



**BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY**

National Heritage Corridor



**Blackstone River Bikeway Summit**  
**May 15, 2014**  
**RI DEM 295 Visitor Center**

DEM's Larry Mouradjian welcomed all to the Visitor Center, and paid great tribute to the efforts of the folks in the room as well as other organizations such as BRWC/FOB in particular who have provided stewardship and volunteerism in support of numerous DEM objectives in the Blackstone River corridor.

**Objective:**

Directors Janet Coit (RI DEM) and Mike Lewis (RI DOT) convened the Summit discussion. Director Lewis indicated that about \$22M has been spent to construct about 15 miles of bikeway path over about a 20 year period. He indicated, however, that the landscape for federal funding of bikeway projects has changed dramatically in recent years, and earmarking Federal Highway projects is no longer an option. Alternative funding sources must be identified.

Ms. Coit indicated that the objective of this meeting is to clarify remaining elements of the Blackstone River Bikeway, perhaps prioritize them, and begin to formulate a process by which funding and political support can be secured. She emphasized the need to identify funding sources; while this is certainly a recreational project, it is also and just as importantly a project which promotes tourism, economic development, and an improved quality of life. Future funding should be pulled from resources supporting all of those objectives.

**Background and Overview:**

**The Big Picture...**

Bill DeSantis, the Bikeway Coordinator for VHB, briefly described the overall status of the Bikeway in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts. The history of interdepartmental collaboration in RI has helped to advance the work in RI as compared to Massachusetts. In some parts of Providence and Pawtucket, there are sections of on-road, shared lane facility. While originally met with great trepidation, those segments are functioning well and the general population seems to have markedly less anxiety about this type of facility. The 10.5 mile segment in Cumberland, Lincoln, North Smithfield and Woonsocket.

generally travels along the Providence & Worcester RR, which is one of the more active freight rail corridors in the northeast.

In Massachusetts, terminology has been shifted. Rather than referring to a “bikeway” which can denote an atmosphere of a small roadway, Massachusetts uses the term “greenway” in order to soften the concept and convey a sense of a bike path (rather than roadway) traveling through or between neighborhoods.

In Massachusetts, Mr. DeSantis described the extensive work that began there about 1 ½ years ago. The southern portion, totaling about 4+ miles in length, runs almost entirely within a former rail line known as the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT). The Mass. DCR acquired that ROW many years ago, and the Blackstone River Greenway, as it is known in Massachusetts, is being constructed within this state-owned ROW in this segment. In a 3 mile stretch, there are 11 bridges, including 7 steel structures over roads and rivers. Most of these required significant repair and rehabilitation; others require complete construction or reconstruction. Bridge rehab work began late in 2012; additional bridge construction, as well as construction of the actual greenway path, is now gearing up and is expected to be completed late in 2016.

The “middle” stretch in Massachusetts is extremely complicated due to geography (slopes, flood plain), ROW (essentially all of the land along the river corridor is in private ownership), and some environmental remediation (due to former mills along the river).

At the northern end of the Massachusetts section, an off-road bike path runs from Millbury into Worcester, and connects with an on-road shared lane section. A mile-long stretch in downtown Worcester is being designed as a separated on-road facility, known as a “cycle track.” Funding for design and construction of that section is secured and MassDOT hopes to advertise the construction in 2015.

**Delving Deeper in RI:**  
***We’ve come so far....***

DOT Project Manager Lambri Zerva emphasized the need to stay focused. Success thus far is in part because the interdepartmental team stayed focused, and tackled small sections as they become manageable. About 2/3 of the Bikeway in RI is about built, and other sections are well into the design phase.

Throughout the project, the design team which consists of DEM, DOT and VHB has met frequently with local officials and stakeholders. This has allowed the team to work on opportunities as they arise locally, such as general consensus of the route, availability of land for the alignment, locally-desired priorities, etc.

Mr. Zerva described the status of each remaining segment. Working with Megan DiPrete, of the Blackstone Heritage Corridor, this remaining work was identified in terms of design status and anticipated funding needed to complete each segment. This information is summarized on the following pages:

**BRB – RI – Remaining Costs**  
**May 2014 – ESTIMATES are for general discussion and planning purposes**

Segment	5/2014 Status	Est. Design (\$ = 15% of est. const) Status and plan	Est. Construc \$ Status, Plan and general comment (assumes no permitting requirements require changes)	Permitting Needs and \$	ROW Needs and general info
8C – N. Smith to Woon (as far south as Cold Spring Park)	90% design Off-road facil	Expect to complete design /adv for construc 2014 -15	\$2.5 M – includes a bridge	Needs Army Corps; then <b>we'll know time/\$,</b> depending on permit requirements	Most ROW is secured; BRB runs on top of flood control embankment. Some acquisition required. (funded by DOT ROW funds)
8B2 – Woonsocket. From Cold Spring Pk to Market Square Off- road & on-road facil	In Prelim Design; moving to 30%	Design funded and programmed through 30% phase	\$2.0 M	DEM, USAC, HazMat  time/\$, depending on permit requirements	Most ROW is secured; Some small pieces needed to accommodate actual route
8B1 – Woonsocket. From Market Square to Truman / Clinton St	30% design Off road facil. Includes a “roundabout”	Design requires additional funding to go from 30 to advertising	\$2.0 M – of this, perhaps \$600k might be funded with other (non- bikeway) funds, to construct the roundabout	DEM, HazMat  time/\$, depending on permit requirements	Most ROW is secured; Some small pieces needed to accommodate actual route
8A – Woonsocket. From Truman / Clinton to Davison St / connection with existing BRB	Moving toward 90%  Off road facility	Design is funded	\$4.5 M – includes a bridge	Army Corp, HazMat  time/\$, depending on permit requirements	Most ROW is secured; BRB runs on top of flood control berm; need Army Corp and National Grid approvals.
3B – Central Falls (from Cumb. Town Hall to Branch St in Pawtucket) Shared lane followed by off-road facility	Pre-30% plans;	Needs \$to bring from pre-30% to adv.	\$5.5M – includes bridge (3m) and utility work	Revision to NEPA, HazMat, DEM	City of CF has secured most ROW. Some small pieces might be needed to accommodate actual route

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3A2 – Pawtucket. From Branch to Roosevelt / Exchange	Preliminary	General concept only; Needs full design \$	\$5.5+? Significant environmental concerns (site remediation?)	Pending route, likely HazMat, DEM, and NEPA	Needed depending on route; Alignment not committed.
3A1 – Pawtucket, From Roos / Exch to Town Landing	Preliminary. Awaiting approval of change order in order to evaluate further	Concept plans	\$1+ M	DEM?	ROW might be ok?
1A – Providence From Richmond Sq to India Point Park	Design funded	Approaching 30%	\$1.5M	CRMC, and HazMat	Several key parcels required
TOTALS		Design = 15% of est. construction costs, = \$3.6M (remember, some design is already in progress)	\$24+ M ; Does not include permitting, environmental remediation, or ROW acquisition, if necessary  (About \$2M is previously earmarked, therefore about \$22M is needed – for construction)	(included in design costs, generally speaking)	
NEED			\$22M + 3M;  NEED: secure \$25M for project, barring big ticket surprises		

## **What's Next:**

### ***How to move the remaining segments to completion***

While it is tempting to try to prioritize segments and seek opportunities to advance them individually, that can in fact have the opposite effect, and delay the overall project. Based on the structure for this project that has developed over time, including the outstanding collaboration between DOT and DEM, and including the current TIP process, local and partner participation, etc., the group is encouraged to keep an eye to the end game.

A segmented approach will put each portion of the bike path effort into its own "box" which, while protected in its isolationism, is oddly restrictive. If the goal is completion of a particular stretch, then segmentation is effective; conversely, where the goal is completion of the entire Blackstone River Bikeway, then we are best served to focus on that goal. In Rhode Island, focusing on the overall goal permits a somewhat fluid environment wherein the design and management team can respond to opportunities that unexpectedly present themselves.

***Based on the detailed, section by section analysis shown above, the overall goal is to secure \$25M for this project.*** Of course, big-ticket items such as expensive property/ROW acquisitions or extensive environmental remediation will affect that funding need, as will specific design changes that may be required by virtue of the Army Corps permitting requirements, if any.

In deference to the federal highway funding landscape described earlier by Director Lewis, the group identified a handful of critical "next steps." These include:

#### **A. Convene a Legislative meeting.**

Purpose: Subcommittee of this group (NPS, BHC, others?) to Convene key legislators in RI House and RI Senate to acquaint them with the project, relate success to a strengthened local economy as well as transportation and recreation opportunities, improved public health, and improved quality of life. Identify funding need (\$25M) to complete project

Timing: 60 Days (In light of upcoming final-push and summer break, meet in September?)

Lead: Bob Billington

#### **B. Introduce a Bond funding proposal**

Purpose: Develop/Propose language for \$50M bond funding to fund design, ROW, permitting and construction of bike path facilities in the state. (Internally, target half of that for BRB).

Timing: Immediate

Lead: Mike Cassidy

C. Identify additional federal funding options

Meet with representatives of Congressional delegation to seek funding through other (non-Federal Highway) sources.

Timing: By July 1

Lead: Blackstone Heritage Corridor

D. Develop coalition of local leaders (mayors, etc) to continue to push through political and administrative needs

Purpose: Create a political force to continue to drive state agencies and state legislators for completion of their projects

Timing: Group indicated that this should not proceed at this time.

Lead: To be addressed at next group meeting

E. Reconvene this group.

Purpose: Groundtruthing. Check status/changes. Check progress with tasks identified above. Identify need for course corrections? Identify additional and/or different tasks.

Timing: Approximately 6 months (Nov/Dec 2014).

Lead: Blackstone Heritage Corridor

Megan DiPrete will coordinate with task leaders identified above to be sure their needs are met, and will communicate any broader needs and outcomes. Additionally, she will coordinate a follow up meeting of the group in the 6-month time frame.

Again, many MANY thanks for the hard work of many people, and for the leadership we are so fortunate to have in this region and state.