



TRANSPORTATION

CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A description of Charlestown's roadway systems and its bicycling and pedestrian opportunities, and recommendations to achieve a full range of transportation options while retaining rural character.

Map
TR-1 Transportation Systems

Cover Photo: Frances Topping

TRANSPORTATION CHAPTER

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CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
CHAPTER 8. TRANSPORTATION
Planning Commission Final Draft; December 2019

INTRODUCTION

Charlestown's transportation system is comprised of a network of state, town and private roads. The major state highway is US Route 1 that generally parallels the recessional moraine that divides the town into distinct areas in terms of geology and land use. The area south of Route 1, which consists of the coastal plain, salt ponds and barrier beaches, was the location of historic settlements and is now the most densely developed area of Charlestown. The area north of Route 1, characterized by hills, forests, rivers and large wetland systems, is less densely developed and includes large parcels of protected land and farmland. Route 1 serves as a major connector to the adjoining Washington County communities, Westerly and South Kingstown, and in the summer serves as the principal thoroughfare for vacationers and visitors.

Interstate 95 is located north of Charlestown's borders. Without easy access to the interstate system, the town has not developed as a destination for retail or office development. The other major state roads – Route 91 in the western portion of town and Routes 2 and 112 in the central eastern portion – are north-south arterials that connect the town to its neighboring communities of Richmond and Hopkinton. Partially due to its roadway system, Charlestown has experienced manageable growth without compromising its rural and scenic qualities. Since 2002, the Charlestown section of Route 1 has been designated a Rhode Island Scenic Roadway.

The Amtrak main line, which runs from New York to Boston, crosses the northerly portion of Charlestown. Despite having this major transportation feature within its boundaries, there is no direct connection for Charlestown residents and visitors; the nearest passenger stations are in the Town of South Kingstown to the north, and in the Town of Westerly to the west. There is also no regularly scheduled bus service within the town.

Charlestown does have some bicycle routes and a few areas with sidewalks. Recent efforts of the town boards and committees with an interest in transportation have focused on increasing safe opportunities for bicycling for both travel and recreational purposes. In addition, redevelopment in the commercial corridors and the villages must include plans for sidewalks or other walkways, to facilitate access between businesses and create a community feeling.

While additional accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians in certain areas of town are likely, it is not anticipated that Charlestown's predominately tourist and recreation economy will require or invite other traditional transportation components such as year-round bus and train service.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER CHAPTERS

This chapter, which describes the network of roadways that comprises the town's transportation system, as well as other components of a circulation system, complements a number of others:

Recreation Chapter

Recreation programs and assets are described in the Recreation chapter, with an emphasis on outdoor activities. Because of the importance of recreation to the town's tourist economy, additional bicycling and walking options are desired, which this chapter addresses in the Goals, Policies and Recommendations section.

Services and Facilities Chapter

Maintaining the town owned roads is a major responsibility of the Charlestown Public Works Department, as described in the Services and Facilities chapter. This includes plowing, pavement repair and in particular, managing the stormwater runoff from these roads. All aspects of stormwater management are described in the Services and Facilities chapter.

Energy Chapter

Promoting alternative forms of travel, ride sharing and public transportation as a means to reduce fossil fuel consumption are discussed in the Energy chapter.

Natural Hazards Chapter

There are a number of natural hazards that can impact transportation, including riverine flooding and fallen trees from high winds. As a coastal community, Charlestown is also susceptible to seaborne natural disasters and must plan for eventual sea level rise. The potential effects of natural hazards and sea level rise on Charlestown's road system, including requirements for emergency evacuations, are contained in the Natural Hazards chapter.

Land Use Chapter

The Land Use chapter describes land uses and development patterns in Charlestown, and describes the town's zoning districts and the allowable uses within those districts. It includes a proposed Future Land Use Map with recommendations for areas to be used for commercial and mixed-use developments. These land use patterns are a function of the automobile-centered transportation system, with proposed commercial development (as reflected by the zoning designation) influenced by the type of roadway access.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Charlestown's transportation system is typical of that of many small and rural communities in Rhode Island. It consists predominantly of local roadways, both municipally and privately owned and maintained, that provide access to and facilitate movement between locations and attractions within the town, as well as a few state-owned collector and arterial roadways that interconnect with the local roadways and provide the means to travel outside of town.

While the existing transportation system in Charlestown is dominated by the automobile, many residents also walk between destinations locally. Walking to the beach and walking to different destinations along the beach are long-standing local traditions. Bicycling is common, particularly along many of the rural collector roads.

Some transportation for seniors and other qualifying persons is available through a state authorized non-emergency medical transportation service provided by a private vendor, and also through the Southern Rhode Island Volunteers, but there is no public transportation system servicing Charlestown as of 2019 (see discussion in Issues and Opportunities section of this chapter).

Regionally, residents can connect to rail at the Westerly Station a few miles away to the west, or the Kingston Station a few miles to the northeast. Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) park and ride lots are also located nearby in Westerly, Hopkinton, Richmond, South Kingstown and North Kingstown.

Roadway Network

Regional Context

In the regional context, Charlestown is less than an hour drive from Providence, Newport, and New London, Connecticut. Because of its beaches, salt ponds, dark skies and large areas of park and conservation land, Charlestown is a major destination, particularly in the summer, for visitors traveling from elsewhere in Rhode Island and from other states. The major thoroughfare bringing traffic into and through Charlestown is its east-west principal arterial, US Route 1 (Post Road). In addition to through and visitor traffic, Route 1 provides a direct link to the neighboring towns of Westerly and South Kingstown, where many Charlestown residents travel for employment and shopping opportunities. It is also a major means of access for motorists traveling west to Connecticut, and those traveling north to other communities in Rhode Island, where Route 1 follows alongside Narragansett Bay. State Route 2 (South County Trail), also a principal arterial, provides Charlestown with its most direct connection north to the towns of Richmond, Exeter, North Kingstown and beyond. See Map TR-1 *Transportation Systems*. Since only about 22% of Charlestown residents who work are employed in the town, these roadways connect residents to work in surrounding towns and throughout the state, as well as eastern Connecticut.

Charlestown's southern location near the coast and distance from Interstate 95 promotes a rural sense without the town being actually remote like some other far flung corners of Rhode Island. It is an attractive vacation area because of its accessibility for residents from the remainder of the state and for vacationers and seasonal residents from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. This accessibility is critical to Charlestown's tourist economy.

Major Roads – Arterials and Collectors

Roads are classified according to the amount of through-traffic accommodated versus the access to property provided. Arterials provide the greatest freedom of movement, local roads are designed to provide access to property, and collectors bring traffic from local roads to arterials. The road classification is also used for funding purposes; federal funds are available to maintain all roads classified as arterials or major collectors, whether they are owned by the State of Rhode Island or the Town of Charlestown. Table TR-1 and accompanying Figure TR-1 identify all of the roadways in Charlestown which meet the classification of principal or minor arterial, and major or minor collector, and their total mileage and ownership by either the state or the town.

Route 1, a principal arterial, is a limited access highway east of Prosser Trail. Installation of stop lights in 2005, which replaced some of the turnarounds at the busier intersections, was designed to decrease traffic speeds and increase the safety of motorists changing directions and traveling on the collector roads that intersect with Route 1. Red light cameras, installed in 2014, are intended to support traffic safety on Route 1.



Frances Topping

Route 1 Westbound

Route 2 (South County Trail) is a principal arterial that runs north-south through the center of the town and intersects with Route 138 in South Kingstown, and Route 102 in Exeter, both of which provide direct connections to Route 95. Route 216 (Ross Hill Road) is a minor arterial that runs north-south along the western edge of Charlestown, and also provides a connection to Route 95 via Routes 3 and 91 in Hopkinton. There are no minor arterials or collectors running east-west that connect with Route 216 or Route 2 because the large interior portion of Charlestown is dominated by state owned open space and Narragansett Indian Settlement Lands; this limits east-west roadway access through the middle of town, including that for emergency vehicles.

Principal arterials:

- Route 1 (Post Road), from the South Kingstown town line to the Westerly town line; and
- Route 2 (South County Trail), from its intersection with Route 1 north to the Richmond border (Pawcatuck River).

The major collectors include:

- Route 112 (Carolina Back Road), from its intersection with Route 2 north to the Richmond border;
- Old Shannock Road, from its intersection with Route 112 east to the Richmond border;
- Shannock Road, from the Richmond border south to Route 2, passing through the Village of Shannock;
- Route 91 (Alton Carolina Road), from the Village of Carolina at its intersection with Route 112 west to the Richmond border;
- Kings Factory Road, north-south through Charlestown, from its intersection with Route 1 north to the Richmond border along Burlingame State Park and the Narragansett Indian Settlement Lands;
- Route 1A (Old Post Road), that portion running parallel to Route 1 through Cross Mills, east to the South Kingstown border;
- Matunuck Schoolhouse Road, from its intersection with Route 1A east to the South Kingstown border; and
- Charlestown Beach Road, from its intersection with Matunuck Schoolhouse Road south to its end at the beach.

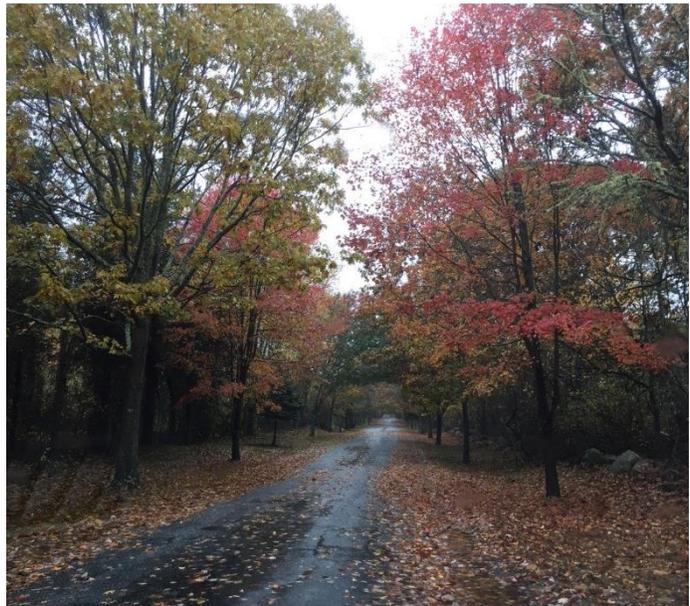
The minor collectors include:

- West Beach Road and East Beach Roads, from their intersections with Route 1 south to the beaches;
- Klondike Road, from its intersection with Route 1 north to its intersection with Route 216 (Ross Hill Road);

- Prosser Trail, from its intersection with Route 1 north to Kings Factory Road;
- Route 1A, west of Cross Mills, which provides access to Ninigret Park;
- Buckeye Brook, Shumankanuc Hill and Burdickville Roads which connect with Kings Factory Road; and
- Shannock Road from its intersection with Route 2 east to the South Kingstown border, and Maple Lake Road and Old Coach Road.

Local and Private Roads

The remaining roads in Charlestown are local roads. Many of these evolved historically from cart paths and trails and exhibit the characteristics of historic rural lanes: narrow rights-of-way with minimal drainage and a circuitous route over hills and around wetlands. More than half of these local roads are private, many of which are in place in the coastal neighborhoods. Many of the private roads are narrow and some are gravel or incompletely paved. Private roads cannot become town roads unless they are upgraded to meet current town standards for a public road. Unless posted otherwise, roads in Charlestown have a speed limit of 25 mph.



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Arnolda Road (Private)

New private roads are allowed in residential compounds, alternative subdivisions permitted by the Planning Commission in order to maintain rural character and protect open space by reducing the density to half that of a conventional subdivision. Private roads in residential compounds must meet minimum standards for construction, as contained in the Charlestown Land Development and Subdivision Regulations (the Subdivision Regulations), and be constructed with a gravel or pervious surface. A homeowners association must be established for permanent maintenance of residential compound roads, and the owners and successors waive their rights to have any such road accepted into the highway system of the town.

**Table TR-1
Charlestown Arterial and Collector Roads**

ROADWAY CLASSIFICATION	MILES	OWNERSHIP
Principal Arterials		
Route 1 (Post Road)	14.24	State
Route 2 (South County Trail)	5.03	State
Minor Arterials		
Route 216 (Ross Hill Road)	2.45	State
Major Collectors		
Alton Carolina Road (Route 91)	1.23	State
Carolina Back Road (Route 112)	2.59	State
Charlestown Beach Road	2.12	Town
Cross Mill Drive	.10	State
Falcone Lane	.10	Town
Kings Factory Road	4.72	Town
Matunuck Schoolhouse Road	.76	Town
Narrow Lane (south of Route 1)	.44	Town
Old Post Road	2.41	State
Old Shannock Road (Carolina Back Rd to Pawcatuck River)	.82	State
Shannock Road (Pawcatuck River to Route 2)	.50	State
Minor Collectors		
Burdickville Road	1.34	Town
East Beach Road	1.16	Town
Klondike Road	2.61	Town
Maple Lake Farm Road	.47	Town
Narrow Lane (north of Route 1)	.45	Town
Old Coach Road	2.42	Town
Old Post Road*	2.33	State
Prosser Trail**	1.33	State/Town
Shannock Road (Route 2 to Old Coach Road)	1.82	Town
Sherman Avenue	.08	State
Shumankanuc Hill Road	2.39	Town
West Beach Road	1.94	Town
Wordens Pond Road	.70	Town

* Includes two separate sections of Old Post Road

** State owned from Post Rd to Sanctuary Rd, town owned from Sanctuary Rd to Kings Factory Rd

Scenic Roadways

The Rhode Island Scenic Highways program, established by legislation in 1985, is intended to promote a continuous system of scenic highways and easements through a designation process for roads with rustic and scenic value. A state Scenic Roadways Board was established to review and approve applications, and to provide input and recommendations on improvements and other physical changes proposed to roads that are designated as scenic.

In 1991, Charlestown, in conjunction with the Town of Richmond, became the first in the state to successfully obtain a scenic roadway designation from the RI Department of Transportation (RI DOT), for Shannock Road, 1.7 miles from Route 2 to Route 112 in Charlestown, also crossing the Pawcatuck River into Richmond for a short distance (see Historic and Cultural Resources chapter). This roadway winds through a unique area of rolling terrain and a variety of different landscapes including marshes, woodlands and farm fields bounded by stone walls. Midway along the road is the historic Shannock Village, listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2002, Route 1 in Charlestown, 7 miles between the South Kingstown and Westerly town lines, was also designated as a scenic highway, due to its combination of outstanding natural, historical and cultural characteristics. As stated on the RI DOT website:

There are important natural resources along Post Road that, for the most part, have been well preserved. On the northerly side, being the edge of the glacial Charlestown Moraine, there is thick and beautiful foliage consisting of a variety of species of trees. The median strip, which is very wide for over half of the road, has attractive plantings which block the view of oncoming traffic in many areas. On the southerly side, the vegetation is lower, offering the driver an occasional glimpse of South County's salt ponds.

In addition to the scenic natural beauty, there are interesting historical and cultural resources along the road dating back as far as the 17th century. These include the 1667 Stanton Inn, the Wilcox Tavern, the Joseph Stanton House and monument, and a red saltbox near the Wilcox Tavern. Many exit signs identify nearby historic sites, many of which are on the National Register of Historic Places.

Post Road offers easy access to numerous recreational opportunities, including stretches of undeveloped coastline and large salt ponds connected to the Atlantic Ocean through breachways. Rhode Island's largest campground at Burlingame Park is also along this scenic roadway.

Charlestown is committed to working with RI DOT to preserve the scenic values of these designated roadways, and to evaluate additional roadways for potential future designation as scenic roadways, as a way to acknowledge and protect their scenic resources.

Bridges

Charlestown contains several roadway bridges, owned by the state, as listed below and indicated on Map TR-1 *Transportation Systems*.

Crossing the Pawcatuck River with Richmond (west to east):

- Burdickville Road – Burdickville Road Bridge
- Kings Factory Road – Kings Factory Bridge
- Alton Carolina Road (Route 91) – Kenyons Bridge
- Carolina Back Road (Route 112) – Third Carolina South Bridge
- Old Shannock Road – Pawcatuck Bridge
- Shannock Road – New Pawcatuck River Bridge
- Sherman Avenue (Kenyon Mill) – Kenyon Arch Bridge
- South County Trail (Route 2) – Wawaloam Bridge
- Biscuit City Road – Biscuit City Road Bridge

Crossing the Amtrak rail line (west to east):

- Burdickville Road – Burdickville Road RR Bridge
- Carolina Back Road (Route 112) – Carolina Station RR Bridge
- Shannock Road – Kenyon Shannock RR Bridge

Crossing the inlet (Perry Creek) between Ninigret Pond and Green Hill Pond:

Charlestown Beach Road – Charlestown Beach Road Bridge



Figure TR-2 Shannock Area Bridges near the Richmond Border

Source: Charlestown GIS

Maintenance, repair and replacement of bridges are the responsibility of RI DOT who addresses these through inclusion of bridge projects in the state’s long-term Transportation Improvement Program (see description under the Issues and Opportunities section below).

Bicycling

While bicycling is a popular activity and there are some off-road options in Charlestown, most transportation related bicycle travel takes place on public roads.

Designated Bike Routes

As part of its Statewide Bicycle System, RI DOT has identified not just existing and proposed bike paths, and bike lanes in place along specific heavily traveled roads, but over 100 miles of major roadways with bicycle route signing consisting of signs and in some cases, pavement markings. These roads have been determined by RI DOT, based on the posted speed limit and the traffic volumes, to have shoulders of sufficient width to safely allow bicycle travel. In Charlestown, the South County Bike Route Signing Project includes the following roads, also indicated on Map TR-1 *Transportation Systems*:



Jane Weidman Route 112 Bike Route

- Route 2 (South County Trail) from its intersection with Route 1 north to the Richmond border in Kenyon. The portion from Route 1 to the intersection with Route 112 is designated as “suitable” by the RI DOT, while the portion from the intersection with Route 112 to the Richmond border is designated as “most suitable”. This bike route designation is in place on Route 2 all the way to Route 102 in Exeter.
- Route 112 (Carolina Back Road) from its intersection with Route 2 north to its intersection with Route 91 in Carolina, which is designated as “most suitable”.
- Route 91 (Alton Carolina Road) in Carolina from its intersection with Route 112 west to the Richmond border, which is designated as “most suitable”. This designation is in place on Route 91 all the way to the coastal area of Westerly, passing through Wood River Junction in Richmond, Alton and Burdickville in Richmond and Bradford in Westerly.

- Route 216 from its intersection with Route 1 north to the Westerly border, which is designated as “suitable”. This designation is in place on Route 216 to its connection with Route 91 in Hopkinton, passing through Bradford in Westerly.

These roads are shown on the state bicycle map: “A Guide to Cycling in the Ocean State 2018”¹. Also indicated as “most suitable” or “suitable” on the map in Charlestown are the country roads of Buckeye Brook, Shumankanuc Hill, Burdickville, Kings Factory, Shannock, Biscuit City, Wordens Pond and Old Coach Roads, as well as Old Post Road and Matunuck Schoolhouse Road south of Route 1. Some sections of these country roads are narrow and winding, requiring caution by drivers, bicyclist and walkers.

Recreational Bike Facilities

Other bicycling facilities in Charlestown are provided for recreation purposes. Within Ninigret Park there is a 0.9 mile criterium bicycle course and a ten foot wide 1.3 mile paved multi-purpose trail constructed in 2016.

Within the state owned Burlingame Park there is an extensive network of hiking and mountain biking trails. The North-South Trail, developed by the RI Department of Environmental Management, is a 77 mile hiking trail that passes through western Charlestown and ends at the Massachusetts border in Burrillville, and also allows mountain biking. The Recreation chapter contains a more complete description of recreational hiking and biking options in Charlestown.

Walking

Charlestown has limited facilities for pedestrians. Sidewalks are in place on state roadway bridges that cross the railroad and the Pawcatuck River, but nearly every road north of Route 1 lacks sidewalks. Aside from neighborhood areas such as Carolina, Columbia Heights and Shannock, sidewalks are neither necessary nor appropriate in this area of town, which is valued for its rural character.

In the more densely developed neighborhoods south of Route 1, Charlestown Beach and Quonochontaug, walking to local business establishments and the beach is much more practical. However, there are no sidewalks along the three major connector roads to the beaches – Charlestown Beach Road, East Beach Road and West Beach Road – as the road rights-of-way are too narrow to add sidewalks.

There is one residential development near the South Kingstown line with a private road system, and a low and moderate income rental housing development in Cross Mills, both off of Old Post Road, which include sidewalks, but otherwise there are none serving the scattered commercial areas alongside Old Post Road and Matunuck Schoolhouse Road. Despite the limited areas of

¹ <http://www.dot.ri.gov/documents/bikeri/maps/BIKEFRONT2018.pdf>

sidewalks, in the expectation of potential future sidewalk construction, in 2005 the town implemented a sidewalk ordinance requiring snow, ice and debris removal by the owner or occupant of any lot of land bordering on a street where there is a sidewalk.

In general, because of the long distances between most of the residential areas and commercial and recreational destinations, it is not practical for most residents to travel by foot along roadways.

TRANSPORTATION: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Long Term Transportation Planning

A number of state and federal agencies have jurisdiction over transportation projects within Charlestown. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) adopted by the State Planning Council determines how federal transportation dollars are allocated in the state, including which projects in Charlestown receive funding, from study to design to construction. This multi-year program, which is periodically updated, provides funding for the state's major transportation infrastructure, but also allows for the introduction of other projects by municipalities, non-profits and members of the general public. Such projects can include bike paths and bike lanes, sidewalks, roadway drainage and intersection improvements, park and ride lots, bridge repairs, rail crossings and rail stations, recreation trails, safe routes to school, and corridor studies. Municipalities are also asked to prioritize state projects within their borders.

Projects supported with federal dollars are only guaranteed funding after RI DOT or RIPTA, or the US Department of Transportation (US DOT), reviews the design, financing and environmental impacts. In addition, the US DOT requires a valid long range transportation plan in order to adopt a new TIP. The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is a plan with a 20 year time frame that covers all transportation modes (automobiles, public transit trains and buses, ferries, air travel) and types of travel (commuter, destination, commercial). The goal of the LRTP is to develop an implementable plan of transportation projects with the legislative, policy and funding needs identified. A companion plan is the Bicycle Mobility Plan with a goal to advance bicycle mobility and safety around the state by identifying bicycle facilities and programs. Both plans are prepared by the Statewide Planning Program and depend on active public and stakeholder engagement.

Given the impact on and importance of the state roadway system to Charlestown, the town must continue to work cooperatively with RI DOT on future road and transportation projects, and to actively participate in the planning and design process to the extent possible, so that the town's interests are considered and concerns are addressed.

Local Input

In late 2016, the Town of Charlestown was made aware of a proposed long-range upgrade to the Northeast Corridor rail line by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Within this corridor from Washington, D.C. to Boston, the upgrade consisted of a proposed “Old Saybrook to Kenyon Bypass”, a new high-speed track in a re-aligned corridor between Old Saybrook, Connecticut and the Kenyon area of Charlestown. The addition of these tracks was to provide a more direct commuter rail line that would save travel time between urban centers.

The bypass would have required 5.6 miles of new railroad in Charlestown. The land use impacts of this new rail corridor are described thoroughly in the Natural Resources chapter. The project did not include any direct benefits to the Town of Charlestown in terms of transportation access; no railroad stops were proposed, only a faster train traveling through the town’s boundaries. Overwhelming opposition in both states to the bypass resulted in FRA withdrawing the proposed bypass project in July 2017. However, the original proposal shows a willingness by some federal agencies to transform the community in direct conflict with the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan, in particular those related to protection of natural, historic and cultural and agricultural resources, without providing any measurable transportation benefits to the community.

Roadway Design and Stormwater Standards

Public Streets

The municipal roadway system consists of approximately 140 miles of roads, the majority of which are paved, although some are maintained as gravel. These roads vary widely in configuration, width and the presence of associated roadway corridor elements such as curbing, storm drainage features and traffic markings. The operation and maintenance of all municipal roads are the responsibility of the Charlestown Department of Public Works (DPW).



Jane Weidman

Newly Constructed Subdivision Street with 24 Foot Pavement Width

Design standards for new roads are contained in the Subdivision Regulations. New public streets proposed as part of a subdivision or land development require a 24-foot pavement width within a 50-foot wide right-of-way. Reductions in pavement width are often permitted by the Planning Commission for small subdivisions, or when the developer agrees to create a more compact subdivision with smaller lots and shorter roads in order to protect trees and preserve rural quality, and reduce both traffic speeds and road run-off.

Private Roads

Frontage lots may be created along an existing private road only if the ownership of the road is known and there are established arrangements for its long-term maintenance. The road and its maintenance agreement must have been in existence prior to September of 1982 (the date of the establishment of the Charlestown Planning Commission), and the arrangements remain in existence to provide for the permanent maintenance of the road. Each new lot owner must become a party to the private road agreement. Extensions of an existing private road to create lots within a parcel or beyond the parcel it services are not permitted.

New private roads, which are referred to as residential compound common private ways, are permitted for certain subdivisions which are constructed at half the density allowed by zoning for a conventional subdivision on the same parcel, provided that the parcel to be subdivided has a minimum frontage of 50 feet on a public street. These common private roads require a minimum of 12 feet of travel way, constructed of gravel or pervious surface, within a 24 foot right-of-way. Concerns about access for more than one fire engine at a single emergency event have pushed residential compound road widths to 20 feet in some subdivisions. Solutions that maintain the narrower and treed aspect of rural roads, but also provide access for fire safety, such as occasional road turnouts, or limiting the road length to the equivalent of that of the standard fire hose, are needed.

New private roads in Charlestown do require the establishment of a homeowners association to permanently maintain and repair the road as needed. To address the issue of existing private roads without an active or cooperative homeowners association, a state law enacted in 2018, Chapter 34-9.1², "*Maintenance of Private Easements and Rights-of-way*", requires, in the absence of an enforceable, written agreement to the contrary, that all owners of property that make use of a private road or easement for access to their property must participate in the cost of needed maintenance of the private road or easement.

² <http://webservice.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE34/34-9.1/34-9.1-2.HTM>

Road Design Flexibility

In general, the Planning Commission recognizes the benefits of narrower roads, and the gravel surface of private roads, in maintaining Charlestown's rural character. Flexibility in road design is as important in the design of new subdivisions and compounds as is lot configuration; flexible roadway standards can include the following:

- Allowing reduced roadway widths in low population and low traffic developments, particularly for new subdivision streets that are serviced by rural collector roads with a width of 20 feet.
- Waiving of elements typically associated with suburban developments, particularly concrete sidewalks and streetlights.
- Offsetting the impacts of narrow roadways and/or lack of sidewalks by accommodating pedestrian travel with unpaved walkways within the road rights-of-way.
- Requiring roadside swales, and other low impact drainage systems as opposed to pipes and structural drainage systems. Low impact stormwater control is addressed in the 2010 Rhode Island Stormwater Design and Installation Standards Manual (see Facilities and Services chapter).

The town should periodically review and evaluate the roadway design requirements in the Subdivision Regulations, and modify them as needed to promote applicable elements of the most current "rural by design" and stormwater management standards.

Speeding on Rural Roads

As stated in the Existing Conditions section of this chapter, Charlestown's local roads have a posted speed limit of 25 mph, although at neighborhood request, a road can be posted at 15 mph. Observations by long-time residents indicate that often these speeds are not obeyed and the winding and narrow nature of many of Charlestown's country roads presents a safety concern, for both drivers and residents. Some of this speeding is exacerbated by the lack of actual posted speed limits, which in some cases are missing due to vandalism, and/or lack of warnings for motorists to look out for pedestrians and cyclists.

Trees and other native vegetation along the roadsides give the appearance of a narrower road which encourages lower speeds. Signage in certain areas to alert drivers to share the road with bicyclists and walkers could also serve to slow down traffic.

Management of Scenic Roadways

Charlestown recognizes the scenic and cultural value of its roadways. Most visitors appreciate the rural character of Charlestown when they journey down its local and state roads. A number of factors contribute to making a roadway scenic:

- Characteristics of the road itself, such as turns and hills and valleys, and even changing surfaces, textures, light and shade, sometimes with flaws or deficiencies compared to current road design standards.
- Interesting features along the road, such as historic stone walls, flowering vegetation, shrubs and mature canopy trees.
- The locations/environments through which the road passes, such as along forests, open farm and meadow areas, seaside areas with water views and through historic villages.



Frances Topping

Scenic Old Coach Road

Scenic quality is not limited to the state designated scenic roadways of Shannock Road and Post Road, of course. This means that the town must be sensitive to not only the design of new local roads, but also the management of its existing roads and the protection of those qualities that make a road scenic, such as views, stone walls, trees and native plants. In particular, management of vegetation within the right-of-way is important; while safety is necessary in terms of maintaining line-of-sight distances and preventing falling branches, the DPW should have a policy of protecting specimen trees and other healthy native vegetation within the rights-of-way of its rural roads.

Lack of Public Transportation

Charlestown recognizes that the lack of regularly scheduled bus stops or other form of public transportation in town results in limited travel options for its residents, as well as for those who travel to town for work. In general the town and its citizens, and workers and visitors, accept that Charlestown's small town and rural character, including its lack of large commercial centers, means that there is not sufficient ridership to justify the establishment of a bus stop or passenger rail station. Residents do have both RIPTA and Amtrak options in Washington County, just not within the town itself. One concern, however, is the travel challenges this places on people without personal automobiles and people who no longer drive. As noted elsewhere in this plan, the median age of Charlestown residents is expected to rise, and as the percentage of older residents increases, so will demands for senior services, including transportation.

Limited non-emergency transportation services are available to eligible seniors (Medicaid beneficiaries), who can access the state authorized (Executive Office of Health & Human Services) network of transportation providers, contracted by a private company, Medical Transportation Management (MTM) for medically necessary trips when the person has no other available or safe means of travel. Assistance is also provided through the Southern Rhode Island Volunteers (SRIV), whose main office is located at the Charlestown Senior/Community Center. For persons 55 years of age and older, SRIV can provide transportation to healthcare appointments, and to the pharmacy and grocery store.

It is expected and encouraged that the transportation delivery or "ride hailing" services operated with private cars through a smart phone application, such as Uber and Lyft, will eventually fill the short-distance travel needs for car-less residents that in another era would have been provided by a local bus service.

Alternative Forms of Travel

Non-motorized means of travel – bicycling and walking – are cost-effective, environmentally friendly and popular among many segments of the population. In addition to providing an alternative to cars and other motorized vehicles, they provide obvious recreational opportunities and health benefits. Charlestown's tourism based economy could also benefit substantially with additional linear greenways, trails and bikeways as a way to extend the tourist season into spring and fall.

In Charlestown, however, the demand for non-motorized forms of travel as transportation alternatives is limited by the wide distribution of the population, and the scattered and linear nature of the commercial areas.

Proposed Shoreline Bike Route

Under consideration for many years and strongly supported by the Town of Charlestown is a coastal bike route which would parallel Routes 1 and 1A, from Westerly to Narragansett, and which would eventually link with the existing South County Bike Path. This path, also known as the William C. O'Neill Bike Path, connects the Kingston Station in South Kingstown with the pier area of Narragansett, passing alongside the Great Swamp Management Area, through the Village of Peace Dale and downtown Wakefield, and under Route 108 to its end near Route 1A.

The concept of a shoreline bike route was first studied in 1999 when a consultant for RI DOT completed the *Shoreline Bikeway Feasibility Study*. Three alternative bikeway routes through Westerly, Charlestown and South Kingstown were evaluated. The study concluded that none of the route options, all of which relied on use of Route 1, either its shoulders or its right-of-way in the form of a shared use path, were viable in terms of accessibility, safety and cost effectiveness. The study recommended that RI DOT continue to work with the communities to find an alternative route along roadways paralleling Route 1 – this option has been viable in Westerly where most of the route has been signed as a shared route along Route 1A rather than Route 1.

Since then, Charlestown has taken the lead in advocating for a shoreline bike route, including hiring a consultant in 2007 to undertake a corridor study. In 2016 Charlestown formed a tri-town committee in partnership with Westerly and South Kingstown to evaluate alternative routes and to promote the project within the communities and with the state. In 2018 the town hired a consultant to undertake a feasibility study of the Charlestown section of the project, referred to as the Coastal Route Bikeway, to identify the most desirable route connecting Ninigret Park to the village center near the South Kingstown town line, and to determine design and construction costs. The multi-use path completed in Ninigret Park in 2016 serves as a prototype for the shoreline bike route.

The maps produced as part of the statewide Bicycle Mobility Plan also indicate potential future bike routes in the area of the shoreline bike route, including Route 1, Old Post Road, and Matunuck Schoolhouse Road, as well as routes along West Beach, East Beach and Charlestown Beach Roads.

Connecting the Charlestown Shore to the Statewide Bicycle System

Safe crossing of Route 1 for bicyclists and pedestrians would allow a non-auto connection of the south shore area with the rest of the community. This would enable bicyclists and pedestrians to access Ninigret Park, the beaches and the village center from the residential areas and campgrounds north of Route 1. The area of focus would be between the intersections of Route 1 with Narrow Lane and Prosser Trail. A safe Route 1 crossing would also allow the future shoreline bike route to connect with the larger statewide bicycle system.

While Route 1 provides ample shoulder width, motor vehicle speeds are not compatible with bicycling. Use of the turning lanes by bicyclists is dangerous and even use of the existing signalized crossings can be problematic. RI DOT does not identify Route 1 as a route suitable for bicycling and as a result Route 1 becomes more of a barrier rather than a means to link the south shore areas of Rhode Island with other bike routes and bike paths, including the South County Bike Path.

Such crossings can be either at-grade (crosswalks) or separated grade (tunnels or bridges). There are benefits and drawbacks associated with each type of crossing. At-grade crossings are less expensive to construct and can make use of existing signalized intersections, but they require bicyclists and pedestrians to cross a busy divided highway and would cause inconvenience for motorized travelers. Separated grades are much safer and convenient for both motorists and bicyclists but have a very high cost and require significant construction and/or roadway modifications.

Adding Sidewalks and Pathways

The installation of sidewalks along the roads in much of Charlestown would be counter to the goal of preserving rural character. Sidewalks are associated with urban and suburban areas and are not typically an element of rural communities. The rights-of-way of many existing roads in Charlestown are too narrow to accommodate sidewalks, and many have constraints such as stone walls and utility poles making it difficult or costly to add sidewalks. Finally, sidewalks that are constructed of concrete or other impervious surfaces increase stormwater run-off. In areas where moderate volumes of pedestrian traffic are expected, shoulders or pathways of grass, stone dust or other pervious surfaces can be an alternative.

The lack of sidewalks and pathways in Charlestown can best be addressed by focusing on specific locations where they would be most feasible. This includes within village centers and within and between residential subdivisions and nearby attractions. Such pathways should be constructed in a way that:

- Conforms to the existing natural environment by preserving trees and high-value vegetation and avoiding excessive grading or earthwork; and
- Makes use of pervious materials, and/or directs run-off to pervious (grassed or wooded) areas of at least an equivalent width.

In lieu of sidewalks in densely developed areas that have insufficient road right-of-way widths to accommodate sidewalks or pathways, such as the three major connector roads to the beaches, other options could be considered, such as one or more of the following:

- Placement of seasonal speed bumps to force traffic to slow during the summer when traffic is heaviest, but allow unhindered sweeping, plowing and maintenance the remainder of the year.
- Conduct a redesign (alter striping) of the existing paved areas to provide wider shoulders for cyclists and pedestrians either by narrowing the travel lanes or by marking a shared (two-way) center lane for motorists who can make use of “advisory shoulders” designated for bicyclists when these shoulders are not in use by bicyclists or pedestrians³; and
- Educate the public on regulations governing the sharing of roads with bicyclists.

Any alteration of the existing roadways to provide a safer travel experience for bicyclists and walkers requires an engineering study to evaluate traffic volumes, right-of-way widths and other characteristics (stone walls, pavement conditions).

Future Planning Efforts to Promote Bicycling and Walking

Charlestown has tasked its Parks and Recreation Commission with promoting the development and use of trails, linear greenways and bikeways, and with investigating, initiating and endorsing efforts at both the local and state levels to create and expand designated walking routes and non-motorized paths throughout the community.

In particular, the establishment of bike routes along town roads (to complement the existing designated bike routes along state roads) is an effective way to promote bicycling as an alternative means of travel in Charlestown. Finally, Charlestown’s extensive trail system, described in detail in the Recreation chapter, provides an opportunity for not only hiking and passive recreation use but an alternate means of traveling within town.

³ <http://ruraldesignguide.com/mixed-traffic/advisory-shoulder>

TRANSPORTATION: GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

GOALS

- Goal 1** Maintain and enhance the existing transportation infrastructure as a means to ensure community livability while protecting Charlestown's rural character.
- Goal 2** Ensure that the full range of alternative and multimodal transportation options are available to Charlestown residents.
- Goal 3** Develop a network for bicyclists and pedestrians in Charlestown.

POLICIES AND ACTIONS

- Goal 1** Maintain and enhance the existing transportation infrastructure as a means to ensure community livability while protecting Charlestown's rural character.

- Policy 1.1** Maintain rural character through flexibility in new roadway design.

Charlestown's local roads are very well maintained and its regulations include rigorous standards for construction. This attention to long-term maintenance is both enhanced and balanced by flexibility in design to ensure rural character and reduced environmental impacts from road runoff. This flexibility includes consistency with current residential street standards supported by both the American Society of Civil Engineers and the American Planning Association. It also includes consistency with the Rhode Island Stormwater Design and Installation Standards Manual, which promotes a low impact approach to stormwater management.

- Action 1** Allow new public subdivision streets to be constructed at a reduced width of 20 feet, depending on the site characteristics and the number of lots.
- Action 2** Review and evaluate roadway design and stormwater standards in the Subdivision Regulations and modify as needed to promote rural and low impact design.
- Action 3** Require, to the degree possible, compact development in the form of cluster or conservation subdivisions, to reduce the length of new roadways.

Policy 1.2 Maintain the scenic quality of existing roadways.

Charlestown’s rural quality is reflected by the views along its many miles of local roadways, particularly those north of Route 1. Efforts are needed to preserve the scenic qualities of these roads – mature vegetation, stone walls, fields, historic structures and landscapes – as development pressures increase.

Action 1 Continue to implement the following policies when reviewing subdivisions and land developments along local and minor roadways, with amendments to land development regulations enacted as needed:

- Retention of stone walls.
- Maintenance of undisturbed natural landscape buffers, particularly significant trees and shrubs, to shield view of new construction from the road where the character of the roadway would be adversely changed by clearing.
- Locate new “curb cuts” (driveways) to town roadways so as to preserve existing stone walls, natural buffers and the scenic qualities of these corridors. Encourage shared driveways to service new development unless there are safety or functional factors that preclude them.

Action 2 Develop and implement a right-of-way vegetation management program for local roadways that uses low impact but effective methods to manage trees and other vegetation that is consistent with roadway safety standards.

Policy 1.3 Actively manage the town’s designated scenic roadways.

Action 1 Establish scenic roadway design standards for new development and building improvements along Route 1, and other designated scenic roadways, including those for signage, lighting and buffers between the roadway and structures, with consideration given to preservation of important views. Incorporate these standards in the town zoning and subdivision regulations, to be applied when reviewing development proposals along the Route 1 corridor.

Action 2 Inventory and evaluate both developed and undeveloped parcels along Route 1 in order to:

- Propose site improvements to preserve, restore or enhance the appearance and scenic quality along the roadway.

- Bring properties into compliance with existing town codes as required.
- Pursue protection of unique undeveloped parcels along Route 1 through conservation easements, purchase of development rights, or purchase of the property, as opportunities arise.

Action 3 Continue to pursue the designation of scenic and rural roadways in Charlestown as state scenic highways.

Action 4 Consider the establishment of a Scenic Roadway Stewardship Commission to oversee and assist in the implementation of the Stewardship Plan.

Policy 1.4 Maximize safety of travel along local roads.

Action 1 Review roadways in town to ensure adequate posting of speed limits, and add signage as needed, including alerts regarding bicycle and pedestrian use.

Action 2 Incorporate traffic calming techniques along designated roadways.

Goal 2 Ensure that the full range of alternative and multimodal transportation options are available to Charlestown residents.

As described elsewhere in this chapter, train and bus service is available to Charlestown residents within the Washington County region. A limiting factor is the ability of residents to access these services, or to simply travel, in the absence of a personal automobile. Charlestown is committed to ensuring access to all forms of travel by encouraging physical improvements where the demand warrants it, and by not unnecessarily limiting the ability of new transportation options like Uber and Lyft to operate in town.

Policy 2.1 Support multimodal transportation on a county-wide and statewide basis.

Action 1 Consult with RIPTA on development of a shuttle service to Kingston Station, at such point when there are sufficient train riders in Charlestown to support such a service.

Action 2 Evaluate development of a park and ride lot for carpooling, vanpooling and possible future RIPTA bus service at a suitable site in Charlestown.

Policy 2.2 Support alternative means of travel within Charlestown and the region.

Action 1 Periodically review town ordinances to ensure that ride-sharing or ride-hailing businesses that provide for travel needs on a case-by-case basis are permitted in a safe and equitable manner.

Goal 3 Develop a network for bicyclists and pedestrians in Charlestown.

Policy 3.1 Work locally, regionally and at the state level to expand options for bicycling in Charlestown.

Charlestown will continue its efforts to expand bicycling opportunities, in particular by coordinating with the RI DOT regarding existing and proposed bike routes, bike lanes and bike paths, and implementing the goals of the Bicycle Mobility Plan as it relates to bicycle infrastructure and operations.

Action 1 Communicate with RI DOT to ensure that roadways suitable for bicycle travel are properly signed.

Action 2 Collaborate with RI DOT to expand the designated state bike route network by identifying additional roadways suitable for bicycle travel.

Action 3 Work towards the development of the shoreline bike route, including collaboration with the Towns of Westerly, South Kingstown and Narragansett.

Action 4 Work with RI DOT to develop safe crossings of Route 1 for bicyclists, with a focus on the area between Narrow Lane and Prosser Trail.

Policy 3.2 Support pedestrian improvements throughout town to encourage walking as an alternative to the automobile.

Action 1 Undertake an engineering study of the three main town-owned roads leading to the beaches to consider options for increasing the safety of bicycle and pedestrian travel, while working within the existing road rights-of-way.

Action 2 Require sidewalks within new commercial developments, and pathways within residential subdivisions and between residential developments and walkable destinations.

Action 3 Identify existing trail systems within Charlestown that can be used as alternative travelways and publicize this connectivity along with information of a recreation nature.

Policy 3.3 Collaborate with other agencies and communities

Action 1 Regularly discuss upcoming state projects and their impact on the town and the town's needs with Statewide Planning Program, RI DOT and RIPTA.

Action 2 Review all phases of RI DOT plans, and submit formal comments to the State to ensure that RI DOT road and bridge improvements are in keeping with the town's character.

Action 3 Participate in the planning and development of RI DOT road and transportation projects involving the state roads within the town, including those that seek to manage traffic safety, particularly during the summer.



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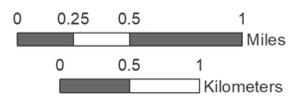
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LEGEND

- Roads
- State Scenic Roads (RIDOT Designated)
- Signed Bike Routes (RIDOT Designated)
- Roads Suitable for Biking (RIDOT Designated)
- ++++ Railroad - Amtrak
- Light Blue Area Lakes & Ponds
- Blue Line Rivers & Streams
- Dark Blue Area Wetlands

Note:
There are no commercial bus stops, rail stations, airports or ferry terminals in Charlestown.

Map Sources:



TOWN OF CHARLESTOWN
RHODE ISLAND



Prepared by:
Town of Charlestown

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, 2020

**TRANSPORTATION
SYSTEMS**