

Letters to the Editor

The Topsfield Rail Trail Committee responds

To the editor:

Editor's note: This letter is addressed to the Coalition for Neighborhood Information

This letter is a response by the Topsfield Rail Trail Committee to an hour-long Coalition for Neighborhood Information presentation made at the Topsfield Selectmen's meeting on Oct. 29. We feel that many of their statements and assumptions do not represent reality. The CNI has requested that the entire trail be designed and costs determined before any part of the TLC is built. Grant funds (\$42,000) are insufficient for this to be done and we feel it unnecessary. The trail can be designed in sections just as the rest of the town has been designed over hundreds of years.

The CNI estimated that there would be someone passing on the TLC every 24 seconds. Using the formulas documented in a recent doctorate dissertation based upon the Minuteman, Norwottuck and Burlington, Vt., bikeways there would be about 200 users per 12-hour day.

The CNI asked about maintenance costs of the trail. After being mowed this year by volunteers the entire 4-mile length of trail is now passable. With the heavy work accomplished continued maintenance will require significantly less effort. Once the trail is completed volunteers will continue trail care at no cost to Topsfield.

The CNI asked how Route 1 will be safely crossed. Route 1 is within the domain of the Massachusetts Highway Department. All crossings will be part of a 25 percent design study that MassHighway is expected to fully fund.

The CNI is concerned about damage to the wetlands and wildlife on the TLC. Keep in mind that trains traversed these areas for more than 100 years, with the last trains going to

freight barns near Main Street as late as 1980.

The CNI objects to the presence of horses on the trail and contends that the TLC will spoil the rural character of Topsfield. We disagree. What is more rural than seeing horses on a trail? The TLC is a former rail bed with excellent sight lines. Horses can be easily seen from long distances. According to Bradley-Palmer State Park personnel horses have not done any damage to their stone dust trails.

The CNI states, "Every dollar that funds a low-priority bike path is a dollar that isn't available for an urgent repair that might save the life of someone's son or daughter, husband or wife." In fact, SAFETEA-LU, the Federal Transportation Authorization for surface transportation, spent \$60 million in 2005 for recreational trails out of a total of \$35 billion for highway funding. This represents a miniscule 0.17 percent of the budget.

The CNI states that abutters cannot be involved with the TRIC as it is a violation of the Commonwealth's Conflict of Interest laws, Ch. 286a. In reality abutters can be involved in discussions about the rail trail, however they cannot vote on committee matters since it might affect their property values.

The CNI presented the "crime report" from Sudbury. This is misleading since Sudbury does not have a rail trail. It does have a group, the Sudbury Citizens for Responsible Land Stewardship, consisting of property owners adjacent to a proposed rail trail. Their Web site attempts to link crime reports to rail trails in other Massachusetts towns. The CNI mentioned several of these during the meeting. Please refer to www.TopsfieldTrail.Org for further details.

The CNI stated the School Committee did not endorse the TLC. The School Committee sent a letter to the selectmen stat-

ing, "At the Oct. 4 meeting, we voted unanimously that the rail-trail would have no negative impact on school operation".

The CNI stated they walked the Marblehead trail and found 280 pieces of trash in less than 0.1 mile and then 75 pieces in 1/6 mile, yet on Nov. 4, a week after the CNI presentation, Selectmen Dick Gandt cycled the trail and found only 11 pieces of trash along its 3.5 miles.

The CNI talked about hazardous waste (creosote and arsenic) on the trail. In fact, Bob Morgan, the spokesman of the CNI, recently had vegetation removed from the trail, which is

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Spinach Lasagna

Served with soup or salad.

\$10⁹⁹

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