

Rail Trail Conversion Advisory Committee

The Rail Trail Conversion Advisory Committee (RTCAC) was created by the Selectmen in November, 2004, to provide a mechanism for the Town to examine the conversion of the existing unused rail line (formerly the part of the Framingham-Lowell line lying north of Route 20) in Sudbury to a recreational path and alternative transportation corridor, to help identify and address the many questions and concerns of Sudbury residents concerning this project, and to support town staff as they study the feasibility of such a conversion.

Following the approval by Town Meeting in April 2005 of funding for a preliminary environmental and engineering assessment of the north-south corridor, the RTCAC has focused on identifying the issues that should be addressed in this assessment in conversion of this right of way (ROW). This includes hearing from ROW abutters and nearby neighbors about their concerns, talking with other town entities about their requirements, and learning about the possibilities and process of converting the corridor.

The RTCAC reviewed and approved a FAQ document (frequently asked questions) for posting on the committee website to inform citizens about rail trail conversions, with some specific attention to Sudbury. Additionally, other documents concerning rail trail conversions are provided as links on the website, or as reference materials in the Goodnow Library.

Major concerns identified by the Conservation Commission in discussions with RTCAC about the possible conversion of the corridor are wetlands, stormwater runoff, and wildlife. They suggested an evaluation of wildlife habitat and the values and functions of wetlands along the ROW. We will continue to work closely with the Conservation Commission to make sure that environmental concerns are addressed in any proposal.

Guest speakers addressed RTCAC to inform us about funding a trail through the enhancements process (Michelle Ciccolo, Assistant Manager, Town of Hudson, on June 13), and the process of proceeding with an engineering firm for a preliminary engineering study (Jen Shemowat, project engineer, and John Hendrickson, project manager, of Fay, Spofford, and Thorndike on July 18, and Nick Rubino of EarthTech on August 8). Craig Della Penna, formerly the New England representative for the Rails to Trails Conservancy was invited to speak on November 10 on rail trail conversions.

A meeting consisting of the RTCAC co-chairs, public safety officials, and the town manager on July 20 established that RTCAC should be the focus for inquiries into the public safety implications of the trail. It is RTCAC's responsibility to hone questions to their essence to avoid any unnecessary burden, yet to involve public safety officials appropriately.

RTCAC has formed a Conservation Subcommittee responsible for channeling our requests to the Conservation Commission and suggesting wording for conservation related items, and a Public Safety Subcommittee responsible for focusing our questions and requirements for public safety officials.

We have identified abutters and others living nearby as a group whose concerns should be addressed as soon as possible; therefore, we have composed and distributed a questionnaire to learn from trail neighbors what those concerns are. We have made the questionnaire responses available to the public, and have submitted our analysis to the Selectmen as a basis for further public discussion. The questionnaire responses are available in the Sudbury Public Library for examination by the public.