CAPE COD TIMES - 10/31/14

Bike trail extension on Outer Cape making headway

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NORTH TRURO – A master plan to provide bicyclists and pedestrians with safer and more enjoyable experiences in Wellfleet, Truro and Provincetown is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2015, about four years after the idea first arose.

About 50 people gathered Thursday afternoon at Truro Community Center to give feedback to planners from the Cape Cod Commission, the Cape Cod National Seashore and town bike committees. The next workshop is planned for February or March.

The concept of a master plan got its start in 2011 and then faltered over grant funding and the economic downturn's impact on the federal government, according to Cape Cod Commission planner Martha Hevenor. It took until June to finalize the $346,500 federal grant, and now the planning can be re-energized, Hevenor said.

The basic idea is to develop an interconnected bicycle and pedestrian network that links the three towns with the Seashore and with the end of the Cape Cod Rail Trail. Currently the 22-mile rail trail follows an old railroad right-of-way from South Dennis to South Wellfleet.

The master plan would provide guidance for projects such as bike trails and sidewalks, bicycle accommodations on certain routes, bicycle and pedestrian facility development and safety improvements. The plan will explore how to extend the rail trail to the end of the Cape.

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Provincetown Bicycle Committee member Jeff Epstein, left, and Alison Leschen of Falmouth and Truro look at maps of the Outer Cape. The two attended a planning meeting Thursday at the Truro Community Center to plan for a bicycle and pedestrian system of trails from the end of the Cape Cod Rail Trail in South Wellfleet to Provincetown.

"The future is going to be toward bicycling more and more," said Roger Chauvette, a member of the Provincetown Bicycle Committee. Chauvette and others mentioned the need to work with police departments to help enforce bicycle-riding laws and ultimately save lives.

As part of the Thursday meeting, those attending were asked to map out their favorite or typical biking or walking routes, in a group exercise with a large map of the three towns and sticky dots placed on the map where bicycling and walking occurs. A second exercise was to show on another big, three-town map where the dangerous "hot spots" are for bicyclists and pedestrians, such as roads with no shoulders, poor paving and sand accumulation. A final exercise took place around three town maps, where people who live in each town discussed where and how bike and pedestrian accommodations would occur.

In Truro, for example, according to Truro Bike and Walkways Committee member Karen Snow, the use by bicyclists of Route 6A in North Truro, particularly at Beach Point, is the town's greatest challenge, given the narrow road and heavy summer traffic. Also, there are at least four crossings of Route 6 that are well-used by bicyclists but dangerous: at High Head Beach and at Standish Way in North Truro; at the merge of routes 6 and 6A; and at Castle Road, Snow said.

Wellfleet also must consider how bicyclists and pedestrians are crossing Route 6, such as at Lecount Hollow Road in South Wellfleet, according to Wellfleet Bike and Walkways Committee member Sara Hutchings. Other concerns are extending the rail trail northward, considering Ocean View Drive for bike trail use and adding sidewalks downtown, Hutchings said.

State Sen. Daniel Wolf, D-Harwich, a bicyclist himself, said he planned to bring state government officials into the discussion as well.

The funding for the master plan will pay for staff of the Cape Cod Commission and the Seashore to compile statistics and the information from the public, hold further workshop and write the plan. The money also will pay for a consultant to write an environmental assessment, as part of the regulatory requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, according to Hevenor and Seashore planner Lauren McKean.

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