

## **Emphasize Pedestrians and Bikes in Local Stimulus Spending**

1/29/09

Thank you all for joining us here today. My name is David Kooris and I'm the Connecticut Director of Regional Plan Association and the President of the Connecticut Bike Coalition.

I'd like to thank Liz Brown, Legislative Coordinator of the Commission on Children for all she did to organize today's event. I'd also like to thank the legislators for standing here with us today: Representative Thomas Kehoe, Vice-Chair of the Transportation Committee; Senator Donald DeFronzo, Assistant President Pro Tempore and Chair of the Transportation Committee; Representative Antonio Guerrero, Chair of the Transportation Committee; Representative Russ Moran, Assistant Majority Leader; and Representative David McClusky, the Deputy Speaker.

These legislators and civic groups have organized today to call attention to the extraordinary opportunity provided by the federal stimulus package to address the deficits in our state's mobility system. For too many years, the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users have not been adequately addressed.

The current crises of a faltering economy, global warming, national security, and volatile energy prices all highlight the importance of transportation alternatives throughout Connecticut; and we must ensure that the local use of stimulus funds emphasize walkability and access to mass transit.

It is not surprising that road repaving and resurfacing projects rise to the top of many communities' wish lists, but only by including pedestrian and bike improvements in these projects can we combine short-term economic stimulus with significant long-term positive effects on personal economies, health, and carbon emissions.

We must not let our short term needs raise conflict with our long term goals.

Pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure form the foundation to the state's mobility system. People need to be able to access buses and trains on foot and bike in order to increase ridership and reduce parking demand. It is that "last mile" between one's home or work and transit that make all the difference in providing attractive alternatives to the automobile.

A bus stop is worthless if no one can walk to it. The recently installed bike racks on buses serve little purpose if no one can bike to the bus route

As we struggle to meet commuter parking demand at the state's rail stations, how many fewer parking spaces would be needed if every commuter within reasonable distance of a station walked there instead of drove?

With proper infrastructure, many local trips can be done entirely on foot. A recent analysis in the City of Bridgeport concluded that if all work trips less than one mile were done on foot, it could eliminate 360,000 miles of driving and annual wear-and-tear on local roads, save city residents at least \$35,000 per year in fuel costs, and reduce transportation greenhouse gas emissions of that city by nearly 2%. It also increases the activity of individual citizens, reducing future healthcare costs.

Mere miles of sidewalks and bike lanes can simultaneously reduce the burden on our ageing infrastructure, limit our reliance on foreign oil, put money back into our pockets, help mitigate global warming, clean our air, and trim our waists. Don't you wish everything was so simple?

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 – the national stimulus package - currently includes \$43 billion in transportation infrastructure spending.

While the majority of these funds will go directly to state Departments of Transportation, roughly one quarter will go to regions for use on local projects. That's estimated at nearly \$100 million for local transportation here in Connecticut. Guidelines should be established to ensure walkability, bikeability, and transit access are emphasized in the local spending of this resource, given to us to spend on the needs of future generations.

Each region has at least one multi-use trail that is “shovel ready,” filling the gaps in the state's expanding greenway system. Road paving and resurfacing projects should include streetscape enhancements, traffic calming, and striping for bicycle safety rather than striping for speed. Projects which reinforce safe routes to school and safe routes to transit should be prioritized.

Only with these measures will local transportation stimulus provide both immediate jobs and the foundation of mobility alternatives that will last for generations.

Governor Rell and Transportation Commissioner Marie have each emphasized the important role that pedestrians and bicyclists play in a balanced transportation system. Let us work together to ensure that local transportation stimulus projects across the state bring us closer to achieving this goal.