

What happened to Route 895? Is the state Department of Transportation still planning to build Rt. 895, or some facsimile of it?

I'm talking about the interstate speedway that once was planned to run from Route 95 in Richmond, across South Kingstown, North Kingstown, and Jamestown, and then up the west side of Aquidneck Island, connecting with Route 195 in Massachusetts.

Is it truly defunct, as state and federal agencies say? Or is it idling patiently in a dark corner of the state DOT garage, waiting to merge back onto the fast track? The question popped up the other day as I was composing a story for these pages about Jamestown's new Bicycle Path Design Committee, which seeks better bicycle access along North Main Road, connecting the village center with the populous Jamestown Shores neighborhood at mid-island.

What does a little old bike path have to do with that rough beast, I-895? Not much at first glance, but consider: a safer North Main bike corridor is needed, in no small part, because the other road running between the mid-Shores and downtown is closed to bicycle traf-

fic, and to pedestrians as well. That road is Route 138.

Why such a prohibition? It's not because the road is too narrow, or the speed limit dangerously high, or the risk of head-on traffic too great. Nor is it because visibility is bad, or the road pavement poor, or there is too much cross-traffic. In fact, the travel lanes are wide and the shoulders generally ample. The speed limit is only 40, like on North Main Road. Eastbound and westbound are divided by turf and guardrails, and the track is mostly flat, with great visibility, smooth pavement and zero crossing traffic.

It is similar to Route 1 through North Kingstown and points south – except the speed limit on Route 1 is 50 miles per hour in places, there are many side roads and driveways entering at right angles, and it is thick with traffic. Yet, cyclists are permitted to ride on Route 1, and pedestrians may go by foot, even though there is nary a sidewalk.

Other state roads that permit walkers and cyclists are even more problematic. Take Routes 114 and 138 in Middletown and Portsmouth, for example, or Routes 6 and 44 in the northwestern part of the state. These are aged, cramped, sparsely-shouldered, undivided, four-lane horror shows, where



**Island Lookout**

By Stephen Heffner

head-on collisions in heavy traffic are not uncommon, and where all manner of other serious vehicle accidents are regular occurrences. To bike these is to court death – but the state allows it, just as it permits pedestrians, even where there are not adequate sidewalks.

But the state won't allow similar access to Route 138 across Jamestown – or to the wide, well-paved, uncluttered stretch of 138 in North Kingstown, between Routes 1 and 1A. Nor will it allow bikes on the Jamestown-Verrazzano Bridge, which, compared with, say, the lethal Metacom Avenue (Route 136) through Bristol, would be a biker's boulevard.

Some history: In the 1960s, highway engineers dreamed up a Providence by-pass – I-895 – so drivers could jump off Route 95 south of the city and loop over to Route 195 in Massachusetts. Early plans offered several options for a

highway through Warwick, across a bridge to Barrington, and northward from there. When that flopped with the public, planners claimed the southern route, which included Jamestown. Though routing strategies differed, each plan had at least one thing in common: they were limited-access highways, meaning no walking or biking.

State and federal officials will tell you that the overall I-895 plan was cancelled in 1982 (because the public rejected it) – but dreams of interstate grandeur were revived when the old Jamestown Bridge had to be replaced in the 1990s. And though state DOT officials denied repeatedly that they were trying to reincarnate I-895, they managed to build an interstate-style piece of Route 138 in North Kingstown, and another one, slightly scaled down, across Jamestown. Then, still claiming I-895 was off the table, DOT officials aggressively pitched section-by-section plans for the very same roadway – albeit without the telltale I-title – along the length of Aquidneck Island, connecting to the Newport Bridge, and through South County, connecting to Route 95. No bicycles or pedestrians allowed. (No sale either, said the public.)

So, I wondered the other day,

are footfalls and bikes still being kept off Route 138 to give the DOT time to conjure a newly disguised cousin of I-895? No, said the DOT's acting chief of design, Robert Smith, when I reached him on Tuesday. He insisted that I-895 is "a dead project," and that the department has no plans to fill in the corridor, a piece at a time, and call it something else. Even so, he said, Route 138 will remain "a limited access highway," with pedestrians and cyclists prohibited. He said the issue of bike and foot traffic might be addressed once demolition of the old Jamestown Bridge has been completed, and all the attendant deconstruction commotion has subsided. But, he added, a shortage of funding has pushed the demo project back to at least 2012, and perhaps beyond.

In the meantime, I guess, would-be hikers and bikers are left to hope for the best – even as we motor to the western terminus of the 138 freeway in North Kingstown, and, bearing off to climb the ramp to Route 1, we glimpse on our left the ominous few feet of the interstate spur, constructed a decade ago, aimed west, clipped for the moment, but patient as a Sphinx, slouching into woods, awaiting its hour.

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