

Metropolitan Boston



Greater Boston's historic sites, classic architecture and distinctive natural features such as the Boston Harbor Islands present exciting challenges and opportunities for creating greenways and trails. Three important rivers — the Charles, the Mystic, and the Neponset — run through the metropolitan area and converge in Boston Harbor. The Boston Common, Walden Pond State Reservation, the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway, Blue Hills State Reservation and the Charles River Greenway are just a few of the public open spaces providing opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors.



A trailside business in Bedford on the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway. (Danny O'Brien)

Because much of the landscape is already developed advocates recognize the critical need to secure a “green infrastructure” that connects remaining open space, protects natural resources, and accommodates recreation and non-motorized transportation. In addition, increased development pressures and skyrocketing land values severely limit opportunities for assembling new greenway corridors. As a result, priorities in this region focus on completing and connecting trail and greenway initiatives currently underway. In many cases, inactive rail corridors throughout the region present ready-made opportunities for linking communities, providing accessible trails and creating alternative transportation routes. Specific priority actions include the following:

Create a network of bike paths and trails throughout the region.

Priority corridors identified for this region include portions of the 25-mile Wayside Trail along the Central Massachusetts rail line and the Bike to the Sea Trail that travels nine miles from Everett to Lynn. Both proposed trails are key segments of the East Coast Greenway. Another priority is the Tri-Community Bikeway connecting Woburn, Winchester and Stoneham. The

MBTA, which currently owns many of the corridors targeted for protection, has recently adopted a policy of transferring surplus corridors at no cost to municipalities for trail use.

Implementing this policy and developing these and other multi-use trails will take continued cooperation among communities, trail groups, and state and federal agencies.

Create greenways along critical river corridors for resource protection, recreation, and education.

Mother Brook, and the Charles, Neponset and Mystic rivers are priorities for protection in this region. Partners are working to create greenways along these rivers to conserve riparian resources, raise public awareness, and gain better public access for recreation and environmental education. Expanding protection of the Sudbury and Concord rivers around the Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is also a priority.



The Charles River Reservation. There are many pockets of natural beauty in the heavily populated area of Boston, Cambridge and the surrounding communities. (Dan Driscoll)



Hikers on the Warner Trail. Long distance trails provide opportunities for day hikers as well as those in for the long haul. (Jim Goyea)

Complete the Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway.

In addition to closing the remaining gaps along this priority trail, efforts also are focusing on securing a wider greenway corridor through this heavily developed landscape.

Permanently protect the Warner Trail and link it to the Blue Hills Reservation.

The Blue Hills Reservation, over 7,000 acres of protected land in Milton, Quincy and surrounding towns, features an extensive trail network, and is easily accessible from Boston and many other metropolitan area communities. Expanding the Warner Trail and linking it with the reservation will create an ideal northern terminus for this important long distance trail and further expand public recreation opportunities.

Support efforts to create the Boston Harborwalk and the East Boston Greenway.

The Boston Harborwalk provides pedestrian access to the waterfront and highlights historic sites in the port of Boston. The East Boston Greenway, a proposed three-mile linear park

from Piers Park in Boston Harbor to Belle Isle Marsh in East Boston, will create opportunities for walking, bicycling, and exploring many parks, natural areas and coastal environments along the way. Both efforts enjoy broad local support and have played a key role in community building. Continued support and funding are needed to secure additional lands and to create a coordinated system of bike and pedestrian opportunities.

Workshop participants recognized the high costs associated with completing many priority greenway and trail projects in this region. Land costs for most of these projects will be formidable, and the conversion of abandoned rail lines into operable rail trails will require significant investments for design and construction.

It will be essential to identify new funding sources and to work closely with the Massachusetts Highway Department and other state agencies to gain better access to existing funds, such as TEA-21 monies, federal dollars available for transportation-related greenway and trail projects. Experience also demonstrates that none of these projects will reach fruition without a significant level of community “investment” of time and good will. With this in mind, advocates are working to develop public education and awareness efforts to spread the good word about greenways and their benefits to urban and suburban living.



Two generations stroll along the Charles River. (Dan Driscoll)



Bike to the Sea Trail in Malden, part of the East Coast Greenway. (Karen M. Votava)

East Coast Greenway — A trail connecting cities

Dubbed the “urban alternative” to the Appalachian Trail, the East Coast Greenway (ECG) is taking shape as the nation's first long-distance, city to city multi-use trail spanning 2,600 miles from Key West, Florida, to Calais, Maine.

In Massachusetts, the proposed route extends north from Rhode Island along the proposed Blackstone River Bikeway, then east to Boston along the proposed Mass Central Rail Trail and the Charles River Bikepath, and north to the New Hampshire border along the proposed Bike to the Sea and Border-to-Boston trails. Today, only about one-third of the 143 miles envisioned for the ECG in Massachusetts is the focus of active designation, design or construction activities.

Like most greenways, the ECG is being assembled segment by segment. The East Coast Greenway Alliance, the multi-state non-profit organization that coordinates trail efforts in the participating states, is working with municipalities and trail groups to designate existing trails within the route and to develop connecting trails to close the gaps.

Stepping up efforts to complete the ECG and the priority trails it connects in Massachusetts will require even more grassroots support and cooperation among communities, trail groups and state agencies. Of particular importance will be a coordinated effort with the MBTA to protect several of the targeted corridors, including the Wayside Trail, a critical link in both the ECG and the Mass Central Rail Trail.