$237,000 for streetscape improvement along the corridor. This money will be used to enhance the sidewalk along the corridor, by adding bicycle racks, benches, street trees, and more.



Figure 20. Route 71, looking north to Mattison Avenue, in front of the Asbury Park train station.

Memorial Drive Road Diet

Route 71 may have garnered the most press, but it was not the first road diet in Asbury Park. In 2015, Monmouth County worked with the city to slim down Memorial Drive, from Route 33 on the Neptune border to Monroe Avenue. This section of roadway previously had two lanes of traffic in both directions. The road diet removed two of the lanes and added a center-turn lane and shoulders. North of Monroe Avenue, the roadway was already limited to two lanes, with parking. In addition to modifying the lane configuration, the project added high-visibility crosswalks and improved the drainage. NJTPA supported the project by granting \$422,000 in Local Safety and High Risk Rural Roads grant funding.

Green Infrastructure

The effects of climate change have been noticed in Asbury Park. In 2018, multiple streets around the city flooded for the first time after exceptionally heavy rains. In order to address this issue, the city asks developers to show how they will address stormwater through green infrastructure. Currently the city has just one rain garden, located near city hall, which was made possible with the help of the environmental shade tree commission, although additional bioswales may be added in the future.

Bike Ped Master Plan

In 2017, the New Jersey Department of Transportation awarded Asbury Park with a technical assistance grant to develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. A firm with extensive experience in New Jersey, WSP, worked with the city to solicit community participation through outreach efforts at city events. Feedback poured in through focus groups, a steering committee, and an online survey with an interactive map. The purpose of the plan is to lay the official framework for future infrastructure improvements, with a special focus on bicycle and pedestrian safety, using the latest guidance from the New Jersey Complete Streets Design Guide. It does this by identifying a core bicycle network for the city and priority infrastructure improvement concepts that will support bicycling and walking.

A draft version of the plan was published at the end of 2018, with official adoption by the city in early 2019. The plan includes recommendations in the areas of education, encouragement, enforcement, policies, and infrastructure. Some of those recommendations in the report are:

- Add pedestrian signals with countdown timers to the 33 traffic signals in the city that lack them
- Distribute public service announcements (PSAs) and brochures on topics such as speeding, safe bicycling, how to bicycle with traffic, proper helmet usage, bicycle routes, and safe pedestrian behavior.
- Integrate bicycle and pedestrian educational programs into school curriculums.
- Continue utilizing resources through Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grants and EZ Ride (Meadowlink) TMA to provide activities that encourage bicycling and walking at local schools, such as bike rodeos or other events.
- Implement a pedestrian safety enforcement (PSE) program.
- Speed limits: Adjust the speed limit on all bicycle boulevards to 20 mph.
- Add two-way protected bicycle lanes to Ocean Avenue, Kingsley Street, Memorial Drive and Asbury Avenue by reconfiguring travel lanes
- Add bicycle lanes to Sunset Avenue, Park Avenue and 1st to 8th Avenues by narrowing travel lanes
- Create bicycle boulevards along eight roadways by reducing speed limits and implementing traffic calming measures
- Add bicycle parking on west side of the city
- Install curb extensions and high visibility crosswalks at seven priority intersections

The recommendations in the plan provide a roadmap for the city to follow. Many of the improvements, such as the standard bicycle lanes, will be made as part of the regular pavement maintenance cycle. Additionally, the city will continue to apply for grants in order to fund the capital intensive recommendations in the plan. For 2019, the city plans on applying for NJ DOT's Bikeways grant, which makes \$1 million available annually.

Transit Village Designation and Grant

In July 2017, Asbury Park received the designation of a Transit Village, becoming the 33rd such municipality in the state with that status. The Transit Village designation is given to municipalities that show a commitment to revitalization and redevelopment that encourages use of transit facilities, and makes the municipality eligible for additional grants. Less than a year later, Asbury Park was awarded \$325,000 under the program for a wayfinding signage design and construction project. The project will focus on areas surrounding the train station, including Main Street, Memorial Drive, and Springwood Avenue. Asbury Park hopes that the signage will help showcase the West Side's unique identity while uniting it with the entire city.

Currently, the land surrounding the train station is primarily used for municipal offices and parking. In the future, the city hopes to redevelop the land as a mixed-use complex to take full advantage of the transit connectivity.

Next Steps

Asbury Park is fortunate that redevelopment projects are adding millions in tax dollars to the municipal coffers. An almost 10% increase in tax revenue is expected in 2019 with the opening of 1101 Ocean Avenue, a new mixed-use building close to the shore. The city expects that some of this money will go to road projects that will be designed with complete street standards in mind. With the new Plan for Walking and Biking in hand, the city will quickly be able to add bicycle facilities as many roadways receive long-needed repaving work.

The city has been successful in perusing grant money, and intends to continue applying. For the 2019 Safe Routes to School grant cycle, Asbury Park asked for funding to add a walk prompt to the traffic signal at Third Avenue and Pine Street, create six neighborhood roundabouts, install four vehicle activated traffic calming signs, place school crosswalk signs, and stripe bicycle lanes along Third Avenue. The city will also be submitting an application to the Bikeways program to make improvements to Asbury Avenue.

Asbury Park is also closely monitoring innovations in multi-modal transportation. Dockless electric bicycle rentals and electric scooters may become legal in New Jersey in 2019, and the city will be making plans for those systems if they do become available. For ride-hailing services, the city will monitor if dedicated drop-off zones could be needed. According to Michael Manzella, every community is better served by carefully managing the on-street parking and ensuring all modes are properly addressed.

The city expects that these steps will be well-received by the community. The success of the safety measures installed in 2018 has created a hunger for more, and Asbury Park is fortunate to have a strong base of advocates that are eager to talk to their neighbors about these improvements. Mayor Moor advised other municipalities to take advantage of the resources advocates provide: “find the champions and don’t be afraid to engage them. They are residents who want to make the community better.



Figure 21. Bicycle lanes and crosswalk on Sunset Avenue.

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