

Milford Upper Charles Trail History

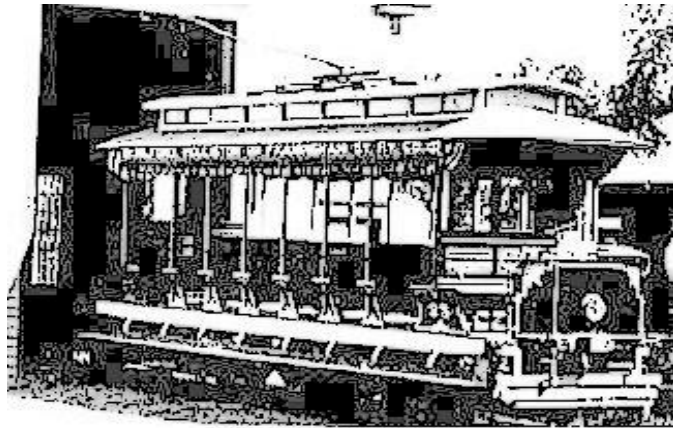
"build it and they will come"

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MILFORD UPPER CHARLES TRAIL DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

This rail bed originally went through a total of six communities: Framingham, Sherborn, Holliston, Milford, Hopkinton and Ashland. Here is a picture of the type of trolley used to transport commuters as early as 1890 between Milford and Framingham on the rail bed which is now a part of the proposed Upper Charles Trail corridor:



Typical 1890's Trolley

The project to convert the rail bed to the trail was originally conceived by the Conservation Commission as part of the 1993 Holliston Open Space and Recreation Plan and it was the direct result of the vision of John Thomas of Holliston.

John Thomas as President of the Upper Charles Conservation, Inc. was the first to see the potential of converting the rail lines and he worked for several years gathering data and support and promoting the concept.

A study was awarded to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, MAPC, to determine the feasibility of converting the unused and abandoned rail lines. The study was funded by the Public Works and Tourism grant program of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority on July 1, 1996 and it was completed in February 1997. Joan Blaustein was the program manager at MAPC.

It was the town of Holliston to originally seek creation of the bike trail in 1993 with linkages to surrounding towns but it was the town of Milford to first open a complete 5.7 mile section.

This was due to the ambition and determination of Reno DeLuzio who in 1997 began working on the project as the Milford Town Planner.

The Selectman formed the Upper Charles Trail Committee. Reno DeLuzio was elected chairman of the committee and continued to work on the project long after his retirement from the town of Milford in 2002. He was considered the driving force behind the project in Milford.

“Reno DeLuzio has been a big part of it for a long time,” said Bob Buckley, chairman of the Conversation Commission and a member of trail committee. Buckley also helped give the initial push for the project as a member of the Upper Charles Conservation Land Trust. “Reno has really taken this on, without him it wouldn’t have kept going.” (1)

In 1998 the Milford Town meeting appropriated \$145,000 for the design and property rights acquisitions for Phase 1 of the Milford Upper Charles Trail. Phase 1 is the portion of the trail which stretches three miles through Milford from the commuter parking lot near Sacred Heart Church on East main Street through Fino Field, across Dilla Street, and past the eastern shore of Louisa Lake, ending up on Cedar Street past Interstate 495.

The design contract for Phase 1 was awarded to Greenman Pedersen, Inc.. Greenman-Pedersen, Inc., of Babylon N.Y. through its local branch in Stoneham, MA provided consulting engineering, planning, survey, and mapping services.

When Greenman-Pedersen received the contract in 1998 this is an example of how what now is the trail appeared:



The Trail As It Appeared in 1988

In some areas the original rail bed was used by bicyclists as shown in the following picture:



Early Rider On The Rail Bed

In 1999 a meeting was held with the abutters to the Trail. According to Conservation Commission Chairman Bob Buckley, "residents have been mostly excited about Milford's trail. There's been very little opposition, he said. There's been concern and we've addressed those concerns. Overall, these bike trails are just a plus for everyone." (2)

With no objections from abutters, town meeting authorized acquisition of property rights acquisition for Phase 1. Greenman Pederson completed the preliminary design plans for Phase 1 of the trail in the year 2000. Completing the preliminary design made the project ready to apply for construction funding through the Federal Highway Administration Transportation Enhancement (TEA-21) Program administered by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

The Division of Conservation Services also awarded an \$116,000 grant to the town of Milford in 2000 for property rights acquisition related to Phase 1. Later that year the town meeting appropriated \$150,000 for Phase 2 preliminary design and property rights acquisitions.

Phase 2 of the trail extends Phase 1 from Route 495 to Hopkinton and develops the section from Route 109 to Holliston.

In 2003 Mass Highway completed the design review of Phase 1, negotiations with the private land owners along Phase 2 were conducted, the Milford town meeting authorized the Phase 2 property rights acquisitions and MassHighway concluded the Phase 1 public hearing.

Greenman Petersen, Inc. was also awarded the design contract for Phase 2.

In 2004 the Trail Committee reported to the Selectmen that Greenman Pedersen's design services fee may have to be increased for the following reasons according to Reno DeLuzio. If MassHighway does not approve the full stop traffic signal at the Route 109 crossing (which was submitted for their review) then an alternative signalization system design acceptable to MassHighway would have to be developed. In addition, if MassHighway does not approve the Town's petition to waive full Bridge Division review 9 (an expensive and time consuming process) additional effort would be required to satisfy Bridge Division's extensive data submittal requirements including a complete structural analysis of the existing abutments.

To pay for the additional design work, the Trail Committee recommended using existing town funds in the trail budget for 25 percent of the additional design fee and then submit an application to the Federal Transportation Enhancement Program for the remaining funds he added. (3)

Also in 2004, MassHighway solicited construction bids for Phase 1 and awarded the construction contract at \$1.4M in 2005. The contract was awarded to Northern Construction Services with offices in Weymouth, MA and Palmer, MA.

Northern Construction Services was a general contractor specializing in bridge construction, site work, marine construction, concrete work and utilities.

“The amount of time needed to get the Upper Charles Trail off of the ground is not unusual, said Craig Della Penna of the Rails to Trails Conservancy. The conservancy is a national nonprofit with a regional office in Worcester. “ (3)

“Although Della Penna described the process as “byzantine” he said it is no different than the process required for other road construction projects. Several factors contribute to this time frame, he said. MassHighway treats rail trails the same way it treats any other construction project, Della Penna said. Trying to receive state and federal funding for the projects is not easy, especially with 130 proposed rail trails within 100 miles of Rails to Trails Worcester office. “ (3)

“Nowhere else in the United States is there that kind of density of projects, Della Penna said. They’re right where people live, work and play.” (3)

“In addition most rail trail projects are headed by ad hoc committees whose members are often new to public service, Della Penna said.” (3)

“It’s probably the first time that regular citizens get involved in seeing how their transportation dollars are spent.” Della Penna added. (3)

In 2005 more than 20 people showed up to organize the Friends of the Upper Charles Trail which eventually became a 501(C) 3 non-profit organization. The Friends mission is to :

- Promote the proper use, development and care of the trail
- Raise and expend funds to support trail maintenance and improvements
- Assist in trail maintenance
- Oversee the trail and report improper uses

The group works closely with the Parks and Recreation Department, which has the primary responsibility for maintaining the trail. Combined with the Milford Upper Charles Trail Committee, there were about 44 people in 2005 working as volunteers to make the trail a success.

“We had a good turnout. The response was positive” said DeLuzio. (4)

Northern Construction began construction of the trail in May 2005, and a ground breaking event was held at the trail head off East Main Street. Sever dozen town employees, officials and residents observed the groundbreaking and DeLuzio observed, “It goes without saying this project has a high level of local support.” (5)

Later that year, town meeting approved an additional \$150,000 to complete the final design of Phase 2 and authorized the additional Phase 2 property rights acquisitions.

Northern Construction ran into issues while working on Phase 1 which could potentially cause the project to overrun. Although the construction was being managed and paid for by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the Town would be responsible for overruns in excess of 10% of the bid price. DeLuzio met with selectmen on two occasions to brief them on the overall progress on the trail construction, potential cost overruns, and offered recommendations to reduce the scope of the project

to offset these added costs. He also briefed them on drainage problems at Fino Field which the Town had neglected over the years and was now impacting the trail project.

Selectman agreed to fix the Fino Field drainage problem and reduce the Trail project scope to offset the Town's share of the potential \$100,000 overrun costs. Removal of interior landscaping and making changes to the extent and location of fencing along the trail would save \$67,000. In addition another \$13,000 could be saved by making modifications to the Fino Field parking lot thereby allowing the project to continue. Many plants and shrubs originally proposed along the route were eliminated. In October 2005 Town Meeting approved \$15,000 to cover the remaining overrun costs if they materialized.

"According to Reno Baci (Park Commission Chairman), the overrun costs on phase 1 were "largely due to the inability of the town to reuse soil material that had been removed during construction of the trail and which was supposed to be reused as fill. The town also ran into a drainage problem on the trail that required the installation of a box culvert at Fino Field. These items coupled with several other minor issues increased the cost."

Baci added, "It is difficult to keep a handle on the overrun costs because the contractor contracts with the state and the town is not always notified in a timely manner when a problem arises." (5)

Also in October 2005, town meeting approved \$150,000 to complete final design of Phase 2.

In 2006 the Town revived an old plan to develop an alternate route that would alleviate traffic on Rt. 16 (Main St.). The Town made a proposal to MassHighway to substitute the proposed 1-mile segment of trail from the end of Veterans Memorial Drive to Mount Pleasant St. with a roadway that included bike lanes. MassHighway approved the substitution. This segment was then removed from the Phase 2 Design Plans.

Also in 2006 the town received a \$185,000 TEA-21 reimbursement for Phase 2 final design.

Phase 2 abutters meetings were held and design plans for Phase 2 were submitted to MassHighway.

Phase 2 would finish three trail segments. One segment would extend the Phase 1 trail from its termination at Deer Street just beyond the I-495 overpass off Cedar Street to the vicinity of the Hopkinton town line, with a 23 space parking lot at that end. Another segment would develop the trail from Friendly's parking lot on Route 109 to Holliston.

The third was a short spur connecting the Senior Center on North Bow Street to the Phase 1 Trail at Main Street.

An issue developed in Phase 2 with securing property rights from National Grid in that any agreement between the Town and National Grid would have to be approved by the Federal Highway Administration and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation since they were providing all of the construction funds.

Massachusetts Department of Transportation would not solicit Phase 2 construction bids unless the Town secured property rights from National Grid. The four party negotiations continued.

“They’re very cautious about giving up land rights, DeLuzio said of National Grid. They’re a willing partner in this, there’s no question about that. It’s the stringent federal highway rules.” (6)

Here is a picture of the trail before construction on that part of Phase 2 that goes underneath the Route 495 underpasses:



Location Of Phase 2 At 495 Overpass

The Grand Opening Celebration for Phase 1 was held on June 16, 2007. “Bill Buckley, the chairman of the selectmen who has walked the trail several times, said it “came out beautiful” and is reminiscent of a walk through the woods of Maine or Vermont. On parts of the trail, it’s amazing to me that you’re still within the town borders.” He said “It’s so secluded. It’s access to nature without having to leave town.” (7)

In 2008 final design of Phase 2 was submitted to MassHighway for review and comment. Shortly thereafter the Phase 2 NGRID 99 year lease agreement was finalized and approved by all parties--- National Grid, the Town, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

MassHighway and the Federal Highway Administration approved the final design of Phase 2 in 2009. And bids for its construction were solicited.

The Phase 2 construction contract was awarded in 2009 to P.A. Landers Construction Company of Hanover, Mass. Phase 2 Ground breaking was held on October 24, 2009. An environmental plan needed to be submitted as “There is a wood turtle habitat area in the section going to

Hopkinton, and per specifications, contractor P.A. Landers needs an approved plan to protect the endangered population, DeLuzio said.” (8)

“Most of the time people won’t even know they’re in the woods, DeLuzio said.” (8)

In April 2010 with Phase 2 of the Milford Upper Charles Trail under construction and having seen no progress on the Alternate Route with bike lanes project, the trail committee developed two interim options to complete the one-mile "missing link" and thereby connect Phases 1 and 2.

Option one would start at the end of Veterans Memorial Drive, go through town owned land (the former Cueroni property), on to Carroll Street, Hayward Street and crossing Hayward to Mount Pleasant Street.

Option 2 would develop an interim paved path from the end of Veterans Memorial Drive over the old rail bed corridor to Mount Pleasant Street which was originally part of the Phase 2 preliminary design plan.

The options were presented to the Selectmen later in 2010 but the question was how either option would be paid for. Because the Town had an agreement with MassHighway to develop the Alternate Route with bike lanes project in lieu of a standalone bike path either option would have to be paid for by the Town or some combination of Town funds, private funds, and pro-bono volunteer help.

"The missing piece of the trail is not eligible for state or federal money, DeLuzio said." (10)

Upon further deliberation the trail committee, with the Selectmen's approval, decided to pursue Option 2. In 2010 Town Meeting approved \$40,000 to complete final design and permitting of Phase 3 ("the missing link"). Guerriere & Halnon of Milford, MA was awarded a contract for environmental permitting design services and Beals and Thomas of Southborough, MA was awarded a contract for trail design services.

Phase 3 design and permitting was completed in 2011. The Town now had a shovel ready project and the trail committee began to explore ways to get it built.

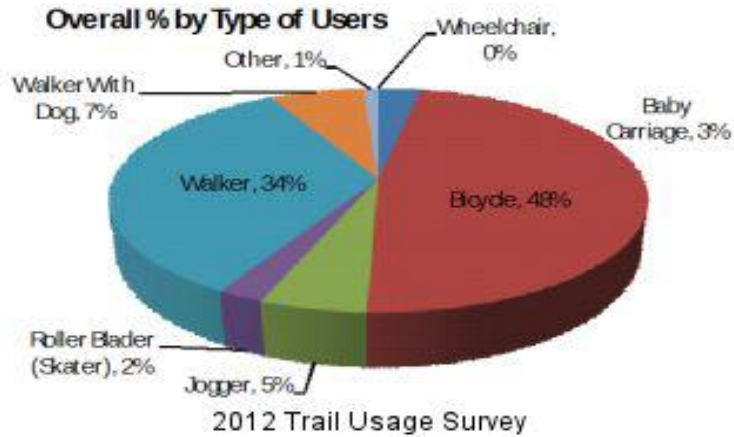
On September 24, 2011 "More than 80 people gathered under the canopy at the Route 109 Medway Road trail head of the Milford Upper Charles Trail to acknowledge and celebrate the official opening of the Phase 2 sections, expanding the paved length of this trail project to 5.7 miles." (9)

Reno DeLuzio, Chairman of the Milford Upper Charles Trail Committee, spoke at the ceremony along with Selectman Brian Murray. "Buckley and DeLuzio were recognized and applauded as the fathers of the project that began 14 years ago." (9)

In February 2012, the Milford Planning Board approved an amendment to Milford Stone Ridge LLC's Planned Residential Development Special Permit to lift a condition requiring that certain units be limited to "over 55" age restricted occupancy in exchange for Milford Stone Ridge LLC'S commitment to construct Phase 3 (the "missing link") section of the trail by October 2014. . Milford Stone Ridge LLC is the developer of the Walden Woods condominiums that are off Route 85 (Cedar Street) in Milford. This agreement, once executed, will accomplish the Trail Committee's original goal to develop a 6.7 mile unbroken trail from the Hopkinton town line through Milford to the Holliston town line.

Build it and they will come. The Friends of the Milford Upper Charles Trail, a 501(c)(3) non-profit volunteer organization, was formed in 2005 to educate the residents of the Town of Milford and neighboring communities about the recreation and transportation opportunities, promote the use, development, enjoyment, and care of the trail through volunteer membership and raise and expend funds to support trail maintenance and improvements.

Beginning with the trail's grand opening in 2007, the Friends have organized annual cleanups in the spring and fall, worked with various individuals and organizations in implementing a very popular memorial bench program with more than 20 granite benches located along the trail, designed an adopter and sponsorship program encouraging community involvement in maintaining the trail, and have improved the trail with the addition of dog clean up stations, information kiosks, bird houses and bat boxes and more. An annual trail census provides important trail usage statistics demonstrating the steady increase in popularity of the trail. The most recent survey completed in 2012, showed more than 2,800 users on a typical Saturday.



...Build it and they will come.

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