

# Bond would get things rolling on bike path network

This year, for the first time, funding to expand and improve the state's 63-mile network of bike paths is included in the open space and recreation bond issue that periodically goes before voters.

The \$35-million Green Economy Bond on the Nov. 8 ballot sets aside money for land preservation, parks and water pollution prevention, but the largest chunk of funding — \$10 million — would be used to complete portions of the Blackstone River Bikeway, the South County Bike Path and the half-dozen other dedicated bike routes around the state, with an ultimate aim of connecting them.

Rhode Island Paths to Progress, a coalition of bike groups and nonprofits from around the state, has mapped out a series of potential projects, in various stages of completion, all leading from



ALEX KUFFNER

Providence, like spokes on a bike wheel, to Woonsocket, Newport, Coventry and Burrillville.

If the bond issue passes, projects that could immediately receive funding include improving the portion of the Woonsocket-Blackstone River Greenway bike path that runs along roads between Eagle Square and Providence Place mall and extending the South County Bike Path to Narragansett Town Beach, said Alex KG Ellis, a coordinator of Paths to Progress and the executive director of the Rhode Island Bicycle Coalition.

There has been recent progress in making Rhode

Island more bike-friendly, such as construction currently wrapping up on a dedicated bike lane on Fountain Street in downtown Providence, and before that, the creation of a similar lane along Blackstone Boulevard on the city's East Side.

But Ellis characterized the work as piecemeal. Only about 2 percent of transportation funding in the state goes to bike paths, even though 11 percent of trips are by bike or on foot, he said.

"It's not commensurate to the need," said Ellis. The hope is not just to fill in the gaps in existing bike paths but to also eventually build new ones across Aquidneck Island and heading north from Westerly.

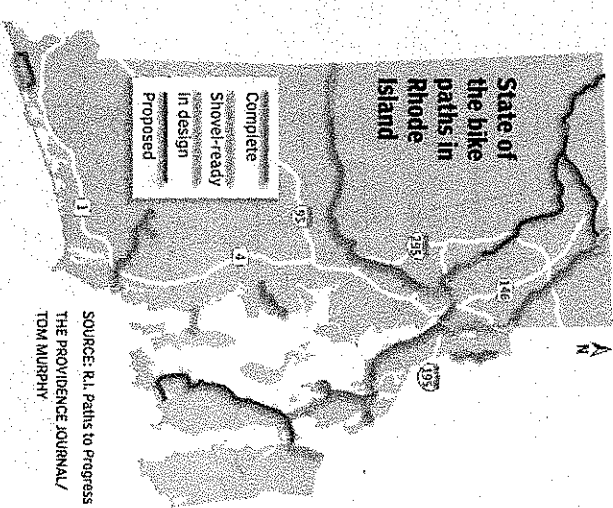
The \$10 million in the bond issue would be just the first installment of the investment needed to create a truly connected statewide system of bike

paths. Paths to Progress estimates the total cost at \$100 million.

Backers say the price tag is worth it, pointing to the quality of life that biking supports but also the tourism dollars that scenic bike paths can help bring in. Ellis cited one New Jersey study that found that for every \$1 million invested in biking and walking paths, \$1.2 million is added to a state's economy.

"National examples show that if you want to get people biking, you need connected bike lanes and bike lanes protected from traffic," he said.

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