

## **Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force Working for Health and Safety**

by John Bliss, Chair of BPTF

Most of us are becoming more aware of the threat from global warming and how much our reliance on the automobile contributes to it. At the same time, we have been learning that obesity is on the rise, in part because children and adults are walking less and driving more. Newton has a Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force (BPTF) working to address these problems, by making walking and bicycling safer and more convenient for everyone in the city.

Recently, a national bicycling magazine gave Boston a low grade for bicycle accommodations, while commending Cambridge for its leadership in this area. Although Newton is not known as being particularly bicycle-friendly, the city has been addressing pedestrian concerns, by publicizing the right of way of pedestrians in unprotected crosswalks and installing “count-down” pedestrian signal lights.

Newton’s population of 80,000 clusters around 13 distinctive village centers, each having a range of stores and services. Improved conditions for bicycling and walking could enable many more residents to satisfy their shopping, commuting and recreational needs without having to use their cars. Trips to school on foot or by bicycle would be more enjoyable and healthier for children and reduce the congestion and safety hazards now associated with the common practice of being driven to school.

BPTF has been cooperating with other Boston-area organizations to improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the entire metropolitan region, while working with our own city officials to mark heavily-traveled roadways with striped shoulders for cyclists, and encouraging private companies to make it easier for customers and staff to access their locations by bicycle and on foot.

The Task Force has updated the city’s Greenman-Pedersen, Inc. Bicycle Accommodations Report (2000) and has submitted it to the Department of Public Works to help guide future road projects. This plan helps the City set priorities for bicycle accommodations required by state law for any road project paid for by state and federal funds. The accommodations include the four-foot wide striped shoulders on Centre Street between Mill Street and Newton Corner as well as “Share the Road” signs and painted “hybrid lane” symbols designed for congested areas that have been proposed for Walnut Street near the Newton Highlands village center.

BPTF has worked with Boston College and Newton-Wellesley Hospital to improve bicycle and pedestrian access for students and employees, and has helped the city’s Planning Department set priorities for locating new bicycle racks (to be provided at no cost by the state) in conjunction with road projects.

Newton is one of many communities in the “inner core” area of the Boston region, and BPTF works with the MassBike Metro Boston chapter on issues of common interest. Most recently, this group helped to prepare a report to the state Dept. of Conservation and Recreation on the deteriorated conditions of the Charles River paths that are used by hundreds of people every day.

In the coming year, BPTF will continue to monitor active road project planning, work with City officials on providing bicycle and pedestrian accommodations to the new Newton North High School, promote the adoption of safe routes to school programs, and work with city officials to improve pedestrian facilities in under-served areas and improve access to all sidewalks in the winter.

The Task Force has public meetings at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday of each month in the cafeteria of Newton City Hall. The October meeting is on the 24th. Come and share your concerns and ideas about bicycling and walking in Newton or contact me to be added to the email list. More information: [johnsbliss@verizon.net](mailto:johnsbliss@verizon.net) or (617) 244-6495.