



## Letter: Project threatens town's character, safety

Tue, May 06 2008

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To the editor:

In response to Mike Stucka's well-written April 30 article on Topsfield's May 6 town meeting ("Topsfield to tackle leash law, senior housing, rail trail"):

The extremely controversial rail trail issue is Article 16 on the town meeting warrant.

Mr. Stucka stated that the Coalition for Neighborhood Information is asking for a delay on the trail's construction until a number of serious questions are answered such as "how neighbors' yards would be screened from the trail, ... the effects on property values and ... how the trail would harm the environment."

There are other, equally serious, concerns to be considered by citizens of Topsfield, prior to May 6.

For instance, the Topsfield trail would be more than a mere link between Boxford and Wenham, as the article stated. It would be a link in a trail envisioned by the East Coast Greenway that would run from the Canadian border to Florida. By connecting existing and planned trails, a continuous route 3,000 miles long is being formed linking Calais, Maine at the Canadian border with Key West, Florida (see [www.greenway.org](http://www.greenway.org)). MassBike will complete the Border (New Hampshire) to Boston Trail that will run through Topsfield.

The cost to construct the trail is \$650,000 to \$1 million per mile. Eighty percent of this would come from the U.S. Department of Transportation; 20 percent (\$460,000 to \$720,000) would come from the state or the town. (See: "Border to Boston Trail Implementation Plan," p. 25; Border to Boston Ad Hoc Coalition, Jan. 15, 2007, draft plan). Costs to service the trail for "... fire, police, public works, and conservation, could exceed \$162,000 annually." (See Weston Rail Trail Task Force Report, p. 2; presented to the Board of Selectmen, December 1997.)

What is especially worrisome is that the trail would run directly between a tot-lot and the Proctor School playground. The proposed Topsfield link cuts through concentrated residential areas. The rural and safe character of Topsfield will be in jeopardy.

Additional police protection will be needed, with the costs to be borne by the taxpayers. The self-policing advocated by the Rail-Trail Committee will be woefully inadequate. In periods of drought, brush fires (like those recently occurring in Massachusetts towns) will be of serious concern to the Topsfield Fire Department, and abutters. These services will also be borne by the Town and result in higher property taxes.

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Topsfield

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