

Marion Shared Use Path Alternatives Analysis

The idea of a shared use path in Marion was pursued as early as 1974 as described in the Town of Marion Master Plan, dated July 1974. Numerous community surveys, including the most recent in 2017, indicated substantial support in Marion for a shared use path connection to neighboring towns. The goals of the project were to develop a connected, safe, and comfortable bicycle and shared use path to fill an existing gap in the multi-modal transportation network and provide a connection to the South Coast Bikeway at the Mattapoisett/Marion Town Line. Several route locations and design alternatives were considered during the development of the proposed Marion shared use path. The information that follows discusses alternatives for the entire project as well as unique project segment alternatives evaluated for the Preferred Alternative.

Project Alternatives

Alternative 1. Use of Existing Infrastructure and Roadways in Marion (Dismissed):

The “No Build” alternative would have used existing public roadways and lands in the Town of Marion. Cyclists and pedestrians currently use Route 6. However, the number of trips made as part of a commute to work or shopping or for recreation etc., is likely low due to unsafe conditions. Shoulders on Route 6 are narrow or non-existent. The roadway features substantial defects and real-time traffic speeds rise as high as 50 mph. The roadway conditions and its limited use for commuting, shopping, and recreation, as well as its lack of connection to the South Coast Bikeway, eliminated Route 6 as a viable alternative.

The existing and abandoned rail ROW’s are also currently used by pedestrians despite poor drainage and downed trees for the majority of the year. The rough surface on the rail ROW is not suitable substrate for the shared use path, especially for narrow-tired bicycles, strollers, and roller blades. The existing abandoned railroad bed itself would not provide access to users of all abilities. The poor surface and drainage characteristics eliminated this alternative from further study.

For these reasons, using existing and infrastructure and roadways was dismissed.

Alternative 2. A Shared Use Path Entirely on Route 6 (Dismissed)

This alternative proposed the entire shared use path on Route 6 from the Mattapoisett Town Line to the Wareham Town Line. This alternative would not meet the project goal of providing a connection to the South Coast Bikeway. Because the shared use path would utilize existing Route 6 ROWs for vehicular travel, it would have less impact to wetland resources, protected open space, and Estimated Habitat. However, the speed limit on Route 6 can reach as high as 50 miles per hour, creating safety concerns for shared use path users.

For these reasons, the Route 6 alternative was dismissed.

Alternative 3. A Shared Use Path Primarily on Town-Owned Land (Preferred Alternative)

The Preferred Alternative will direct shared use path users away from vehicular travel and will accomplish the Project's goals to provide passive recreational in the Town of Marion, enhance pedestrian safety and enable future connectivity to the South Coast Bikeway. The Preferred Alternative primarily uses Town-owned land and places 80% of the shared use path on existing rail and trolley ROW's. In this alternative, the shared use path originates at the Mattapoisett/Marion town line, connecting to the South Coast Bikeway, runs for several miles on a railroad ROW, traverses the Front/Spring Street intersection, runs along another abandoned trolley ROW and alongside Washburn Lane, and into Washburn Park. North of the Park, the SUP extends onto another railroad ROW, crosses over an 80 foot wide section the Washburn Park Extension, which is subject to a Self-Help Program Agreement, until arriving at a parcel gifted to the Town to provide access to Washburn Park from Point Road.

The Preferred Alternative consists of the use of Town-owned land which was acquired or gifted to the Town of Marion for the purpose of the Shared Use Path. Alternative routes out of Washburn Park to the east would have had a greater footprint on the Washburn Park Extension parcel, greater impact to Estimated Habitat, and greater impact to Wetland Protection Act Resource Areas Bordering Vegetated Wetlands, Land Subject to Coastal Storm Flowage, and River Front Area.

This alternative accomplishes the project's goals of providing passive recreational opportunities in the Town of Marion and growing the network of regional trails while enhancing pedestrian safety; it was therefore chosen as the Preferred Alternative.

Preferred Alternative Summary

The Preferred Alternative will primarily use Town-owned infrastructure, including the abandoned railroad right-of-way originating at the Mattapoisett/Marion Town Line and extending to the area immediately west of the Front Street (Route 105)/Spring Street intersection, where it will meet the intersection via a parcel directly south of the Brew Fish Restaurant. On the east side of the intersection, it will travel along the abandoned trolley line to Washburn Lane, travel along Washburn Lane for a short stretch before entering Washburn Park. The path will navigate through Washburn Park using existing gravel paths before reaching Washburn Park Road where it will travel for a short distance before rejoining the abandoned railroad bed where it will continue to the project's terminus at Pond Road. The Town submits that it has

demonstrated that all other options to avoid and/or minimize the Article 97 change of use have been explored, and no feasible or substantially equivalent alternative exists.