

# Envisioning a Better Main Street

*An analysis by the Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition*



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# Making Main Street Safer

## *Complete Streets “Road Diet” Information*

### *from the Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition*

Complete Streets is a nationwide movement to design and build road networks that are welcoming to everyone: young and old, motorist and bicyclist, walker and wheelchair user, bus rider and shopkeeper.

The state of New Jersey has proposed to implement, and pay for, a comprehensive reconfiguration of Main Street in Asbury Park. The reconfiguration would include a variety of safety and aesthetic improvements, most notably a reconfiguration of the current four travel lanes (two in each direction) to three lanes (two travel lanes and one dedicated turn lane). The space remaining from the reconfigured lanes would be used to add dedicated bike lanes on each side of the road. This reconfiguration is commonly called a “road diet.”<sup>1</sup>

Since there are some local officials, residents and business owners who may not be familiar with the nuances of a road diet, this paper will present a comprehensive outline of road diets, their benefits and the facts surrounding the current NJDOT proposal in Asbury Park. Armed with comprehensive information about road diets and their proven health, safety and economic benefits, members of the Asbury Park community can make informed decisions and provide direction to City leaders.

## **What is a road diet?**

A “road diet” is a traffic-calming lane reconfiguration.<sup>2</sup> The road diet treatment involves narrowing the total area covered by travel lanes and creating a dedicated turn lane or turn pocket, leaving more space for pedestrians and bicyclists. A typical road diet consists of converting a four-lane roadway (two in each direction)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://asburyparksun.com/putting-asburys-main-street-on-a-diet/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/road\\_diets/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/road_diets/) See also: <https://youtu.be/xn8JqW5DBML> (Dan Burden video)

to a three-lane (one in each direction plus a center turn lane) and adding sidewalks and/or bicycle lanes. Often, this reconfiguration can be accomplished by simply restriping the lanes in conjunction with a resurfacing project.



In theory (and often misrepresented by skeptics<sup>3</sup>), road diets could have potential drawbacks; but in fact, case studies in a number of states suggest that problems normally do not occur. Instead, this approach offers a number of benefits in terms of smoother traffic operations, safety, and livability when applied in the appropriate situations.

Simply put, a road diet re-prioritizes the public right-of-way to reintroduce safe pedestrian and bicycle access. From a “historic” perspective, road diets are a design tool that is reversing six decades of road design that focused solely on automobiles at the expense of all other users. The result of these poor design priorities has been that cars currently move faster to the detriment of all others, leading to a breakdown of community fabric. Road diets are just one design tool for reversing that harmful trend.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://asburyparksun.com/the-main-street-road-diet-is-off/> . But see: [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/road\\_diets/desk\\_ref/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/road_diets/desk_ref/)

**Streets that are pedestrian- and bicycle- friendly have many benefits, including:**

- Safer environments, where all users are less likely to be in a traffic collision or get injured.
- Economic benefits for business owners and increased property values for property owners.
- Better access to more destinations, providing more choices in how you can get where you want to go without relying on a car.
- More opportunities to be physically active, which can improve your health and overall quality of life.
- Access for everyone, which includes people with disabilities and others who cannot drive.

Cities across the country have implemented thousands of lane reconfigurations that have had dramatic safety, social, environmental and economic benefits like those listed above. To that end, the Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition advocates that the City implement a lane reconfiguration on Main Street in Asbury Park for the benefit of all users.

The pages that follow describe the historic and current condition of Main Street in Asbury Park, then outline six important reasons why a lane reconfiguration (or “road diet”) is critical to the health, safety and economic well being of Asbury Park residents.



## **PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE:**

Main Street in Asbury Park has always been a corridor of commerce. From the late 1800's to the 1920's it accommodated horses, wagons and a streetcar, in addition to bicycles and pedestrians.<sup>4</sup> The 1920's saw the expansion of the automobile and paving of most streets, including Main Street. However, Main Street remained a friendly place to walk and stroll into shops. In 1956, the federal government kicked off massive changes to our national infrastructure when it enacted the Federal Highway Act, pumping billions of dollars into highways and local road building. The unintended consequence of that Act was the near-complete marginalization of pedestrians and alternative modes of transportation nationwide. Consequently, federal dollars made their way into state highway budgets, with states exerting jurisdiction over otherwise local roads and expanding those roads at the expense of all other users.<sup>5</sup>

A 1999 research paper by traffic engineer Thomas Welch summarized the process by which 1960's automobile proponents advocated for wider lanes at the expense of all other users:<sup>6</sup>

At public hearings, project engineers would state that corridor safety would improve if the two-lane roadway were widened to a four lane undivided roadway. Graphics would be shown to illustrate that additional acceptable gaps in the traffic stream would result, and motorists could avoid rear-end collisions by changing lanes and going around slowing/stopping vehicles. Those in opposition to the widening would argue that travel speeds would increase, pedestrians would have to cross a wider street, and noise would increase. In most cases, however, the four-lane undivided cross-section was selected as

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<sup>4</sup> Pike, Helen-Chantal, *Asbury Park's Glory Days*, Rutgers University Press, 2005 at 8, 156 - 58.

<sup>5</sup> See generally, "Consequences of the Development of the Interstate Highway System for Transit," Transportation Research Board, Results Research Digest, Number 21, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Welch, T.M. (1999). The conversion of four lane undivided urban roadways to three lane facilities. Prepared for the TRB/ITE Urban Street Symposium, June 28-30, 1999, Dallas, Texas.

the preferred alternative because the only other alternative was generally to do nothing (i.e.: the roadway remains a two-lane facility).

Welch summarized the effects of widening of a four-lane state road in Iowa, virtually identical to Main Street in Asbury Park: Traffic volume increased by 4% and average speed increased by 2.5 m.p.h. However, the accident rate increased by 14% and the injury rate a whopping 88%. Even worse, the loss value (cost of injuries, property damage and lost property value) went up by 280%.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of the 20th century the cumulative result of federal highway building was an American society completely dependent on automobiles and near total alienation of all other road users. Is traffic backed up? The unquestioned response was always to build more and more lanes so cars can speed on by. Of course, Main Street in Asbury Park was not spared. Sometime around 1960 Main Street was expanded to four travel lanes, two in each direction. To do so, sidewalks were narrowed and diagonal parking was converted to parallel. The speed limit went up and traffic sped through even faster than before. As a result, there was less reason for pedestrians and bicycles to be on Main Street, since the street scene had become less hospitable for walking or riding. Even worse, there was less reason for automobile traffic to stop at local businesses. After all, at those speeds a driver could be out at the mall in short order.<sup>8</sup>

Combined with other economic and social factors, the poor design of Main Street has contributed low economic performance of this once vibrant corridor. Indeed, despite the recent resurgence of Main Streets in many local areas (including the towns immediately south of Asbury Park with lane reconfigurations), Main Street in Asbury Park continues to struggle.

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<sup>7</sup> Welch, T.M. (1999) at 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Pike at 164: “[By 1960, Asbury Park’s] wide boulevards were now little more than wide thoroughfares for funneling more and more vehicular traffic thorough town.”

Fortunately, with the recent adoption of Complete Streets policies by both the state of New Jersey<sup>9</sup> and Monmouth County,<sup>10</sup> there is a conscious effort to begin turning the tide on sixty years of single-minded policy that enforced the predominance of the automobile. Most towns have been eager to adopt these new standards that benefit “local” interests over need-for-speed commuters. Asbury Park, however, appears to be slow in catching on.<sup>11</sup>

In the mid- to late-2000’s the state Department of Transportation, NJDOT, began implementing Complete Streets projects, including road diets, in towns that were seeking the benefits of traffic calming and pedestrian/bicycle amenities. One local town that implemented such a “road diet” was Avon-by-the-Sea. Like most towns, Avon actually approached the state and requested a new streetscape in accordance with Complete Streets standards. These standards included a lane reconfiguration that would organize traffic, beautify the streetscape and reduce bike and pedestrian accidents.<sup>12</sup> The results have been universally positive on all fronts.

### **Plans, plans, plans:**

Over the last two decades, a handful of formal plans and studies have examined Main Street in Asbury Park in an effort to make it “friendlier” and more economically vibrant. Each of those plans has included calls for traffic calming and increased pedestrian and bicycle amenities. The two most recent Master Plans included explicit calls for pedestrian and bike improvements throughout the city, including Main Street.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/eng/completestreets/policy.shtm>

<sup>10</sup> <http://njbikeped.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Monmouth-County-Complete-Streets-Resolution.pdf> . But see also: <http://www.njbwc.org/monmouth-county-guts-its-complete-streets-policy/> .

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://asburyparksun.com/the-main-street-road-diet-is-off/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/works/njfit/route71.shtm> Avon councilman Frank Gorman reports that pedestrian accidents in Avon have been reduced to near-zero, while businesses there are thriving.



The following is a partial list of plans that have, in one form or another, called for pedestrian, bicycle and alternative transportation improvements along, across and connecting to Main Street in Asbury Park:<sup>13</sup>

- 2005 Asbury Park Transportation Improvement Study
- 2006 Asbury Park Master Plan
- 2008 Springwood Avenue Redevelopment Plan (Amended 2014)
- 2006 - 2012 Asbury Park Cultural Plan
- 2012 Connecting Community Corridors

The 2008 Main Street Redevelopment Plan, in particular, makes specific calls for better bike and pedestrian connectivity along Main Street. Prepared by three top planning firms with the support of the Asbury Park Planning Board and City Council, the 2008 Main Street Redevelopment Plan was adopted by the city in September 2008 and is still in effect today.

In analyzing the feasibility of a road diet for Asbury Park's Main Street, the 2008 Main Street plan states:<sup>14</sup>

Road diets have been successfully implemented on roads having traffic volumes over 20,000 vehicles per day. However, they are typically undertaken on four- lane undivided roadways having traffic volumes between 10,000 and 20,000 vehicles per day. Traffic volumes on Main Street vary from 11,000 and 14,000 vehicles per day—well within the range of volumes that can be accommodated with a road diet, and also within the typical volumes of many two-lane New Jersey state highways.

Where right turns are frequent, especially at signalized intersections, a separate right turn lane can be added between the curb and the bike

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<sup>13</sup> All of the listed plans and studies are available on the City of Asbury Park website at <http://www.cityofasburypark.com/egov/apps/document/center.egov> under “Plans” or “Studies.”

<sup>14</sup> City of Asbury Park 2008 Main Street Redevelopment Plan at 30. [http://www.cityofasburypark.com/egov/documents/1424294214\\_55889.pdf](http://www.cityofasburypark.com/egov/documents/1424294214_55889.pdf)

lane. Elsewhere, a curb extension can be provided to reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians.

In a far more modest fashion, the recent NJDOT “road diet” proposal calls for physical changes to Main Street that are less dramatic and involve less physical change to the street than that proposed by the 2008 Main Street Redevelopment Plan. For example, the 2008 Main Street Redevelopment Plan calls for a lane reconfiguration that includes hardscaped, planted medians along most of Main Street. On the other hand, the most recent NJDOT road diet proposal consists merely of reconfiguring painted stripes, which could be reverted at very little cost if the City is dissatisfied with the result.

### **Current Main Street / Route 71 AP Crash Statistics:**

It is hard to refute both the statistical facts and the ongoing perception that Main Street in Asbury Park is not a safe place for pedestrians or cyclists. However, the statistics are equally bad for automobiles along Main Street.

Accidents reported to the New Jersey database on automobile accidents between 2010 and 2014 yielded the following results for Main Street / Route 71 in Asbury Park:<sup>15</sup>

- **A total of 645 crashes** during the five year observation period. That’s over 10 per month!
- At least **38 reported accidents** are listed as “Crash Type = *Pedestrian*” and another 22 listed as “Crash Type = *Pedalcyclist*”. This roughly comports with two other databases that we have reviewed for the same period whereby 66 and 75 pedestrian and bicycle crashes are counted. That’s a pedestrian or cyclist involved in a reportable crash along Main Street every month for five years - not a very

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<sup>15</sup> [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1cInLDdyVTU1U\\_kX8n7kC0godyb1E60F0kF7egIzUTVA/edit#gid=736506839](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1cInLDdyVTU1U_kX8n7kC0godyb1E60F0kF7egIzUTVA/edit#gid=736506839) located at <https://www.facebook.com/Asbury-Park-Complete-Streets-Coalition>

friendly environment and not even close to the “pedestrian and bike friendly environment” described in the Master Plan and all of these redevelopment plans.

- Of the 60-plus reported crashes that include “pedestrian” or “bicycle” in the descriptor, **virtually ALL involve injuries**, and at least 27 of those involved involved “moderate pain” to “incapacitating injury.”

Here is another shameful presumption that is **not** listed in the data but is nonetheless critical: Undoubtedly, a substantial proportion of those pedestrians and cyclists who were injured are from our poorer, predominantly minority community. This is unacceptable, as these road users may not have a choice to drive a car to a safer destination.

Even the automobile crash data points to the types of accidents that are reduced by lane reconfiguration (“road diet”): the data is replete with rear end and side swipe crashes, which are drastically reduced with road diets. The automobile crash data alone supports the road diet, but additionally, the *perception* that Main Street is not a safe environment also puts a damper on business growth along the corridor.

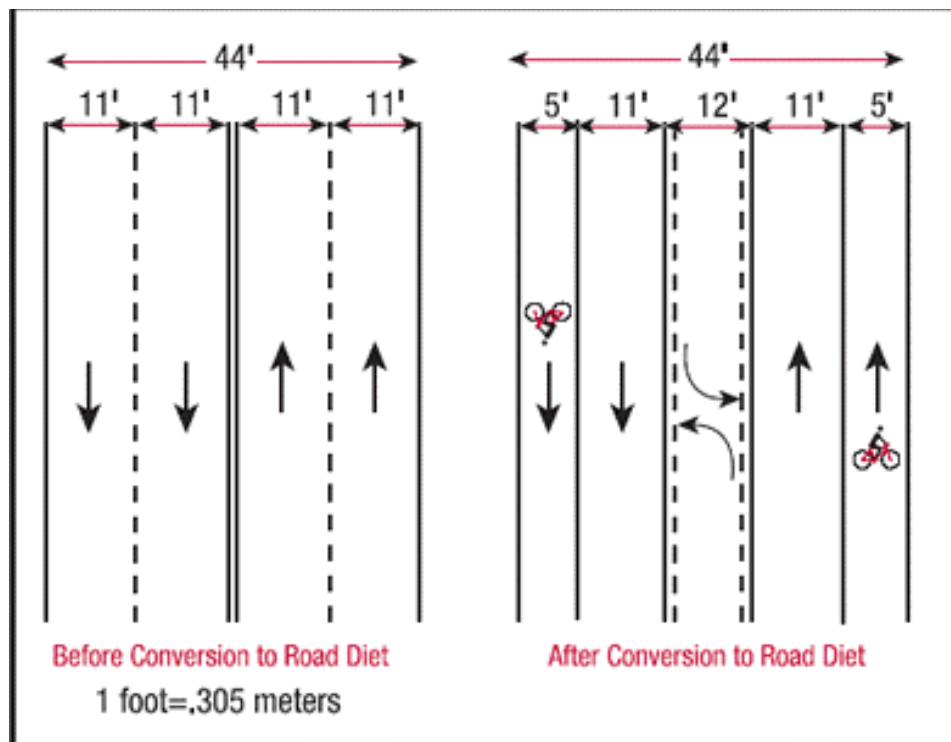
Countless studies on road diets have shown a 30 to 40 percent reduction in all types of crashes, with even greater reductions in crashes affecting pedestrians and bicycles. Avon-by-the-Sea officials report that pedestrian injuries in Avon went from a handful per year to **zero** after the road was reconfigured. Although some Asbury objectors to road diets can point to anecdotes or “hunches” about negative outcomes, no Asbury Park city officials have provided any verifiable data to refute the effectiveness of a road diet on Main Street. These objectors need to move away from an obtuse posture of *pure conjecture* and begin to look at the objective data - **the lane reconfiguration is the most critical part of rehabilitating Main Street**.

In summary, when accidents do occur on Main Street (and they will), we should think beyond categorizing direct causes, such as “improper left turn” or “speeding.”

Instead, we should focus on the root causes, such as “poor road design,” “lack of bike lanes” and “prioritizing cars over people.”

### **Future Use - Demographics:**

Nationwide our population is getting older. As older adults become empty-nesters, they are increasingly moving to more dense, walkable neighborhoods than they previously lived. Likewise, millennials and younger generations are also living in more urban environments, often choosing to forgo a car in favor of walking, biking, mass transportation and car sharing. Asbury Park is a prime target for future homes of those two demographics. Those “lifestyle” residents will be in addition to the existing population of elderly, poor or otherwise mobility-impaired that already live in Asbury Park.



The key question is, will Asbury Park create safe places for future generations to walk, ride, shop and live? If we do not, will those residents simply move to other forward-thinking towns that provide safe bike and pedestrian facilities? After all, if

Main Street is a freeway then they can just drive here to Asbury Park, or drive anywhere else, for that matter.

Main Street is certainly poised to be the next “frontier” of reinvestment and development in Asbury Park, particularly now that Cookman Avenue and the central business district have begun to reach a critical mass. However, Main Street will never achieve significant gains if there is both a perception and reality that Main Street is a dangerous place to visit.

The choices we make today determine who will invest, work and live here in the future. In this instance, Asbury Park faces two choices: On one hand, we could make important changes that benefit residents, businesses and drivers by reconfiguring the lanes for an equitable Main Street. Those changes are backed up by hundreds of examples of successful projects and reams of underlying data. By changing painted stripes on Main Street we could actually find out if the science works. Or, on the other hand, we could keep the dangerous and inequitable status quo by doing nothing and never finding out if the well-researched science actually works.

The following pages highlight **SIX key areas** where a lane reconfiguration on Main Street would benefit all Asbury Park stakeholders: Safety, Equity, Economics, Environment, Health and Social.

## **1. SAFETY:**

**Lane reconfigurations from four travel lanes to three (two thru lanes and one dedicated left turn lane) result in lower accident rates for drivers, pedestrians of all types and cyclists.**

Road diets cause reductions in the incidence of speeding. They also stop cars from “jockeying,” or changing lanes when speeding in between traffic lights. Fewer rear-end and sideswipe accidents occur. Speed is also moderated by the most prudent driver: On a four-lane road, the *fastest* driver sets the pace and puts other drivers and users in danger; with two travel lanes, however, the *slowest* driver sets the pace, which is usually at or below the speed limit.

Pedestrians benefit from the certainty provided by slower average speeds, fewer travel lanes and dedicated turn lanes. A pedestrian in the street does not need to “guess” what the driver is going to do. Pedestrians who are struck by cars at slower speed have lower incidence of serious injury or death, with survival statistics showing dramatically lower fatality rates at 30 mph and less than when speeds are higher.

Similarly, bikes in dedicated bike lanes fare much better than bikes in lanes with no markings or “shared” lanes. The bike lane also provides a safety buffer for passengers exiting parked cars.<sup>16</sup>

A federal Highway Safety Information System (HSIS) study analyzed data from California, Iowa, and Washington State used in earlier, separate road diet safety evaluations. Their study measured crash reductions of 47 percent on predominantly U.S. and State routes in small urban areas (average population: 17,000) and 19 percent on corridors in suburban areas surrounding larger cities (average population: 269,000).<sup>17</sup>

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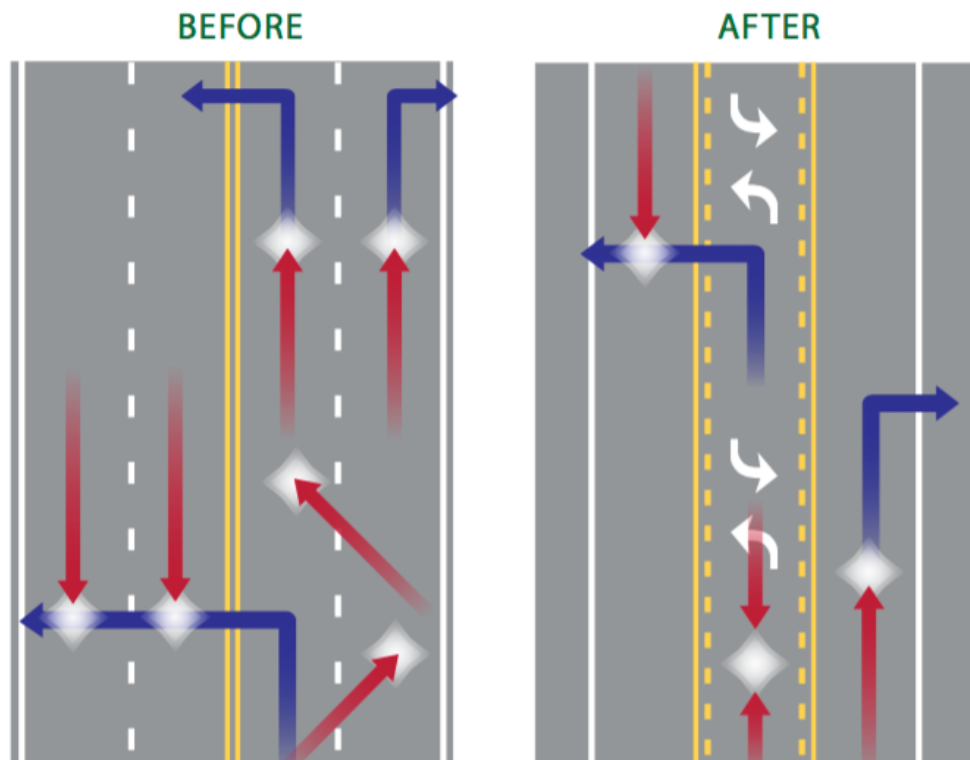
<sup>16</sup> See: <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/publicroads/11septoct/05.cfm>

<sup>17</sup> FHWA, Evaluation of Lane Reduction “Road Diet” Measures on Crashes (FHWA-HRT-10-053).

### **A Proven Safety Countermeasure:**

Four-lane undivided roadways have a history of relatively high crash rates, especially as traffic volumes and turning movements increase. The main issue is that the left (inside) lane is shared by higher-speed through traffic and left-turning vehicles. Road Diets reduce the number of vehicle-to-vehicle conflict points that contribute to rear-end, left-turn, and sideswipe crashes.

Studies indicate a 19 to 47 percent reduction in overall crashes when a Road Diet is installed on a previously four-lane undivided facility as well as a decrease in crashes involving drivers under 35 years of age and over 65.



The graphic above demonstrates the 50% reduction in the number of potential conflict points with a lane reconfiguration.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The dedicated two-way left turn lane (“TWTL”) shown on the right is often mislabeled as a “suicide lane,” as critics allege there are more head-on crashes in these lanes. All data refute that assertion and show fewer crashes.

## **2. EQUITY:**

**A road diet provides improved access along and across streets for a broader cross-section of users, including vulnerable road users and those without cars.**

“Vulnerable road users” are users on or near the public right-of-way who are not in automobiles. VRU’s include pedestrians, children in strollers, drivers exiting and entering their automobiles, bicyclists, users of wheelchairs, walkers or other mobility devices and public transit users. Demographically, VRU’s can range all ages and levels of mobility. However, VRU’s are often members of lower-income groups who cannot afford and/or cannot operate automobiles.

Asbury Park faces a unique challenge in that many vulnerable users live on one side of Main Street but need to cross Main Street at all hours on a daily basis. In fact, a 2004 report found that “children, senior citizens, and recent immigrants [and other users of color] were all thought to be more at risk of getting in crashes than other groups because of their lack of awareness, lack of mobility, and lack of acculturation, respectively.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, non-wealthy, non-white residents are prevalent users of businesses and services along Main Street. These users are less likely to own or drive cars and more likely to be vulnerable road users. By placing greater emphasis on safety for these users, a Main Street road diet creates equitable access for the entire Asbury Park community.

Currently in Asbury Park, pedestrians face perils when crossing four lanes of traffic on Main Street. Many accidents occur because of “lane confusion,” which is when oncoming cars appear to be turning but do not, and vice versa. Other pedestrian accidents have occurred because of “benevolent” drivers, who wave pedestrians into traffic without recognizing that there is another car in the other travel lane, often in a blindspot. Currently there is over 48 feet of travel lane to cross on Main Street, often with cars that exceed the 30 mph speed limit by more than 10 mph.

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<sup>19</sup> Knoblauch, Richard, et al., “The Pedestrian and Bicyclist Highway Safety Problem As It Relates to the Hispanic Population in the United States,” Center for Applied Research Report DTFH61-03-P-00324, 2004. [http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/hispanic/03p00324/050329.pdf](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/hispanic/03p00324/050329.pdf)



The result is that Main Street is inhospitable to pedestrians, especially those who cannot cross quickly because of mobility problems or because they are crossing with young children.

Likewise, most cyclists observed along Main Street are not cycling for recreation or sport. Rather, they are going to or from work or other places of business. Because the roadway is not safe for cycling on Main Street, these users ride on the sidewalk,



further displacing and endangering pedestrians. Visit Main Street any day and you will see cyclists riding along the sidewalk. On the other hand, ride a bicycle on Main Street and you will realize that you are putting your life at risk. For leisure riders, this is an avoidable choice; however, for many residents and workers in Asbury Park, the bicycle is their *only* choice.

Main Street has been a physical and psychological divide between the east and west sides of Asbury Park since the founding of the city. Against that backdrop, we see that the lack of pedestrian and bike facilities affects those in lower income brackets the most, as it either puts them in danger, isolates them or forces them to buy cars they cannot afford.

Why would any City leader continue to prioritize north/south automobile traffic over the safety of local residents who need to cross Main Street on a daily basis, whether it be on foot, bike, wheelchair, baby stroller or by car? What interests are being served for Asbury Park residents when our roads are designed for the Allenhurst-through-Belmar commuters?

### **3. ECONOMICS:**

#### **Businesses prosper and property values increase in pre/post measurements of road diets.**

These economic benefits occur for a variety of reasons: First, pedestrian and bike traffic increases. Also, vehicles do not speed by. Rather, they actually have time to see and stop for local businesses. Finally, the street environment is more hospitable, meaning that visitors are willing to stroll along consumer-friendly streets.<sup>20</sup>

Planetizen blogger Todd Litman recently authored, “Good For Busine\$\$ - The Benefits Of Making Streets More Walking And Cycling Friendly.” His analysis evaluated the local economic impacts of commercial street walking and cycling improvements. It found that streetscape enhancements that improve walking and cycling conditions tend to increase property values and rents, attract new businesses, and increase local economic activity. The analysis indicates that bicycle parking tends to provide much more retail spending than the same space devoted to car parking, and that a larger proportion of retail expenditure comes from local residents and workers, many of whom walk or bicycle, than car-borne customers.<sup>21</sup>

A 2006 study from Los Angeles also found no detrimental impact to business or property values as a result of the implementation of a local road diet, concluding that “[o]pposition to road diets on economic grounds therefore appears unfounded.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, a 2004 study from Washington state concluded that businesses in the reconfigured district fared substantially better than their non-modified peers. (Also as expected, pedestrian activity increased dramatically while traffic accidents of all types decreased precipitously.)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See TED “Walkable Cities” presentation by Jenette Sadik Kahn, 2014. Neighborhoods with bike lane projects saw a 49% increase in retail sales and a 47% decrease in commercial vacancies. <https://youtu.be/diVUmYc2ZWo>

<sup>21</sup> See: <http://www.planetizen.com/node/81542/responding-bike-improvement-skeptics>

<sup>22</sup> [http://nacto.org/docs/usdg/yorkblvd\\_mccormick.pdf](http://nacto.org/docs/usdg/yorkblvd_mccormick.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cob.org/documents/pw/transportation/alabama-corridor-safety-improvements/vancouver-wa-case-study-fourth-plain-road%20-diet.pdf>

#### **4. ENVIRONMENT:**

**Less local driving means less noise, congestion and vehicle exhaust.**<sup>24</sup>

The primary metric for automobile use in a particular metropolitan area is vehicle miles travelled (“VMT”). In dense, walkable neighborhoods where transportation options are abundant, VMT’s are substantially lower than those neighborhoods that are designed solely for automobiles.<sup>25</sup>

Recent concerns in Asbury Park have focused on traffic and the availability of parking. The installation of bike lanes has been shown to cause bicycle trips to increase by over 100%.<sup>26</sup> For each bike and pedestrian trip that is not conducted in an automobile, traffic is reduced and parking is made available for those who need to drive.

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<sup>24</sup> See Newman, Sophia, “Designing a Bike Path to Global Health,” <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/bike-usage-global-health-pollution-china>

<sup>25</sup> See Jeff Speck presentation, “The Walkable City - Lessons from the U.S.” <https://youtu.be/PoFO5Rt9cPM>

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.peopleforbikes.org/statistics/category/protected-bike-lane-statistics>

## **5. HEALTH:**

**Neighborhoods with improved pedestrian and bicycle amenities promote walking and cycling instead of driving, leading to improved health outcomes.**

We do not need to reiterate the fact that Americans have become progressively fatter and more sedate during the decades of unfettered automobile dependency. Increased rates of obesity, diabetes and asthma have tracked upward concurrently with the rise of automobile use in the United States. Likewise, studies conducted both domestically and abroad have universally found that communities that walk and cycle on a regular basis fare much better than in multiple health metrics than those who are essentially automobile dependent.<sup>27</sup>

These health effects are particularly pronounced among residents who are older or have mobility challenges. A pedestrian friendly community provides opportunities for walking, shopping and social interaction that would be impossible in a sprawling suburb. A neighborhood that is perceived as safe and walkable is one that becomes accessible to all, not just those in automobiles.

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<sup>27</sup> Speck, Jeff, Walkable City - How Downtown Can Save America One Step at a Time, Farrar Straus and Giroux, New York, 2012 at 39 - 43.

## **6. SOCIAL:**

**Walkable, safe streets allow social interaction and chance encounters that promote community cohesion.**

As a resident or frequent visitor to Asbury Park, ask yourself the following questions: While walking on Cookman Avenue, how many times have you had chance encounters with friends, neighbors or colleagues? To the contrary, how many of those encounters have ever occurred while walking or driving on Route 71?

In a beach community, many residents are only in town seasonally. Walkable streets provide an opportunity to meet with neighbors and develop bonds that strengthen communities. Just like a boardwalk, a well-designed, walkable streetscape encourages strolling, which then fosters social interaction.

In cities across the world, walkable urban streets are also places for artists and performers to share. People congregate on sidewalks outside urban cafes to hear mimes sing and watch silver statues dance. (Checking if you are still reading.) The presence of others inspires more visitors, and more visitors at longer hours means safer urban environments, a principle known as “eyes on the street.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Jacobs, Jane, “The Death and Life of Great American Cities,” Random House Publishers, New York, 1961.

## **OBJECTIONS:**

In countless cities across the country, when a road diet is introduced, predictable cries of “traffic,” “carmageddon” and “business killer” are launched.<sup>29</sup> Predictably, some of these same concerns have been raised about NJDOT’s proposal for a painted lane reconfiguration on Main Street in Asbury Park.<sup>30</sup>

Below are some of the common objections that have been asserted by some Asbury Park constituents in opposition to the road diet (**in bold**), with factual responses after:

**There will be terrible traffic:** Four-to-three lane road diets organize traffic without reducing road capacity. Road diets in other jurisdictions, including Seattle, have been proven to work on roads with average daily traffic (“ADT”) of up to 25,000 cars, which is far above the highest recorded peak ADT’s on Route 71 in Asbury Park of 20,219 (in 2012) and 17,817 (in 2014).<sup>31</sup>

**Cars will go onto other roads and create hazards:** Indeed, during some busy times, a portion of cars on Main Street may choose to drive on other streets. However, this is what already occurs now and is the functional purpose of an urban grid of streets - there are options. Memorial Drive and other local roads already serve as perfect relievers for local traffic. This will not change.

**Businesses will suffer. Trucks cannot unload.:** How do cars speeding by, crashing and double-parking help business? As described earlier in this report, pre/post studies of dozens of road diets show improvements for businesses and higher land values. Trucks double park now, which is illegal. By doing nothing on Main Street, truck deliveries might remain status quo, but business will suffer in the long-term. With the lanes reconfigured, delivery trucks can be accommodated in

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<sup>29</sup> See “Road Diet for Dummies” Xtranormal video: <https://youtu.be/XflpMQAMdOY>

<sup>30</sup> See APTV video of September 8, 2015 council workshop at [http://www.asburyparktv.org/AP\\_MayorAndCouncil/2015/September\\_8\\_2015.html](http://www.asburyparktv.org/AP_MayorAndCouncil/2015/September_8_2015.html)

<sup>31</sup> See NJDOT traffic data for Route 71: [http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/sldiag/00000071\\_-\\_pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/sldiag/00000071_-_pdf)

the center island or side streets and provide opportunities for Main Street businesses to finally grow.

**Fire trucks and other emergency vehicles will be impeded. People will be at risk!:** The reconfiguration proposal by NJDOT is just paint. It doesn't change the structure or width of the road and will not hinder the movement of fire trucks. There is still over 60 feet of pavement width from curb-to-curb on most of Main Street. In fact, with a road diet, there are bike lanes and a center island for cars to clear or for an emergency vehicle to maneuver.

Frank Gorman is a councilman and former mayor of Avon-by-the-Sea. He is also an Avon fireman and career first responder as a Senior Chief in the U.S. Coast Guard. Gorman reports that there have been no issues in maneuvering fire trucks or responding to emergencies since the implementation of a road diet in Avon almost a decade ago. This is also the case in thousands of road diets nationwide.

In another successful local example, several years ago a section of Route 33 in Neptune was converted from four lanes of traffic (two in each direction) to three lanes (two travel lanes, plus dedicated center turn lanes or pockets). That section of road, between Memorial Drive and Route 35, is a main local evacuation route and also leads to Jersey Shore Medical Center Hospital. Most notably, that section of Route 33 is also the home to Neptune's busiest fire department - the Unexcelled Fire Company. If a road diet was such a hazard to emergency vehicles, as alleged by Asbury Park officials, wouldn't this be the worst place to reconfigure the lanes? To the contrary, that stretch of Route 33 reports far fewer accidents, no problems with traffic congestion and no disruption of emergency vehicles.

**Where will the snow go?:** Right now snow often remains in the travel lanes, making Main Street a functional mess every winter. With a road diet, snow can be moved into the center lanes/islands and the bike lanes without hindering the travel or turning lanes. With a reconfiguration proposed only with painted lines, there is no infrastructure concern for snow plows, only additional options for moving snow.

## **TAKE ACTION:**

In September 2015, the Asbury Park City Council passed a resolution in opposition to a state-funded and -implemented road diet project designed to make Main Street as safe and economically vibrant as it can be. Some local leaders only want the road repaved and re-stripped without the critical lane reconfiguration. The reasons stated for their opposition come straight from the “**Objections**” listed on the previous page. Unfortunately, the safety and accessibility benefits of repaving are virtually wiped out without the road diet’s requisite lane reconfiguration. Hopefully, readers of this position paper will see that the responses to the objections stated and the data contained in this paper create a level of understanding for a more intelligent dialogue on the issue.

The Asbury Park Complete Streets coalition is encouraging all Asbury Park stakeholders to demand that the City Council rescind its September 2015 resolution in opposition to the road diet, and instead re-engage NJDOT to implement the most forward-thinking, comprehensive update to Main Street since automobiles stole priority from pedestrians and other users in 1956.

We urge Asbury Park leaders to adopt comprehensive Complete Streets policies that include the needs of all road users, including the vulnerable users - young, old and of all mobility types.

*For more information about Complete Streets in Asbury Park, find us on Facebook:  
“Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition”*



## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

(Linked in electronic copy)

1. [Asbury Park Complete Streets Coalition Facebook page](#)
2. [New Jersey Bike Walk Coalition](#)
3. [New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center](#)
4. [City of Asbury Park Document Center](#)
5. [Traffic Data for Route 71 in Monmouth County](#)
6. [Crash Data for Route 71 in Asbury Park, 2010 - 2014](#)
7. [New Jersey Department of Transportation - Complete Streets](#)
8. [United States DOT FHWA Road Diets page](#)
9. [“Designing Walkable Thoroughfares” ITE Guidebook](#)
10. [NATCO Urban Street Design Guide](#)
11. [NATCO Transportation Planning Handbook Ch 16.: Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities](#)
12. [Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center](#)
13. [Smart Growth America](#)
14. [Jeff Speck, Walkable City - How Downtown Can Save America One Step at a Time](#)