

# Traffic Calming & Pedestrian Safety in Little Falls, NJ

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Results of community walk

August 2008

The Township of Little Falls' bustling downtown area has promise to be a truly pedestrian and transit oriented community, ready to capitalize on the economic development that comes with downtown revitalization. However, safety hazards to pedestrians and cyclists remain. To address these issues, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign and ABC of Little Falls held a walking tour on July 11, 2008. The tour was made possible with funding from the Community Foundation of New Jersey.

Examining crosswalk visibility, sidewalk continuity and integrity, traffic calming and access to transit, this report is an assessment of current conditions and infrastructure, followed by recommendations and next steps.

**1 Crosswalks**

Marked crosswalks serve to highlight the right-of-way where motorists can expect pedestrians to cross. Having visually prominent crossings greatly increases the safety of pedestrians, thus creating a more inviting environment for foot traffic.

There is a highly visible (albeit slightly faded) bright green crosswalk on the East side of the intersection of Main Street and Stevens, which provides added visibility for both motorists and people walking. Existing crosswalks at controlled intersections are in need of restriping, and adopting a similar color-coding for all of the crosswalks in the downtown area would significantly improve the walking environment.



*Color crosswalk at Main & Stevens should be replicated community-wide*

**Specifically, we recommend the following improvements for downtown:**

- ◆ **Painted crosswalks at the following intersections:** Main Street and Maple Street; Main Street and Stevens; Main Street and Center Ave, where there is a bus stop; East Main and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue; and Van Ness and East Main, which is also a bus stop.
- ◆ **Leading pedestrian intervals at traffic signal on Main Street and Stevens.** The current walk signal coincides with a green light for motorists turning onto Main Street. Allowing lead-time for the walk signal increases the visibility of crossing pedestrians and helps ensure turning motorists steer clear.



- ◆ **Pedestrian crossing signs in the crosswalks** (see photo, left) are also effective in alerting drivers to the presence of pedestrians. Recommended guidelines from NJDOT are attached, however signs must be purchased by the municipality.

- ◆ **Mid-block crosswalks on Paterson Avenue** would be beneficial just after the triangle median at Maple Street. The sidewalk ends just after the Fire Station on the West side of Paterson, but continues along the East side towards the Recreation Center, forcing people to cross unsafely.

- ◆ **More prominent crosswalks or optical speed bars on Paterson Ave across from the Recreation Center** would alert drivers to the



presence of pedestrians likely to cross to access the Center. The current crosswalk should be highly visible given the presence of children and pedestrians.

## 2 Sidewalks

While the downtown area has a basic network of sidewalks, improvements are still needed. Sidewalks should be located so that the majority of residents are safely and conveniently connected between destinations such as schools, recreation, retail, employment and transit facilities. Sidewalks should be continuous throughout the downtown and residential areas; interruptions are difficult for people with strollers, wheelchairs and walkers, and often force pedestrians to cross a busy street midblock.

*Paterson Ave crosswalk by Recreation Center*



- ◆ **Add a sidewalk on the West side of Paterson Avenue** across from the Little Falls Recreation Center in order to facilitate and encourage walking to the greatest extent possible.

## 3 Other Traffic Calming

Traffic calming projects involve changes to road design and streetscape to reduce traffic speeds and make streets easier and safer for people to cross. Traditionally, residential neighborhoods would request traffic calming to reduce speeding in areas where children play and quiet is appreciated; but increasing numbers of businesses and downtowns have been asking for traffic calming, encouraging people to shop locally, drive less and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

At uncontrolled intersections, such as Main Street and Paterson Avenue, marked crosswalks should be utilized in conjunction with other traffic calming measures that physically reinforce crosswalks and reduce vehicle speeds.

- ◆ **A curb extension or bulb-out at the intersection of Main and Paterson** would improve pedestrian visibility for drivers and narrow the lanes to encourage slower driving speeds.

Adding more than just aesthetic value, **streetscaping is an integral part of traffic calming** as it creates a physical environment that necessitates slower driving and increased driver awareness. Uncertainty about what is ahead slows drivers. Elements that have proven successful elsewhere include vertical objects close to the street, such as trees or bushes in irregular patterns, as well as visually-complex material close to the street, such as flower beds, or café tables and chairs interrupt sight lines and shorten the view.

Recent studies have also shown success with optical traffic calming measures, where the street is painted to give the appearance of a speed bump or other obstacle. As Little Falls funnels a significant amount of through-traffic, these cost-effective and successful measures may produce the desired effect.

## 4 Transit Oriented Development

The transit network in Little Falls is a great asset to the community. If planned correctly, mixed-use development around the train station and bus stops will attract NYC commuters, ratepayers, and a more

vibrant downtown. Little Falls should ensure that sidewalks, crosswalks and bicycle racks be provided by developers planning to build around the existing station. This way, a public-private partnership is formed where the developer has more attractive property with walking access to the downtown, and Little Falls local businesses benefit from an increased customer base and higher densities.

## 5 Going Forward

Little Falls has the potential and the drive to make township infrastructure safer, more convenient and more pleasant for pedestrians and cyclists. Below are some suggestions for moving forward with advocacy and implementation, along with a list of suggested funding sources.

### Next Steps

Tri-State Transportation Campaign is happy to help draft or to co-sign on a letter to Passaic County officials, and is more than willing to write letters of support for related grant proposals.

### Sources of Funding

♦ **Safe Streets to Transit** Program is a key component of Governor Jon S. Corzine's Pedestrian Safety Initiative. The program provides \$5 million dollars over five years for pedestrian safety improvements including infrastructure, education, outreach and planning guidance in areas surrounding transit facilities. The link for the NJ Department of Transportation Safe Streets to School website is <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/business/localaid/safe.shtm>

♦ **Safe Routes to School** is a federal, state and local effort to enable and encourage children to walk and bicycle to school, aiding communities in developing and implementing projects and programs that encourage walking and bicycling to school while enhancing the safety of these trips. While the 2008 deadline has already passed, this is a great program that could provide funding for any bicycle and pedestrian improvements near schools. The link for the NJDOT Safe Routes to School website is <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/community/srts/>

♦ **Bikeways** funding is available to all counties and municipalities working toward the State goal of achieving 1,000 miles of dedicated bikeways in New Jersey. The NJDOT Bikeways site is <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/business/localaid/bikewaysf.shtm>

♦ **Centers of Place** provides a funding opportunity to support non-traditional transportation improvements that advance municipal growth management objectives. The link for the New Jersey Department of Transportation Centers of Place is <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/business/localaid/centerplace.shtm>

♦ **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)** is a Federal program that strives to reduce transportation-related emissions by providing State DOTs and local governments options to fund different emission reduction strategies. Little Falls experiences significant through-traffic from cars diverting off congested highways, which in turn decreases air quality and increases local congestion. The link to the CMAQ site is <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/cmaq/funding.htm>

♦ **Transportation Enhancements** program is funded through the Federal Government, and its projects are designed to foster more livable communities, preserve and protect environmental and cultural resources and to promote alternative modes of transportation. The website link is <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/business/localaid/enhancements.shtm>