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## ONLY IN NEWSDAY BIKE LANES FOR LI'S 'CAR LAND' FACE A DIFFICULT ROAD

### Cycling advocates frustrated by lack of infrastructure

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On a sunny September weekday morning, cars barreled down Long Beach Road, the six-lane thoroughfare connecting "mainland" Long Island to the barrier island of the City of Long Beach. Crossing the bridge from Oceanside onto Island Park, an islet in the bay north of Long Beach, they sped past a few bicyclists and scooter-riders carefully negotiating the shoulder.

Posted signs mark Long Beach Road as a "bike route," but there is no bicycle lane and it is anything but inviting to cyclists.

"I would say unrideable for the average person," said biker Sean Cirillo, who posted a YouTube video where he dodges speeding vehicles while navigating between the shoulder, parked cars and the right lane.

Cirillo, 34, of Oceanside, said the road presents a dangerous bottleneck between safer areas for cycling in Oceanside and Island Park.

He envisions a solution: dedicated bike lanes, with plastic posts as delineators, along the busiest half-mile stretch from near Daly Boulevard to Austin Boulevard. Creating it, he says, would not only make the route safer but could help address summer parking shortages in Long Beach by encouraging more people to bike to the ocean.

Cirillo requested Nassau County to study the proposal in January, and in August he received an official response from the Department of Public Works: A bike lane is "not feasible" because it won't fit along the 40-foot wide road while also accommodating the existing three lanes for vehicles, each 11 feet, and parking spaces for cars. It also could interfere with drainage and "emergency access points." There was no "recognizable pattern" of bicycle crashes there over three years, the letter said.

Public Works Commissioner Michael Kwaschyn and County Executive Bruce Blakeman's office did not respond to multiple requests for an interview or emailed questions about the bike lane.

However, two traffic engineers told Newsday the project seemed feasible while keeping existing traffic lanes, with the elimination of a handful of street parking spaces in front of a well-known clam bar.

"It's something that looks like it could be fairly easily done inexpensively, and it might get more people bike riding," said Hal Tarry, a retired state Transportation Department engineer in Smithtown who volunteers with the New York Bicycling Coalition.

Michael Shenoda, a traffic engineering professor at Farmingdale State College, said: "If you asked me to design a bike provision in there that would meet the standards, I could do it."

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Biking advocates have long lamented the lack of bike infrastructure on Long Island, where 49 cyclists were killed and about 300 were seriously injured between 2019 and 2023, according to state data. Just 5.5 of the roughly 4,100 miles of road in Nassau County have dedicated bike lanes, while Suffolk County has around 140 miles out of 7,400 miles of road, according to Newsday's analysis of 2021 data from the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council. Nassau also has about 72 miles of off-road paths for biking and Suffolk around 52 miles.

Experts told Newsday Cirillo's case illustrates some of the common challenges to building bike facilities on Long Island, like long-standing prioritization of cars, limited space and a feeling that bike lanes have become politicized.

"Long Island was designed as a car land, and so it's very hard" to change the focus, Shenoda said.

Denise Ford, a former county legislator who lives in Long Beach, said she's long wanted to improve bicycle connectivity to the north. The county began a formal study for a Long Beach Road bike lane years ago, she said, but she was unsure if it was ever finished.

"I don't know, with the county, why there is resistance," Ford said of Cirillo's bike lane proposal. "I wish that we would try to find ways accommodate all modes of transportation, cars as well as bicycles." "Bike city" As a teenager, Cirillo loved working on and driving cars. After Army service and a tour in Iraq, he studied mechanical engineering on the GI Bill at Hofstra, then joined his father's business managing cellphone tower sites.

As he began bicycling more, he wondered why Nassau had so little bike infrastructure compared to New York City or even other suburbs.

"I was like, 'Why the hell is this not happening here?' " he said, sitting in the home he shares with his wife, pregnant with their first child.

Cirillo found decades-old planning documents outlining unrealized, grand visions - such as a 1998 county master plan calling for an extensive network of bicycle trails and a 2010 proposal to integrate bicycles "into the transportation system as a real alternative to vehicular travel."

Mike Hammer, the owner of Long Beach Bicycles, who pedals over 8,000 miles each year, said he was unaware of Cirillo's proposal but supports the idea, especially since he was hit by a car while riding on Long Beach Road years ago.

"This is a bike city," he said. "When traffic is dense here, you can get around much faster on a bike than you can in your car, not to mention the parking woes that we have here." A bottleneck for cyclists Cirillo asked the county to study a mile-long stretch of Long Beach Road, noting the most critical area is a half mile between Austin Boulevard and Daly Boulevard. To the north, cyclists can access southwest Oceanside's quiet residential streets by cutting through a shopping mall; to the south, Long Beach Road becomes quieter as cars diverge onto Austin Boulevard.

Much of the segment is flanked by marsh and landfill, with a wide grassy median. It includes a bridge where anglers often fish from the sidewalk and Peter's Clam Bar, which hosts an annual charity clam-eating contest, where past winners have slurped down over 100 mollusks.

On a September weekday morning, roughly a half-dozen cyclists and scooter-riders passed through over the course of 40 minutes, including a man with a half-open backpack filled with groceries.

Tarry, the former state DOT engineer, noted some cyclists bike for recreation but others, lacking a car or license, do it out of necessity.

In the county's response to Cirillo, Kwaschyn, the DPW commissioner, wrote that in order to be feasible, there would have to be a 3-foot buffer between the 5-foot bike lane and vehicular traffic - but there was insufficient space "to ensure cyclists' safety."

Shenoda, the Farmingdale State professor, said as long as the bike lane is 5 feet wide, it could fit in the available space, possibly with a narrower buffer and plastic delineation poles separating it from vehicle lanes.

Cirillo said he thinks county engineers were reluctant to remove six to eight street parking spaces in front of Peter's Clam Bar. The restaurant, which also has two parking lots with over 100 spaces, is owned by longtime Nassau concessionaire and GOP fundraiser Isaac "Butch" Yamali. Yamali's company, Dover Group, did not answer Newsday's requests for comment about the proposed bike lane.

Cirillo said he hoped the restaurant would see it as a boon to business, adding, "Bicyclists spend money." Institutional hurdles Tarry said traffic engineers' reluctance to build bike lanes is not unique to Nassau.

For one, the state awards

road aid to local governments by considering their length of vehicle lanes, but not bicycle lanes, so there is not the same incentive to add them, he said.

But even when funding is already provided, there can be resistance. He said he struggled for years to get the state to use a federal grant it won to build an off-road bicycle path near the Oakdale Merge, where Sunrise and Montauk highways connect in Suffolk County.

"Planners and the engineers who design roads don't typically ride bicycles," he said. When redesigning a road, they "are not seeing it as cyclists. They're talking about, 'We've got traffic congestion, and we've got to try to get more vehicles through here.' "

There's also a chicken-and-egg problem, in that engineers often dismiss the need for a bicycle lane because of a lack of bicyclists, though Tarry said if more bike facilities existed, more people would bicycle.

There can also be pushback from residents against biking infrastructure, especially when there's a tradeoff with parking spaces or vehicle traffic lanes.

At an informational meeting Tuesday night about the Long Island Greenway - a planned trail from Montauk Point to Manhattan, a portion of which is expected to begin construction in 2026 - some Levittown residents expressed concern the trail could attract crime and homeless people. In that area, the trail would use an easement under the

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Long Island Power Authority's transmission lines.

Cirillo's proposal is different in that it is far shorter and would use the road shoulder and a few parking spaces. Besides the county officials' rejection, he hasn't encountered opposition to his advocacy at county meetings and through an online petition, he said. But, he noted, there's a sense among some that bike lanes are "woke," or part of a liberal agenda.

Nationally, The Associated Press reported last month that the Trump administration clawed back previously awarded federal grants for bike lane projects in Alabama, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts and New Mexico, calling them "hostile to motor vehicles" and noting it wants to focus on "projects that promote vehicular travel."

"It's sad, to be honest with you, that bicycling has also become political," said Ford, the former county legislator, who is a Republican. "It really shouldn't be."

Shenoda said some local towns and villages have made progress in recent years by adding more bicycle infrastructure.

But for now, some cyclists say the bike route signs along Long Beach Road aren't enough to entice them.

Roy Lester, 75, who grew up in Long Beach and sits on the city council, said he bicycles during summers to Jones Beach, where he's worked as a lifeguard on and off since 1968.

He supports Cirillo's idea. Asked whether he'd bike Long Beach Road now, without a designated lane, he laughed.

"Hell no," he said.

Newsday reporter Arielle Martinez contributed to this story.

#### WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

An Oceanside man, Sean Cirillo, is advocating for a protected bike lane along Long Beach Road, but Nassau County has called the plan "not feasible."

Biking advocates have long lamented the lack of bike infrastructure on Long Island, where 49 cyclists were killed and about 300 were seriously injured between 2019 and 2023, according to state data.

New York State awards road aid to local governments by considering their length of vehicle lanes, but not bicycle lanes, so there is not the same incentive to add them, according to a retired state Transportation Department engineer.

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