



CAPE COD TIMES

Officials peddling rail trail extension

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Turn left and it's a busy state highway. Turn right and it's a narrow two-lane road.

"They risk their lives on Route 6," said Suzanne Thomas, Wellfleet's representative on the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority. "There are a huge number of bicyclists that come off the rail trail. It's becoming more and more crucial that we offer an alternative."

Officials from the three outermost towns of Cape Cod, the Cape Cod National Seashore and the Cape Cod Commission will hold their first public meeting on Wednesday on the concept of extending the rail trail north to Provincetown, roughly a 20-mile stretch from South Wellfleet.

The primary concern is safety, bike safety advocates said.

Blake Van Hoof Packard, 16, died July 14 when he was hit by a car as he walked a bicycle along Route 6 toward the center of Provincetown. The town averages two to four bike accidents a year that require rescue responses, the police said. In Truro, there are one or two serious incidents a year involving a bicycle, police records show. In Wellfleet, there have been six crashes since 2008 involving both a bike and a car, the police said.

“This is a regional effort,” said Candace Nagle, chairwoman of the Provincetown Bicycle Advisory Working Group. “All the towns have to work together and agree on how this is all going to come together.”

The rail trail, completed in 1994, is a paved bicycle and pedestrian path, primarily on an old railroad right of way. An estimated 400,000 people use it annually, and during the summer season about 400 bicyclists, pedestrians, skateboarders and in-line skaters use it at any one time, according to a 2010 study by the Seashore and the Cape Cod Commission.

Rough estimates of how many bicyclists are using the roads in Wellfleet, Truro and Province-

town have not yet been made, said Clay Schofield of the Cape Cod Commission.

The three towns have a total year-round population of less than 10,000, but the towns grow significantly during the summer.

Three of the four rail trail alternatives under consideration are drawn from a 2010 countywide bicycle study: The first is a scenic “Outer Cape” corridor through the Seashore; second is a share-the-road “Inner Cape” corridor of back roads west of Route 6; and third is a “Rail” corridor that follows the former railroad right of way, some of which is now privately owned.

A fourth idea would run a bike path along a power line right of way from South Wellfleet into Truro and then along Route 6 into Provincetown, including reserving the northbound double-barrel lanes of Route 6 from North Truro into Provincetown for bicyclists and pedestrians only.

Provincetown selectmen created the town’s bike advisory group June 13, and the committee’s focus turned to safety, in particular after the death of Van Hoof Packard. A few weeks before his death, Van Hoof Packard had begun a Seashore junior lifeguard program.

“After the death of one of our junior lifeguards, once again we want to emphasize that it’s important to have a safe bicycle route,” said Seashore maintenance head Karst Hoogeboom, who represents the federal agency on the regional effort. “We’re working with the towns to see what we could do and

where the areas are that we could get a bike route in. We want to have a full public review process and shake the trees for possibilities and for concerns that people might have.”

Truro made its 2-year-old ad hoc bike committee into an official five-person town board in June, said member Susan Travers, who is also head of the town’s council on aging. The Truro committee, which still needs two more volunteer members, is working on bike trails within the town as well as looking at regional approaches.

“It just seems like there was such an onslaught of bikers this year,” Travers said. “Riding on the side of Route 6, it’s incredibly dangerous.”