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III. BICYCLING IN THE NORTHERN OUTER BANKS

Ten Years of Bicycle Improvements

The northern Outer Banks region of coastal North Carolina is a natural attraction for bicyclists. Looking at a map, the long, thin ribbon of land conjures images of sun and sea that are almost irresistible to those who like to travel on two wheels. In 1974, a group of Dare County citizens and decision makers who understood that appeal initiated an effort to improve conditions for bicycling in the area. They began by lobbying the North Carolina Department of Transportation for assistance. A basic bicycle plan was developed and NCDOT officials were invited to tour the area and assess the possibilities. At that time, neither the NCDOT nor the federal government had set aside any special funds for such facilities. Although everyone could see the potential, it was not until the late 1980's, when NCDOT funding was first earmarked for construction of bicycle facilities, that the Bicycle Program (now the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation) could begin to plan, fund, design and build bicycle improvements in the region.

Over the past ten years, NCDOT has built an extensive system of special bicycle facilities in the region. Multi-use paths, wide paved shoulders and wide curb lanes now link the towns and villages from Corolla south to Nags Head and west to Manteo. To date, approximately \$5.9 million of Bicycle Transportation Improvement Program funds have been allocated for these facilities. The Towns of Nags Head and Duck and the Dare County Tourist Bureau also contributed approximately \$800,000 toward construction costs bringing the total public investment in dedicated funds to approximately \$6.7 million. In addition, NCDOT has incorporated other improvements, such as bicycle-safe accommodations on bridges and additional width on roadways, into scheduled highway projects. Expenditure figures for these bicycle improvements are not available as they were incorporated into overall project costs. In some areas, developers have used private funds to build bicycle facilities as well. Combined, these improvements have made bicycling a viable transportation option in the region and have enhanced bicycle recreation opportunities. The considerable investment of public funds reflects the strong desire of residents and visitors alike to be able to bicycle to their destinations and to just enjoy traveling under their own power.

Shown below in **Table 3** is a comprehensive list of independent* bicycle projects built within the study area, from north of the Currituck Lighthouse to Whalebone Junction in Nags Head and in Manteo. Project costs, approximate mileages and year constructed are also shown for each project.

Table 3. Northern Outer Banks Bicycle Facilities, with corresponding cost to construct, length and year installed. *Independent project funding provided by state, federal and/or municipal funds. Does not include projects built in conjunction with a highway or bridge improvement or by developers. **Traffic counts and/or intercept surveys were conducted on these projects.

| Bicycle Project Location | Estimated Cost* (dollars) | Length (miles) | Year |
|---|---|-----------------------|------------|
| Currituck County Bicycle Projects | | | |
| NC 12 paved shoulder project from north of Corolla Lighthouse to Dare County line (built in phases)** | 1,707,741 (300,000 paid by Currituck County) | 12.1 | 2000, 2002 |
| Dare County Bicycle Projects | | | |
| Side Path along NC 12 from Currituck County line to Duck | 230,151 | 2.8 | 1999 |
| Bike lane along NC 12 in Duck** | 225,000 (120,000 paid by locality) | 1.2 | 1998 |
| Side Path along NC 12 from Duck to Southern Shores (US 158)** | 438,740 | 3.9 | 1999 |
| Side Path along US 158 in Southern Shores | 84,840 | 1.1 | 1997 |
| NC 12 paved shoulder project from Kitty Hawk to Whalebone Junction (built in phases)** | 1,760,000 | 16.0 (approximate) | 1997-1999 |
| Woods Road Bike Path along SR 1206 in Kitty Hawk | 338,000 (paid by locality, designed by and managed by NCDOT) | 2.0 | 1999 |
| Kitty Hawk Road (SR 1206) paved shoulder project in Kitty Hawk | 188,447 | 1.7 | 2000 |
| Veteran's Drive Bike Path in Kill Devil Hills | 65,000 (32,500 paid by locality) | 0.4 | 1997 |
| Wright Brothers Bike Path Phase I in Kill Devil Hills | 118,238 | 1.0 | 1996 |
| Collington Road Bike Path Extension in Kill Devil Hills | 43,646 | 0.5 | 1999 |
| Side Path along NC 12 in Nags Head (built in three phases)** | 1,145,500 | 8.8 | 1997-1998 |
| Side Path along US 64/264 in Manteo** | 382,000 | 4.25 | 1994 |
| Total Facilities in northern Outer Banks | \$6,727,303 | 55.75 miles | |

A System of Bicycle Facilities Encourage Usage and Improve Safety

Bicycle facilities greatly enhance the safety and enjoyment of local and visiting cyclists alike, providing bicycle access to many residential and commercial areas, beach access sites, tourist destinations and points of interest. In addition, the bicycle facilities provide benefits for all road users. Congestion is reduced, and the

addition of paved shoulders enhances motorist safety and extends the life of the roadway. Descriptions and photographs of the bicycle improvements, listed from north to south through this region, are shown below. Their locations are also displayed on detailed maps of the northern Outer Banks seen in Appendix A (page 45). Unless specified otherwise, these projects were funded, designed and built by the NCDOT Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation through the Bicycle Transportation Improvement Program.

NC 12 from Corolla to Dare County Line

This narrow, heavily-traveled roadway was improved for bicyclists and motorists alike by the provision of 4-ft wide paved shoulders on each side of the road for approximately 12 miles. Completed in phases, NCDOT designed, funded and administered this bicycle facility improvement. (See letter A on Figure 25 on page 45.)

Duck Trail along NC 12

This facility consists of a side path parallel to NC 12 from the Currituck County line to the northern Duck town limits that transitions to a wide paved shoulder section, marked as a bike lane, through town. The 8-ft wide asphalt side path carries two-way bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The shoulder/bike lane section is 1.2 miles long and has 4-ft shoulders on each side of NC 12. The Duck Trail provides access between residential, recreational and commercial areas in Duck. Funding for this project was provided by NCDOT with participation by the Town of Duck. (See letters B and C on Figure 25 on page 45.)



Wide paved shoulder/bike lane in Duck on NC 12. Photo Courtesy NCDOT.

Southern Shores Side Path along NC 12 and US 158

Built in phases, this 6- to 8-ft multi-use side path carries both bicycle and pedestrian traffic from Duck to the Southern Shores Town Hall and provides an alternative to the heavily-traveled roadways in the area. The facility connects residential areas, beach access areas and retail outlets. (See letters D and E on Figure 26 on page 46.)

NC 12 from Kitty Hawk to Whalebone Junction

Bicycle usage in this corridor was high even before the addition of 4-ft wide paved shoulders to improve bicycle safety. This is the old beach road, tucked behind the first row of sand dunes, and provides access to many residences, commercial establishments and the numerous beach access areas along the strand. The paved shoulder project through this area is approximately 16 miles long. (See letter F on Figure 26 on page 46.)

Woods Road Bike Path in Kitty Hawk

This off-road 8-ft wide, two-way bicycle and pedestrian path runs for two miles on the west side of Woods Road and provides an important link from Kitty Hawk to Southern Shores. The project was paid for with local funds and was designed and administered by NCDOT. (See letter G on Figure 26 on page 46.)

Kitty Hawk Road (SR 1206) in Kitty Hawk

Kitty Hawk road is a two-lane road that is heavily used by residents as an alternative to congested NC 12 and US 158. Four-foot wide paved shoulders were added along a 1.7 mile section of the road to

provide dedicated space for cyclists. This project links to the Woods Road bike path (see above) at its northern terminus and to NC 12 on the south, providing an important link in the bicycle transportation system. (See letter H on Figure 26 on page 46.)

Kill Devil Hills Bicycle Improvements

Built as discrete projects, the three facilities described below provide a viable bicycle transportation alternative to the congested roads in the area. These facilities form a continuous 2.4 mile off-road connection between residential areas, the First Flight Elementary and Middle Schools, the local government complex, commercial areas and the Kill Devil Hills beach access areas along NC 12, Beach Road. (See letter I on Figure 26 on page 46.)

- Wright Brothers Memorial Bike, Path Phase I, in Kill Devil Hills - This one-mile off-road bicycle and pedestrian path is eight feet wide and carries two-way bicycle and pedestrian traffic. It provides a connector through the Wright Brothers' National Memorial property.
- Collington Road Bike Path Extension in Kill Devil Hills – This short, 0.5-mile, section of off-road path is built on the north side of Collington Road, a narrow two-lane road. The path is eight feet wide and carries two-way bicycle and pedestrian traffic.
- Veteran's Drive Bike Path in Kill Devil Hills – This 8-ft wide two-way bicycle facility provides direct access from neighborhoods to two schools and is heavily used by children. It is 0.4 miles in length.

Nags Head Side Path along NC 12

Built in phases, this off-road facility runs along the east side of NC 12/Virginia Dare Trail for 8.8 miles. The path is eight feet wide and carries two-way bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Primary usage is by novice and child cyclists as well as by rollerbladers, skateboarders and parents pushing baby strollers. For this reason, the more experienced cyclists typically ride on the wide paved shoulders built to accommodate bicyclists, on each side of the road, rather than on the bike path. (See letter J on Figure 27 on page 47.)



Nags Head Side Path – an off-road facility. Photo courtesy of NCDOT



Manteo Side Path. Photo Courtesy NCDOT

Manteo Side Path along US 64/264

This 5-ft wide trail provides an off-road bicycle and pedestrian alternative to US 64/264 from the Croatan Sound through Manteo to NC 345. The four-mile project included construction of two sections of asphalt path that linked with existing sections of concrete sidewalk to complete the corridor. Incidental bicycle improvements built as part of highway and bridge projects extend this corridor to Whalebone Junction, linking to the bicycle improvements along NC 12. (See letter K on Figure 27 on page 47.)