

Rail Trail Frequently Asked Questions:

1 Brief background

- i) Eversource has received approval from the State of Massachusetts to build a farm-grade access road that will enable them to service the three miles of powerlines that lie within Weston along the old Central Mass Railway line. This is a done deal. Because of ownership and right of way issues the Town of Weston has no say in whether the access road will be built. In addition, in January, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) decided to pave the road so that it can be used as a rail trail. This is a state decision and the town has no jurisdiction here either.
- ii) Last summer the Selectmen appointed a group of residents to the Rail Trail Advisory Committee (RTAC) to make recommendations regarding the construction of a rail trail over the Eversource gravel roadbed. The Selectmen specifically instructed the committee to seek input from residents, especially abutters, to address any concerns or wishes the community might have.
- iii) Eversource and DCR, however, are being very cooperative and are incorporating many of the town's needs into their plans. They have met with the Selectmen, Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, and the RTAC to seek input.
- iv) Eversource will be pulling up the old tracks and railroad ties and removing them and will be constructing a 16-foot wide gravel access road in their place. After the gravel access road is complete, DCR will be paving a 10-foot wide section leaving a 3-foot wide unpaved apron on either side.
- v) Eversource and DCR are predicting completion sometime in the spring, depending on weather.
- vi) **IMPORTANT:** Since the above facts are givens and the process is in motion, the RTAC has unanimously decided to "get into the process early as a partner, rather than later as a judge." By working with Eversource and DCR and the people of Weston, we hope to help influence and shape the nature of the trail, where possible, to be consistent with the nature and needs of the town. Our intention is to make the rail trail we are being given into a true asset for the town.

2 Why a rail trail?

- i) The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has begun work on a proposed "Wayside Branch" Rail Trail which would convert the unused rail line to a greenway or rail trail. This rail trail would be 23 miles long and run from Waltham to Berlin. Three miles of the trail would pass through Weston. Portions of the rail trail have been completed and Wayland's section is well underway.

- ii) Because people are already using the abandoned tracks for hiking, jogging, horseback riding, and other outdoor activities, the new paved trail will make those activities even easier and will attract more use.
- iii) By influencing the 10-foot wide formal rail trail, the town becomes proactive around issues such as access, parking, use, safety, historical preservation, habitat conservation and landscaping. The alternative is to leave these issues to be determined in a haphazard way by Eversource, DCR, and users.
- iv) A formal rail trail, with proper surfacing, gives adults and children alike a safe place, off of the narrow Weston roads, to be in nature while exercising or doing other forms of recreation. It is an asset to the health and well-being of the community.
- v) Once the 23 miles of the trail have been completed, it will give individuals the possibility of commuting all the way to Boston, as well as other parts of the state, by connecting with other trails in Waltham.

3 How will it be used?

- i) Judging by how the existing informal trail is being used, we anticipate it will be used for walking, off road bicycling, cross-country skiing, etc. There will also be space next to the trail for equestrian traffic.
- ii) With an improved surface, we also anticipate it will be used for recreational bicycling by adults and children, wheelchair outings, roller-blading, and walking babies in strollers.
- iii) Motorized vehicles will be excluded from the trail, with the exception of motorized wheelchairs.

4 Will there be access from the trail to Town Center?

- i) We are seeking input from residents on this, and we anticipate that there will be access to the town center via Weston Forest & Trail Association's trails.
- ii) In addition, there will be access to and from Town Center by using the sidewalks at Church and Concord streets.

5 How will it be paid for?

- i) Eversource is paying for the removal of the existing tracks and ties and for the groundwork needed to lay the foundation for the gravel road. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will be paying for the paving of the 10-foot wide section, safety fencing along steep embankments, road crossings, some plantings, and on-going maintenance of the surface.

- ii) The Weston Rail Trail Advisory Committee (RTAC) will be holding several community meetings and reaching out to town residents to seek input about enhancements or amenities the town might add to the trail that DCR will create. We will be seeking suggestions on plantings, educational areas, signage, safety concerns, etc. We will put these together as recommendations to the Selectmen.
- iii) The RTAC will be unanimously recommending to the Selectmen that the town raise the money to re-tunnel under Conant Road. We see this as an extreme safety issue, as well as a logistical impediment to a continuous trail. We are researching the overall cost of the project and whether DCR will share any of the cost. We will present various alternatives to the Selectmen. The Selectmen will then determine the best means of funding and bring it to a Town Meeting for a vote.
- iv) Hopefully a “Friends of the Weston Rail Trail” group will also emerge to help raise funds for special educational or beautification items for the trail.
- v) It is important to note that the town will have the final say on any of these additional improvements that benefit the town, but the Eversource service road and DCR rail trail will exist with or without these improvements.

6 How will this affect property values?

- i) Property values and safety are the two biggest concerns when rail trails are proposed for communities.
- ii) There has been a substantial amount of research done by state and local governments, colleges and universities, and environmental organizations in over 372 urban, suburban and rural rail trails nationally on the effect of rail trails on property values and safety.
- iii) The studies have shown, that contrary to most concerns, that multi-use trails are amenities that do not lower property values, help sell homes more quickly, in some cases increase property values and improve the quality of life in communities.
- iv) See section #19 below for links to some of this research.

7 Crime and Safety concerns

- i) The above-mentioned studies (see more in section #19) also show that “crime rates are lower on trail networks than the overall crime rate for the region in which they are located,” and that the “way to minimize crime on trails is to ensure that users exercise proper safety precautions, keep the trail well-maintained, and boost trail use.” The more ‘eyes’ on the trail, the less incidence of crime.
- ii) The Rail Trail Advisory Committee (RTAC) is working with the Weston Police and Fire departments to maximize safety both in terms of crime and accident prevention.
- iii) The RTAC will be making recommendations for the design of the trail that will include fences, railings, and landscaping as ways of preventing accidents and discouraging crime.

8 What will the surface be?

- i) According to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, the surface will be a 10-foot wide asphalt surface with a 3-foot packed gravel apron on each side to accommodate Eversource repair and maintenance trucks.

9 Who will maintain it?

- i) The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has said that they will maintain the surface and safety railings and other safety equipment they install as they do with the Minuteman Trail and the Bruce Freeman Trail.
- ii) The town will be responsible for trash and beautification maintenance as they do with other trails in town.
- iii) Eversource will continue to do the tree work necessary to keep trees from falling on the high-voltage lines.
- iv) In some areas of Weston, and in some neighboring towns, volunteers do some of the trail maintenance. This is an option we can explore as well.

10 Number of Users?

- i) On a good weather, peak, summer weekend day, Wachusett Greenways sees ridership equal to 1.4% of the population of the towns it traverses. On a good weather summer day, the ridership equals 1%. It is less on other days. Using Wachusett Greenways metrics on Weston's population suggests about 160 riders (say 13 per hour) on a peak summer weekend day and 9 per hour on a good summer day. On cloudy, rainy, and non-summer days the ridership would be much smaller.

11 Access points and parking?

- i) Currently the public access points for the existing informal trail are 1) the old railroad station at Church Street, 2) the Concord Road overpass, and at Warren Avenue/Gun Club Lane. We anticipate that these will remain as the main access points to a formal rail trail.
- ii) The rail trail will also be accessible to hikers from existing trails maintained by the Weston Forest and Trail Association.
- iii) The Rail Trail Advisory Committee is currently investigating the best way to provide and control parking at the trail's public access points. In addition, we are working with the Town Center Planning Committee and their consultants around issues of parking that would also benefit rail trail users.

12 Noise and visual abatement, and landscaping?

- i) Noise and visual abatement and landscaping will be the responsibility of individual abutters and the town.

- ii) The Rail Trail Advisory Committee (RTAC) will be soliciting suggestions from abutters about appropriate landscaping and will make recommendations to the Selectmen as part of our funding proposal.

13 Restrooms and other amenities?

- i) Restrooms are expensive to build and maintain. A septic system would be costly and impossible to build along most or all of the trail. Therefore a portable toilet would probably have to be used, which requires cleaning. Some well-used trails in Massachusetts have portable toilets but most don't. Wachusett Greenway has 7 portable toilets over 21 miles.
- ii) We will be soliciting input from town residents and from the Weston Department of Public Works on this issue.

14 Wetlands, environmental, and habitat preservation?

- i) Eversource and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) have already negotiated conservation and remediation issues with the town for their service road. Any aspect of a formal rail trail that might impact wetlands or the environment further would also be brought before the Conservation Commission.
- ii) There will be some toxic residue from the removal of the existing railroad tracks and ties. The current best practice, which Eversource & DCR will be following, is to trap those toxins in place by capping them. Eversource will be capping the old rail bed with a foot of packed gravel which is the foundation of their service road. DCR's further surfacing adds to that cap.
- iii) Stormwater runoff from a 10-foot wide surface will be minimal and will be shed onto neighboring vegetation. A member of the Weston Conservation Commission is on the Rail Trail Advisory Committee (RTAC) and the RTAC is in frequent contact with the Conservation Administrator for the Town of Weston.
- iv) DCR's Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) was approved by the Mass. EPA in 2013. In the EENF review, 8 state-listed rare species were identified in the corridor. Mass EPA does not consider that the trail will significantly alter the habitats of these 8 species.
- v) The rail trail also offers the opportunity for environmental and habitat education along the corridor. The RTAC will be seeking input from the Conservation Commission and other interested parties about these topics.

15 Historic preservation

- i) The Rail Trail Advisory Committee is working closely with the Historical Commission not only around issues of historic preservation, but also around the use of the trail as a means of education about Weston's history along the rail corridor.

16 Will drivers/motorcycles/ATVs/snowmobiles be able to use the trail?

- i) The trail will be designed for non-motorized vehicles only, with appropriate barriers and signage at parking lots and major intersections.
- ii) Motorized vehicles has not been a reported problem on other rail trails in the area.

17 Will the trail be wheelchair accessible?

- i) Yes. It is a requirement of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.
- ii) The access to the trail from parking areas will also be wheelchair accessible.
- iii) The trail will be suitable for motorized wheelchairs.

18 Who are the contact people during construction?

- i) If you have any questions or complaints during the construction of the trail, first please call Kate McEaney, Senior Project Manager for Eversource, 800-793-2202, email: transmissioninfo@eversource.com
- ii) The person observing construction as it pertains to the town's interests is Tom Cullen, Director of Weston's DPW.

19 Links for more general rail trail research, resources & information:

- i) <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/projects/mcrt/mcrt-overview-and-guidelines-1114.pdf>
- ii) <http://www.outdoors.org/articles/amc-outdoors/the-rail-trail-effect/>
- iii) <https://linkingtheloop.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/studies-of-existing-trails-crime-and-properties-value.pdf>