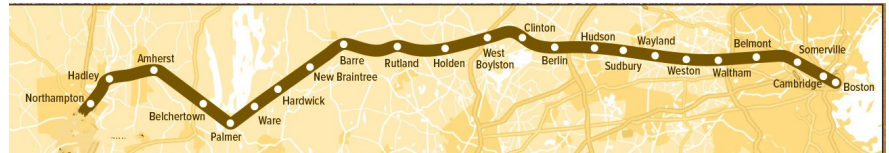




MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL —BOSTON TO NORTHAMPTON—104 MILES



Healey-Driscoll Transportation Transition Team

December 29, 2022

May I present a perhaps unexpected proposal to enhance ease of transportation, particularly in eastern Massachusetts, with the hope that you will give it serious consideration?

I represent the Norwottuck Network, a community organization committed to completing the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT), a 104-mile bicycle greenway stretching from Boston through scenic Quabbin to Northampton. The completed MCRT will provide realistic opportunities for people to commute via bicycle within the Rte. 128 region, and open pathways from the City to parts of Massachusetts offering *lebensraum* for “Zooming” workers and their families.

MassDOT has already shown how this trail can be developed from a repurposed dead railroad on otherwise virtually useless long strips of land. Over 50% of the MCRT is already complete; 80% of the remainder is under construction, in the planning stages, or can be easily shovel-ready, as funds permit.

Boston is a young city with modern ideas. As with other leading research and tech development cities, much of the work force (including the Mayor!) is most happy to commute by bicycle, as weather and safe cycling permit. And happy commuters can make a serious dent in our traffic problems (including grumpiness) because bicycles subtract vehicles from our overcrowded roads. Massachusetts’ innovative industrial past has bequeathed to us the densest network of dead steam railroad corridors in the U.S. Kittelson & Associates data specialists have shown that 24% of Massachusetts residents live within 1 mile of the MCRT, and 61% live within 10 miles of the MCRT (see map below).

Completing the MCRT not only mitigates urban traffic but also addresses many issues identified by Melissa Hoffer, our new Climate Chief, who notes:

The climate crisis ... presents an unprecedented opportunity for us to build a better, healthier, more equitable future.... Climate change is not just an environmental issue — it's a public health issue, an energy security issue, an issue inextricably linked with emergency preparedness, land use, agriculture, workforce development, clean tech innovation, transportation, housing, education, and more. —Boston Globe, Dec. 19, 2022

A better, healthier, more equitable future opens up with the eco-friendly MCRT cycling trail—it promotes regular, safe exercise for all, replacing imported oil with home-grown human muscle. Some community-supported segments of the MCRT, such as Hardwick’s East Quabbin Land Trust, have formed an innovative public-private partnership with National Grid by sharing the corridor. And in the Wayside area we see Eversource, burying utility lines in the dead railroad bed, making the grid more resilient and robust. That private investment will reduce the overall cost to DCR who can now more affordably apply a cycling trail surface and park-like landscaping.

Not all cyclists are lithe, spandex-clad Gen Zers. Clean tech innovators have developed e-bikes with powerful rechargeable batteries for those needing assistive devices. An innovative MassTrails program in Worcester in 2022 offers e-bikes to residents without other means to provide their own transportation. The results are encouraging.

Between our glittering international city famous for its culture and education and our certifiably ‘hip’ destinations in western Massachusetts lies our own mini-Appalachia. The completed MCRT will offer tourism and other economic opportunities to gorgeous parts of our state that have languished in impacted rural poverty with associated ills.

If your panel has interest, I’d be happy to do a presentation for you all about just how impactful this is going to be.

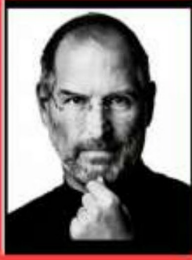
Thanks for your service to our beautiful state!

Craig Della Penna, Executive Director

(See enclosed Fact Sheet for detailed information on prospective impacts of a completed trail.)



You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them by looking backward.
---Steve Jobs



TODAY WE ARE GOING TO CONNECT THE DOTS FOR YOU.

Here's a few links that will show you how our Commonwealth ended up with so many miles of former steam railroad corridor—and why this inventory will be so important to our communities going further into the 21st century.

[Here's a link](#) to a simple infographic that shows:

- History of a dispute in Falmouth to build a trail on the old RR corridor where the case went all the way to the Massachusetts SJC who ruled that a municipality could use Eminent Domain to reassemble the corridor. First time in the U.S.
- That so alarmed the the State government, because they had no role the process. On the legislative side, the local state rep got passed, two laws that were geared to help defend corridor against inappropriate sales and development near or on top of corridor.
- Then the State Transportation secretariat stepped up to buy corridor in 73 communities—largely inside I-495 in just four transactions. They bought live corridor and dead corridor. Hundreds of miles came to be owned by the state.
- 40+ years later the MBTA started to make the unused, dead corridors available to become trails. Over 40 communities involved.

In 2017 there were 2 notable things that happened in the rail trail world.

1. In NY, then Governor Cuomo was given a report showing that one long trail there; the Erie Canal Trail at 325 miles, but only 78% complete, was producing over \$250 million a year in benefits/impacts to the state and the communities along the way. [Link here](#). He was so stunned that he commissioned the NYSDOT to build another 400 miles in four years. They succeeded. It is called the [Empire State Trail](#). 750 miles.

2. In Massachusetts, Governor Baker was shown that compelling report from NY and shortly after, the [Mass Trails Team](#) was stood up—taking down the silos between three agencies that have major roles in developing this network. This buildout is accelerating.

The MCRT is 104 miles long and 53± miles are open right now. In 2 years, we'll be 75± miles open. To get it fully open will be expensive.

In 2020-21 MassDOT commissioned a study to see if it was even possible to reassemble the corridor. [LINK HERE](#) to a highly detailed, three volume report. It was determined that it is possible, but will be expensive. That then begs the question; "What would a completed 100 mile trail mean to the Commonwealth and the communities along the way."

In the spring of 2022, we commissioned an RFP to find a consultant who could find out that answer. [LINK to RFP](#).

After a nationwide search, we received four responses and chose Kittelson & Associates out of Boston. They are working on the report right now and it should be done in a few weeks. And like what happened in NY several years ago, it will likely cause a stir. Probably a big stir.

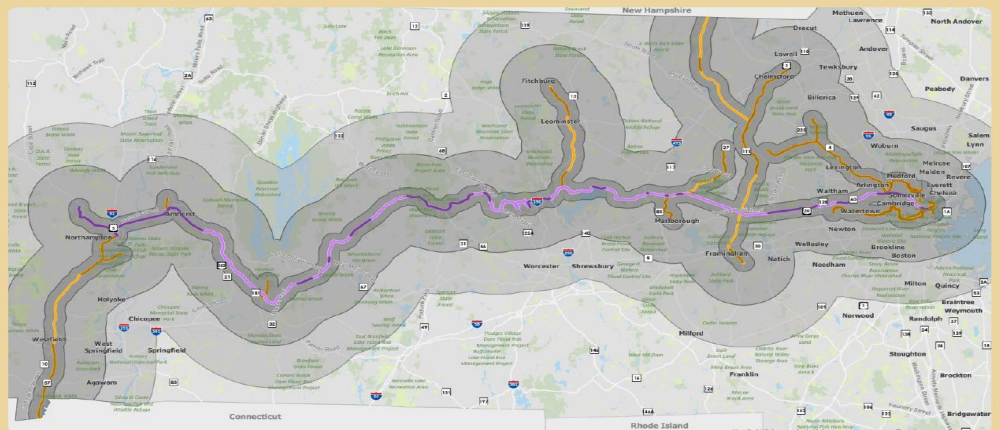
[Here's a link](#) to one slide from our consultant's in-progress presentation showing that if built out, the MCRT will have 2.9 million, 43% the state's population within five miles of it. 4.2 million, 61% within 10 miles. There is nothing else like this in North America.

[Here's a link](#) to a compilation of recent studies about community health impacts in places that have trails. One is from MassTrails.

Residents near Trail Network

Within 1 Mile	1.4 m (24%)
Within 5 Miles	2.9 m (43%)
Within 10 Miles	4.2 m (61%)

Completion of MCRT and connecting trails, would result in the majority of Massachusetts residents living less than 10 miles from a 300+ mile network of trails.



Mass Central Rail Trail Economic Study