



Northampton Rail-trail News

Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc. (<http://www.fntg.net>) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports the expanding network of rail-trails in Northampton, Massachusetts. Volume 4, Fall 2009

Hop aboard for a pleasant spin for the ribbon-cuttings

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Countless fall diversions this past weekend (editor's note: this piece was written in early October 2009 after the ribbon-cutting events), but none better than to seize the opportunity to see Northampton from a fresh perspective.

That involved showing up, on a bike, if possible, to ribbon cuttings first downtown and later out in Leeds for two new links in the growing chain of bike trails connecting Northampton neighborhoods as well as joining the city to nearby communities.

And so this how it went.

1:25 p.m. From Fairway Village, down Spring Street in Leeds, up Meadow Street to Florence Center; then hop on the original (1983) bike trail to its terminus at Stoddard Avenue, along State Street to Main Street, south on Pleasant to the entrance to Union Station and at last onto the bike trail above Strong Avenue.

1:50 p.m. A large group is gathered at the new rust-colored bridge that spans Bridge Street where the first ribbon cutting will take place. The mood is festive as friends, bikers and officialdom mingled. There are tables loaded with maps, brochures, snacks and beverages. The day is sunny and pleasant as is the crowd.

2:15 p.m. Ward 3 is represented by City Councilor Bob Reckman, who spoke as did Mayor Higgins and Planning Director Wayne Feiden, who is acknowledged as the engine behind the long-term city effort to expand the bike trail network. He praises many individuals, organizations and companies, including National Grid,

owner of the trails' rights of way.

2:25 p.m. Active picture-taking because this downtown link is regarded as something of an historic occasion, given the logistical complications of spanning Bridge Street and installing a second bridge over North Street to push the trail north and parallel to King Street. I explored this section by bike and then returned to the Bridge Street overlook to join up with the tour conducted by local trail guru Craig Della Penna, who would lead bike acolytes out to the Leeds event.

2:40 p.m. Della Penna, proudly displaying his new Danish-made urban bike with many cool accessories, got the group oriented by describing the anomalous situation of the bike trail occupying one former railroad bed only 10 or 12 feet away from an active track on which trains still run once a day back and forth to Vermont. Della Penna is not only steeped in the lure of bike trails for which he has lobbied over many years throughout New England. He also provides fascinating snippets on local railroad history including the fact that the downtown bike trail overlays a New Haven railroad route built back in the 1840s.

3:00 p.m. We stop for more background at the second bridge and then continue on to King Street. The stretch from Bridge Street north will split and go east along the completed section to Damon Road and the Norwottuck Trail as well as west to Florence and Leeds. A tunnel will be required to take the eastbound trail under the active railroad tracks, but that is still in the works. The King Street segment provides new perspec-

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tives as we travel behind the familiar King Street businesses and get a rear-view look at the homes and structures along Market Street and Woodmont. We make the crossing at the special pedestrian light near the entrance to the Stop & Shop that has been made possible by private contributions from bike enthusiasts. Across King Street we join the original bike path but not before Della Penna explains the complicated legal "payback" that resulted in the trail eventually dumping its riders onto King Street by cutting through the Acme Automotive Center's property.



**Rail Trail
Ribbon Cutting
Ceremonies**

Manhan Rail Trail in Downtown Northampton
Ribbon cutting on the rail trail bridge above Main Street
2:00 PM Sunday October 4th, 2009
Rain location on the Deck at Union Station

Norwottuck Rail Trail in Leeds
Ribbon cutting in Leeds Village where the rail trail crosses Florence Street
(just west of Leeds Elementary School),
4:00 PM Sunday October 4th

Sponsored and Organized By:

Northampton Office of Planning and Development	Leeds Civic Association	Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways	Ward 3 Neighborhood Association
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More information at www.fntg.net/ribbon

3:18 p.m. We travel west on the familiar old bike path that all of us know well and which is always so tranquil and welcoming with its canopy of trees and easy grade. Additional stops occur in Florence, not surprisingly first at Chestnut Street next to Della Penna's bed and breakfast at the very edge of the bike trail. He uses his own experience as fodder to persuade critics in other communities that bike trails make good neighbors. We stop again to view the site of old Florence train station, now occupied by the Florence Paint store. He also points out the former Norwood Engineering brick structure on North Maple Street that trains used to enter to deliver and pick up heavy equipment in the good old days.

3:43 p.m. Then on to the final destination, the cele-

bration of the opening of the trail in Leeds, but first after we reach the end of the original trail path at Bridge road, we leave railroad right of way and head into Look Park. For reasons that I still don't understand and for which Della Penna could not provide elaboration, the park now hosts a short section of the trail where it previously had none. The former pedestrian path has been expanded to accommodate bikes, and MassHighway, designer and supervisor of the trail extension to Leeds, has installed generic signs and brightly painted travel lanes with obvious information. One jarring element is that the section of path running down the hill from the Garden House, next to the miniature golf area and ending near the visitors' center is now posted off limits to pedestrians. How come?

3:50 p.m. Exiting Look Park at the small bridge and waterfall near to Route 9, we now traverse the section of the trail I was so strenuously concerned about earlier because of the number of trees that were cut down during construction. Well, it is not as bad as I had anticipated. And the stretch from the Arch Street Bridge and into Leeds is about the prettiest ride in the entire city as it runs along the nicely elevated land with the sight and sound of the river below. This section is not just for bike-riding but for a leisurely walk. It's sure to become a favored destination for those seeking to commune with nature.

3:58 p.m. A big crowd of Leeds residents and a large fleet of bicycles greet us as we reach the site of the festivities, just before the trail crosses Florence Street west of the Leeds School. This is very much a community event. Lots of children, provided by the Leeds Civic Association and again speeches and praise for the city's long-term efforts (the memory of the late City Councilor Ray LaBarge is invoked and cheered). The event ends with a valiant attempt to take a giant group photo.

4:20 p.m. I finished the circuit by riding along the trail as it cut into the hill below Front Street and continued for another quarter mile past the dramatic waterfall on the left, before it makes a U-turn (it can't continue west because the divided citizens of Williamsburg don't want a bike trail in their town) and doubles back along Grove Avenue.

4:30 p.m. I pedal along Main Street in Leeds to the bridge over the Mill River, past the Northampton Country Club, up Spring Street and back to Fairway Village.

4:36 p.m. Nice outing. Lots of exercise, conversations with many people, beautiful scenery and generous displays of hometown pride. Hard to top. All that in a mere three hours.

Ed Shanahan (publisher of downstreet.net)

Update from the President

This has been an amazing year. Thanks to the efforts of many in the City and beyond, there were three ribbon-cutting events as projects long in the making came to fruition. It's now possible to walk or bike from Leeds to Florence to downtown Northampton to Smith College to the Route 10 heading to Easthampton on a continuous path separated from traffic. Construction is underway for the Jackson Street connector (which will include traffic calming as well as widening of sidewalks). The extension from Earle/Grove to Easthampton (with eventual connection to the Manhan Rail Trail) is being worked on, with hopes of installing the bridge over Route 10 in 2010. The pesky sinkhole in Easthampton has been repaired. Planning and design of the tunnel to facilitate the connection to the Norwottuck Rail Trail (connecting from Woodmont to Damon Road then eastwards to Hadley, Amherst and Belchertown) is underway. The Norwottuck Rail Trail is also in the process of being upgraded and resurfaced, with the design process underway.

Our colleagues to the east are working to extend these paths all the way from Northampton to Boston. There's also activity to the south. Norman Thetford, executive director of the Farmington Canal Rail to Trail Association, tantalized the crowd at New Haven's bike breakfast last year with visions of a completed 80-mile paved, connection from New Haven to Northampton, Mass.

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways was established to help support this growing network of transportation and recreation paths. Activities that we've helped to organize or contributed to include:

- raising \$3,650 for trail design by the City of Northampton as part of our holiday appeal
- co-organizing or co-sponsoring three ribbon-cutting events
- helping to publicize a trail cleanup organized by Marty Nathan and Paula Sakey
- assisting with the drafting and submission of grant applications to the Rivers and Trails and DCR Greenways and Trails program for kiosks and other trail improvements
- working with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the City DPW to create new on-road signs advertising the trail network
- publishing and distributing 10,000 copies of the enclosed new map (designed by Smith College student Ella Hartenian) and brochure (designed by Alana Horton)
- updating our website (with assistance from Karin Rosenthal)
- designing new hiking maps, writing reviews, and proposing signage for new recreation areas in Northampton (underway by Smith College students Hannah Kegley and Stephanie Greenlaw)

Thanks to everyone for their continued financial and volunteer support.

Nicholas Horton, President

Rail trails increase property values?

A 2008 master's thesis by Duygu Karadeniz, a graduate student in community planning at the University of Cincinnati, suggests that, contrary to popular belief, properties located closer to rail trails often have higher property values than those farther away. The study took a sample of the sale prices of single-family residences located along the Little Miami Scenic Trail in Hamilton and Clermont counties, near Cincinnati, Ohio. Karadeniz reviewed previous studies on the topic and identified a variety of variables, both geographic, including the distance from each property to accessing the rail trail, and house-related, such as the number of bathrooms, that might affect the sale price for the prop-

erty. She identified and measured variables that might otherwise skew the data, such as the location of some houses in the affluent Terrace Park neighborhood, to control for the effect of these variables on the study's findings. Then, Karadeniz used ArcGIS mapping technology to measure geographic measurements, such as distances. She developed a "hedonic pricing model" to measure the effect of the most significant variables on property values. The study found that, even with the effect of other variables accounted for, there was a significant positive difference in property values for houses located closer to the trail. For each foot closer a property is to a trail, the predicted sale price increases by \$7.05. These results were important because, as Karad-

eniz notes in the study, opponents of rail trails often argue that they lower property values for people who live near them, when, in fact, the study indicates that quite the opposite of this occurs. In fact, the study suggests that, over time, the costs of building and maintaining rail trails eventually are recovered by governments due to increased property tax revenues. While Karadeniz cautions that these results cannot be generalized to areas with multiple-family homes or commercially zoned areas, and that, as with any statistical study, there are limitations to the accuracy of the data, the findings are quite encouraging for supporters of rail trails and green-

ways, as they help provide numerical data to support the argument that these trail networks provide positive benefits to the surrounding municipalities.

A similar study is underway to assess price changes in houses near the Northampton rail trail, and hopes to be able to shed more light on this question.

A website with reports on the effects of trails and greenways on adjacent property can be found at tinyurl.com/railtrailprices.

Stephanie Greenlaw

Trail neighbor award to Northampton DPW

FNTG is proud to announce the winner of our Trail Neighbor award for 2009. The award is being given to the City of Northampton Department of Public Works (Edward S. Huntley, P.E., Director) for their continued and tireless work on behalf of the Northampton rail trail network. Whether it's snow removal in the winter, leaf removal in the fall, mowing in the spring or summer, or general maintenance and cleanup year-round,

the trails are kept in good shape and usable by walkers, bikers, strollers and wheelchairs. Given all the budget constraints that they face, these efforts to maintain the growing network of trails is greatly appreciated.

The award will be formally presented at an upcoming City Council meeting.

Judith Cardell, Secretary

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Address correction requested