



FRIENDS OF THE BRUCE FREEMAN RAIL TRAIL

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Binder course at the ball fields in Chelmsford Center

When is the Ribbon Cutting?

CHELMSFORD/WESTFORD – The heavy snowfall this winter put a halt to most rail trail construction from December into March. The contractor plowed sections of the rail trail at one point to allow work on the four bridges. Before the snow fell, the 10-foot wide binder course was down on 98% of the trail, all the way from Rt. 3 in Chelmsford to Rt. 225 in Westford. The sides of the trail have been seeded or, in steeply sloped wetland areas, covered with stone. Curbing has been installed behind Ginger Ale Plaza in downtown Chelmsford. Curbing in the parking lot adjacent to Center Town Hall in Chelmsford will be installed this spring, along with railings, fencing, and landscaping in Chelmsford and Westford.

The trail is still under construction. Parts of the trail may be dangerous because of steep slopes that are lacking the railings that will be present when the trail is completed. Also, there have been some near-misses at road intersections, none of which have been marked yet. Lastly, there have been deep footprints left in seeded sections from people walking up the slopes and onto the trail. Please stay off the trail during construction to avoid injury to yourself and to the trail. Construction is expected to be completed by August. Sometime after that, there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening. The Friends will work with MassHighway and the towns of Chelmsford and Westford to organize the event. Details will be available after the date and location are selected. For information about the ribbon cutting, please see www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/ribboncutting.

If you would like to be a sponsor or volunteer for the ribbon cutting, please email ribbon-cutting@brucefreemanrailtrail.org. We are planning a big event and could use assistance in several areas. For construction status, see www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/Phase1.

Trail Activity Bustling in Chelmsford

CHELMSFORD – The Town is eagerly anticipating the long-awaited opening of the rail trail expected in August. We have been busy over the past months preparing for it and will only get busier as the opening nears. While the rail bed is beginning to look like a trail, it is still very much a construction site. Because safety features are not installed and safety hazards exist, please remain off the trail until it is completed.

In addition to working with MassHighway and the Town during construction, we have been developing a plan for adding benches, bike racks, kiosks, and other amenities after the trail is completed. We are working with local artist Markus Lewis (Markus + Leslie) on a proposed mural project for the concrete retaining wall behind Ginger Ale Plaza. We also have been preparing trail maps and information to put in the kiosks.

To fund these efforts the Friends are soliciting donations from citizens and businesses in the region as well as investigating grant opportunities. We are happy to report that we already have donors for four benches, and two other groups are considering such a donation. Contact us at:

chelmsford-amenities@brucefreemanrailtrail.org. If you are interested in researching and writing grants, we would really like your help. For more information about the amenities and making donations, please see the blue box on the page to the right.

The BFRT is a good start for cyclists and walkers in Chelmsford, but it isn't the whole story. The Chelmsford Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) is looking for ways to improve bicycle and pedestrian conditions in town. An important task for both the BPAC and the Friends is to improve access to the rail trail by bike and on foot. A first step in this direction was the Center School's participation in the Safe Routes to School Program, but there is much more to be done. For further information please see:

www.townofchelmsford.us/bicycle.cfm.

We are once again looking for help with our booth at the Chelmsford Country Fair on July 3 and 4. No experience is necessary; we will provide you with the necessary information. If you would like to volunteer please contact Cynthia McLain at:

cynthia.mclain@comcast.net.

Late news is, the Town is in negotiations to purchase open space property at Pond Street in South Chelmsford. This property is adjacent to the rail trail. Approval for using CPA funds to purchase the property is on the spring Town Meeting Warrant. Town Meeting begins on April 27.

Westford Progress

WESTFORD – Along the right of way (ROW) in Westford, visible construction progress reached an exciting stage on November 5, when the 1½" asphalt binder coat was laid down from the town's border with Chelmsford to the very curb of Rt. 225!! Our trail portion is now a hard black surface instead of the ties and rails or the muddy corridor it had been over the spring and summer of 2008. While Phase 1 is still an active construction site and therefore not open for use, we are really eager to schedule the BFRT ribbon-cutting ceremony this summer!

By this time next year we hope to have held some trail-user count days to demonstrate just how many area rail trail users are enjoying the New Trail in Town! The Town also is working to identify a suitable parcel for parking in Westford along the ROW next to the trail.

Westford's Board of Selectmen has signed an inter-municipal agreement covering Phases 2A and 2C, continuing the town's co-operative partnership with Acton and Carlisle, and which now includes Concord. This contract is an essential and visible working document that also serves to raise the "regional" importance and value of the BFRT that is increasingly essential for future design and construction.

On January 20, Westford was the host town for the Friends' monthly meeting at the J.V. Fletcher Library on January 20. The audience enjoyed a wide-ranging and detailed talk by Bill Steelman, who discussed the Essex National Heritage Commission and the proposed 28-mile Border-to-Boston Trail which traverses a railroad ROW from the New Hampshire border in Salisbury to Danvers, MA.

An amenities fund has been established for contributions in memory of, or to honor someone with a bench, planting, or other physical object along the ROW in Westford (see box above).

If you would like to help in any way – perhaps you are not yet a Friends' member, or would like to receive information by email or find information for yourself – please visit our website: www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org or contact Westford Friends Board members Emily Teller or Chris Barrett.

Carlisle Cyclists Await Trail Opening

CARLISLE – The Town's 847.2 ft. section of the rail trail is part of Phase 2A, on which construction will not begin for a while. Nonetheless, Carlisle cyclists eagerly await the opening of Phase 1 this year, since its southern terminus will be only a few hundred feet from the western boundary of the town. We anticipate exploring it as soon as it opens and expect to see a major increase in bike traffic along Carlisle's scenic back roads this summer as a result of the trail's abrupt (and – we presume – temporary) ending at Rt. 225. We welcome these cyclists but caution them that our roads are in far worse shape than the new BFRT. The ideal solution to this situation is the prompt completion of Phase 2A.



New pavement anticipating spring at Rts. 225 & 27 in Westford

Concord Residents

Please vote on **Article 34**
Town Meeting starts on April 27th

CPA Funds at Concord's Town Meeting

CONCORD – The Town Community Preservation Committee has recommended \$125,000 of funding to continue the 75% and 100% designs of the rail trail. These recommendations (Article 34 on the Warrant) require Town Meeting approval. **Concord's Town Meeting will be held at CCHS on April 27 to April 29 (and May 4 and 5, if necessary). We urge you to attend.**

In addition to CPA funds, Concord (along with Westford, Carlisle, and Acton) is pursuing Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program funds. Although the application for these funds has been recommended by the state steering committee, the amount available is not known at this time.

Also on the warrant for Town Meeting is a proposed Wetlands Bylaw. In response to concerns that this Bylaw could adversely affect construction of the rail trail, the language of the Bylaw has been revised to include publicly maintained trails from the set back. This means that the 25-foot setback provision would not apply to construction of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail..

After 2008 Town Meeting approved the Town's 25% design for the trail, it was submitted to the MassHighway Project Review Committee for its review. MassHighway is expected to hold a public hearing on the design later this spring. Details about this important meeting will be sent to all trail supporters. Acceptance of the 25% design by MassHighway will be a significant milestone toward completing the design of the trail.

Finally, the \$50,000 of rail trail funding approved at last year's Town Meeting is being used for other work on the rail trail: additional environmental studies, a survey of the railroad spur in West Concord Village, a study of alternatives for crossing the MBTA commuter rail line in West Concord, incorporating changes voted by 2008 Town Meeting into the 25% design, and preparation of the Right of Way plans in Concord.

Rail Trail Moving Slowly in Sudbury

SUDBURY – Contractors have now completed several studies of the Sudbury section of the BFRT that lies north of Rt. 20. The studies include a title search, wetlands delineation, Town surveying and a wildlife study. There was great anticipation that the completion of these studies would provide sufficient information for the Town to proceed with the next step, the 25% design. However, Town officials have decided to postpone such a decision until at least the fall of 2009.

For four years, the Town's appointed Rail Trail Conversion Advisory Committee has been gathering information and making recommendations about how to proceed with the BFRT. This was done with minimal involvement of Town staff. Recently, the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager have appointed a three-person staff committee that is charged with further defining a vision of the BFRT in Sudbury. The committee consists of Town Planner, Jody Kablack; Director of Public Works, Bill Place; and Conservation Coordinator, Debbie Dineen. Since the bids for the now-completed surveying and wetlands delineation came in well below the amount approved by 2007 Town Meeting, there are left over funds. To assist the efforts of the three-staff committee, the 2009 Sudbury Town Meeting will be asked to approve the use by this committee of \$25,000 of these left-over CPA funds. The request will appear as Article 27 in the Town Meeting Warrant, which is an amendment to Article 24 in the Warrant of 2007 in which the original funds were requested. **We urge Sudbury residents to attend Town Meeting that will take place on April 6, 7 and 13 at the LSRHS.**

The April 2008 Sudbury Town Meeting voted unanimously to use Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to purchase from CSX Corporation the 1.5 miles of the BFRT rail bed from Crumble Station/Chiswick Park Road south to the Sudbury/Framingham town line. \$450,000 of CPA and other funds were approved which, when combined with a \$250,000 state water-supply protection grant, would add up to the estimated price of \$700,000. However, the purchase is not complete because negotiations are still ongoing, and the state has changed the rules. Sudbury is now required to purchase the corridor and, after completion of the purchase, the \$250,000 will come to the Town as a reimbursement. The next step is to go back to Town Meeting and ask for the final negotiated purchase price so the purchase can be completed.

The Friends have contacted state transportation planners requesting inclusion of the BFRT in Sudbury in the long-range regional transportation plan. Such inclusion will assist in obtaining future design and construction funding for the trail.

Hansen Addresses Friends in Framingham

FRAMINGHAM – Bill Hansen, Chair of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advocacy Committee in Framingham, gave a brief review of the activity of the Committee at the February meeting of the Friends. The Committee is authorized and appointed by the Board of Selectmen, and its charge is to advocate at all town boards and hearings for bicycle and pedestrian access.

Bill stressed the importance of each community having an active advocacy group which will attend all hearings and meetings where bicycle and pedestrian access needs are being discussed to insure their inclusion in the development of a project in the community. Often these details are missed or ignored unless there is a constant and systematic review and commentary on all town projects that could potentially affect bicycle and pedestrian users.

Bill mentioned a few specific projects in Framingham where sidewalks, bike access and parking were included in the plan following the committee's input. Bill is aware of the time and perseverance that is required, but he is convinced that such efforts pay off in the long run.

Greenway Construction Continues

LOWELL – The Concord River Greenway, in Lowell, will be a multi-use trail constructed primarily on an unused railroad right of way paralleling the Concord River. Construction of the trail began in the fall of 2008. Phase II of the Greenway went out to bid on February 23, with construction scheduled for completion by the end of June.

The goal of providing a connection between the Greenway and the BFRT's northern terminus at the Lowell/Chelmsford line involves looking at several possible routes for the link. One of those includes potential use of a dormant section of railroad right of way, the Lowell Industrial Track, beginning at Industrial Avenue in Lowell. The future ownership of this right of way is currently uncertain and is being discussed by interested parties. However, no decisions have been made at this time.

A link between the two trails would enable BFRT users to continue into downtown Lowell, and the FBFRT will continue to work toward that end.

Sudbury Residents
Please vote on **Article 27**
Town Meeting starts on April 6th

Fun-ding Snags on Phases 2A and 2C: Rays of Hope Abound

by Tom Michelman, President of the Friends

This is not a *fun* article to write, nor do I imagine to read. Not fun because, while there has been progress on both Phases 2A (the 4.9 miles from south Westford, slicing through Carlisle and ending just shy of Rt. 2 in Acton) and 2C (in Concord), the elephant in the room -funding for design and construction – is still not settled. Not fun because to explain what is going on means shining light into the dark corners of the bureaucratic processes that can dull the senses of the most ardent rail-trail supporter.

As of last fall, things looked pretty promising. In September the Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program Steering Committee unanimously voted to move forward the BFRT application for funding the design of Phases 2A and 2C to the Secretary of Transportation. In October the MassHighway Public Hearing in Acton for the Phase 2A 25% design was a well-attended love fest with unanimous support for moving into final design and construction. More recently, the Phase 2A 25% design was finalized, and the Phase 2C 25% design is being prepared for a public hearing anticipated this spring. Further, and very importantly, Westford, Carlisle, Concord, and Acton are forming an inter-municipal agreement as part of the future design and construction efforts. Since the state requires multi-town projects to have a single lead community, Acton has accepted that role.

Unfortunately, securing funding for the rest of the design (75% design through complete construction-ready details) of Phases 2A and 2C has gotten bogged down. This design funding is currently being held up until construction funds for the project are included in the first ten years of the long-range regional transportation plan known as *Journey to 2030*. This inclusion is a prerequisite to releasing design funds from the Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program that have already been approved. For several months transportation officials have been discussing revisions to the regional plan which is expected to be completed this spring.

So where does that leave us? The Friends have strongly advocated having the entire length of the BFRT included in the long-range regional plan. (Perhaps you were one of the

250 supporters who sent emails advocating BFRT funding last October. Supporters may be called upon again to advocate for the trail in the regional plan.) Once Phases 2A and 2C of the BFRT are included in the regional plan, the Friends will push for immediately releasing the Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program funds so design can move forward. Also we will advocate for having funds for construction of the BFRT included in the near-term Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). When the design has been completed, construction costs will come from state and federal funds, assuming of course, that both state and federal agencies approve the funding. Inclusion in both the near-term and long-range plans is crucial for obtaining such approval.

We are encouraged by recent developments, such as Governor Patrick's emphasis on active transportation connections. Also, the proposed increases in gasoline taxes at both the state and federal level would provide additional funds for transportation projects. Many thanks go primarily to Board members Dick Williamson and Joyce Reischutz who have attended many of the state transportation committee meetings where these issues are fleshed out. In-person advocacy is key. If you would like more detailed information on the funding process, please see:

www.bostonmpo.org/bostonmpo/index.html. -- Are we having *fun* yet? I didn't think so.

Hats off to...



Pedal Power Bike and Ski in Acton for their dedication to the trail. *The nice folks at Pedal Power will give you 10% off the price of parts when you show this newsletter!*

John and Robert Kohler and Jet Mailing Services in Hudson, MA for their sustained commitment to getting this newsletter to you.

Chelmsford Cyclery for their support of the rail trail. *If you bring in this newsletter, you will receive 10% off the price of parts!*

Mass Community Path Alliance

Recognizing that shared-use path efforts around the Commonwealth are struggling with many of the same issues, a group of about 80 path supporters from around the state gathered last September to discuss how the various advocates might band together to further our common causes. The term 'shared-use path' is used to describe a facility of sufficient width and firmness to accommodate a wide range of non-motorized users. A shared-use path built on an unused rail bed is called a rail trail. The assembly strongly endorsed a proposal to form a statewide organization with representatives from all of the local shared-use path groups in the state.

What name should the new organization use? The name chosen was The Massachusetts Community Path Alliance. 'Community Path' encompasses all types of shared-use paths and is a term more readily recognized by government officials and the general public than the engineering term 'shared-use path'.

A draft charter of the Alliance is being circulated around the state as a prelude to formal establishment of the Alliance. Among the goals of the Alliance will be education of the public and government officials and pressing funding organizations to provide more support of community paths. The Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail expects to be one of the charter organizations of the Alliance.

Mass Central Rail Trail Moves Forward

A statewide interconnected network of rail trails and foot paths has been a gleam in the eye of trail supporters for many years. Recent events have brought this concept a step closer to reality. The 2002 study entitled "Commonwealth Connections" laid out a vision of such a network (www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/greenway/pdfs/connections.pdf). The former 104-mile Mass Central Railroad right of way (Boston to Northampton) was identified as a key cross-state trail for connecting a host of other rail trails and foot paths.

Development of the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) has proceeded in pieces for many years. Some sections such as the Norwottuck Rail Trail and the Wachusett Greenways section have been built and continue to be expanded. A key undeveloped section of the MCRT is the 25-mile rail bed owned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) running from Waltham through Weston, Wayland, Sudbury, Hudson and Berlin. The MCRT crosses and links the BFRT in south Sudbury.

For many years the MBTA had shown little interest in leasing the rail bed for development of a rail trail. Recently, the situation has changed dramatically. The MBTA Board of Directors has voted to lease the 25-mile rail bed to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for development as a rail trail. These are the same folks who have developed the beautiful Cape Cod, Nashua River, Norwottuck and Ashuwillticook rail trails. Because DCR will hold the lease, DCR will not have to go through the often tedious steps of getting local approval of rail trail development town by town. However, DCR does face a major challenge in obtaining funding for rail trail design and construction. Once DCR is successful and the BFRT is completed, we can look forward to an extensive rail trail network with Sudbury as Rail Trail Central.

Mass Bike & Pedestrian Advisory Board

It was a dark and stormy night, March 2nd, when Rosalie Anders, co-chair of the Mass Bike and Pedestrian Board (MABPAB) traveled to Sudbury to update a small group of the Friends on the Board's activities. The MABPAB was created by Massachusetts General Law to oversee the state's bicycle and pedestrian activities and advise the bicycle and pedestrian program office. It has members representing both the bicycle community and pedestrian interests, as well as representatives of various state agencies.

Rosalie said that the emphasis of the Board's current work is on pedestrian issues. Although there is a Mass Bike Plan, she stressed the need for a comprehensive pedestrian plan as well. The Board will give input on questions such as placement of sidewalks. For example, although transportation centers should be pedestrian accessible, they frequently are not. Bike and pedestrian access on bridges is another principal concern. For instance, the BU bridge and the bridge by the Science Museum should be made readily accessible and adequate to handle their heavy foot and bicycle traffic. Rosalie believes there is a very real need for a more integrated and cooperative approach to the design of transportation projects throughout the state.

She also shared the Friends' view that something must be done to assure that federal transportation enhancement funds designated for rail trails and other facilities to increase non-motorized transportation should be spent that way. Massachusetts ranks 51st among the states - behind Puerto Rico - in using enhancement funds for their intended purposes. In short, she feels that pedestrians and bicyclists generally have been shortchanged in plans to increase transportation and recreation facilities, and it is time for the Board and its allies to be more forceful in advocating for them.



Binder course and seeded slopes in Chelmsford
Cross Point Towers can be seen beyond the Rt. 3 tunnel

“Active Transportation for America”

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's recently published report, “Active Transportation for America,” calls for increased investment in the nation's bicycling and walking infrastructure. The report, for the first time, puts dollar estimates on the economic value of benefits in transportation, oil dependence, climate change and public health.

The report concludes that increases in federal investments to improve the convenience and safety of active transportation represent a highly cost-efficient use of public funds. The full report is available at www.railstotrails.org/atfa.

Donations to Amenities Funds

Funds have been established to help pay for amenities along completed portions of the rail trail. People wishing to donate may specify that their contributions be used in Chelmsford only, Westford only, for a specific project, or anywhere on the trail. Mail contributions for amenities to: FBFRT, PO Box 1192, Concord, MA 01742. Please include your name, address, email, phone number, whether your donation is for the amenities general fund or a specific town and if you wish to remain anonymous.

If you have ideas for projects that you would like to have considered, please email the Friends of BFRT at chelmsford-amenities@brucefreemanrailtrail.org for Chelmsford or westford-amenities@brucefreemanrailtrail.org for Westford.

For more information about amenities, please visit <http://www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/amenities>.

Monthly Friends Meetings

When: April 23, 7:30 pm
Where: Concord Children's Center
 West Concord
What: Steve Noble,
 Farmington (CT) Trails Council
 "Shared Experiences with a Similar
 Trail: Progress and Pitfalls"

When: May 13, 7:30 pm
Where: TBA
What: Charles Martin
 New Hampshire Trails

When: June 21, 6:00 pm
Where: Minuteman Bikeway
 Bedford Depot
 Intersection of Loomis St.,
 Railroad Ave., & South St.
What: Summer Solstice Bike Ride

Not a Member? Please show your support and join the Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail

http://www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/help_bftr/join.html

Upcoming Community Events & Volunteer Opportunities

May

2nd - Concord Earth Day - parade and table

2nd - Concord: Minute Man Arc MARCH - marshaling

June

20th - Westford Strawberry 'n' Arts Festival - booth

27th - Carlisle Old Home Day

TBD: Trail clearing & clean-up

TBD: Framingham Flag Day - booth

July

3rd&4th - Chelmsford Country Fair - booth

4th - Sudbury Fourth of July Parade

4th - Concord Picnic in the Park

24-26th - Lowell Folk Festival - information table

Summer

Mondays - Sudbury Summer Concerts

Tuesdays - Westford Farmers Market

Fridays - Framingham Concerts on the Green

We hope you will join and/or help us out at one or more of these local events this summer. Consider giving an hour to staff an event table in your town or walk in a local parade to spread the news of the continuing progress - town by town - of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.

See www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/help_bftr/volunteer.html for up-to-date volunteer opportunities. Or contact your town's representative listed at the bottom of this page.

Check www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org for further information and events.

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