
Advocacy Column

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Rhode Island legislation update

In an effort to better protect cyclists and provide for stronger penalties for striking a cyclist, the RI Bike Coalition (former Providence Bike Coalition and Greenways Alliance of Rhode Island) have been working to get a vulnerable roadway user law enacted.

Last year the House Judiciary Committee approved a version of a 3-foot passing bill. However the Senate did not act on that and new bills have been introduced in both chambers.

Recently Barry Schiller of the RI Bike Coalition attended the April 27 meeting of the Senate Judiciary Committee. He reports that members of that committee were receptive to suggestions to amend the bill to be a "vulnerable roadway users" law and provide for stiffer penalties for striking and injuring a cyclist. As it stands now, the bill merely mandates a 3-foot passing distance for passing a cyclist and provides no penalties.

National update

On the national scene, the month of April was named Distracted Driving Month and the US DOT proposed a revision to the rules for Motor Carriers as regards the use of wireless communication devices. These rules, if adopted, would apply to Commercial Motor Vehicle operators and would ban texting while driving, which is estimated to be 23.2 times more likely to result in a "safety event" than a non-texting vehicle operator. By comparison, having a phone call with a hands-free device is 0.4, and talking on a hand-held phone is 1.0 times greater, the same as eating. The trucking industry is expected to support this rules change, as they have in the past supported legislation to ban texting while driving.



Washington Pedestrian Bridge Linear Park project



Construction on the Washington Bridge Linear Park is expected to begin in the spring of 2011. As currently planned, the project will run for approximately two years and cause the closure of the bridge to pedestrian and bicyclists for the duration of the project. Given the importance of this link between the East Bay Bike Path and the India Point/Fox Point, and Providence for both recreational users as well as daily commuters, the Rhode Island Bike Coalition is in discussions with RIDOT and the construction company to see if there is a way to keep this key connection in the non-motorized network as usable as possible for as much of the construction as is safely feasible.

RIBike plans to perform a traffic count on two days to ascertain the number of weekday as well as weekend users. It is believed that the Henderson bridge detour is not practical, will lower usage of the East Bay Bike Path, create a hardship for bridge users, and that presenting concrete usage information will aid in explaining that.

As always, if you see an opportunity to improve conditions for cyclists, be it a planning meeting, street design, or neighborhood association, please let me know by sending email to advocacy@nwclub.org

Bicycling Coalition of Maine releases public service videos

Two bicycle safety PSAs (public service announcements) have been produced by the Bicycle Coalition of Maine. One stresses the importance of wearing bicycle helmets. The other informs viewers about the law in Maine and several other states requiring motorists to give at least three feet of clearance when passing cyclists.

The videos are posted on the Bicycle Coalition of Maine's website (<http://www.bikemaine.org/news-room/share-the-road-media-campaign>) and are also on YouTube. Links from our NBW website, nwclub.org, will also be posted.