

Lincroft group wants trucks off local roads

Posted by the [Asbury Park Press](#) on 12/7/06

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COASTAL MONMOUTH BUREAU

MIDDLETOWN — Members of a community group are lobbying officials of six towns to back their plan to get trucks off local roads and onto highways, including a stretch of the Garden State Parkway where trucks are now prohibited.

Members of the Lincroft Village Green Association are lobbying governing bodies in Red Bank, Eatontown, Tinton Falls, Colts Neck, Little Silver and Middletown to back their proposal. They suggest allowing trucks on the Parkway between exits 105 in Eatontown and 117 in Aberdeen and Keyport, building additional exits on Route 18 between that highway and the Parkway and another to allow traffic to use the back entrance of Brookdale Community College.

"It would allow substantial relief to local roads," association member Mary Ellen Hintz of Middletown told Red Bank Borough Council Tuesday night. "We have a terrible congestion problem and truck traffic."

The association plans to make the suggestions to the state Department of Transportation during a comment period on new truck regulations announced by the DOT on Nov. 17.

Those restrictions require large tractor-trailer trucks to use the "national and state network" of interstates, state highways and some county roads, but allows them to deviate to local roads to find food, fuel, rest, repairs or reach a terminal.

Hintz said that's not always the case.

"They're not supposed to go through residential streets. They take the path of least resistance," she said. "They need to be off local roads."

The group wants governing bodies in the six towns to pass resolutions backing their plan and submit them to the DOT before the 60-day public comment period closes on Feb. 18.

"The traffic in eastern Monmouth County is the worst," Hintz said.

DOT officials will review the comments and will implement those determined to be safe and consistent with constitutional provisions regulating truck traffic, said spokeswoman Erin Phalon in a prepared statement.

Compounding the problem are trucks traveling locally to reach the Marpal recycling facility and a landfill in Tinton Falls, said Carol Baker, association co-president.

"There are a lot of trucks going to Tinton Falls. This was evident when the Marpal expansion plans showed there are quite a few trucks coming here from other counties," Baker said.

The group wants to reduce traffic using Newman Springs and Middletown-Lincroft-Swimming River roads.

Their proposals include creating an exit from Route 18 at an extension of Laird Road, which would provide access to the rear entrance of Brookdale Community College to

reduce traffic through the neighborhood.

The plan also seeks to fill in missing links in the interchange between Route 18 and the Parkway, by building a connection between the Parkway north and Route 18. The group also wants an exit to and from the Parkway at Wayside Road.

Officials from the New Jersey Highway Authority said that the Parkway north of exit 105 isn't built for the big rigs.

Parkway bridges north of Eatontown don't have the proper clearances and some of the curves may be too tight for trucks, said Joe Orlando, highway authority spokesman.

"It is not a possibility for safety reasons, for the most part, clearances and the overall geometry of the road," Orlando said.

Baker said trucks are using local roads now, such as County Route 50 (Middletown-Lincroft/Swimming River roads), which are narrow and not on the state's list of truck access routes. A Monmouth County study done last January found that 61 trucks an hour were using Route 50; 22 trucks per hour used Sycamore Street and Homestead Avenue, and 12 trucks an hour used Route 537.

"It's clear that trucks are cutting through roads they're not supposed to be on because they can't get on the Parkway, and (parts of) Route 35 are not adequate for large trucks," Baker said.

She suggested that Parkway officials consider retrofitting the bridges to allow trucks to use the highway.

"They should look into it. Are the other roads really built for it?" she asked. "Route 35 in Red Bank isn't. A large car barely fits through (the Maple Avenue section) sometimes, and Route 34 has quite a bit of curves north of Matawan."

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