



## Mass Central Rail Trail

# The Golden Spike II Conference

This will become the biggest Rail-Trail in Massachusetts

- |                   |                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Colleen Abrams    | Wachusett Greenways                 |
| Darcy Adshead     | Wachusett Greenways                 |
| Tim Baldwin       | MassBike                            |
| John Brennan      | Cochituate Rail-Trail               |
| Craig Della Penna | Rails-to-Trails Conservancy         |
| Betsy Goodrich    | Rails-to-Trails Conservancy         |
| Andy Greene       | Wayside Rail-Trail Committee        |
| David Kaplan      | Wachusett Greenways                 |
| Richard Kerver    | Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust |
| Bryce Nesbitt     | Friends of the Community Path       |
| John Player       | Wayland Open Space Committee        |
| Lesya Struz       | Waltham Land Trust                  |
| Dick Williamson   | Wayside Rail-Trail Committee        |
| Ed Yaglou         | Wachusett Greenways                 |

A community has to have the capacity to envision a future they want, and not just the one they are likely to get. --Unknown

# Program

To voice support or comments, please email to: [Craig@MassCentralRailTrail.org](mailto:Craig@MassCentralRailTrail.org)

Bentley College  
Waltham, MA  
June 21, 2002

## Order of the Day

11:00 event officially opens with short remarks by Craig Della Penna , Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

11:05—12:00 Guest speakers

12:00—2:00 Luncheon, networking, and background music by *Southern Rail*.

Greetings from Bentley College

Bruce Schwoegler, Boston area Meteorologist

Waltham Mayor David Gately

State Representative Anne M. Paulsen

Senator Pamela P. Resor

Amy Panek, speaking for Senator Cheryl Jacques

John Cogliano, Commissioner MassHighway

Dennis DiZoglio, Deputy General Manager-Planning, MBTA

John Scannell, Director—Wachusett and Sudbury Reservoirs, MDC

Jennifer Howard, Greenway Coordinator, DEM

Senator Steve Tolman for Warren Tolman,  
Democratic Candidate for Governor

Colin Mahoney for Sen. Tom Birmingham,  
Democratic Candidate for Governor

Clare Dalton for Robert Reich,  
Democratic Candidate for Governor

Chris Gabrieli , Democratic Candidate for Lt. Governor,  
and running mate with Treasurer Shannon O'Brien

the Commonwealth. An effective way to build trail, however, is to funnel money to the local towns and communities along the corridor and into the hands of those at the grass-roots level like what is being done by the Wachusett Greenways through various DEM grants.

### ***Whatever happened to the Wayside Rail-Trail?***

After a string of overwhelming town meeting and city council approvals in Belmont, Waltham, Wayland, Sudbury, Hudson and Berlin, the town of Weston voted down their participation at an acrimonious Town Meeting in 1997. Since that time, efforts to move the project forward (absent Weston) have been hampered by numerous bureaucratic obstacles, some of which still remain today.

The deafening silence about the Wayside Rail Trail and the passage of much time have led many to believe that the project is dead or at least won't be completed in our lifetimes. In truth, reports of the Wayside Rail Trail's death are greatly exaggerated, as Mark Twain might have put it. In fact, the Wayside Rail Trail is showing new signs of life and is now being seen as a crucial segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail.

### ***Will eminent domain takings be necessary to complete the trail?***

No!! Most of the corridor is already in public ownership and in the sections where it is not in public ownership, the various trail groups, land trusts and municipalities will be working to obtain easements. A few landowners have been approaching these groups to do just that for a while now.

### ***Will the entire corridor have to be paved?***

No. In the mid 1990s, MassHighway indicated that all bikeway projects receiving state or federal funds had to be paved to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for access. That directive has been relaxed and communities can now choose their surface. Virtually all other states have deemed that well-built soft surface trails are suitable and ADA-compliant—for wheel chair access. In all likelihood, depending on community preferences, the Mass Central corridor will be a mix of pavement, gravel, compacted stone-dust, and possibly even some porous pavement sections.

### ***Why the Rail Trail Rally today?***

There is no ribbon-cutting or groundbreaking to celebrate today. Though we do not have any of these milestones to celebrate, we do know that the landscape in Massachusetts for trail development is changing for the better. There are currently almost 70 separate rail-trail projects underway in Massachusetts. Unfortunately, rail trail projects in the Commonwealth don't just happen. Large numbers of visible and vocal supporters, political support at the state and local levels, and extensive media coverage are essential. This event has benefited greatly from your participation and your interest in seeing more rail trail project get done in Massachusetts. But the hard work is not over! Stay involved in whatever way you can. Join a rail trail advocacy group. Ask candidates questions about what they will do if elected. Let your local newspaper know your thoughts as well. Being quiet never got any rail trail project built in Massachusetts.

### ***When is the next Golden Spike event?***

The first Golden Spike was hosted by Wachusett Greenways in 1999. We are envisioning an event like this, somewhere on the Mass Central corridor every other year. Next year, in June 2003, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy will be holding their International Trails and Greenway Conference. Golden Spike III will be held during the summer of 2004. We cannot wait to show you what will be built by then.

Thanks for coming today!!

The organizing committee for Golden Spike II Conference.

### **What is the Mass Central Rail Trail?**

Once a 104-mile railroad line from Northampton to Boston, now the corridor is being restored as a rail trail—a path for bicyclists, walkers, runners, baby strollers and young cyclists with training wheels, wheel chair users, cross country skiers, equestrians and nature enthusiasts.

## General Q & A

### **What was the line's claim to fame?**

A relocation of track necessitated by construction of the Wachusett Reservoir, led to the engineering of a 1100 foot rock tunnel – that led to a majestic trestle bridge 133 feet over the Nashua River. The trestle was torn down in 1974, but the tunnel remains. Also, the Mass Central was the route of the commuter train that brought Governor Calvin Coolidge (later President Coolidge) to the State House every day from his home in Northampton.

### **Would such a trail prevent a railroad from returning?**

Of the 104 total miles, roughly 20 miles between I-95 & I-495 have some potential for restored Commuter Rail service. However, a study for the potential of commuter rail service for the Mass Central corridor concluded that restoring train service would not attract many new riders, would cost over \$100 million in capital expenditures, and would also create yearly operating deficits of \$10-15 million—in 1996 dollars. Nevertheless, the corridor was originally retained for just this reason. When the merits of transit use are compelling, the corridor could be built out as a rail-w-trail. The basic principal of 'rail-banking' applies here and all groups support the return of rail alongside the trail.

### **What about the center section, where Wachusett Greenways (WG) is building miles of trail?**

This is the 30-mile section in the center of the Commonwealth passing through Sterling, West Boylston, Holden, Rutland and Oakham. (The Sterling section is a spur along a different rail line.) WG is a nonprofit, all-volunteer group established in 1995 to connect the Wachusett community with trails and greenways. Together with the towns, state agencies, foundations, businesses and other groups, they are building and maintaining the MCRT and helping people discover the joy of exploring the lands right in their own towns.

### **How much will it cost and when will it be finished?**

An approximate cost estimate is \$30 million to complete the entire project. Wachusett Greenways' 30-mile trail cost will be about \$1,000,000. A true bargain in trail dollars and that is due in large part to tens of thousands of volunteer hours, and generosity of local donors. The typical trail paved trail is much more expensive—about \$300,000 per mile, while stone dust surfaces are much less. There are several locations where bridges have been removed. These will add to project costs. In some cases along the corridor, easements may also be necessary and these will involve some costs. Fortunately, about 25 miles of trail have already been built and these sections require no additional costs.

### **Didn't the Weston vote stop the trail project?**

In 1997, the town of Weston voted against participation in the Wayside Rail Trail, one of the projects on the Mass Central corridor. The Mass Central groups respect this decision. The Wayside and the larger Mass Central trail proposals work even without Weston's participation. Public roads through Weston make all necessary trail connections and there is already considerable "informal" public use of the existing railroad corridor in Weston. A formal rail trail in Weston would be very nice, but is not essential, and in any event, it was not the desire of the majority of Weston voters as of a Town Meeting vote taken in 1997.

### **How will the trail be completed?**

The many towns and volunteer groups along the trail will play the most important role. Community is not a place but an activity and the rail-trail gives these towns and groups a good excuse to get together and do something highly constructive. There are many important partners to this effort - of the Governor's office, Mass Highways, the EOEA, the DEM, MDC and MBTA and other agencies of

## Useful web sites for trail and greenway development

[www.MassCentralRailTrail.org](http://www.MassCentralRailTrail.org)  
[www.railtrails.org/newengland](http://www.railtrails.org/newengland)  
[www.railtrails.org](http://www.railtrails.org)  
[www.wachusettgreenways.org](http://www.wachusettgreenways.org)  
<http://www.walthamlandtrust.org/>  
<http://www.trailsandgreenways.org>  
[www.massbike.org](http://www.massbike.org)  
[www.greenway.org](http://www.greenway.org)  
<http://www.state.ma.us/mhd/publications/other.htm>  
[www.new-england-rail-trails.org](http://www.new-england-rail-trails.org)  
<http://www.obviously.com/trailstorails/statewide.html>  
<http://www.state.ma.us/mdc/>  
<http://www.state.ma.us/dem/>  
<http://www.pedbikeimages.org/>  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/97dec/rails.htm>  
<http://www.holdenpd.com/bikepath.html>  
<http://www.sctrails.net/trails/quotes/quotes.html>

Imagine walking out your front door, getting on a bicycle, a horse ... or simply donning your backpack and within minutes of your home, setting off along a continuous network of recreation corridors that could lead across the country. — PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON AMERICANS OUTDOORS, Americans and the Outdoors, 1987

## Where it all started

We are human beings. We are able to walk upright on two feet. We need a footpath. Right now there is a chance for Chicago and its suburbs to have a footpath, a long one.

The right-of-way of the Aurora electric road lies waiting. If we have courage and foresight, such as made possible the Long Trail in Vermont and the Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia, and the network of public footpaths in Britain, then we can create from this strip a proud resource.

Look ahead some years into the future. Imagine yourself going for a walk on an autumn day. Choose some part of the famed Illinois footpath. Where the highway crosses it, you enter over a stile. The path lies ahead, curving around a hawthorn tree, then proceeding under the shade of a forest of sugar maple trees, dipping into a hollow with ferns, then skirting a thicket of wild plum, to straighten out for a long stretch of prairie, tall grass prairie, with big blue stem and blazing star and silphium and goldenrod.

You must go over a stile again, to cross a highway to another stile. This section is different. The grass is cut and garden flowers bloom in great beds. This part, you may learn, is maintained by the Chicago Horticultural Society. Beyond the garden you enter a forest again, maintained by the Morton Arboretum. At its edge begins a long stretch of water with mud banks, maintained for water birds and waders, by the Chicago Ornithological Society. You notice an abundance of red-fruited shrubs. The birds have the Audubon Societies to thank for those.

You rest on one of the stout benches provided by the Prairie Club, beside a thicket of wild crab apple trees planted by the Garden Club of Illinois.

Then you walk through prairie again. Four Boy Scouts pass. They are hiking the entire length of the trail. This fulfills a requirement for some merit badge. A troop of Scouts is planting acorns in a grove of cottonwood trees. Most of the time you find yourself in prairie or woodland of native Illinois plants. These stretches of trail need little or no upkeep. You come to one stretch, a long stretch, where nothing at all has been done. But university students are identifying and listing plants. The University of Chicago ecology department is in charge of this strip. They are watching to see what time and nature will do.

You catch occasional glimpses of bicycles flying past, along one side. The bicycles entered through a special stile admitting them to the bicycle strip. They cannot enter the path where you walk, but they can ride far and fast without being endangered by cars, and without endangering those who walk.

That is all in the future, the possible future. Right now the right-of-way lies waiting, and many hands are itching for it. Many bulldozers are drooling.

—MAY THEILGAARD WATTS, letter to the editor, Chicago Tribune, October 2, 1963. This letter led to the creation of the 50-mile Illinois Prairie Path and is generally credited with getting the rails-to-trails movement started.

# What's Happening?

## An Update Along the Trail Corridor

**Boston:** Nashua Street Park is under construction; groundbreaking on North Point park was June 13, 2002.

**East Cambridge:** Spaulding & Slye are proceeding with environmental permitting for the 45 acre North Point mixed-use development. The Mass Central Rail-Trail is a featured part of the design, and part of the development's transportation plan, along with a relocated Green Line trolley.

**Somerville:** ('Somerville Community Path') A preferred alternative has been identified for an extension with partial design funding in place from the city and discussions are underway with the MBTA for access to land. For a number of months now, a series of still on-going community outreach meetings have shown strong local support for extending the path.

**Somerville/North Cambridge/Belmont:** MassHighway File #600811 has been reactivated for critically needed improvements to the intersections along this segment, including construction of a missing bridge and connection to the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway.

**Belmont:** ('Wayside Rail-Trail') The original railbed was sold to private interests long ago. The Belmont Bikeway Planning Committee continues to seek an alternate route through Belmont. Redevelopment plans at McLean Hospital offer an opportunity for a connection.

**Waltham:** ('Wayside Rail-Trail') The MBTA and the city are currently in negotiations to turnover the corridor to the city of Waltham. Dealing with the various, encroachments are among the items for discussion.

**Weston:** In 1997, they chose not to participate in the Wayside Trail. We respect their decision.

**Wayland:** ('Wayside Rail-Trail') Wayland has been working with the MBTA and the Bay Circuit Trail to lease a segment of the Mass Central line for use by Bay Circuit. Regular trail clearing by local volunteers characterizes this project as a hands-on trail.

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**Hudson:** ('Wayside Rail-Trail'): Hudson is at the intersection of both the Wayside and the Assabet River Rail-Trails. ARRT has been active with a recent agreement between the town and the MBTA to turn over a segment to the community for the N-S oriented ARRT.

**Berlin:** ('Wayside Rail-Trail'): Nothing new to report.

**Clinton:** The Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust, Inc. has begun to investigate possible trail routes through town and to build the coalitions necessary to move things ahead.

**Sterling:** ('Wachusett Greenways'): The former Fitchburg & Worcester RR is now being cleared for walking, biking and cross-country skiing. The trail runs from Sterling Center at the old Cider Mill to Bean Road (3.5 miles). Bridges donated from the "Big Dig by Kiewit Corporation await installation between the Quag and West Lake Waushacum.

**West Boylston:** ('Wachusett Greenways'): Open stone-dust trail runs 7000 feet along the Quinapoxet River between Thomas Street and the Holden/West Boylston line.

**Holden:** ('Wachusett Greenways'): Currently open is a short .2 mile stretch from River Street to the Jeremiah Kaplan bridge. Another section of the Central Mass corridor from the West Boylston line to Jeremiah Kaplan bridge—1.7 miles—will be open later this summer. A connector from River Street to Manning Street to Mill Street 2.2 miles is also open. In the autumn of 2001, the 60" Jeremiah Kaplan Bridge was installed over the Quinapoxet River near River Street. The 90' Charlotte Kaplan Bridge was installed June 20, 2002.

**Rutland:** ('Wachusett Greenways') the 1-mile section from the Holden line to Wachusett Street is open. An A new 1.2 mile section from Rutland to Glenwood Road to Pomogusset (Rte 56 will be open by the fall of 02.

**Oakham and Barre:** ('Wachusett Greenways') A recent WG sponsored bicycle tour from Rutland to Barre-passing through Oakham found it passable on foot and partially with mountain bikes. Ties

are still in place and the route is wet in places. Beaver activity and the 1938 hurricane have some open culverts so new structures will be needed as the trail is developed here.

**Hardwick:** This group has recently focused on the water trail segments and will be refocusing on the rail-trail segments again later

**Ware:** Project is currently at 25% design stage and discussions are underway with the few landowners including Mass Electric who own segments of the line.

**Palmer:** No news to report. Project largely dormant at this time.

**Belchertown:** The town is working on acquiring a two-mile section that would come with a 100 acres open space protection project. In order to get a greater say in land protection issues for Belchertown proper, a land trust was formed this spring.

**Amherst:** The 1 mile spur/extension into the University is nearly complete and will be officially opened this summer.

**Hadley:** Looking to build a safer trail, DEM is working on widening the curve on the west side of the tunnel/culvert under Rte 9 near the Buffalo farm. Other maintenance in 2002 will include repairs of the bumpiest root-damaged sections.

**Northampton:** ('Norwottuck Trail') In late April, 2002, the city held a meeting to show MassHwy that there was city wide support for bringing the Norwottuck Trail across Damon Road at grade to Woodmont Ave—even though a tunnel under the active Guilford Rail Systems (ex B&M RR) is still a few years away. At the end of May, 2002, the City acquired from Mass Electric, the right-of-way adjacent to the active railroad all the way to Union Station—about 1 mile. The trail corridor will undergo design in 2003. Union Station in Northampton was the historic 'end of the line' or Mile Post 104/0 for the Mass Central. Beyond here, the city has also recently acquired another mile of ex New Haven Railroad corridor from Mass Electric. This project will connect with the Manhan Trail in Easthampton.

### Updates on Northampton's other nearby projects:

**Manhan Rail-Trail -** Construction on this 5.5-mile trail in Easthampton begins this summer.

**Williamsburg Rail-Trail -** An appeal of the lawsuit against Mass Electric will be heard this fall in the Supreme Judicial Court.

**Farmington Canal Rail-Trail in Connecticut—**eventually running from New Haven to Northampton—has had more ribbon cuttings and groundbreakings this spring. 27 of the 55 miles are now open. The entire route could be open in 5 years.

"For twenty-nine months [April 1883 - September 1885] no trains ran. The snows of two winters covered the tracks and drifted deep in the cuts and ledges. The spring runoffs resulted in a gradual erosion of the roadbed and during the summer months trees began to take root between the ties. Citizens in the various towns along the line despaired of ever seeing it in operation again. A concerned citizen of Waltham, considering the road's future to be hopeless, recommended that the rails be removed and the ties planked over to create a bicycle path. Recreational and environmental groups in applauding this 19th century gentleman's back-to-nature philosophy, can take note that theirs is not really such a novel cause." (*The Central Mass, Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society, 1975, P.13*)