

First Wave Of Investments from Green Economy Bond Will Fund ‘First Mile’ Bike Path in Newport

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Written by Ryan Belmore , March 15, 2017

Mark Felag, RIDOT Bike Path Coordinator, and Bari Freeman, Bike Newport, explore the future Rail-With-Trail location in December 2016.

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As part of continued efforts to grow Rhode Island’s green economy, Governor Gina Raimondo, along with First Gentleman Andy Moffit and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), announced on Monday the first wave of investments, totaling \$10 million, to be funded by the \$35 million Green Economy Bond passed last November. Ten bikeway projects around Rhode Island will create over 10 new miles of path and improve safety and connectivity across the state’s bikeway network.

Bond-funded projects will connect and extend segments of the Blackstone River Bikeway and the South County Bikeway, make the Jamestown Bridge bicycle accessible, establish new bikeways in Westerly and in Newport, and improve on-road connections in Olneyville and other urgent locations.

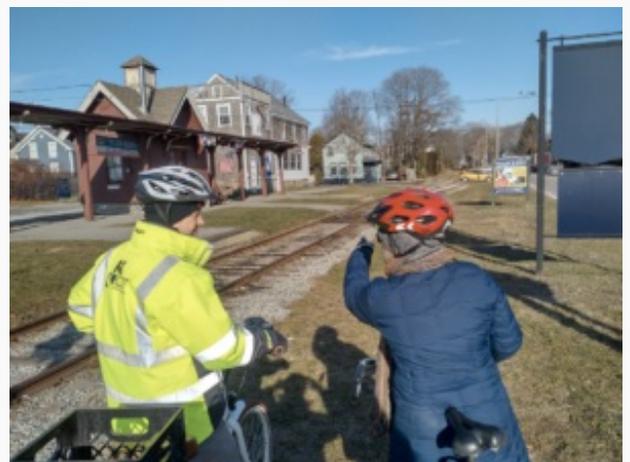
“We are fortunate to have a wealth of beautiful outdoor spaces to enjoy in Rhode Island. And as Rhode Islanders, we know their value to our state – a point reinforced by the overwhelming voter support this Bond received,” said Governor Gina Raimondo. “Improving our already impressive system of bikeways is a smart investment that will benefit our economy, communities, and families. Amenities like these are at the heart of what attracts people and businesses to locate here. Our goal is to get these projects underway and completed quickly, so we can continue to support our families, entice additional investment, and create jobs.”

Newport First Mile

In Newport, “The First Mile” stretches 1.7 miles and is the articulation of a decades-long dream for a shared use path in the rail corridor. The project estimate is \$1 million and includes shared-use path along the Newport Secondary Rail corridor – from Newport Gateway Visitors Center to the Community College of Rhode Island Campus.

This project represents the “first mile” of a larger Aquidneck Island Bike Path project. It will be the first protected bikeway on Aquidneck Island, other than the exemplary separated bicycle and pedestrian lane on the new Sakonnet Bridge.

The rail-with-trail path will run from the Rail Depot adjacent to the Visitors Center at the south end to the vicinity of CCRI Newport at the north end. The multi-use path will provide safe and inviting passage for pedestrians and cyclists between



Mark Felag, RIDOT Bike Path Coordinator, and Bari Freeman, Bike Newport, explore the future Rail-With-Trail location in December 2016. Contributed Photo

Newport's downtown and the residences, schools, parks, and businesses of the north end. The rail corridor path will pass through the area of the Pell Bridge ramp realignment and the upcoming Newport Innovation Hub, providing an alternative short-distance entry to Newport for everyone who wishes to leave their cars outside of the city. The path has the potential to reduce traffic congestion, relieve parking stresses, add to the Newport outdoor experience, and improve road safety for high numbers of residents and visitors alike.

"It is exciting to think about the impact this project will have – from connecting communities to promoting green commuting options and enjoyment of the outdoors and beautiful Newport," said DEM Director Janet Coit. "The investments we're making with the Green Economy Bond are important for Rhode Island – for our environment, economy and families. And they wouldn't be possible without the leadership and strong support of community partners like Bike Newport. I am grateful to the entire bike advocacy team that came together to advocate for this funding and to work with us to produce a list of projects that will dramatically improve our bike facilities across the state. Kudos to a job well done! I look forward to celebrating completion of The First Mile project."

A proposed rail corridor bikeway is referenced in numerous historic planning documents dating back decades. Most recently it is a featured recommendation in the Aquidneck Island Transportation Study (2012), the Newport Comprehensive Land Use Plan (expected 2017), and the upcoming Newport Open Space Master Plan. It is included in the plans for the Pell Bridge ramp realignment and the Newport Innovation Hub. It is a primary focus of work by Bike Newport, Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, the Newport Health Equity Zones, and the Open Space Partnership. The Newport Rail with Trail path is also included in the State Transportation Improvement Plan.

Bike Newport has advocated for the First Mile since its inception in 2012. Bari Freeman, the agency's executive director, serves on the RI Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and the statewide bike path group, Paths to Progress. Advocacy for the First Mile has been met with consistent statewide support. Ms. Freeman explains, "These projects represent the start of connecting one of the most beautiful statewide bikeway networks in the country. It's also the chance to begin needed bike paths on Aquidneck Island. Starting at the south end of the rail corridor, we will see significant community benefits and improve transportation for the greatest number of people. From here we can work our way up to connect with the rest of the state."

The First Mile has been a partnership of numerous stakeholder groups including the RI Department of Transportation, RI Department of Environmental Management, RI Turnpike and Bridge Authority, the City of Newport, Seaview Railroad – operator of the Newport Dinner Train, Bike Newport, numerous conservation and open space agencies, and resident advocacy groups such as Newport Health Equity Zones.

According to the Outdoor Industry Foundation, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion to the U.S. economy each year – with bike facilities contributing \$133 billion and supporting over one million jobs. In Rhode Island, outdoor recreation generates \$2.4 billion annually in consumer spending and supports 24,000 jobs. There are more than 60 miles of bike path in Rhode Island, supporting the use of nearly two million people each year.

Other Projects That Will Be Funded

Blackstone River Bikeway, Segment 8C (Woonsocket, North Smithfield) Bond Funding: \$1.4 Million | Project Estimate: \$2.8 Million Included in the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP), this project includes .6 miles of predominantly off-road path and construction of a river crossing and small stream bridge. It will be supported via bond and federal highway funds.

Blackstone River Bikeway, Segment 3B1 (Central Falls, Cumberland) Bond Funding: \$1.1 Million | Project Estimate: \$1.1 Million Includes one mile of a combined on- and off-road path from Pierce Park in Central Falls to Heritage Park in Cumberland, essentially completing the Central Falls segment of the bike path.

Blackstone River Bikeway, Segment 3A1 (Pawtucket) Bond Funding: \$1.6 Million | Project Estimate: \$1.6 Million Includes .75 miles of path from Pawtucket Town Landing to City Hall.

South County Bikeway – Segment 4A (Narragansett) Bond Funding: \$750,000 | Project Estimate: \$750,000 Includes .26 miles of path from Mumford Road to the Narragansett Community Center.

URI/South County Bikeway Connector (South Kingstown) Bond Funding: \$2.2 Million | Project Estimate: \$2.6 Million Includes 2.1 miles of path to create a new connection from Flagg Road to the South County Bike Path. The University of Rhode Island will partner in providing the remaining \$400,000 estimated cost.

Urban Bike Route Markings, Amenities (Statewide in Urban Areas) Bond Funding: \$300,000 | Project Estimate: \$300,000 Includes pavement markings and signage for on-road bike routes along urban corridors and connecting existing bike paths.

Westerly Loop (Westerly) Bond Funding: \$300,000 | Project Estimate: \$330,000 Includes 2.25 miles of striping for on-road and on-shoulder bike route. The Town of Westerly will partner in funding the remaining \$30,000 estimated cost.

Woonasquatucket/SanSouci Connector (Providence) Bond Funding: \$550,000 | Project Estimate: \$550,000 Includes .25 miles of on-road path and demonstration project to create a safer bike route from Broadway to the Woonasquatucket River in Olneyville Square.

Jamestown Bridge Ramps (Jamestown, North Kingstown) Bond Funding: \$800,000 | Project Estimate: \$800,000 Includes 1.2 miles of on-road striping to facilitate bike access on the bridge. This project will involve a broader effort to examine a bicycle crossing on the bridge – currently not allowed due to its designation as a limited access highway.

Together with community partners, the State selected projects for funding based on several factors, including project readiness and cost, priority as evidenced by the STIP submission, and connectivity between or extension of existing bike routes. Construction will begin as early as this summer – with completion of all projects anticipated within three years. Project estimates are preliminary, as many of these projects are in the early stages of design. Cost adjustments are possible as engineering and design work progresses.

The 2016 Green Economy Bond will also fund improvements to other state and local recreational facilities; preservation of open space; stormwater mitigation; and cleanup of former industrial “brownfield” sites for redevelopment.

Information from a Bike Newport and Rhode Island DEM press release was used in this story.

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