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## Advocacy Column

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**A**s you read this, we're on the upward swing for daylight, and all can start plotting our riding goals for the coming year, be it a trip out of state, Saturday jaunts to Bristol, or the weekly club ride. As always, there are always opportunities to advocate for better protections and conditions for riding.

As you may have heard following the November elections, come January, new leadership will be taking control of many federal, state and local governments and alter the priorities assigned to transportation funding and projects.

At the federal level, Representative Jim Oberstar of Minnesota was not re-elected and is likely to be replaced on the House Transportation Committee by a new chair who is not likely to be as vocal in support of bicycle projects, especially with the likely exclusive focus in the next Congress on economic development, jobs and fiscal austerity.

*Why is this relevant to Rhode Island and South Eastern New England?*

Because much of the funding that has been used by RIDOT to develop our state bike paths and build bridges has been sourced in federal transportation enhancement programs. As we're all very well aware, the economics of building and maintaining our paved infrastructure is seriously underfunded, which may lead to cancellation at the federal level of existing funding grants and reducing or eliminating programs that have been used to for those projects. I'm sure the situation is similar in Eastern Connecticut and Southeastern Massachusetts, as well as in other states where you may choose to ride this year.

*What can you do about it?*

At a recent conference I attended, Jim Sayer, the Executive Director of Adventure Cycling Association described our government system as "Government of the people, for the people, by the people—who show up." Jim was referring to the opportunity that the League of American Bicyclists' National Bike Summit in spring offers for anyone interested in making a difference to improve road conditions and fund changes to how roads get built so as to improve the safety of bicycle riders and other road users. As part of that summit, the "by the people who show up" is put into action when the 700+ advocates go to Capitol Hill and ask their representatives and senators to represent their interests by sponsoring or voting in favor of crucial bills. This year, while I'm there, I'll be making a request that on the day that the attendees are visiting congressional offices, that

you call, fax or write to your elected officials and reinforce the message we deliver in person.

Not everything occurs at the federal level, as you well know. Planning decisions are made, projects are prioritized and funding sought based on input from communities, appointed department heads, and bills are introduced in state legislatures that intend to increase the safety and penalties for injuries caused by automobile operators striking bicyclists, pedestrians, emergency responders and road workers. With a nearly unenforceable safe passing distance law on the books with a paltry \$85 fine, the Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition, with my support, will be working to have a vulnerable road user law enacted to impose tough automatic fines. Connecticut attempted to pass such last session; though it did not pass, it is hoped it will be reintroduced in the near future. Given the number of accidents in the past year to pedestrians and cyclists who have been hit, with no charges brought against the drivers, we desperately need this law to change the mentality that damages caused while driving a motorized vehicle are acceptable.

Again, I'll be asking for your support in the form of letters, faxes or phone calls to state representatives to support this bill.

Have a great winter, and as always, if you see an opportunity in your community for an improvement to be made for bicyclists, feel free to contact me at my club email address, [advocacy@nbwclub.org](mailto:advocacy@nbwclub.org).



### **Bike to Work Day Friday, May 20, 2011**

Details in next issue

### **League of American Bicyclists**

See their website for an interesting new  
Advocacy Report  
"Bikes on Bridges"

[www.bikeleague.org/resources/reports/pdfs/bridges.pdf](http://www.bikeleague.org/resources/reports/pdfs/bridges.pdf)

Bridges are extremely important to bicyclists. They are critical to overcoming the barriers to cycling.  
Learn how to get bikes on bridges from successful advocacy campaigns.

also linked from the NBW website, [nbwclub.org](http://nbwclub.org)