

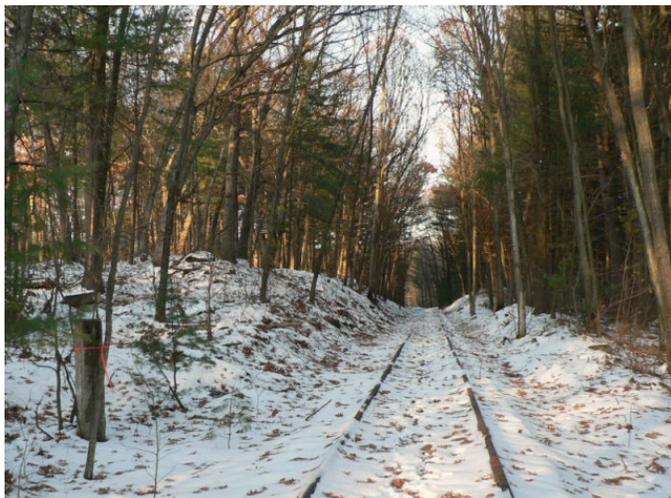


FRIENDS OF THE BRUCE FREEMAN RAIL TRAIL

Clearing the Way in Phase 1

CHELMSFORD / WESTFORD – In mid-January, the snow finally put a halt to construction on Phase 1 in Chelmsford and Westford. The clearing operation was completed before the winter weather put a damper on construction activities. Clearing of trees and underbrush for the 6.8 miles of the future path took two months, which included three holidays and near-record snowfall. Installation of erosion control fencing was completed at the beginning of December. At the end of February and into March, the rails and bridge superstructures were removed. Reconstruction of the four bridges, removal of the ties, and grading will occur this spring and summer.

In the spring it will become noticeable that the clearing was done in a way that maintains a canopy over the trail in many areas. That is particularly true for sections adjacent to conservation areas and woodlots. The contractors also preserved railroad artifacts, such as whistle posts and mile posts. At road intersections, additional clearing was required to improve crossing safety. Those locations will be landscaped with shrubs and grass once the rest of the construction is complete in 2009.



A cleared section of Phase 1 heading towards Lowell. The railroad mile post on the left, marked for preservation, indicates the number of miles to Framingham and Lowell.

Please stay away from work zones since many hazards are created by the construction activity. The entire trail is a construction zone, and the contractor and MassHighway consider anyone other than construction workers a trespasser.

Watch the FBFRT website, the *Chelmsford Independent* and *Westford Eagle* for construction information. Also, please visit the Friends' booths at the July Fourth Country Fair in Chelmsford and the June 14th Strawberry 'n' Arts Festival in

Westford for updates and to find out how you can get involved. If you're willing to help answer questions at either booth, we'd love to have your help. No prior knowledge is necessary.

Not So Extreme Rail Trail Makeover

CHELMSFORD – Completion of Phase 1 in summer 2009 may seem like a long time away for those who want to use the trail. However, it is not much time for developing a design for amenities, such as benches, bike racks, and artwork, and funding and installing them. The construction plans for Phase 1 do not include amenities. Nonetheless, for the ribbon cutting next year, the vision is to have a downtown area that is more attractive to pedestrians with murals, rest areas, and bicycle racks in place.

Work is just starting on this ambitious vision. FBFRT will continue working with organizations, town officials, and residents in Chelmsford to develop a conceptual design. Over the next few months, a special fund will be established to pay for amenities and fund raising will begin.

FBFRT would like to thank Emanouil Brothers, Inc. and Jon Diette for agreeing to develop a conceptual landscape design pro bono. Jon Diette is a landscape designer with Emanouil Brothers. We would also like to thank Markus Lewis for agreeing to provide pro bono consulting services for incorporating artwork into the trail. For more information, attend our May meeting in Chelmsford and watch our website and the *Chelmsford Independent*.

Attend Town Meeting and Make your voice heard!

Sudbury

Town Meeting starts April 7

Vote YES on Article 32 for CPA funding to purchase the rail trail right of way.

Concord

Town Meeting starts April 28

Vote YES on Article 27 to support the Town's design for the rail trail.

Look inside for more details.

Carlisle Seeks to Add Interesting Features

Carlisle residents have been eagerly awaiting the completion of the BFRT phase 2A preliminary design, which was released on January 30. Upon examining the plans we find that our portion of the trail will run in a straight line from our town line with Westford to our Acton border, 847.2 feet to the south. Almost devoid of interesting features, the Carlisle portion of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail will be 12 feet wide, paved with asphalt, but will narrow to ten feet at the southern end, where wooden guardrail borders the east side. The elevation will fall seven feet (from 195 feet above mean sea level to 188 feet) along that stretch, a grade of 0.85%.

Upon further examination, the design plans reveal that the Acton and Westford portions of the trail are far more interesting, with bridges, culverts, and even the occasional traffic light. Our plan for compensating for the dullness of the Carlisle segment is now being formulated. Interested citizens with any ideas should contact alancameron@comcast.net.

Monthly Friends Meetings

- When:** April 17, 7:30 pm
Where: Garden in the Woods
180 Hemenway Rd, Framingham
What: Blackstone River Bikeway
- When:** May 14, 6:30 pm
Where: Byam Elementary School,
25 Maple Rd, Chelmsford
What: 6:30pm Bird Walk
7:30pm Trail Beautification
Panel Discussion
- When:** June 20, 6 to 8 pm
Where: Assabet River Rail Trail
Wilkins Street Parking Lot
14 Wilkins Street, Hudson
What: Summer Solstice Bike Ride

Phase 2A: 75% Design – Next S.T.E.P.s

WESTFORD / CARLISLE / ACTON – The 25% design for Phase 2A (the 4.88 mile BFRT segment from Route 225 in Westford, through Carlisle and then through Acton to Acton Indoor Sports) is being overseen through a 3-town partnership of Westford and Carlisle and Acton, the latter being the “lead town.” All three towns chose the same design firm, Greenman-Pedersen, Inc. (GPI).

As a prerequisite for further progress, this past summer, each of the three towns’ Boards of Selectmen wrote letters of support to the MassHighway Project Review Committee (PRC), requesting written favorable determination that the Phase 2A segment would be “eligible for Federal Aid highway funding.” The PRC favorable determination letter for “Phase 2A, Acton/Carlisle/Westford” was received by the Acton Board of Selectmen in January.

GPI’s scope of work (through 25% design) includes a task to “assist the towns in working with State or Region officials to identify appropriate funding programs and to obtain the

necessary additional funding increases.” The most promising funding vehicle to offset future design (75% and 100%) costs has been identified as a Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program (STEP) grant. To be eligible for STEP funding Phase 2A must be considered a “Statewide” (rather than regional) project. Meeting the “Statewide” criteria is more difficult and takes more coordination. With significant help from GPI, the Acton-Carlisle-Westford partnership is now applying for a STEP grant to obtain final Phase 2A engineering-design funds. The Friends have been working closely with GPI, the Towns, state and local agencies to help with coordination and documentation.

In November GPI requested the Friends’ help compiling documentation as part of the STEP application. We obtained letters of support from State Senators and Representatives, and also from Westford, Carlisle, and Acton’s Boards of Selectmen. We located and supplied over 5 inches of documentation, including copies of town boards’ and Town Meetings’ minutes and votes, public hearing minutes, as well as significant supportive newspaper and online articles and letters. Also included were *Boston Globe* articles and editorials showing state interest and support for the BFRT and other rail trail projects and networks, and material showing issues of concern and/or opposition to this project.

In early February a Letter of Intent signed by all three town managers/administrators, and the Directors of the two responsible regional planning agencies – Northern Middlesex Council of Government (NMCOG) and Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) – was sent to the STEP Steering Committee, to ensure inclusion on their upcoming agenda and to demonstrate Phase 2A support from all local and regional agencies. The target date for the STEP application’s submission is the next quarterly meeting of the State Transportation Enhancement Steering Committee on March 26. The Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation has final approval for projects recommended by the Steering Committee. Finally, before acquiring STEP funding, approved projects must meet certain conditions, including adequate funding by a regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which for Phase 2A is the Boston MPO.

NMCOG, the regional MPO for Westford, has graciously ceded oversight for the last quarter-mile of the BFRT in Westford to the Boston MPO, the regional MPO for Carlisle and Acton, in order to simplify the bureaucratic processes needed for approval and funding.

If you are still reading this article, congratulations! You have the commitment to detail and strength of character to be a FBFRT Board Member! Sometimes the amount of bureaucracy is daunting – and yet the fact that the BFRT is a transportation corridor that will be open to so many Massachusetts residents means that it has to “pass muster” at the local, state, and regional levels to ensure that it is a worthy use of our state and federal tax dollars! We are glad to be so immersed in this work and are grateful for the support and expertise of so many citizens of the towns along the BFRT! Grassroots work is rewarding.

“If I build these paths and one kid comes out here and has contact with nature, then maybe that will do something. Maybe he’ll be inspired to fight for the place. Maybe he’ll be the next John Muir. Or at least maybe he’ll be less of a jerk.”

Taken from “On Earth,” published by the Natural Resources Defense Council, Winter ‘08 in an interview with Dan Driscoll, Mass Department of Conservation & Recreation

Concord's April Town Meeting to Vote on BFRT Trail Design

CONCORD – Concord voters will be asked to consider four separate warrant articles concerning the rail trail in crucial votes at this spring's Town Meeting, which starts on April 28 at Concord-Carlisle High School.

Article 27

After two years of work by the Town BFRT Advisory Committee, the 25% design for the BFRT in Concord, Article 27, will be presented by the Selectmen for Town Meeting approval. Through an extensive and public process, the Town Advisory Committee and the consulting firm of Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. have incorporated many compromises to reflect different needs and desires for the rail trail. Although many design issues remain to be addressed in the further stages of the project, the 25% design specifies the general layout of the trail. Once the design has been approved, it can be sent to MassHighway for review and inclusion in the funding queue. The design is available at the Department of Planning, both public libraries and online at the Town's website.

The Friends' Board of Directors strongly supports the Town's 25% design, feeling that it best reflects the interests of a wide variety of constituents and groups within the town. **The Board urges a YES vote for Article 27.**

Article 28

A competing, privately commissioned, design is expected to be submitted by a special-interest group to reflect their desires for the trail. This design was not available at press time. The Friends have concerns about a design that has not been publicly reviewed. Because of the unavailability of the alternative design as of press time, the FBFRT Board has not yet taken a position on Article 28, but will do so prior to Town Meeting.

Article 29

This article would specify a trail with a hard surface in the center and soft-surface shoulders. The petitioners have taken the position that a hard surface would make the trail fully accessible to all citizens to use in whatever (non-motorized) way they would like. While **the Friends have consistently supported creating a trail for citizens of all ages and abilities**, we recognize that our members and supporters have different opinions concerning the surface material of the trail. The Board of Directors explicitly voted not to take a position on Article 29. We believe that voters, after educating themselves on different surface materials, will be able to make an informed vote on Article 29. In any case, we do not believe that the trail surface issue should delay the submission of the Town's 25% design to MassHighway for approval.

Article 30

This article would authorize an additional \$50,000 for further study and design of Concord's rail trail. The Board recommends a YES vote for Article 30.

IT IS CRITICAL THAT SUPPORTERS OF THE RAIL TRAIL ATTEND TOWN MEETING.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE TOWN'S DESIGN BY VOTING YES ON ARTICLE 27.

Sudbury Town Meeting to Vote on Railbed Purchase

SUDBURY – Town officials will ask April's Sudbury Town Meeting to approve Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to complete the purchase of the portion of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail right of way in Sudbury that is still owned by the railroad company CSX. Although the state owns the railbed for Phases 1 and 2 of the BFRT, the Phase 3 railbed is still owned by CSX. Phase 3 runs from a point just north of Rt. 20 in Sudbury south to Rt. 9 in Framingham.

After six years of on and off negotiations between the Town of Sudbury and CSX, the parties are close to an agreement for the Town to purchase the 1.3-mile railbed. A section of the railbed south of Rt. 20 runs on an embankment through wetlands. Surrounding the wetlands are five of Sudbury's drinking-water wells. The Town has received a \$247,000 grant from the state toward the purchase of the railbed for protection of the water supply. Article 32 will request approval of up to \$420,000 for the balance of the purchase price. If approved, this balance would be paid out of CPA funds, which would not affect the property tax rate.

Although the land would be purchased primarily for water-supply protection, it may also be used for passive recreation, such as a rail trail. **Sudbury residents are urged to attend Town Meeting and vote YES on Article 32.**

Sudbury Completing Studies

The April 2007 Sudbury Town Meeting approved three CPA articles for funds to conduct a title search, a wildlife study and a survey of existing conditions, including wetlands flagging. The title search is complete, and no ownership impediments were found to converting the railbed into a rail trail. The four-season wildlife study is underway, and together with the other studies will be completed by the fall of 2008. Based on the results of these studies and extensive information being assembled by the Town's Rail Trail Conversion Advisory Committee, the Sudbury Board of Selectmen will make a recommendation this fall on whether or not to proceed with the next steps in establishing the Sudbury section of the BFRT. A recommendation to proceed likely would lead to an article at the 2009 Sudbury Town Meeting to approve CPA funds for the 25% design of the trail.

Framingham Builds Support for Purchase of Right of Way

FRAMINGHAM – Winter snows have revealed the tracks of many users of the railroad right-of-way in Framingham, including humans, animals and some unauthorized motorized vehicles.

Members of the Framingham Friends of the BFRT have met with Selectman John Stasik and other bicycle and pedestrian enthusiasts in two meetings during the winter to build more support for acquiring the railroad right of way. We will be publicizing the trail at several events in the spring, including Earth Day on April 26th at NEWFS and the town Flag Day events. We also hope to sponsor a trail walk along the right-of-way in June. To receive more information on these events, contact Susan Haney at 508-788-2732, or sign in at the Friends' website to receive email.

Construction to Start on Concord River Greenway

LOWELL – This spring and summer construction will begin on the Concord River Greenway (CRG). The northern terminus of the BFRT will eventually be linked to the Greenway via the Greenway Connector Trail. Work will start in the Davidson Street parking lot, across Merrimack Street from the Lowell Memorial Auditorium. Students at Middlesex Community College and patrons of the Merrimack Repertory Theatre and Lowell Memorial Auditorium primarily use that lot during the school year. The Greenway will follow the edge of the parking lot, adding critical green space in addition to the trail itself.

The City of Lowell has \$1.5 million available for Greenway design and construction from a variety of sources. Most recently, the state awarded a \$500,000 Urban Self Help grant to the City of Lowell for the Greenway. Artist Wopo Holup is working with the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust (LP&CT) through an Art and Community Landscapes grant to integrate public art into the design of the Greenway's bridges and gateways.

Finally, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has provided a grant to LP&CT for community outreach and planning for the Greenway Connector Trail to link the CRG to the BFRT.

If you're looking for something to do this spring, consider whitewater rafting in Lowell! Starting April 6th, the LP&CT and Zoar Outdoor will sponsor rides on the Concord River following the route of the future CRG. The ride goes through Class III and IV rapids, ending in historic canal locks behind the DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Lowell. For reservations, call 800-532-7483. (or call LP&CT for rafting information at 888-375-1115).

Crossing Route 2 on the Trail

Many of those interested in the rail trail ask: "How is the trail going to get across Route 2?" This will be answered as part of the Route 2 Rotary Redesign Project.

To a large degree because of the Friends' early intervention, the crossing of Rt. 2 is incorporated into the current Rotary 25% design project. The BFRT segment included in the Rotary redesign has been officially been dubbed Phase 2B. The area covered by 2B includes the section of the BFRT between Wetherbee St. in Acton and Commonwealth Ave. in Concord. Since the Phase 2B project scope overlaps Phase 2A in Acton to the north and Phase 2C to the south, there will be no gaps in the rail trail. A map of the project limits is available at www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/rotarymap.

The Notice to Proceed for work on the Route 2 Rotary Redesign Project's Environmental Impact Report and 25% design was issued in December 2007 by MassHighway to the design consultant Earth Tech of Concord, MA. The Friends will be reviewing and commenting on all aspects of these efforts, including advocating for constructing the BFRT Route 2 crossing prior to completion of the rest of the rotary redesign project.

We Will Miss You Betsy

BETSY GOODRICH, OUR LOWELL FRIENDS' BOARD MEMBER, HAS RECENTLY RESIGNED. SHE HAS PROVIDED INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE, EXPERTISE, ENTHUSIASM AND LARGER PERSPECTIVE OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS. UNTIL RECENTLY SHE WAS THE REGIONAL FIELD DIRECTOR OF THE RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY OFFICE. THE FRIENDS BOARD IS GRATEFUL FOR HER SERVICE AND COLLEGIALLY AND WISHES HER WELL IN HER FUTURE ENDEAVORS.

Please Join or Renew!

If you aren't currently a FBFRT member, we invite you to climb aboard! Membership is available either through the FBFRT website or by using the form included with this newsletter. Larger membership numbers give us a stronger and more persuasive voice.

The Friends use membership funds to support development of the BFRT. Members funded this newsletter, informational brochures, the website, the numerous phone calls required to advance the project to the construction phase, the courtesy mailings to rail trail abutters, and public education and outreach activities. All of this is necessary to advance the rail trail!

State-Level Coordinating Committee Improves Communication

WESTFORD/CARLISLE/ACTON/CONCORD/SUDBURY /FRAMINGHAM – After only two meetings, the new BFRT Coordinating Committee has increased dialog among the stakeholders for Phases 2 and 3. The quarterly meetings are expected to result in the BFRT being designed and built more quickly and efficiently.

MassHighway formed the Committee last fall. Lawrence Cash, P.E., MassHighway Project Manager for Phase 2, is the Chair. Other members of the committee are representatives from the six towns included in Phases 2 & 3, their two Regional Planning Agencies (MAPC & NMCOG), their MassHighway District Offices (3 & 4), and the Mass Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

These are working meetings. In January Mr. Cash began by summarizing information from the October meeting. He noted the three sections of Phase 2 currently under design have been given separate designations: Phase 2A (Acton/Westford/Carlisle), Phase 2B (Route 2 Rotary area), and Phase 2C (Concord). He then asked the representatives from each of the six towns to report on status and any issues in their town. Mr. Cash and representatives from the State Agencies provided perspective and advice to the towns. For example, one discussion focused on Federal loading requirements for pedestrian bridges.

As a result of the meeting, items requiring further action were identified. In one such case, Mr. Cash is taking action on the coordinating efforts between the Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) and the Town of Acton for advancing the required Phase 2A lease agreement. He also took action to obtain information on the project limits for Phase 2B.

Mr. Cash said, "I feel the meetings have provided a valuable open line of communication with each town, and this will help the planning process for each phase." He has tentatively scheduled the next Committee meeting for the end of April.

If you live in a Phase 2 or Phase 3 town, please thank your Town Manager or Board of Selectmen for sending representatives to the BFRT Coordinating Committee meetings. Also, please urge them to continue participating. Participation of the towns in this committee is important for advancing the BFRT.

Upcoming Community Events & Volunteer Opportunities

April

Concord: 4/12 - The League of Women Voters will host a tour of 2 portions of the rail trail. **April 12** (rain date April 13), 9:15am Sanborn school south to White Pond area, followed by 11am at Winthrop St south to the Assabet River.

Framingham: 4/26 - Earth Day, Garden in the Woods

May

Concord: 5/3 - Earth Day parade and booth

Concord: 5/3 - Minute Man Arc MARCH marshalling

Acton: 5/3 - Earth Day, St. Matthew's Church

June

Framingham: Flag Day Celebration

Westford: 6/14 - Strawberry 'n Arts Festival

Carlisle: 6/28 & 6/29 - Old Home Days

July

Chelmsford: 7/3 & 7/4 - Information Booth

Concord: 7/4 - Picnic in the Park information booth

Sudbury: 7/4 - 4th of July Parade

Lowell: 7/25-7/27 - Lowell Folk Festival

September

Sudbury: 9/13 or 9/20 - Sudbury Day Festival

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_bfrr/volunteer.html for more up-to-date volunteer opportunities. Or contact your town's representative listed at the end of this newsletter.

Muchas Gracias!

Thank you to the numerous staff at various state, regional, and local offices and agencies who have provided answers to our questions and assistance over the past year.

Pedal Power Bike and Ski has stuck by the Friends through thick and thin. Show them your appreciation by shopping for your next bike there! If you bring this newsletter you can get 10% off on parts! 176 Great Road (Rt. 2A) in Acton.

The Friends are once again indebted to Jet Mail Services Inc. and HLN Printing of Hudson, MA for their support and for their assistance in printing, assembling and mailing this newsletter.

Another Step Forward for a Neighboring Trail

The town of Stow has been awarded a state grant to study a potential site where the Assabet River Rail Trail could by-pass land on the original right of way which is now privately owned. The site to be studied is the Lundy property, a 32-acre parcel located off Sudbury and Forest Avenue.

Statewide Trail Usage Counts

ACTON – The results of the first statewide trail usage count from last September were reported at the February FBFRT meeting. Cathy Buckley Lewis, Chief Transportation Planner for the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), discussed the results. Cathy described how trail usage counts are important for determining how much and how trails are being used.

Duane Cromwell, chairman of the Friends of the Nashua River Rail Trail, noted the benefit of the usage count in Groton. The results there were used to justify designing amenities for the rail trail into the Station Avenue redevelopment project.

Cathy would like to use additional statewide counts to better estimate trail usage for different locations and under varying conditions. She envisions organizing two or three statewide counts each year to collect the data needed. The next counts will be on a weekday and a weekend day in May. Volunteers will be needed for 1 or 2 hour blocks of time. No experience is necessary. Please consider helping out. More information, including tabulated results and information on upcoming usage counts, is available at www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org/TrailUsageCounts or by contacting Cathy Buckley Lewis at cathy@ctps.org.



At the March meeting Senator Pam Resor presented Marion Stoddart a citation in recognition of her work for the preservation of the Nashua River.

For Further Information

Visit: www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org

Call or E-mail:

Acton:	Tom Michelman	978-580-6190	tmichelman@comcast.net
Carlisle:	Alan Cameron	978-369-2223	alancameron@comcast.net
Chelmsford:	Cynthia McLain	781-981-3943	cynthia.mclain@comcast.net
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Attend: Monthly Friends meetings

Send E-mail: info@brucefreemanrailtrail.org

