

Sustainability Hero



March 2024

Leigh Ann Von Hagen, AICP, PP

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Leigh Ann Von Hagen is a managing director and adjunct professor with the [Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center](#) and a founder of the [Planning Healthy Communities Initiative](#) at the [Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy](#) at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. She is a licensed professional planner and has worked in the transportation planning field for over 20 years with a focus on developing sustainable and equitable transportation and land use solutions for communities.

As a change agent for sustainability in New Jersey, Leigh Ann is a hero, addressing health and socio-economic disparities through the development of sustainable transportation and land use solutions. Leigh Ann was part of the core leadership group who launched [Sustainable Jersey](#) in 2009 and has continued to be an active contributor for 15 years. Leigh Ann was also instrumental in launching the statewide initiatives [Safe Routes to School](#), the [Mayors Wellness Campaign](#) and Shaping NJ.

Inspired early on by family camping and hiking trips, Leigh Ann developed an appreciation and passion for outdoor recreation and natural resources stewardship. "I have my parents to thank for instilling a love of conservation during many Park Ranger talks at National Parks," says Leigh Ann. As a skilled communicator and experienced planner, she is always on the short list to speak at events, run summits, review data and help develop innovative projects.

She specializes in initiatives that address pedestrian and bicycle safety, health, equity and access through research, training, education, community engagement and best practices in policy and design. "Am I often stretched too thin—yes," she said, "but it's rewarding to be a part of projects that make a difference and contribute to creating safe, vibrant and happy communities."

As a veteran bicycle and pedestrian planner, she is a leader in creating multi-disciplined approaches to environmental and policy change through community-based initiatives and partnership building. Leigh Ann said, "My goal is to help make the healthy choice the easy choice through changes to the built environment and by creating a culture of healthy, active living. Also, it's true that what does not get counted, doesn't count. My job is to count the walkers, the bicyclists and other often 'invisible' modes of transportation. I love a good walking or biking audit. It's important to see the landscape from a perspective that is different than from the inside of a car." Leigh Ann is pictured holding a broken tactile warning surface that she identified on a walking audit.



Leigh Ann manages the New Jersey Department of Transportation's (NJDOT's) Safe Routes to School Resource Center and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center, and helps oversee the statewide School Crossing Guard Training program. As part of these initiatives, Leigh Ann serves on Sustainable Jersey Task Forces and led the creation and review of many Sustainable Jersey actions including the action: [Anti-Idling Education & Enforcement Program](#). For Sustainable Jersey for Schools, Leigh Ann and her team authored the actions: [Safe Routes to School District Policy](#); [Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and Promotion Initiatives](#); and [School Travel Plan for Walking and Biking](#). Leigh Ann was also involved on the Sustainable Jersey Health Gold Task Force and is an active participant in the Sustainable Jersey Certification Standards Committee.

New Jersey Safe Routes to School: The [Safe Routes to School Resource Center](#) works with regional Safe Routes to School coordinators and assists professionals, non-profits, school and municipal officials, and the public in improving conditions for people to walk, bike or travel by other low speed wheeled devices.

The Safe Routes to School Recognition Program, and the Sustainable Jersey and [Sustainable Jersey for Schools](#) certification programs all reward actions that help make communities more walkable and bikeable. Municipalities and schools that meet the requirements for the Safe Routes Recognition Program can also earn points toward Sustainable Jersey and Sustainable Jersey for Schools certification. To understand how the programs and actions relate, visit the Safe Routes to School webpage: [Sustainable Jersey Actions](#).

Leigh Ann explained, "Towns and schools want to do the right thing but need an easy way to get there. They usually don't have experts on staff who can advise about pedestrian and bicycle safety measures. The Sustainable Jersey actions are created by industry and academic experts so the towns and schools can have confidence that they are following the current best practice when they complete an action." She added, "Safe Routes to Schools and Sustainable Jersey have grown together in a symbiotic relationship. Working with the eight [Transportation Management Associations](#) (TMAs) at the local level helps to promote the information. It's the perfect trifecta with NJDOT, Safe Routes to School Resource Center and the TMAs working together."



The [New Jersey Safe Routes to School YouTube channel](#) has 81 educational videos. Leigh Ann's family is often enlisted to help, as they are pictured biking in the [New Jersey Safe Passing Law](#) materials and she and her son are in the video, [Bicycling is Empowering!](#) The [Crossing Guard Training Program video](#) currently has 83K views and the Safe Routes to Schools extensive [NJ Crossing Guard Training & Resources Program](#) resources are used for trainings across the country.

New Jersey Safe Routes Academy: Held annually, the [NJ Safe Routes Academy](#) is designed to help enable and encourage safe routes to parks, trails, transit, shops, restaurants, employment, schools and recreation. The Academy, sponsored by NJDOT, features hands-on interactive sessions to help participants make their communities more walk and bike-friendly for all users. The next Safe Routes Academy will be held on Saturday, May 18, 2024, as part of the [NJ Bike and Walk Coalition's NJ Bike and Walk Summit](#).

Complete and Green Streets for All: Leigh Ann is currently the co-chair of the Sustainable Jersey Land Use and Transportation Task Force. She led the effort to revise the Complete Streets Policy Action into the [Complete and Green Streets for All Policy](#), by adding equity, stormwater management, health and safety guidance and more.

Leigh Ann developed a new action to encourage municipalities to install temporary demonstration and/or permanent infrastructure improvements that benefit pedestrians and bicyclists: [Bicycle and /or Pedestrian Improvement Projects](#). She helped create the actions: [Bicycle & Pedestrian Audits](#) and [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#).

Through the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's (NJTPA) [Complete Streets Technical Assistance Program](#), Sustainable Jersey is collaborating with Leigh Ann and the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University to provide free technical assistance to municipalities to advance Complete Streets initiatives. Since 2018, 24 municipalities in the NJTPA region have benefited from the program. The completed project reports are located [here](#).

New Jersey Complete Streets Summit: Since 2021, Leigh Ann and her team have coordinated biennial [New Jersey Complete Streets Summits](#) funded by the NJDOT. During each summit, a wealth of information is provided in sessions centering on municipalities adopting Complete Streets policies, lessons learned from implementation and what is in store for the Complete Streets movement. Leigh Ann said, "We need to acknowledge that even one death on our roads is unacceptable, and we need to work together to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries on our roads. Complete Streets polices and implementation of projects that create a more equitable transportation system for all road users of all ages and abilities are key components to reaching that life-saving goal."

Urban Planning Studio Instructor: For over 12 years, Leigh Ann has been an adjunct professor at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. She teaches classes for students concentrating in the fields of planning, policy and public health through urban planning studios. Students undertake a community-based project and produce client-based products, which helps students apply classroom skills in the real world.



Leigh Ann enjoys teaching and working with students. "I appreciate working on projects that are not funded through regular sources but are worth doing like placemaking and trail development," she said. For example, Leigh Ann served as one of the instructors for the Transit Oriented Development and pedestrian/bicycle access studio course that created the report: [Reimagining Bloomfield Township Streets](#). The report was done in conjunction with the [New Jersey American Planning Association's Community Planning Assistance Program](#) and public officials from the Township of Bloomfield.

For the 2022 urban planning studio, Leigh Ann was one of three professors who led 12 graduate students from the Bloustein School as they completed the [Asbury Park Bike and Scooter Lane Demonstration Project](#), which received the 2022 New Jersey Planning Excellence Outstanding Student Project Award. The students worked with the City of Asbury Park's Transportation Division to explore micromobility and active transportation options and infrastructure. Students researched pedestrian, bicyclist and e-scooter user safety including current best practices and ways to make it easier, safer and more attractive for people to choose sustainable transportation options. As part of the research, the team proposed several bicycle and scooter lane design options to the city council. One of these proposed lanes was set up as a temporary pop-up bike and scooter lane, which the students surveyed and analyzed to inform the

recommendations for bike and scooter rider safety. As a final product, the students created an [ArcGIS StoryMap](#) to showcase the graphical elements of the project including photos, videos, maps and a walk through the study area showing the plans for bike lane implementation. The results from the studio furthered analysis and produced several journal articles as part of a [Rutgers micromobility research collaborative](#) funded by the National Science Foundation.

Health Impact Assessment and Health in All Policies: Leigh Ann is a member of the Sustainable Jersey Health Gold Task Force. In July 2021, after a two-year effort of collaborative research, strategy development and program implementation, the Health Gold Task Force developed the [Gold Star Standard in Health](#). Municipalities can aspire to build a culture of health and advance health equity with these standards and levels of performance. To be eligible to apply for the Gold Star Standard in Health, a municipality must first complete the foundational action, [Local Health Assessment and Action Plan](#). This action helps a town assess and prioritize addressing the health needs and contributing conditions existing within the community. A municipality must then submit, and be approved to receive points for, actions available in Health Gold-designated categories that will address the health issues uncovered in the assessment.

Leigh Ann and her Bloustein planning and public health colleagues Karen Lowrie, Ph.D., Anita Franzione, Ph.D. and Marci Berger, Ph.D., led the training Health in All Policies (HiAP). Attending the training is part of the requirements for completing the Sustainable Jersey action: [Integrating Health Into Municipal Decision Making](#). The trainings, offered through Rutgers Office of Continuing Education, often fill quickly. The course focuses on how to bring community health and equity into planning processes and decision-making, emerging tools to build capacity for health advancement in planning and how to support health in all policies; see [HiAP training](#).

Education and Career: Before coming to the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, Leigh Ann worked for several private engineering firms on a variety of comprehensive planning projects and as a risk communication researcher for the Rutgers University Center for Environmental Communication and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. She received a BS in Human Ecology from Rutgers University, and she is a League of American Bicyclists Certified Instructor for Bicycle Education. Leigh Ann's impressive publications are available on Google Scholar: [Leigh Ann Von Hagen](#).



More about Leigh Ann: Leigh Ann considers herself a Jersey girl with southern roots. She grew up in New Jersey but spent every summer with family in Tennessee. She has been married for 30 years to her husband Rick. They bought an older fixer upper and spend weekends restoring it to its 1920s original self. Historic preservation is important to both. Leigh Ann helped a neighborhood church get listed on state and national historic registers. They have two children and added a son-in-law last summer. After many years of leading many walk- and bike-to-school events, scout meetings and coaching a LEGO robotics team, she continues to be involved in her community as a trustee on the town's business improvement district.