

Completing Martha's Vineyard's Network of Bike Paths (Shared Used Paths)

As a recreational destination, Martha's Vineyard hosts large numbers of bicyclists, both visitors and year-round residents. Considerable effort since the 1970s has improved bicycle accommodations on the Island, but a lot more needs to be done. This document summarizes efforts to deal with one part of the challenge, namely improving the off-road bike network.

The Need to Accommodate a Range of People Riding Bicycles

According to MassBike, a bicyclist advocacy organization, two thirds of the population wants to bicycle at least occasionally. They fall into two broad categories:

- **Skilled Cyclists:** About 10% are "Strong and Fearless" or "Enthusied and Confident" bicyclists, comfortable with riding in the roadway under most traffic conditions. Many avoid off-road paths, in part because of potential conflicts with slow-moving users or because these paths tend to be less well maintained.
- **Casual Cyclists:** About 90% are "Interested but Concerned", who would ride for some trips or recreation if they felt safe. This includes children, elders, and people who only ride occasionally, such as on vacation. They are less comfortable with riding in roads, especially with lots of vehicles or faster-moving traffic.

Roads and Shared Use Paths

We need both on-road and off-road facilities to accommodate the large range of skill levels amongst bicycle riders.

- **Roads:** By law, bicyclists can ride on all public roads on Martha's Vineyard, even when a path is adjacent the road, provided they ride in the direction of traffic and obey other traffic regulations. There are a number of improvements to on-road bicycle accommodation that the towns and MassDOT could consider in the future.



- **Shared Use Paths:** Off-road paths provide an option for cyclists to ride separate from motor vehicle traffic. The Island started constructing bike paths in the 1970s and currently has 37 miles of paths linking the populous Down-Island towns and circumnavigating the State Forest at the center of the Island. These paths are also magnets for pedestrians, joggers, skateboarders, dog walkers and the like, which is why they are more accurately called Shared Use Paths or SUPs. The surface conditions of SUPs are often less smooth or clear than roadways, and caution must be exercised at road and driveway intersections. SUPs are more suited to slower, leisurely riding.

The two parallel networks should be interconnected, allowing those bicyclists who are comfortable in doing so to move from one to the other. It is especially important that, in those parts of the Island where there are SUPs, they form a complete network on their own, so those bicyclists who are not comfortable on the road aren't forced onto the street to get to their destinations

Filling in the Gaps in the SUP Network

Currently, the Shared-Use Paths (SUPs) in the Island's four most populous towns – Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury and West Tisbury, link to many of the Island's recreational destinations such as several beaches and the State Forest. Martha's Vineyard's bike paths are an important attraction for visitors.

However, there remain major gaps in the SUP network. Some bike paths stop at the edge of the downtowns and, notably, do not connect to the ferries or most of the bike rental shops. Sidewalks between the town centers and the SUPs are inadequate for most bicyclists, resulting in bicyclists being forced into the roadway at the very places where the roadways are most congested. The terminations of SUPs also create situations where cyclists have to cross the road to proceed along the correct side, increasing potential conflicts between motorists and cyclists.



Linking Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Vineyard Haven, and the State Forest

In 2008 the Martha's Vineyard Commission commissioned a study to examine how to extend and complete the SUP network. It looked at potential alternatives to eliminate the gaps in the network and provide continuous SUPs connecting Tisbury, Oak Bluffs and Edgartown with each other and with the State Forest. The study recommended focusing on the part of the Island because it has the greatest concentration of bicyclists, because most of the network is already in place, and because it doesn't have some of the constraints found Up-Island, such as hilly terrain and stone walls.

The narrow street rights-of-way bounded by dense development in the downtowns make it improbable to bring SUPs directly into or through the hearts of the towns, so the plan proposes a two-part strategy.

- Close the gaps in the existing SUP network to provide a continuous off-road network that gets as close to town centers as possible. If necessary, this might include short portions of designated bike routes on low-volume, low-speed roads.
- Provide bicycle parking and good sidewalks to allow people to walk from that closest point to town centers, as well as adequate shoulders for those willing to ride in the road.

The study identified six major gaps in the network, and looked in detail at each, to identify proposals for how the gaps could be closed in the future.

In some areas, several alternative routes were identified. In other areas, there is only one possible location for the SUP, and if that road is rebuilt without the SUP, it would no longer be possible to achieve the overall objective of having a complete network of off-road bike paths on Martha's Vineyard .

The First Priority: Beach Road

On the basis of this study, the Martha's Vineyard Joint Transportation Committee (JTC), made up of representatives of all the towns and the County, identified completing the SUP network along Beach Road as the highest priority for several reasons:

- The virtual absence of bike and pedestrian facilities between the two port towns of Vineyard Haven and Oak Bluffs, which are just 2.5 miles apart,
- The opportunity to leverage the SUP extension that is part of the Lagoon Pond drawbridge replacement project,
- The fact that the Beach Road SUP from Oak Bluffs to Edgartown already exists.

The 2009 study identified the missing links needed to complete the SUP network along Beach Road between downtown Vineyard Haven and Oak Bluffs by piecing together several interconnected town and state projects. The Joint Transportation Committee then programmed several projects in the Martha's Vineyard Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for state and federal funding.

It could take a decade or more to complete this network as each segment is dependent on funding and development opportunities for each section.



Beach Road Projects - Status Report - October 2014

Tisbury Projects

- **Section A:** Extending the SUP network from Eastville Beach to the Tisbury Town Landing is part of the design of the drawbridge replacement, to be completed in 2016.
- **Section B:** Tisbury constructed the first section of SUP, from the Tisbury Town Landing to Wind's Up, in 2002.
- **Section C:** The section from Wind's Up to the Tisbury Market Place is part of a road improvement project extending from Wind's Up to Five Corners, programmed for implementation in the 2017-18 federal fiscal years. The study proposed to maintain the SUP on the south (Lagoon) side of the Beach Road, where the other segments stretching to Edgartown. MassDOT hired a firm to work on the specific design and the Tisbury Board of Selectmen held several public meetings to discuss alternatives.
- **Section D:** This proposed section veers away from Beach Road because the study demonstrated that there was not room to continue along Beach Road to Five Corners without acquiring considerably more right-of-way from abutting landowners, since sidewalks are needed on both sides of this segment of the road to serve adjacent commercial activities. Tisbury Market Place has authorized construction of about half of this section and Town Meeting votes in 2010 and 2012 authorized the Town to pursue agreements from other landowners to connect to Lagoon Pond Road and Veterans Park.

- **Section E:** Tisbury built the SUP segment in Veterans Park in 2010, which brings cyclists close to downtown and links to another SUP and bike route connecting to Edgartown Road.
- **Section F:** The Town has begun focusing on linking cyclists from Veterans Park into the center of downtown and the ferry terminal via the low traffic volume Cromwell Lane and through the municipal Water Street Parking Lot.

Oak Bluffs Projects

In 2014, the Town of Oak Bluffs hired a consultant to more closely examine alternative routes and designs for a SUP from the drawbridge to downtown, and to start looking at the link from downtown along Seaview Avenue linking to the end of the existing SUP to Edgartown. Construction is programmed in the TIP starting in 2019.



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