

Mr. Roger Wentz, ATSSA



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Highway  
Administration**

400 Seventh St., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

May 25, 2004

Refer to: HOTO-1

Mr. Mark C. Jewell  
148 Bernon Street #2  
Woonsocket, RI 02895

Dear Mr. Jewell:

Thank you for your May 7 letter to the Federal Highway Administration's Associate Administrator for Operations, Jeffrey F. Paniati, concerning the safety and operations of shared-use paths in Rhode Island (RI). Mr. Paniati has asked me to reply to your letter.

We understand and share your concerns related to the RI State policy that requires pedestrians to "walk on left, facing bicycles." This requirement is potentially very confusing to pedestrians because it is different from the behavior that is expected of them on shared-use paths in other States.

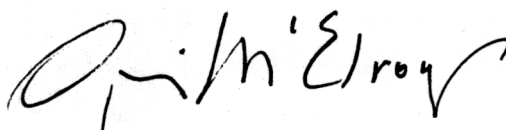
The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is the national standard for the design and application of all traffic control devices, including regulatory signs and pavement markings. However, the MUTCD does not govern the States and local jurisdictions in their authority to enact laws, regulations, and policies to regulate the use of roads and paths under their jurisdiction by pedestrians and other users. While we cannot require changes in RI State laws or regulations, we welcome the decision of the RI Department of Transportation to review their policy and consider changing it. We believe that the safety and convenience of all path users in RI would be best served by having the paths regulated in the same manner as other States, particularly the adjoining States.

The pavement markings on the path shown on the photos you sent appear to be particularly confusing and they do not conform to the MUTCD standards. The MUTCD specifies that a yellow centerline on a shared-use path shall only be used to separate two opposing directions of traffic flow on a two-way path. However, the symbols and arrowheads being used seem to indicate that both lanes operate in the same direction. Regardless of whether or not the "walk on left facing bicycles" regulation remains in effect in RI, we recommend that these confusing and nonconforming markings be removed.



For reference purposes, we have numbered and titled this request as "9-75(I)—Bike Paths\_RI." Please refer to this number in any future correspondence. If you have any questions, please call Ms. Guan Xu at 202-366-5892. Thank you for your interest in improving the safety and operation of RI bike paths.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Regina S. McElroy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Regina" written in a large, stylized script, followed by "S. McElroy" in a smaller, more compact script.

Regina S. McElroy  
Director, Office of Transportation  
Operations

cc: Mr. Roger Wentz, ATSSA

May 7, 2004

Mr. Jeffrey F. Paniati, Associate Administrator for Operations  
Federal Highway Administration  
400 7<sup>th</sup> Street S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

RE: Shared Use Paths / Bikeways

Dear Mr. Paniati:

I write to you today seeking your assistance in what I believe to be a safety/operational concern on shared use paths / bikeways in Rhode Island. Although I currently work for the National Park Service, I write to you today requesting your assistance as an individual resident of Rhode Island.

Currently, in Rhode Island, pedestrians are directed to "walk on left, facing cyclists" on all shared use paths (figures 1&2) (all RI paths have been federally funded). I believe this protocol is unsafe and not in accordance with design and safety recommendations as outlined in documents such as the MUTCD.

Another significant concern is the issue of uniformity. Currently, two bikeways are under construction and will soon reach the Massachusetts and Connecticut state lines. These neighboring states subscribe to the standard rules of the road where all users stay to the right and pass on left when clear. The Massachusetts Highway Department and Connecticut DOT have informed RI that they believe a yellow center line delineates the direction of travel not the mode of travel. As RI's burgeoning bikeway system becomes an interstate system this issue will become a major safety concern.

Earlier this year, on separate occasions, I met with Governor Donald Carcieri, RI DOT director James Capaldi and RI DEM director Fred Vincent to discuss this issue (correspondence enclosed). The outcome of which has been a letter from RI DOT stating that this unusual protocol is consistent with state law and does not violate the MUTCD. The DOT did state that they recognize that there "may be some confusion" on the bikeways and they will research this issue further.

After those conversations, I met with RI- FHWA Division Administrator Lucy Garliauskas, to express my concerns and her office believes it is not their place to force DOT to change at this time.

To date, a few organizations have written to the DOT director to express their interest in seeing RI change their "walk on left" protocol including the RI State Health Department, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and the East Coast Greenway Alliance (letters enclosed).

Thank you for taking the time to consider this issue. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have 401 965-9590.

Enclosed you will find some additional information on the history of the "walk on left" protocol

Sincerely,



Mark C. Jewell

Enclosures

cc: Mr. A. George Ostensen

## Rhode Island Bikeways



Figure 1 East Bay Bikepath, Providence, RI



Figure 2 Walk on Left Signage

## **History of the “Walk on Left” issue**

Rhode Island’s first bike path was the East Bay bike path, a 14 mile converted railroad bed completed in the late 1980’s. When this path was constructed there were no stencils on the pavement and no “walk on left” signs along the path.

Once DOT constructed the path and DEM took over ownership and maintenance, use increased dramatically. DEM as the manager of the facility did not know what to do about the increasing conflict on the path. DEM made a management decision to paint the stencils on the path at major road crossings and parking lots. This effort did not reduce the conflict so DEM turned to the traffic engineering division of the DOT for assistance. The outcome was the sign stating “Walk on Left facing bicyclists”. The hope was that the signs would help to further clarify the stencils. After nearly 15 years on the ground, Rhode Islanders still do not know how to properly use the path.

This precedent setting situation has carried over into every bikeway in Rhode Island.

In 2001, the DOT through the University of Rhode Island, conducted a statewide bicycle user survey. The results of which stated that the majority of those surveyed statewide thought the “walk on left” protocol was confusing and caused conflict. This report can be found at <http://www.dot.state.ri.us/WebTran/bikeri.html>

RI DOT states that bikeways in Rhode Island are classified under state law as bicycle roadways and therefore the motor vehicle code is applied which is why they feel it is appropriate to have pedestrians cross the yellow center line and face oncoming cyclists. According to DOT and DEM pedestrians facing oncoming traffic are supposed to yield to the oncoming traffic by stepping off the path. This rarely happens and cyclists are forced to cross the center line into oncoming traffic.



Office of the Governor  
State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
State House  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-1196  
401-222-2080

Donald L. Carcieri  
Governor

February 2, 2004

Mr. Mark C. Jewell  
21 Mt. Hope Avenue  
Providence, R.I. 02906

Dear Mr. Jewell:

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me at our January Open Door Thursday. I value your input and appreciated talking with you.

This process has given me the opportunity to realize, through advocates such as you, the many varied issues affecting constituents in our State. Although concerns presented at these meetings often require complex resolutions, sometimes involving processes beyond the means of State resources, I always enjoy occasions to be educated on various programs and laws and their impact in the community.

I have instructed a member of my staff to contact both the Department of Transportation and the Department of Environmental Management to look into the problem with signage on our bike paths.

Thank you again for taking the time to enlighten me. Please feel free to call my office should you have any other comments or suggestions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Donald L. Carcieri".

Governor



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

Rhode Island Department of Transportation  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER

Two Capitol Hill, Rm 224  
Providence, RI 02903-1124  
PHONE 401-222-2492  
FAX 401-222-3435 TDD 401-222-4971

February 18, 2004

Mr. Mark Jewell  
21 Mt. Hope Avenue  
Providence RI 02906

Dear Mr. Jewell:

Governor Carcieri asked that we respond to the bike path concerns that you posed to him during your recent "Open Door Thursday" visit to his office.

As you may know, bike paths in Rhode Island were designed and built specifically as bicycle roadways, and are currently defined in RI General Law as roadways. As such, the rules of the motor vehicle code were applied. Following the state law for roadways, we signed and striped the state bike paths for pedestrians to walk on the left hand side of the path facing "traffic" (cyclists) and for cyclists to ride on the right hand side of the path. Pedestrians can react and get off the paved path quickly, should they see a potential conflict coming on. This policy is consistent with state law and is not in violation of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

Bike paths have become tremendously successful and popular with various users, including bicyclists, walkers and inline skaters. While we acknowledge that there may be some confusion on the state's bike path network, we, in cooperation with our sister agency, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) will research this issue further to see if it warrants a change in policy.

Thank you for your interest in Rhode Island's bicycle network

Sincerely,

Edmund T. Parker, Jr., P.E.  
Chief Engineer

cc: Governor Carcieri; Fred Vincent, RIDEM

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS  
D E P A R T M E N T O F H E A L T H

*Safe and Healthy Lives in Safe and Healthy Communities*

Patricia A. Nolan, MD, MPH  
Director of Health

22 March 2004

Mr. James Capaldi, Director  
Department of Transportation  
State of Rhode Island  
2 Capitol Hill  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Director Capaldi:

The Department of Health is very interested in promoting safe use of Rhode Island's wonderful system of bike paths. One of our ten Healthy Rhode Island goals for 2010 is to increase physical activity among our residents, and we want them to do this in ways that are both safe and enjoyable.

Both Helen Drew and Ann Thacher of our staff have discussed safety concerns with Mark Jewell of the National Park Service in Woonsocket. Following those conversations, they are concerned about this safety issue and have asked me to convey the Department's position that use and safety would improve if Rhode Island conforms to the standard for pedestrian use of bike paths that is widely used in other parts of the country, where bicycles and pedestrians travel in the same direction.

The difficulty with the current protocol is well documented in your *Bicycle Transportation User Survey*, which demonstrates that many respondents do not feel comfortable with the current situation between bikers and walkers. Please let me know if there is any way we can advance this change as we work to increase Rhode Islanders' activity levels.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at 222-2231 or by email at [pnolan@doh.state.ri.us](mailto:pnolan@doh.state.ri.us) or Ann Thacher of the Office of Health Promotion at 222-7637 or by email at [annt@doh.state.ri.us](mailto:annt@doh.state.ri.us).

Sincerely,

*Pat*

Patricia A. Nolan, MD, MPH  
Director of Health

PAN:bjjs

cc: Helen Drew  
Ann Thacher  
Mark Jewell



East Coast



Greenway.  
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*Executive Director*  
Karen M. Votava

April 1, 2004

Mr. James Capaldi, Director  
Department of Transportation  
State of Rhode Island  
2 Capitol Hill  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Mr. Capaldi:

The East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA), the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization developing a trail connecting cities from Maine to Florida for bicyclists, walkers and other non-motorized users, is concerned about Rhode Island's current bike path user rules.

Rhode Island is the only state in the nation to employ "walk on left, bike on right" rules. While we understand the reason for this rule in RI, we would like to encourage RIDOT to revisit this decision. The ECGA, forging a trail network joining several Rhode Island trails with trails in Massachusetts, Connecticut and the rest of the east coast, is concerned that trail users passing from one state to the next, will be confused by the rules change. This could become a safety issue for trail users in the state.

The East Coast Greenway Alliance and its partner in the state, the Greenways Alliance of Rhode Island, will be happy to work with the state as it considers the rule change, and as implementation of the new rules take place.

Sincerely,

Karen M. Votava  
Executive Director

cc Mark Jewell