



**CENTRAL
WARE RIVER
VALLEY RAIL
TRAIL
PLANNING AND
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

**Prepared for the
Town of Hardwick,
Massachusetts**



September 2000

***Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail
Planning and Research Project***

***Prepared for the Hardwick Board of Selectmen
by
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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

The Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail Planning and Research Project is the initial phase of a long-term effort which will result in the assessment of the former Boston & Maine Railroad from the Hardwick-Ware Covered Bridge in Gilbertville to Hardwick Road in New Braintree. This project builds upon the on-going successful efforts of the Hardwick Area Conservation Trust, Hardwick Conservation Commission, Hardwick Planning Board and the Hardwick Board of Selectmen in the preservation of open space and development of recreational facilities within the community. It is the intent that this project will assess the feasibility of the development of a multi-use trail from Gilbertville to Old Furnace as well as to identify project alternatives and priorities. An aerial photograph of the proposed trail in its entirety is provided on the next page. These efforts have been funded through a Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs Department of Environmental Management's Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grants Program "The Year 2000".

Goals and Objectives

The long-term overall goals of this project are to:

- convert an approximately 3.8 miles section of abandoned railway corridor into a non-motorized multi-use trail
- create rail trail linkages to three communities, four recreational sites, and fourteen villages
- create links to historic sites along the trail corridor
- promote visual access to the Ware River and adjacent farmland
- create connections to the Pioneer Valley Regional Bikeway - Trail System and the Central Massachusetts Regional Bikeway - Trail System

In order to accomplish the long-term goals of this effort, the first phase of planning and research must be initiated. It is the intent to accomplish this initial phase through the completion of this project using DEM Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grant funds. This project will identify direct abutters to the rail corridor, document existing conditions of and along the rail corridor, develop cursory cost projections (development and acquisition), and initiate a preliminary survey of abutting property owners to identify concerns and/or outstanding issues.

It is the intention to use the information from this initial phase to prioritize those areas desired for acquisition and protection as well as serve as the base for obtaining design and construction funds.



Importance

Rail-trails are multi-purpose public pathways that are created from railroad corridors that are either abandoned or no longer being used as an active rail line. There are hundreds of rail-trails throughout Massachusetts and the United States which serve as very popular recreational areas as well as a conduit for alternate modes of transportation. Typical users of a rail-trail include walkers, runners, bicyclists, wheelchair users, roller bladers and in-line skaters, cross-country skiers, snowshoe users, and horseback riders. According to the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, over 10,000 miles of rail-trails have been created across the country. It has been documented that the users of these trails have typically contributed significantly to the local economy of the communities through which the trail passes.

Presently in Massachusetts there are nearly 100 projects involving bikeways in either the planning or construction phases. In the Central Massachusetts region, there are thirteen established, planned, or proposed bicycle paths, routes, or designated lanes (exclusive of the Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail). These vary in type, usage, condition and phase. The proposed 3.8 miles Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail is an integral part of the region's bicycle and pedestrian network because of its location. Locally, this proposed rail-trail parallels the Ware River and directly compliments the Old Furnace Launch (Wheelwright/New Braintree) and New Furnace Landing (Gilbertville) recreational facilities. Regionally, the ability of the Central Ware River Valley Rail Trail (Hardwick) to connect directly to the planned Ware River Valley Rail Trail (Ware) at the Ware-Gilbertville town-line as well as the proposed Ware River Rail Trail (Barre) in Barre is unique. Such an effort would link the trail systems of the Pioneer Valley and Central Massachusetts regions creating an extensive network of bicycle and multi-purpose trails.

Organization

This project report consists of six sections. Section one is primarily introductory. Section two contains the detailed assessment (existing conditions, environmental considerations, railroad bed, structures, encroachments, visual/aesthetics, ownership patterns, etc.) including mapping, photography and data collection of the railroad corridor from Gilbertville to New Braintree. Section three contains a discussion of the trail development options. Section four consists of preliminary cost projections for some of the options based on "typical" cost estimates. Section five discusses the results of the preliminary survey sent to all rail corridor abutters. Section six consists of a few brief comments, recommendations, and conclusions. A number of Attachments serve as support documentation to the formal written portion of the report and include sample forms, photographs, and other information.