



Bikes come to the end of the William C. O'Neill Bike Path behind Narragansett Elementary School on Mumford Road. KRIS CRAIG/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

# A PATH FORWARD?

## Narragansett hits new bumps in effort to connect bike path with town beach

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Providence Journal  
USA TODAY NETWORK

NARRAGANSETT – For nearly 10 years, Narragansett has wrestled with a conundrum: how to extend the town's beloved William C. O'Neill Bike Path to the beach.

The path, which runs about 8 miles, from Kingston Station in South Kingstown to the community center off Mumford Road in Narragansett, is a

well-known fixture of the community. Thousands of Narragansett residents and visitors from other communities – estimates of how many people use it annually range widely, from nearly 60,000 to 100,000 – enjoy riding their bicycles, running, skating or taking a leisurely stroll down the path.

The only thing that would make the path better would be to extend it to nearby Narragansett Town Beach. The problem: Between the path's current terminus and the beach are three-

quarters of a mile of wetlands and neighborhoods.

Proposals to extend the path have run into roadblocks. Some residents have balked at the idea of a bike path running through their neighborhood. Proposals to put the path on main roads have also raised safety concerns.

In May, the Town Council heard the results of a long-awaited feasibility study by DiPrete Engineering. The news was not encouraging: The recommended route, out of three possible paths, would run along busy Kingstown Road and Narragansett Avenue and would require scrapping 87 parking spots,

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# Path

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making it a non-starter for most council members.

“I was not thrilled with the three choices that we had, and I really thought we could figure out something better,” said Deb Kopech, a Town Council member.

Kopech is neither an engineer nor an expert on bike paths, but that did not stop her from seeking an alternative route. She surveyed the area on foot with fellow council member Susan Cicilline-Buonanno and drew a new path that circumvents the wetlands of Canonchet Farm and the traffic of main thoroughfares.

Kopech argues that her route is more scenic and less exposed to traffic than the options presented by DiPrete Engineering. It runs behind Sprague Memorial Field and Park, hugging Canonchet Farm before veering onto Strathmore Street past the South County Museum and Anne Hoxsie Lane, which leads straight to the South Beach Pavilion.

The route is not without its hitches. Rhode Island’s Department of Environmental Management – or perhaps the Coastal Resources Management Council – may have to sign off for the path to pass over Crooked Brook. Residents of Strathmore Street may also need to be convinced to let the path run along their part of the neighborhood. And Kopech does not know how much her proposed route would cost, though the town has \$3 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation to spend on the bike path.

But she sees potential in the idea.

“There’s a lot of really great opportunity there to create not just a fitting terminus to the William C. O’Neill Bike Path, but also to provide public recognition of all the various kinds of recreational things that we can do at Narragansett. So to me, all of those pieces fit together beautifully,” Kopech said.

At a Town Council workshop early this month, other council members expressed disappointment in DiPrete Engineering’s proposal and were baffled that the engineering firm had not considered Kopech’s idea in the



**Signs direct visitors on how to use the William C. O'Neill Bike Path, which runs from South Kingstown to Narragansett.** KRIS CRAIG/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

first place. The council has asked the town manager to request that DiPrete Engineering review Kopech’s proposal.

Narragansett has until 2027 to spend the \$3 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation earmarked for the bike path.