

Congressman Bill Pascrell's Livable Communities Newsletter – Solutions for Cleaner, Safer Living

April, 2002

Issue IV

On May 22, 2002 from 3:00-4:30 in the Science Committee room, 2320 Rayburn House Office Building -- Congressman Pascrell and Congressman Blumenauer, Chairman of the Livable Communities Task Force, and Congressman Boehlert, Chairman of the Science Committee will be hosting a briefing by the National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE), a non-partisan organization of scientists, environmentalists, business people, and policy makers working to improve the scientific basis for environmental decisionmaking. NCSE will brief congressional staff, members and outside interested groups on their recommendations for achieving sustainable communities which will include information on: why science is important for sustainability, but community participation is essential; why conservation is essential for healthy community; why educational institutions should assist in seeking solutions; and why an international exchange of information should be established. The featured speaker is Dr. David Blockstein, Senior Scientist for NCSE. Please contact Kim Zarish-Becknell of Congressman Pascrell's office with any questions at 202-225-5751.

Dear Colleagues:

Children's lives have altered dramatically over the last few decades. One of the most startling changes is how little independence and mobility they now have compared to the generations who grew up before them. Not so long ago, a vast majority of kids routinely roamed their neighborhoods on foot or bicycle, taking the first

steps toward independence. Today, a new generation of moms and dads chauffeur their kids to nearly all their activities, fearing for their children's safety on streets due to both the real and perceived dangers of crime and traffic. Forty years ago, half of all U.S. school children walked to school. Now, the Centers for Disease Control estimate that only 10% do.

In this month's issue of our newsletter we explore the results of the Surface Transportation Policy Project's "High Mileage Moms" report and the potential solutions to this problem.

The greatest danger for many children who choose to walk or bike to school comes from traffic on neighborhood roads and streets. Parents often cite the fear of traffic as one of their top concerns in allowing their kids to walk or bike to school.

The STPP report examines potential methods of remedying local traffic problems to make our community streets safer for children.

I will also continue to inform you about brownfield redevelopment. This issue focuses on the briefing the Livable Communities Task Force and the Real Estate Caucus held in March on the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfield Environmental Restoration Act. a bill that will help us in our efforts to remediate brownfields sites focusing on the clean-up rather than the litigation.

As always, if you have any questions about any of these innovative programs, please feel free to contact my office at 225-5751.

Sincerely,

Bill Paswell J

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL: Getting kids to walk and bike to school safely



Ask anyone involved in transportation how they got to school when they were young vs. how their kids travel nowadays and you'll likely open up one of the most potent transportation reform topics that cuts across all political and philosophical boundaries. The need to shuttle kids back and forth to school is one of the most visible indicators that

communities are no longer walkable and that kids under 16 are increasingly marooned in the suburbs. The recent "High Mileage Moms" report issued by the Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) found that the number of kids walking to school dropped 23% from 1990 to 1995. It's estimated that only 10% of all U.S. schoolchildren now walk to school (CDC).

The growing "Safe Routes to School" movement in the U.S. presents a golden opportunity for transportation reform advocates to reach out to public health professionals, traffic safety groups, local PTAs, elected officials eager to promote school safety issues, and neighborhood associations. The topic can expose traditional health and safety organizations -- groups that usually think about things like bicycle safety in terms of increased helmet usage -- to consider the potential for traffic calming, bicycle and pedestrian facilities and more walkable neighborhoods to improve public health, increase levels of exercise and decrease obesity, and reduce injuries. As the cutting-edge California

Department of Health Services states: "Our vision is a state where doctors prescribe walking and biking to their patients, employers subsidize bike facilities and community trails, and transit services accommodate cyclists by making intermodal travel safe and seamless..."

"Safe Routes to School" is an idea that has sprouted up places as diverse as England, Toronto, Chicago, and California. In California in particular, STPP's field offices have joined forces with public health officials and advocates to advance state-level legislation aimed at securing a third of the TEA-21 federal safety set-aside money for a "Safe Routes to School" program. The federal transportation bill has for some time reserved 10% of every state's STP funds for traffic safety projects. TEA-21 amended the safety set-aside language to include "bicycle, pedestrian and traffic calming" projects as eligible expenditures in addition to the traditional types of programs that have historically funded guard rails, medians and shoulders. Yet, as is the case in

many states, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) hasn't taken any action to update its safety set-aside program to reflect the changes TEA-21 made with regards to bicyclists and pedestrians.

STPP has helped introduced the "Safe Routes to School" bill in the California legislature that would reserve one-third of the state's TEA-21 safety set-aside for a program that would fund traffic calming, crosswalks, sidewalks, bike lanes and paths in and around California schools. The legislation was seen as necessary since Caltrans didn't appear to be embracing the changes in the TEA-21 language on their own. And STPP California staff decided that rather than make the "Safe Routes to School" projects merely eligible for statewide safety set-aside funding, they would carve out a mandatory amount (one-third of a \$60 million/year program or roughly \$20M/yr) to be spent on the projects.

Supporters have been careful to characterize the bill and its surrounding efforts as a public health/school safety

measure. Endorsers targeted early on included the California PTA, the California Teachers Association, the California Coalition for Child Injury Prevention etc. This has been critical to the bill's growing support from a wide range of legislators; if the bill had been backed exclusively by bicycle advocacy groups or environmentalists it would never have done as well.

If you are interested in promoting a similar program in your own state, please contact the Surface Transportation Policy Project's website at <http://www.transact.org>.

Brownfields Update: Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfield Environmental Restoration Act



Brownfields can be found anywhere -- in the inner cities, the suburbs and in rural areas. Any time an industry leaves an

area or a business closes its doors two sharply contrasting possibilities exist-on one hand, contamination, poor aesthetics, no economic benefits, and on the other, the opportunities for "smartgrowth" -- jobs and business development. It has been estimated that there are over 450,000 brownfields in the country, and according to a recent study 47 states (all but North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming) have some sort of brownfield program in place.

On January 11, 2002, President Bush signed into law the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfield Environmental Restoration Act. This law has three significant provisions, which provide for businesses to gain resources from local governments and protect them from problematic liability concerns. In March of this year, I co-hosted with Representatives Blumenauer, English and Neal a Livable Communities Task Force and Real Estate Caucus joint, bipartisan briefing on the new law.

At the highly successful briefing, members and staff had the opportunity to learn

and ask questions about how their districts could improve and benefit from the new brownfields law. Members were provided with information to assist them with outreach to business, industry, government and other interested parties, and received expert advice on how districts can develop a brownfields plan. The expert panel included Charles Bartsch-Senior Policy Analyst, from the renowned Northeast Midwest Institute, Roger Platt-Senior Vice President and Counsel of the Real Estate Roundtable, and Sven-Eric Kaiser-Brownfields Program of the Environmental Protection Agency. The presenters addressed liability issues, and economic benefits resulting from redevelopment, such as new businesses, new jobs, and tax revenues. Presenters provided specific information about projects from all over the country.

The important new law will: provide more funds for state and local grant activities; provide Superfund liability relief to contiguous property owners, prospective purchasers, and innocent landowners; and create a more prominent role

for State cleanup Voluntary Cleanup Programs or Response Programs. I believe that businesses throughout the country will find the provisions of this new law extremely useful as they embark on redevelopment strategies, and that communities will greatly benefit from this smart growth.

Additional information may be found on these websites:
www.epa.gov and
www.nemw.org.