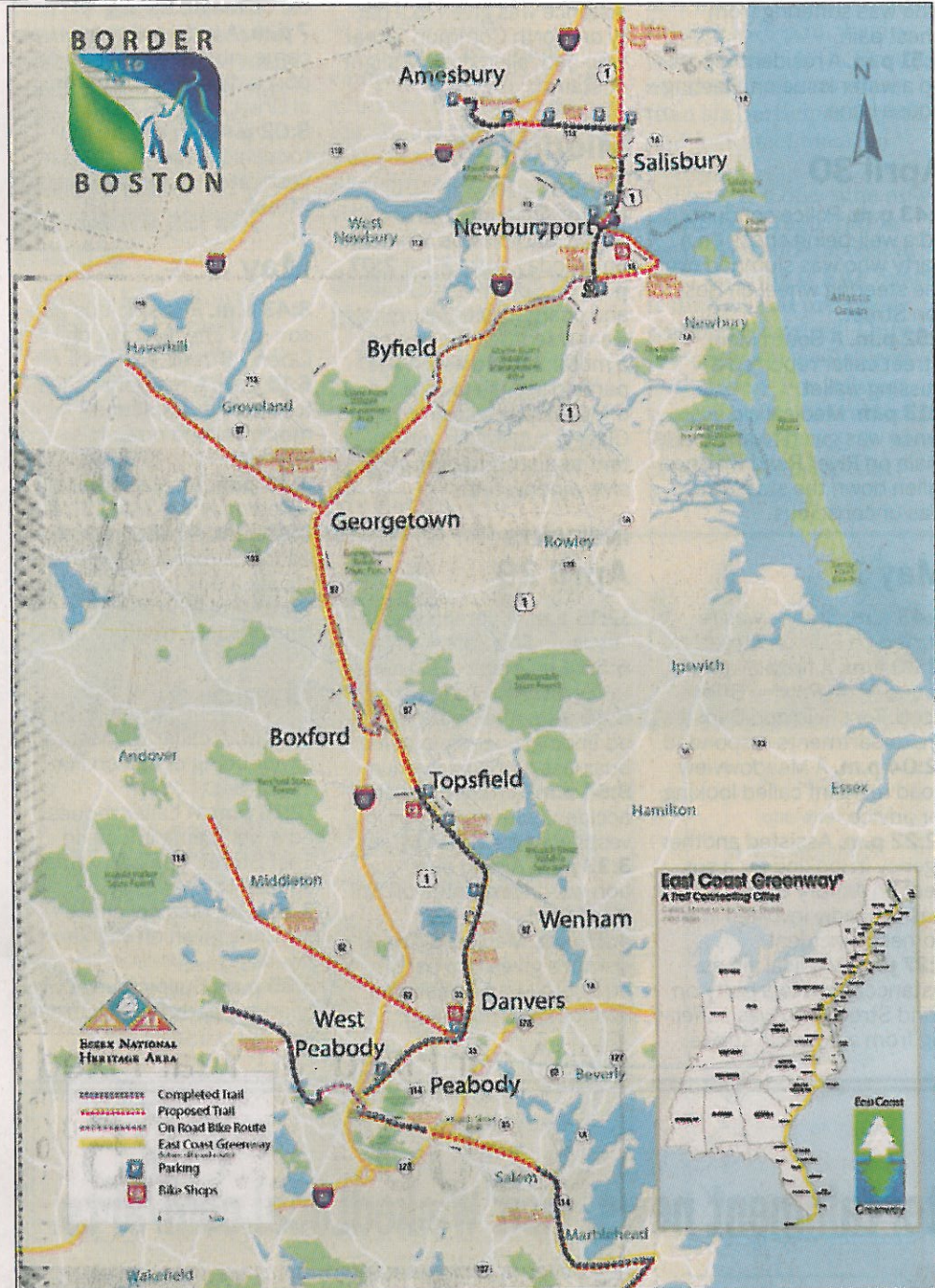


RECREATION

Off-road cycling expands across North Shore

A progress report on the Border-to-Boston Trail plans



The Border to Boston trail map COURTESY PHOTO

Imagine riding your bike from Topsfield, Boxford, or Danvers for about 30 miles safely to Boston. And then imagine riding your bike safely for 100 miles to Portland, Maine. All of that, and maybe more will be possible in our lifetimes.

In fact, as spring progresses, trail users will be able to see recent improvements and learn about further improvements to the Border-to-Boston Trail and other local connecting trails.

Over the fall and winter, crossing signals to slow traffic were installed to help get trail users safely across Route 1 and Route 97 in Topsfield. Earlier in 2012, a similar crossing system was also installed at Route 97 in Wenham. Significant progress occurred over the winter when the towns of Topsfield, Boxford, Georgetown and Newbury began focused discussions with National Grid, the local electric utility, to be able to develop the section of trail through those towns.

Completed trail

The Border-to-Boston Trail is the name of the regional effort to develop a shared use, non-motorized trail through the following nine towns: Peabody, Danvers, Wenham, Topsfield, Boxford, Georgetown, Newbury, Newburyport, and Salisbury. Currently there is trail completed at the southern end for 8.5 miles from Lowell St. in Peabody to Topsfield Center.

The two northern towns have 3 miles on the ground from the Newburyport Train station over the Merrimack River to Mudnock Road. in Salisbury. When the entire route is completed, the Border-to-Boston trail will allow for a safe walking and cycling recreational and transportation corridor from the Tri-town (Boxford, Tops-

field and Maine rail line, now abandoned – one of several that connected Boston with Maine. Trail groups in Middleton and Haverhill/Groveland have started efforts to develop trails in their towns as the proposed trails on the accompanying map show.

Later this spring, the town of Salisbury will open a new segment that will allow trail users to cross safely under the Route 1 Gillis bridge rather than across the busy highway. The underpass will feature murals commissioned from local artists and a picnic area on the northern bank of the Merrimack River.

Other amenities, only accessible from the trail, include a boardwalk through the adjacent wetlands that has been built just off the trail at the Wenham/Danvers town-line. Now complete, the Swamp Walk has become a destination in itself on the trail, offering a close-up view of turtles, beaver activity and other diverse wetlands plants and wildlife.

Further to the north, the southeastern towns in New Hampshire are working on developing trail on their section of the abandoned railroad, complete with a new bike-friendly bridge in Portsmouth. Southern Maine is well along on their section with 21 miles of the 60 miles between Kittery and Portland Maine complete, including a recently opened trail bridge over I-95 in Kennebunk (www.easterntrail.org). Within a few years North Shore residents may be able to cycle or hike on a complete off-road trail for over 100 miles to Portland, Maine.

From Peabody to Marblehead

The Peabody trail system will eventually connect to the Salem Bike Path, which leads directly into the Marblehead trail along the harbor. The city of Salem is working to extend their trail from Canal St. another 1.5 miles to

part of the Northern Stand Community Trail. (www.biketothesea.com).

To get from Charlestown to a new park in Cambridge, you will cross over the beautiful North Bank bike/pedestrian bridge. It resembles a cross between an undulating DNA helix – and a roller coaster – this new structure gets trail users safely across many sets of tracks coming out of North Station, under the Zakim Bridge and over the launch ramp at the Charles River for the Duck Boats. Once over the bridge a short trail leads trail users to the Museum of Science and onto the bike paths along the Charles.

These trails and the Border-to-Boston Trail are an important component of the emerging East Coast Greenway (ECG), a multi-use, non-motorized trail developing from the Canada border in northern Maine to Key West at the tip of southern Florida. The ECG will be a sister to the Appalachian Trail but one that will be bikeable, ADA compliant, and accessible to many more people along the 15 east coast states through which it traverses (www.greenway.org).

With the increasingly alarming obesity and diabetes epidemics, it's even more important that we're able to offer the residents of the North Shore safer places to bike and walk. With the explosive use of electronic devices that can compromise exercise and time spent outside, the B2B trail offers an alternative as it connects town centers and neighborhoods with many schools including Danvers High School, the Proctor Middle School in Topsfield, and soon past an elementary school in Salisbury. Children will again soon safe recreational venues and some will even have the option of again riding their bikes to school.

Stay tuned for updates on the trail and informa-