



# 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: Sean Roche**

**Office Sought in Election: City Councilor at-large from ward 6**

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

**Campaign social media accounts: Instagram andm**

## 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

Mine has been a journey using nearly every mode on the list. For over 10 years, I biked to and from either Boston or Cambridge every day (absolutely every day). During the summers, I have biked with my children to and from camp on the way to and from work. I've biked to and from Marlborough. I have biked for exercise with the Crack of Dawn riders. I have biked recreationally, especially with the kids. And, I've used and continue to use my bike extensively for local trips. I've been a Green Line commuter. My wife was a long-time commuter rail commuter. I've (sadly) commuted to and from Watertown by car, dropping my kids at school in Cambridge. While in Newton, I've owned a sports car and a motorcycle.

Since COVID, I have worked from home, though recently I started a job in Newton Centre that I walk to. I walk as much as I can to shop and otherwise visit Newton Centre and Four Corners. For local trips that I don't bike or walk to, I generally drive our electric VW id.4. For longer trips and for when my wife and I both need cars, we use a gas crossover.

**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?**

No, Newton does not have sufficient safe-cycling options.

Sadly, the *biggest* challenge related to safe bicycling is the available right-of-way on the most desirable routes. For instance, Parker St. – near me and an important route I'm familiar with – lacks a wide enough right-of-way for grade-separated bike paths.

Where there is sufficient right-of-way, the challenges:

- Parking
- Lack of resources to create adequately protected bike lanes
- Political will to create adequately protected bike lanes

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

Unfortunately, without takings there isn't much to do about the right-of-way challenge.

The other three challenges are a matter of political will (especially #3).

What I would do is focus on those opportunities that are likeliest to result in more bicycle trips and then understand what the specific obstacles are to creating bike facilities. Then, as I have done in the past, work with stakeholders to overcome those obstacles. Do we really need on-street parking? Are there alternatives? What funding is required? Where can we get funding. &c.

**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??**

Yes.

So much opportunity!

For starters, I believe in the value of incrementalism. We need to seize whatever opportunities we can, when they become available. The history of bike lanes in Newton demonstrates that a bit here and bit there can ultimately lead to a larger connection.

I created the blueprint for Andreae Downs's work in the City Council to reduce speed limits by eliminating regulatory speed limits. (The statutory speed limit applies to any road that is not covered by a regulatory speed limit. When the statutory speed limit was 35, most of the regulatory limits were lower. When the statutory speed limit was lowered to 25, many of the regulatory limits were higher. For instance, there is a section of Brandeis Rd. near Newton South where the regulatory limit was *lowered* to 30 when the statutory limit was 35. But, now it's higher. It can and should be lowered. And, it's an easy process.) I will continue the work that Andreae has done. Speed limits are not a magic bullet, but they are a step in the right direction. At a minimum, no local or collector street should have a regulatory speed limit, other than a 20 MPH designated safety zone, where appropriate.

One of the biggest improvements for pedestrian safety in the city – and the perception of safety, which can encourage more walking – is the installation of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB) at crosswalks across the city. I will push to continue installing them at a rate of 3 per ward (24 for the city) per year. In fact, the installation of RRFBs has highlighted more crosswalks where they would make a difference, like the crosswalks across Dedham St. that connect to the Newton Highlands playground.

The WRBNP (does anyone refer to it by its initials?) talks of conflicts with turning cars at intersections as a danger. Recent data undermines the case initially made for right turns on red. If they are not providing environmental benefits and they create a safety issue or discourage people from biking, we should rethink where we should allow right turns on red.

On the issue of bike lanes ending abruptly, the solution is to look at the lanes that would be used more if the lanes didn't end and figure out how to continue them. Also, there is a design issue. The end of a bike lane is indicated by a solid line angling to the curb, which is not consistent with how cyclists operate or motorists expect cyclist to operate. I will advocate for a design where the inside (towards the middle of the road) line becomes dashed and then ends, with a sharrow or similar right beyond to indicate the transition from bike lane to the expectation of sharing the road.

I have one beef with the WRBNP and that is the priority of biking between village centers. Until more people can comfortably and safely bike from their homes to village centers, they will not be able to bike between village centers. The key problem to solve is how can we get cyclists

and walkers flowing into the village centers, schools, houses of worship, parks and open spaces, &c.

One issue not raised in the WRBNP is the car-centricity of our roadway design. There are too many intersections with wide turning radii. Centre St. and Clark Rd. is a great example. Wide turning radii invite cars to take turns at higher speeds, which results in higher speeds on our roads. And, wide turning radii create very wide crossings.

Conceptually, the WRBNP is great. The biggest challenge is going to be funding. I will advocate for funding the projects necessary to

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

My first priority would be to create safe bicycling options for students (or students with the parents) who wish to bicycle to and from school. Car travel to and from schools is one of the biggest sources of traffic in Newton. And, biking (and walking) to school is great for students physically, emotionally, and developmentally.

I think the Washington St. bike lanes are fabulous in that regard, connecting up to decent bike facilities on Lowell and feeding into Newton North High School. I think there is a great opportunity to create protected facilities on Wheeler Rd., feeding into the Brown and Oak Hill middle schools and Newton South.

I think that the streets in front of the elementary schools should be car-free zones at drop-off and pick-up times.

**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 fully support the Walk, Roll, and Bicycle Network Plan. I've lobbied for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure for nearly 20 years, with several significant improvements for which I can claim modest to substantial responsibility.

That said, I do not think I can commit to a \$1 million a year allocation. The city's financial challenges are significant and I'm not ready to identify tradeoffs that would fund a dedicated allocation.

Our roads are in horrible condition and are extremely expensive to repair and maintain due to years of neglect. I would support a capital override for an accelerated road-repair project. My support would be contingent on investment in bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements.

**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.

I think that, in Newton, the folks who are climate focused have a pretty good understanding of the need to reduce emissions by reducing vehicle miles travelled. If we think of Newton activists grouped as climate-focused, transportation-focused, or housing-/land-use-focused, I think there is a disconnect about the important role that housing plays in reducing emissions. I am already working with folks who see the tight interrelationship among the three focuses to get better alignment, and will continue to do so.

**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?**

With regard to resilience and infrastructure, I think that the most profound impact will come from the construction of fully accessible, two-platform stations at the three commuter rail stations. Accessible two-platform stations will also transform the villages and neighborhoods around the three stations. I will continue the great work done by various elected officials and transit advocates and make the case for the funds to get the stations built.

Bus service is critical, especially for the less well-to-do in Newton, who rely on consistent, reliable bus service to get to jobs and other critical destinations. We need to advocate for bus-route continuity to meet our climate and climate justice goals.

**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?**

I don't have a great answer for this. It's a shame that Newton's recreational destinations are not more spread about the city, but our development patterns have privatized open space.

I think my first commitment here is to consider the need for recreation and escape from the heat for people from climate justice zones in the city.

**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 generally support Vision Zero, but only if there is a commitment by the city to implement the changes required to actually achieve Vision Zero. Helsinki, with a population of 648, did reduce traffic-related fatalities to zero, through street redesign and lowering speed limits to about 20 MPH. If we can get a commitment to safer street design, lower speed limits, and enforcement, I would support Vision Zero. But, I would not support Vision Zero as simply a motto to adopt.

**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 strongly support automated enforcement and have lobbied on behalf of legislation that would allow Newton to install speed cameras.

**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?**

The historical trend for walking and bicycling to school in Newton has been, distressingly, going in the wrong direction for decades. I think blue zones are a tacit acknowledgement that it is good for students and the school community for parents and caregivers to drive students right up to the school property.

I have long advocated for pilots of car-free zones around schools during drop-off and pick-up periods. This would be an effective way to redistribute congestion. Probably more importantly, this would create a better physical, emotional, and developmental atmosphere for students.

**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??**

See the answer to #12.

**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 have witnessed exactly the kinds of behaviors described above at numerous Newton schools.

I think that this problem requires a multi-factor approach. The first step would be to remove traffic from school property and nearby streets, by implementing car-free zones, see above. Beyond that, we need to fund buses so that bus fees do not act as an incentive for parents to drive.