

ENTERTAINMENT, LIFESTYLE, NEWS

WINDY DEBUT FOR BIKE PATH

BY BILL BROTHERTON | April 8, 2018



(Spenser Hasak)

It's 11 a.m. on Saturday, 37 degrees, overcast, and windy as hell. A perfect day for a bike ride. Forty-one cyclists — 43 if you count the child in the tag-along behind dad and this sleepy reporter — are standing in the wet parking lot at Bent Water Brewing Co. on Commercial Street in Lynn.

Bike to the Sea's annual April Fool's Ride is about to begin. This year's 10-mile trek is special, because it includes cycling on the proposed Lynn portion of the Northern Strand Trail. Since 1993, Bike to the Sea has been working to create a mostly-paved car-free path from Malden/Everett, through the Saugus marshes, to the beaches in Revere, Lynn and Nahant.

This is Bike to the Sea's 25th anniversary year and, finally, good things are happening on the northernmost section of the trail. In February, the state awarded \$1.5 million to fund additional design work to improve the current trail and jumpstart the expansion into Lynn.

"People are fired up about this trail," said Pete Sutton, a Bike to the Sea board member and the guy who plans the group's rides.

Lynn's Mayor, Thomas M. McGee, who chaired the Joint Committee on Transportation and served as its Senate chair since 2010, is committed to the project. On Saturday, Bill Bochnak, project coordinator at Lynn Economic Development, updated riders on the trail's progress, standing on Lynn Common with the colorful mural on the Centerboard building in City Hall Square hovering in the background. He and his boss at EDIC, James Cowdell, are committed to the project, as is Peter Capano, the Ward 6 councilor and candidate for the 11th Essex District House seat, who showed up on the Common and at the start of the ride to wish everyone well.

"I like to refer to this as a community path," said Capano, "because it's not exclusively for bicyclists. Some of it will be a paved walking path families can enjoy."

Richard Fries, former executive director of MassBike, and current interim director Tom Francis both rode and are enthused by the trail's expansion. Clay Larsen of Malden is project manager for Bike to the Sea and a landscape architect; he rode and is responsible for writing grants to help fund trail projects.

"The trail changes for each town. Everett is close to the Mystic River; the Wynn casino staff loves the trail and the mayor is a booster. Malden has street crossings, stores and community gardens. In Revere, the view of Rumney Marsh is spectacular. Saugus is shady, lots of trees, and access to neighborhoods. Lynn is more of an urban experience.

"Ten years ago, we met with now-Mayor McGee and Peter Capano, longtime supporters. They understand the trail's importance. Lisa Wallace, a Lynn resident, is to be commended as well. She and I teamed up when she bought a house on Neptune Street Court, then a rough neighborhood. She and her neighbors cleaned it up. Every house on that street is well-maintained. It was a grassroots effort and neighbors use the current dirt path to walk to the grocery store. Parks and lots of community gardens are planned for the Lynn leg of the trail."

Steve Winslow, a Malden attorney who moved from bike-friendly Davis, Calif., in 1989, yearned to ride from his new home to the beach, just a few miles away. It was impossible, so he put Bike to the Sea's wheels in motion.

"The focus has always been for Lynn and the beaches of Nahant and Revere to be the ultimate destination," said Winslow. "The Beyond Walls murals have inspired people to envision a family-friendly trail in Lynn. The commitment is there in Lynn now. It's a great opportunity for the city. The trail will connect to jobs, in Boston, Assembly Square and elsewhere.

"How much would it cost to bring the Blue Line to Lynn? What would the cost of another Big Dig be? This is happening now, and it will connect Boston and Lynn."

When completed, the trail itself be a shade over 12 miles long.

The most important thing, of course, is that the residents of Lynn, Saugus, Revere and neighboring communities are behind the plan. Those who rode Saturday morning, when the temperature eventually rose to 45 degrees under sunny skies, definitely are.

Rich and Leah Razumny, young parents and homeowners in Saugus, live near the Iron Works historic site and are thrilled about the trail. “I work in the Financial District in Boston and would love to ride my commuter bike into work,” said Rich. “It’s 10.3 miles, he mapped it,” added Leah.

Right now, Rich drives his car on Route 1 to Wellington Station in Medford, where he catches the Orange Line to his office on State Street. “It takes forever,” he said.

Gus Fish of Saugus, who rides often with fellow retired pals, is eager to see the trail expansion completed. “We ride a lot, mostly on the Malden/Everett part, and in Chelmsford and Danvers. Part of our criteria is that there has to be a great breakfast spot on the trail. Lynn would fit that bill easily.”

Jim Tozza, also of Saugus and a former president of Bike to the Sea, was the point person during the Saugus trail’s earliest days, working with Selectmen and other officials eight years ago. He was awarded a citation from the town for spearheading the effort. Tozza rode Saturday, despite having a mini-stroke 12 years ago and battling diabetes.

“My sugar was way up and my doctor wanted to put me on the needle. I told him I wasn’t going on the needle. I started riding on Bike to the Sea rides. I rode from Saugus to Peabody when I worked. I don’t own a car,” said the 58-year-old. “My health has improved. I do take one pill (Metformin) a day, but that’s it.”

Saturday morning, the 43 of us meandered through Lynn streets, some remote (Neptune Street Court, where Lisa Wallace and her team of Community Path of Lynn volunteers had unveiled three new murals and just finished a morning clean-up of the area) others busy (Western Avenue and over the Belden Bly Bridge), into the glorious Rumney Marsh in Saugus (the path’s entrance is across the street from the Officer Harold Vitale Memorial Park), into Revere briefly, then returning via an off-road path that leads to the Market Basket store in Lynn and, finally, through Lynn Common and then back to the brewery where thirsty riders quenched their thirsts with Sluice Juice, Thunder Funk IPA and other libations.

Karyl Stoia, a Lynn resident and Bike to the Sea board member, relaxing at the brewery, said she spent the morning with Wallace cleaning up the path. “I’m a part-time, fair-weather bicyclist,” she said with a smile. “This trail is wonderful. It’s a way to get people healthier, whether they walk or ride a bike. There will be community gardens on the trail; the views are beautiful.”

Linda Sullivan, a lifelong Lynner, said additional cleanups in Saugus and Lynn will be held for Earth Day, on April 21, and April 28 and May 12. For more information, go to biketothesea.com or the group’s Facebook page.

Bill Brotherton is the Item’s Features editor. Tell him what you think at itemlive.com.



Bill Brotherton

Brotherton is Features editor for the Daily Item. He is also editor of Essex Media Group's North Shore Golf, 01907 and ONE magazines. A Beverly native and Suffolk University graduate, Bill recently retired from the Boston Herald, where he wrote about music, edited the Features section and was Editorial unit chairman for The Newspaper Guild-CWA local 31032. This is his second stint at the Item, having labored as Lifestyle editor back in the olden days, when New Wave and Hair Metal music ruled the airwaves.

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