

# RIGHT OF WAY

## SHARING OUR CHANGING STREETS

May 10, 2013

Tri-Town

Transcript



On a recent spring day teen boys cross Route 97 where there are both traffic lights and marked lines on the road at the Topsfield/Wenham line. The Rail Trail will eventually be connected from Newburyport to Marblehead. WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTOS BY NICOLE GOODHUE BOYD

### TRAILS

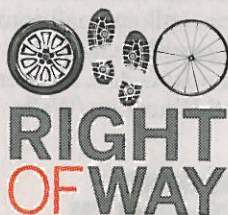
## Border to Boston will connect nine cities and towns

Pathways progress at different paces

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In years to come, locals will be able to jump on a bicycle, lace up running shoes or leash the dog and hit 28 straight miles of trail, spanning from the New Hampshire border all the way through many of Boston's North Shore communities.



## TRAILS

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These emerging trails will link nine local municipalities in the Border To Boston Trail, starting as far north as Salisbury and ending in Peabody. In between, the trail will run through Newburyport, Newbury, Georgetown, Boxford, Topsfield, Wenham and Danvers.

While some cities and towns like Newburyport, Wenham, Danvers and Peabody are ahead of the game with their portions of trail already built, towns like Boxford, Georgetown and Newbury are still waiting to get the OK from National Grid-owned paths before moving forward.

Some spans of trail are built in Topsfield and Salisbury, while others need approval from either National Grid or the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA).

The trail, which is designed along former railroad corridors, aims to connect town centers, schools, neighborhoods, parks, recreational facilities and natural areas. It even connects to the North Shore Mall so outdoor-activity enthusiasts can break for retail therapy.

A complete 8.5-mile portion spans from Lowell Street in Peabody to Topsfield center, and another 3-mile path spans from the train station in Newburyport to Mudnock Road in Salisbury.

Although the Border To Boston Trail connects communities through a common ground, each city or town involved has its own trail name, own committee and is moving at its own pace.

"At the end of the day the trails are developed community by community, and in turn that just means communities are at different places in their preparedness and their ability to develop the trail," said Bill Steelman of Newburyport, director of heritage development at the Essex National Heritage Commission. "For those towns in the middle of the rail, a significant challenge remains ... getting the legal right to develop the rail."

The idea for the Border

## More information

Find all of our Right of Way coverage — including articles, photos and videos — at our special website, [wickedlocal.com/rightofway](http://wickedlocal.com/rightofway). Join the community in a conversation about the issues at the Right of Way Facebook page, [facebook.com/RightofWay2013](https://www.facebook.com/RightofWay2013).



To Boston trail stems from the 1970s and was given a renewed push in 2003. Some volunteers have been working towards trail development for over a decade.

"I think it's a pretty strong indicator of the passion that local individuals have," said Steelman. "There are a lot of people out there using [the trails], which is strong evidence to suggest that these are valued community assets."

### Acquiring control of the land

Boxford, Georgetown, Newbury and Salisbury trail committees are in the midst of a design study that will help them build their paths.

Boxford, Georgetown and Newbury must also wait for approval from National Grid to build on the land. Boxford's Border To Boston Committee member Steve Davis said the town's committee expects to receive its license soon, which would allow them to make minor changes to the land.

He thinks Georgetown and Newbury also anticipate receiving their licenses in the near future. Davis said the license will allow committees to fill in holes or build small bridges over streams with the utility company's permission, but to make any permanent changes they would need a lease.

Steelman said Salisbury's trail (the Old Eastern Marsh Trail) is under MBTA jurisdiction, but the town has already acquired a 99-year lease from the transportation system.

Steelman explained that the four towns entered into a contract with engineering company Fay, Spofford and Thorndike in 2011 to design the trails. The company completed 25 percent of its design study, which must then be approved by the Massachusetts

Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Boxford's Davis said he thinks MDOT is close to approving the quarter-mark designs, which will then allow the towns to hold public hearings to inform locals about the plan, take suggestions and ask questions.

Steelman said the design is 80 percent federally funded, while the remaining 20 percent comes from a portion of each of the four communities.

The next step for Boxford, Georgetown and Newbury trail committees after receiving their licenses will be to acquire long-term leases with National Grid. Steelman said that a 99-year lease generally gives projects more leeway to receive state funding, since the long time frame ensures dedication.

David Read, chairman of the Border To Boston Trail Coalition, noted that the complete Border-to-Boston Trail will have short sections that are on road in both Boxford and Salisbury. Bicyclists in Boxford will cross over I-95 on an existing road to avoid construction of a new bicycle-pedestrian bridge. Salisbury bikers will ride around the Martin Burns Wildlife Management Area in Newbury.

Topsfield, which has already built two miles of trail, is awaiting approval from National Grid to develop another two miles of trail. The utility company owns the land from north of Washington Street to the Boxford town line.

Topsfield Rail Trail Committee chairman Joe Geller said that they are in the final stages of obtaining a license from the utility company to make changes to the land.

At their April 29 meeting, the selectmen signed a copy of the license, which has



**Caleb, Jenna, and 6 month old Aislin Lyons, of Boxford, walk the Danvers portion of the trail Friday, April 19.** WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTOS / NICOLE GOODHUE BOYD

been submitted to National Grid and Geller is waiting to hear back. The committee will hold a public forum at the Town Library on Wednesday, May 15 at 7:30 p.m. to discuss plans for the rest of the trail.

"The first thing to do is to make the trail passable, so we'll keep the vegetation down," said Geller. "One area is very wet and we have to look at how we're going to fix the drainage in that area. We have to do some surveys to figure out what the drainage situation is on that trail."

#### Smooth trailing

While there is still much work to be done to eventually connect the Border To Boston trails, portions of the pathway are currently open and in use.

Danvers senior planner Kate Day said the Danvers Rail Trail Committee planned to install three benches along the trail in mid-April that were donated by Brooksby Village in Peabody. The committee is also preparing to launch an adopt-a-planter program in which residents can sponsor one of the planters installed at various intersections throughout the town's trail.

Day also hopes to install a finely compacted stone dust surface, similar to what Topsfield used to build its trail, extending it from Danvers to Wenham. And with the \$50,000 grant Danvers and Wenham received from the Department of Conservation and



**A sign alerts drivers that pedestrians may be crossing the roadway on Route 97.**

Recreation, they will be able to improve the surface.

"Once that's done, it'll be a beautiful, continuous surface from Topsfield to Wenham to the Peabody line," said Day.

Day said committee volunteers are currently trying to raise money to install a sign at the Swamp Walk kiosk. The Swamp Walk is a deck boardwalk that passes through the great Wenham swamp, located just off of Route 97.

Although each community is at a different stage of the process, most involved agree that the Border To Boston Trail is a great benefit to the North Shore.

"Trails are all about making connections," said Steelman. "And no trail in the region does a better job of connecting people to their community, to the outdoors and to each other than the Border to Boston Trail."