

BLACKSTONE RIVER WATERSHED NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT FINAL REPORT SEPTEMBER 2021

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

16. Complete new sections of the Blackstone River Bikeway/Greenway.

Short Description Complete design and installation of specified sections of the interstate Blackstone River Bikeway/Greenway.

Implementation Timeline October 2021 to September 2026

Justification The Blackstone River Bikeway/Greenway is a regional gem for biking, running, and hiking. Some portions constitute a green ribbon (greenway) along the river and through parks, while others are designed more as bike trails or lanes in existing roadways. For the purposes of this report the bikeway/greenway are viewed collectively as a spine of trails that connects the upper and lower watershed. There are three completed sections of the bikeway/greenway, totaling 17 miles of off-road paved trails with the remainder connecting the segments on marked, on-road routes. Finished sections include 2.5 miles from Worcester to Millbury, MA, 3.5 miles from Uxbridge to the Rhode Island border, and 11 miles from Woonsocket to Cumberland, Rhode Island (BRVNHC, 2021). These sections were completed with federal transportation funds. Besides connecting 14 municipalities in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, it also links the Blackstone River and the historic Blackstone Canal to form the Riverway, a green corridor within the Heritage Corridor that will offer opportunities for residents and visitors to experience history and enjoy nature. The vision is for the bikeway/greenway to extend 48 miles from Worcester, Massachusetts to India Point Park in Providence, RI, where it would connect to the existing East Bay Bike Path and continue an additional 14.5 miles to Bristol, RI, and then join the Maine to Florida East Coast Greenway (BRVNHC, 2021). Completing the additional 31 miles of the bikeway/greenway is not an easy task, it will require coordination with landowners, fundraising, planning, construction, and advocacy. The route is unlikely to follow the Blackstone for its entire length and will need to be designated roadway shoulder or follow other off-river paths. Identifying, championing, and advocating for specific sections will assist with necessary funding and approvals. To this end, it is suggested here that the Blackstone Watershed Coordinator lead a discussion among local bikeway/greenway advocates to identify the sections that will be funded, designed, and installed over the next five years. These stretches were selected based on legal considerations, field and financial realities, public input, and consideration of recreational access equity along the path.

Ultimately finishing the bikeway/greenway, and connecting to other regional and national path systems, would be a signature accomplishment for Blackstone champions and a lasting asset for both states.

Outcomes Bikeway/greenway will be closer to completion, new educational and recreational opportunities created, momentum created for completing the project from top to bottom of the watershed.

Outlook

Local physical/political barriers and funding are the biggest challenges faced by this action. However, with the steadfast commitment of bikeway/greenway advocates, the popularity and visibility of the path with municipalities and elected officials, and the thoughtful selection of specific sections to be pursued, completing this action is attainable by the end of 2026.