

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Westchester Bicycle Summit May 6, 2010

The second Westchester Bicycle Summit was held in the Greenburgh Town Hall on Thursday, 6 May, 2010, bringing together local bicycle advocates and cyclists, planners and legislators, including New York State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins. Skip Beitzel and Terry Burke of the Bedford Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee also attended the meeting.

The first Westchester Bicycle Summit in 2009 had had a very different mood. It was anticipatory, and it had also marked the creation of the Westchester Biking and Walking Alliance, formed to foster the growth of local biking and walking advocacy. The then County Executive Andrew Spano had spoken, as had Congresswoman Nita Lowey, Andy Clarke, and President of the League of American Bicyclists had provided the keynote speech. The atmosphere was very charged with possibility.

One year on the second summit was more low key, local and practical, taking a hard look at what had been achieved since April 2009, and what were the challenges that the bicycling and walking community had to face in order to make Westchester a safe place for cycling and walking. There had been some successes, but it was evident that things were moving slowly, and that continued grassroots efforts were necessary in order to bring real pressure to bear on local officials to get proposed bicycle and pedestrian projects done and to obtain necessary funding. It was early days, but there was no evidence to date that local transportation officials had taken to heart the stated objective of the new NYDOT policy that had been issued on 20 April: to ***“promote development of pedestrian and bicycle networks that support sustainable and livable communities, minimizes impact on natural resources, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and improve quality of life”***.

David Wilson, President of the Westchester Cycle Club (WCC) chaired the event, giving a brief summary of what was to come and introducing each speaker as they came on.

Paul Feiner, the Greenburgh Town Supervisor and himself a bicyclist, gave a brief welcoming address and the meeting moving quickly forward.

Kate Slevin was the first main speaker. Ms. Slevin is the Executive Director of the Tri State Transportation Campaign, an advocacy organization dedicated to creating a more sustainable, balanced, and equitable transportation network in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut (check their site at <http://blog.tstc.org>) After discussing work being done in the tri-state area, Ms. Slevin advised local advocates to “Focus on how the state departments of transportation spend their money”, saying that the lion’s share goes to motor vehicles. Ms. Slevin spoke of ways to raise money, such as applying for Smart Growth funding, locally generated funding such as public/private partnerships, and the federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER grants) – and said that applications for TIGER 2 funds (\$600 million available) are due in August 2010.

Maximilla Cassell, the widow of Merrill Cassell, the bicycling advocate who was killed by a Bee-Line bus in Greenburgh in November 2009, spoke to the summit about Merrill’s deep passion for cycling and bicycle advocacy. Indeed many of the speakers paid tribute to Merrill, and the next speaker, State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, talked of how she was sponsoring a safe-passing bill, to be called “Merrill’s Law”, which had advanced to the Codes Committee in the State Senate, and called on advocates to continue to put pressure to have the Bill (S6620) passed into law.

Tom Madden, the Greenburgh Planning Commissioner, spoke of work being done to update the Bicycle Plan in the Greenburgh Comprehensive Plan, and how he wanted to start a bicycle program at Greenburgh schools. Mr. Madden said that he was probably the only town planner with a bicycle tattoo on his ankle and proceeded to show it!

Steve Kahn, owner of Danny's Cycles of Scarsdale and Mohegan Lake talked of the growth in cycling, and the responsibility of bicycle retailers to support local bicycle advocacy.

Sandra Fry, the principal transportation planner, Connecticut Regional Council of governments, spoke about the development and expansion of bicycle racks on buses and of the benefits of such a program for low income workers, expanding their transit accessibility. (Unfortunately New York cut spending on bicycle racks in January 2010, citing budget restraints).

Michael Oliva of the East Coast Greenway (<http://greenway.org>) spoke of work being done to fill in gaps on the Greenway, and the frustrations of obtaining future federal funding whilst federal money already obtained was still unused, citing the Yonkers/Westchester project to complete the Bronx River Trailway to the New York city line. Mr. Oliva said that politicians needed to see that a great many of their constituents supported advancing bicycle and pedestrian issues, as this would make them support legislation that advanced equity for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Lukas Herbert, Westchester County Associate Planner gave an update on the many bicycle and pedestrian projects underway, including the South County Trailway and Bronx River Trailway. He also spoke of the New Rochelle bicycle ordinances, requiring developers to install a bicycle parking space for every ten car parking spaces.

Jackson Landres of the RBA Group spoke of "Complete Streets", and work that RBA had done in writing the complete streets policy for New Jersey DOT (presentations on the New Jersey complete streets policy made be seen at <http://www.njbikeped.org> Mr. Landres also spoke of how much work New York city had achieved over the course of the past two years in turning New York into a bike-friendly city.

Stephen Lopez, former Greenburgh Planning Commissioner, spoke of the problems of making Westchester safe for bicyclists, and the basic lack of courtesy and consideration for bicyclists shown by many Westchester drivers.

Richard Ward, Larchmont Village Trustee, spoke of what he was trying to achieve in Larchmont, and the frustrations of dealing with much opposition from some members of the Larchmont community to provide even simple amenities for bicyclists. Mr. Ward has however managed to introduce preferential parking for bicycles near the stairs to the railway platform, and advised advocates to be patient and advance things bit by bit.

Peter McCartt of the Eastchester Environmental Committee spoke of his work in bicycle advocacy in Eastchester, and reported that this summer sharrows will be marked on certain Eastchester streets to help bicyclists and motorists alike (sharrows are bicycle signs and chevron arrows, to indicate to both bicyclists and motorists where bicycles should safely ride on the road).

Terry Burke of the Bedford Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee then spoke about what Bedford has done, the recent draft bicycle plan and ongoing efforts to create support for bicycling and pedestrian issues at a grassroots level in order to ultimately achieve equity in treatment of such road users.

David Wilson provided the closing words, thanking everyone and stressing that it was what was happening at the local level that was most important, as slowly perceptions towards bicyclists were changing. Bicycling was becoming more popular, and advocacy work was making Westchester safer not only for bicycles, but also for motorists – we must truly share the roads.