



Northampton Rail-trail News

Friends of the Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc. (www.fntg.net)

Volume 1, Spring 2006

Founding of FNTG

On my morning walk on the Northampton rail-trail today, I kept a mental note of people passing by me and how they were using the trail. I saw kids commuting to school, pairs of friends exercising together, someone who looked to be biking to Amherst, a rollerblader, someone bird watching, several dog-walkers, and me, enjoying a shaded, quiet, car-free path to Florence. The growing network of trails in Northampton is a very special resource in our community, and it is worthy of our support. The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways (FNTG) exists for just that purpose.

Founded this year in January, 2006, a small group of involved neighbors established FNTG to advocate for the growing network of rail-trails in our community. As a newly established non-profit organization, it replaces the former Northampton Pedestrian and Bicycle Alliance. The goals of the group are to raise funds for the trails, advocate for their development, educate and encourage new users of the trails, create resources to improve them, and organize fun, community-building activities.

As a member organization, FNTG is strengthened by

its broad-based community of members who join because they, like you, are interested in seeing our trails in Northampton flourish.

FNTG volunteers have already begun work on a number of projects, including the creation of a map of the expanding network of trails, and coordination with other organization on joint projects, such as Safe Routes to Schools and the Bike Kitchen at Smith College. A number of adults and kids joined in on a trail clean-up this spring. We are currently working on soliciting ideas for car-free outings in the Pioneer Valley to share with residents and visitors to Northampton.

There is great energy in Northampton, and I am excited to help gather together some of these existing individual efforts to better improve our trails. There are many ways to support and enjoy our beautiful trails in Northampton, and one of the easiest is to become a member of FNTG. I hope to see you on the trails soon,

*Nicholas Horton
President, FNTG*

Future of Northampton trails and greenways

On Monday, June 5th at 7:00pm, Wayne Feiden will be speaking on "The coming trails and greenways in Northampton: what's next and how we are getting there". Wayne is Director of the Office of Planning and Development for the City of Northampton, and has

been working to create a spine of trails and greenways that connect the entire City. Through the creative use of mapping software and images, he will lead a virtual tour of the trail network, beginning with the extension of the Norwottuck Rail Trail from Damon Rd. to the

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King St. area, the extension of the Nagle Walkway to Veterans Field, Route 66 and Earle Street, and the extension of the Bikeway to Look Park and Leeds. Wayne will also discuss plans for a "rail-with-trail" along King Street from the Stop and Shop to Union Station, and connection with the Manhan Rail Trail in Easthampton.

The meeting will also feature the public unveiling of the map of the Northampton rail-trails, and free copies

of the map will be available.

This is an exciting time for the rail-trails of Northampton, and we encourage you to attend. The meeting will take place at Smith College in McConnell 103 (Clark Science Center), and the public is invited. For more information, please contact Nicholas Horton at nicholas_horton@yahoo.com.

Walking Schoolbus

The spring Walking Schoolbus is back up and running at the Jackson Street School. The kickoff event took place this spring on a beautiful morning with over 60 kids and their families walking to school with Mayor Clare Higgins and Principal Gwen Agna. The Walking Schoolbus gathered near the Stoddard Street entrance to the Northampton Bikeway, and proceeded up the rail-trail to the Jackson Street overpass. They were also joined by MassRides representative Davida Eisenberg who is coordinating a state-wide effort to reduce driving to school.

Along with the walking schoolbus, this year the Northampton Safe Routes to Schools group will be offering "frequent walker" tickets to over 400 kids at Jackson Street School. Any child who walks, bikes, buses or multi-family carpools to or from school will get a check—10 checks equals a small prize.

On May 12th, a second walking schoolbus is starting at the Bridge Street School. These projects help to decrease the number of cars driving to school, reduce pollution, build community and friends, add a fitness

component to everyone's morning, and slowly change the world for the better by connecting us more with the environment and with our neighbors.

Risa Silverman

Northampton Safe Routes to School



Figure 1: Still a little young for school...

Car Free Outings

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways has begun a project to document trails and outings that are accessible via bike, walk or public transportation from the Pioneer Valley. Sometimes there may not be time to head far afield, or there may be a group that can't easily be accommodated in a single vehicle. We are hoping that people will share short (or long and detailed!) descriptions of places that you can get to without having to drive. These could include hour-long walk-

ing tours, day-long treks into the hilltowns, or PVTA-assisted loops. Creative use of alternative transportation, little-known loops, hidden beautiful spots are all welcome. All entries received by September 30th, 2006 will be eligible for a prize drawn at random.

Nicholas Horton

President, FNTG

www.fntg.net

nicholas_horton@yahoo.com

Tuesday Summer Evening Rail-trail Rides

Have you ever noticed the stone post marked with a "W" along the rail trail? They told train engineers when to blow their whistle before crossing an intersection.

Have you wondered about the old wooded building with a sliding door close to the trail? Or did you always walk past that rusted metal pole with the tipped

up metal flag? What is that for? Do you know which past President of the United States and former Governor of the Commonwealth rode in style along this path to the statehouse in Boston each week?

These are just some of the clues to Northampton's railroad past that I learned about during Craig Della Penna's Bike tours last summer, and they are starting up again this summer on Tuesday nights, starting May 2nd.

On the first Tuesdays of June, July and August, Craig and the riders will start at the Sugar Maple Inn and head west on the Northampton Bikeway to explore Leeds and the future trail along the Mill River. A similar ride that Craig organized last year got me involved in advocating for these sustainable transportation and recreation networks. Come hear about historical, political, legal and environmental issues involved in building rail trails in Massachusetts.

On the second Tuesday of those months, Craig will be heading East from the Sugar Maple Inn to explore the ongoing construction of the extension of the Norwottuck Rail Trail from Damon Road to King St.

Third Tuesday tours will head down to Easthampton to the Manhan Rail Trail from the Oxbow in Northampton, and discuss the planned extension of the Manhan Rail Trail into Downtown Northampton.

The fourth Tuesday tours will explore the Norwottuck Rail Trail and discuss plans for the extension to Boston along the corridor of the old Mass Central Rail line.

All rides will begin promptly at 6:15pm. All rides will be for beginner or intermediate riders, though probably not for children younger than teenagers. No heavy hills will be encountered. Some on road portions will be part of each ride. See <http://www.fntg.net> for a flier with information about how to sign up and where to meet (or call 413-585-8559). These tours are co-sponsored by the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Kudos to Craig for organizing these tours!

*Julia Riseman
Vice-President, FNTG*

Bike Crossing Ordinance

As you may be aware, City law stipulates that bikers on the Northampton Rail-trail must dismount to cross the street at an intersection. Several FNTG members have noted the potential hazard this creates, particularly for families with trailers. At long last, the City Council is considering an amendment that would replace the requirement to walk all bicycles across street crossings with the requirement to stop at all street crossings and yield the right-of-way to vehicles in the road.

It's important for the City Council to hear public support for this measure. Phone numbers and email address for the City Council can be found at the following webpage:

www.northamptonma.gov/gsuniverse/httpRoot/council/

*Susan Voss
Treasurer, FNTG*

Spring Trail Cleanup

Like many others, I typically bring a plastic bag along with me for my walks along the Northampton Rail-trail,

and pick up any stray trash that I see. However, cleaning is useful for more deeply entrenched gunk, so a work party was organized.



Figure 1: Kudos to the mystery street-sign maker!

While the rain came down on Saturday, April 22nd, it didn't deter the intrepid Northampton rail-trail cleaners. This group, including a number of kids, celebrated Earth Day by picking up many bags of trash, glass, and other detritus, and the rain gave everything (and everyone) a good wash. The trail looks great!

Particular thanks to Geoff Friedman for making this event happen, putting up signs, providing assorted

tools, coordinating with the DPW and the Stop and Shop and above all, maintaining a great spirit amidst the cold and wet.

Nicholas Horton
President, FNTG

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, May 17th, 2006 Northampton Bike breakfast at the corner of King and Main Streets, 7-10am.

Monday, June 5th, 2006 Wayne Feiden from the Office of Planning and Development, "Future of Northampton trails and greenways", at 7:00pm at Smith College (McConnell 103).

Friday, June 16th Assabet River Rail Trail tour in Hudson that crosses the path of the future Mass Central Rail Trail. Carpooling will be from

Northampton at 7:15am. Contact Nicholas Horton. nicholas_horton@yahoo.com to register.

Tuesday, June 20th and Wednesday, June 21st, 2006
Sustainable Northampton meetings to discuss the City's Master Plan for Development, 7:00pm at Northampton High School.

Tuesday evenings tours of the local rail-trail network on the first through fourth Tuesday evenings from May through August, call 413-585-8559 to sign up.

Photo credits: Craig Della Penna

Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc.
351 Pleasant St., Suite B #117
Northampton, MA 01060