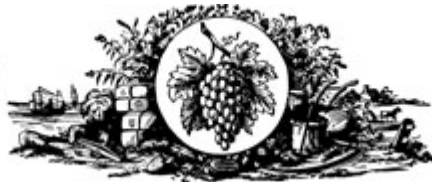


VINEYARD



GAZETTE

Archived Edition: Friday, June 19, 2009

Pedal Politics

Seasonal weather brings cyclists, joggers and other outdoor enthusiasts back onto Island roads, and seasonal traffic is making them feel less safe. On County Road as the sun dropped this week, a woman pushing an all-terrain baby stroller and pulling a leashed dog had nowhere to walk but on the road. Nearby, heading from Tisbury up-Island on State Road, parents and a young boy pedaled their way toward a Seth's Pond picnic; the look on the mother's face as she watched her son navigate the narrow shoulder, cars swerving closely by, indicated the trip wasn't the relaxing and fun family activity biking is supposed to be.

Bicycles are safer than cars, healthier and a more environmentally friendly way to get around. Given the Vineyard's green-leaning population, it's surprising how the creation of bike paths here has slowed in recent years, after a remarkable start in the seventies and eighties. While cyclists can go for many miles on wide, well-constructed and sometimes scenic paths, shared with strollers and joggers, it can be hard for them to actually arrive at a useful destination — critical gaps mean the bike paths don't safely connect towns yet.

The Martha's Vineyard Commission last week released a report analyzing options that would connect the down-Island towns with the bike paths that run between them.

The report details costs for various options — taking into account such factors as land already publicly owned or available for purchase, and where a new path would interfere with parking, pedestrians or business.

Selectmen down-Island should make it a priority to read and discuss the report. Even if the current economy prevents achieving the best outcome quickly, opportunities will be lost if the report is simply left to collect dust. And some costs could be recouped through state and federal assistance.

West Tisbury, not examined in the commission study, should likewise be doing more to encourage bicycling; it too has critical gaps, particularly as traffic between Tisbury and West Tisbury is not slowed to the rural pace of roads farther up-Island.

A healthier, safer, greener Island would be the result.