

# BOSTON TO NORTHAMPTON | 104 Miles



Northampton, Hadley and Amherst comprise the Norwottuck Rail Trail segment of the MCRT. This western-most section of the corridor was bought by DCR in 1980 and after years of planning and development, it opened in 1993. Management and maintenance is handled by DCR

Belchertown voted down the trail in 1997. A few years later, a local land trust was formed and then slowly, over time, most of the 9.5 miles was purchased and reassembled into a future trail. More recently, the land trust's holdings have now been donated to the town. The project is managed by the town's Cons-Com. A local Friends group is now active there too.

The Bondsville village of Palmer has an undeveloped section about 3 miles long. Efforts are beginning that will make it available to be built out as a trail.

East Quabbin Land Trust (EQLT) develops parts of the corridor in Ware, Hardwick and New Braintree. They have opened about 9 miles of this section.

Barre, Rutland, Holden, and West Boylston and Sterling are communities of Wachusett Greenways (WG). A lot of this 30-mile section is owned by DCR's watershed protection agency. 17 miles of the WG segment are now open. Funding over the years has mostly been via Rec. Trail grants from DCR along with a large and energized volunteer component.

The town of Clinton and the Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust recently purchased the old RR including a 1,000 foot tunnel. Together they are working on a plan to renovate the tunnel and make it a part of the trail.

The Wayside segment of the MCRT is comprised of Berlin, Hudson, Sudbury, Wayland, and Weston, and Waltham. This will be a DCR-managed and maintained project. Only 2-3 years from completion now.

Belmont is moving forward as an individual project at the community level.

Somerville, Cambridge and Boston are mostly open now, as municipal projects.




How the idea of a 100+ mile long, Cross-State Bicycle Trail has progressed over the years.



### MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL DATA BY THE NUMBERS

94.5	60	9.5
Number of miles PROTECTED	Number of miles open today	Number of miles UNPROTECTED

THE MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL IS A PROJECT of the  a 501C3 charged with assisting with the buildout of the MCRT and doing betterments along the corridor. The longest rail trail in New England.

How the idea of the MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL becoming a 100 mile trail has progressed over the past 40+ years.



## A TIMELINE OF THE JOURNEY THUS FAR TO PIECE TOGETHER THE CORRIDOR

**1980:** The Mass. State Parks agency-DEM-purchases the western most 8.5 miles of the corridor and begins a 13 year process to plan and develop the corridor.

**1988:** The Fisk family completes a walk from Northampton Union Station to North Station Boston and they write a never-published manuscript. A copy of this was given to a top DEM official, who kept a copy in his office and referred to it often.

**1993:** The Norwottuck Rail Trail opened. It was one of the last formal, paved, bikeways in the US to be built at the old design width of 8 feet. In 2015, the trail was widened to 10± feet.

**1995:** Wachusett Greenways (WG) was formed and they purposely decided to build out their sections as a soft surface—stone-dust trail, and not a paved trail. This was a momentous decision. Receiving small grants through the DCR grants process— that also encouraged a volunteer component—meant this would be built much faster. The other alternative, going through the transportation funding process looked much more complicated. They have completed 20 miles so far and have built or redone 10 bridges. Their service area includes 30 miles of the corridor that is largely owned by DCR's watershed protection agency.

**1995:** Both the six-community Wayside Rail Trail project and the Belchertown Rail Trail began to be talked about.

**1997:** Both Weston and Belchertown voted down their rail trail projects, with a smorgasbord of reasons, but one main reason in Belchertown was the state's requirement to pave. At that time, Mass was the only state in the U.S. to require pavement. If you were using federal dollars you had to pave. Local equestrians almost everywhere opposed paving and in Belchertown, they led the effort to fight against the paved trail.

**1997:** Wachusett Greenways (WG) opened their first mile of the MCRT in West Boylston.

**1998:** Commonwealth Beacon Magazine did a story about the fight against the trail in both Belchertown and Weston. <https://tinyurl.com/CommonwealthMagStory>

**1999:** DCR released a report that called for more

trail projects and encouraged of piecing together the \*Mass Central Rail Trail\* corridor. <https://tinyurl.com/GreenwayVision>

**1999:** In 1999, WG hosted the first "Golden Spike I" event, in West Boylston, where Congressman Jim McGovern spoke enthusiastically to the vision for a statewide, E-W trail. <https://tinyurl.com/GoldenSpike1>

**1999:** The Federal Highway Administration encouraged all states to hold a Millennium Trail Contest. Norwottuck Network (NN) was named the winning entry for Massachusetts. <https://www.nnnetwork.net/about-us>

**2000:** The Belchertown Land Trust—a linear-thinking land trust—was formed and they purchased their first section of the MCRT. A 2.5 mile section for \$100,000. They continued on for 15+ years. Quietly buying sections of the dead RR, where they could, when they could.

**2002:** A 2nd event, Golden Spike II was held in Waltham at Bentley University, and over 400 advocates, gubernatorial candidates, and policy makers turned out. This was the largest rail trail event ever held in Mass.

**2004:** An anti-trail group (Protect Sudbury) was founded to fight against both the N-S and the E-W trails. (N-S trail is the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. E-W trail is the MCRT. Both trails intersect in Sudbury.)

**2005:** Central Highlands Conservancy LLC (CHC) was stood-up to buy parts of this corridor, blocking sales of it, to adjoining land owners.

**2006:** Shortly after the discovery of a theft of a short section of the former railroad corridor in Berlin, the MBTA offered up a lease to DCR—to lease the 24 mile, Wayside section of the MCRT

**2007:** 3.2 miles of the corridor in Hardwick was purchased by the East Quabbin Land Trust (EQLT) from CHC to develop that section of the trail. This includes 3 rare bridges. One was the last of its type still standing in southern New England.

**2011:** After several years of negotiations, the MBTA and DCR entered into a lease agreement for the entire 24 mile Wayside section, including the eastern half of the corridor in Berlin. The west side in Berlin is still owned by the B&M RR. (Now in 2024, it is owned by the CSX RR.)

**2017:** Norwottuck Network (NN) launched a free, monthly E-newsletter about news along the MCRT, that quickly ramped up to over 10,000 subscribers in 8 states. And a little more than a year in, Constant Contact names it in the top 10% of all their E-newsletters world-wide.

**2017:** In order to accelerate trail development, Massachusetts Governor Baker forms the Trails Team. It is made up of staffers in the 3 agencies that have a role in developing the network of rail trails in Mass. To ensure 'silos' get taken-down, they originally met every two weeks in the Governor's suite of offices in the statehouse.

**2017:** Wachusett Greenways opens the 17th mile of their segment of the MCRT. <https://tinyurl.com/WGMission>

**2017:** The Belchertown Land Trust donates to the town, 5 miles of the MCRT, increasing town owned sections to be nearly 7 of the 9.5 total miles. <https://www.belchertowngreenway.org/by-the-numbers>

**2017:** Friends of the Belchertown Greenway was formed. <https://www.belchertowngreenway.org>

**2018:** EQLT purchases a farm in Ware that includes another mile of the MCRT corridor in Ware and begins to develop the trail.

**2018:** The 7th Golden Spike event was held in Northampton. <https://www.gs2018.org/>

**2019:** NN was re-launched with a broader mission and a more geographically encompassing board.

**2019:** Weston and Wayland segments of the Wayside section of the MCRT open. Eversource's grid enhancement project makes it easier and less expensive for DCR to build the trail.

**2020:** Protect Sudbury fights the Eversource plan in Sudbury to build a more resilient and robust grid by putting it underground, under the future trail.

**2020:** The Town of Clinton along with the Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust purchase the 1,000 foot tunnel and a remaining mile or so of dead corridor still owned by the B&M RR. <https://tinyurl.com/TunnelClinton>

**2020:** MassDOT commissions a feasibility study of the MCRT and hires VHB, a nationally recognized consulting firm, to identify the missing pieces and come up with a plan to develop work-arounds until the expensive missing pieces can be filled in.

**2021:** The VHB study is finalized and released. <https://tinyurl.com/MCRT-Study>

**2021:** Protect Sudbury loses at the SJC in their case against the Eversource project. <https://tinyurl.com/SJC-ruling>

**2022:** Protect Sudbury loses twice at the Surface Transportation Board in Washington DC. <https://>

[tinyurl.com/STB-ruling](https://tinyurl.com/STB-ruling)

**2022:** Allies of Protect Sudbury file a lawsuit at the Mass Land Court claiming that the MBTA doesn't own the corridor. Plaintiffs later withdrew their case in 2023.

**2022:** EQLT enters into a lease agreement with National Grid and builds out another 2.3 miles of the corridor in Gilbertville. Late 2022 another 5/8th of a mile is under construction.

**2022:** Golden Spike 2022, the 8th GS conference. This one held in Gilbertville on July, 30 with nationally known speakers. <https://www.gs2022.org/>

**2022:** NN hires a consultant to produce a report about the MCRT. RFP is here: <https://tinyurl.com/MCRT-RFP>

**2023:** Here is a link to the report. <https://tinyurl.com/MCRT-Report>. It tells a compelling story. 4-5 million users a year. 400K-500K overnight visitors a year. \$200Million in impacts each year. And it intersects directly with over 15 additional trails.

**2023:** Somerville Community Path section of the MCRT opens.

**2024:** NN obtains a Google Street View Camera and maps and uploads the trail onto Google Street Maps.

**2024:** NN begins to organize a cross state ride in the fall of 2024, that in 2025 could be unveiled as an annual event.

**2024:** NN begins to layout the beginnings of a cross-state QR Code infrastructure that will call out and highlight industrial, railroad, and cultural history along the corridor.