

## Falmouth Bikeways Committee



### ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2009

The Bikeways Committee is dedicated by its charter to "the development, maintenance and improvement of bikeways." This has come to include a role in promoting bicycle safety and in encouraging bicycle use for transportation and recreation in Falmouth.

The last year has been a momentous one in a number of ways. Long-sought goals have materialized and bicycles are more conspicuously in use in Falmouth than at any time in recent memory. According to recent studies, increased use and visibility of bicycles leads to greater safety, so a broader goal is served by improving the bicycling environment. And of course increased bicycle use leads to reductions in automobile use and its less desirable concomitants.

**Shining Sea Bikeway:** The extension of the Shining Sea Bikeway from Carlson Lane to County Road has proceeded more quickly than anyone could reasonably have expected. Last year I reported that "construction [of the Bikeway] is expected to continue through summer of 2009 and possibly into 2010." In actual fact, construction began in earnest in August 2008 after removal of rails and ties, and is virtually complete at this time. The skillful planning of VHB Corporation and the careful work of Lawrence-Lynch Corporation has produced a corridor of extraordinary beauty attractive for many recreational and transportation uses. The path has now more than doubled its previous length.

A few details remain to be accomplished. A short segment of the path is to be relocated a few feet westward near Old Dock Road to improve boat trailer parking in the adjacent lot. Some signage is still being installed; and a few minor alterations or repairs are on the punch list. A separate issue is a project funded by Ducks Unlimited to replace poorly-flushing culverts in the Great Sippewissett Marsh, which awaits permitting. When it is under construction it will block travel on the bikeway through the marsh for a period of time, so we hope that the work will be timed to low-volume bikeway usage so as to disrupt travel as little as possible.

The Bikeway construction was funded entirely by U.S. and Commonwealth sources, including a Congressional earmark of \$3.2 million secured by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and U.S. Representative William Delahunt. The Town of Falmouth provided initial design funding following a referendum approving a debt exclusion for this purpose.

**Grand Opening of the completed Shining Sea Bikeway:** At the request of Representative Delahunt, we have planned to celebrate the opening of the Bikeway on July 2 at 11:30 AM, at the Carlson Lane location where Sen. Kennedy and Rep.

Delahunt delivered the facsimile check to us for construction of the Bikeway in November 2005. We hope to have a choral group to perform the great hymn "America the Beautiful" by Katharine Lee Bates, and other music and musicians suitable to the event. Additional details of the program will be released as they are confirmed.

**DCR Recreational Trails Grant:** through the efforts of Stace Beaulieu, a member of the Bikeways Committee, in September 2008 we were awarded a grant of \$15,900.00 by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation for the design and production of a trail map and the installation of interpretive signs at several points of interest. The project was designed to identify connections to adjacent trail systems, promote environmental awareness and protection of Falmouth's natural resources, and to highlight the history and agricultural heritage of our Town.

The brochure has been created using professional writing and graphic design specialists, and extensively vetted by the Bikeways Committee, Friends of Falmouth Bikeways, and other readers. It should become available within the next few weeks.

**620 Palmer Easement:** In the last few days the easement alongside 620 Palmer Avenue has been paved, allowing easy access from the Shining Sea Bikeway to the West side of Palmer Avenue. Next it is obligatory that we provide some form of safe passage, such as a striped crosswalk or on-demand pedestrian crossing signal, across Palmer Avenue/ Rt. 28 at this point in order to make the connection from the Bikeway to Goodwill Park and other recreational facilities. Pedestrians and bicyclists have crossed here for years despite lack of any regulated crossing, and we should take measures to protect them while connecting several of our town's finest recreational resources, currently quite dramatically separated by the highway.

**Emergency Vehicle Access:** in collaboration with Falmouth Fire Rescue, we reviewed accessibility of the Shining Sea Bikeway for emergency vehicles and prepared a report outlining the obstructions to passage and the remediation steps to be taken. This report was presented to the Selectmen on April 27, and its recommendations were endorsed. Some of these recommendations have been accomplished: the removal or moving of some bollards. A key recommendation is the enactment of Emergency Access Points, conspicuously signed with a towing penalty, to keep the access open. The Bikeways Committee and the Fire Rescue Department hope to see this recommendation become reality in the near future.

**Extending Bicycle Access Throughout Falmouth:** The Committee continues to seek to extend designated Bike Lanes or Bicycle Routes (Class 2 or Class 3 Bikeways) to parts of Falmouth not served by the Shining Sea Bikeway, which is entirely located along the Western edge of the town. A network of designated on-street Bike Routes marked by signs is a bicycle-friendly feature of Falmouth and is unique among Cape communities. The Bikeways Committee has been assured by the DPW that we will be able to work with them in finding accommodation or improving awareness of bicycles on roadways scheduled for re-surfacing or re-striping. Recent developments in nationally standardized roadway marking have been shown to improve bicycling safety and comfort with little or no effect on motor travel.

A reasonably complete network of Bike Routes will serve to increase use of bicycles for transportation, provide health benefits for our school students, among others, and reduce traffic congestion and parking space competition for motorists. Connections to the Easterly neighborhoods of Falmouth from the Bikeway continue to be a matter of intense interest. At this time there is no clearly-marked, protected connection between the Bikeway and Goodwill Park, Falmouth Village, or Teaticket.

**Bicycling-associated Facilities:** A grant to purchase and install bike racks in many locations in Falmouth was provided in 2007 under provisions of the Community Preservation Act. At the time of our last report, the project was out to bid. I am pleased to report that the racks covered by the 2007 grant and an additional smaller group of racks funded by a 2008 grant all have been installed.

**Bike Helmet Program:** The highly successful helmet distribution program of previous years was not funded this year by the Executive Office of Transportation. It is still possible that it will be funded later in the summer. We can hope that it will continue in the future. In calendar 2007 and 2008 the Bikeways Committee distributed as many as 125 bike helmets free through a variety of community programs.

**Bicycle-Friendly Community Program:** The Bikeways Committee has a strong interest in having Falmouth qualify as a Bicycle-Friendly Community, consistent with the criteria of the program operated under the League of American Bicyclists, a national bicycling advocacy group. The program is well-described at the website, <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bicyclefriendlyamerica/communities/>.

Designation as a Bicycle-Friendly Community has significant value, as the number of such communities is quite limited, particularly in the Northeast U.S. The list of qualifying communities is published in nationally prominent bicycling and travel guides. If numbered among them, Falmouth could expect increased tourism as a bicycling destination. In order to attain this designation, we must carry out a number of measures, including the creation and adoption of a Bike Plan for the town. The Bikeways Committee plans to work on these components over the coming months.

**Bikeway Usage:** Twice yearly the Central Transportation Planning Staff (Boston, EOT) coordinates a census of users on the bikeways throughout the Commonwealth. We participated in this count in May, with volunteers counting all users on the Bikeway on a Saturday and a Tuesday, May 9 and 12. Also, we conducted a Bike-to-Work Day on May 19, collecting information from bicyclists headed to work along Surf Drive and the Shining Sea Bikeway. In addition to simply documenting the users of the Bikeway, these data sets provide some idea of the number of automobile trips avoided and parking spaces made available because of bicycle commuting. We feel confident in saying that 50 to 80 people are regular bike commuters to Woods Hole alone. We have not yet collected data for commuting to the Falmouth Hospital or Falmouth Village businesses, which no doubt will further underline the contribution of bicycling, and the value of the Bikeway, in reducing traffic congestion and promoting healthy exercise in place of car-bound commuting.

**Important Problems and Conflicts:**

**Maintenance:** The addition of six miles of grass-bordered roadway to the inventory of our Department of Public Works poses a significant burden. The ability of the relevant departments to perform routine maintenance in a natural area, which has requirements different from, and exceeding those of ordinary roadways, is uncertain. Preventive efforts are needed, as well, to stop the processes of pavement deterioration caused by tree roots and bamboo rhizomes, and it is not clear that this can be managed by the existing DPW staff and equipment. The Bikeways Committee is put in the role of advocating for bikeway maintenance ahead of other, equally worthy but perhaps less conspicuous (to us) needs. It is quite clear that our Public Works department wishes to keep this remarkable asset in beautiful condition, and we will work with them to do so, but a coordinated approach and additional support from the Town may be necessary. There can be no doubt that the costs are money well spent; the number of tourists coming to Falmouth in recent weeks, despite the fact that the Bikeway is officially closed, speaks to the volume of new tourism and other business that will result, but only if we keep the Bikeway beautiful.

**Memorial Benches:** after several years and numerous problems in attempting to administer a program of memorial bench installation along the Shining Sea Bikeway, the Bikeways Committee voted in December 2008 to terminate the program. The main reasons were: a lack of space in the locations desired by prospective donors; a wide range of designs in adjacent benches (the "bench showroom look," as one observer described it); inability to maintain a fund for long-term care of benches, leading to poor maintenance and exposure to cost of removal of damaged benches; and by design, no additional bench spaces on the new section of the Bikeway.

In place of this, we began discussion with Brian Dale about creating memorial areas on town-owned land adjacent to but off the Bikeway, where bricks, tables, benches, drinking water, and other objects, including decorative elements, could be endowed as memorials. We hope to develop such a program in the near future. Many of our residents want a way to memorialize loved ones and many have said they would like to be part of such a program.

**Commercial Interests:** A bikeway attracts people who can be expected to stop from time to time and become customers of nearby businesses. We are gratified that businesses along the Bikeway have reached out to path users and hope to support these efforts. However, we believe it is our obligation to protect the park-like ambience of the Bikeway. This means that within the land corridor of the Bikeway, which is approximately 50 feet in width over most of its course, we will work to keep it clear of visual and physical clutter by allowing no signage or business activity within the corridor, a practice consistent with that of bicycling trails throughout Massachusetts.

**Vendors and Stands:** The Bikeways Committee has already come under pressure to allow such activities as food sales along the bikeway, and some property-owners adjacent to the bikeway have been creative in setting up signs and stands to capture potential customers.

**Realty Signs:** Realtors are aware that access to a bike path improves home sales prices and turnover rates. Even before the bikeway was fully paved, sales signs for homes began appearing along its length. We will continue to encourage our community's Real Estate industry to respect the boundaries of the Bikeway in placing their for-sale signs.

**Regulations:** The regulations for the Bikeway are in need of reevaluation. We expect to meet with relevant Town officials, particularly Town Counsel and the Town Manager, in the near future. Questions arise almost daily with respect to such things as horses on the path, motorized bikes, fence locations, user conflicts, intersection signing, speed limits, and many other topics. A clear set of regulations adopted duly by the Selectmen and, if necessary, by Town Meeting, will go a long way to clarifying these issues and enabling police enforcement of appropriate rules.

**Goals:**

*Enforcement:* In January 2009 Governor Patrick signed into law a new set of rules for bicyclists and their interactions with motorists. The new law makes a host of changes, including: police training on bicycle law and on dangerous behavior by bicyclists and motorists; rules as to how a motorist should safely pass or make a turn in front of a bicycle; makes "dooring" (opening a car door into the path of a bicycle or other vehicle) subject to ticket and fine; permits bicyclists to ride two abreast when it does not impede cars from passing; and adds legal protections for bicyclists who choose to ride to the right of other traffic. Discussions to shape implementation of the new law are ongoing, and we plan to bring the message to Falmouth when enforcement becomes possible.

*Access:* The Committee will continue to seek to connect ill-served neighborhoods of Falmouth to each other and to the Shining Sea Bikeway. In particular, we hope to improve access to Falmouth's excellent Main Street and Village area shopping; schools; lodgings; beaches; and other destinations where bicycling can play its role in improving traffic density, parking demand, and health.

*Education:* Through the Safe Routes to School program, the Bicycle-Friendly Communities program, and other means, such as Bikeway kiosks and the Bike Routes Map, we will work to raise awareness of the laws governing bicycle operation and motor vehicle interaction with bicyclists. We seek to improve conditions for bicyclists in Falmouth. No one should be frightened to operate a bicycle in a lawful manner on a town street, nor should any motorist believe he or she has "special" or exclusionary rights to use of the roads.

*Engineering:* We hope to continue to work with Falmouth and Massachusetts Highways Departments to make our streets as accommodating as is practicable for bicycling transportation. We are grateful for the collaboration offered by our Town's DPW and look forward to a productive partnership.

*Promoting Business:* there is no doubt that the Bikeway is a major attraction for people planning a trip to the Cape. We will work with the Chamber of Commerce to promote

good relations and communications with Bikeway users, to create an enjoyable experience and improve business in the same effort.

*Environmental Education:* The environment through which the Shining Sea Bikeway passes includes substantial fragile and unspoiled terrain. We are dedicated to teaching Bikeway users about these extraordinary lands and their wildlife environment. We will provide an informational brochure and information displayed in kiosks and available at Town Hall and the Chamber of Commerce.

*Environmental Maintenance:* We will continue to explore means that may reduce the environmental effects of the Bikeway, including such measures as composting toilets; surveillance for and prompt mitigation of debris and damage, possibly in collaboration with local businesses; and close cooperation with other groups and Town departments interested in preserving and enhancing the beauty and value of the Bikeway.

The newly-formed Friends of Falmouth Bikeways are expected to be a strong partner in our efforts to preserve the bicycling-related environment and educate Bikeway users. Their program of naming Stewards for the entire length of the Bikeway should serve to sustain awareness of problems and successes in managing this facility and all bicycling venues in Falmouth.

Respectfully submitted,

Edward S. Gross MD  
Chairman