Hempstead Town Safe Streets Policy

Aisha Al-Muslim
HEMPSTEAD TOWN

Road-design policy awaits green light

BY AISHA AL-MUSLIM
aisha.al-muslim@newsday.com

For more than a year, transportation safety advocates have tried to get Hempstead Town officials to pass a policy that would change the future design of town roads in an effort to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The town finally is ready to act.

The Hempstead Town board is scheduled to vote tomorrow on a policy that would consider safety and convenient access for all users of town roads — including people in cars, on foot, on bicycles and on buses — in the design, construction and revamping of town streets. The towns of North Hempstead, Babylon, Islip, Brookhaven and Southampton already have adopted similar policies.

“I was getting nervous,” said Sandi Vega, 36, of Wantagh, a safety advocate who testified at a January 2011 town meeting. “I am really glad to see that the town is taking this seriously.”

The statewide law passed last year and dubbed “Complete Streets” was sparked by the death of Vega’s daughter Brittany, 14, who was killed in September 2010 in Wantagh while crossing Sunrise Highway on her way to school.

“What scares me is that I have four other children that will have to cross all sorts of streets one day,” said Vega, whose children are 9 months old, and 4, 6 and 9 years old. “I would hate to see anything like this happen again.”

The state’s measure requires pedestrian and cyclist safety to be considered in any road or transportation facility built with state and federal funding.

“The state bill is a good bill, but the town can also close the loophole and make sure that its residents are protected,” said Ryan Lynch, senior planner of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a nonprofit transit advocacy group. “Long Island in general is home to most of the dangerous roads in the region and the Town of Hempstead is not excluded from that.”

For the most part, the town is responsible for side streets that don’t have traffic lights, including busy roads such as Neptune Avenue in Seaford, Dogwood Avenue in Franklin Square and Bellmore Road in North Bellmore and East Meadow, said spokeswoman Susan Trenkle-Pokalsky.

“The town is laying the groundwork for creating more efficient roads that are safe for all residents,” town Supervisor Kate Murray said in a statement.

The town’s policy would also promote a cleaner, greener transportation system that helps reduce traffic congestion and air pollution. Design features might include countdown crosswalk signals, bicycle lanes, pedestrian islands, bus pullouts, curb cuts, sustainable construction materials and landscaping.

“We think this is a very good step toward enhancing the safety of all the roads,” said Lynch, who plans to testify at tomorrow’s meeting.