

## **Fears about rail trails come to be 'myths'**

**To the editor:**

After reading a letter that detailed dangers of rail trails, we are writing to convey our experience of living next to a rail trail and in support of development of the Topsfield Trail.

We believe a rail trail would be a wonderful asset as a safe place to walk and for our children to ride their bikes. Prior to moving to Topsfield, we were abutters on the Marblehead-Salem trail. Before that trail was developed, we were initially skeptical about what would happen. Soon after opening it proved to be a wonderful 'linear park' that we didn't have to drive to. The trail's development also cleaned up several areas along the abandoned rail corridor. The trail also created a better sense of community as we saw many neighbors more often.

During the development of the Marblehead-Salem trail, we were kept informed of the plans and consulted on a couple of occasions. We asked that a fence be put up between our property and the trail, but one with a gate for access. Some of the neighbors who initially declined a gate later changed their minds. We also addressed the potential issue of motorized vehicles. To our knowledge there was never any motor bikes on the trail (car access was prevented by placing bollards at road intersections).

Re safety, the trail is no more or less safe than the sledding hill in town which many families enjoy. Rather than issues of child safety and motorized vehicles, the true issue for this resident might be one of 'not in my back yard' privacy concerns. Those concerns can be easily mitigated with an open, respectful planning and design process.

Given the current epidemics of diabetes and child obesity that now confront our society, we should do everything we can to provide as many recreational venues as possible—especially ones that are safer and so readily available as paths on rail lines that are no longer used.

**David, Susan Read and family  
Topsfield**