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### **Lease clears way for 26-mile trail**

By Richard Conn/Daily News staff GHS Posted May 02, 2008 @ 12:48 AM

WALTHAM -

The MBTA's board of directors yesterday afternoon approved a 99-year agreement with the state to lease a 26-mile stretch of abandoned railroad right of way between Waltham and Berlin.

The board's vote paves the way for the state Department of Conservation and Recreation to convert the land to a bike and walking path.

Since 2005, Waltham officials had been working on their own lease agreement with the MBTA for the city's portion of the Wayside Rail Trail, which will extend from the Linden Street Bridge to the Weston line.

However, about a year ago the Department of Conservation and Recreation took over negotiations for a lease with the MBTA for the entire 26-mile portion.

The status of those talks seemed to be up in the air as of a couple months ago, and city officials pushed for an update.

"That's great news," said City Councilor at large Patrick O'Brien yesterday about hearing the lease agreement had been finalized. "It's been a long wait." Last month, the city's Community Preservation Committee approved \$150,000

for an environmental assessment of Waltham's portion of the trail. The City Council still has to OK that money. O'Brien said now that the lease agreement between the state and the MBTA is complete, he hopes it will be easier for Waltham to get funding for its portion.

Ken Doucette, a former city councilor who was involved with rail trail issues, was also happy to hear the news that the lease agreement was done. He said that the state ran into the same "stumbling block" that the city had encountered with the MBTA during negotiations - liability issues.

The 26-mile portion of abandoned railway will be part of the 104-mile corridor of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail from Waltham to Northampton.

"We are extremely pleased and grateful to the T's board for granting us this lease," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. in a statement. "The final 104-mile bikeway will truly be the backbone of the state bike and pedestrian trail system, linking numerous DCR parks, forests, local conservation lands, and long distance hiking trails."

A 21-mile portion of the Mass. Central Rail Trail is already open to the public, which includes the Norwottuck Bike Trail, which runs from Amherst and Northampton.

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