

## Thoughts In Return

A Q&A About Rail Trails in Sudbury with Len Simon

**You've been advocating for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail for years and also have experience as a Select Board Member working on both the BFRT and issues related to the Mass Central Rail Trail. Can you give us a running summary of the current plans and how they relate, if at all?**

There will be two rail trails in Sudbury, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) and the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT).

### BFRT

The BFRT in Sudbury runs north-south.

The design of the BFRT is complete. Construction should begin in the next several months.

### MCRT

The MCRT in Sudbury runs east-west.

The MCRT will be built on a gravel service road Eversource will install on the inactive railroad corridor above the underground Sudbury-Hudson transmission line. It will take about 2 years to complete installation of the transmission line. When the service road is complete, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will pave over the service road. The resulting paved, multiuse rail trail will be like the BFRT and other DCR paved rail trails in Massachusetts.

### How the BFRT and the MCRT relate?

The BFRT and the MCRT will intersect close to Station Road, which is  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile north of Route 20 and just west of Union Avenue. This spot is often referred to as the "diamond". See diagram below.

**Some residents may not be as familiar with the phasing of the BFRT, especially the phase 3 part in the southern part of Sudbury, and it's not quite as far along as phase 2D. What should residents know about the phasing?**

The BFRT Sudbury has two phases, Phase 2D and Phase 3.

### BFRT Phase 2D, Sudbury

- Runs north to south, from the Concord town line to the diamond in Sudbury.
- It is 4.4 miles in length.
- The land is owned by the MBTA.
- The lease for use of the corridor as a multi-use path, rail trail, has been signed by all parties.

Status:

- The design, Sudbury's responsibility, is complete.
- Mass DOT published the Request for Proposals (RFP) for construction on August 6, 2022.
- Responses are due on September 7, 2022.
- Next steps: Mass DOT will open the bids and select a contractor to build the Sudbury BFRT Phase 2D, from the Concord/Sudbury town line to the diamond.

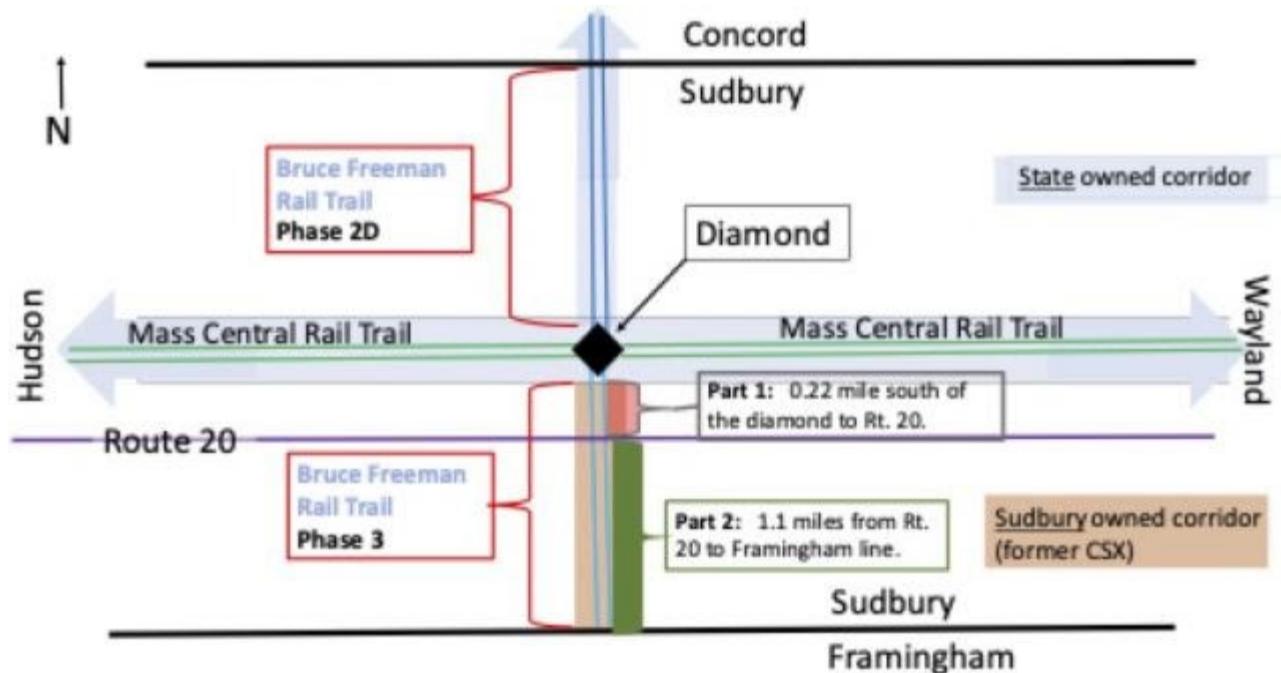
The contractor selected to build Sudbury BFRT Phase 2D will also build (actually complete) the southernmost portion of the BFRT in Concord. This section runs from the existing Powder Mill Road tunnel southward to the Sudbury town line, a distance of about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. This section of the BFRT will run close to White Pond in Concord. Due to 'economies of scale' it made sense to have the same contractor finish the Concord section while constructing the Sudbury section.

### BFRT Phase 3, Sudbury

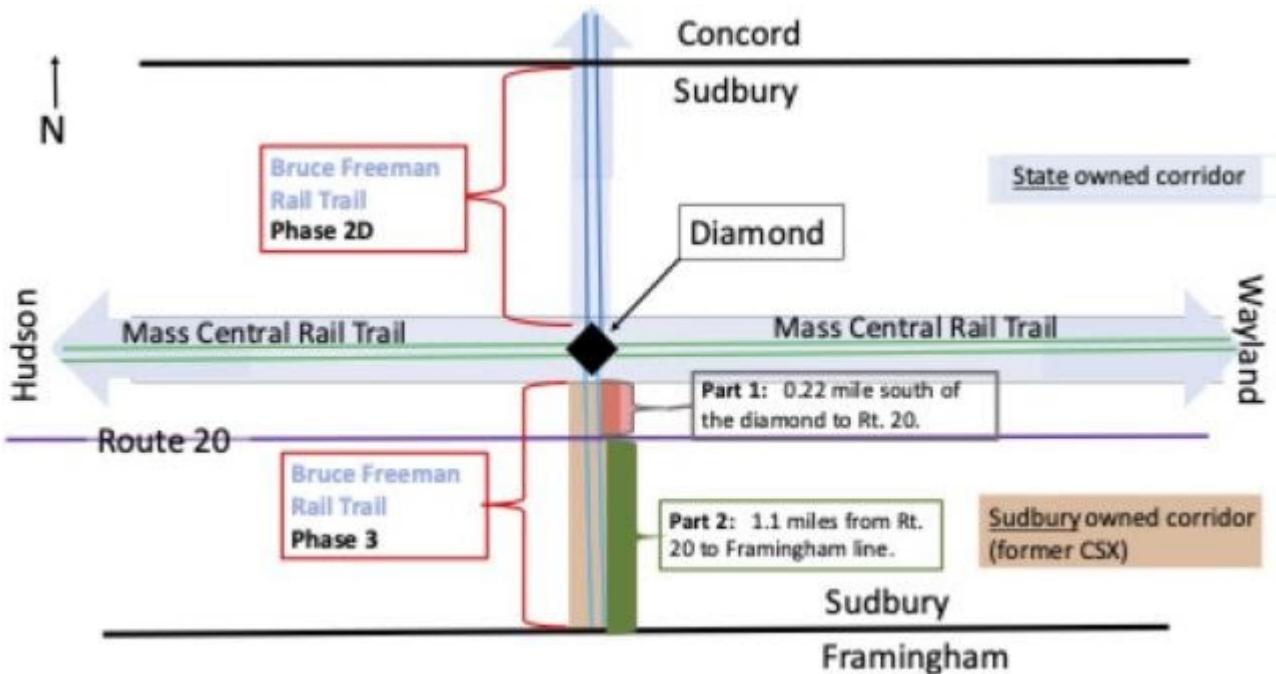
- Runs north to south, from the 'diamond' in Sudbury to the Sudbury/Framingham city line along a railroad corridor formerly owned by CSX corporation.
- It is 1.4 miles in length.
- Sudbury purchased the entire corridor two years ago from CSX and owns the land outright.
- No lease is necessary.

Status:

- The design of Phase 3 will be Sudbury's responsibility. Design not yet started.
- Construction: Who will build it - not yet determined. Possibly the Town of Sudbury, OR, a traditional MassDOT project using Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) funding, like the rest of the BFRT.



This is where it gets a bit complicated. Because the Sudbury/Framingham line is not at a cross street, Mass DOT will not build a rail trail that ends in the woods. This is precisely what happened in Concord. That is why the BFRT now ends at Powder Mill Road, Concord.



Sudbury BFRT Phase 3, (formerly the CSX owned corridor) may be divided into two parts, see diagram above:

- Part 1: The  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the diamond to Route 20, [actually 0.22 miles] gray box and bracket.
- Part 2: The approximately 1.1 miles from Route 20 southward to the Sudbury/Framingham city line, green box and bracket.

Extending the Sudbury BFRT from the diamond to Route 20, a distance of less than a  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile, is a high priority for the following reasons:

- The southern end of the BFRT at the diamond comes out to Station Road, which does not have walkways on either side. See photo below.
- The destination of trail users coming south on the BFRT will most likely be the Sudbury business district at Rt. 20, where restaurants and shops are located. This destination is less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile directly south of the diamond, however, the path is through woods. There is no defined trail. Some users will be tempted to 'cut through' the woods to Rt. 20.

Currently, southbound trail users would have to turn right toward Chiswick Park, an industrial/

commercial area not intended for pedestrians or bicyclists, OR, turn left toward Union Avenue to get to the Rt. 20 business district. Union Avenue is not safe for pedestrians or bicyclists because it does not have sidewalks on either side of the street.

This image shows the north end of the ¼ mile between the diamond and Route 20:

The common-sense answer to making Phase 2D of the BFRT safe and user friendly is to make Route 20 the southern terminus, until it can be extended further south into Framingham and beyond. This do-it-in-segments progression has been supported by Mass DOT and is consistent with the construction history since the first BFRT section was completed 13 years ago.

At the 2022 annual town meeting Sudbury residents appropriated funding to accomplish two goals:

- 1) extending the BFRT to Route 20, and,
- 2) study the feasibility of future extension to Framingham.

Recently, the Select Board authorized the Interim Town Manager to enter into a contract for design of the ¼ mile of the first part of Phase 3 of the BFRT, from the diamond to Route 20.

**The intersection of the two trails at the diamond junction has been discussed in the Historical Commission, and we've covered it here. But readers haven't heard much about the significance of that intersection as it relates to trail usage. What's the significance of having that intersection in Sudbury, if any? How does it impact use of the trail systems?**

The BFRT and the MCRT will intersect at the 'diamond'. This is a 90-degree railroad cross track. It is located about ¼ mile north of Route 20 and just west of Union Avenue at Station Road. (It is close to the former AAA Limousine structure.) See second photo below.



In this photo, the BFRT runs left to right, and the MCRT runs top to bottom. The former AAA Limo building is the small yellow building at the top of the photo. Union Avenue is on the far side of the yellow structure, with a vehicle on it:



It would be hard to overstate the significance of the Bruce Freeman and the Mass Central Rail Trails intersecting at the diamond in Sudbury. These are two of the longest rail trails in Massachusetts. When complete, the BFRT will cover 25 miles, from Lowell to Framingham. When complete, the MCRT will cover 104 miles, from Boston to Northampton. Together, 71 miles have been built, with more coming online every year. They form the backbone of an interconnecting web of rail trails in Massachusetts.

Studies have shown rail trails bring vitality to business districts, increase the value of homes along the rail trails, enhance tourism, and add to the quality of life for residents along the trails. They also provide a safe place for walking, running or riding.

Rail trails bring us into contact with wetlands, forests, old stone walls, farms, historic bridges, cattle crossings, streams, and quiet spots we never knew existed until they could be accessed by a rail trail. You will be blown away by their ever changing beauty.

Without question the intersection of the two trails will increase the usage of both as residents take advantage of the ability to access to historic sites and town centers such as; Sudbury's commercial district, Wayland Town Center, Weston Center, Meadow Walk, West Concord, and more town centers to the north and south.

**We have reported that the MCRT is being built by DCR after the Eversource project is completed. But some residents might have concerns about what kind of input the Town will have on that trail and if there's any risk that we would incur unexpected costs from the project since the Town isn't in the driver's seat as much as we are on the BFRT. Based on your understanding of the project, what should members of the community expect?**

Virtually all permits necessary for Eversource to begin construction of the underground electrical transmission line have been issued, including the Sudbury Conservation Commission and Sudbury Historical Districts Commission. The Army Corp of Engineers will issue a Memorandum of Understanding.

According to Eversource, construction of the transmission line project is expected to take about 2 years. Construction is slated to begin third quarter 2022. After the transmission line is complete and a service road is in place, DCR will pave the service road to convert it into a multi-use path and rail trail. Per DCR, once the road is in, the paving can be accomplished quickly.

The Sudbury section of the MCRT will be designed and constructed done at no cost to the town. Should residents wish to add further amenities, such as additional benches, a hydration station, or tool locations, that would be a separate expense.

Sudbury officials and DCR are now discussing design of the intersection and adjacent amenities at the diamond.

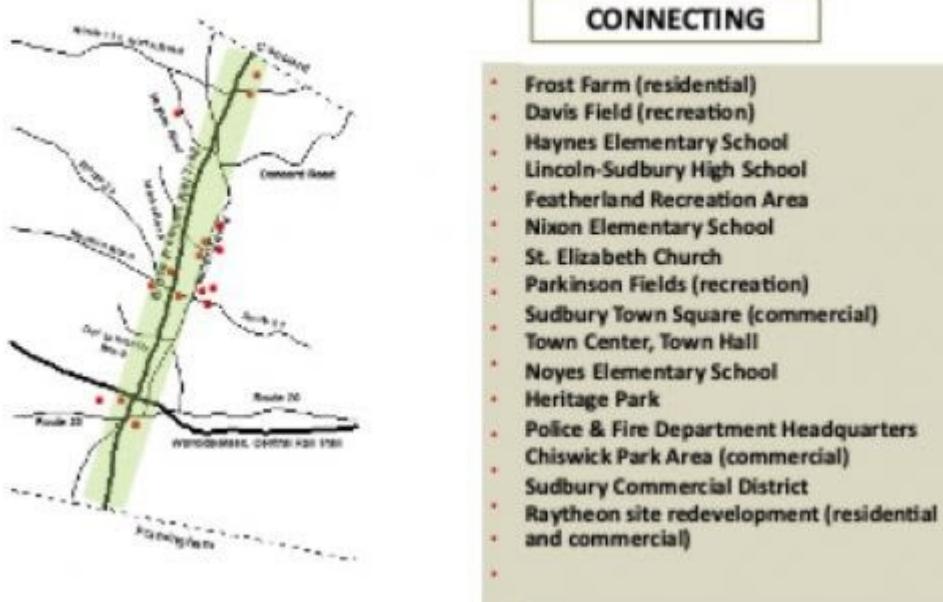
**Some readers may not have experienced a rail trail before, and others such as avid cyclists, may have lots of experiences with rail trails. Beyond the obvious benefits for recreation, what value can rail trails bring to a community? What should people new to rail trails know about the expected impact of these trails on Sudbury?**

Rail trails are community connectors. Kids use them to ride to school and athletic fields, taking cars off the roads. They can be used as outdoor classrooms for field trips to study nature in real time and to learn about habitat and ecosystems.

Rail trails can be used for walk/run/ride fundraisers along a safe route. They can be venues for conservation projects and for community service activities.

This diagram shows just how many schools, municipal buildings, houses of worship, and athletic facilities are close to the Bruce Freeman:

## Bruce Freeman Rail Trail in Sudbury



Both trails have been topics of discussion and planning for many, many years in Sudbury. Some residents may have developed some doubts that the projects will be completed as time has gone on. Can you help readers understand why these projects take the time they do to be completed? Is it a function of delays, or is this just what the process looks like everywhere? Or maybe it's the nature of these specific projects?

This is a very understandable question given how long the rail trails have been discussed, the number of votes at town meetings, and the town committees which have provided input. The answer is some of each. State law, municipal bylaws, funding sources, bureaucratic compliance, and some outright opposition, have made the process seem frustrating and endless. In my view, Sudbury has had missteps and has been slower than other communities in getting to the finish line. However, the town's work is now complete. The BFRT project is now in the hands of the Mass. Department of Transportation. It has put the project out for construction bids which are due September 7. Construction will start this fall or in the spring.

Construction of Eversource's underground electric transmission line is slated to begin September 2022 and to be completed in 2024. Then DCR will pave it for use as the Mass Central Rail Trail.

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## Eversource Updates Sudbury: Did We Hug and Make Up? (Submitted by Kevin LaHaise)

The Select Board assembled anyone and everyone working on the Eversource transmission line project for a comprehensive update on Tuesday. They first got updates from all of the Town department heads, then they did a Q&A with Eversource employees. ([3:10:50](#))

- Much of the back and forth with Eversource focused on their plan to communicate with Sudbury residents over the course of the project. Eversource cited regular updates to their own project page, direct mail, door hangers, and email updates as primary channels. But they also noted that they would have a member of their Outreach team on-site for most of the project. If you're looking to stay up to date here are the resources you'll need:
- [Town of Sudbury Project Page](#) (you can sign up for the emails on this page)
- [Eversource Project Page](#)

Eversource is providing the following contact information: "For more information about the Sudbury to Hudson Transmission Reliability Project, send an email to [ProjectInfo@eversource.com](mailto:ProjectInfo@eversource.com) or call 800-793-2202."



Okay, so did we learn anything new during the meeting? Yes, we sure did:

1. They anticipate starting work in late September or early October.

Since the project start has been delayed, they expect construction to carry into 2024. The previous estimated end-date was December 2023. ([3:20:34](#))

Eversource said the latest soil sampling results came in last Friday and they did not find any detectable PFAS. They'll be sending those results to the town soon. ([3:21:20](#))

Apparently someone has been removing the stakes they installed along the corridor to mark the boundaries for vegetation removal. ([4:10:40](#))

The changes that they made at the request of the Historic Districts Commission to reroute around the Section Tool House will indeed need to be approved by the Conservation Commission. They'll be discussing this on September 12th. ([3:31:51](#))

The Sudbury Historic Districts Commission has recently been invited to sign the Army Corps of Engineers Memorandum of Agreement. We did not, however, find out which parties have signed the MOA, if anyone, though we know the Sudbury Historical Commission has not signed it from prior reporting. On Thursday night, the Historic Districts Commission voted unanimously to sign it. ([3:24:58](#))

Perhaps the most useful part of this update came from the department heads. You can read their written reports starting on page 39 of the packet. They are decidedly thorough and presented with clarity. Importantly, they itemize many of the conditions on the project and give status updates on compliance.

As for the discussion in the meeting, here are the notable comments from the department heads:

**Lori Capone, Conservation Coordinator:** "I have been working with the applicant since the order was issued in February of 2021, to address these pre-construction conditions, which they have been working diligently on. In my report I provided the links to all of the information, all of the documents, that detail how the applicants have met all of the requirements, so if people have not looked at those I would recommend you do."

**Bill Murphy, Health Director:** "There was some arsenic detected in the soils which is typical to the redevelopment of a rail bed. I think the concern is while construction is going on will there be exposure to the arsenic through dust or windblown dirt throughout the project? And I did have an opportunity to talk with Eversource's LSP and was assured that the protocols that are within their plans adequately address that. So as long as they adhere to that. Obviously there's a concern with drought conditions where we're so dry right now that the excavation could cause human exposure . But if they adhere to the protocols within their plans, the Board of Health doesn't have any concerns."

**Adam Duchesneau, Director of Planning and Community Development:** "Our department is tracking the Stormwater Management Permit that was issued by Planning Board, the Earth Removal permit issued by the Earth Removal Board, the Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the Historic Districts Commission, and monitoring the memorandum of agreement that's involved with the Historical Commission."

**Fire Chief Whalen:** "I had a good meeting with Eversource on 8/11 and they provided a much more defined scope of what this project is going to be. Our confidence level went from semi to high at this point."

**Vincent Roy, Executive Director of the Sudbury Water District:** "I am satisfied as the Executive Director of the Sudbury Water District that the concerns from the District to protect the Towns aquifer have been addressed. And lastly, I want to commend the Town for its effort to fully vet this project with the various Town boards, departments, as well as the Water District, and providing all the information regarding this project onto the Town's website."

Later in the meeting, the Select Board voted to approve execution of a contract with Pare Corporation, who will be Sudbury's Environmental Monitor for the project. Lori Capone gives a detailed summary of what services the environmental monitor will be providing to the Town earlier in the meeting. The vote was 4-0-1 with Member Carty abstaining. (Summary at [3:33:00](#)) (Vote at [5:15:37](#))

### Why It Matters

- Given the scope and potential risks of this type of project, the Town is going to great lengths to reassure residents that all of the necessary safeguards and precautions have been put into place and that construction will be actively monitored throughout the project.