

ADDING THE MISSING LINK: Connecting the Neponset Greenway to the Boston Harborwalk in Dorchester

Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of a bike ride. ~John F. Kennedy

The Neponset Greenway and Boston Harborwalk offer residents and visitors ten scenic miles of car-free paths enjoyed for walking, running, family bike rides, and commuting along *most* of the Dorchester Bay shoreline and Neponset River. However, a short (approximately .75 mile) gap thwarts safe and convenient use of these wonderful paths. This confusing and dangerous disconnect prevents visitors and community residents alike from fully enjoying and accessing this potential world-class urban greenway. A series of dangerous intersections and crossings obstruct the route between the southern end of the Boston Harborwalk at UMass Boston and the northern end of the Neponset Greenway.



A safe connection between the existing paths would provide a vital waterfront link in Boston's famous Emerald Necklace and would dramatically increase the value of these paths for nearby communities, Boston residents as a whole and the entire region. Dot Bike, the Boston Natural Areas Network and the Dorchester community hope to bridge the "missing link" between these paths.

EXISTING AND PROPOSED ROUTES

1. Existing Conditions

Currently, the Neponset River Greenway ends the dedicated multi-use path in the Port Norfolk neighborhood at Taylor Street. There are wayfinding signs that point the way through lightly traveled streets in this neighborhood to end at Tenean Beach. Tenean Beach marks the current end of the Neponset River Greenway. To continue north to reach the Harborwalk trail beginning at UMass Boston one must navigate several difficult areas. Upon exiting the Tenean Beach area one can travel along Conley St. via street or sidewalk depending on the mode of travel until reaching Tenean Street. Travel along Tenean Street brings one to the confusing and potentially dangerous intersection with the Morrissey Boulevard access road, which parallels the highly trafficked main thoroughfare. This intersection can have traffic entering from several directions including Morrissey Boulevard as well as the adjacent parking lots for Boston Bowl and the Phillips properties. Travel along the access road is made unsafe by no shoulder and faded or missing lane markings. The access road turns into Freeport St., which after the intersection with Victory road carries a high level of traffic that

comes off I-93 heading for Morrissey Boulevard. At the intersection of Freeport St. and Morrissey Boulevard bicyclists and pedestrians are faced with three (two for pedestrians) less than desirable choices: 1. One can cross Morrissey Boulevard and use the sidewalk on the west side of Morrissey to travel north past Malibu and Savin Hill Beaches and then re-cross Morrissey to access UMass Boston. 2. One can use the, in some locations non-existent, sidewalk on the East side of Morrissey Boulevard and negotiate the crossing of the I-93 Exit 14 off ramp, which funnels fast moving traffic from the interstate onto the northbound travel lanes of Morrissey Boulevard. 3. If one is on a bicycle one can ride in a travel lane on Morrissey Boulevard but this requires not only negotiating the merging off ramp traffic but riding over the metal grated Beades Bridge over Savin Hill Bay. None of these options provides safe access to the Harborwalk.



2. Proposed Off-road Paths

a. Path West of I-93 connecting Conley St. to Victory Road

A right of way exists that begins at Conley St. shortly after passing under I-93 and parallels the interstate on state land managed by the

Massachusetts Highway Department. The right of way was mowed this past fall and appears to accommodate an easement to National Grid. After continuing for approximately 500 yards the right of way runs adjacent to an MWRA sub station to Victory Road for another 175 yards. This entire area is currently enclosed by chain link fencing. The presence of the right of way provides an obvious and direct route for construction of a surfaced multi-use path. Fencing could be installed between the path and the highway embankment and also around the sub station.

b. Path East of I-93 connecting Victory Road to Morrissey Blvd.

This section runs along the space between the secured area of the National Grid property and the east side of I-93. This is in a corridor at the boundary of Mass Highway and National Grid property. The space available here should allow for the path to be sited such that it does not conflict with National Grid's compliance with security requirements. The path joins the sidewalk along the east side of Morrissey Blvd. avoiding putting cyclists and pedestrians in the path of traffic exiting I-93 northbound at exit 13. Property along Morrissey Blvd. is under the aegis of MA DCR.



PROPERTY OWNERS AND ABUTTERS TO THE PROPOSED TRAIL

The proposed path (from Section 2a of this document) from Conley Street to Victory Road appears to be on Mass Highway Dept. property west of I-93, there may also be easements on this property for use of the land by National Grid and/or Mass Water Resources Authority.

Non-Agency Owners abutting the west side of the proposed path between Conley Street and Victory Road include:

- Along Freeport Street - Strazzula [Phillips House & Bowling Alley property] and First Boston Ten Pin.
- At the intersection of Conley and Tenean - Tenean Properties LLC.

From Victory Rd. to Morrissey Blvd., the proposed path (from Section 2b of this document) is on state-owned land and the western border of the National Grid property [this may be an easement] east of I-93.

PROJECT HISTORY

What we are calling Section 2b of the so-called “missing link” of MA DCR’s Neponset River Greenway is a portion of the alignment that, a few years ago, was included in a second phase continuation of the Neponset Greenway Trail that uses the former railroad alignment from Pope John Paul II Park south to Central Avenue as an off road walking and biking trail and that connects north to Tenean Beach and Victory Road Park using city streets. Phase 2 of the Neponset Greenway was a path from Tenean Beach along the east side of the highway to connect with Morrissey Boulevard. Constructing the path along the east side was considered critical for safe use by the cycling public by providing an alternative path to avoid the busy intersection of the I-93 off ramp at Morrissey Blvd. as cyclists continue on to the Boston Harborwalk and DCR's beaches and parklands to Castle Island.

In 2001, as DCR was constructing the Phase 1 Neponset Greenway Trail along the old rail alignment with federal transportation enhancement funds (ISTEA) provided through the MA Highway Department, DCR requested and received from the same source a commitment for \$550,000 for the construction of Phase 2. Construction drawings and specifications were completed. This project was based on a license granted to DCR by the former owner of the site, Boston Gas in 1997. It was an annual license renewable yearly.

In 2002, as DCR was nearing completion of Phase 1 of the Trail, they resumed discussion with Keyspan about moving forward at that time with Phase 2. By mid-2002, Keyspan informed DCR that the easement was canceled due to national security issues following the events of 9/11/2001.

DCR has confirmed that the Phase 2 project is still on the active project list for federal funding through EOT/MassHighway. This is the important first step to determine if funding is available and/or if a new application would be required. Further discussion with EOT will determine if funds are available.

NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Dorchester is the largest of Boston's neighborhoods and is composed of many smaller neighborhoods, each with their own character and in most cases a neighborhood or civic association. In an effort to gauge existing support and to garner widespread support,

members of our group have made presentations to four affected civic associations. Port Norfolk, Pope's Hill, Clam Point and the Columbia/Savin Hill Civic Association host a section of either the existing or proposed trail. All four groups, representing hundreds of residents each, provided a positive response to the prospect of a continuous off-road waterfront trail along the entire Dorchester shoreline and stand at the ready to provide letters of support. There were some concerns about personal safety along any of the more isolated sections, but all agreed that the off road trail provided a safer physical environment than does the existing condition. It should be pointed out that the existing trail enjoys a reputation of safety despite its many isolated and remote sections.

SECURITY ISSUES

Section 2b of the proposed multiuse trail link on Mass Highway land would pass adjacent to or over an easement of National Grid property. Heightened security concerns in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks of 2001 caused the previous incarnation of this connection to be shelved and security-related arguments have been used to deflect any discussion of this type of use near the National Grid property.

Over the past several years, while the need for strong security at sensitive sites has not changed, there have been several projects that have worked with utilities and government agencies to establish recreational facilities within or nearby such sites. The below examples demonstrate that with cooperation and due diligence that the security needs of sensitive sites can be addressed in the context of multi-use recreational paths and trails.

Examples of Trails in Co-existence with High Security Properties

- *Pedestrian Bridge across Broad Canal, East Cambridge, MA:* To be built in cooperation with and in close proximity to the Mirant-Kendall power plant to allow access along the water between 1st and 3rd Streets.
- *Dearborn Trail, Lawrenceburg, IN:* Passes through an American Energy generating plant. The trail developers worked with American Energy to ensure that appropriate fencing and grade separated road crossings were included to assure the sites security. http://www.indianatrails.org/Aurora_files/brochure_map.gif
- *Riverfront Trail, St. Louis, MO:* Proceeds atop the flood levees, along flood walls and passes by a water treatment plant as it parallels the Mississippi River along its 10 mile path.
- *South Bay Bike Trail, El Segundo, CA:* Runs along the pacific coast and passes the fence line of El Segundo power plant along the beach.
- *Bike Trail, Camp Pendleton, CA:* Was closed to public access in the wake of September 11th but reopened in February 2005 to civilian cyclists.
- *Blackwater Heritage Trail, FL:* State park on a former military railroad line in the panhandle of Florida and continues north to Whiting Field Naval Air Station. It was built and opened with cooperation of the Navy in 1996. <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/gwt/state/black/default.htm>

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