

HNTB Corporation
Engineers Architects Planners

31 St. James Avenue, Suite 300
Boston, MA 02116

Telephone (617) 542-6900
Facsimile (617) 428-6905
www.hntb.com

Date
12/18/20

To
Peter Sutton, Bicycle and
Pedestrian Program Coordinator,
MassDOT



From
Leah Epstein, Public Involvement,
HNTB

PROJECT
CORRESPONDENCE

Subject
MCRT PIMA Comment Summary

Comments collected from 10/27/20 – 12/08/20:

#	Comment	Name	Town	Date	Request a response?	Draft Response
1	Our family frequently uses and enjoys the rail trail in its existing locations, both as bicyclists and pedestrians. We are very much in favor of extending it.	Duane Jenness	Worcester	10/27/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
2	The MCRT will have positive impacts on all of the communities it travels through. Positive impacts include opportunities for exercise, community building, and tourism. Having recently moved here from the midwest, I've been disappointed at the lack of rail trails, and look forward to the completion of the MCRT!	Zach Sawyer	Waltham	10/27/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.

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	amongst motorists in traffic and so, the completion of the MCRT would be a huge benefit for not only cyclists but for other users as well.					
75	A western-eastern mass path would be incredible!! Please consider doing it.	Alexander Psilakis	Franklin	12/1/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
76	<p>MassDOT should make the MCRT its highest priority rail trail and complete it ASAP for the benefit of the entire Commonwealth. There are many reasons to complete the unbuilt pieces of the MCRT between Belchertown and Rutland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of public transport combined with significant population that cannot drive or does not own cars. - State highways (181, 32, 9) on which it is dangerous to ride bicycles or walk. - Higher than average levels of obesity among population when compared to state as a whole. - Beautiful region of Massachusetts which will attract bicycle riders and hikers to enjoy our Quabbin countryside and Quaboag Valley. - Generate economic growth around tourism. - Incentivize relocation of families and younger people from overpriced eastern Massachusetts to small towns west of Worcester. <p>In terms of the specific route options described in the MCRT Feasibility Study, I want to emphasize the need to segregate the rail trail as much as possible from automobile</p>	Ben Hood	Palmer	12/1/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.

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	<p>traffic. In the Belchertown, Bondsville, and Ware sections of Segment 2, this means utilizing the currently unused sections of the rail ROW with existing or re-built bridges crossing the streets, rivers, and state highways. Trail connections along state routes 181 and 32 should be avoided, or, if absolutely unavoidable, should be separated and greatly distanced from the roadways; otherwise these areas will discourage use by hikers and walkers, and be, at best, unpopular with bicyclists.</p>					
77	<p>I think this project would be a huge benefit to the communities it would run through and the surrounding ones. Having safe, fun and family friendly outdoor locations is very much needed in all of these areas.</p>	Ashley Reardon	Three Rivers	12/1/20	No	<p>Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.</p>
78	<p>I live in Palmer. Two years ago, I put a map of the MCRT on my fridge, and since then I've walked all but a few of the smallest official and unofficial sections west of Route 495. I can hardly believe that I might be able to start my hike in my own town, without getting in my car. Obviously, I support any improvements to the trail. In particular, I would advocate that the trail NOT run alongside our local highways, and if it does, to create as much distance from the roads as possible, even if this requires splitting the bike and pedestrian routes. I would also highly recommend that at-grade highway crossings be avoided, as people routinely</p>	Anne Miller	Palmer	12/1/20	No	<p>Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.</p>

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	drive much faster on rural roads than posted speed limits. This is true virtually everywhere in rural America. Thank you.					
79	I'm a homeowner in Northampton, MA, and want to state my overwhelming and energetic support of forming a Northampton to Boston rail trail. We have a great local and regional network of rail trails here and having a long-distance trail to Boston would be a fantastic option for travel (Yes! I've biked from Northampton to Foxboro, Somerville and Taunton, and a bike path would be revolutionary), tourism and exercise access for people across the state. This effort is a state-wide public good that should be implemented as soon as possible.	Adam Trott	Northampton	12/1/20	Yes	Thank you for your comment. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
80	The 495/MetroWest Partnership is a non-profit organization serving thirty-five communities, which are home to over 600,000 residents and approximately 1 in 10 jobs in the Commonwealth. The Partnership seeks to address regional needs through public-private collaboration by working to enhance economic vitality, improve quality of life, and sustain natural resources. The Partnership focuses on helping to alleviate regional constraints and limitations, and conducts numerous initiatives on transportation, workforce housing, and economic development, among other regional concerns. The	Jeremy Thompson	Westborough	12/1/20	Yes	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.

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	<p>495/MetroWest Partnership commends the MassTrails team for their feasibility study of the 68.5 mile mid-state section of the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) between Belchertown and Hudson. The Partnership has long supported efforts to integrate the Commonwealth’s greenways and rail trails into a cohesive, interconnected network, which will unquestionably improve statewide mobility, reduce GHG emissions and bridge social equity gaps. We recognize rail trail infrastructure as a critical and cost-effective component to downtown revitalization and long-term regional economic development strategy; particularly when trails are designed to link commercial centers, mixed-use districts, public facilities, existing public transportation stations, and recreational areas. A prime example of such, is the Assabet River Rail Trail which connects downtown Hudson and Marlborough. The 495/MetroWest Partnership continues to advocate for funding to various segments of the MCRT – Wayside corridor through the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization’s rolling Transportation Improvement Program. The Partnership has also used its role on the Central MA Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Advisory Committee to advocate for a host of rail trail expansion and complete</p>					

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	streets projects. As it pertains to the Feasibility Study, the Partnership is particularly hopeful that Segment 3J: Five Corners Intersection, Clinton to I-495, Berlin will be constructed along State Route 62 to connect with a future segment of MCRT – Wayside in Hudson. The Feasibility Study lays the groundwork for a truly transformative plan; we look forward to hearing feedback from the public engagement process.					
81	Please build this, more projects like this are a great benefit to people near them providing recreation. People that do use bicycles as a means of transportation will have a safer way to travel	Arthur Gauthier	Belchertown	12/1/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
82	I love using the MCRT closer to Boston and am thrilled at the prospect of it connecting all the way to the Pioneer Valley! It would be a great opportunity for me and my family to spend more time in central Mass.	Josh Rosmarin	Watertown	12/2/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
83	I am so excited about this project! We have such beautiful land in western Massachusetts but few areas to enjoy it in. This would not only provide a place for people to visit but it would also pull desperately needed tourists to the area.	Keri Pitcher	Wales	12/2/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
84	I would love to see this project move forward, and hopefully, one day connect to the Grand Trunk abandoned railbed in Brimfield. This would be a tremendous asset to the community as we have seen	Kate Garvey	Three Rivers	12/2/20	Yes	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project. Members of the public are encouraged to advocate for

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	with the Norwottuck Rail Trail! How can the public help this project move forward?					the advancement of the trail in their communities through scheduled public meetings and engagement with local officials.
85	Really excited for this project but in particular segment 3H and the Clinton tunnel. No real issues with some of the other segments. Given the traffic density in the area I would prefer the trail be built as soon as possible even if that means some of the trail has to be shared with on street segments (i.e. section 1B). If a majority of this trail is completed, I would definitely use it for recreational riding from Waltham to Amherst and back.	Adam Crossman	Waltham	12/2/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
86	I'm so excited to see this rail trail work in discussion! I wish we had more and longer ones here in MA. Though I live in Cambridge, I would definitely drive to do the rail trail if it were worth my time. I regularly ride 50 miles on the road but would love to do this through via a rail trail forest. My request is that the longest path is built as soon as possible!! I have a toddler now, and I hope he will be able to ride this trail. Thanks!!	Adriane Musgrave	Cambridge	12/2/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
87	Having a complete trail from Amherst to Boston would be absolutely fantastic! I bicycle all over the US and love riding on rail trails. In 2019 I biked from San Francisco to Boston and rode several hundred miles of trails on my 5000-mile route. We need many more beautiful trails	Timothy Oey	Sunnyvale, CA	12/2/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.

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	and more people biking and walking instead of driving motor vehicles. Thanks!					
88	Do it!! This would be amazing. One of my favorite parts about Mass is the rail trail system. The benefits are huge to public health and local economies as well as property value. I hope the state progresses non car-centric infrastructure here and elsewhere ASAP	Kellan Simpson	Boston	12/2/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.
89	I write this email to express my personal viewpoint on one segment of the route for the MCRT. I would like to voice my support for a route that utilizes the rail bed on the east side of Rauscher Farm through the abandoned rail tunnel then across Rte 62 and the millpond below the dam via a reconstructed pedestrian bridge to connect with the former rail corridor on the north side of the Nashua River. Given that the Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust is pursuing acquisition of the rail corridor including the tunnel on the south side of Rte 62 with funds from a MassTrails grant and that pedestrian use is already allowed on the north dike of the Wachusett Reservoir, it seems like the decision to allow the shared use path along this route would make sense from a design and approval process. While the cost of a new bridge over the millpond would be expensive and the engineering would have its own set of issues, they would not be insurmountable, and it would be a tremendous draw for users of the	Dick O'Brien	Leominster	11/24/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project.

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	<p>trail. Additionally, as many of us who walk the existing gravel path on the dike can attest, the views here are spectacular. I also think that the engineering issue of attempting to go over the top of the dam or to go down to the millpond and back up would be much more challenging and complex than the bridge alternative.</p> <p>I am a strong supporter of the State's goal of making more connections to our system of shared use paths. I would love to see it be an alternative to our state highway system and connected to our neighboring states. That may someday come to pass. This segment of the MCRT could be a spectacular section that would attract local users, other state resident users, and tourists to our region in Central Massachusetts. In this instance, I would look to choose the option that makes the greatest impact to the users and the communities involved. I believe the bridge route is that option.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration and thank you for all the effort you have put into this project and other bicycle and pedestrian projects across our state.</p>					
90	The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) is providing comments on the Feasibility Study of the 68.5 mile mid-state section of the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) as presented by MassDOT, the	PVPC	Springfield	11/18/20	No	Thank you for your comments. On behalf of MassDOT, the MassTrails Team appreciates your input and support for this project and looks

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	<p>Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR), and Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB) on Wednesday, November 18th, 2020. PVPC is only providing comments on the sections in Belchertown, Palmer and Ware (Segment 1 and 2). It is our understanding that the study assesses the condition of the corridor, intersecting trails, ownership, and alternate routes at constrained sections. All recommendations are preliminary.</p> <p>General comments:</p> <p>1. The report does not define the types of use anticipated along the trail, however the alignments presented provide some concepts for use. Along the 68.5 miles the character of the trail varies significantly from central business district to miles of vast open space. In addition to people walking and biking the trail may be an appealing place for equestrians, snowmobiles, and other motorized recreation. It may be helpful to define the “user” for each segment as alignment traverse’s rural countryside or detours on public roads and through town centers.</p> <p>2. This rail trail will provide access to many schools, residential, employment, and recreation areas. The recommendations for trail alignment and future design should address the need to make these important connections while continuing to provide safe off-road access to destination and proper</p>					<p>forward to partnering with PVPC on next steps. These specific comments and suggestions require further investigation to assess how they would be considered for future development as the feasibility study moves into the project development phase.</p>

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	<p>wayfinding should be considered. Several “on-road” _alignments in Ware should be reconsidered and alternative considered as referenced in the Separated Bike Lane Design Guide.</p> <p>3. Parking should be a primary consideration in selecting a preferred trail alignment. Most users will drive a car to access the trail. Parking along the shoulders of streets that intersect the right-of-way is not a viable option. There is however on-street parking in downtown Ware, and in the center of Belchertown and Bondsville. There may be existing public and private lots near and adjacent to the right-of-way that may be willing to share their parking facilities on weekends. The Lowes/Walmart parking lot in Ware is one example.</p> <p>4. The scope of work for the feasibility study does not address costs for policing and maintenance. Communities should be made aware of these costs from similar locally managed trails. The life cycle cost for the trail should also be a consideration if replacement/re-construction is applicable. There are many models for trail stewardship. “Friends Groups” _and trail organizations that can contribute significantly toward maintenance and fundraising and these groups should be actively engaged in the decision-making process moving forward.</p> <p>5. During the presentation, MassDOT acknowledged that the design and</p>					

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	<p>construction costs are anticipated to be state funds or a combination of state and federal funds with a potential local match. As project advances through the planning and design stages it would be helpful to have a clearer picture of these funding commitments within the constraints of available TIP/CIP resources.</p> <p>6. During the November 18th presentation MassDOT mentioned that the “next step” _would be working with the individual communities. Including respective RPA’s in project would also be beneficial to streamline future efforts to align projects on the TIP and meet deadlines. development may streamline future efforts to align projects on the TIP and meeting deadlines.</p> <p>7. The study referenced potential easements and/or lease agreements needed from the railroad. Railroad acquisitions require patience, persistence, and flexibility in the design (without compromising on key elements of the shared use path, such as safety). Will the community be negotiating with the railroad or will MassDOT/ EEA be heading up right-of-way negotiations and legal agreements?</p> <p>8. Will the local community be managing the design process and the work of the engineer/designer or will MassDOT/EEA be the lead? If local communities take the lead</p>					

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	<p>it is important that they understand contractual obligations for work-order changes and final construction costs.</p> <p>9. Does MassDOT/EEA provide communities with a standard specification for “soft surface” trails? It has been our experience that natural surface trails have maintenance costs and if not managed can erode into adjacent wetlands. A “standard detail” specification would be helpful to communities prefer a crushed aggregates and other natural surface trail.</p> <p>10. Does the study provide projections for the number of trail users for each section of the Mass Central Rail Trail? There is count data for similar trails and this information would be useful when making design decision for at-grade crossings, parking capacity, and the selection of trail surface materials.</p> <p>11. A major advantage of an off-road trail is that it provides a place for users to travel that is separate from motor vehicles. Trail users share road space with motor vehicles only at the road crossings. On the Central Mass. right-of-way, bridges and tunnels further reduce interaction between trail users and motor vehicles. It is essential that the at-grade intersections be designed as safely as possible, keeping in mind the need to minimize the impact on roadway traffic flow.</p>					

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	<p>12. Projects programed by the Pioneer Valley MPO are evaluated bases on Environmental Justice to ensure that low-income residents and communities of color have meaningful participation in decision making processes, are not disproportionately affected by potential negative impacts, and benefit fairly from projects and programs. Federal agencies are directed to address EJ by Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. Has the influence of EJ populations been included in the Mass Central Feasibility Study?</p> <p>Segment 1A: Map PDF link Location: Norwottuck Rail Trail, Northampton to Warren Wright Road, Belchertown Proposed Changes: • The recommendation for this existing, established section of MCRT is to utilize the ongoing maintenance plan and to install standard signing and marking for road crossings and trail identification as for other sections of the MCRT.</p> <p><i>Comment: Consideration should be given to bicyclists accessing the along Warren Wright Road where the New England Central Railroad tracks cross the pavement at a diagonal. Diagonal tracks present a serious hazard for road bikes.</i></p>					

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	<p><i>This section of the Norwottuck Rail Trail is currently listed on the TIP for resurfacing. To receive federal aid, projects need to be programmed and meet all requirements of federal aid projects. Programming is the annual process of compiling projects into regional and statewide plans for construction funding.</i></p> <p><i>At the regional level, the MPO prioritizes projects into its transportation improvement program (TIP). MassDOT compiles regional TIPs and statewide funding programs into its State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), making them eligible for federal aid. Projects can be programmed for construction as early as the preliminary design phase. Early coordination with the MPO and MassDOT District Office clarifies project evaluation and scoring criteria. Once the project is programmed, continued advocacy at MPO meetings is needed to advance the project.</i></p> <p>Segment 1B: Map PDF Link</p> <p>Location: Warren Wright Road, Belchertown to Federal Street, Belchertown</p> <p>Proposed Changes: • The lengthy areas in diverse private ownership dictate that an alternate route will likely be necessary for this section. Co-locating a rail-with-trail within the New England Central RR Right-of-way is not an option due to active RR traffic and narrow cross sections. A possible alternate route is a rail-to-trail along the</p>					

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	<p>former MCRR corridor east from Warren Wright Road, and then negotiating access through to Goodell Street. The possible alternative would follow Goodell Street and then Federal Street to the southeast before rejoining the MCRR corridor south of Arcadia Lake.</p> <p><i>Comment: The right-of-way challenges on this important section are well documented. The negotiation of right-of-way lease and easements from private landowners can be a challenging task for municipalities. MassDOT and DCR have extensive experience in these negotiations and contractual arrangements. Moving forward will this expertise be made available to assist communities in securing needed right-of-way for this important project?</i></p> <p>Segment 1C: Map PDF Link</p> <p>Location: Federal Street, Belchertown to State Street, Belchertown Proposed Changes: • A potential route is to create a rail-to-trail along this entire length, negotiating access through the few private parcels. A rail-with-trail would need to be created near the State Street bridge, adjacent to the active NECR, and land would need to be purchased from NECR or an easement established. Existing unpaved segments of footpaths would be formalized, and at-grade road crossings clearly signed and marked, considering sight distance difficulties on some of the smaller roads. At Federal Street,</p>					

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	<p>a grade crossing may need to be established, but this depends on the manner of MCRT connection further north.</p> <p><i>Comment: The Town of Belchertown is creating a network of trails in and around Lake Wallace, Foley Field and Carriage Grove. The Mass Central Rail Trail should complement to this effort and enhance the planned trail system. Assistance from MassDOT with NECR easements is critical. The Pioneer Valley region has numerous "rail with trail" projects (as proposed) that have proven safe and effective.</i></p> <p>Segment 1D: Map PDF Link Location: State Street, Belchertown to Franklin Street (State Route 181), Belchertown Proposed Changes: • The potential option is to negotiate access to or purchase of land from NECR south of State Street and construction of a rail-with-trail path south to where the two rail corridors diverge. Beyond this point, the publicly owned corridor can be formally designed as a rail-to-trail, including road crossings with appropriate markings and signage, and trail identification signage.</p> <p><i>Comment: While the significant parcels have been secured for public use by the Belchertown Land Trust, negotiation with the NECR (or any railroad) can be problematic for municipalities and assistance from MassDOT and DCR is warranted.</i></p>					

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	<p><i>The at-grade crossing at North Washington Street has poor sight lines. Trail users also need adequate warning of an upcoming intersection.</i></p> <p><i>The at-grade crossing of the Segment 1D at Route 181 (Franklin Street) is of concern. This State numbered route has a posted speed of 45 mph (higher observed speeds) and an extensive shoulder. The paved width at the location of the Route 181 crossing is 49 feet. The width combined with the trail's angle of crossing create to potential conflicts. At this time Is MassDOT/DCR considering a grade separated crossing for this location?</i></p> <p>Segment 2A: Map PDF Link Location: Swift River to Summer Street Proposed Changes: • Rail-to-Trail along the former MCRR (now MCER) right-of-way</p> <p><i>Comment: A significant railroad bridge structure is no longer standing at this location on the Swift River and a grade differential exists creating steep slopes. Many of the footings for the bridge are still in place. The only alternative proposed is an on-road route. If easements could be negotiated, a replacement bridge over the Swift River would offer spectacular views of the streambed and avoid higher speed vehicular traffic on Route 181 (Franklin Street).</i></p> <p>Segment 2B: Map PDF Link</p>					

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	<p>Location: Summer Street, Palmer to State Route 32 at MCER, Ware Proposed Changes: • Connection along Summer Street and River Street to State Route 32.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side path along State Route 32 from River Street to intersection with inactive MCRR corridor. <p><i>Comment: An abandoned Springfield Street Railway right-of-way exists parallel to the Mass Central and State Route 32 ending at Forrest Lake in Palmer. The corridor is identified on the MassDOT Rail Inventory (ID # 702). This streetcar corridor to Forest Lake may provide an opportunity for a “rail with trail” and an alternative to the proposed heavily traveled section of Ware Street (Route 32).</i></p> <p>Segment 2C: Map PDF Link</p> <p>Location: State Route 32 at MCER to Gibbs Crossing Shopping Center, Ware Rail-to-trail along former MCRR corridor to Gibbs Crossing Shopping Center property.</p> <p>Proposed Changes: • Ramp up from State Route 32 to Former MCRR corridor grade.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rail-to-trail along former MCRR corridor. • Reconstruct bridge crossing of the Ware River. • Rail-to-trail along former MCRR corridor to Gibbs Crossing Shopping Center property. <p><i>Comment: The reconstruction of the bridge crossing of the Ware River is justified and</i></p>					

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	<p><i>provides several alternatives for safe connections.</i></p> <p>Segment 2D: Map PDF Link Location: Gibbs Crossing Shopping Center, Ware to Ware River east of Robbins Road, Ware Proposed Changes: • Rail-to-trail from Ware River to Gibbs Crossing Shopping Center parking lot. Pedestrian access through to the retail store parking lots should be a consideration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a separate bike/ped path through the shopping center parking lot to reconnect the corridor. • Upgrade signs and markings at roadway grade crossings. <p><i>Comment: There is property to the south and east of Gibbs Crossing Shopping Center (adjacent to the Ware River) that would provide an alternative alignment, avoiding the Walmart/Lowes parking lot driveway entrance and providing scenic views of the river. When the property owner is approached for an easement (from the bridge) this alternative river alignment to the back of Gibbs Crossing Shopping Center (and reconnecting with the existing Ware River Rail Trail) may be an appealing option.</i></p> <p>Segment 2E: Map PDF Link Location: Ware River East of Robbins Road, Ware to North End of Ware River Reservoir, Ware Proposed Changes: • A new shared use path from existing path on Robbins Road to</p>					

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	<p>the Ware River, construct a new bicycle/pedestrian bridge over the River opposite Laurel Drive then along an on-road bikeway and sidewalks through downtown Ware to Grenville Park. Comment: <i>Designer should consider a sidepath as an option to an on-road bikeway. Many trail users do not feel comfortable riding on-road with mixed traffic.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-street connection via Robbins Road, West Street (State Route 32) and other surface streets with the goal of linking to Grenville Park. [This is the option included in the alternatives matrix.]. <p>Comment: <i>There are clear recommendations for a replacement bridge at Laurel Drive and connections through Grenville park (both warranted) however the other proposed changes described for Segment 2E do not provide sufficient detail. Segment 2E is one of the most significant segments of the Mass Central and further study is warranted.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared use path through Grenville Park and along an existing trail through a privately-owned parcel adjacent to Ware River Reservoir to reconnect to MCRR corridor. <p>Comment: <i>As mentioned previously, the negotiation of right-of-way lease and easements from private landowners can be a challenging task for municipalities. MassDOT and DCR have extensive</i></p>					

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	<p><i>experience in these negotiations and contractual arrangements. Moving forward it would be helpful if this expertise were made available to assist communities in securing needed right-of-way for this important project.</i></p> <p>Segment 2F: Map PDF Link Location: Ware River Reservoir, Ware to Gilbertville, Hardwick (Map Pages 11-15) Proposed Changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • _Rail-to-trail from the Ware River Reservoir to the southern end of the MCRT as constructed and managed by East Quabbin Land Trust. • _Rail-to-trail from Church Street north to a point just south of the Ware-Hardwick Covered Bridge. • _Ramp up to the roadway grade of Old Gilbertville Road and continue on-road facility to the bridge. • On-road connection via Spring Street from the covered bridge to North Street <p><i>Comment: The extension of the EQLT trail north from Church Street to Hardwick will be a valuable addition to the bikeway network. PVPC has previously worked with Ware, Hardwick and MassDOT to restore the covered bridge and the bridge is a popular attraction for visitors.</i></p>					
91	We remain in awe of the progress which Wachusett Greenways has exemplified over the years, and merely cheer their team	Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition	Fitchburg	11/25/20	Yes	Thank you for your input. These specific comments and suggestions require further investigation to assess how they would be considered for future development as the feasibility study moves into the project development phase.

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	onward! Their vision and hard work are evident and very much appreciated.					
	<p>MRTC GENERAL COMMENTS: There was discussion of the “Off-Corridor Northern Spur”. Sterling is one of the member communities in the MRPC region. Brian Cline was the chairperson for the Open Space Committee during the 2010 cycle, during which there was much investment in consideration of the trails and the MCRT. Wachusett Greenways was also involved. In general, Sterling was supportive of WG efforts to complete the spur and hopes to complete the spur northward towards and eventually connecting with Leominster.</p> <p>There has, however, not been a time when Sterling did not recognize the need to also push the MCRT Eastward towards Clinton. Until now, the Eastward push has not been a priority either for Sterling or Wachusett Greenways. In context with this Feasibility Study, there is a renewed focus on completing the MCRT Eastward. Sterling has long been a mecca for bicyclists. At times, the USA Olympic bicycling team has trained in the area, since the gently rolling hills and rural character of the town are conducive to riding and muscle strengthening exercise. There is hope for additional shared-use off-road paved trail.</p>					

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	The Northern Spur is seen as a main connector for the region’s trail system.					
	<p>“As suggested by Wachusett Greenways” Wachusett Greenways has long been held in esteem for their work on trails accessible to the Sterling Community in the region. But the Town of Sterling has reasserted its authority over trail planning and development through its Open Space Planning and Implementation process, in conjunction with MassGIS staff, and with the MRPC trails coalition. We feel we’re in the best position to satisfactorily resolve controversy and complete the MCRT through Segment 3F. Richard Kerver, Brian Cline, Dick O’Brien and the Sterling Open Space Committee have met several times to discuss how to build out the MCRT in Segment 3F. Richard Kerver has provided his response in a document titled ResponseKerver.pdf. That document outlines the effort in 2002 in a coalition pulled together by him, which involved everyone committed to the MCRT build out at that time. In the interim years, the MRTC was formed, and has since been the context for continued dialog and planning.</p>					
	<p>“The top of the dam is not presently open for public access.” This is known, so does not add any information for consideration. As a “feasibility study”, additional information of use would ascertain and elaborate on the reasons why, and the process that would be</p>					

#	Comment	Name	Town	Date	Request a response?	Draft Response
	<p>required to change that. Dams throughout the world are open for transit, whether vehicular or pedestrian only. This dam at one time was open. We believe it was closed in 2001 as a safety precaution, for the dam. This state of affairs can and should change. “Possible Options” Over the course of the last twenty years, there has been much discussion of various options for passage of the MCRT over the Nashua River (and/or dam), in the context of the Clinton Open Space planning process, with the Clinton Board of Selectman and the Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust (CGCT), and at various Golden Spike conferences. In particular, the CGCT has convened trail enthusiasts in the region, and raised funds to acquire the historic rail bed from Pan Am Inc. As of the 2020 MassTrails grant cycle, CGCT has been awarded the necessary funds to complete the acquisition, which may happen as soon as December. This includes the historic tunnel.</p> <p>This means that the next several years are critical for resolving the “possible options” to the one “best option.”</p> <p>“Formalize the service road on the eastern flank.” No, please don’t. The service road is currently the default option and in use. But there is little support for formalizing the option, which would preclude other options.</p> <p>“The grade of the service road will need to be verified to see if it meets ADA</p>					

#	Comment	Name	Town	Date	Request a response?	Draft Response
	<p>standards.” The region consists of hills and the MCRT crosses varying terrain. Some sections of the MCRT near urban centers can be made ADA compliant. But any “grade” provisions should be evaluated project-by-project and not be applied as unconsidered policy.</p> <p>“State Route 62/70 poses significant width difficulties for provision of a shared use path alongside the road.” Doing so would be difficult as the road slices the flank of the hill, so a path either on the downside or upside would be a major construction project. We feel that the expense of construction funds would be better spent on the other options.</p> <p>“Explore options to open public access to and across the top-of-dam.” Please do this, as part of the DRAFT Feasibility Study. In consideration of the relative importance of further consideration of this and the other options, we require additional information regarding “feasibility.”</p> <p>There are many in our community that feel this is the best option for passage of the MCRT over the Nashua.</p> <p>“ [This is the option included in the evaluation matrix.]” We don’t know what this means.</p> <p>What exactly is the level of support within MassDOT, MassTrails, and the EOEEA for the over-the dam option? Over the years, there has been discussion with the DCR in</p>					

#	Comment	Name	Town	Date	Request a response?	Draft Response
	<p>an attempt to open access to the dam and build the necessary bridge on the western flank over the spillway. We feel now is the best time to resolve the controversy, so as to enable and move forward with the preferred option.</p> <p>“This option would need to link either uphill or downhill along State Route 62/70.” Some careful planning is required to insure bicycle and pedestrian safety over Route 70. The least cost option would cross Route 70 at grade, with a pedestrian cross walk, and then a gentle reinforced trail on the hillside to the West entrance to the tunnel. Rails on this short trail then around the tunnel entrance, across the dam, and over the spillway could be identical, to tie the whole together architecturally and artistically. Best practices for safe pedestrian crossing would be implemented. For instance, the crosswalk could be raised as speed bump.</p> <p>The second option would build a pedestrian bridge from the tunnel, across Route 70, and then a ramp over to the top of the dam.</p> <p>There are some in our community that feel this may be the best option.</p> <p>“Difficulty of Implementation” We concur with the relative difficulty of the “Top of Dam” vs “Bridge Reconstruction” options for passage over the Nashua. But “implementation” considerations should also take into consideration the political process of approvals. For instance, there are many</p>					

#	Comment	Name	Town	Date	Request a response?	Draft Response
	<p>residents in the area with views of the Nashua and the dam, who may prefer the view as is, without a bridge.</p> <p>The bridge would take many years and many of us would like to see completion of the MCRT in our lifetimes. Avoiding difficulties where viable options exist seems prudent.</p>					
	<p>“The tunnel is in poor condition.” As part of the acquisition process, the CGCT commissioned an inspection of the tunnel. This inspection confirmed that the tunnel is stable and with remediation would be suitable as a shared use path. After the acquisition, the tunnel will be secured until that remediation can be completed.</p> <p>The water leaks would need to be plugged and lighting added. These improvements would be straight forward. There is no apparent reason preventing the tunnel from being part of a completed MCRT.</p> <p>“Additional structural survey will be needed to assess the full viability of the tunnel.” The tunnel is viable, in our well-considered opinion. We do agree funds would be well spent with a structural survey by qualified structural engineers.</p> <p>“A designated Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program area. ” We are well aware and requested a preliminary review by NHESP – their comments as follows:</p>					

#	Comment	Name	Town	Date	Request a response?	Draft Response
	<p>The proposed section of trail is within habitat for the Marbled Salamander. For more information about the species, please see the link below. As this relates to the trail, a design/ layout that minimizes tree clearing (especially canopy removal), impervious surface, and impacts to hydrology is preferred. Water quality is also of the upmost importance. Based on our discussion, a stone dust trail that stays on the existing rail bed and minimizes the extent of clearing is likely a permissible design. Further, keeping people on the trail (or on other established trails) is encouraged. As the design moves forward, it would be good to know if any culverts/bridge improvements are proposed and if any parking areas would be located within Priority Habitat. Current plans provide ADA compliant access points at the Woodlands and a short trail to Rauscher Farm, with parking.</p> <p>“Assumed to be obliterated ” We have walked this section and investigated all the obstacles here. There are two homeowners who have purchased the portion behind their homes, but one also owns some land behind that and was happy to show us an alternate path that he'd allow the trail on. A beaver has been active in that area, too. Two other big parcels: one is for sale, but the land has a trail easement on it and the Woodlands agreed to a rail trail easement.</p>					

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	<p>“Multiple bridge abutments are visible at several points around the intersection.” There are opportunities to make use of the historic MCRR abutments to rebuild a pedestrian bridge, that would avoid the roadways and maximize the safety of passage. The Clinton Greenway Land Trust: Correction: Conservation Trust, not <Land> Trust. See above – the CGCT is currently finalizing purchase. There have been many visual inspections and walk-throughs of the tunnel, each ending with a favorable review. Segments 3H and 3G are moving forward, with the tunnel, to Berlin Town Line, on the border with Rauscher Farm. We hope to complete at the same time as the Wayside trail is complete to Berlin Town Center.</p>					
	<p>“Construct the MCRT through the tunnel.” As above, this is the option that is currently moving forward. Hence, the other options would best be scratched. “Difficulty of Implementation” Though understandably difficult, the result we feel will be worth the various efforts of our constituents on behalf of the “Commonwealth Connections” being made.</p>					
	<p>“An alternate to the Clinton Tunnel should that for some reason be determined to not be practical or feasible.” Please refer to previous comments, that our preference is for both the historic railbed through the</p>					

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	<p>Clinton Tunnel and the Wachusett Aqueduct corridor, not “alternates.”</p> <p>“Feasibility of the aqueduct option.” We feel the Aqueduct Corridor is already viable, and that it should remain so, perhaps with the suggested MOU with the MWRA. From a trail use point of view, integral loops are great. As envisioned, the Aqueduct would connect with the MCRT at two points: near the dam and near Five Corners, with great views and natural heritage throughout. So destined to be one the great trail loops for MCRT enthusiasts.</p> <p>As an option that obviates the preferred route along the historical rail bed and through the tunnel, however, it should not be further considered as an off-corridor alternative.</p> <p>“Agreement from MWRA”. The MassDOT, DCR, MassTrails, and the EOEEA should do what is necessary to obtain a Memorandum of Understanding with the MWRA with regards to all matters MCRT. We suggest and offer our services in consultation drafting an MOU.</p> <p>“Recommend exploring these options with DCR Water Supply and MWRA.” Given the historical continued obstruction to progress in the silo formed by the MWRA, the matter should be referred to the Governor for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for immediate resolution.</p>					

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	<p>“A shared use path would add one more layer of complexity to this already challenging intersection.” We agree with data and analysis. Since this is the first segment, East to West, past the Wayside Trail, which is in fast-forward, this segment should be considered a priority. There may be renewed opportunity for the Towns of Clinton and Berlin to work together completing this segment of the MCRT. There are historical animosities that may need to be overcome, however. The Tall Pines condominium development in Clinton, on the border with Berlin, created tensions. The Town of Berlin has managed to successfully preserve its natural, rural and farm character, and considered that development a threat. Gordon Taylor and Larry Kunz, who live in nearby Bolton, are cyclists. Cyclists applaud the idea of putting a bridge on the old abutments over this junction, it’s a difficult spot for bicycles already, and if the trail goes at road level it will get much worse unless there is some traffic control or the bridge. We do not see a ramp up to the bridge(s) from road level on the map - it would be very helpful to also have a way of getting on to the trail here. We’d also like to see a connector to the Berlin Park and Ride lot at I-495. As well as bicycle safety improvements into and around the Shops at Highland Common. Shopping by bicycle is</p>					

