Dear Senator Beach and Members of the Senate Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

I’m writing to request your support of Senate Bill 609 (Complete Streets). In our community, Morgantown, like many around the state pedestrian safety has become a critical issue in recent years. Many West Virginians walk, bike, or ride transit as their primary source of transportation (20-30% of residents in Morgantown). From 2005-2011, according to police reports, there have been 144 pedestrian-vehicle accidents within Morgantown City limits– roughly 1 every other week. An astounding number! **Interestingly, only 20% of road miles in the City are state-maintained yet 66% of the accidents occurred on them.** Why? Many projects have been completed with little attention paid to the non-motorized users of the road, including those on bicycles, on foot, in wheelchairs, using canes, or pushing strollers.

Studies have shown that walkable areas (that is, “Complete Streets”) **benefit the local economy** by commanding higher home sales prices and retail rents per square foot and show increased sales in walk-up retail customers versus drive-up customers. Walkable, Complete Streets, areas also **save households money** on transportation costs (expected to be $3.95 per gallon by Memorial Day); provide an opportunity for **safe, healthy physical activity** (70% of state residents are overweight or obese and less than one-third meet national physical activity guidelines); and enable residents of all ages and abilities a measure of **independence**. Young parents, like my wife and me, demand a safe place to walk our children - not *on* the street, but *next to it on a sidewalk*. Remember your childhood, before being allowed to drive, what did you have? A bike, your feet and sidewalks! Now think of your retirement days - do you want to be *independent* or beholden to transportation services, friends, and family to drive you everywhere? Obviously, SB 609 is about much more than asphalt and concrete. It is about the viability of West Virginia to provide a good quality of life for its residents and retain young families, such as mine, that are fleeing the state daily because of a lack of support for the healthy life we hope to have for our children.

The question is this: should the State invest in its communities and residents by adopting a Complete Streets policy? Or should it continue the status quo, spending only 0.6% ($1.55 per capita) of federal money on pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure (4th lowest, nationally) and ask other agencies to foot the bill for obesity and physical inactivity related costs ($208 annually per taxpayer; 6th highest nationally) and injuries to its residents. Interestingly, a case study of infrastructure improvements in Baltimore, Maryland showed that for each $1 million spent creating on-street bike lanes, pedestrian projects, or roads, 14, 11, and 7 jobs were directly or indirectly created, respectively. Thus non-motorized projects provide a bigger bang for the buck in job creation! For these many reasons I ask the state invest in its residents and taxpayers, who have borne the burden of unwisely spent transportation dollars for far too long.

For the sake of the health and safety of all your constituents, please support SB 609. With SB 609 in place I am sure that poorly implemented projects such as the recent $1.2 million redesign of South University Avenue, cutting residents off from multiple business and recreation venues because of treacherous pedestrian conditions, will be the exception not the rule - costing much more in the long run in redesign costs. Let's no longer accept dangerous designs as the rule.

Thank you for your time and service, we appreciate your support of SB 609.

Christiaan