

Wachusett Greenways, summary compiled by Carole Wolfe in summer 2008.

This document offers gleanings from presentations by Colleen Abrams, President of Wachusett Greenways, given at the Sudbury RTCAC meeting of December 14, 2006, the Concord Rail Trail Advisory Committee meeting of June 18, 2007 and the 2007 Moving Together Conference as well as from the Greenways' website.

For those who might wonder about the compatible use of strollers, wheelchairs, road bikes, children's bicycles equipped with training wheels and tricycles, with a stone dust trail, please refer to the website at www.wachusettgreenways.org. The site provides photos and information that confirm all of the above types of use take place on the Wachusett Greenways stone dust trail. Contact names, numbers and e-mail addresses of various key members of the organization are also provided by the site.

Wachusett Greenway's board members:

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THE ORGANIZATION

Wachusett Greenways is a grass roots organization of 600 (as of June 2007) dues-paying members formed in 1995 to develop a 30 mile trail for non-motorized recreation and transportation located primarily along the Massachusetts Central rail corridor. The trail goes through the towns of Sterling, West Boylston, Holden, Rutland, Oakham, and Barre.

As of the summer of 2007, 11 miles of stone dust trail had been completed. Much of the trail is built on land that is owned by and under the supervision of the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Watershed Protection Division.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation Division of Water Supply Protection (formerly the Metropolitan District Commission Division of Watershed Management) owns 16,472 acres of land in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed through which the Wachusett Greenway passes. DCR manages these watersheds primarily for water quality protection, drinking water supply, and environmental resource protection purposes. The policy guidelines governing public access to these facilities (including users of the Wachusett Greenways within its borders) are available at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/waterSupply/watershed/wachaccess.htm>.

The construction cost for the 11 miles of trail was approximately \$100,000 per mile, including the cost for culverts but excluding bridges which each cost \$50,000-\$100,000 or more. The completed trail sections include 4 bridges and 1 tunnel.

FUNDING and COST

The organization actively seeks grants and contributions and has already secured over \$1.2 million of the expected \$2 million it will cost to construct the entire 30 miles of trail.

Funding has come from:

Small amounts of ISTEA federal grants administered by the DCR

Urban self-help grants

Municipal funds

Contributions from individuals, businesses and foundations

Contribution of volunteer labor

WHY THE DECISION WAS MADE NOT TO GO THE FEDERAL/STATE FUNDED ROUTE

The Wachusett Greenways specifically eschewed the standard process for trails constructed by MassHighway (design conforming to the MassHighway design guidelines and using the TIP process to procure CMAQ funding for trail construction.)

Large amounts of federal and state funding were not sought for several reasons including: The organization did not want to build the trail according to MassHighway project standards, the trail would get built faster, and the proponents hold the philosophy that if people have a hands-on construction experience the trail will be better cared for once built. The trail does meet ADA standards.

WHY STONE DUST INSTEAD OF ASPHALT

There are several reasons stated by Mrs. Abrams as to why a stone dust surface was chosen: it is much cheaper than asphalt to initially install and to repair and redo; because they believe it is aesthetically more pleasing and more in keeping with rural, wooded areas; more trees could be kept; the surface is easier on joints; and DCR, the owner of the right of way, also required stone dust on its property for water protection. (See http://www.town.sudbury.ma.us/documents/dl/3117/RailTrail_2006-12-14_Minutes.pdf)

MAINTENANCE

There have been practically no repair costs to the Wachusett Greenways organization over the 10 years, (Mrs. Abrams speaking in 2007) with only 6 small repairs during that time involving a couple of hours of work. Only about \$200 has been spent on additional stone dust in a couple of instances. Additional stone dust was required due to mistakes made in early construction resulting from inexperience in trail building and are reflected by the first trail sections. Some problem places that developed in the first sections built have been fixed by volunteers or by the various municipalities. One area that did not receive a fine stone dust topcoat will be remediated in the future. West Boylston did pay to plow its section one winter, which did not please the cross country skiers or those using snow shoes. Plowing did not harm the trail.

Each town has committed to maintaining the rail trail with mowing, trail bed and drainage repair and maintenance which requires machinery. Volunteers do tree and brush removal, litter patrol, drainage care, entry landscaping and signage repairs.

Mowing of trail shoulders, leaf blowing, cleaning of drainage systems, removal of fallen branches and trees, litter pickup, repair of signs and brush trimming are maintenance tasks universal to trails no matter the surface treatment.

TYPES OF USE

The trail has been built to the 1999 AASHTO standards, which form the basis for the shared use path recommendations in the 2006 MassHighway Project Development and Design Guide, thus it is compatible with ADA guidelines for wheelchairs. Besides wheelchairs, the trail is used by road and mountain bicyclists, tricycles, bikes with training wheels, walkers, joggers, strollers, cross-country skiers, and those who snowshoe.

It is estimated that more than 450 people use it on a peak day with closer to 200 on a usual day. More accurate trail counts are planned for the future.

TRAIL SURFACE CONDITION

The trail width is 10-11 feet and the surface appearance varies because as already stated, the first sections were built with the lack of information as to the best formula for amount and types of stone dust to use in order to create a no/low maintenance surface accommodating all types of use except roller blades. (However, according to internet sites, it appears there are roller blades now being manufactured that may navigate stone dust trails, ed. note. Please refer to the site at <http://www.skates.com/gateskate-video-s/144202.htm>, by googling Skorpion Multi-terrain skates and by searching

<http://www.skates.com/urban-off-road-skates-s/84.htm> .) As time has passed and the volunteers have attended MassHighway workshops on gravel road building, they have learned what works best under what conditions. Trail areas on the Wachusett that are described as being rough either have no fine stone dust topcoat, or were not built with proper drainage or base material. Now, the organization affirms that it has successfully developed and used the ideal method to build a smooth and lasting surface. Mrs. Abrams stressed that proper and well maintained drainage is of prime importance no matter whether the surface treatment is stone dust or asphalt. The organization has found that putting a sufficiently thick base of ¾ minus gravel and then a rolled layer of 3/8 minus stone dust as a topcoat creates ideal trail conditions. At the Concord trail meeting at which Mrs. Abrams spoke, the engineer from Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., (the consulting firm that wrote the guidelines for all MassHighway bicycle trail construction and designed Concord's 25% design) stated that the Wachusett trail is one of the best stone dust trails he has ever ridden.

A PRECAUTION TAKEN AND PRECAUTIONS NOT OBSERVED

Smaller equipment was used to help protect the tree canopy and leave trees standing closer to the trail. One example given was the use of smaller dump trucks rather than tri-axles.

Mrs. Abrams stated that there are environmental restraints now in place that weren't observed during prior construction. The Wachusett Greenways organization now realizes that some actions they previously took are actually violations of the wetlands protection laws. The soil contamination issue from prior railroad use that is now recognized to exist, (all rail trails are considered potential brownfields, ed. note) was not considered a problem by the organization in earlier years and they did not take soil contamination into consideration when removing soil from the rail corridor during trail construction.

PATROLLING AND USER CONFLICT

The trail has been patrolled by DCR rangers, local police and volunteers. In the summer of 2006, the Holden and West Boylston police decided more police presence was needed to make people feel safe along the trail and instituted a tandem method of patrolling.

One specific issue they have had to deal with is conflict between bicyclists and pedestrians. Signs have been used in the attempt to keep bicyclists to the left and pedestrians on the right. Another issue is dog feces, to which Colleen referred as "the enemy." West Boylston does provide a dumpster for the collection of dog droppings. A sign asking people to pick up after their dogs was removed by someone unidentified. Dogs and horses are officially not allowed on DCR owned property.