Watertown to Fresh Pond Trail

A proposed connection

The Watertown Bicycle Committee
Vision Statement

- To provide Watertown and area residents with ways to enjoy the natural beauty of the area and safe means of pedestrian & bicycle travel by connecting the Charles River pathways to the Alewife T Stop.

- This path, the Watertown Branch Path, would connect residents of the towns of Watertown, Cambridge, and Belmont to the network of trails connecting at the T-stop.
Background

- The Paul Dudley White Path along the Charles River, and the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway are both established and well used paths, maintained by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

- DCR is in the process of extending the set of paths which will continue the River Path out to Waltham and beyond, allowing bicyclists to ride most of the Charles River.
Map of Paul Dudley White path
Path Network

- The Metro Boston area has a number of multi-use paths, most of them on old rail beds, most heading east-west (in to/out of Boston).
- It is more difficult, and frustrating, to travel north-south, or to connect from one path to another.
- Several paths are in process/vision which could remedy this problem, including the Somerville Community Path and the Watertown Branch Trail.
Map of current & possible paths
Watertown Branch Trail: current & possible

The Alewife T stop is a multi-modal transportation hub that connects to:

- The Minuteman path leading northwest.
- The future Central Mass trail leading to the west.
- The future Watertown branch trail, which would link to the River paths thereby connecting to the Charles River, Boston and the Harbor, and out to Waltham.
Watertown Branch Trail History

- 1996: Study to link Charles River & Alewife suggests using the rail Right of Way (ROW) through Watertown
- 1998: Town of Watertown rezones unused RR property as Open Space.
- 1999: State purchases ROW from School St to Grove St. to develop a multi-use path.
- 2003: State selects VHB as Path designer.
- 2004: State gives VHB notice to proceed with design contract.
Current Watertown Branch trail

From: Grove St. to School St.
Watertown Branch: possible connections to the River Path

Charles River

Arsenal Street

Lexus

W Mall

Arsenal

How can we connect these paths?
Connections to the River: Talcott Ave photos
Watertown Branch: Connecting it all together

Goal: to connect the new section of the Watertown Branch Path with the Cambridge Path at Fresh Pond which leads to the Minuteman Path at Alewife by:

1: State purchase or easement on the RR Right Of Way (ROW).

2: Reconstruction of the rails (if required) and accommodation of the Path (divided/dual use).
“Dual Use” Trails

- Might be called “divided use”: separating train tracks and multi-use paths by fences, grade differentials or screening
- 50 such trails exist in the United States

Green Bay Trail, Illinois

The Green Bay Trail connects commuters to this train station in suburban Chicago. (Photo: Steve Emmett-Mattox)
Map of potential Path:
from Grove St. Watertown
to Fresh Pond, Cambridge
Arlington St.
Grove St. West
Grove St.
Mt. Auburn Bridge
Holworthy St.
Star Market on the right
Huron Ave. bridge
Huron Ave. to Fresh Pond
Huron Ave. to Fresh Pond
Making connections: the bike path at Fresh Pond, crossing the tracks in Cambridge
Today’s Situation

- Newlywed Foods, at end of active rail line, was receiving 1 train of 5 bulk carrier cars of flour per week.
- Guilford Industries (RR operator and property owner) has filed its intention to abandon the RR & discontinue service.
- The RR tracks are in such poor condition, trains would regularly derail at 3 mph.
- RR ROW is wide enough to accommodate dual use for infrequent freight at walking speeds.
The current condition of the tracks….
Available Options

- Rail with Trail (RWT): would include purchase or easement of a Right Of Way along the train tracks
- The State purchases the ROW for continuation of the Watertown Branch Trail.
Current Status

- The State has included funds for a dual-use feasibility study in the 2004 Transportation Bond Bill.
- Newlywed Foods supports a dual-use plan if it will provide increased rail support and liability issues are clarified.
- The Watertown Branch Trail is in design as a Multi-Use Path by the Watertown firm of VHB, Transportation Planners & Engineers.
Our thanks to the following for helping make the Watertown Branch Trail possible:

- Representative Rachel Kaprielian
- Senator Steven Tolman
- Former Senator Warren Tolman
- Representative Anne Paulsen