

Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy



Common Ground

**A Leadership Conference to Advance
Walking, Biking, and Healthy Community
Design held February 6, 2004**

Conference Report May 2004

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Preface

Jack Lettiere
Commissioner
NJ Department of Transportation



An important goal for the New Jersey Department of Transportation is to achieve a balance in New Jersey between moving cars, and moving bikers and walkers. But we need to acknowledge that right now in New Jersey, we still have a car-oriented mindset that is not friendly to walking and biking.

Street systems are designed to move vehicular traffic at maximum efficiency. New schools are being built all over New Jersey, yet many are in remote locations where students cannot safely walk or bike, and often they replace older community schools where children used to be able to get to school on their own. In planning for new development, most towns would never allow even a small strip mall or retail outlet to be built without adequate water and sewage, electricity lines, and parking spaces. Yet by neglecting to factor in transportation as another utility, local officials too often unwittingly make decisions that clog their communities with local traffic.

The public support does exist for walking and biking; but it is latent. There is much work to be done. The concept has to be marketed to be successful. The Common Ground Conference on February 6, 2004, was an important first step in advancing the awareness of walking, biking, and healthy community design in New Jersey.

We need to get the message out to the planning and design professionals that walking and biking facilities are part of context-sensitive design for our communities; it needs to become part of the *routine* checklist that communities consider before making important land use decisions. The opportunities for local leaders are as numerous as they are practical, whether it's building a sidewalk to connect senior housing to a local shopping mall, or connecting a school complex by bike path to a greenway. State highways running through town centers can be reclassified as "main streets." Traffic and parking patterns can be altered to make our town centers safer and more appealing to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Walking and biking facilities need to be usable and accessible. We would not build a highway to nowhere, because no one would travel on it. In the same way, we are trying to build usable segments of bikeways that link people to their daily destinations—downtowns to greenways, schools to after-school activities such as soccer fields, shore towns to the beach. Likewise with walkways. We are creating transit villages where people can walk from their homes to their downtowns and to the train. We are helping people find ways *not* to get in their cars.

People want to see visible improvements that afford a better quality of life. They are looking for leadership to give them a choice. Common Ground creates the opportunity for leaders across many fields to come together to identify and cultivate new choices for enjoying healthier, more active lives. NJDOT is proud to be an active partner with counties, local communities, businesses, advocacy organizations, and individual citizens to work on this vital initiative.

Contents

	Executive Summary	3
I.	Introduction	5
II.	Common Ground: Toward a Healthier New Jersey	7
	The Vision	
	The Evidence	
	Bringing New Jersey’s Leaders Together	
III.	Challenges:	9
	The Human Health Crisis	
	The Health of Our Communities	
	The Motor Vehicle Bias	
	The Impact of Personal Preference and Policy Choices	
IV.	Toward Common Ground: Reasons for Optimism	14
V.	Recommendations	19
VI.	Next Steps	23
VII.	Resources	25

Executive Summary

On February 6, 2004, more than 170 invited leaders from the public sector, private industry, and nonprofit organizations gathered in New Brunswick for the first time in New Jersey to explore how community design can support healthy lifestyles, specifically through the advancement of walking and biking. The Common Ground Conference sought to illuminate the existing and potential roles of land use, health, transportation, education, and related disciplines in fostering more active lifestyles to counter the epidemic of obesity afflicting New Jersey and the rest of the nation. Leaders shared their knowledge, identified impediments as well as opportunities, and began to consider possible strategies to advance walking, biking, and Smart Growth development practices that can reverse the unhealthy trend toward greater auto dependence.



Sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Transportation with support from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the conference was organized by the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Additional support was provided by the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association, the New Jersey

Chapter of the Institute for Traffic Engineers, and the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

The Common Ground vision is to create healthy, active communities throughout New Jersey. This is consistent with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan's "2020 Vision—Livable Communities and Natural Landscapes," which foresees a time when walking and bicycling become an integral part of community design. One in three New Jerseyans does not drive, because they are too young, too old, or physically incapable, among other reasons. Yet land use practices have fostered greater dependence on the automobile at the expense of walking and biking. One result has been an epidemic of obesity—two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese—due to poor nutritional habits and lack of daily exercise.

New Jersey, however, does have characteristics that can be advantageous to creating active communities. The state's population density favors the creation of compact communities conducive to walking and biking, many traditional communities already incorporate healthy design, and many decision makers in transportation planning and community design comprehend the huge impact of their daily decisions on lifestyle and health. For instance, First Lady Dina Matos McGreevey told the conference that the "Healthy Choices, Healthy Kids" campaign she heads encourages New Jerseyans to

walk for their health. The campaign links employers and health insurers with the State's departments of agriculture, health and senior services, and education.

NJDOT Deputy Commissioner James Snyder told the conference that the NJDOT "no longer subsidizes sprawl," expending just 4 percent of its \$2.5 billion budget on highway expansion. Capital spending on transit in FY 04 for the first time exceeds the amount invested in highways, and millions of dollars in state and federal grants are awarded to local governments for pedestrian improvements and bicycle paths. Secretary of Agriculture Charles Kuperus said that the state met its goal this year of preserving 20,000 acres of farmland, up from 13,000 the year before, and it assured that walking and biking access to acquired properties was guaranteed before closing deals.

Municipal leaders, including Mayors Jose (Joey) Torres of Paterson, Edmund O'Brien of Metuchen, and George Paschalis of River Vale, told the conferees of the local initiatives they have undertaken to foster walking and biking, while stressing the need to better engage local leaders and administrators if these efforts are to take root. Employers are contributing, such as AtlantiCare, whose efforts to encourage employees to walk along a campus path during breaks have achieved a remarkable 99 percent participation rate. And private foundations are playing a role, such as The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's support of *NJ Walks and Bikes!* and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation's efforts to develop a "Garden State Greenway."

In moving forward, Ian Lockwood, a senior transportation engineer with the community-planning firm of Glattig Jackson, explained how community leaders throughout the United States have been able to inject healthy designs in even the most unpromising environments. Dying "big box" shopping malls have been converted into thriving mixed use centers, and pedestrian-friendly features have been designed into rapidly developing rural communities before they dissolved into far-flung suburban subdivisions.

The report closes with recommendations to target efforts at the local level by engaging municipal officials and providing them the tools to incorporate walking, biking, and healthy community design in their planning and engineering; amend the Municipal Land Use Law to encourage municipal attention to walking and biking; overhaul state laws governing the interaction among motor vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists; build a "business case" to augment the known "health case" for enhanced walking and biking opportunities; and recruit the business, advocacy, and philanthropic communities to help educate the public about the connections between active living and obesity, and the need for healthy community design to promote active living.

The principal next step resulting from Common Ground is the creation of a multi-disciplined Active Living Task Force that reflects the wide interests brought together in the conference. The goal of the task force would be the formation of a permanent broad-based state entity to oversee and promote policy changes and more financial support for active living initiatives.

I. Introduction

I am pleased today to add my voice to yours as an advocate for designing communities that integrate biking and walking spaces for all of us.

—First Lady Dina Matos McGreevey
Special Presenter

Sprawl development and a car-dependent lifestyle are two features of life in New Jersey that many residents accept as inevitable. But roads without safe access for nonmotorized transportation represent a barrier for a sizable proportion of the population—one of every three people does not drive, primarily the elderly, children, and those who use wheelchairs. Not only do our sprawling communities, with streets built only for driving, compromise accessibility for so many people, but they are also the most dangerous places to walk and bicycle. Roadways often lack sidewalks, have lanes too narrow to share with bicyclists, and feature few, poorly marked, or dangerous pedestrian crossings. A recent federal survey found that about one-quarter of walking trips take place on roads without sidewalks or shoulders, and that bike lanes are available for only about 5 percent of bicycle trips. And while just 10 percent of all trips are made on foot or by bicycle, more than 13 percent of all traffic fatalities involve bicyclists or pedestrians.



The health risks of car dependency do not end there. Sprawl and the sedentary lifestyle it fosters contribute to an epidemic of obesity and the deadly diseases caused by obesity, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and cancer. This problem is not unique to New Jersey—about two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese—but it is exacting a heavy toll on our state’s resources and on our residents.

Attacking the problem of obesity will require action on many fronts, including changing our eating habits. But experts agree that increasing our levels of physical activity also must be an essential part of the solution. A challenge to overcome is that physical activity has been engineered out of our daily lives, in large part because our communities are now designed to facilitate automobile travel.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people need 30 minutes of moderate activity at least five days a week to maintain health. Our chances of meeting this target improve dramatically when we can integrate physical activity into our daily routines, such as by walking or biking in our own communities to daily destinations. This is why, over the last decade, the public health community has begun to reach out to those sectors responsible for community design—locally elected and appointed officials, and the transportation, land use and planning, and engineering professions. The goal is to form new partnerships to create healthy communities that make walking and bicycling convenient, safe, and enjoyable for everyone.

On February 6, 2004, The Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, held an invitational leadership conference to promote walking, biking, and healthy community design in New Jersey. The conference, named "Common Ground," brought together approximately 170 leaders representing many diverse interests to address health and quality-of-life concerns related to New Jersey's patterns of transportation, land use, and community design.

Conference planners deliberately brought together two types of leaders:

- 1) those responsible for providing the "supply" of healthy community design, such as transportation, community affairs, environmental protection, local government, planning, and real estate development professionals.
- 2) those able to help create the public "demand" for such design, including representatives from the health, education, advocacy, and philanthropic communities.

The purpose of the conference was to identify common goals and practices concerning health and community design, and to seek ways of collaborating or coordinating efforts to create more active, healthy communities throughout New Jersey.

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) was the primary conference funder. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association, the New Jersey Chapter of the Institute for Traffic Engineers, and the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services also provided support.

This report summarizes conference themes and outlines the challenges New Jerseyans face in making our communities more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, and therefore more healthy. But conference participants also identified many features about New Jersey that offer a promising environment for the creation of active, healthy communities throughout the state. The report includes recommendations for progress on many fronts, from changing state-level policy, to better disseminating information to mayors and other local decision makers, to engaging New Jersey's business, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors to help advocate for walking, biking, and healthy community design.

The report concludes with follow-up steps that VTC proposes to undertake in conjunction with the NJDOT to build on the network of partners established at the Common Ground conference.

II. Common Ground: Toward a Healthier New Jersey

The Vision

Our common ground is human health.

—Robert Perry, Program Officer
Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

The Common Ground vision is to create healthy, active communities throughout New Jersey. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) refers to places where everyone, of all ages and abilities, can enjoy daily, moderate levels of walking, bicycling and other physical activity as *Active Community Environments* –which encourage and accommodate walking and bicycling through their approach to:

- Transportation facilities and services
- Land use planning and development
- Schools
- Recreation, parks, and trails
- Safety, security, and crime prevention



The Evidence

Researchers in public health are gathering scientific evidence that community design does indeed affect our physical activity levels and, therefore, our health. In the fall of 2003, three peer-reviewed journals -- the *Journal of Urban Health (JUH)*, the *American Journal of Health Promotion (AJHP)*, and the *American Journal of Public Health (AJPH)* - all published special issues on the relationships among health, transportation, and community design. Researchers cited various community features that were found to be associated with increased levels of walking and biking -including mixed land use that combines residential, employment, and retail destinations; compact communities with dense populations; streets with short blocks and few cul-de-sacs; accessible and available walking and biking facilities, such as sidewalks and trails; and pleasant and safe surroundings.*

Activity-friendly features in our communities make a difference to our health. For example, one study in the *American Journal of Public Health* compared similar residents from two San Diego neighborhoods: a walking-friendly neighborhood and one not

* Articles by Roux, *JUH*; Frumkin, *AJPH*; Saelens et al., *AJPH*; Huston et al., *AJHP*; King et al., *AJHP*.

conducive to walking. Residents of the walking-friendly neighborhood engaged in almost one hour more of moderate physical activity per week than residents of the other neighborhood, and they were less overweight.¹ Another national study in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* found that residents of sprawling areas tend to walk less during leisure time, weigh more, and be more likely to have high blood pressure than those in compact communities.²

Bringing New Jersey's Leaders Together

Beginning in September 2003, a team from NJDOT and VTC undertook an extensive planning process to develop the Common Ground leadership conference. To shape the conference program, the team convened a planning meeting with potential partners, conducted focus groups of experts and advocates, and interviewed 20 decision makers and stakeholders from the public and private sectors to identify common concerns, as well as leaders to invite. Voorhees staff also catalogued initiatives aimed at increasing physical activity—like walking and bicycling—and improving nutrition throughout New Jersey.

The Common Ground Conference, which took place on February 6, 2004, provided an opportunity for leaders from across the state to envision how they could form partnerships to create more active, healthy New Jersey communities. Over 170 participants shared knowledge; identified barriers, challenges, and opportunities; and they began to consider possible strategies to advance walking, biking, and healthy community design more broadly. Participants also:

- Examined through expert presentations the health and quality-of-life consequences of our decisions about land use, community design, and transportation.
- Shared in panel discussions with senior officials from state agencies, mayors, foundation officers, and business leaders about their policies, strategies, and initiatives to promote walking, biking, and healthy community design.
- Learned from representatives of eight different resource organizations and agencies about the tools available to help communities promote walking, biking, and healthier community design.

VTC and NJDOT staff believe the key outcome of the conference was the intimation of a network of New Jersey leaders and organizations sharing the common commitment to advance walking, biking, and healthy community design.

¹ *AJPH*, Saelens, Sallis, et al.

² *AJHP*, Ewing, Schmid, Killingsworth, et al.

III. Challenges

The Human Health Crisis

We need to do something drastic about obesity.

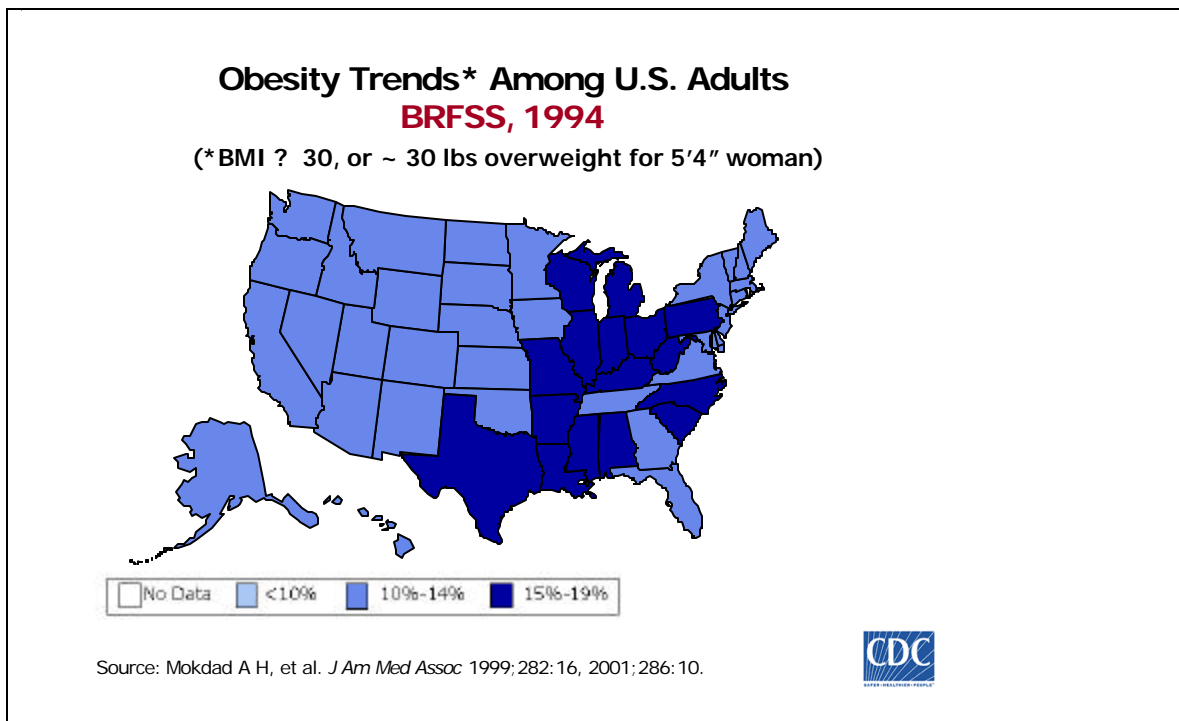
—Dr. Eric Berman, Medical Director
Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield of New Jersey



Almost two-thirds of New Jersey's residents are overweight or obese, a plight shared with the rest of America. The combination of poor diet and physical inactivity is causing an American epidemic of obesity. Obesity strongly contributes to such major and deadly diseases as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and cancer.

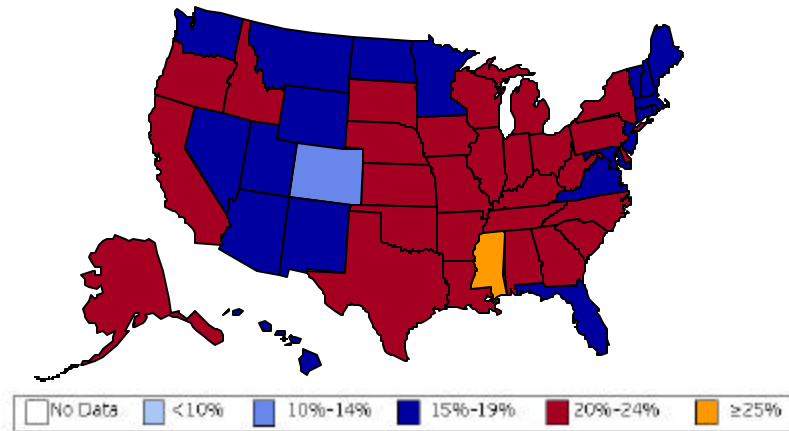
In fact, *the combination of poor diet and physical inactivity is now the second greatest cause of death in America—topped only by tobacco.*

The rapid pace of this epidemic was illustrated by Sharon Z. Roerty, of the National Center for Bicycling and Walking, in the following two maps from the CDC. These maps highlight the rapid increase in obesity rates in the United States in just seven years.



Obesity Trends* Among U.S. Adults BRFSS, 2001

(*BMI \geq 30, or ~ 30 lbs overweight for 5'4" woman)



Source: Mokdad A H, et al. *J Am Med Assoc* 1999;282:16, 2001;286:10.



Perhaps most alarming are the trends among our children. Data from 1999 and 2000 published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* show that more than 15 percent of children aged 6 to 19 years are overweight—double the proportion noted from 1976 through 1980.* Serious diseases that used to appear almost exclusively in adults, including high blood pressure and adult onset diabetes, are now appearing in children who are obese. Public health experts now predict that today's children may have a shorter life span than their parents because of obesity-related diseases.

This epidemic burdens both individuals and our society. Dr. Eric Berman, a medical director at Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield, estimated that obesity costs the United States between \$117 billion and \$230 billion annually in direct and indirect costs. The cost of obesity to New Jersey is about \$2.3 billion annually, according to the state Department of Health and Senior Services.

* *JAMA*, 2002.

The Health of Our Communities

Walking and cycling are the least polluting, most energy-efficient, least congesting, least expensive, and healthiest means of getting around within our cities. Yet in many ways, we discourage walking and cycling in the United States by making them inconvenient, unpleasant, dangerous, or practically impossible.

—John Pucher, Professor
Rutgers University

The sprawling, car-dependent development that characterizes much of New Jersey isolates our residents in subdivisions that are far removed from shopping, work, or any walking destination of interest or use. It seems counterintuitive that quiet, cul-de-sac streets would create congestion. But in fact, residents of these neighborhoods must drive everywhere they need to go, and they usually funnel onto the same roads where everyone else drives, feeding the congestion that most of us endure frequently. From 1982 to 2000, the annual amount of time spent in highway traffic delays in urban areas increased from 16 to 62 hours per person.¹ These high-speed, busy roads also prevent children from safely walking or biking to school. The U.S. Department of Transportation reports that only one American child in nine starts the day by walking or biking to school.²



New Jersey's cities and older suburbs, places where community design is more hospitable to walking and biking, are also affected by our suburban preferences. Sprawl development lures jobs and investment into our rural areas, diminishing the tax base, political power, and investments in public services in New Jersey's urban areas. Many of these communities are viewed as places to drive through quickly. Ironically, many city neighborhoods designed with interconnected streets and sidewalks that prioritize movement by foot or bicycle are now poorly maintained and burdened with street crime, disintegrating facilities, and fast-moving traffic. The lack of consistent investment in existing facilities means that residents in many of our urban communities are also deprived of opportunities to safely walk and bike.

Rural sprawl creates communities and jobs at such low densities that dependence on the auto is the inevitable outcome. Sprawl eats up 16,000 acres of farmland and open space each year in New Jersey, according to the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. This pattern of development diminishes our air quality, degrades rural and farming communities, destroys habitats for native plants and animals, paves over our watersheds causing increased flooding and decreased water quality, and limits outdoor recreation opportunities.

¹ *AJPH*, Jackson.

² *AJPH*, Staunton et al.

The Motor Vehicle Bias

Cities can be motor vehicle oriented or they can be healthy. They can be somewhat motor vehicle oriented and somewhat healthy. But they cannot be motor vehicle oriented and healthy.

—Ian Lockwood, Senior Transportation Engineer
Glatting Jackson



Unfortunately, since the arrival of the automobile—and especially after World War II, with the spread of suburbanization—several generations of planners, engineers, special interest groups, policymakers, and civic leaders have catered to a motor vehicle orientation at the expense of pedestrians. Likewise, millions of Americans over these same years have grown up in car-dominated communities and do not know any other way. As Andrew Clarke of the League of American Bicyclists pointed out, one-quarter of all trips we make are in cars for *one mile or less*. And Ian Lockwood illustrated how the dominance of the car over other modes of transportation is revealed even in our language.

Road-widening projects are "improvements"; converting small, slow roads into big, fast roads are "upgrades"; and highways become "more efficient" when they can carry more vehicles at higher speeds. What these terms neglect to account for are the trees that are cut down; the neighborhoods that suffer more noise, pollution, and isolation; and the bicyclists and pedestrians who are left with fewer safe options for their forms of transport.

Policy choices and personal preferences have had significant environmental, fiscal, economic, and social consequences, including many that support the current, unhealthy pattern of sprawl. Among these are intensified road building, cheap gasoline prices, and a shift to an information-based economy. Also, residential preferences now focus on large-lot single-family housing and good schools, while government policies encourage low-density, dispersed development (minimum lot sizes, setbacks, parking requirements, a lack of requirements for sidewalks). All serve as barriers to building compact and/or walking- and bicycling-friendly communities.

Our communities experience sprawl in large part because our transportation priorities favor motor vehicles over transit, walking, bicycling, and other transportation options. New Jersey shares this bias with most of the rest of America. Compared with 1970, Americans today walk and bicycle much less and drive automobiles much more. Recent studies show barely 1 percent of U.S. trips are made by bicycle¹ and 6 percent by walking.² According to America Bikes, a collaborative effort of leaders of the bicycle community, a federal study found that about a quarter of walking trips take place on roads without sidewalks or shoulders; bike lanes were available for only 5 percent of cycling trips.

¹ *AJPH*, Cervero.

² *JUH*, Savitch.

The Impact of Personal Preference and Policy Choices

What we've learned from the experiences of the State Plan and the Transit Village initiative is that while state government can create programs and policies, execution is at the local level. If these programs and policies aren't widely embraced at the local level, our goal of making New Jersey the most walkable and bikeable state has no chance to succeed

—Martin E. Robins, Director
Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center



In New Jersey, decisions regarding the physical environment are largely controlled at the municipal level. In addition, the local planning and land use process characterized by Home Rule is typically inconsistent with transportation techniques that are supportive of increased walking or bicycling. With Home Rule, land use in New Jersey is determined through a fragmented system of governance and public management: New Jersey has 566 municipal governments, 617 school districts, 21 counties, innumerable utility

districts, myriad state agencies, bi-state authorities, and the courts, not to mention a wide variety of federal authorities.

Other impediments are the competing interests among various levels of government, turnover at all levels, the absence of training requirements and lack of technical expertise in transportation and land use issues for Planning Board members, and a lack of mandates (like requirements for a “Circulation Element” for the municipal Master Plan) to guide Planning Board members in their decisions. Lacking technical specialization at the local level, planning boards are not aware of opportunities to improve facilities for walking and bicycling, nor are they encouraged to seek out such opportunities. These factors all serve to compromise the potential for the successful coordination of land use and transportation in ways that are supportive of active living communities.

IV. Toward Common Ground: Reasons for Optimism

These facilities for walking and biking need to become part of the thought process, part of the routine checklist that communities consider when making decisions.

—Jack Lettiere, Commissioner
NJ Department of Transportation



In preparation for the Common Ground Conference, VTC staff conducted 20 interviews and held focus groups of a cross-section of people from state and local government, business, and the nonprofit sector to obtain opinions on this question: “What would New Jersey look like if it were the most walkable/bikeable state in the nation?” The results of these interviews and focus groups were remarkably similar to a preexisting official vision of New Jersey’s communities embodied in the State Development and Redevelopment Plan’s “2020 Vision—Livable Communities and Natural Landscapes.”¹

That vision document foresees a time when facilities for walking and bicycling will become part of the thought process, a time when

New Jersey's communities are designed to promote walking and cycling for transportation and recreation, and older suburban communities have been redesigned to provide the same advantages. Schools are central features of every community and a majority of children live within walking or cycling distance, and most of them use this opportunity. Through a combination of recreational and utilitarian activities most New Jersey residents meet or exceed recommended levels of physical activity. As a result, they live longer and are healthier; medical costs have declined; and the prevalence of obesity and diabetes is declining.

A growing group of transportation and land use policymakers recognizes their critical role in the creation of healthy community design. Officials from the Federal Highway Administration, professionals from county and local agencies, representatives of the NJ Schools Construction Corporation, the Board of Public Utilities and associations of planners and traffic engineers were all present at the conference. Advocates for the health of children and seniors, including the New Jersey School Nurses Association and the New Jersey chapter of the American Association for Retired Persons, also were in attendance. Each of these organizations recognizes the importance of healthy community design for children and seniors alike, and they can help create the demand for such communities.

¹ NJ State Plan, p. 233.

While acknowledging the challenges outlined in Section III, conference participants offered reasons to believe that this vision for a more walkable, bikeable, healthier New Jersey can become a reality:

New Jersey’s population density favors the creation of compact communities conducive to walking and biking.

New Jersey is the most densely populated, most developed state, with all 21 counties classified by the federal government as part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Such density lends itself to the creation of compact communities where daily destinations can be located close together, and linked by mass transit. The goal of a system of greenways within a reasonable walk or bike ride to every community may be easier to achieve in a small, densely populated state.

Many traditional New Jersey communities have healthy design.

An essential feature of healthy community design is “good bones,” which Ian Lockwood describes as the grid networks of streets, multiple routing options, and good access to public spaces that were characteristic of older communities built around the pedestrian, not the motor vehicle. Such “traditional” communities—we think of the corner store, the neighborhood school, front porches—are all by nature walkable and bikeable. Blocks are short, buildings front sidewalks rather than parking lots, and traffic moves slowly, distributed throughout many streets.

These older communities include towns such as Lambertville, Maplewood, Metuchen, and Paterson. Each of these communities is currently trying out ways to promote, protect or reinvigorate its pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly character. Through community leadership, they can serve as models for other localities.

Beyond those built-in advantages, New Jersey decision makers in transportation planning and community design comprehend the huge impact of their daily decisions on *health*.

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (2001) found that “the fastest-growing public health concern for New Jersey is obesity and its causes.” The State Plan envisions communities throughout New Jersey in which residents can walk and bike to meet their physical activity needs, and therefore live longer, healthier lives. Many state agencies have adopted goal statements and strategic plans that encourage the creation of communities where residents can walk and bike, including NJDOT’s Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan and the Department of Agriculture’s Plan for Smart Growth, which promotes the creation of accessible greenways.

State-level policymakers at the conference presented evidence of a shift to healthier policies:

NJDOT Deputy Commissioner James Snyder remarked that the department “no longer subsidizes sprawl.” This year, the State spent just 4 percent of its \$2.5 billion transportation capital budget on expanding the system of roads and highways, compared with 40 percent in recent years. For the first time this year, the combined capital budget of NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT devotes more to public transit than to highways.



Secretary of Agriculture Charles Kuperus noted that Governor McGreevey's goal of preserving 20,000 acres of farmland was met this past year, up from 13,000 the year before. Walking and biking access to acquired properties is assured *before* deals are closed. The Department also will increase its base of 60 farmers' markets, adding 10 new markets a year. These markets not only help farmers and give people access to local fresh fruits and vegetables but also create attractive, walkable destinations in our communities.



Deputy Commissioner Dale Caldwell of the Department of Community Affairs cited his agency's efforts to induce businesses to locate in urban and other densely populated areas, to discourage sprawl development, and to promote investment and jobs where more people live.

Gary Sondermeyer, Chief of Staff at the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), described his department's new "tiered" regulatory initiatives. This tiered system aims to steer development away from environmentally sensitive areas through tougher regulation and enforcement while permitting more flexibility in densely developed areas. The DEP also plans to create or upgrade 200 parks by 2005, 2 per year in urban areas.



Public- and private-sector agencies across New Jersey are already addressing the challenge of creating healthier, more active communities by creating new partnerships and testing new strategies.

New initiatives are being created to address the multidimensional nature of improving community design and increasing physical activity. Promising programs include:

- The departments of agriculture, health and senior services, and education are partnering in a campaign called "Healthy Choices, Healthy Kids." This campaign, headed by First Lady Dina Matos McGreevey, is designed to combat childhood obesity and improve academic performance by promoting better nutrition and increased physical activity in New Jersey schools.
- The New Jersey Conservation Foundation developed the "Garden State Greenway" in partnership with the DEP. This document lays out a vision to connect our walkways and bikeways so that "anyone can get on a trail or walking path a reasonable distance from their home."
- The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with technical support from VTC, is helping 10 New Jersey communities create the local capacity to support pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly conditions. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is a national health philanthropy that, as part of its efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, supports

research and demonstration projects across the United States to promote active community environments. The communities participating in the *NJ Walks and Bikes!* pilot project are testing approaches such as policy and infrastructure change, promotional campaigns, and leadership development to promote walking and biking.

The health and education sectors recognize that they must reach beyond schools and clinics to the surrounding community to achieve broad progress in preventing adult and childhood obesity.

Everyone needs safe and supportive environments to enable them to change behavior. As panel moderator Dr. J.A. Grisso of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation pointed out, doctors cannot tell patients to "get out and walk more," when patients have no access to safe, convenient, and affordable places to do so.



Celeste Andriot-Wood, Assistant Commissioner for Family and Health Services at the Department of Health and Senior Services, observed that people in New Jersey want to engage in physical activity and are seeking opportunities, even in the most sprawling suburbs. Some senior centers and youth groups have managed to find some limited venues for physical activity in shopping malls and in and around sports stadiums, for example.



James McCall, Health and Physical Education Coordinator for the Department of Education, believes that his department can play a role in getting the message out to all school districts that schools need to support opportunities for children to engage in physical activity, including walking and biking to school.

In partnership with communities and school districts, the NJDOT has granted \$12 million to municipalities throughout the state over the last two years under its Safe Routes to Schools program, with most funds going to providing sidewalks and crosswalks on school routes.

New Jersey's employers and health insurers are encouraging New Jersey citizens to walk for their health.

Eric Berman, a conference panelist, described a walking program for employees of AtlantiCare, whereby employees are encouraged to walk along a safe and pleasant campus path during their breaks. He said the program achieved a remarkable 99 percent participation rate, with many employees reporting increased physical activity during weekends as well, through activities such as family bike rides. Horizon Blue Cross/Blue Shield is adapting this program for middle school students, especially to benefit overweight and obese kids. These students may be self-conscious about their

body image during traditional gym classes and will be able to gain their gym credits through walking.

We know how to make *any* community walkable and bikeable.

We know that safety for walkers and bicyclists *is* possible. Rutgers Professor John Pucher described his recently published research, which suggests that walking and bicycling can be made safe through employing methods and technology that have been used successfully for decades in Europe’s dense, congested urban areas. And throughout the United States, mayors, engineers, planning boards, and community leaders are working creatively with designers and planners to transform even the most unpromising settings into healthy environments. For instance, dying "big box" shopping malls have been converted into thriving mixed use centers, and "good bones" have been incorporated into rural communities before they dissolve into far-flung suburban subdivisions. Engineering and policy solutions also exist to calm almost any local traffic situation.

New Jersey offers plenty of innovative examples where engineering and policy tactics have been set in motion, such as Washington Township in Mercer County, where an entire new community was created based on the principles of healthy design. Other communities, such as Plainsboro, are deliberately shaping a good “bone structure” around which to grow. In established communities, such as Lambertville, the local transportation committee with the support of the Mayor, made a commitment to review and inventory the existing codes, ordinances, design standards, and practices that affect nonmotorized transportation in the city. These documents will help Lambertville identify and directly address impediments to nonmotorized travel and develop design templates for new development that actually encourage walking and biking.



Other successful tactics include those adopted in River Vale, which has created a vision to regain its community character by reengineering a major intersection to once again accommodate people as well as cars. And Metuchen Mayor Ed O’Brien described *Walk Metuchen*, a simple route-mapping initiative designed to raise local awareness of the walking and cycling routes connecting residential areas with the train station, downtown, local schools, and parks.

Healthy community design brings economic benefits.

Money magazine recently chose Maplewood as one of its “10 Best Places to Live.” According to *Money*’s senior editor, the choice was driven “in part because it’s not a cul-de-sac kind of bedroom community where the kids have to be driven everywhere.” In addition, at a recent meeting sponsored by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s national Active Living By Design program, commercial homebuilders reported that active-living communities sell faster and at a higher profit margin than most other housing options.¹

¹ AJHP, editor’s notes.

V. Recommendations

We need planning and money, in that order.

—River Vale Mayor George Paschalis

Several recommendations on how best to overcome the barriers and capitalize on the opportunities for creating active living environments in New Jersey emerged throughout the conference. The recommendations were wide-ranging and innovative, and include:

1) **Update and improve state policies and regulations that present barriers to the promotion of walking, biking, and healthy community design.**

Counties, municipalities, and school districts need standards and assistance, so that enabling walking and biking is ingrained in land use and school facility planning and regulation. Three new tools could spur local action:

- **Consider legislation that mandates circulation planning, including elements for walking and cycling, and provides state financial support to municipalities for the extra work.** The Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) provides an opportunity to take the vision for walkable and bikeable communities set forth in the New Jersey State Plan and put it into action. The principal planning exercise under the Municipal Land Use Law is the Master Plan process, and Master Plans must be updated every six years. Currently, the MLUL does not require municipalities to include a circulation plan. If Circulation Plans with bicycle and pedestrian elements were required, they could be used during the local site plan review process to ensure that adequate bicycle and pedestrian facilities were provided with any local development. In addition, they could be consulted when developing community capital improvement programs so that bicycle and pedestrian facilities would be considered when planning infrastructure improvements.
- **Consider an initiative with the Department of Education to update its Facility Efficiency Standards for the Abbott Schools, so they incorporate Safe Routes to Schools concepts.** The State has committed to a capital improvement program that will change the face of many school districts. The Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act (EFCFA) provides \$6 billion for renovation and new construction of school facilities in the 30 Abbott districts. Another \$2 billion is available for funding school construction in non-Abbott districts. This represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to influence the location and design of new schools in New Jersey. They should encourage safe, secure, and routine physical activity by schoolchildren and community members in the surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Consider reexamining and recodifying Title 39 and other relevant state statutes that govern bicycle, pedestrian, and motor vehicle traffic regulation and use.** The safety and rights of bicyclists and pedestrians to use our roadways should be unambiguous and codified to provide for their protection and safety. Attention should be given to clarifying Title 39 and other state statutes governing the interaction between bicyclists/pedestrians and motor vehicles.

2) **Develop local leadership.**

Mayors are the chief planners and architects of their communities. Three New Jersey mayors—Edmund O'Brien of Metuchen (right), Jose "Joey" Torres of Paterson (center), and George Paschalis of River Vale (left)—offered this advice during a conference panel that also included Eric Berman (second from left) and Robert Perry:



- **Establish networks of mayors to advocate for policy change in public agencies.** Mayors grasp the policy barriers and can present the case based on practical experience.
- **Increase opportunities for experienced mayors to "mentor" mayors newly engaged in addressing community design for health and a better quality of life.**
- **Get the success stories out.** Mayors will embrace the idea of healthy community design if they believe it is their idea and in the interest of their community. If mayors know about and understand the concepts of healthy community design, they will come to support it. One tool that will be available through VTC by late 2004 will be an assessment of the *NJ Walks and Bikes!* pilot project now under way in 10 communities throughout New Jersey. Lessons learned from these demonstration projects can provide insight into other communities wishing to promote walking and biking.
- **Give mayors information.** Transforming a community long lost to the car can be daunting and discouraging. To help leaders in such communities overcome any inertia and pessimism they may encounter, they need to be made aware of existing resources and technical assistance that can help them create a vision and develop a plan. The New Jersey Conference of Mayors and the New Jersey Mayor's Institute are two such resources available to help mayors advance a vision for their community.

3) **Create knowledge at the municipal level and support continuing education of mayors and planning boards.**

Considerable need exists for consistent training of mayors and planning boards in areas such as transportation and land use.

- **Tap into resources like the New Jersey State League of Municipalities and the New Jersey Planning Officials.** These organizations can play a key role in convening and educating stakeholders who are interested in making their communities healthier places to live. Both organizations have resources available for outreach, and to assist local planning boards and boards of adjustment with advice.

4) Give communities effective strategies, models, and tools.

State government can create programs and policies, and mayors can provide essential leadership, but implementation depends on the informed actions of many key local decision makers. Planning officers and planning boards, engineers, and school boards are among the key local stakeholders who need information, resources, and technical assistance.

- **Support academic and other nonpartisan centers to collect clear and high-quality information and disseminate it as widely as possible.** In addition to VTC at Rutgers, such organizations include the New Jersey Institute for Technology, the new Municipal Land Use Center at the College of New Jersey, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and the nonprofit planning organization New Jersey Future.
- **Engage not only the mayors' affiliate groups but also professional groups.** Organizations like the New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association, the New Jersey Builders Association, the New Jersey Institute of Traffic Engineers, and other associations are well suited to disseminate information to key decision makers at the county and municipal levels.

5) Bolster the "health case" with the "business case."

Local leaders face tough choices in difficult economic times. Evidence that healthy community design can have a positive economic impact on real estate values, the ability to attract employers, and the viability of downtown business districts needs to be documented and disseminated.

6) Engage New Jersey's regulatory, business, advocacy, and philanthropic communities in supporting and devising strategies to achieve healthy community design.

These sectors will be essential to promoting change, not only at the policy level but also on the ground, community by community. Key stakeholder groups were present in force at the conference, and they have been invited to join a network of partners, such as

- Representatives of the business community, including the New Jersey Builders Association, and from the real estate development, insurance, and health care communities;
- Walking and bicycling advocates, representatives of nonprofit organizations working to preserve New Jersey's past, envision our future, protect and revitalize our Hudson waterfront, ensure transportation alternatives for all citizens, and create and connect a system of greenways in our state;
- Foundation leaders from New Jersey's philanthropic sector with program priorities in such areas as environmental protection and fighting sprawl, improving access and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities, healthy schools, and the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity;
- Members of state commissions like the Board of Public Utilities, which has oversight of the street lighting that affects pedestrians and cyclists.

To illustrate the potential of such partners, panelist Robert Perry of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation described an exploratory effort in New Jersey's foundation community that is being coordinated by the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers. Under this effort, several philanthropic and corporate funders are exploring the possibility of working together with a community that exhibits high needs and strong leadership to create a more active, healthy environment.

VI. Next Steps

As immediate follow-up to the Common Ground Conference, VTC is working with NJDOT and other conference sponsors to:

1. Create a multi-disciplined Active Living Task Force that will begin the follow-up on these recommendations. Members of this Task Force will reflect the wide interests that were brought together in the conference and their ultimate goal will be the creation of a permanent broad-based state entity that would oversee and promote policy changes and more financial support for active living initiatives. Among the needs to be addressed are:
 - A review of the wide variety of existing policies, programs and projects in New Jersey that focus on improving the activity-friendliness of our communities;
 - A forum for leaders across the state to champion the creation of active, healthy New Jersey communities;
 - A mechanism to promote policy change and develop strategies in favor of walking, biking, and healthy community design;
 - A coordinating body for the many interacting initiatives necessary to achieve the goals of Common Ground.
2. Identify opportunities to hold follow-up meetings and seminars for members of the new partnership network on high-priority topics identified at the meeting. Opportunities might come via the Bicycle Advisory Council and the Pedestrian Task Force, both of which are convened under the auspices of VTC and NJDOT. These periodic meetings could address specific issues of concern, such as safety and enforcement of pedestrian laws, or reach specific audiences, such as local health departments.
3. Enhance communications electronically and by newsletter with all conference participants and the broader network of stakeholders identified at the conference. Voorhees will continue to convey information about developments and opportunities in walking, biking, and community design in New Jersey.
4. Work with key staff at the NJDOT to gain commitments from peer policymakers at other state agencies, including those represented at the meeting. Such commitments might include support for policy change and/or designating or redirecting funding to support healthy community design.
5. Identify funding opportunities for public- and private-sector funders to support follow-up activities. These activities might include community planning or demonstration projects, replication of successful models, policy development, convenings, public education/communications, documentation, and evaluation.

6. Work with the New Jersey League of Municipalities and the New Jersey Conference of Mayors to identify ways to bring examples of best practices to the municipal level.
7. Work with the Municipal Land Use Center to shape educational programs and outreach efforts to municipalities and planning boards that focus on increasing opportunities for walking, bicycling, and physical activity in the state.

VII. Resources

For communities and organizations that want to create healthier environments for walking and biking, many resources are available. Representatives of eight different resource organizations and agencies—national, state, and local—spoke to participants at the conference. These groups ranged from public funders, such as the NJDOT's Division of Local Aid, to major foundations, such as The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, to local grassroots groups, such as BRAKES of Westfield.

NJ Department of Transportation

Division of Local Aid and Economic Development

Division staff work with county and municipal officials to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the state's transportation system. The Office of Bicycle and Programs provides:

- technical assistance to other units in the NJDOT and outside agencies regarding bicycle and pedestrian needs
- input during Scope Development to ensure that projects in the "pipeline" meet the needs of cyclists and pedestrians
- technical assistance to counties and municipalities for bicycle and pedestrian planning
- information on bicycling and walking developed and distributed to the public.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care. It concentrates its grantmaking in four goal areas:

- To assure that all Americans have access to quality health care at reasonable cost.
- To improve the quality of care and support for people with chronic health conditions.
- To promote healthy communities and lifestyles.
- To reduce the personal, social, and economic harm caused by substance abuse—tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs.

Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

The Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC), one of 13 centers in the Bloustein School, is a national leader in the research and development of innovative transportation policy. VTC has developed specialized expertise in bicycle and pedestrian transportation, working in conjunction with NJDOT and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its *NJ Walks and Bikes!* program. Rutgers Professor John Pucher, who teaches in the Bloustein School, has conducted research on a wide range of topics in transport economics and finance. Currently, his research focuses on walking and bicycling, and in particular, how American cities could learn from European policies to improve the safety, convenience, and feasibility of these nonmotorized modes in the United States.

League of American Bicyclists



The League of American Bicyclists promotes bicycling for fun, fitness, and transportation, and it works through advocacy and education for a bicycle-friendly America. The League represents the interests of the more than 57 million adult American cyclists, including 40,000 individual members and 300,000 members of affiliated clubs and organizations. **(Andy Clark)**

NJ Conservation Foundation

Founded in 1960, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation is one of the nation's most respected land conservation organizations. Since its inception, NJCF has helped protect tens of thousands of acres of New Jersey's treasured open spaces. The mission of NJCF is to preserve New Jersey's land and natural resources for the benefit of all. As a leading innovator and catalyst for saving land, NJCF protects strategic lands through acquisition and stewardship; promotes strong land use policies; and forges partnerships to achieve conservation goals. **(Adam Mednick)**



The BRAKES Group

The BRAKES Group (Bikers, Runners, And Kids are Entitled to Safety) is a local nonprofit pedestrian advocacy organization working in Westfield, New Jersey. BRAKES was founded in 1997 by **Sara Strohecker** out of concern for the number of children who were being struck by cars even when crossing at legitimate intersections. Working with representatives from all public and some private school communities throughout the town, the group organizes community events, including holding annual "Walk to School Day" events, student poster contests, and crossing guard appreciation awards.



National Center for Bicycling & Walking



The National Center for Bicycling & Walking (NCBW) is the major program of the Bicycle Federation of America, Inc., a national nonprofit corporation established in 1977 whose mission is to create bicycle-friendly and walkable communities. The NCBW works with local, state, and national bicycle, pedestrian, and transportation advocates to bring about changes in government policies, programs, and procedures to help create more bicycle-friendly and walkable communities. **(Sharon Z. Roerty)**