



A section of the Topsfield "Rail Trail" that travels by the Topsfield Bike Shop. COURTESY PHOTO

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# Another grant for bike path received

\$50K from state to complete three 'Rail Trail' projects

By Anna Burgess

aburgess@wickedlocal.com

Thanks to a new \$50,000 grant from the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Topsfield "Rail Trail" is one step closer to completion.

The Rail Trail is part of a larger project called "Border to Boston," a trail that, when finished, will start at the New Hampshire border and end in Boston. The Topsfield branch of the trail, officially named the Topsfield Linear Common, is almost four miles long, with two miles completed and 1.6 in progress. It's been nicknamed the "Rail Trail"

## RAIL TRAIL

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because it's built on an old railroad.

"So far, the trail is finished from the Wenham town line up to Washington Street in the center of Topsfield, with a stone dust surface," explained Joseph Geller, chairman of the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee.

"There's another section from Washington Street up to the Boxford town line that's grass with a worn path in the middle [right now]," he added. "That section is good for mountain bikes, walking, or running."

### Grant money for three projects

The new grant is designated for three projects on the Rail Trail.

"[We want] to install accessible crosswalks, with ramps, for the trail where it goes across Main Street," said Geller. "And we will fix the supports on the railroad bridge [over the Ipswich River], which have been damaged by ice."

The remaining money will be used to create a parking area next to the trail on Route 97, on land owned by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, pending their approval.

### Community's contribution

The only condition of the grant, said Geller, is that Topsfield must match 20 percent of the grant money with donations of cash or of volunteer time.

Gregg Demers, a member of the Rail Trail Committee and president of Friends of Topsfield Trails, explained that working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is a familiar process at this point, since this is the fourth grant the DCR has given for the Topsfield Linear Common.

"The grant process has been relatively straightforward," he said. "We've been very successful in getting



Volunteers Bill Rossiter and Bruce Davison helped out by putting crosswalk lights together for a section of the trail that crosses Route 97. COURTESY PHOTO

that's the source of the majority of our funds."

Friends of Topsfield Trails is a group dedicated to raising money and organizing volunteer work for trails in Topsfield, and Demers and other members often volunteer themselves. The DCR allows labor time on the trail to count toward the necessary grant match, which Geller said is how Topsfield has met the 20 percent requirement in the past.

"We have a great group of volunteers," said Geller. "They do maintenance on the trail because they really love it."

The completed section of the trail gets a lot of use, according to Demers.

"I would say [it's used by] twenty percent runners, forty percent walkers, and forty percent bikers," he said.

"The trail is for any non-motorized use," Geller specified. "Horses use it, people in wheelchairs, and kids on tricycles use it... people meet in the morning to walk their dogs. People used the trail to walk down to the Topsfield Fair, when that was going on."

He added that, "It's not just people from Topsfield [that love it]. We get people from Boxford, Danvers, Hamilton, Wenham, and other nearby towns."

### Finishing the trail

For the Rail Trail Committee, the next project to tackle is completing the unfinished section of the trail.

Most of the completed trail is on property that Topsfield leases from the MBTA. The 1.6 incomplete miles are on property owned by National Grid, with whom Topsfield has a

license to use the trail, but does not yet have a lease.

"We need to submit a design for the trail to National Grid," Geller explained. "Friends of Topsfield Trails will be doing a fundraiser to raise money for the design ... it will show the trail's composition, and how close to [National Grid's] utility poles the trail will go."

After the trail design is approved, Topsfield will sign a 99-year lease with National Grid, and apply for another state grant to finish the remaining 1.6 miles of trail.

Demers believes that Topsfield residents will be happy to have the trail completed, as they're already making good use of the completed portion.

"It is very rewarding [for us]," he said, "to see it getting used by a wide variety of folks from town."