

PROVINCETOWN BANNER

New bike lane plan for Shank Painter gets OK

K.C. Myers kmyers@provincetownbanner.com

Published 6:22 p.m. ET March 6, 2019 | Updated 6:22 p.m. ET March 6, 2019

PROVINCETOWN — The select board has approved the addition of bike lanes on both sides of Shank Painter Road as part of a \$9.4 million state-funded project to improve traffic flow along that street.

The Feb. 25 vote, during another continuation of the road design hearing, was significant because it gave a green light to the most critical part of the plan — five-foot-wide bike lanes on either side of the street, said Rik Ahlberg, chair of the town's bicycle committee.

The next hearing will be on April 22, to vote on whether to install a roundabout at the intersection of Route 6 and Shank Painter Road, and whether to put the portion of Route 6 between Shank Painter Road and Herring Cove on a “road diet” by closing the southern lanes to cars.

The project is proceeding with “baby steps,” said Select Board Chair Cheryl Andrews. Engineers had hoped the first 25 percent of the project design would be done in January. Construction is slated for 2023.

But the plan has been controversial. Citizens did not like the pitch they saw in November, which called for a two-way bike lane on one side of Shank Painter Road. It would be separated from the roadway by a sidewalk. People criticized two-way lanes side by side. The new design has one lane on each side of the road, with bikes moving in the same direction as vehicular traffic.

Placing a pedestrian walkway between bike and vehicle traffic also got panned in the first plan. Now the pedestrian lanes will be on the far sides of the bike lanes.

Finally, this design keeps the width of the car part of the road at 34 feet, wide enough to allow a fire truck to pass when cars pull over. This had been a big concern for Fire Chief Mike Trovato, who did not attend last week's hearing.

Resident Jay Gurewitsch thanked the engineers for “keeping pedestrians on the outside, not in between cars and bikes.”

Ahlberg said, “We love this project. It is fantastic.”

“Congratulations, gentlemen, you’ve beaten this issue to death,” Andrews joked to the engineers after the board approved that portion of the design unanimously.

Then the engineers moved on to the roundabout, and there the protests began.

James Fitzgerald, the director of transportation for the designers, Environmental Partners, presented statistics showing more accidents occurred at the Shank Painter and Route 6 intersection than at the Conwell Street and Route 6 intersection.

Reports over a five-year period showed 11 crashes at Conwell versus 13 crashes at Shank Painter.

Some people “thought it was worse at Conwell, but that’s not the case,” Fitzgerald said.

Yet even after they heard these numbers, skeptical residents disputed the source of the data. Town Manager David Panagore later confirmed the accident reports came directly from the local police and the state Dept. of Transportation.

The roundabout design didn’t impress Deb Trovato, who said, “I’m a firm believer in if it’s not broken don’t fix it. And I don’t believe those accident numbers.”

“This is complexity we don’t need,” said Duane Steele, a member of the finance committee. “Keep it simple, keep it straight, keep Provincetown the way it is. And I don’t want to see something grotesque like that.”

The hearing continues on April 22.

