

Report of the Towpath Safety Committee for the 2022 Annual Meeting of the
C&O Canal Association
March 26, 2022

The Towpath Safety Committee arose out of the former Bicycle Safety Committee that was formed to address concerns of board members who had been struck, or nearly struck, by bicycles on the canal towpath.

On October 3, 2021, the board authorized the Towpath Safety Committee to work with President Holdsworth to update the Association's website with towpath safety information and to contact the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park with recommendations for it to update its hiking and biking regulations to meet current conditions, to make such information more accessible on its website and social media, and to include them in its print and digital publications. Additionally, the board gave the committee authority to forward similar recommendations to other organizations that promote use of the canal towpath.

On November 21, 2021, President Holdsworth added the Park's towpath safety information to the Association's website, along with etiquette recommendations that the committee had developed. On January 17, the president sent an email letter to Tina Cappetta, superintendent of the Park. Because the issue is one of public safety, U.S. Senators Cardin and Van Hollen and Representatives Trone and Raskin were copied on the email.

On February 7, the superintendent responded via email letter. She stated that safety is a top priority for the N.P.S. and that the Park had been developing "a variety of strategies to reduce user conflicts between those groups, especially bicyclists and pedestrians," many of which align with recommendations provided by the Association, which include:

1. Replacing park regulation signs at park access points that, when complete, will include towpath safety requirements for all users, and that the Park was considering creating "individual signs that focus on bicycle regulations and trail courtesy on the linear ports of the towpath, generally at the split gates at access points."
2. The Park has made updates to their website that make it easier for users to find biking regulations and safety information, including the creation of a webpage specifically dedicated to biking information.
3. On social media, the Park has committed to include a campaign that addresses bike safety, and will so on Facebook in the Spring of 2022 "with a series of social media posts exploring different elements of bike safety and regulations."
4. The Park pointed out that many of its print publications already include towpath safety information and that the Park Planner, which the Association has supported, is being updated for 2022.

The only point that the Park did not specifically address was the Association's recommendation that it conduct a review to determine if the Park's current hiking and biking regulations and guidelines are still adequate in light of the 2013 linkage of the Great Allegheny Passage trail to

the canal towpath at Cumberland and the current towpath resurfacing project, which has increased bicycle traffic on the towpath. Superintendent Cappetta only mentioned that “Park regulations are reviewed each year during the annual revision to the Superintendent’s Compendium and feedback like that provided by your letter helps to inform that process.”

On March 9, President Holdsworth sent a letter to the Great Allegheny Passage Conservancy with recommendations to improve its website, social media and trail signage. On the same day, it was favorably received by its executive director with a promise to review the suggestions and get back in touch with him at a later date.

Over the past week President Holdsworth sent three additional letters via email to the C&O Canal Trust, the Canal Towns Partnership and Visit Hagerstown. All have been acknowledged. The Trust and Canal Towns will discuss our recommendations with their staff or board, Visit Hagerstown has expressed a willingness to work with us.

A fourth letter to the Maryland Office of Tourism, which, in partnership with the previously mentioned organizations, has developed the C&O Canal Experience marketing campaign, is also being composed.

Attached you will find a copy of Superintendent Cappetta’s response to President Holdsworth.

Respectfully submitted,

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Tom Crouch
Doug Zveare