

MEMORANDUM

To: Natick Select Board
From: Josh Ostroff, Chair, Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee
Date: October 13, 2021
Re: Upcoming CRT Matters

cc: Jamie Errickson, Town Administrator; Jeremy Marsette, DPW Director; Claire Rundelli, Community and Economic Development; CRT Advisory Committee

With the opening of the Cochituate Rail Trail at hand, this memo will provide a summary of upcoming developments and pending Town decisions for this project. This memo discusses planned connections and improvements; maintenance and safety; and upcoming decisions that may be on the Board's agenda for future meetings.

Town staff will surely have important input into future decisions and policy. The DPW, CED and Public Safety staff have been, and continue to play critical roles in bringing this amenity forward.

Planned trail connections and improvements

Natick Center Connections: The MBTA's contractor will construct a paved path extending the CRT to the future outbound platform at the Natick Center MBTA Station as part of the new station project. At this time, this is currently scheduled for 2022.

In addition, a connection to Main Street is now in design, funded by grants from MassTrails grant and the MetroWest Health Foundation, and will be eligible for TIP (Transportation Improvement Plan) construction funding through the Boston MPO in the coming years.

Lake Cochituate Path: the connection from Speen and Hartford Streets in West Natick is currently at about 25% design, and as this design advances it will be programmed for the TIP in Federal Fiscal Year 2025, and potentially sooner. This is a MassDOT-funded design contract.

Cochituate State Park: DCR is designing and will construct a paved path from the new CRT entrance at the end of Chrysler Road, through the park to the parking lot on Cochituate Road/Route 30.

Whitney Field: DPW has begun constructing a paved connection to the new park from the current southern CRT terminus.

LaGrange Street: DPW will be constructing a connection to LaGrange, primarily to accommodate cyclists, in the coming months.

Future connections in and through Framingham: The City of Framingham is primarily responsible for trail connections to the north, which should ensure safe

connections to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, the Mass Central Rail Trail, various MWRA aqueducts and other multi-use trails and destinations.

Future connections through Golden Triangle: Part of the Golden Triangle study proposed under Article 25 should include active transportation connections to improve the utility of the CRT.

13 Mechanic Street lot: DPW is designing a parking lot for this parcel, which the Conservation Commission acquired from CSX in 2007. DPW anticipates construction and a connection to the trail in 2022. These plans are subject to ConCom approval and to the use restrictions related to the land's former status as a rail connection. Mechanic Street itself is a substandard, privately-owned roadway that is currently used by construction vehicles for the MBTA station project. Roadway improvements are an ongoing topic of discussion.

Moderna, Avalon and Cloverleaf: These multifamily developments are designing, and will construct accessible connections to the CRT in 2022. The Town will provide guidance and standards for these connections, portions of which will be on Town property and likely subject to Town upkeep.

Informal connections: The Town may provide design guidance to private abutters who seek to connect to the CRT.

Parking: In addition to the Mechanic Street lot, DPW will be striped for parking spaces at the end of Chrysler Road. There is likely to be demand for additional parking. (See "Future Decisions" below.)

Loker Street Bridge: This bike/ped bridge may receive future safety improvements. This matter has been referred to the Safety Committee.

Safety improvements: We anticipate additional safety upgrades and enhancements to the CRT, informed by staff and public input.

Regulatory and wayfinding signage: The Board recently approved regulatory and advisory signage to help promote safety and courtesy on the trail. Additional signage requests are likely. (See "Future Decisions" below.)

Sponsorship signage: various signage will be erected for ten-year terms through the Town's agreement with the Friends of Natick Trails. This revenue is in a recently established revolving fund for trail maintenance and enhancements.

Maintenance

Maintenance of the CRT is under the able stewardship of the Land Facilities and Natural Resources and Highway/Sanitation Divisions of the Department of Public Works. DPW is establishing standards for upkeep and will be primarily or solely responsible for trash pickup, maintenance, landscaping (see note below), snow and ice removal, removal of graffiti and other care. There are likely to be formal and informal arrangements with volunteers for some aspects of trail maintenance. As

Board members are aware, there is a strong culture of stewardship for the Town's trails and open spaces.

Public Safety

Our Public Safety departments will include the CRT in their portfolios. The Natick Police will patrol the CRT. Natick Fire has acquired apparatus to help provide emergency services. The CRT and its bridges can support a Town ambulance.

Upcoming decisions

1. Parking policies

The Town should implement designated parking and regulations to encourage safe CRT access. These discussions will be informed by experience and public input in the coming months. There is a larger context for Town parking policy, as members are aware.

2. Abutter screening

Several abutters have requested screening from the trail. Those discussions have been deferred to allow the Town and abutters the benefit of experience in living with the trail. These requests may emerge in the coming months.

3. Trail grade crossing improvements

The design of the CRT, including at grade crossings, is subject to change in the coming years, likely as part of town-wide capital planning efforts. Also, other capital improvements will affect the CRT, such as a future signalized intersection at North Main/Lake/Washington streets.

4. Signage

Additional or modified signage is likely to be requested, and will likely come before the Board in the coming months and years.

5. Bike share

The CRT will likely increase demand for bikeshare, which has been an agenda item for the Transportation Advisory Committee in the last few years. While the economics are currently challenging, this is likely to continue as a potential area for a regional public system (and for private networks that are already planned).

6. Committee oversight

The Select Board and Administration have primary responsibility for the CRT. The Town may want to consider a process for approving events, recommending changes, etc. with the understanding that the CRT is an active transportation and recreational facility.

The CRT Advisory Committee charge is:

The Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee is charged with advice and oversight for the CRT project, including design and construction; communication and outreach to abutters and the community; regional and state collaboration; coordination with community efforts to improve, support and maintain the trail; and recommendations for future operations, maintenance and oversight.

Given the mission of the committee and the upcoming work, there is value in maintaining the committee during the design phase for trail connections and as the community adapts to the CRT. As we shift from planning to operations, the Advisory Committee, Board and Administration should consider alternative models for trail oversight, and the Advisory Committee will consider this topic at upcoming meetings.

Thank you for your consideration and consistent support, and please reach out with any questions.