

Southampton Greenway project gaining steam with new state grant

by Sam Ferland October 30, 2025

The Coleman Road end of the Manhan Rail Trail in Easthampton. Credit: STAFF PHOTO/DAN LITTLE

SOUTHAMPTON — The town has received another significant state grant to bring it one step closer to completing design work necessary to connect the Southampton Greenway to the regional Manhan Rail Trail.

The \$324,000 in funding awarded by the state's MassTrails grant program aims to bring the Southampton Greenway project to the 25% design stage. While the percentage suggests otherwise, this would actually nearly finish the design process allowing the town to send the project out for construction bids.



The project seeks to transform a 3.1-mile section of railroad track into a multiuse bike path, spanning from Coleman Road on the border of Easthampton to College Highway (Route 10) by Sheldon's Ice Cream.

This is only a small piece to the puzzle.

"This is the part of the process of getting a trail from north of Northampton all the way down to New Haven, Connecticut ..., " said Mark Kassis, a member of the Southampton Greenway Committee. "We're one of the few places where there are missing gaps, so this is working on a very regional project."

The 3.1-mile defunct rail is part of the more than 80-mile track spanning from Northampton to New Haven, Connecticut, also known as the New Haven & Northampton Canal Greenway. The railroad was owned by the Pioneer Valley Railroad Co., that has not used the line since the early-1990s.

Since the line stopped being used, communities have been purchasing the portion of the track that runs through their jurisdiction, adding to the Greenway. Southampton purchased its portion in December 2022, kicking off the process.

The design stage is contracted to Tighe & Bond, of Westfield. Kassis expects plans to be finished within the next two months, enabling a final review process from the town and state. In 2023, Tighe & Bond completed surveying, base mapping, wetlands delineation and condition assessment of the necessary bridges and culverts. At that time, outreach sessions were held to help understand the community's vision for the project.

Kassis says while this is a big step in the right direction, there is still going to be a wait.

Construction is slated for July of 2028, and is expected to be funded by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. Kassis said the Massachusetts Transportation Improvement Plan for fiscal year 2029 has allocated roughly \$16.2 million for the Greenway, covering construction costs.

Even after the construction of this portion, the Manhan Rail Trail will still not be connected to the full New Haven & Northampton Canal Greenway. There will be a gap between the Sheldon Fall's end and Westfield's Columbia Greenway, which connects to the larger track. Southampton and Westfield are in talks over connecting the trails, after Southampton's portion is constructed.

"We're very excited," Kassis said. "Even though it always feels like we'd love to have it immediately, it's moving in the right direction."

This round of funding from MassTrails builds on four years of awards since 2022, totaling more than \$1 million from the program with added Community Preservation Act funds.

"We can't thank MassTrails enough ..." said Select Board Chair Christine Fowles. "Working with the Greenway Committee, we've probably submitted grant applications over the past four years ... and almost got funding every time."