



# Bike Newton Candidate Questionnaire

## Questionnaire Intro:

Bicycling concerns are inextricably linked to a number of issues, including transportation and recreation generally, but also to concerns of climate, housing, land use, health and wellness, healthy aging, affordability, commuting, and mobility justice. This Candidate Questionnaire, developed by the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition and Bike Newton, is designed to explore how candidates for public office view and approach these interconnected issues.

**Candidate Name:** Jenna Miara

**Office Sought in Election:** School Committee, Ward 5

**Campaign website:** <https://www.jenna4newton.org>

## Campaign social media accounts:

- Facebook – [Jenna Miara For Newton School Committee](#)
- Instagram – [@jenna4newton](#)

## Tell Us Your Story

### 1. Which of the following modes of transportation do you use regularly?

- Car
- Green Line
- Commuter Rail
- Bus
- Bike

- Mobility Device
- Walking
- Ride Share
- Moped/Motorcycle
- Scooter
- Carpool

**2-12:** I appreciate the critical work Bike Newton does to advocate for more biking and to make biking in Newton safer and more accessible, as well as supporting other sustainable forms of transportation. I think it is important to ask candidates for their thoughts on these matters as they relate to the offices being sought. Given that Questions 2-11 mostly do not fit squarely within the role of School Committee member, I am providing a general statement that I hope is responsive to the important school-related issues raised in these questions:

It is essential that city leaders and advocates – including City Council, School Committee, the Mayor’s office, and groups like Bike Newton – work together to prioritize safe routes to school so that students and caregivers feel safe and comfortable walking and biking. I have seen first-hand how safety concerns can influence school transportation choices. Our house is on the corner of a busy street where elementary, middle, and high school buses stop. There is a cross walk with a lighted beacon. Despite these safety measures, I regularly observe drivers failing to stop for walkers and bikers in the crosswalk and even trying to pass the school bus while it is stopped to pick up or drop off students. There have been so many scary close calls that several families in our neighborhood opt to drive to school rather than have their children cross the street.

We must do a better job protecting school routes. I support the completion and implementation of Newton’s Walk, Roll, and Bike Plan and the adoption of “Vision Zero” They are both meaningful steps toward to ensuring safe and sustainable ways for students to get to school. As a member of School Committee, I commit to being an engaged stakeholder and ensuring that the needs of students and schools are given careful consideration as such city-wide initiatives move forward. I am supportive of cameras to detect drivers passing school buses, as permitted by the state law passed earlier this year, and other types of automated enforcement to reduce speeding and improve safety, if they can be used without infringing on our civil liberties and the data shows they are effective. Newton should only implement such measures with strong privacy protections and robust guardrails to protect against inequitable enforcement.

**12. The school trip by car in Newton contributes roughly thousands of trips per day to Newton’s streets. This contributes to substantial auto congestion around drop-off and pick-up times. Is this an optimal configuration for our schools, roads, and sidewalks. If not, what would you propose?**

It is important that we look for ways to reduce school trips by car, and encourage students and caregivers to walk and bike to school. This is not only better for the environment, it provides an opportunity to exercise and to build community with neighbors. It also gives students more

independence when they are able to safely travel to and from school without an adult. A key ingredient for more walking and biking is that students and caregivers feel confident that there are safe routes to school. As a School Committee member, I would be a strong partner in supporting efforts to lower risks, such as working with school communities and reviewing available data to identify where improvements are needed to cross-walks, sidewalks, signage to create more protection for bike riders, etc. I would also help to promote options like “walking school buses” and bike groups, and support continued bicycle safety programs for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders and exploring the development of additional programming for middle schools.

In addition, it is important to make school buses available to middle and high-school students, as more students using buses means fewer cars at school. The unfortunate elimination of the high-school late buses this school year as well as the lack of bus transportation to many off-campus sports practices means that more high school students are driving or being picked up in cars. Also, the recent and significant increases in bus fees likely means more students are opting for cars instead of buses. Finally, we should consider whether there are ways to reduce the number of students driving to high school, perhaps by increasing parking fees or incentivizing carpools.

**13. Safety around schools has been a top priority for city transportation planners. Many of our new schools have been designed to protect children walking and biking to school, and additional changes have been made around existing schools--particularly eliminating drop-off loops for parent/guardian cars. Do you support these changes? If so, do you have any proposals to extend/improve these changes??**

I support the changes that make it safer for biking and walking, as long as they are thoughtfully implemented so that there is no negative impact on accessibility for students or caregivers. As schools are being renovated and new schools are being built, School Committee must ensure that protecting children walking and biking to school is a top priority and integrated into design decisions. As discussed below, School Committee must also help to educate caregivers about the new protocols and why it's so important for the rules to be followed.

**14. A significant safety concern is drivers of private vehicles who violate school campus rules or city and state traffic ordinances. Our police department is unable to enforce because officers are often covering crossing guard locations (hiring remains an issue). How can you as a member of the School Committee help to alleviate this issue?**

First, School Committee should work with the City (which employs the crossing guards) and other stakeholders to identify the challenges to crossing guard hiring, and work to address those challenges so more police department resources can be directed toward sorely needed traffic enforcement around schools, particularly during drop-off and pick-up. Second, School Committee should partner with school leaders to clearly and regularly communicate with caregivers about the rules and expectations, and to spread the message that there is zero tolerance for unsafe driving near schools. As a good example of this, last year the principals of Brown and Oak Hill collaborated with the Newton Police Department on a short video reviewing

the driving safety rules around those schools and asking caregivers to model the important value of respecting the greater good for the safety of all. Importantly, NPD were then present at the schools to educate drivers, and if necessary, issue citations.