

OUR VIEW

Promotion of bicycling gets results

It has been a great few weeks for bicycle enthusiasts.

Last weekend, hundreds of bicyclists took part in the third annual 4 Bridges Ride, a 26-mile ride that took participants over the Jamestown-Verrazzano, Pell, Sakonnet and Mount Hope bridges, and raised money for Save The Bay.

The weekend before that, bike riders took advantage of the new Sakonnet River Bridge's dedicated bike lane connecting Portsmouth and Tiverton, by riding over the bridge to celebrate the bike lane and to send a message that the state needs to provide more similar opportunities.

And just two days after that, Bike Newport held a "Distro Disco" event to distribute bikes in return for donations to support the Bike Garage program, which refurbishes bikes and makes them available for loan to local youngsters.

These three events demonstrated that bicycling is an activity that is fun and healthy for all ages, from young children to those who are young at heart — like Frank Menezes, 71, of Fall River, Mass., one of the members of Bike Fall River who took part in the Sakonnet River Bridge bike lane ride.

Local communities and the state seem to have a greater appreciation for and awareness about the importance of providing safe opportunities for people to walk and ride their bicycles; some of that is because of the efforts of organizations like Bike Newport and Bike Fall River, and some of that, unfortunately, is because of the publicity surrounding several fatal accidents in recent years.

On the positive side, that has spurred efforts to create an Aquidneck Island Bike Path, and perhaps to connect

with similar projects over the border in Massachusetts.

"We want to bring awareness that we do have this fantastic connection between Fall River and Newport," said Brian Peterson, head of Bike Fall River.

On the Newport side, while several bike lanes and "sharrow" markers have been created on local roadways, advocates also are pushing for more dedicated space for riders and walkers, including potentially with the redesign of the access ramps on and off the Pell Bridge. Railroad tracks on either side of the state border also have been eyed for pedestrian and bike paths.

"This is a symbol of what's possible. It's a big first step," Bike Newport director Bari Freeman said of the Sakonnet bridge bike path. "It's important for our economy, our environment and also a protection of a fragile, historic landscape."

Bike Newport also is leading an effort, supported by a \$10,000 grant, to examine local and state regulations and ordinances and suggest ways to make them better, and to increase compliance and enforcement.

All of these things are good for the environment, individual health and perhaps even the economy.

"It's great recreationally and will attract tourists," Menezes said of dedicated bike paths. "If you can get off the road (to ride), it's the best and safest way to do it."

That, as motorists and bicyclists alike will attest, is true. And that is good for everybody. We're sure these kinds of events will help keep the momentum going, and we congratulate organizers as well as participants for making them so successful.