



**VIRTUAL DESIGN PUBLIC HEARING**

**NOVEMBER 18, 2021**

**FOR THE PROPOSED**

**Norwottuck Rail Trail Resurfacing  
Project No. 608719  
Highway Design**

**IN THE TOWNS OF AMHERST AND BELCHERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS**

**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
HIGHWAY DIVISION**

**JONATHAN GULLIVER  
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR**

**CARRIE E. LAVALLEE, P.E.  
ACTING CHIEF ENGINEER**

**THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – HIGHWAY DIVISION**  
**NOTICE OF A PUBLIC HEARING MEETING**  
**Project File No. 608719**

A Live Virtual Design Public Hearing will be hosted on the MassDOT website below to present the design for the proposed **Norwottuck Rail Trail Resurfacing** project in **Amherst and Belchertown, MA**.

**WHEN: 7:00 PM Thursday, November 18, 2021**

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this hearing is to provide the public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed **Norwottuck Rail Trail Resurfacing** project. All views and comments submitted in response to the hearing will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

**PROPOSAL:** The proposed project consists of rehabilitating a 1.5 mile segment of the Norwottuck Rail Trail (also known as the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail). The paved surface was originally constructed in 1997. The pavement surface is cracked and deteriorating in many places and reaching the end of its planned life. There are also several root-damaged areas and edge drop-offs which pose significant safety concerns for people walking and people biking. Improvements to the Warren Wright Parking Area are also planned.

A secure right-of-way is necessary for this project. Acquisitions in fee and permanent or temporary easements may be required. The **Department of Conservation and Recreation** is responsible for acquiring all needed rights in private or public lands. MassDOT's policy concerning land acquisitions will be presented in the hearing.

Project inquiries, written statements and other exhibits regarding the proposed undertaking may be submitted to Carrie E. Lavalley, P.E., Acting Chief Engineer, via e-mail to [DOTHighwayDesign@dot.state.ma.us](mailto:DOTHighwayDesign@dot.state.ma.us) or via US Mail to Suite 6340, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116, Attention: **Highway Design**, Project File No. **608719**. Statements and exhibits intended for inclusion in the public hearing transcript must be emailed or postmarked no later than ten (10) business days after the hearing is posted to the MassDOT website listed below.

This hearing is accessible to people with disabilities. MassDOT provides reasonable accommodations and/or language assistance free of charge upon request (e.g interpreters in American Sign Language and languages other than English, live captioning, videos, assistive listening devices and alternate material formats), as available. For accommodation or language assistance, please contact MassDOT's Chief Diversity and Civil Rights Officer by phone (857-368-8580), TTD/TTY at (857) 266-0603, fax (857) 368-0602 or by email ([MassDOT.CivilRights@dot.state.ma.us](mailto:MassDOT.CivilRights@dot.state.ma.us)). Requests should be made as soon as possible prior to the meeting, and for more difficult to arrange services including sign-language, CART or language translation or interpretation, requests should be made at least ten business days before the hearing.

This Live Virtual Design Public Hearing or a cancellation announcement will be hosted on the internet at [www.mass.gov/massdot-highway-design-public-hearings](http://www.mass.gov/massdot-highway-design-public-hearings).

JONATHAN GULLIVER  
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR

CARRIE. E. LAVALLEE, P.E.  
ACTING CHIEF ENGINEER



Dear Concerned Citizen:

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is committed to building and maintaining a transportation infrastructure that is both safe and efficient for all who use our roadways, bridges, bicycle facilities and pedestrian paths, while maintaining the integrity of the environment.

As part of the design process for this project, we are conducting this public hearing to explain the proposed improvements, listen to your comments and answer any questions you may have. At the conclusion of the hearing, MassDOT will review all of your comments and, where feasible, incorporate them into the design of the project.

We recognize that road and bridge construction can create inconveniences for the public. MassDOT places a great deal of emphasis on minimizing the temporary disruptive effects of construction.

MassDOT encourages input from local communities and values your opinions. Please be assured that we will undertake no project without addressing the concerns of the community.

Sincerely,

Carrie E. Lavallee, P.E.  
Acting Chief Engineer

## **WHAT IS A PUBLIC HEARING?**

### **WHY A PUBLIC HEARING?**

To provide an assured method whereby the Commonwealth of Massachusetts can furnish to the public information concerning the State's highway construction proposals, and to afford every interested resident of the area an opportunity to be heard on any proposed project. At the same time, the hearings afford the Commonwealth an additional opportunity to receive information from local sources which would be of value to the State in making its final decisions to what design should be advanced for development.

### **WHY NOT A VOTE ON HIGHWAY PLANS?**

The hearings are not intended to be a popular referendum for the purpose of determining the nature of a proposed improvement by a majority of those present. They do not relieve the duly constituted officials of a State highway department of the necessity for making decisions in State highway matters for which they are charged with full responsibility.

### **WHAT DOES A PUBLIC HEARING ACCOMPLISH?**

It is designed to ensure the opportunity for, or the availability of, a forum to provide factual information which is pertinent to the determination of the final alternative considered by the state to best serve the public interest, and on which improvement projects are proposed to be undertaken.

It is important that the people of the area express their views in regard to the proposal being presented, so that views can be properly recorded in the minutes of the meeting. These minutes will be carefully studied and taken into consideration in the determination of the final design.

## **RIGHT OF WAY CONCERNS**

Your Municipality is responsible for securing the right of way for this project. If your property, or a portion of it, must be acquired by the Municipality for highway purposes in the interest of all people of the Commonwealth, your rights are fully protected under the law. Briefly, here are some of the answers to questions you might ask.

1. REASON FOR PROJECT

The completion of this project will serve local needs. The proposed enhancement will also be in the interest of others in the greater community, and provide for the public good.

2. WHO CONTACTS ME?

Representatives of the municipality have already contacted or will contact you. They will explain the procedures used in acquiring any necessary rights in land.

3. WHAT ABOUT DONATIONS? WHAT IS A RIGHT OF ENTRY?

Town officials will often seek donations, of parcels, where permanent rights are required. This procedure will minimize the acquisition cost for your community.

A Right of Entry is a document that is signed by the owner. It allows the Contractor to perform certain types of work on the owner's land. The work is usually minor in nature and frequently consists of loaming/seeding behind sidewalks, new driveway apron work, grading/sloping, and wetland protection, etc. The rights granted are temporary in nature.

4. WHAT IS A FAIR PRICE FOR THE ACQUIRED PARCELS?

In the event that donations are not considered, or completed, every effort will be made to ensure that an equitable value is awarded. Municipal and/or outside appraisers will complete an appraisal. Consideration is given to the type of rights needed, whether in fee, permanent or temporary easements. The appraisal will be the basis for arriving at a fair price (for damages that result).

5. MUST I ACCEPT THE MUNICIPALITY OFFER?

No, if the owner feels that the offer is not fair the owner may petition the courts. This action does not stop or delay the acquisition. The action must occur within 3 years. The owner(s) may be paid pro tanto (for the time being). The pro tanto payment will not prejudice the court's final decision.





U:\179410779\design\checklists\EEC\GIS\02 aerial locus.mxd Date: 8/13/2020

Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, ONESatbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community



Map Source: Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and ArcGIS Online.

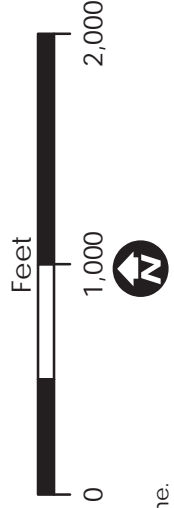


Figure 2 - Aerial Locus

Norwottuck Rail Trail  
Bleichertown, Amherst, Massachusetts  
MassDOT Project No. 608719

- Existing 8-Foot Wide Trail
- Existing 12-Foot Wide Trail

# **MCRT – Norwottuck Rail Trail**

## **Project in Amherst & Belchertown**

### **PROJECT LOCATION**

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation – Highway Division (MassDOT) in coordination with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is proposing to resurface and rehabilitate a section of existing shared-use path in Amherst and Belchertown, MA. The route follows the former railroad right-of-way from Station Road in Amherst southeast to Warren Wright Road in Belchertown. The total project length is approximately 1.5 miles comprised of off-road trail.

### **PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS**

This project seeks to improve the safety of bicycle and pedestrian movements by rehabilitating the existing trail surface to eliminate pavement cracking, root damage and improve accessibility along this section of the shared-use path. In recent years, DCR and MassDOT have worked together to improve various sections of the MCRT. Other improvements include widening the existing 8-ft section to a 10-ft width, repairing and cleaning existing culverts, seeding the shoulders along each edge of the trail, and formalizing the parking and trailhead area at Warren Wright Road.

### **RIGHT OF WAY IMPACTS**

The existing path follows the former railroad right of way currently under municipal ownership with maintenance provided by the DCR. MassDOT's policy regarding land acquisitions will be discussed at the meeting.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

The proposed project has been designed to avoid and minimize impacts to adjacent resource areas. A Notice of Intent application will be filed with the Amherst Conservation Commission for the proposed work occurring within wetland resource areas.

### **MAINTENANCE OF TRAFFIC DURING CONSTRUCTION**

It is the intent of this project that all cross streets remain open to traffic at all times during construction. However, this section of trail will need to be closed during construction activities.

### **PROJECT COST**

The project construction cost is estimated to be approximately \$1.5 million and will be funded using a combination of State and Federal funds.

### **PROJECT SCHEDULE**

This project has been programmed in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for Federal Fiscal Year 2022. The design plans displayed at this meeting are at the 25% Design Stage of completion (Preliminary Design Stage). Comments made at this public meeting will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Q: Will my commute via motor vehicle on area roadways be impacted?

A: No – cross streets are intended to remain open during construction.

Q: Will my trip on the Norwottuck be impacted?

A: We do anticipate that the trail itself will need to be closed during paving operations. Any trail closures will be posted in advance.

Q: Who will own this – DCR, MassDOT, or the Towns?

A: Portions of the trail are currently owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and portions are owned by the Town of Amherst. It is intended that the portions of trail under Town of Amherst ownership will be either transferred to DCR, or the DCR and Town will enter into a long-term maintenance agreement. MassDOT is administering the design and construction oversight.

Q: Will my private property be impacted?

A: No impacts to private property are proposed at this time.

Q: The hearing notice says comments must be received within ten days of the hearing – if I have a comment after ten days, does that mean you won't look at it?

A: All comments will be reviewed at all stages of design – the ten day time limit is the cutoff for comments to be included in the formal meeting transcript.



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
HIGHWAY DIVISION

FEDERAL AID PROJECT

Amherst-Belchertown, MA  
Norwottuck Rail Trail Resurfacing  
Project File No. 608719

This sheet is provided for your comments. Your input is solicited and appreciated. You may e-mail comments directly to [DOTHighwayDesign@dot.state.ma.us](mailto:DOTHighwayDesign@dot.state.ma.us) or you may mail this sheet with any additional comments to:

Carrie E. Lavalley, P.E., Acting Chief Engineer  
MassDOT – Highway Division  
10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116-3973  
Attn: Highway Design

Statements and exhibits intended for inclusion in the public hearing transcript must be emailed or postmarked no later than ten (10) business days after the hearing.

**PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT LEGIBLY.**

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Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Carrie E. Lavallee, P.E.  
Acting Chief Engineer  
MassDOT – Highway Division  
10 Park Plaza  
Boston, MA 02116-3973

RE: Virtual Public Hearing  
Norwottuck Rail Trail Resurfacing  
**AMHERST-BELCHERTOWN**  
Project File No. 608719  
Attn: Highway Design

