

## Winter Newsletter 2011

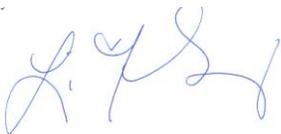
Dear Friend of the Farmington Canal Rail-Trail:

It's 1987, and a proposal for a new mall is meeting opposition in Hamden. A group of protesting citizens discovers that the right-of-way for an abandoned train track on the site of the planned development is within weeks of being sold off. The protesters form our association and successfully fight to preserve the right-of-way; the dream of the trail that you now enjoy was born.

Nearly a quarter century has passed, and 55 miles of the old canal and railroad have been converted to a greenway. That's 65% of the total 84 miles, and three more miles (plus two bridges and a tunnel!) than last year. Every year, as the mileage increases, there's more to celebrate. But challenges to close the remaining gaps are daunting. Trains still run a few times a week on the rail line in Plainville and Westfield, MA, and voter support in Cheshire and Southampton, MA has been insufficient to approve bonds to pay for trail construction (although action by the state is moving Cheshire forward - see below). Where the trail is now open, its popularity creates different struggles concerning maintenance and user rules. We welcome the new challenges at the same time that we focus on closing the gaps.

The gaps have shrunk so much in recent years that for the first time, producing a map for the entire trail in Connecticut was considered appropriate. The map, brand new and up-to-date for 2011, was a joint effort with the Farmington Valley Trails Council. That partnership, and the single map, demonstrate how the trail is becoming, increasingly, one.

Thank you for your membership. Please continue to be part of the community embracing our vision for an inviting, continuous, off-road path from New Haven, CT to Northampton, MA.



Lisa Fernandez, President



**Hillhouse Ave. Br.  
New Haven, CT**



**New Skiff St. Tunnel  
Hamden, CT**



**Manhan River Br.  
Easthampton, MA**

## FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE GREENWAY - UPDATE ON PROGRESS, Cont'd.

### 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, although construction continues on the improvements to the bridge over the trail at Prospect St. Improvements to the Hillhouse Ave. bridge, funded in part by Yale University, and Temple Street bridge over the greenway have now been completed. The preliminary design for Phase IV, the final section south to the waterfront, was presented at a public hearing on October 25, 2011. At the hearing, numerous architectural sketches of different parts of Phase IV were presented along with discussion of various options still under development. Of particular interest were sketches of the treatment of the portions of the trail that are in a tunnel section under the condominium complex located between Temple Street and Whitney Avenue. In addition to extending the hiking and biking trail, the designer's goal for development of the tunnel section is to provide for interpretive signage concerning the history of the Farmington Canal and rail line.
- 2. Hamden:** (9.5 miles; 100% complete) The long-awaited tunnel under Skiff Street was completed this summer, and the official ribbon-cutting was held on October 21, 2011. The existing grade crossing, with a traffic light, is still available, but the new tunnel will make traversing Skiff Street much faster. For safety purposes, the new tunnel has six security cameras and several call boxes as well as good lighting. Farther north, the construction at the West Woods Road/Mt. Carmel Avenue intersection is nearing completion. The trail will now run farther to the west, away from Whitney Avenue, which should make crossing easier, albeit a bit longer.
- 3. Cheshire:** (2.8/7.5 miles; 37% complete) Cheshire has reached agreement with Dalton Industries on an easement through their property, and the state has agreed to pay for the cost of both the design and construction of the trail there (about 0.6 mile). The cost of the section from West Main St. to Jarvis (about 1.4 miles) will be split 80/20 between the state and Cheshire, and the final section from Jarvis to the Southington line (about 1.9 miles) will be paid for by the state. The major caveat is that the state funds have not yet been bonded, but at least the DOT is focused on getting the Cheshire section completed! Cheshire also plans to resurface the entire existing trail in 2012.
- 4. Southington:** (4/6.6 miles; 61% complete) Construction is essentially complete on the next two-mile section south (towards Cheshire) from the portion that was completed in 2005 to Plantsville. One company, SRS, has agreed to construct a half-mile section of the remaining portion. Some minor work on the kiosk at the southern town line and a bridge facade remain to be completed, and the towns of Southington, Plainville and Farmington have met to consider plans for completing the trail to the north.
- 5. Plainville:** (0/4.3 miles; 0% complete) The Plainville Greenway Alliance has been working with town officials and the design firm of Milone & MacBroom. The town now has a design outlining the preferred route through town that doesn't conflict with the active railroad. The southern section will be a combination of on-road along low-volume, low-speed roads as well as open-space parcels; the northern section will be a combination of on-road and original railroad right-of-way. The railroad 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 will start shortly. Trail construction is likely to start there first.
- 6. Farmington:** (2.3/4.8 miles; 48% complete) Construction is now complete in Farmington from Red Oak Hill Road north to the Avon line. Farmington will be starting 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. That will ensure the connection of Plainville to the northern half of the trail.

## FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE GREENWAY - UPDATE ON PROGRESS, Cont'd.

7. **Avon:** (4.6/4.6 miles; 100% complete) Avon's section of the trail is complete, and mileposts have been installed in cooperation with Farmington and Simsbury. The zero marker is at Red Oak Hill Rd. and increases going north. Once the trail is complete all the way to New Haven, we plan to initiate a project to re-mark the entire trail, starting from Long Wharf in New Haven.
8. **Simsbury:** (7.4/7.4 miles; 100% complete) The final 1.8-mile section of the trail, from Stratton Brook Rd. through Hazel Meadows to Drake Hill Rd., is now complete.
9. **East Granby:** (5.6/5.6 miles; 100% complete) Construction is now complete in East Granby with the installation of the Salmon Brook Bridge and the re-alignment of the trail around the Imperial Nurseries and partially into Granby.
10. **Suffield:** (1.2/1.2 miles; 100% complete) With the refurbishment of several former railroad bridges, construction is now complete in Suffield as well, all the way to the state line.
11. **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. Volunteers from the Powder Mill Middle School recently completed a mural in the Point Grove Road Tunnel. The Park and Recreation Department has been working to install accessible benches and display kiosks along the trail.
12. **Westfield, MA:** (0/8.3 miles; 0% complete) Design of the Westfield Columbia Greenway is moving ahead. The city purchased the right of way from the railroad several years ago. The tracks and ties along much of the 3.2 miles are still in place. The trail has a number of challenging design issues including the installation of municipal sewer and gas lines and the replacement or rehabilitation of nine bridges, including several that pass through the city's central business district. Because of the complexity and cost, the project has been divided into three sections: southern, central, and northern. The southern section is 25% designed with a cost estimate of \$2 million and an anticipated 2014 construction date. The central section, which traverses downtown Westfield, is estimated to cost \$5 million, and the northern section has a preliminary cost estimate of \$4 million. The city is considering advertising for bids for a portion of southern section over the winter with the hopes of breaking ground in 2012.
13. **Southampton, MA:** (0.1/5.1 miles; 2% complete) The concept of a greenway along the railroad right-of-way has been included in the Southampton Open Space Master Plan. At a Town Meeting in 2008, voters approved the expenditure of \$25,000 for a feasibility study for a greenway and \$5,000 for an appraisal of the land on the proposed two-mile trail. In 2011, as part of the Easthampton Manhan Rail Trail (see update below), a 0.1 mile section of rail trail was constructed in Southampton to connect to Coleman Road - the first portion of the trail built in Southampton!
14. **Easthampton, MA:** (6.3/6.3 miles; 100% complete) The city of Easthampton and the Friends of the Manhan Rail Trail have been busy completing two new trail extensions in 2011. When finished, the projects will connect the bike path in Northampton to Easthampton's Manhan Rail Trail and extend just beyond into the adjacent community of Southampton. The connector between Easthampton and Northampton is almost complete, including construction of the bridge over the Manhan River, adjacent to Lovefield Street (see picture above). It is already seeing a fair amount of traffic. Finishing touches include trail markings, signs, and loam and seed that may be delayed until the spring 2012 because of wintery October weather. In September of 2011, the first coat of pavement was laid on the new trail section from South Street to Coleman Road. The three-quarter mile section stretches from South Street in Easthampton to Coleman Road in Southampton. Before construction could begin for this project, the area needed to be cleaned of asbestos that was spilled there decades ago by a zonolite plant. Removal of the contamination by the Environmental Protection Agency allowed both construction of the trail and the installation of a new sewer line along the trail bed. Root barriers and fences have been installed, and work on the finish coat of asphalt as well as the loam and seed work continues.

**FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE GREENWAY - UPDATE ON PROGRESS, Cont'd.**

15. **Northampton, MA:** (3.5/3.5 miles; 100% complete) The city of Northampton and the Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways distributed a new trail map and continued building a robust trail-support network. Bicycling and walking are being promoted heavily by the city government. North/south passenger rail service through the city (connecting to New Haven ) has brought new challenges and opportunities. The DOT will be designing and constructing 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.

**JOINT TRAIL MAP PROJECT:** Our Association worked with the Farmington Valley Trails Council to develop a comprehensive map of the entire trail in Connecticut with distances, key features, parking sites, and trail status clearly indicated. The maps are now available and have been distributed to several local businesses near the trail. Please include an extra dollar in your donation to receive one in the mail.

**WEBSITE:** As several of you have noted, we have had some problems with the website due to the failure of the original developer and hosting organization. We have retained a new development team and hope to have a new site up by spring 2012.

**USEFUL LINKS:** East Coast Greenway: [www.ecg.org](http://www.ecg.org), Bike Walk CT: [www.wecyclect.org](http://www.wecyclect.org), Farmington Valley Trails Council: [www.fvtc.org](http://www.fvtc.org), FCRTTA: [www.farmingtoncanal.org](http://www.farmingtoncanal.org).

**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 contact Norm Thetford: [nthetford@att.net](mailto:nthetford@att.net), or write the Association at the address below. Thanks for your help!

**Farmington Canal Rail-to-Trail Association**  
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