

RHODE ISLAND BICYCLE COALITION



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COMMUNITY

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February 16, 2022

Regarding Article 5 Question 3—Green Economy Bonds

Members of the House Finance Committee:

The Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition urges the House Finance Committee to add \$5 million to the Green Economy bond in Article 5 for "bikeways" which are really shared-use paths also used for many forms of non-motorized travel.

For economic, environmental, and public health reasons we have a societal interest in promoting bicycling. Of course, the paths also simply add to the quality of life in Rhode Island. You need only to come for a ride and see for yourself how folks enjoy them!

Yet, despite general support for bikeways/greenways, progress on our bike path infrastructure is painfully slow. For example, even after about 30 years under development, the Blackstone Bikeway still does not reach central Woonsocket and Pawtucket. Those disadvantaged communities could benefit from the safer, inexpensive travel a bikeway can provide and with the Museum of Work and Culture and Slater Mill in their downtowns, a bikeway connecting key sites in the Blackstone Heritage Park can help us market the Park for our tourist economy. Yet RIDOT, despite a large infusion of new Federal money for transportation, does not plan to complete the Blackstone Bikeway until at least 2029 (see page 46 of the STIP). There is a similar scenario of delay for bringing the South County path to the coast in Narragansett. We are also still waiting for the first bikeway on Aquidneck Island and despite the interest in Fall River to use an abandoned rail line along the Sakonnet River for a bikeway to our state line, extending the path through Tiverton is not even in RIDOT's 10 year plan.

When DEM Director Gray was asked about including bikeways in the Green Economy Bond at an Environment Council, he indicated a pending Transportation Climate Initiative could be a funding alternative. But the TCI is now off the table. Meanwhile, despite the deepening climate problem, RIDOT has twice shifted funds away from bike and pedestrian programs to its highway programs that still have substantial highway capacity expansion projects. So, we need an additional source of funding to adequately continue our bike path development.

Previous Green Economy bonds in 2016 and 2018 had bike funding, but not in 2020 so that earlier source of funding, intended to supplement but not replace the RIDOT's bike program, is running out. But those earlier green bonds did help finance some worthwhile projects such as connecting the South County path to URI.

Including even \$5 million in the Green Economy bond can keep the bike program alive and there are plenty of projects in the state's officially approved Bike Mobility plan that await action in cities and towns all over the state. Please consider making this adjustment to the Governor's budget.

Best,

Kathleen E Gannon for Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition