

EDITORIAL

## *Bridge to nowhere*

**T**hat new Sakonnet River Bridge bike lane is a beauty but for one thing.

It's a path to nowhere and that's something that needs to be fixed.

Bicyclists and walkers with a taste for irony plan to gather on the bridge lane in an April 25 celebration of the "Link." This bridge lane should be a link, they say, between Newport and Portsmouth to the west and Tiverton, Fall River, Westport and beyond to the east.

The lane itself offers extraordinary views up and down the Sakonnet Harbor and even a mid-bridge lookout point to pause and take it all in. But that's where the fun ends. On the Tiverton side, cyclists and walkers are dumped onto busy streets and neighborhoods, no bike path to be found.

On the Portsmouth side, the path ends nearly as abruptly. It leads allegedly to a narrow marked bike lane at the edge of very busy roads — not a route for children or the faint of heart.

What these towns need is what many places already have — real bike and walking paths that would enable people to get places they want to go and some exercise, all without burning a drop of fuel or risking life and limb. But a couple of decades later it has become apparent that bike advocates need to crank up the volume.

The irony is that while these towns could be a bicyclist's dream, people pedal here at their peril. Narrow roads, blind corners, heavy traffic, gravelly shoulders, stone walls and obstinate drivers conspire to suck the fun out of cycling.

To the west, a little-used rail line runs the length of Aquidneck Island, most of the way a stone's throw from the bay. Rather than drive into crowded Newport, visitors could park a short way out and ride in — avoiding all those stop lights and that futile search for parking.

In Tiverton, Peter Moniz et al. have their eyes on that 2.5-mile railroad right-of-way from the bridge north to the Fall River line. For bike path potential, this is nearly as good as it gets, a fact recognized by a state study a few years back. Though it passes through a populous part of town, it is out of sight of traffic and houses much of the way, hugs the water and is owned by the state. All that's needed is money.

At its north end, that Tiverton rail line enters Fall River with a branch bearing east toward Westport; it could someday go all the way to Cape Cod.

For all the possibilities, talk of bike paths will amount to little more than daydreaming unless these towns clamor for help, list paths high on funding priority lists, and include them prominently in town plans.

The bridge lane is a great start. It should lead to something special.