

Beach Road SUP in Tisbury – Status Update – January 28, 2015

Background: In collaboration with the Martha's Vineyard Joint Transportation Committee, the Martha's Vineyard Commission had John Diaz of Greenman Pederson Inc. prepare a plan in 2009 examining how to fill in a number of gaps in the Island's Shared Use Path (SUP) network. (While commonly called "bike paths" on Martha's Vineyard, SUPs are also used by pedestrians, skaters, wheelchair users, joggers, and other non-motorized users.) Though the SUP network is used to various degrees by bicyclists of all skill levels, the SUPs provide the only viable bicycling option to reach many key destinations for the considerable portion of residents and visitors who aren't comfortable riding in the roadway of busy, congested roads, and would only ride their bikes in a physically separated off-road path.

The aim of the 2009 plan is to complete a basic SUP network that allows people to travel among the three down-Island towns (as well as to the State Forest) without having to ride in the roadway of busy streets. This is seen as an incentive to encourage more potential bicyclists to use their bikes, and as an amenity that would be an asset for tourism.

The study outlined a long-term plan to complete the missing SUP gaps (in a few places using low-speed, low-volume, residential streets). The proposed SUP network is designed to bring bicyclists within walking distance of town centers – where bike racks and other support services can be provided – and then circumnavigate the densest parts of the downtowns. The plan to complete the continuous, Down-Island SUP network was incorporated in the Regional Transportation Plan and the Island Plan.

In moving to implement the plan, the JTC identified the Vineyard Haven – Oak Bluffs corridor along Beach Road (which would also connect to Edgartown) as the highest priority, and a lot of effort has gone into moving this forward.

- MassDOT agreed to incorporate an SUP on the drawbridge project and to extend it to link to Tisbury Town Landing, connecting to the existing SUP that goes to Wind's Up.
- As part of a DRI approval, the Tisbury Market Place committed to allow for an off-road SUP route along Lagoon Pond.
- Tisbury Town Meeting twice approved the Town pursuing easements for the off-road SUP between the Tisbury Market Place and Lagoon Pond Road, and the bicycle and pedestrian subcommittee of the JTC has spoken with landowners about SUP links in this area.
- The Town of Tisbury approved the Department of Public Works installing SUPs in Veterans Park, the future hub of the two SUPs serving Vineyard Haven.
- The Department of Public Works also discussed with the US Postal Service about possible easements to widen the existing Veterans Park access to Beach Street across from Cromwell Lane (possibly now moot with the removal of the adjacent fire station).
- The 2013-14 planning of the Water Street Parking Lot included an extension of the SUP from Veterans Park to the ferry terminal, using Cromwell Lane.

With advancement of the SUP between Vineyard Haven and Oak Bluffs at the drawbridge occurring on several fronts, the JTC put the extension of the Beach Road SUP in Tisbury between Winds Up and Tisbury Market Place as a priority item on the Transportation Improvement Program. The advancement of the SUP network was the only reason it was programmed in the TIP

to use local funding for a state road. MassDOT has since indicated that it would add \$1 million of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Funding, based on the project's intent to improve bicycling and pedestrian facilities.

Building upon the efforts in Tisbury to extend the SUP to the drawbridge, in 2014 the Town of Oak Bluffs submitted a Project Notification Form to MassDOT to create a SUP from the drawbridge to County Road, the first phase to develop a SUP from the drawbridge to downtown Oak Bluffs. (Oak Bluffs also began examining options to extend the Beach Road SUP from Edgartown.)

Project Update: When MassDOT started working on the Tisbury Beach Road project, they said that once they were working on Beach Road, they might as well make needed improvements – mainly to the sidewalks – in the section between the Tisbury Market Place and Five Corners, noting that there was no reason the design would have to be the same for both segments of the project. (There was never a proposal by the JTC or MVC to extend the SUP from the Tisbury Market Place to Five Corners; this possibility has been consistently dismissed as not feasible given the need for sidewalks on both sides of that stretch of Beach Road to serve the high pedestrian activity there.)

At a joint meeting of the Tisbury Board of Selectmen and Planning Board held on October 29, 2014, the boards agreed to ask MassDOT to pursue a design concept in conformance with the overall SUP plan, namely with the SUP between Winds Up and the Tisbury Market Place and widened shoulders to accommodate bicycles between the Tisbury Market Place and Five Corners.

However, on December 17, 2014, after a JTC meeting, the MVC was told that the Tisbury Board of Selectmen had apparently subsequently asked MassDOT to work on a design plan that does not include the Shared Use Path, but only includes widened shoulders.

Some missing segments of the planned SUP network have several optional routes. However, along the Beach Road corridor between Winds Up and the Tisbury Market Place, there is only one possible location, so if a SUP is not included in the Tisbury Beach Road project, there will continue to be a substantial gap in the SUP network between the Island's two port towns and major destinations just 2.5 miles apart.

For the many potential cyclists uncomfortable with riding in the roadway, even in a widened shoulder, this design would have several disadvantages:

- It would mean that bicyclists on the SUP heading towards Vineyard Haven would have to cross the busy road to continue in the shoulder, which then dead-ends at Five Corners.
- This would perpetuate the disincentive for Vineyard residents and visitors from using their bikes along this activity and tourism corridor.
- It would no longer be possible to achieve the larger long-term goal of Martha's Vineyard having a continuous SUP network linking the centers of the three down-Island towns with each other and the State Forest, resulting in potential negative impacts on tourism and the economy.