



# 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: Julie Irish**

**Office Sought in Election: City Councilor, Ward 5 (Ward Councilor)**

**Campaign website: [irish4newton.org](http://irish4newton.org)**

**Campaign social media accounts: Instagram [@irish4newton](https://www.instagram.com/irish4newton)**

## 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?**

*Newton does not yet have enough safe cycling options. The safest cycling options are off-road bike trails and paths, where novice and recreational cyclists likely feel most comfortable. In Newton, the options are limited: aside from the one-mile Upper Falls Greenway and a small section of the Charles River Bike Path, there are no other dedicated trails in Newton.*

*As a result, most cyclists - whether commuting, biking to school, or riding for recreation are left to navigate our roadways. These streets are often narrow, carry heavy traffic, and lack consistent bike lanes or signage. These conditions can be a deterrent to those who may be interested in becoming a cyclist.*

*While I'm not a frequent cyclist myself, my husband bikes daily to office in downtown Boston and for exercise. He and many other local riders often leave very early in the morning, when traffic is lighter, because it simply feels safer. The real challenge, however, is not just infrastructure but driver behavior. With far fewer bikes on the road than cars, many drivers still seem unsure about how to share the road or respond when they encounter a cyclist. Work needs to be done educating the public about bike safety and what it means to "share the road"*

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

*To make Newton more bike-friendly, we can improve signage and education so drivers understand how to coexist safely with cyclists and create safer routes to schools so families can feel confident letting their children bike. With clear timelines, funding, and a commitment to maintaining infrastructure year-round, we can move beyond treating cycling as a rarity and instead make it a more reliable and safe option for those who choose to bike.*

*I would also like to see careful consideration of bike lane placement – that is installing bike lines in safe zones, not on curves or locations with limited site lines or with a high number of curb cuts. For example, on Needham Street, the sheer number of curb cuts makes it a stressful and risky road for cyclists in Newton as they will constantly encounter vehicles making turns into oncoming traffic. Before any new bike lane is installed it should be "tested" by an experienced cyclist who can anticipate safety concerns, as well a less-experienced cyclist who can provide feedback as to what would make them feel more confident on the road.*

### **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??**

*Newton's Walk, Roll, and Bike Network Plan is an impressive document, with a clear focus on safety, connectivity, and accessibility for residents of all ages and abilities. It provides a thorough picture of current conditions and reflects extensive public engagement, with hundreds*

*of comments submitted. (It would be good to know how many individual people responded, as that would help us understand how representative the feedback is.)*

*The plan highlights a number of priority projects, and there is much to support. I would back both the plan and its implementation, especially if it included cost estimates and a clear timeline with key milestones or phases. To strengthen it further, I believe measurable objectives and a public monitoring system should be added as this would make it easier for residents to see progress and hold the City accountable.*

*Lastly, because we live in New England, the plan should also address the reality of winter. Protected bike lanes only work if they are safe year-round, which means planning for snow clearing, de-icing, and the staffing and equipment needed to maintain them.*

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

*This is a frequent conversation in our household, and we often talk about how priorities for protected bike lanes may differ depending on the type of rider. For commuters, a protected lane along Walnut Street would be a high priority, since it could serve as a direct path across the City and a feasible connection to the Charles River Path - even though it has many intersections to navigate. Chestnut Street would also be ideal, but its width makes it unrealistic at this point. A protected lane along Route 9 could also be transformative, providing a direct route to the Longwood Medical and Fenway areas.*

*At the same time, recreational cyclists and students may have different needs, such as safer routes to schools and village centers. That's why I believe Newton should take a data-driven approach - mapping where cyclists are already riding most often (capturing days and times) and prioritizing those roads for protection. That way, we invest first where bike infrastructure will have the greatest impact.*

**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?**

*The City of Newton is under real budget pressure, and there are many competing needs we have to weigh carefully. I support the goals of the Walk, Roll & Bicycle Network Plan, but I think any annual funding commitment should be tied to a clear set of costs, priorities, and measurable outcomes. Without that level of detail, it's hard to justify setting aside a fixed \$1 million every year. What I would strongly support is going after state, federal, or private funding to help move these projects forward, with the City matching or contributing in a way that keeps the balance between fiscal responsibility and public safety.*

**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?**

*Yes, climate and transportation are absolutely connected - you really can't talk about one without the other. Here in Massachusetts, transportation accounts for about 40% of our greenhouse gas emissions, so the way we get around makes a big difference in meeting our climate goals. I'd like to focus on making it easier and more appealing for people to choose low-emission options. That means teaming up with our State Representatives to push for more reliable MBTA service and helping accelerate the shift to electric vehicles by adding more public charging stations here in Newton and across the state.*

*We also need to take a close look at congestion and what we can do about it - from improving transit efficiency to encouraging carpooling instead of everyone driving separately - either in their private vehicle or while using a rideshare service. We need to focus on making low emission options easy, reliable, and not cost prohibitive for our residents.*

**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?**

*Building climate resiliency means working together across city and state agencies, neighboring communities, and regional groups. As a City Councilor I will encourage working closely with state agencies like MassDOT and the MBTA, and regional partners such as the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). We won't work in isolation but will link our efforts with other municipalities in Metro West and across Massachusetts to share resources and align priorities.*

*Following Newton's Climate Action Plan, which emphasizes sustainable transportation, emissions reduction, and infrastructure resilience, we'll focus on strengthening our roads, bridges, and transit systems. I'll also propose a resiliency task force that includes local officials, state reps, and agency leaders to keep communication open, track progress, and coordinate funding. This collaborative approach will help Newton and the region build a stronger, more climate-ready transportation network.*

**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?**

*Access to parks and recreation for all residents means working closely with people who know these issues best. I'll work closely with local groups like Newton's Disability Advisory Group and organizations such as Newton Athletes Unlimited, which offers sports and recreational programs for people with disabilities. By coordinating with these groups and others in the region, we can better understand current efforts and identify gaps in access to parks and green spaces. I'll also collaborate with Newton's Commission on Disability and community advocates, including Newton's ADA Coordinator, Jini Fairley, to understand what's already being done and where the gaps exist.*

*We will review all of Newton's parks and open spaces to ensure ADA compliance, identifying barriers and prioritizing improvements. I also want to create a volunteer program to help people with disabilities or who lack personal transportation get to and enjoy our green spaces. By building on existing efforts and working together, we can make sure everyone in our community can benefit from Newton's many outdoor recreation destinations and the health it brings.*

**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 strongly support adopting the Vision Zero strategy, as it aligns with the City's broader goals around safety and public health. For it to succeed, there must be clear communication with the public about what Vision Zero is - and what it is not - along with full transparency on how and where it will be implemented, as well as the costs involved.*

**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:***

*I support the use of automated enforcement, but only in limited circumstances. It should be applied at intersections with a clear history of frequent crashes, where safety risks are highest. To ensure fairness and transparency, the City should communicate openly with the public—explaining where cameras are installed, why those locations were chosen, and whether the data show improved safety. Just as important, if the cameras fail to achieve meaningful results, they should be removed.*

**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 think the City should take the time to hear directly from parents and students about why they choose the transportation options they do. For some families, driving may feel like the only practical choice—whether because buses are unreliable, fees are a burden, or schedules just don't line up. Others may have safety concerns, whether it's about letting a child walk or bike alone, or a child feeling anxious on the bus. And for some kids, the issue might be as simple as wanting a friend to walk or bike with.*

*If we better understand these reasons, we can design solutions that really meet families where they are. That could mean safer walking routes, "walking school bus" programs where kids travel together, better bus service, or even small incentives to make walking and biking more appealing. The important thing is to match any policy change with practical supports that make it workable for families day to day.*

**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 City's efforts to make school areas safer for children walking and biking. Designing new schools with safety in mind is the right approach, and I would like to learn more about the details of these designs. I also understand that removing drop-off loops is intended to reduce congestion and encourage more walking and biking, but before expanding this policy, I believe we need more input from families. Hearing directly from parents and students will help us understand the real challenges they face (See answer above). It may also be useful to look at school communities outside of Newton to see what best practices might apply here.*

**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?**

*N/A. Not running for School Committee.*