



more, better & safer bicycling

To the HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

Representative Evan P. Shanley, Chair
Representative Mary Messier, First Vice Chair
Representative Arthur J. Corvese, Second
Vice Chair
Representative Edith H. Ajello
Representative Jacquelyn M. Baginski
Representative Jon D. Brien, Member
Representative Matthew S. Dawson

Representative Katherine S. Kazarian
Representative Brian Patrick Kennedy
Representative Jason Knight
Representative Michelle E. McGaw
Representative Brian C. Newberry
Representative Christopher G. Paplauskas
Representative Jennifer A. Stewart
Representative Teresa A. Tanzi

From: Bari Freeman, Executive Director, Bike Newport

Bike Newport's Mission: to ensure that bicycling is a viable, safe, and comfortable primary choice for transportation and recreation.

April 24, 2025

Regarding: House Bill No. 5192 ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES -- OPERATION OF BICYCLES {LC56/1} which requires anyone using a bicycle trail or path to stay to the right on the path and would always pass on the left when safe to do so.

Thank you for your consideration of this Act introduced by Representatives Speakman and Spears.

This recommendation has come before you because Rhode Island's rules on our shared use paths are different from those in place in all other states – and that causes confusion. It also is before you, because our current rules inherently suggest that bicycles have favored status on the paths compared to pedestrians.

Our popular statewide shared use paths are enjoyed by tens of thousands of people on a regular basis, including both residents and visitors. The standard practice in other states is to "Stay right except to pass" along with "Pass to the left only when safe to do so" and "Use audible signals when passing." The Rhode Island practice of "Ride Right, Walk Left" understandably causes confusion on the paths, which are used by people biking, walking, and otherwise.

The simplified question is whether our rules should align with the rest of the states - and there are varied and strong opinions from those who frequent the paths. The case can be made for being consistent with the rest of the country, as well as for maintaining our current arrangement and avoiding change.

Our different rules for shared use paths originate with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, to whom the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management turned for a decision in the 1980s regarding the East Bay Bike Path. RIDOT recommended applying motor vehicle code to the bike paths - stating that bicycles are vehicles and that pedestrians on bike paths, like pedestrians on streets with no sidewalks, need to face traffic so they can leave the path and get out of the way of oncoming vehicles.

On shared use paths pedestrians do not have to get out of the way of bicyclists. Bicyclists - and all path users - slow down and wait to pass until they can safely do so. This culture is understood and safely practiced on shared use paths everywhere.

Interestingly, the language of this bill, and our ordinance language in general, uses the term BIKE PATHS. In fact, the paths under discussion are not exclusively for bicycles. They are Shared Use Paths. They invite and welcome people biking and walking and otherwise rolling and strolling. Bikes have no more right to these paths – or on these paths - than anyone else.

RIDOT's rules suggest that pedestrians get out of the way of a bicycle as they would a vehicle on the road. On shared use paths, the rules and etiquette are different. Slower road users stay to the right and faster road users pass to the left – but only when it is safe to do so.

So, in addition to placing Rhode Island in agreement with the other states, these proposed changes will convey that all path users have equal rights and responsibilities on the shared use path.

At Bike Newport, we support the practice of "Ride Right Except to Pass" along with using an audible signal to alert other path users.

We also support use of the term "Shared Use Path" or "Greenway" in place of "Bike Path" to remove the suggestion that bicycles are prioritized, and to recognize the range of people and modes present.

We recommend that the state encourage and support community engagement to help facilitate this discussion and the collection of opinions and data to inform your decision, and we stand by ready to assist with that engagement.

Thanks to you, and to all who are participating in this discussion, for taking time to consider the best long-term solution.

Sincerely,



Bari Freeman