



Northampton Rail-trail News

Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc. (<http://www.fntg.net>) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports the expanding network of rail-trails in Northampton, Massachusetts. Volume 9, Summer 2015

Updates from the trails

After many years of no train service, Amtrak returned to Northampton this past December. The temporary station is installed and working and the permanent station is on track to open in 2016. As part of this project the long-awaited tunnel will connect the two sides of the trail network in Northampton.

Until the underpass is opened, all trail users should travel on the officially designated road connection instead of illegally crossing the tracks. This is important because the trains will be traveling *much* faster than in previous years. The rail upgrade project contractors will be adding new fences to deter trespassing. The official road detour (on Market Street to North Street) is well-signposted and needs to be the default for all users to ensure safe crossings. While the delay for this tunnel is unfortunate, many trail users are finding their way on the detour and exploring our wonderful network of trails.

In the past year, there have been wonderful improvements to the trails (see Sean Kinlin's recap of Wayne Feiden's update at our evening event this spring). The rehabilitation of the Norwottuck Rail Trail is fully complete (see Hilary Caws-Elwitt's review).

We have been working with our partners at the Friends of the Manhan Rail Trail to reprint our popular trail map and brochure. This should go to press later and be available by early Fall. Kudos to the many businesses and organizations that have signed on as sponsors (a full list is available on our website).

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways continues to work with the City of Northampton to help design, build, maintain, and improve the local trail network. As always, your support of our efforts helps us to do even more. See you on the trails!

Nicholas Horton

Northampton's Growing Trail Network

On March 10, 2015, Wayne Feiden, Northampton's Director of Planning and Sustainability, gave a presentation sponsored by FNTG. The event, titled "Northampton's Growing Multiuse Trail Network," took place at the Northampton Friends' Meetinghouse.

Wayne talked about various elements of the city's

comprehensive plan and its Open Space, Recreation, and Multiuse Trail plan, with a focus on trail improvements that will be carried out in coming years. Among the goals mentioned in the talk are that the trail network will eventually serve all the urban centers in the city, and it will reach 75% of city residents.

The first project coming up is the extension of the rail

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trail in Leeds. The trail will be paved another 0.4 miles from the existing Grove Street off ramp, covering half of the remaining distance to the Williamsburg line. This work is expected to be completed in late 2015.

Construction should begin this year on the long-awaited railroad underpass for the Mass Central (Norwottuck) Rail Trail, joining the current trail end on Woodmont Street to the trails on the King Street side of the tracks, which connect to downtown and head out to Leeds. The underpass is expected to be finished in the latter half of 2016.

Also being constructed in 2016 will be a paved off-ramp by Edwards Square, allowing users riding north from downtown to exit onto North Street. Other ramps to be constructed in the next 5 years or so will add access points at Main Street in Leeds and Arch Street near Look Park.

Design work is occurring this year on the next trail to be built: the Rocky Hill Greenway. This new trail will travel from the New Haven and Northampton (Manhan) Trail (from a point just north of the Route 10 bridge)

and connect to Route 66, not far from the existing Ice Pond trail. Construction on the trail would begin in 2020.

Another new trail to be designed after the Rocky Hill is the Connecticut River Greenway, which will run from Damon Road to the new riverfront park and boat ramp. The timeline for this project is still to be determined, and it will form the initial section of what is hoped to eventually be a trail up to Hatfield.

Other projects coming in the near future include trailside bicycle repair stations, bike lanes and cycle tracks, and new street construction standards that will emphasize pedestrians over motor vehicles at crosswalks, driveways, etc.

Roughly 30 people attended the presentation and participated in an extensive questions and discussion period. FNTG would like again to offer our thanks to Wayne for the informative talk and for all his work on trails in the city.

Sean Kinlin

The Leeds Hotel Bridge

Background: The single-lane Leeds Hotel iron truss bridge, constructed in 1880, was named after the Leeds Hotel, which was built next to it in 1885 to accommodate the village's growing population. In addition to being the oldest bridge in Northampton, the Hotel Bridge is the sixth-oldest iron bridge in the state.



Hotel Bridge in Leeds

The bridge has been closed to vehicles since 2004 when the City of Northampton installed Jersey barriers

on each end. Pedestrians and bicyclists continued to cross the bridge over the last decade, despite signs warning against it. That changed in August of 2014 when the Department of Public Works installed a chain-link fence on both sides of the bridge to keep people off it for good. The decision to fence off the bridge was made because of findings of a recently completed engineering study that analyzed its structural integrity and pinpointed weaknesses in certain beams and roadway decking. This \$35,000 study completed by Stantec Consulting Service Inc. of Northampton was financed by a Community Preservation Act grant awarded in 2012 to the DPW at the behest of the Leeds Civic Association (LCA).

New Developments: A small remainder of the CPA grant (\$5,292) was requested by the LCA to fund an alternative engineering study. Workin' Bridges (WB), a team of iron bridge specialists, was then hired to perform a site visit, submit a scope of work report, and hold a larger community meeting in Leeds. (More information on this firm can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/WorkinBridges>.) The LCA, Northampton DPW, and Workin' Bridges took advantage of the frozen river this past March by quickly organizing the site visit. They spent a day and a half assessing, measuring and photographing the top and bottom chord members, abutments and deck. The river was frozen solid so the team could inspect underneath while standing on the ice: no boat, no scaffolding necessary! The Workin'

Bridges' scope of work report was recently submitted to the City and on June 1 a community meeting reviewed their findings. Their recommendations included a plan for full restoration and projected costs. In addition, a plan to open the bridge to foot traffic and bicycles while restoration funding is sought was described.

The city of Northampton owns the bridge and must approve of any work. If the historic 1880 iron bridge can be opened in a safe way, it will greatly improve the enjoyment and movement of local residents and others who relied on the bridge for crossing the river. Active

use of the Hotel Bridge by pedestrians and bicyclists will also increase restoration fund raising opportunities.

Hotel Bridge has an excellent chance of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places which could allow access to grant funding for restoration. On Tuesday, April 28, the Northampton Department of Public Works submitted the Leeds Civic Association's nomination for the Hotel Bridge to be officially recognized as a national historic place.

George Kohout and Heidi Stevens

Trail Happenings in Southampton



Current end of the trail in Southampton (photo credit Sergei Serigiogin)

In November 2012 the Town of Southampton voted overwhelmingly to pursue acquisition of the Pioneer Valley Railroad corridor extending from the southern terminus of the Manhan Rail Trail 4.25 miles south almost to the Westfield border. Soon thereafter the Town won a State grant to fund 2/3 of the acquisition.

Since then negotiations with the Railroad have been

proceeding slowly but well, and the two parties are now finalizing a purchase and sale agreement. The Town has begun conducting its "due diligence" activities, which will ultimately include a title review, phase I environmental assessment, and a structural assessment of existing bridges and structures.

We wish the process could have moved more quickly, but are increasingly confident that this project will come to fruition, and that the regional rail trail network will extend through Southampton.

Mike Buehler

Rail Corridor History (from the fofsg.org website)

On July 29, 1835, the Hampshire and Hampden Canal opened for business from New Haven to Northampton. The canal specifications: 24' wide at the bottom; 34' wide at the surface; water depth 4'; horse tow paths 10' wide, 2-5' above the water level. The boats were 75' long, 11' wide, 7' high. Pleasure boats carried from 150 to 250 people. The passenger fare from Northampton to New Haven was \$3.75, including meals. The trip took approximately twenty-six hours.

The Southampton section had 6 locks, which were 80' long and 14' wide: one near Route 10 to the south with a 10' elevation change, a 60' aqueduct near Lyman's Tin Shop bridged the Manhan River, followed immediately by three more 10' locks, and two additional locks. The next lock system lowered the canal into Easthampton at the town line at the North Branch of the Manhan River where five locks lowered the canal 36'.

However, by 1847, the New Haven and Northampton Canal Company declared bankruptcy and the canal ceased operation. By 1855, the right-of-way had been purchased and the "Canal Railroad" had been completed. In Southampton, the railroad lines were constructed in the canal bed from East Street south to the Westfield line.

By 1854, the Hampshire and Hampden Railroad

Company was operating on these tracks. The rail business boomed. Over the years, Southampton has had two railroad stations. The first station was built on the "Road to Holyoke" (present-day East street) but it burned down. A new depot was erected, situated by the corner of College Highway and Moosebrook Lane but it also burned down in 1869. By 1890, the railroad reached its pinnacle of success. Revenues on the entire New Haven railroad exceeded \$100 million as they car-

ried over 12 million passengers annually and had 4,000 employees. By 1929, there were 2,131 miles of tracks laid.

The final passenger train passed through Southampton in 1926. However, the freight rail trains continued on. At its apex in the 1970's, over 4,000 cars rolled on Southampton's tracks. The last regular freight service passed through town in 1992. These tracks have lain dormant for the last 20 years.

Review: Renovated Norwottuck Rail Trail



New trail markers on the Norwottuck Branch of the Mass Central Rail Trail in Amherst

The new Norwottuck Rail Trail (now officially the Norwottuck Branch of the Mass Central Rail Trail) is much more than a wider, glass-free version of the old one. The DCR and MassDOT have done a great job in upgrading every aspect of the trail. The wait was worth it!

The Norwottuck already had just about the best setting for a rail-trail one could imagine. From Northampton to Belchertown, the route includes quiet woods; the gorgeous Connecticut River bridge, with one leg on tranquil Elwell Island; miles of protected farmland, with crops from butternut squash to soybeans; rolling hills and spectacular views of the Holyoke Range; wetlands full of birds; acres of wildflowers. The old version of the trail gave access to it all, but the narrow, root-cracked surface was uncomfortable. The embedded glass glittered beautifully in the sun, but had a tendency to relocate itself into bicycle tires. The smooth new asphalt surface has been widened to ten feet. That's only two more feet, but it makes a big difference; the trail is now comfortable for two people to walk abreast in the lane and still have room for passing bikes. But because DCR targeted only a small number of trees for removal to deal with root and visibility issues, the twelve-foot right-of-way did not change. There's still plenty of shade to keep

it cool in the summertime.

The approach to the tunnel under Route 9, which was very abrupt, has been straightened with the installation of a pre-cast concrete boardwalk. It's a great solution which not only increases the safety of the tunnel, but reduces the impact on the wetland area there and also eliminates the poor drainage right at the mouth of the tunnel, where mud and ice would accumulate. The bridge over the Connecticut River has been completely re-decked—no more splinters! The small bridge over Snell St. in Amherst was re-decked as well.



New signage on the trail (photo credits Nick Horton)

Beyond the basics of the trail surface, there are dozens of thoughtful new touches which make the trail experience even more pleasant. Engraved granite markers at road intersections show that the trail is officially

part of the Mass Central Rail Trail. The intersections also have new signage, textured ramps, and a brick-like divider between the lanes at the approach. They are much more noticeable and safer. Navigating the busy South Maple Street intersection is getting easier thanks to a set of switch-activated pedestrian crossing lights.

Signposts indicate the named access points and their distances. The Connecticut River access point is the upgraded Damon Road parking lot, with new picnic benches. Heading east, the next area is Hadley Depot, with a new striped parking area next to the split-rail fence. Mountain Farms (behind the strip mall) and Rangeview are on either side of South Maple Street. Rangeview, so named for the spectacular view of the Holyoke Range, has always been a favorite stopping point along the trail; the new picnic benches make it even more pleasant.

One of the nicest new features is the number of

pull-out/turnaround rest areas with benches. Most of them feature striking boulders engraved with images of trail wildlife (bullfrog, spotted salamander) and their common and species names. The rest area just west of the Mountain Farms access point has a boulder engraved with something else entirely: a verse by Clarence Hawkes. Hawkes (1869–1954) was known as “The Blind Poet of Hadley,” where he lived from 1899 to his death. “I love to be a child at Nature’s feet / And on her mossy footstool sit and dream,” reads the stone.

If you haven’t traveled the new trail, you’re in for a treat. It showcases the best of the Pioneer Valley, and provides residents, commuters, and visitors of all ages with countless delightful opportunities for recreation and leisure. Congratulations to all whose hard work made it possible!

Hilary Caws-Elwitt

Winner of Trail Neighbor Award



Gaby Immerman displaying the new Mill River Greenway t-shirts (photo credit Nick Horton)

For 2015, FNTG is recognizing two Trail Neighbors to the North: Gaby Immerman of Williamsburg and John Sinton of Florence.

Gaby and John are leaders of the Mill River Greenway Initiative, which provides public education about the river’s history and ecology, and works for access to and conservation of the entire length of the river, from

its source in Goshen to its end in Easthampton.



Gaby Immerman and John Sinton receiving the FNTG Trail Neighbor Award (photo credit Gail Gaustad)

John and Gaby have spent many years as professional educators (at UMass and Smith College, respectively), and bring great expertise and passion to the river tours they lead, as well as to efforts to develop a walkable and/or navigable route all along the Mill's course. Participants in the walks and other events get to know surprising facts of the area's history, and can contribute to the river's health in such ways as helping to remove invasive plants.

These two wonderful people have helped many local residents to discover (or rediscover) the connections

of their community to the river, and are helping to ensure those connections remain strong in the future. To learn more or to participate in MRGI activities, visit <http://millrivergreenway.org>.

Past awardees include the residents of Six-Eight High Street in Florence, Craig and Kathy Della Penna, the City of Northampton Department of Public Works, Smith College, Jane Sommer, Julia Riseman, and James Lowenthal.

Sean Kinlin

Sweet Spoken Tweed Ride



Natty attire, good food, and good company were the order of the day at Sweet Spoken's First Northampton Tweed Ride (photo credit Angela Klempner Photography)

Sweet Spoken bicycle patisserie organized a Spring Tweed Ride benefiting FNTG on Sunday, May 10th, from Downtown Northampton to Look Park. Co-owners Emily and Caleb Langer have become a familiar presence at area Farmer's Markets with their pastry case

mounted on a three-wheel bicycle. Caleb reached out to FNTG to offer to organize the Tweed Ride as a fun way to use the trails, a nice way to socialize, a good chance to get people out that might not otherwise ride very much, a way to promote a fun, bike culture, and finally a way to raise awareness for FNTG.

The Tweed Ride event was a perfect way to kick off Bike Week and enjoy Mother's Day afternoon, with many families participating. Following in the tradition of the Tweed Ride—or "Tweed Run"—started in London, England. The ride was fun, casual, and social. Participants dressed in traditional tweed, seersucker or similar attire. While any bicycle was welcomed, riders were encouraged to bring along their vintage bikes.

The group of approximately 25 met in the pedestrian plaza behind Thorne's Market at 2:30 PM and after a group photo, set off on a leisurely paced ride along Northampton's bicycle trail network, ending at Look Park. There, Sweet Spoken served light refreshments, similar to an afternoon tea with live music. Thank you to Angela Klempner Photography for her work documenting the event.

Sweet Spoken created the Tweed Ride to benefit the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways (FNTG), as a way of saying 'thanks' and to invest in our ongoing work supporting the improvement of our trail system for the residents and visitors of the Pioneer Valley. Riders chose from our registration options, which offer a range of donation levels to FNTG, all of which include a complementary one-year membership. The event raised over \$500 for the FNTG. We're already looking forward to next year!

Julia Riseman

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