



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: Jim Murphy

Office Sought in Election: School Committee, Ward 8

Campaign website: <http://www.jim4newton.org>

Campaign social media accounts: N/A

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. Do you think Newton has sufficient safe cycling options in our city? If not, what do you see as some of the biggest challenges related to safe bicycling in Newton?

I had to give up cycling years ago, so I may not be entirely up to date. What's more, transportation policy on this level of specificity is new to me. For all of these questions, I'll give you the best answer I can, with the caveat that this is an area I need to learn.

With respect to the question itself, my impression is that safe cycling options are uneven in Newton, and it seems to me that one of the challenges is connecting existing bike options and providing smooth transitions between them. I'd like to know that it's possible to bike from one end of Newton to the other, safely.

3. What specific actions will you take to address these challenges?

This isn't something the School Committee would likely take up directly, but to the extent that I could advocate for safe bike routes to our schools, I would want to see safe cycling routes to and from schools, the elementary schools in particular. This is not a specific action, but once again, I'm new to cycling issues.

4. Do you support the completion and implementation of Newton's Walk, Roll and Bike Network Plan? If so, how will you work to support the completion of this plan??

At first glance the plan seems to have priorities straight. Newton is big, but it should be possible to at least connect hubs such as T stations and neighborhood schools. I can't say how I'd support the plan overall, but I do believe that a School Committee needs to think on a larger scale than simply managing the school budget.

5. If you could choose where to place protected bike lanes or separate trails, what would be your top priority locations?

It seems to me that some of the east/west roads have more protection than the north/south ones, so I guess I'd like to see some attention paid to having a convenient grid of protected lanes or trails.

6. Bicycle infrastructure and safety improvements cannot be implemented without adequate funding. Would you support an annual allocation from the City of Newton budget of at least \$1 million per year dedicated towards implementation of the Walk, Roll, and Bicycle Network Plan?

I can't predict Newton's budget realities, but as a School Committee member I think I would prioritize NPS' needs over anything else - that goes with the job. At the same time, I believe public schools are at the heart of building community, so to the extent that transportation policy can enhance that role, I would certainly support a predictable revenue stream.

7. Emissions: Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Massachusetts (40%). At the same time, congestion rates have quickly returned to pre-pandemic highs. Do you see the issues of climate and transportation as connected, and if so how would you work to align them?

How do you see them as not connected? Only the climate-deniers would revel in their willful blindness to the climate crisis and the role of auto emissions in it. My School Committee version of alignment would suggest looking at pickups and drop-offs, and how we can reduce idling during those times.

8. Resiliency: Infrastructure in Massachusetts needs to be built to withstand our climate future — our bridges and roads, as well as bus and transit service, are crucial in the event of climate emergencies and in meeting long term climate goals. What specific actions will your office take to influence local and state agencies to improve our climate resiliency and meet our climate goals?

I'm not aware of how School Committee policy could address this. I certainly think NPS needs to build and renovate in ways that are climate resilient and reduce emissions, but I'd have to be further educated as to how school policies could contribute to the city's overall climate resiliency.

9. Access to Health and Wellness: Walking and biking improve mental and physical health; however many recreational destinations are out of reach for people with disabilities, or for people without a personal automobile. How will you work to provide access to recreation for all people?

My initial thought is that we should consider providing transportation to these destinations. Newton already offers some transportation, and if that's not enough to fully serve seniors' needs, it deserves a second look.

10. "Vision Zero" is a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all. Do you believe that Newton should adopt Vision Zero?

- Strongly Support
- Somewhat Support
- Neither Support nor Oppose
- Somewhat Oppose
- Strongly Oppose

Explanation: I think the goal is incredible, but to the extent that Newton can't do away with bad choice-making, it would be hard to imagine achieving it.

11. Automated Enforcement (i.e., speed cameras and red-light cameras) is one key strategy that has been proven to effectively reduce speeding, improve safety, and remove racial bias in traffic enforcement in other states. Would you support automated enforcement legislation that allows Newton to opt-in to a speed or red-light camera program?

- Strongly Support
- Somewhat Support
- Neither Support nor Oppose
- Somewhat Oppose
- Strongly Oppose

Explanation:

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?

I've actually seen this because I've been doing morning standouts at the schools – I'm on the second go-round of all of them – and can see it's a problem. I don't have a ready solution, but law enforcement, bus usage, and biking/walking routes are among the considerations. This is where bottom-up solutions are usually much better than top-down ones, and I think engaging the parents in particular could uncover creative solutions.

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 goals, but my impression is that the results vary. Solutions, to my mind need to start by engaging the parents, all of whom share the priority of safety. That's a good start, and if the shared goal of keeping children safe is put to them, I think they can come up with school-specific solutions.

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?

I'm seeing this on a daily basis, and there are two ways to address it: increased enforcement, and a thoughtful look at how the configuration of parking and drop-off spots can influence the behavior of people dropping off students to schools. I have to assume there are research models for this – there have to be – so the first step is to understand that different schools will have different needs carry that understanding into serious research of each school's traffic patterns. Then, parents can be engaged to develop solutions.