

Steven Sepe

From: Shriram Krishnamurthi <shriram@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 23, 2025 5:10 PM
To: House State Government and Elections Committee
Cc: Rep. Speakman, June; Rep. Boylan, Jennifer; Rep. Knight, Jason
Subject: bike path walking direction

Dear legislators,

I am a RI resident and regular user of the EBBP and other bike paths.

I understand you are proposing a change to make people walk on the right instead of the left.

Thank you for paying attention to safety issues. However, as a cyclist *and* pedestrian, I am writing to **strongly** oppose this change.

There is a good deal one can write about the nuances of this. You are busy, so I will spare you a long message. However, please consider:

As a practical matter, these days, more often than not, walkers have headphones/earbuds/other audio tools. This makes them oblivious to traffic behind them. They are thus much more likely to swerve at a time someone is passing them on a bicycle, roller-blade, etc., which can result in accidents for all.

While their sense of hearing has been completely overtaken, in contrast, their sense of sight is still active. Therefore, they and approaching cyclists/roller-bladers can see one another and negotiate safe passage for both.

This goes even more so when people have animals in tow, like a dog on a leash. It is quite natural for a dog to stretch its leash. If you are walking on the left, your dog is still likely to stay on your side of the path and not interfere with a cyclist on the right (who can then move over to the right edge). If you are walking on the right, not entirely aware of a cyclist behind you, you are now creating a very unsafe situation for both the cyclist and the animal (and the person holding the leash).

Requiring the use of bells does not make things better. I have tried multiple kinds of bells. Trust me: people with earbuds/headphones *simply can't hear them*. And frankly, I am sympathetic: they can't be this immersed in music on a road, whereas the bike path lets them do that. But this means bells are not effective. Furthermore, bells can startle people by coming "out of nowhere" (because you can't see the approaching bike!). It's a bad solution all round.

As someone who rides over 2000 miles every year on RI bike paths, I can confirm that the current convention is in place for a very good reason. I have ridden in states that don't follow this, and it is a truly worse experience. More often than not, it is walking-on-the-right pedestrians who cause problems and near accidents and walking-on-the-left ones who minimize them, all of this compounded by earbuds, pets, etc.

Please, please, please: don't mess with a good thing. What we need is more signage telling people where to walk, not changes to where they walk.

Thank you for your consideration.

Shriram