

MEMORANDUM

To: Natick Board of Selectmen
From: Josh Ostroff, Chair, Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee
Date: March 14, 2019
Re: CRT Connection to Natick Center MBTA Station

cc: Melissa Malone, Town Administrator; Jamie Errickson, Director of Community and Economic Development; Jeremy Marsette, DPW Director; CRT Advisory Committee

This memorandum is provided to the Board as an update on the proposed connection of the Cochituate Rail Trail to the future Natick Center MBTA Station. This is expected to be a highly cost-effective project for the Town, and a very desirable one for the state because of its connectivity features.

Background

As members may recall, this 1000-foot section is not part of the federally- and state-funded CRT project that will soon break ground. In early 2016, the Town and MassDOT pulled the terminus back to Willow Street, primarily because of the need to integrate a connection with the new MBTA station, which at that time had not yet been funded for design.

As a public street, Willow Street was appropriate as a connection for CRT project planning and funding, but is not optimal as a permanent solution, as it shunts CRT users onto Main Street and does not take advantage of the full CRT right of way with direct connection to the MBTA station. In other words, a future MBTA connection was always part of the long-term plan. A direct link is important because of the utility of a CRT/MBTA connection; for safety concerns; for accessibility, which is driving the MBTA station project; and for all the benefits of a convenient connection from the CRT to Natick Center.

Process

With Natick Center station design well underway, Town staff and I have organized a few meetings and conversations with MBTA and MassDOT staff and designers to discuss the proposed process to complete this important connection. The following are the consensus proposed steps.

1. The Town submits a project request to MassDOT District 3. This starts the process to get it into the MassDOT “universe of projects,” and to be eligible for TIP construction funding. This is the same funding source being used for the CRT construction, as well as the Route 27 North Main Street improvements and many other major transportation projects. This request should be submitted in the coming weeks.
2. The Town obtains quotes for project design services over the next several months.
3. The Town submits an application for design funding through [MassTrails](#) with a February 1, 2020 deadline. MassTrails is a new state initiative to provide one-stop-shopping for trails projects, and to facilitate the coordination required to execute these projects. A minimum 20% Town match is required for these grants, which are made on a reimbursement basis (similar to Chapter 90 funding).

4. Pending a grant award, design work to be completed in 2020. Concurrently, the Town would advocate with legislative support for construction funding through the TIP. Funding allocation should be scheduled in coordination with the MBTA station project funding for construction for practical and safety reasons..

Depending on the final design, the Town may be required to obtain right of way on private property to ensure the desired connection can be constructed as designed. Such detail will be worked out through the design process noted in Step 4 above.

The Town should anticipate that the CRT Right of Way will be used to facilitate the Natick Center Station construction. After project completion, inclusive of the connection between the trail and the station, the ROW will also be shared with the MBTA/MassDOT to provide occasional maintenance access to the station and associated infrastructure. As such, the trail design must anticipate this shared use.

As part of the discussions between the Town, the MBTA and MassDOT, AECOM (the station design engineer) provided the below conceptual design for this connection. This was done to demonstrate that CRT access to Main Street (in grey), CRT access to the outbound station platform (in orange), ROW access to track level for maintenance, and room for bicycle storage could all be accomplished within the available land area. This design is only conceptual, but it suggests that key design objectives can be achieved.



As noted above, a project request should be submitted to MassDOT District 3 in the coming weeks (pending support by the Board). Later in 2019, the Board will be asked to submit a MassTrails grant application inclusive of design cost estimates.

Thank you for your consideration.