



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Timothy M. Kennedy

Senator Kennedy Proposes New Bill, Pushes for Investment to Make Streets Safer in WNY

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY December 10, 2013

| ISSUE: **TRANSPORTATION, HIGHWAYS**



Kennedy announces new reform to strengthen the state's Complete Streets law at dangerous intersection in Cheektowaga.

With collisions involving pedestrians and bicycles on the rise, Kennedy, Supervisor Mary Holtz, Justin Booth of GObike Buffalo and local parents call for investment in infrastructure projects that make streets safer for all roadway users.

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. – Senator Tim Kennedy, a member of the Senate Transportation Committee, today announced a new, two-pronged initiative that will help make Western New York’s streets and highways safer for all roadway users. Standing with parents and advocates at the busy intersection of Union Road and Maryvale Drive in Cheektowaga, Kennedy outlined new reform legislation that will revise and expand the state’s Complete Streets law.

As a result of the state Department of Transportation’s Preservation First policy, nearly 80 percent of transportation funding and numerous road projects exclude pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure, according to the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. Kennedy believes this wide exclusion of a key component of complete-streets design runs contrary to the original intent of the state’s Complete Streets law, and his new bill would address the issue and strengthen the law.

Kennedy also called for new and direct investment in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to ensure all who rely on our state’s roads – drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users – are kept safe while commuting.

It recently came to light that Erie County witnessed 3,468 vehicle collisions with pedestrians and bicycles between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2012, according to the Tri-State Transportation Campaign. At least two of those accidents happened close to Union and Maryvale in Cheektowaga and involved children who were walking or rollerblading near the school. The heavily traveled intersection has proven risky for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Cheektowaga Supervisor Mary Holtz, Justin Booth, executive director of GObike Buffalo, and Cheektowaga parents whose children are often forced to cross Union Road to get to school joined Senator Kennedy Tuesday to draw attention to the urgent need for new state actions to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety across Western New York and throughout

the state.

“Safer roadways lead to stronger communities, and an expanded Complete Streets law will pave the way to an improved transportation network and a stronger state,” said **Senator Tim Kennedy**. “At least two children have been struck by vehicles near the intersection of Union Road and Maryvale Drive in Cheektowaga in the last two years. By reforming our state’s Complete Streets law, our legislation would make dangerous intersections like this one much safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. It would ensure our children have safer routes to school and improve quality of life for local families by providing more opportunities to walk and bike safely.

“Our Complete Streets bill combined with targeted investment in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure,” Kennedy added, “will make a long-lasting impact on the safety of our roads and highways, and help strengthen neighborhoods in Buffalo, Cheektowaga and throughout all of New York State’s towns, villages and cities.”

Justin Booth, executive director of GObike Buffalo, said, “With the highest fatality rate in the nation for pedestrians and bicyclists, 27 percent, New York State is only spending a few pennies on the dollar to protect the most vulnerable users of our roads. For the good of the economy and the health, safety, and quality of life of all New Yorkers, an increase in the state’s financial commitment to pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure should be paramount.”

Amy Mutton, a parent of three students within the Maryvale School District, said, “Every parent’s priority is to make sure their kids remain safe, especially after they leave the house and head to school. With more and more children walking to school in the town of Cheektowaga, Senator Kennedy’s bill would be a big help by making our roads safer for those whose only way to get to school is by walking or biking. We’ll be standing with Senator Kennedy to fight

for these changes to be made quickly, so that the next road project integrates the important pedestrian-safety improvements that are a key part of complete streets.”

Complete streets are designed to ensure the safety, mobility and convenient access of all roadway users – especially pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers and transit users – of all ages and abilities including children, senior citizens and people with disabilities. In 2011, New York State passed a new Complete Streets law, but many road projects, including some undertaken by the state Department of Transportation, are not required to incorporate complete streets standards.

Kennedy’s bill will refine and expand the scope of the law to ensure more infrastructure projects include complete-streets design features. Current law only requires complete-streets compliance when the state – or a municipality receiving state and federal funding – undertakes a road construction or reconstruction project. Under Kennedy’s legislation, complete-streets requirements would be extended to resurfacing, maintenance and road preservation projects on state roads – which tend to be the majority of DOT’s road projects, especially under its Preservation First policy.

In other words, current state law only requires the complete-streets approach when the state DOT or a municipality embarks on a major project like building a new road or a total revamp and reconstruction of an existing highway. For most projects, such as repaving roads to maintain their functionality, there is no requirement to consider complete-streets design features. Kennedy’s bill changes this, and ensures more road projects fall under complete streets rules.

Senator Kennedy also called for the creation of a dedicated line of funding for pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure in the state budget. Transportation watchdog group Tri-State Transportation Campaign recently pointed out that DOT funding for pedestrian and bicycle

infrastructure has sharply declined. At the same time, funds for Safe Routes for Schools, a federal program, have also diminished. Kennedy wants funds directed to pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure to ensure New York State keeps pace with neighboring states as well as those across the country in improving safety and providing more commuting choices.

Kennedy believes safe roads are key to vibrant and thriving neighborhoods, and he wants the state to direct more resources to projects that enhance area roads and communities. Advocacy groups like Tri-State Transportation Campaign and GObike Buffalo are calling for millions of dollars to be invested into pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure. While Kennedy is open to discussion on the specifics of the dedicated funding stream to improve roadway safety for all, he believes investment must be substantial and immediate.

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Senator Timothy M. Kennedy represents the New York State Senate's 63rd District, which is comprised of the towns of Cheektowaga, the city of Lackawanna and nearly all of the city of Buffalo. More information is available at <http://kennedy.nysenate.gov>.