



Winter Newsletter 2013

More than a quarter century ago, a small group of citizens banded together and organized to preserve the right of way of an abandoned rail line with the idea to turn it into a ribbon of green connecting central CT towns. Here we are folks, well into the 21st century, and that vision has now become reality. We're not done yet, but boy, we've come a long way baby!

Forty of 56 miles of the right-of-way in Connecticut have now been completed, and six of the 11 towns it passes through have finished the conversion. Progress this year was more in the form of funding commitments than in new miles of trail built. Cheshire is the bright light. The town that built one of the first sections has now committed to constructing its remaining pieces, and designs are underway. New Haven's piece connecting the trail to the Long Island Sound will be built over the next two years. We've still got miles to go in Southington and Plainville, but we are being heard more clearly and progress, while slow, continues.

More than miles of new trail, it's the new and continuing partnerships that affirm our significance. For the second year in a row, we partnered with the New Haven Friends of the Trail group, the City's Youth-at-Work Program, and the Urban Resources Initiative at Yale to recruit a work crew of local highschoolers, organized by the Student Conservation Association, to improve the trail and create new plantings. We hope to continue this relationship, and perhaps scale it up to other towns, in coming years. We have joined forces also with regional pro-trail voices, including BikeWalk CT and the CT Forest and Park Association, to synergize our advocacy efforts. And, as the trail becomes more unified, so, too, do we organizationally, joining forces more and more effectively with our sister organization, the Farmington Valley Trails Council.

The trail is now way beyond us. This was brought home to me when the trail was showcased by State Representative Roland Lemar, who, unbidden, wrote about riding the trail with his young family and recommended it to his constituents. The trail has been similarly written up in local media, and volunteers do plenty of clean-ups on the trail without us even knowing about them. This kind of unsolicited shout-out and good work proves to me that the trail is present in Connecticut residents' minds and hearts. It is a welcome resource, and a fixture, already a generation old. It's still growing, and we still need your help, to maintain and improve, as well as to build.

Please join us next year for:

- ❖ National Trails Day, the first Saturday in June (7th);
- ❖ The first-ever Greenway Rally, to be held June 22nd in Plainville to focus attention on closing the remaining gaps in the trail and celebrate success so far.
- ❖ Trail rides or walks as part of the New Haven Festival of Arts and Ideas in June;
- ❖ Summer and Fall rides and other events with the Bioregional Group, Elm City Cycling, Parks Departments in towns along the trail, and others.

Many happy returns of the season and see you on the trail!

Lisa Fernandez, President



Tree Planting in New Haven with the Student Conservation Association

News on Individual Sections of the Trail

- 1. New Haven:** (1.6/3.4 miles; 47% complete) The New Haven portion of the trail is now complete from Hillhouse Ave. to the Hamden town line. There are occasional closures in the southern part of this section while Yale University develops two new residential colleges in the area – please check our website for updates: www.farmingtoncanalgreenway.org The final design for Phase IV, the final section south to the waterfront, is almost 100% approved by CONNDOT. Bidding for the construction will happen over the winter of 2014, and construction should begin in the Spring, and conclude by the end of 2015. The New Haven Friends of the Trail has continued to be a welcome local partner for clean-up and improvements, and advocacy, as New Haven’s new mayor, the first in 20 years, takes the helm in January. The Honorable Toni Harp, a State Senator for many years, has a Master’s in Environmental Design from Yale and has a long-standing legacy of support for the built landscape that improves quality of life. We look forward to working with her.
- 2. Hamden:** (9.5 miles; 100% complete) Several groups of high-school students have "adopted" sections of the trail and are doing regular clean-ups. The museum at the LockKeeper's House (just south of Shepard Avenue) has been open on nice weekends during the summer and fall. Please stop by and enjoy some of the history of the canal, get a map, or use the restroom!
- 3. Cheshire:** (2.8/7.5 miles; 37% complete) Cheshire has three projects underway in various phases of design and engineering. In the south, the CT D.O.T. is designing and will fund the section from Cornwell to West Main. This is CT DOT’s first effort at trail design! The middle section, from West Main to Jarvis Street, has been designed but the funding source is unclear at the moment. However, this is planned to be the first gap closed from whatever funding is available. The northern section, from Jarvis to the Southington town line, is also being designed by CT DOT and is expected to take up to three years to get to the point of construction. That section will involve bridge work over West Johnson Ave. and I-691. The funding is expected to be from CT DOT.
- 4. Southington:** (4/6.6 miles; 61% complete) Southington also has three sections in various stages of planning and design. In the south, from Hart St. to Lazy Lane, much of the site is on “brownfield” land which is subject to Superfund remediation by the owner, Solvent Recovery Systems (SRS). SRS has agreed to fund the design and construction of that portion, although some design work remains for the street crossings at Curtiss and Hart Streets. In the middle section, from Lazy Lane to West Queen Street, the town is seeking to purchase the remaining abandoned portion from Pan Am Railways. The northern section, from West Queen St. to Townline Road, still has active rail

traffic at several businesses. Preliminary design and engineering will be included in the design of the Plainville section.

5. **Plainville:** (0/4.3 miles; 0% complete) The railroad (Pan Am Railways) is willing to abandon the right-of-way from Northwest Drive to the Pequabuck River, and the CT DEP has funds to purchase it. Negotiations are progressing slowly, but surely! However, rail freight traffic at the yard south of the river has been increasing, making acquisition of the entire piece north of the river unlikely. The on-road portion from Norton park to Cronk Road has had “sharrows” installed on East and West Main Streets through the center of town in anticipation of this section becoming part of the Greenway.
6. **Farmington:** (2.6/5.0 miles; 52% complete) Construction is now complete in Farmington from Red Oak Hill Road north to the Avon line. Farmington has started the process of getting quotes for the design and construction of the last section south from Red Oak Hill Road to Cronk Road in Plainville. Funding for the bridge over a very busy Route 6 is unclear, but CT DOT has suggested that they may be able to fund the construction of the bridge.
7. **Avon to Suffield:** (18.8 miles; 100% complete) All construction is now complete in the northern section, from Avon all the way to the state line in Suffield. For additional details on activities in this area please check the website of the Farmington Valley Trails Council, which is www.fvgreenway.org
8. **Southwick, MA:** (6.2/6.2 miles; 100% complete) Construction of Phase 2, from Point Grove Rd. to the Westfield line, was finished in October. Southwick's trail is now paved from the Connecticut line to the Westfield line, a total of about 6.2 miles. The Park and Recreation Department has been working to install accessible benches and display kiosks along the trail.
9. **Westfield, MA:** (2.0/7.4 miles; 28% complete) Phases I and II of the Columbia River Trail are now complete from the Southwick town line north to East Silver Street, at the edge of downtown Westfield. The construction included the rehabilitation of two bridges over the Little River. The final two phases, Phase III, from the Northampton line to downtown, and Phase IV, the downtown section, have been designed and Phase III has been funded, with construction scheduled to start in 2014. Their website is: www.columbiagreenway.org
10. **Southampton, MA:** (0.1/3.9 miles; 3% complete) The concept of a greenway along the railroad right-of-way has been included in the Southampton Open Space Master Plan, and voters approved the purchase of the right-of-way from Pan Am Southern Railway in November 2012. However the small section connecting to Easthampton remains the only portion constructed to date!
11. **Easthampton, MA:** (6.3/6.3 miles; 100% complete). The city of Easthampton and the Friends of the Manhan Rail Trail have now completed the trail in Easthampton. They have a great website with lots of information: www.manhanrail.org
12. **Northampton, MA:** (3.5/3.5 miles; 100% complete). Construction has started on a trail tunnel under the active rail line that will connect the network of Northampton trails to the Norwottuck Trail that currently runs 10 miles from Northampton through Hadley and Amherst, and into Belchertown (completion mid 2014). They recently produced an on-line map showing all the

connections to the trail in both Northampton and Easthampton:

<http://transitauthorityfigures.tumblr.com/post/68166888148/again-with-the-maps> Check it out!

CT DOT Hires VHB: The CT DOT has hired Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc (VHB), a planning and engineering firm, as the program manager of an effort to close the gaps in the East Coast Greenway, of which our trail is a major part! In this role, VHB has been reviewing and coordinating efforts at the local level (in particular in Cheshire, Southington and Plainville) to appraise CT DOT of the status of viable projects in need of funding. This should be a big help in closing the remaining gaps!

WEBSITE: Our new website has been operational since early 2012. Please go there for up-to-date information, news about events, and to contact us about any issues. Its address is:
www.farmingtoncanalgreenway.org Please check it out!

USEFUL LINKS: East Coast Greenway: www.ecg.org, Bike Walk CT: www.wecyclelect.org, Farmington Valley Trails Council: www.fvgreenway.org, FCRTTA: www.farmingtoncanalgreenway.org.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RETIRING: Norman Thetford, who has been our Executive Director for the last 14 years will be retiring at the end of this year. Since getting involved with the trail's development in 1995, when very little had been constructed, it has been extremely gratifying to see the trail nearly complete and to see how much of a valuable resource it is to the people of both Connecticut and Massachusetts. The Board is extremely grateful for Norman's dedication and commitment over the many years of his tenure. He has been the bedrock of the organization and we wish him well.

THANK YOU!

Hundreds of Association members generously contribute to our organization and provide virtually *all* of our financial support. We are very grateful for your response to our annual membership campaign. We appreciate not only our faithful regular contributors, but also new members and those who have resumed support. We like to think this reflects your understanding that the Association continues to be an effective advocate for rail-trail construction.

As in the past, Association leaders remain involved as significant advocates of Farmington Canal Rail-to-Trail activities at both state and local levels. Your continued, generous support enables the organization to pursue our ultimate goal of an 84-mile trail from New Haven to Northampton, MA, connecting with other major trails at those and intermediate points. If you would like to participate more actively in this stimulating process, please send an email to info@farmingtoncanalgreenway.org, or write the Association at the address below. Thanks for your help!

Farmington Canal Rail-to-Trail Association 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT 06517

Farmington Canal Rail-to-Trail Association Board

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