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Walk/RollLV Event Coming June 12

With music blaring and a drone flying overhead, people from across the region will dance in traffic at one of the region's busiest intersections in a faux protest that will almost certainly turn heads, raise eyebrows and cause a little controlled chaos.

But that's exactly what the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and the City of Bethlehem will be going for as they try to create a safer, more connected transportation system for walkers, rollers and drivers.

On June 12, the city, the commission and more than 50 partners from across the region will be staging a sort of active transportation block party at Broad and New streets in Bethlehem. The event will include a disc jockey, flash mob dancing in traffic and lots of education designed to promote the creation of the region's first ever master plan for pedestrians, bikers and people with disabilities. Walk/RollLV, scheduled to be released by LVPC later this year, is to be a blueprint for filling the gaps in the roads, trail and transit system to provide a seamless network connecting every community in the region.

The mission for the event is to have little fun, while raising excitement and support for a plan designed to change the daily routine for a region that's unmistakably car-centric.

"When you're trying to bring about culture change, sometimes you have to be a little disruptive," said Becky Bradley, Executive Director of the LVPC. "We're trying to create a movement. This is going to be a lot of fun, and hopefully, it will raise enough awareness to gain some momentum."

The Walk/RollLV event, from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., June 12 will essentially turn the busy intersection in Bethlehem Downtown Historic District into a rush hour block party to include bicycle rides around the downtown, a walking loop for pedestrians, food, music and people carrying signs such as "share the road" and "move together." The highlight will be a periodic flash mob dancing through the crosswalks – all supervised by the Bethlehem Police Department and Bethlehem Health Bureau, of course.

That intersection was chosen because, like many busy urban intersections in the region, it has a high crash rate and it not especially welcoming to pedestrians, bicyclists and wheel chair users. Bethlehem officials embraced a chance to raise awareness on an issue it has been trying to improve safety with measures that include bike share lanes, crosswalk enforcements stings, traffic-calming road designs and multiple connections to the city's extensive trail network.

"We figured if we were going to do this we might as well do it big and fun and get everyone involved," said Sherri Penchishen, Bethlehem Health Bureau's Director of Injury and Disease

Prevention. “For years, Bethlehem has been trying to spread this message that everyone can co-exist on our roadways. It’s nice to be part of a wider plan for the region.”

The intersection was chosen not only for the opportunity to improve safety, but because it’s near neighborhoods where rates of obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure are high. The idea is to demonstrate that public health can be improved through transportation design that encourages people to walk and roll, rather than drive.

The event is aimed at encouraging residents to participate. The Coalition for Appropriate Transportation (CAT) will lead bikers on loops through the downtown, others can take part in a walk, while a dance instructor helps the daring learn a 15-second dance they can do through the intersection during periods of stopped traffic. The intersection will include a selfie station, a LANta bus open for tours inside and several information tables run by partners to include the City of Bethlehem, the LVPC, LANta, CAT, the D&L Trail, Community Bike Works, United Way and the Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living.

The Walk/RollLV plan will look to change habits with suggestions that include dedicated bike lanes, pedestrian safety improvements and ways to connect the region’s disjointed trail network. The plan is being drafted by the LVPC and Baltimore-based consultants Toole Design Group. It’s a change that will take years, but one that in the end affects more than just traffic flow.

“It’s about our health, our safety and our economy. It’s about quality of life, in general,” Bradley said. “Every major corporation wants that quality of life for its employees, and they’re not going to come to our area or stay without it. This is essential to the future of our region.”

Learn more or join the movement at <https://www.lvpc.org/walkrolllv.html>