

Peter Martin
1 1/2 Willow Street
Newport, RI 02840

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Jody Richards
Project Manager
Rhode Island Department of Transportation
2 Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02903
jody.richards@dot.ri.gov

Hi Jody,

Thank you hosting the online **public meeting** on Wednesday, April 29, 2000 which was held on behalf of the **Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)**, the **Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT)** and the **City of Newport**, related to the environmental conditions related to the planned redevelopment of the existing **railroad right-of-way** that is being proposed as a “**shared use path**”.

First, I want to thank you, and **Fred Bevans** of VHB, for for helping to work out the technical details that allowed me to ‘attend’ the meeting from the comfort of my own home.

As you know, I am very much in favor of this bikeway project being implemented.

My background:

Being that I am the ‘**original proposer**’ of the bike path, a former secretary of the **City of Newport Planning Board**, a former chair of the **Aquidneck Island Planning Commission**, a former engineer on the **Old Colony & Newport Railway**, the former **District 75 state representative**, and a current **abutting property owner**¹, you will not be surprised that I am interested in sharing my experiences and opinions with you.

¹ I own the property on the west side of the railroad right-of-way, from a point about 70 feet south of the Walnut Street Street bridge abutment to the north sidewalk of Willow Street. My east property line, to my knowledge, is on bottom of the hill that borders the railroad right-of-way.

I am very happy to see progress being made.

Scope of the Project

I was most happy to learn from the meeting that the scope of the **shared use path** is limited to the area between **Admiral Kalbfus Road** and the railroad depot at **Gladys Carr Bolhouse Road**. That is approximately 1 mile as measured along the right-of-way. ²

My original “**Bike Path / Pedestrian Walkway**” proposal was focused on the same section of the **Newport Secondary track**. Details of my proposal, as well as **photographs** of the newly installed **East Track**, can be seen on my personal website at this address:

<http://www.stacyhouse.com/bikepath/mainpage.htm> ³

Keeping this project within the proposed boundaries should provide for a manageable and successful project. It will be limited to only two currently existing street crossings, **Poplar** and **Elm Streets**.

The reconstruction of the east track included the partial rebuilding to these crossings. That is the part of the crossings that carry the new rail track.

It is important to note that the East Track project did not include any work on the area covered by the West Track.

Indeed, the west track sections of the crossings were left in place and are in need of being re-paved for the current road traffic.

²Hopefully, bicycle and pedestrian traffic in the area from **Admiral Kalbfus Road** along **Connell / Coddington Highway** corridor is being considered with the currently active project to build those two roads out to the West Main Road.

As the **2012** successful **House of Representatives** sponsor of **Rhode Island’s Complete Streets legislation**, I certainly would hope that to be the case.

³ Over 200 of my railroad photos can be seen at this link: [NeRail Photo Archives](#)

Here are my photos of the two street crossings:

Elm Street



Poplar Street



My Concerns:

Drainage

I have been told that this railroad right-of-way was historically a river bed. Until the railroad took over the area, **Fourth Street** ran from **Bridge Street** to **Walnut Street**. It was taken over by the **Old Colony Railroad** which started operations on this railway in 1864.

Prior to the recent reconstruction of the east track, there was heavy infiltration of water both from the streets to the west of the right-of-way and from the cemetery to the east. The water from the west would often flood both tracks and run into the drainage ditch on the east side of the east track.

The water flows in that drainage ditch, from a point around **Cherry Street**, to the south. At the **Walnut Street** abutment, there is a recently upgraded drain pipe between the track and the bridge abutment.

Under normal conditions, the water should flow through the pipe. Unfortunately, the pipe is regularly blocked by fallen leaves and other foreign objects. When it is not cleared, the water floods both tracks and runs in the middle of the right-of-way to the south. ⁴

⁴ The only way that the drainage pipe would be cleared would be if I, or my maintenance man, would clear it.

The Sewer Pipe

As I reported during the ZOOM meeting, there is a **sanitary sewer pipe** that enters the right-of-way at a point between **Maitland Court** and **La Salle Place**.

I have been told that the pipe is located under the cemetery and that it services the area to the northeast of the cemetery known as the **Swamp**. The 'contents' of this pipe flow in a southerly direction.

I know from prior experience, that this clay pipe ran directly between the rails of the west track. This is an **18 inch clay pipe**. I know that it was relined since I retired here in 2000.

There is a man hole directly to the East of my building at 1 ½ Willow Street. There is also a man hole cover at the **Poplar Street** intersection is somewhat misleading. It is not directly over the center of the pipe. It is offset to the west.

There were concerns about the condition and future plans for this pipe during the rebuilding of the track. I was told that this was the reason that the west track was not rebuilt.

That decision is what has resulted in the area being open for consideration as a bikeway.

I am concerned that heavy construction equipment that will be used on this project could rupture the sanitary sewer line. I would like an opinion from the engineers on this project as to whether my concerns are well founded.

Going North

As you will see, there is a double track from a point 70 feet north of Walnut Street to a point about the same distance north of the Van Zandt Avenue bridge.

Both tracks between those two points are in very poor shape. It appears that much of that condition is due to very poor handling of ground water.

It will not surprise me that a near term request would be the continuation of the newly installed east track to the location of the current switch north of Van Zandt Avenue.

Hunter Park

As I mentioned during the online meeting, there is an opportunity to provide easy access to the bikeway from **Hunter Park** which is to the northwest of the Van Zandt Avenue bridge. The park has a street wide entrance from **Sycamore Street**.

During the construction phase, and with due consideration of returning the park to pre-construction conditions, this park could provide an easy access point for construction equipment. Since it is on the west side of the right-of-way, there will be no interference with the east track.

Construction from the depot to the park could be considered a separate phase of construction and implementation.

When the bikeway is completed, a gate could be installed at the south east corner of the park which would provide easy pedestrian and bicycle access.

Newport Bridge

From the Van Zandt Avenue switch to Admiral Kalbfus Road, there is only one track. There is an area directly under the Newport Bridge where there might not be enough room for both the bikeway and the one track. The track might need to be shifted to the east. There is probably enough room to accommodate that shift.

There might also be an area behind the large apartment complex on Third Street where there might be a need for some additional room for the bike path. However, that area is not long and the required expansion area would not very wide.

Dyers Street

The next point of consideration would be just north of the apartment complex at Dyers Street. This is another road which would allow easy access for construction equipment from Third Street.

The map shows that **Dyers Street** comes in from **Third Street** and makes a right turn to go behind the apartment complex.

It is noteworthy, that on the east side of the track, '**Dyer Street**' becomes a foot path. That path connects directly to the southern end of the bisected Connell Highway. This is between the **Newport PlayHouse & Cabaret** and the **Viking Tours** bus garage. It appears to be wide enough to be a single lane road.

A point to consider is that this could provide easy access to the northern segment of Connell Highway which in turn leads to the Admiral Kalbfus Road rotary.

Construction from Hunter Park to Dyers Street could be considered another separate segment of construction.

Admiral Kalbfus Road

From **Dyers Street** to **Admiral Kalbfus Road** is an area which is fairly open to accommodate the bikeway. The west side of it is swamp land. The area is not known for flooding. All of the water from south of the Van Zandt Avenue bridge flow in a Northerly direction.

At the Admiral Kalbfus Road crossing, there are larger open areas that might well be part of the railroad right-of-way.⁵

Fencing

Given that there is very little railroad traffic on the tracks, I would hope that the project does not require fencing to be installed between the bikeway and the east track.

My property at 1 and 1½ Willow Streets shares a common border of approximately 200 feet with the right-of-way. Both my property and the east boundary of the right-of-way are situated on a higher elevation than the rail tracks. I have been told that my property extends to the bottom of the slope.

I do not foresee a need for fence along my property line.

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I hope that my knowledge and experience will help you and your project team. I would like to be included in any future meetings regarding this bikeway project.

⁵ On the north side of the road, the parking lot for the restaurant has been paved on what was once explained to me to be part of the right-of-way.

You can reach me on my cell phone at: 401 924-2402

Thank you,

Peter Martin

Peter Martin

PeterMartin@StacyHouse.com

Copy:

Fred T. Bevans
Environmental Scientist
VHB
1 Cedar Street - Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
pgrivers@vhb.com

Jeffrey Crawford,
Project Manager & Principal Environmental Scientist
RIDEM - Office of Waste Management
235 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908
jeff.Crawford@dem.ri.gov

Robert Rocchio, P.E.
Managing Engineer
RIDOT
2 Capitol Hill
Providence, RI 02903
robert.rocchio@dot.ri.gov