

## Tri-Town Blog

### Do you support Rail Trail project? Take this poll!

Posted on May 1, 2008 by [drogers](#)  
Filed Under [Uncategorized](#) |

Do you support Topsfield's Rail Trail project as currently proposed? (Poll Closed)  
Yes 42% (42 votes)  
No 57% (58 votes)  
I don't have an opinion 1% (1 votes)

Total Votes: 101

[PollDaddy.com](#)

[Do you support Topsfield's Rail Trail project as currently proposed?](#)  
(surveys)

#### Comments

##### 20 Responses to "Do you support Rail Trail project? Take this poll!"

1. Mike DeAmario on May 1st, 2008 8:09 pm

There are to many unanswered question concerning property values, privacy, safety and security for properties around the trail. These are questions that cannot be answered by committee made up of rail trail enthusiasts. Our selectmen have let down the abutters by not appointing a more diverse group of individuals. Article 16 only asks that certain criteria be met to protect all residents before any construction is started.

2. Nick Chandler on May 2nd, 2008 12:38 am

Although I am an abutter and concerned about the Trail's effect on my property value, I am \*not\* against the Rail Trail, in concept. However, the \*fact\* is that the Trail will have direct costs to Topsfield that have not yet been budgeted or properly planned. Given recent budget decisions regarding school programs and emergency services, I feel it is correct to state that a decision to proceed with the Trail will entail trading off other town funded services. A decision like this should be fully informed and made as part of a town vote. Requiring the design, budget and vote before proceeding with construction is the fiscally responsible course of action.

3. Eric Gutowski on May 3rd, 2008 9:26 am

While researching other rail trail initiatives in Massachusetts, the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee has not done what many other cities and towns have done. These include addressing issues such as abutters' concerns, congestion with horses and bikes in a toddler playground, road crossings and total funding needed to complete and maintain. These actions are also recommended by national rail trail advocates. Until more details are available, residents should refuse to allow construction to begin.

4. guggipatricus on May 3rd, 2008 3:09 pm

I love the idea of a rail trail in Topsfield.  
What I don't like is the plan or lack thereof that has been put forth.  
Too much secrecy and the perception of it getting a wink and a nod from the powers that be.

5. sickofnimbys on May 4th, 2008 1:28 pm

Secrecy? The meetings have been posted in Town Hall for several years, as appropriate, and they are open to the public. The minutes are online, and the website is well done. About as secret as any other town committee, and perhaps even more open than some.

6. Mike DeAmario on May 4th, 2008 3:50 pm

Hey sickofnimbys you want to see some real good informative web sites check out the following Squannacook River Rail Trail and Sudbury Mass they actually have the Police and fire chiefs on record instead if senseless articles such "Rail wail" "Rail trail foes recruiting sixth-graders". But they fail to post letter from the teacher who's class wrote the letters and why they where written. No other rail trail web site has this type of garbage posted on them. I Find it quite disturbing that a potential Selectwoman Nancy Luther would have on her resume that she is a member on a committee that will not treat their residents with dignity and respect. By the way sickofnimbys why don't you have the courage to use your real name!!

7. sickofnimbys on May 4th, 2008 6:53 pm

Well gosh, Mike, I did just that. Here's the link for anyone who is interested.  
<http://www.squannacookriverrailtrail.org/>  
Look for the faq list.

Many of the concerns are the same. Privacy, watershed, road crossings, finance. And most of their answers are the same as those put out by Topsfield's Rail Trail Committee.

Of which I am not a member, btw.

And the reason that I don't put my name? Well, the venom in your response might give you a hint. Almost everyone who works on any committee in this town is volunteering his or her time, and this kind of nastiness is pretty hard, esp. on the weekend. People do disagree, but there is no need to be mean about the disagreement. That way, there is room to find mutual ground.

I hear that there is an opening on the Planning Board. Maybe you might want to run a sticker campaign and get elected and plan for some of the things that you claim that other volunteers have overlooked instead of whining about letters from 6th graders not getting published. I did notice that there was a 10 year old whose letter was published recently. He used his name. Maybe he's braver than I am.

8. sickofnimbys on May 4th, 2008 7:07 pm

Furthermore, the site references a site that has studied property values and crime rates along bike rails. Here's the quote about property values:  
Home Sales Near Two Massachusetts Trails, Jan. 25, 2006.iv Craig Della Penna.

- "Municipalities through out the United States have found economic benefits in Bike Trails within close proximity to residential areas."  
- "Homes sales were examined in the seven Massachusetts towns through which the Minuteman Bikeway and Nashua River Rail Trail run. Statistics on list and selling prices and on days on the market were analyzed. The analysis shows that homes near these rail trails sold at 99.3% of the list price as compared to 98.1% of the list price for other homes sold in these towns. The most significant feature of home sales near rail trails is that these homes sold in an average of 29.3 days as compared to 50.4 days for other homes."

as far as crime goes:

here's the quote:

Rail-Trails and Safe Communities: The Experience on 372 Trails. National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, January 1998.iii Tammy Tracy & Hugh Morris.

□ "Stories of trails attracting drug dealers, murderers and rapists are perpetuated by trail opponents with only a handful of newspaper headlines to back up their assertions rather than empirical research."

□ "The research that has been conducted, along with anecdotal evidence, suggests that converting an abandoned rail corridor to a trail actually tends to reduce crime by cleaning up the landscape and attracting people who use the trail for recreation and transportation."

□ "The study found that incidents of vandalism and burglary did not increase as a result of the trail."

The link is here:

<http://www.squannacookriverrailtrail.org/documents/pdf/LA-Metro-Bike-paths-safety-property-values.pdf>

It makes me wonder what your committee is eating when you draft your talking points. And, btw, for Mrs. Baker - the park is Willowdale, not Wellington, which is in NH.

9. guggipatricus on May 4th, 2008 7:13 pm

There is secrecy. Meetings are posted but you cannot tell me that things haven't been discussed and agreed upon informally at "chance" offsite meetings. There is more to this than meets the eye and all the information isn't out there as of yet. Maybe I am a conspiracy theorist or possibly just choose to see the seamier side of life.

10. sickofnimbys on May 4th, 2008 7:32 pm

Question for you, then. Have you been to a meeting? If not, maybe you are a conspiracy nut. If so, Have you felt that questions have been avoided/railroaded? Or has the discussion been open?

I maintain that the people who are working on this question are some of the straightest arrows in town, and we - as taxpaying residents- would not risk paying off a couple of 5digits to some administrator like happened a couple of years ago in this very town.

11. guggipatricus on May 5th, 2008 7:28 am

Yes I have been to the meetings. Also while "some" of the people working on this project are straight arrows "some" are not. The discussion has been open to a point but there are still many unanswered questions. This little town cannot afford to be blindsided in a few years with a huge expense that no one "saw" coming.

12. Mike DeAmario on May 5th, 2008 8:03 am

sickofnimbys: I am so sorry that you feel I am a venomous person. After being called a NIMBY by so many rail trail enthusiasts I am the one that should be afraid to post my name. I Stand by the facts that were written in this weeks Letter to the editor.

13. sickofnimbys on May 5th, 2008 8:16 am

Mike:

I did not address you personally. I do not know you, or your family: how can I judge you personally? Your words in the letter, however, come across as mean.

The name comes from a variety of reasons - the rail trail being but the proverbial straw on the camel's back. I understand the privacy concerns, but the piece of land that we are talking about is not owned by the abutters.

Guggipatricus.

Nice slam. Is it possible for you to give details since your comment is full of innuendo?

14. Nick Chandler on May 5th, 2008 9:08 am

Hi SickofNIMBYs,

Can you explain why the B. to B. Implementation Plan which we are signatory to is lacking an abutters assessment *\*only\** for the Town of Topsfield? Do we have one? Has it been presented publicly in any fashion? Are you saying that the RTC is *\*not\** responsible to address the issues of abutters? To be clear I don't think there is any question: the town officers and the RTC are *\*accountable\** to all townspeople, including abutters.

Or how about the issue of the Proctor School Playground. Topsfield is the *\*only\** town in the B. to B. Plan where the Trail goes directly *\*through\** a school yard and children's playground, yet the B. to B. Plan does not address it.

By the way, it would be helpful if your dialogue on this matter did not start with a poke-in-the-eye name like SickofNIMBY's.

15. sickofnimbys on May 5th, 2008 11:28 am

Nick,

I'm sorry you felt like it was a poke in the eye. Perhaps the feeling goes both ways. (Remember Oz?) Your questions to me are a bit over the top, here. I did not say that the RTC is not responsible for addressing abutters' concerns. I did say that I think that privacy is a legitimate issue.

Moving on: The B2B document that I found is at:

[http://www.bordertoboston.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/B2B\\_Implementation\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.bordertoboston.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/B2B_Implementation_Plan.pdf)

It seems to be a generalized document. I did not find any reference to abuttor's assessments.

What I did find was a copy of the selectmen-signed agreement on page 82. The relevant quote:

” Whereas, the ability to access this (some number) funding will help and assist the 8 communities to make informed decisions about the planning, designing, engineering, and permitting of the right-of-way as a non-vehicular recreational trail.”

And: if I refer to the brochure that I picked up at the library this weekend, I read:

5 Property Rights- Property ownership will be examined in the 25% design phase. For Phase IA the TLC is owned by the Town and there is an easement for the trail through the Topsfield Station” property. South of Main St. to the Wenham town line Topsfield has a 99 year lease with the MBTA.

6 Adverse abutter effects– Privacy issues will be examined during the design of each phase and discussed with abutters.

I can only wonder if the warrant article was written so that the rail trail will get built far, far into the future.

Re playground: I spent 5 years hanging out with my children at the Proctor School playground tot lot. There are (small) fences that delineate sides of the playground that help parents understand boundaries. I am, and was, more concerned about the speed of cars whipping through the parking lot, and the lack of maintenance on the pressure treated wood (having landed in the doctor’s office with a huge sliver in my child’s hand), than I am by the idea that playing children will collide with RT users. In fact, the advantage that I see to having this trail is that children will be able to access it without having to bike along the streets. When one is a parent biking with smaller children, it is pretty difficult to stay on the slightly safer sidewalk. Kids are pretty wobbly, and it’s hard keeping them from either going on the abutor’s lawn, or over the curb. Also, did you know that bicycles are allowed to use streets, but are not encouraged to use sidewalks, particularly in business districts? see: <http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/85-11b.htm>

There seems to be a huge concern about funding. At the same time, I note that Hood’s Pond is privately funded through a non-profit volunteer organization. I have heard that this is roughly the same for the ball fields at Klock Park and the Emerson Center, although I don’t have any more time to research this to be sure. There is a non-profit organization being set up to do the same thing for the rail trail. Why can’t we believe the committee when they say that the project will be paid for, and maintained by volunteers?

Even if only 1 section is able to be constructed in the near future, that is a huge plus for the town, and most importantly, for our children. I believe, in contradiction to the words on warrant item 16, that the rail trail does not have to be examined from town border to town border in order to proceed with answering the important questions that have been raised publicly, and others that might not have even been thought of. And it does not need to have a full examination from border to border in order to begin construction on a segment of the trail.

16. drogers on May 5th, 2008 12:48 pm

This has been a interesting and informative discussion on the Rail Trail issue. Thanks for all who have chimed in.

Let's keep the discussion focused on issues and not dwell on "venom" or the names of posters.

Thanks,  
DR

17. Dana Forman on May 5th, 2008 9:06 pm

The facts that concern me are safety, traffic congestion, privacy issues, horses and bikes together, horses manure and cleanliness, and the volume of users: 200 hundred people/horses will be using the trail a day which amounts to 73,000 people a year (which are not all going to be from Topsfield.) I moved to Topsfield for the rural culture the town promotes. This type of bike trail will change that culture.

My concerns that have not been answered are where are the horse trailers and the out of town bikers going to park. How is traffic going to be handled down town and on Washington Street on a busy weekend. (Will it be Topsfield Fair every day in downtown?) I can just visualize trying to get to a soccer game and having to wait 15 minutes for the bikers and horses to go by. Are the horse riders going to carry large green garbage bags to pick up when their horses excrete?

I believe the Liability Concerns have not been addressed. For instance, one accident between a biker and horse on the trail without the town having the proper coverage could be very costly to the Topsfield taxpayers.

The plan for this trail has been sketchy with not all costs and concerns being addressed. Any prudent business person would ask for a complete picture of what the town is committing to. I do not find it to be ridiculous to ask for what is the TOTAL cost and who is paying for it.

The town should hear all voices including the abutters. From my research an abutter was allowed on trail planning committees in other towns and here in Topsfield that was shot down. It has been stated that abutters can not be on the committee due to conflict of interest. Not having an abutter on the committee is a conflict of interest as who is really looking out for their concerns.

Let's not have any more tax increases. Enough is enough. Vote NO on Question One until all these questions are answered.

18. Paul Jamieson on May 6th, 2008 12:17 am

I would support the rail trail if all the out-of-town cyclists who clog the roads of Topsfield and Boxford every weekend and refuse to ride on the sidewalks or in single file would promise to use the rail trail instead.

19. guggipatricus on May 6th, 2008 3:39 pm

Dana you did a very nice job articulating the concerns of many Topsfield residents.

Parking and traffic aren't at the top of my list for concern as I think people will be spread out all up and down the trail. However the lack of transparency is concerning. To be against having an abutter on the committee is very troubling, what is being hidden? Maybe nothing but the abutters could be thinking that.

Also the reason they haven't given a total cost of and who is paying for what is that they DON'T KNOW the answer. For that reason alone Question 1 should be a resounding NO

20. Dana Forman on May 7th, 2008 9:07 pm

Please keep the culture of Topsfield and vote NO on Question 1 on May 8, 2008.