

LOCAL

NH Seacoast Greenway and more trails to unseen Portsmouth to be completed in 2024

Jeff McMenemy Portsmouth Herald

Published 5:15 a.m. ET Nov. 10, 2023 | Updated 10:50 a.m. ET Nov. 10, 2023

PORTSMOUTH — The section of the long-planned New Hampshire Seacoast Greenway from North Hampton to Barberry Lane in Portsmouth is expected to be completed by the summer of 2024, according to city Public Works Director Peter Rice.

“That is just based on what we’ve heard directly,” Rice said about conversations city officials have had with the state Department of Transportation, which is in charge of the project that’s commonly called the rail trail. “But given the progress they’ve made, it’s in good shape.

“It’s going to be a great asset for the city and the entire Seacoast,” Rice said during an interview Thursday.

What is the NH Seacoast Greenway?

The project when finished will be a 17-mile network of rail trails and bikeways connecting the communities of Seabrook, Hampton Falls, Hampton, North Hampton, Rye, Greenland and Portsmouth. It’s a small part of the larger East Coast Greenway project, which is intended to connect off-road trails from Maine to the Florida Keys.

The local portion of the project is being built on former rail lines the New Hampshire Department of Transportation bought from Pan Am Railways, according to information previously provided by David Allen, a Seacoast Greenway Alliance board member and former Portsmouth deputy city manager.

The trail will run from Seabrook through all six New Hampshire coastal communities until it stops at Barberry Lane in Portsmouth, Allen said.

The Rockingham Planning Commission has been helping to coordinate the regional effort to bring the Rail Trail project to fruition.

Trails touted as Seacoast asset

The rail trail “will be a community asset offering a safe place for children, seniors, and all members of the community to exercise, learn to ride a bike, enjoy nature, or simply get where they need to go without a car,” according to commission officials.

The Portsmouth portion of the trail will be about 3.6 miles. City engineer Eric Eby said work is ongoing.

“They’ve got the base down, but the finished course will not be installed until next year,” he said during a recent meeting of the city’s Parking, Traffic and Safety Committee. “It’s kind of tough to bike on right now, it’s a good walking path right now.”

But he added it’s still “officially closed.”

Borthwick Avenue multi-use path makes connections around city

As the state work on the Rail Trail is continuing, work on the city’s Borthwick Avenue multi-use path is moving toward completion, Rice said.

The rail trail — combined with a growing network of multi-use paths in Portsmouth — will allow people to walk or bike off road all over the city, and, in time, all over the Seacoast, Rice said.

“You’ll eventually be able to get from Massachusetts to Market Street in Portsmouth, all off road except for minor crossings,” Rice said. “From an infrastructure standpoint, it’s very exciting.”

The multi-use paths — which are all either completed, being finished or are planned — will connect to each other and to the rail trail, Rice said.

“The long-term vision is to also have spur paths that will connect to neighborhoods throughout the city,” he added.

Access to beautiful, largely unknown parts of Portsmouth

Once the rail trail is officially open, it will allow people “to see some parts of the city that are really beautiful that they might not know exist,” Rice said.

He added he’s “really excited” for people to get to experience those locations, including the Great Bog.

Eby pointed out the Borthwick Avenue multi-use path will connect “to the existing multi-use path along Eileen Dondero Foley Ave., which will connect to the rail trail.”

“When all the projects are done by next fall, you’ll have a complete multi-use path going along the rail trail, Eileen Dondero Foley Ave., Borthwick Ave. up to the bypass, where there’s an existing crossing, and the existing multi-use path along Hodgdon Way,” Eby said during the committee meeting.

The rail trail is part of the East Coast Greenway, which is “envisioned as a multi-use urban Appalachian trail, running nearly 3,000 miles and connecting cities, towns and natural areas on the eastern seaboard from Canada to Key West,” according to the Rockingham Planning Commission.