

Rail Trails in Sudbury: Bridging the Past to the Future

BY LORI CAPONE, CONSERVATION COORDINATOR

The Mass Central and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail corridors over the last six months have progressed from demolition to resurrection.

Since my last article in the Spring, the most significant change within the Mass Central corridor was the bisection of the corridor with the removal of Bridge 127, shortly followed by Bridge 128. These bridges, both over Hop Brook, are two of the most beautiful locations within the corridor. Both removals were very different in scope. Bridge 127 was more degraded of the two bridges and dangerous to traverse. This structure was removed in its entirety in less than

half an hour. Following removal of Bridge 127, divers spent days hand removing underwater pieces. Alternately, Bridge 128, being more structurally sound, was only losing its rails, ties, and wooden footbridge that had been constructed atop. This took three hours to remove, but it was all in one piece.

In turn, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail had quickly removed both the Hop Brook and Pantry Brook bridges in the spring. The reconnection of the Bruce Freeman corridor has commenced, with the reconstruction of the Hop Brook Bridge. The Pantry Brook Bridge has not yet commenced construction. The water elevation in Pantry Brook has significantly affected the ability to install the footings.

This summer's rains have certainly been challenging for both projects. This was most evident east of Boston Post Road where Hop Brook resembled the days of its glacial Lake Sudbury glory. On the rainiest of days, water from the wetlands flowed into the site, and a river formed down the corridor. In a segment further to the west, the rains led to the failure of a drainage structure under the rail bed. These conditions did not deter reconstruction of Bridge 127 where weeks were spent installing new footings for the bridge, while Hop Brook flowed a few feet away, fifteen feet above their heads.



Site of Bridge 127

Rail Trails in Sudbury

The footing installation at Bridge 127 was an impressive feat given its location on narrow peninsulas surrounded by water. The existing bridge was half submerged in Hop Brook. Weeks were spent driving interlocking metal sheets into the ground to create a watertight box. Soil was then excavated and concrete footings installed. This required a substantial amount of dewatering, contained within the limit of work. The superstructure has not yet been installed. The decking on Bridge 128 will be installed in the next few weeks.

The initial round of invasive species removal has been completed on both trails. Between the two projects, over eight acres of invasive species have been removed from the corridors. The Mass Central project conducted all work by manual or mechanical means. One of the techniques being employed is to install black bags over the stumps of large buckthorn plants in order to kill them in place.

These have all been GPS located, so they can be monitored and will be removed from the site once the plant is dead.

At this time, all manholes and most of the conduit has been installed. The transmission line has been rerouted around the cattle crossing that was recently discovered west of Bridge 128. Care was taken during installation, using a vacuum to remove soil adjacent to the structure. Wetland replication areas are under construction on both projects.

But the most exciting advancement, what has truly brought to trail to life, has been the installation of binder asphalt on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. As we narrow in on one year of construction, we no longer need to wonder, we can see what these trails are going to bring to our community.



PUBLIC NOTICE: These corridors are not currently open to the public, nor safe for passage. Please refrain from accessing these corridors until construction is complete and safe road crossings have been installed.