



MINUTES

January 21, 2021 – 5:00 PM

Meeting held via ZOOM

Present: Nick Zaiac, Bruce Lierman, Janet Hurley, Anthony Maclaurin, Charlie Rockwell, Sheila Kearns, Cinda Morse, Jock Irons, Nancy Faesy, John LaVecchia

Also Present: Megan Herrington (VDH), Lorna Mattern (UCS of Bennington County), Scott Winslow (GBICS), Stephanie Lane (Shires Housing), Tom Donahue (BROC Community Action), Representative Mary Morrissey, Heather Parks, S. Hernandez, Nancy Shuttleworth, Jason Parks, Leslie Addison, Andrew McKeever, L. Parks

BCRC Staff Present: Jim Sullivan, Catherine Bryars, Mark Anders, Bill Colvin, Allison Strohl, Callie Fishburn

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order with a welcome to commissioners and guests at 5:03 PM.

2. Minutes of November 19, 2020 Meeting

Motion to approve as presented by Morse; second by Rockwell. Passed unanimously.

3. Local Public Health Response to Covid-19 Pandemic

Jim Sullivan described some of the work that the BCRC has done to assist businesses and municipalities during in response to needs presented by the pandemic, as well as efforts to provide information through its website and other means. A tremendously important part of the response effort, of course, involves public health and related community services. Several of the agencies/organizations that provide those services presented on overview of their Covid response work.

- Vermont Department of Health: Megan Herrington described the Covid testing being coordinated by the Department, noting its wide availability (confirmed by a meeting attendee's positive experience) as well as the contact tracing work that they conduct. VDH also provides outreach on a variety of pandemic health related issues to organizations and the general public. Vaccination clinics currently are in the active planning phase – timing dependent primarily on vaccine availability.

Fortunately, the same interface will be used for scheduling vaccinations as has been employed for scheduling testing.

- UCS of Bennington County: Lorna Mattern gave an overview of UCS programs and services and described the various measures the agency has responded to make sure that those critical services have been provided without interruption. The demand for mental health services has increased significantly during the pandemic (135% increase in call volume). UCS also has implemented a rapid assistance program to support SVMC patients and staff. Special efforts have been made to deal with both parental and children's stress and to provide broad-based Covid health education. UCS also has had to ramp up their ability to respond to an increase in opioid-related situations and crisis work.
- Greater Bennington Interfaith Community Services (GBICS): Scott Winslow described the work that the staff and cadre of volunteers provides on an ongoing basis and how those services have been impacted by the pandemic. He discussed modified operating procedures implemented to ensure safe delivery of services and products and the necessary suspension of some in-person services. GBICS' work on food security continues to be extremely important as their food distribution system (the largest in southern Vermont) served over 900 families last year. Scott recognized the work done by the VT Agency of Human Services to provide housing and food for the homeless.
- Shires Housing: Stephanie Lane described the organization and its mission of providing quality affordable housing and services to residents of the region. Their staff has managed the difficult transition to remote work and management of the 400+ units of housing in their portfolio. In addition to providing important Covid safety information to residents, Shires also used Coronavirus Relief Funds to rehab 15 units to provide housing for families transitioning from homelessness and is working to develop a new housing development in conjunction with the Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless. CRF and state funds also have been deployed to provide rental assistance to residents in need. Shires has opened access to their foodbank to the entire community, with seven locations serving 300-500 families each month. Stephanie also described the key services provided through SASH, especially those that help seniors who are experiencing social isolation.
- BROCC Community Action: Tom Donahue described BROCC's crisis assistance and "path forward" programs and how they have been important during the Covid crisis. He highlighted a microbusiness development program that has provided over \$160,000 in assistance to 33 area small businesses, utility arrearage assistance to residents, and \$86,000 in rapid relief housing assistance provided to local residents. Their crisis fuel program is an ongoing effort that is particularly important this year. Additional work has been done to work with and support the food shelf, the farmers to family food program, and to provide masks to anyone they offer services to.

4. Trolley Line Study

Mark Anders and Catherine Bryars presented a summary of the Trolley Line Scoping Study that is intended to assess the value and viability of developing a multi-use pathway at least in part along the alignment of the abandoned trolley line that runs between Bennington and Williamstown, MA (draft

final report attached). The project was coordinated by a steering committee with membership from each town and includes concepts for connecting with pathways (existing and under development) in Berkshire County. Questions were asked by Representative Morrissey and landowners along the route concerning engagement with affected property owners and residents, the purpose of a scoping study in the overall project development process, and how individual concerns have been, and will be, considered. Residents noted the extremely negative impacts of trail development on the use and enjoyment of one property in particular.

Meeting adjourned at 7:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Sullivan
1-22-2021

Trolley Line Path Scoping Study



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Main Street, Bennington, VT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the feasibility of converting an abandoned electric trolley car bed in Southwestern Vermont into a 14-mile shared-use path to enhance safety and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists traveling between Bennington, VT, Pownal, VT, and Williamstown, MA. This project is envisioned and designed primarily as a transportation and commuter corridor, but it meets additional and complementary needs for economic development, public health, and sustainability in the region. The greatest challenges to this project involve right-of-way acquisition and funding. This report concludes that the Trolley Path proposal is feasible, especially if pursued with technical support from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), with federal transportation infrastructure funding, and with the support of local communities.

This scoping report was prepared by the Bennington County Regional Commission with the guidance of a citizen steering committee and with financial support from the VTrans Bike/Pedestrian Program.

BENEFITS

- The 14-mile project would create a continuous 40-mile path connecting 9 towns and villages along a major commuting corridor.
- Connects to existing and planned path projects in Massachusetts and Vermont.
- Would link: North Bennington, VT; Bennington, VT; Pownal, VT; Williamstown, MA, North Adams, MA; Adams, MA; Cheshire, MA; Lanesborough, MA; and Pittsfield, MA.
- Would serve as a 14-mile segment of the Western New England Greenway, an initiative to create a greenway between New York City and Montreal.
- Makes the region more attractive to visitors, families, and young people.
- Encourages physical activity in a region with a 10% rate of type-2 diabetes.
- Project would serve a broad cross-section of society as a fully ADA-compliant public facility.
- Connects many important trip generators.
- Potential to raise property values, which are reportedly higher in proximity to shared-use paths.
- Potential to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by providing a safe, fun, and healthy alternative to driving, VT’s largest source of GHG emissions.

CHALLENGES

- Right-of-Way: at least 44 permanent easements required
- Cost: The project would cost between \$29 and \$37 million dollars



Berkshire Hills Trolley in Bennington

INTRODUCTION

In the early 20th century, the Berkshire Hills Trolley Line connected a string of communities nestled in the narrow valley between the Green Mountains and Taconic Mountains, operating regular service between Bennington, VT; Pownal, VT; Williamstown, MA; and North Adams, MA. The communities connected by this 18-mile route were, and are, linked economically, socially, and culturally.

These communities grew in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries around farming and mills powered by the rivers that coursed through the valley. By the late 19th century, Bennington and North Adams were manufacturing boom towns. Land-use and settlement patterns followed available transportation: walking, horses, bicycles, trains, and trolleys,



This cattle pass in Pownal allowed livestock to walk under the trolley tracks.

created a settlement pattern of lively and dense towns surrounded by bucolic farmland. Children walked to the many small schools. Mill workers lived close to the mills. By the late 1920s, the automobile took over and the communities began to spread out. The trolley tracks were torn up.

The trolley’s last run was in 1927 after only 20 years of service. In the years since, trees and honeysuckle have reclaimed the trolley bed, but it remains mostly untouched by development and is largely intact.

This report assesses the feasibility of reusing the abandoned trolley bed to create a shared-use path from downtown Bennington, VT to Williamstown Massachusetts, where it would connect to a sequence of planned and existing shared-use paths. The result would be a continuous path from downtown Bennington, VT to downtown Pittsfield, MA, 40 miles to the south, giving pedestrians, cyclists, runners, commuters, local residents, and tourists of all ages and abilities a safe, appealing, and physically renewing alternative to driving. The beautiful landscapes, the historic towns and villages, and the cultural treasures it will pass through will make it a national attraction that will bring visitors to the area and will improve the quality of life for those living here already. It will offer a different travel experience – slower, yet more invigorating – at a pace well-suited to truly savor the beauty and culture of our region.



The Y at North Hoosac Rd and Cole Ave. in Williamstown.



The 14-mile project would connect to other existing and planned paths to create a continuous 40-mile path connecting 9 towns and villages along a major commuting corridor. The explosive popularity of E-bikes make 20+ mile trips appealing to many more people.

STUDY AREA

The study area is a 14-mile corridor which roughly follows the historic trolley route between downtown Bennington, VT and Williamstown, MA. A connected shared-use path network is a primary project objective, and the Trolley Path should connect to shared-use paths at both ends. A logical northern project terminus is the Walloomsac Path in downtown Bennington, southern Vermont’s largest town and a major trip generator. The logical southern terminus is the planned Mohawk Bike/Ped Path, which will connect downtown Williamstown, MA, to North Adams, MA and communities to the south via the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail.



The Trolley Line Path would connect to the popular Ashuwillticook Rail Trail via new path projects planned in Massachusetts.



Mass MoCA is one of the many destinations Vermonters could cycle to on the new path network. The planned Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension will go through the Mass MoCA complex – one of the largest centers for contemporary and performing arts in the US.

CONNECTING SHARED-USE PATHS

Direct Connections

- Walloomsac Path: An existing shared-use path in downtown Bennington that will connect to the planned Bennington Rail Trail and the planned Benmont Ave. Active Transportation Corridor.
- Mohawk Bike/Ped Path & North Adams Adventure Trail: Combined, the two projects will create a continuous shared-use path between Williamstown, MA and North Adams, MA, where it will connect to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail.

Network Connections

- Ashuwillticook Rail Trail: An existing path between Adams, MA and Cheshire, MA. Connection planned to North Adams, MA. A southern extension is planned to downtown Pittsfield, MA.
- Bennington Rail Trail: A planned path in Bennington. Construction expected in 2021.
- Kocher Drive Path: A shared-use path in Bennington (constructed in 2020).
- Ninja Path: A planned shared-use path that will connect to Bennington to North Bennington and Bennington College. Construction expected 2022.
- Applegate to Willowbrook Path: A shared-use path that will connect an affordable housing complex to Bennington’s path and sidewalk system. Construction expected in 2021.

TRIP GENERATORS

Trip Generators – Direct Connection

- Downtown Bennington and residential neighborhoods
- Williamstown: (residential neighborhoods and businesses)
- Pownal Center (residences, schools, businesses, Town Office)
- Pownal (residences, businesses, library)
- Williams College
- Bennington Recreation Park
- Hoosic River access

Trip Generators – Indirect Connection

- Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (Bennington County’s largest employer)
- Williamstown: (downtown business district)
- The Clark Art Institute (internationally renowned art museum)

Network Connection

- Bennington College
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

- Mass MoCA (one of the US’s largest contemporary art museum)
- Downtown North Adams and residential neighborhoods
- North Bennington

Towns the fully built path network will connect

- North Bennington (population 1,613)
- Bennington (15,764)
- Pownal (3,420)
- Williamstown (7,754)
- North Adams (12,904)
- Cheshire (3,144)
- Lanesboro (2,965)
- Pittsfield (42,533)

Total Population connected by path network = 90,097

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

PURPOSE

The project’s purpose is to create a safe and appealing active transportation route from downtown Bennington, Vermont, through two village centers of Pownal, Vermont, to the planned Mohawk Bike/Ped Path in Williamstown, Massachusetts. The route is designed to appeal to many different types of path users and connect to important origins and destinations efficiently and safely.

NEED

Safety

There is no safe and direct active transportation route for pedestrians and cyclists between downtown Bennington, VT, Pownal Center, Pownal South, and the planned Mohawk Bike/Ped Path in Williamstown, MA. The 14-mile route is a major commuting corridor, but the only direct route, ROUTE 7, is dangerous and uninviting for cyclists and pedestrians. ROUTE 7 has the following deficiencies for active transportation:

1. The road has a 50-mph speed limit, and most traffic travels between 50 and 60 mph. A collision between a motor vehicle and cyclist or pedestrian would likely be fatal.
2. For 5.8 miles between Pownal Center and downtown Bennington, the road has narrow shoulders and is extremely dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians.
3. The road has a high volume of large truck traffic.



Between Pownal Center and downtown Bennington most of US-7 has narrow shoulders and a speed limit of 50 mph making it very dangerous bicycle on.



Route 7, between the Massachusetts border and Pownal Center, has some sections with shoulders wide enough for cyclists, but with many large trucks and most vehicles traveling 50-60 mph, it is dangerous and unappealing to bicycle on. Note the narrow shoulder between the truck and the edge of pavement.

It is clear from the presence of desire paths and sightings of pedestrians and cyclists that ROUTE 7 is currently traveled by bike and foot under these hazardous conditions, underscoring demand for a safer route along this busy corridor.

Economic Development

In addition, the ‘no build’ alternative for this project carries large opportunity costs for a region in need of economic opportunity. The State of Massachu-

A 2016 study by the trail advocacy group Vermont Trails and Greenway Council estimates that just four bike trails across Vermont support 365 jobs, \$9 million in earnings, and \$22.4 million in spending in-state each year.



The Western NE Greenway would pass through Bennington County on the Trolley Line Path.

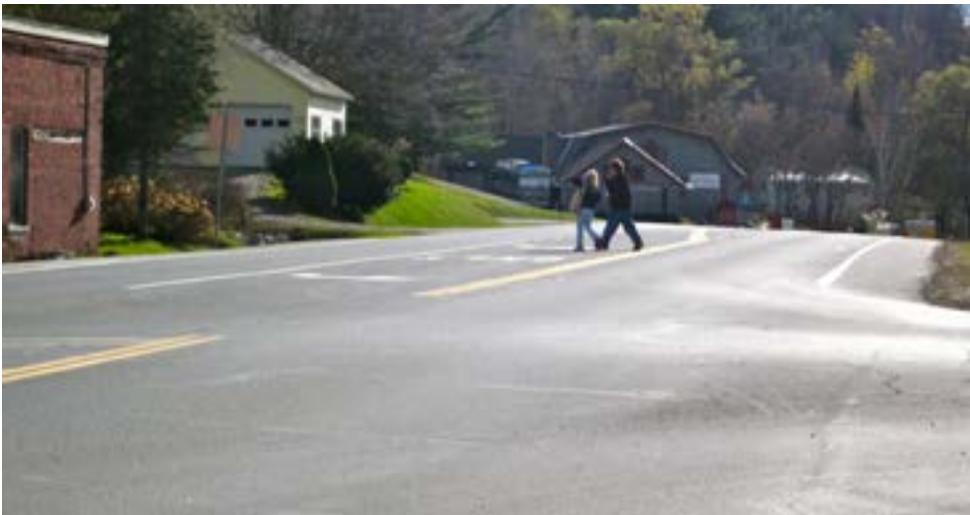
setts is planning to extend the popular Ashuwillticook Rail Trail north to North Adams in the coming years. The Town of Williamstown will begin construction of a connecting path, the Mohawk Bike/Ped Path, in 2021 to bring the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail network further north to within 2 miles of the Vermont border. Connecting downtown Bennington’s path system to the Mohawk Bike/Ped path would create a continuous 35-mile active transportation path linking 9 towns and villages, which would generate great public value for both states.

The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is a regional attraction and local treasure that sees scores of pedestrians, cyclists, and snowshoers year-round. Each year many cyclists pass through Pownal and Bennington in this area to complete the Western New England Greenway route between Montreal and New York City. The Trolley Path has the potential to multiply this number of visitors to the region and to raise southwestern Vermont’s profile as an outstanding place to live and work.

Several studies have attempted to quantify the economic impact of greenways and bike/ped activity in Vermont in recent years. A 2012 VTrans study, Economic Impact of Bicycling and Walking in Vermont, concludes that each year bike/ped

infrastructure, events, and businesses generate \$53.9 million in direct economic benefits and \$35 million in indirect benefits to the state economy. Notably, the report found that about half of all bike/ped-related business spending was by non-residents. With more than 700,000 people living within an hour’s drive, Bennington County is perfectly positioned to attract large numbers of visitors from neighboring Berkshire County, MA and Albany, NY to spend

In Vermont, 2 out of 5 adults do not get enough physical activity, which contributes to chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and dementia that cause over 40% of all deaths in the state. The DOH concludes that the treatment of chronic disease in Vermont costs \$2 billion per year.



Teenagers walking on and crossing Route 7 in Pownal along the former trolley route (the brick building in the top photo was a power station for the trolley). Most public infrastructure funding in Vermont now subsidizes driving at the expense of greener, healthier, less expensive options.

out-of-state dollars in Vermont communities. Additionally, real estate impacts are estimated to be significant, with homes in walkable areas being roughly \$6,500 higher in value than homes located in exclusively car-oriented neighborhoods. Another study from 2010 by the University of Vermont Transportation Research Center reports that an average of \$45,000 per weekend is spent by users of the lakefront section of the Island Line Trail in Burlington, VT, and A 2016 study by the trail advocacy group Vermont Trails and Greenway Council estimates that just four bike trails across Vermont support 365 jobs, \$9 million in earnings, and \$22.4 million in spending in-state each year.

Equity and Public Health

ROUTE 7 is the major north-south commuter corridor through Bennington and Pownal. Residents of these towns rely on ROUTE 7 to reach places of employment, schools, groceries, social services, and more. Equity and health concerns arise when a population becomes dependent on motor vehicles to access these resources. For individuals and families that lack reliable access to a car, the Trolley Path alternate route along ROUTE 7 could introduce much-needed freedom and flexibility. The region’s Green Mountain Express bus system is an important resource, but its schedules cannot serve all residents at the most convenient times, especially extending out into the more remote sections of the corridor. Furthermore, exclusive travel by motor vehicle correlates with a sedentary lifestyle and the bad health outcomes and costs that result from chronic inactivity.

The Vermont Department of Health (DOH) reported in December 2019 on the public health benefits that result from increased reliance on walking and biking for transportation. The DOH emphasizes that walking and biking help meet physical activity goals that are key to reducing the prevalence of chronic disease. In Vermont, 2 out of 5 adults do not get enough physical activity, which contributes to chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and dementia that cause over 40% of all deaths in the state. The DOH concludes that the treatment of chronic disease in Vermont costs \$2 billion per year. Meanwhile, according to DOH’s analysis, 40% of vehicle trips in Vermont are two miles or shorter, a fact that indicates tremendous opportunity to replace those vehicle trips with walking or biking. The Trolley Path, which is routed through southern Vermont’s largest town and two village centers, would in-

troduce a safe connection to the following destinations that see frequent short-distance trips: schools and daycare centers, convenience stores and shopping areas, municipal offices, recreational facilities and public open space, post offices, libraries, health clinics, and densely settled neighborhoods.

COMPATIBILITY WITH PLANNING EFFORTS

The Trolley Path project exemplifies the goals of the **2040 Vermont Long-Range Transportation Plan (2018)**, which outlines the State’s vision for a “safe, reliable and multimodal transportation system that grows the economy, is affordable to use and operate, and serves vulnerable populations” (pES2). In addition, the Trolley Path project advances the objectives of many statewide and local planning efforts, ranging from land use to economic development planning:

Land Use

Shared-use paths are an attractive asset to connect dense, commercial town centers with scenic stretches of rural countryside. For this and other reasons, they are highly compatible with the cluster-based settlement pattern encouraged throughout the State of Vermont. Accordingly, the **Bennington County Regional Plan (2015)** advocates that “towns and villages should seek opportunities to develop new bicycle and pedestrian facilities and connect them to form networks and to provide access to existing trail networks and outdoor recreational sites” (p59). The plan highlights multidimensional benefits of shared-use and bike paths in its sections on economic development, transportation, and outdoor recreation and public health. Town plans of the municipalities through which the Trolley Line Path will pass also note the role that paths play in providing a high quality of life to residents, attracting businesses and visitors, and providing efficient and scenic connections among community destinations and natural assets. The **Bennington Town Plan (2018)** highlights the northernmost portion of the trolley line in its municipal Transportation System Map (p78) and commits the town to pursuing opportunities to “ensure that adequate facilities are available” for walking and biking in the community (p67). The **Pownal Town Plan (2019)** supports use of the area’s “extensive natural, scenic and recreational resources to provide recreational opportunities for both Pownal residents and visitors” (p16) and underscores the town’s role in developing recreation opportunities, including walking and biking trails, for its citizens (p65).

Economic Development & Outdoor Recreation

Dedicated pedestrian and bike facilities are widely recognized catalysts of economic activity and enhanced community well being (see report **VTrans Economic Impact of Bicycling and Walking in Vermont, 2012**). Consistent with these findings, construction of the Trolley Path would mark progress toward specific goals outlined in state and regional economic development plans. For example, the statewide **Vermont 2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2016)** report calls for workforce development, infrastructure investments, and bolstering assets that reinforce the Vermont brand. The proposed shared-use path is consis-

tent with these goals as an investment in outdoor recreation infrastructure that will attract visitors and residents to the region. Similarly at the regional level, the **Southern Vermont Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2019)** identifies three development goals that emphasize infrastructure improvements to retain and attract young people and families, enhance quality of life, and provide abundant recreation opportunities.

60% of survey respondents said that outdoor recreation is “essential” to their household, but that low access to recreational assets is a common barrier.

Outdoor recreation is increasingly recognized as a driving force of Vermont’s tourism economy and a critical asset that draws families to settle in the state. **Vermont’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2019-2023** reports that 60% of its survey respondents said that outdoor recreation is “essential” to their household, but that low access to recreational assets is a common barrier (p8). Improving access to outdoor activities that accommodate a wide range of users and ability levels, such as the proposed shared-use path would do, is essential to unlocking the region’s full economic potential. To this end, in 2017 the Governor’s office established the **Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) initiative** to develop and promote the state’s outdoor recreation assets as drivers of economic growth and well being. This initiative has prioritized funding high-profile projects that create a unique and regional draw to Vermont. The Trolley Path fits the profile of such an investment.

Energy & Resilience

Non-vehicular modes of transportation like walking and biking may not at first seem viable transportation modes in the largely rural state of Vermont, but the State’s planning documents reveal that they are key components to achieving the State’s future targets for sustainability and lower greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, the **Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan (2016)** commits to doubling the 2011 baseline percentage of bicycle and pedestrian commute trips to 15.6% by year 2030 as a way to lower carbon emissions and achieve greater resilience through diversification of the transportation sector. In particular, the plan notes that rising popularity of electric-assist bicycles is likely to accelerate the use of bicycles for commuting in Vermont. The Trolley Path’s design requiring limited interaction with vehicle roadways addresses the principal barrier to walking and biking in Vermont: safety concerns. The **Bennington County Regional Energy Plan (2017)** emphasizes that member towns should implement “safe and convenient” improvements to encourage walking and biking (p4). The Trolley Path is an excellent example of such safe development that will help lower overall energy use and reliance on motor vehicles in the transportation sector.

Public Health

The first strategy outlined in the **State Health Improvement Plan 2019-2023**, is to invest in infrastructure that creates healthy communities. The plan expounds on this policy with two action items focusing on encouraging physical activity and expanding access to transportation services. This focus underscores the fact that public investments, built infrastructure, and access to a range of mobility options shapes a person’s physical and mental health.

MA/Williamstown Planning

The Berkshire Bike Path Council of the Berkshires region of Massachusetts has been planning and building bike and pedestrian infrastructure to interconnect the region for several decades. The **2020 Berkshire Regional Transportation Plan** developed by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission highlights among its top recommendations the goal to complete the Berkshire Bike Path to be a “safe biking and walking spine from Vermont to Connecticut”. In accordance with this long-term planning process, the Town of Williamstown, MA will begin construction of a connector called the Mohawk Bike/Ped Path in early 2021. This path will link northern Williamstown to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, which will, with planned extensions, connect the city of North Adams to the city of Pittsfield for an estimated 20 miles of bike and pedestrian path. Further path development is projected to link this route to the center of Williamstown, the Williams College campus, and the renowned Clark Art Museum.

To bring this path to the Vermont border, several groups have studied possible routing and developed guidance for visitors on bike. A 2012 Williams College study suggested three possible connections into Pownal and the upper Hoosic River Valley. Similarly, advocates for modern-day use of the Mohawk Trail, an ancient roadway used by Native Americans to travel between the Hudson Valley of New York and the Deerfield Valley of Massachusetts, have contemplated the safe foot and bike access consistent with historic paths between these areas. The Western New England Greenway (WNEG), a bike route linking New York City and Montreal, Canada, has marked a route along ROUTE 7 as the only access point between Massachusetts and Vermont, though users often note the high traffic levels of the corridor and WNEG recommends using side roads where they exist.



Trolley on Main Street in Bennington.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This scoping study has been informed by a series of public meetings, the oversight and guidance of a project steering committee, and a letter outreach campaign to abutting property owners. It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated state of public health emergency in the State of Vermont impacted the project’s public outreach. Meetings that would otherwise have been in-person were facilitated by videoconference. Due to the pervasiveness of internet-based and socially-distant communication used to conduct public business in 2020 and beyond, videoconferencing turned out to be highly effective for gathering public input and sharing updates on the status of the draft scoping study. Ultimately, public involvement in development of the scoping study was successful and robust despite the challenges presented during this unprecedented time. A full overview of public involvement efforts is attached to this report as an appendix.

Project Steering Committee

A steering committee formed in 2020 to provide guidance to BCRC staff on the public outreach process and on a draft of the scoping study report. The committee consists of 20 members representing the interests of the impacted communities of Bennington, Pownal, and William-

stown. The committee held periodic meetings throughout 2020 and early 2021 to provide comments on the overall progress and direction of the scoping study, to advise on the public and property abutter outreach strategies, and to review and provide comments on the draft report.

Public Meetings

Public meetings occurred as follows:

- 1. Bennington Select Board Re: Grant Application: June 5th, 2018 (link to relevant minutes)
- 2. Western New England Greenway Conference, Project Kick-Off: November 9, 2018
- 3. Local Concerns Meetings. Presentations to each Municipal Select Board and Public:
 - a. Pownal: July 23, 2020
 - b. Bennington: July 27, 2020
 - c. Williamstown: October 26, 2020
- 4. Alternatives Presentation: September 16, 2020
- 5. Final Presentation: January 21, 2021

Coordination and feedback sought with VTrans, Berkshire RPC, DCR, MASS DOT for a preliminary draft in November and December 2020 and again for a full draft report in January and February 2021.

Property Owner Outreach

Following the September 2020 Alternatives Presentation, the BCRC mailed out on behalf of the Project Steering Committee a letter and survey request to all 58 properties that may be impacted by the alternate route alignments under consideration. The letter provided an overview of the Trolley Path proposal, history, purpose, and anticipated impacts. The enclosed survey inquired about general landowner sentiments regarding the project and openness to providing an access easement for the path. As of 10/22/2020, the survey response rate was 43%. See section on Right-of-Way for a discussion of results from the abutter surveys.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

TRAFFIC DATA

Traffic Volume

On Route 7 between the Massachusetts state line and Main St./Route 9, the 2018 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) ranged from 5,100 at Barber’s Pond Rd. in Pownal to 7,500 at the Route US 7/Main St. intersection in Bennington. (See Appendix for VTrans 2018 AADT’s for Route US 7).



The trolley tracks in Pownal in the early 20th century and the same location now (photos from Joe Hall).

Speed Limit

The speed limit on Route 7 is 50 mph in most of the project area. There is a 40-mph section in Pownal Center and a 45-MPH near the Vermont/Massachusetts border.

Crash History

Between May 5, 2010 and May 5, 2020, there were 5 fatal crashes and 100 injury crashes on Route US 7 between Route 9 and the Massachusetts state line (VTrans Public Crash Query Tool). The actual numbers of killed and injured were not included in the queried data set. Each incident counts as 1 crash, even if several vehicles or occupants were involved. (See Appendix for full list of crashes).

High-Crash Sections Route 7:

Pownal from mile markers 0.4 – 0.7, and between 6.1 – 6.4
Bennington from mile markers 0.012 – 0.312 and 2.712 – 3.012

(VTrans High Crash Location Report 2012–2016)

HISTORIC TROLLEY LINE

To determine the location of the Berkshire Hills Trolley Line from Bennington, VT to Williamstown, MA, BCRC referenced historic maps, analyzed GIS data and modern-day satellite imagery, and performed more than fifteen site visits to various portions of the trolley line from the fall of 2018 through the spring of 2020. Field visits to accessible areas of the trolley line revealed that considerable sections of the trolley bed remain impressively intact. Some well-preserved areas have come under municipal ownership and are functioning as public trails in the Greenberg Headwaters Park and One World Conservation Center near Bennington’s down-



town. Other intact areas on private land are evidently maintained and used for personal recreation. Still other tracts of the trolley line are quite overgrown, but recognizable due to the raised or depressed nature of the earth and a lack of aged trees along the surface of the trolley bed.

Other areas of the historic alignment are not visible where topography is flat and unremarkable or where the trolley bed was superseded by active road or railways. In some locations in proximity to ROUTE 7, it is clear that the trolley bed was intentionally dismantled and its foundational fill repurposed for the establishment of ROUTE 7. However, in these cases infrastructure is often present to indicate the original trolley line route. Such infrastructure includes bridge abutments along rivers and streams, cattle-passes, blasted sections of rock, and in one case an old powerhouse that provided electricity to the trolley.

Using the hybrid analysis described above, the BCRC mapped the approximate historic alignment of the trolley bed with a high degree of certainty. The historic alignment served as the primary reference for siting a new shared-use path. Of the proposed 14-mile Trolley Path, about 12 miles are within the original length of trolley line, with the two additional miles consisting of extensions to connect the Trolley Path to existing and planned paths. Of the 12 miles where the proposed Trolley Path coincides with the original trolley line, more than 8.5 miles of the trolley bed, in variably disturbed and intact states, would be reused for the shared use path in the preferred alignment scenario. In the northern half of the Trolley Path’s preferred alignment, the trolley bed is largely intact in the areas we have highlighted due to its remote location and low exposure to development. In more than half of the highlighted areas in the southern portion of the Trolley Path, the trolley bed has been superseded by road and railways, yet the Trolley Path often follows nearly or exactly the track of the original trolley line by running parallel to these roads and railways.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Potential impacts to natural resources and cultural resources were assessed through a review of publicly available geographic information systems datasets, consultation of the Vermont historic preservation database, and through site visits to the project area. The table below summarizes findings of the natural and cultural resource review. For full review, see Appendix

Natural & Cultural Resource Constraint Summary	
Wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 11 Class II wetland complexes intersect the immediate project area in VT.• 4 wetland complexes in MA intersect the immediate project area.
Surface Waters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 19 perennial stream or river crossings occur along the preferred alignment. 6 ponds are within 50 feet of the project area.
Floodplains and River Corridors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The project area passes through FEMA mapped 100-year floodplain and VT river corridors.
Significant Natural Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No significant natural communities are impacted by this project.
Necessary Wildlife Habitat and Endangered Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 10 incidences of VT rare plant/animal species occur within a quarter mile of the preferred alignment.• MA mapped priority habitats of rare species intersect extensively with the immediate project area.
Hazardous Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are at least 6 hazardous sites within 100 feet of the preferred alignment in VT. In addition, the path would cross over a capped landfill in MA.
Prime Agricultural Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 34 units of mapped prime or statewide agricultural soils in VT.
Historic and Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Numerous historic properties exist adjacent the project area and should be documented to make sure the project presents no Adverse Impact and qualifies for all funding sources.• There is some potential for archaeological impacts from this project, though the pre-disturbed nature of the trolley line corridor mitigates these impacts.

The table above covers Act 250 project review criteria. The analysis suggests that in areas where the trolley line is intact, there may be limited novel impacts to natural resources. However, where the historic trolley line no longer exists or is otherwise not viable to repurpose as a shared-use path, there are significant impacts to *wetlands, river corridors, and wildlife habitats.*

PATH DESIGN

PATH TARGET AUDIENCE

The path will provide the most public benefit, both for transportation and recreation, if it is designed to accommodate as many different kinds of users as possible, including:

- Casual, slower recreational cyclists
- Fast recreational cyclists
- Commuters/utilitarian cyclists
- Children
- E-bikes
- Bike tours (WNG)
- Pedestrians
- Runners
- Tourists/visitors exploring area
- Dog walkers



The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is family-friendly.

Electric Bicycles (E-bikes)

With e-bikes, bicyclists can ride more often, farther, and for more trips. Pedal-assist e-bikes have a computer and built-in sensors that constantly measure pedaling effort. The harder the cyclist pedals, the more assist the small electric motor gives. E-bikes come in three classes: Class 1 is pedal-assist up to 20 mph (above 20 mph, pedaling is completely manual). Class-2 e-bikes have a throttle which provides a maximum assisted speed of 20 mph without any pedaling required. Class 3 is pedal-assist up to 28 mph. E-bikes dramatically expand the potential of using bicycles for transportation and are exploding in popularity. Industry analysts estimate that 130 million e-bikes will be sold worldwide between 2020 and 2023.



E-bikes are climbing in popularity.

With e-bikes, bicyclists can ride more often and farther over steeper terrain. Allowing e-bikes to use the Trolley Line Path will attract more users and will make it far more useful as a transportation facility.

Allowing e-bikes to use the Trolley Line Path will attract more users and will make it far more useful as a transportation facility.

In many states, e-bikes are regulated by antiquated laws primarily aimed at combustion vehicles such as mopeds. As of 2020, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation defines e-bikes as motorized recreational vehicles, and only allows them on trails designated for motor vehicles. Vermont defines e-bikes as “motor-assisted bicycles,” which are subject to the same laws as completely human-powered bicycles. Many municipalities with robust path systems such as Boulder, Colorado; Scottsdale Arizona; and Boise, Idaho allow e-bikes on some or all trails. There is no evidence that pedal-assist e-bikes are more dangerous than conventional bicycles on shared-use paths. While the average speed of e-bikes is higher than conventional bicycles, conventional bicycles often have higher top speeds because e-bikes are heavy and difficult to pedal fast after the electric assist automatically turns off at 20 mph.

DESIGN

Design standards

The project must conform to AASHTO, NACTO, and VT Design Standards, and must be ADA accessible.

Width

Wide paths are key to accommodating different types of path users. At a minimum, the path should be 10 feet wide to comfortably allow a cyclist to pass a pedestrian. A width of 11 or 12 feet is preferable. A 12’ wide path is ideal.

Crossings

The path must intersect roads and driveways at 90 degrees and where there is adequate sight distance. The path must be prioritized at driveways to minimize the risk of entering and exiting vehicles crashing into path users. Bike/pedestrian underpasses must be used in locations where it is not safe to install a crosswalk.

Center line

A centerline is useful for organizing traffic and reducing conflicts between path users. Path users are more likely to stay on the correct side of the path where there is a centerline.

Path surface

There are advantages and disadvantages to paved paths and gravel paths. Many cyclists prefer paved path surfaces. Runners, pedestrians, and some cyclists may prefer gravel. Gravel requires more frequent maintenance, but pavement can be undermined by tree roots. Gravel paths are less expensive to construct (roughly 80% of the of cost of a paved path) but can be more expensive to maintain. We recommend a paved path surface where it is feasible.

Grade

To be ADA accessible, the path’s grade should not exceed 5% (although this may not be possible everywhere). Creative use of bridges and switchbacks may be necessary to reduce steep grades.

Path connections

The path is only useful if people can get to it. Safe and convenient connections to trip generators should be a priority.

Path entrances

Use bollards or other obstacles to keep out ATVs and motor vehicles while allowing emergency vehicle access.



A gravel Path in Quebec.

Amenities

- Parking at trail heads
- Frequent benches, especially at nice vistas
- Clear wayfinding signs explaining how to reach common destinations
- Map kiosks
- Features which explain the trolley line’s history
- Bike repair stations
- Bike parking at town and village centers

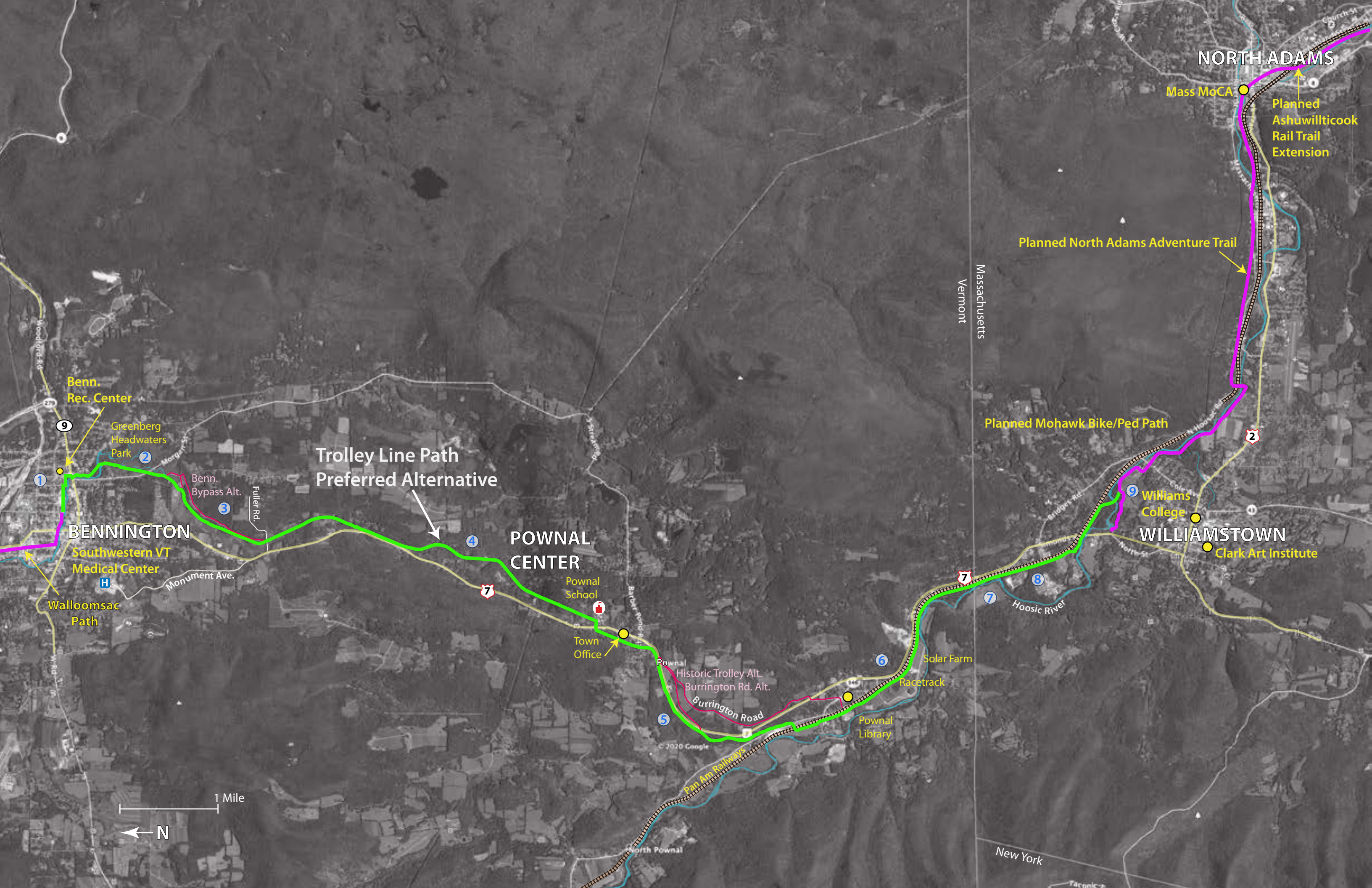
COST ESTIMATE

Scoping report cost estimates are notoriously inaccurate. The complete Trolley Line Path is a big project that must go through a long project development process and many design iterations before it is constructed. At this early stage, there are many unknowns, including the final alignment and future prices for materials and construction. The intention of this report is not to provide a detailed cost estimate, but to calculate the likely magnitude of cost to design, permit, and construct it.

	VT Section	Mass Section	Total
10’ Paved Path	\$27,157,211	\$7,022,223	\$34,179,433
10’ Gravel Path	\$23,147,527	\$6,279,555	\$29,427,082
12’ Paved Path	\$30,301,038	\$7,783,004	\$38,084,042

Based on *VTTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Unit Cost Report*

The cost estimate above includes engineering, permitting, right-of-way, project management, construction inspection, incidental items (includes fencing, traffic control, signs, and amenities such as benches), a 20% contingency, and a 5-year inflation factor of 16%.



NORTH ADAMS

Mass MoCA

Planned
Ashuwillticook
Rail Trail
Extension

Planned North Adams Adventure Trail

Planned Mohawk Bike/Ped Path

Williams
College

WILLIAMSTOWN

Clark Art Institute

Hoosic River

Solar Farm

Racetrack

Pownal
Library

Historic Trolley Alt.
Burrington Rd. Alt.

Burrington Road

Pan Am Railways

North Pownal

New York

POWNA
CENTER

Pownal
School

Town
Office

Trolley Line Path
Preferred Alternative

BENNINGTON

Southwestern VT
Medical Center

Walloomsac
Path

Benn.
Rec. Center

Greenberg
Headwaters
Park

Benn.
Bypass Alt.

Monument Ave.

1 Mile

N

ROUTE ALTERNATIVES

Due to the large scope of the project, the study area is divided into nine sections to allow for detailed examination and discussion of alternate alignments and their impacts. Four of the nine sections have alternate alignments, while the remaining five sections have a single proposed alignment. Designation of a single alignment occurs where site conditions are uniquely advantageous on the highlighted route and/or other options are not likely to be viable. In Sections 2, 4, and 6, the single alignment follows the historic trolley line bed. In Section 1, the proposed route has minimal cost and ROW impacts and provides the best connections to downtown Bennington trip generators. In Section 8, the vast majority of land is municipally owned and available for the path along the identified alignment.

For Sections 3, 5, 7, and 9, the alternate alignments present individual benefits and challenges. The reasoning behind selection of the preferred alignment is presented in the **Discussion** field for each Path Section below. The relative advantages and disadvantages of the alternates have been systematically quantified for comparison and findings are presented in Alternate Matrices in the appendix.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

A preferred alignment was identified over the course of drafting the scoping study and affirmed through public input. The path begins at the eastern terminus of the Walloomsac Pathway in downtown Bennington and heads south through Pownal Center and Pownal South villages to connect to the planned Mohawk path in northern Williamstown, MA. A narrative tour of the route is oriented by the following landmarks:

- Bennington: from the Walloomsac Pathway in downtown, the route goes past the Energizer building on Scott St, past the Recreation Center, crosses the Main Street intersection with Beech Street, goes through the Headwaters Park, through the One World/Greenberg Reserve, to Fuller Rd;
- Pownal: the route hugs Route 7 on its eastern side and heads south along the length of Peaks Pine Rd, then through private, rural properties until it crosses Jackson Cross Rd at the Royal Pine Villa mobile home park, then past Oak Hill Children Center in Pownal Center, across to Center St, past the Pownal Center Cemetery and Town Hall, down the west side of Route 7, coming out on Route 346 just south of the vacant Mack building in Pownal South, then along the rail line south to Main St, and on the west side of the rail line through the Racetrack property, then continuing along the rail line to the MA border;
- Williamstown: the route continues south along the rail line until



Section 1: Downtown Bennington

reaching the commercial access drive to the Hoosac Water Quality District, then drops down along the northern edge of the Hoosic River, crosses under the Route 7 bridge spanning the Hoosic, and heads east across municipally-owned lands to traverse the Hoosic and connect to the planned Mohawk Path on the Williams College campus.

Overall, more than 70% of the historic trolley line would be preserved and repurposed for the Trolley Path preferred alignment scenario. The preferred alignment measures 14.02 miles in length. A majority of the path, more than 8.75 miles, would follow the historic trolley bed alignment. Another 1.75 miles is routed on existing roadways, particularly through densely settled downtown Bennington and Pownal Center’s village center. The remaining 3.5 miles are sited as close as possible to the original trolley line route.

The preferred alignment experiences a total elevation change of 107 feet, starting at an elevation of 700 feet in Bennington, VT and ending at 593 feet in Williamstown, MA. The path would have a peak elevation of 986 feet in Pownal Center and a low elevation of 538 feet in Pownal South. The total project is estimated to cost upwards of \$30 million. The alignment has 20 stream and river crossings and crosses 15 public roads and commercial driveways. In

total, 44 privately-owned properties could be impacted by its development.

Sections of the Trolley Path are broken down for more detailed analysis below. Each Section indicates which of any alternative alignments is the preferred alignment for that section.

SECTION 1: DOWNTOWN BENNINGTON

Connects the Walloomsac Path and downtown Bennington to the northern end of the abandoned trolley line.

Alternatives Overview

Alternative: *Rec Park Path and Local Streets*: Connects to the Walloomsac Path via a 300’ path to the Bennington Recreation Center and then on a 3-block signed route on low traffic streets.

Section Length in Miles

Rec Park Path and Local Streets = 0.51 miles



Scott Street is a low-traffic and low stress street for cycling

Features

This section is in Bennington’s densely populated town center – a collection of single and multi-family homes, retail businesses and industrial buildings. *Rec Park Path and Local Streets* would give path users the experience of traveling through a neighborhood with street life and pre-war buildings.

Trip Generators:

Direct Connections:

- Businesses on Main St.
- Downtown commercial district
- Downtown residential neighborhoods
- Bennington Recreation Center

Indirect Connections:

- Mount Anthony Union High School (0.28 miles from path)

Connecting Paths:

Walloomsac Path

Grade/Elevation

Both alternatives are fairly flat. The total elevation change is approximately 33 feet.

Stressful Road Crossings

Route 9/Main St. at a signal-controlled intersection (AADT 6,600, speed limit 25 mph).

Right-of-Way Impacts

Rec Park Path and Local Streets is the only alignment proposed for this Section. **One** permanent easement is needed from a private property. The property is a commercial property that is currently vacant with a large parking lot that could accommodate the path. The remainder of the route is located within the ROW for the following streets: Main Street, Coolidge Avenue, Safford Street, Scott Street, and Park Street.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

The alternative is partially within the Walloomsac River’s River Corridor and the FEMA A AE Zone. The alignment is on existing streets, and the short path section is outside of the River Corridor. Construction in the River



This worn path of desire show the need for a path to the Bennington Recreation Center.

Corridor would require coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program. Technically, the path crosses the Walloomsac River on Park Street, but the existing bridge is adequate to accommodate the path.

Wetlands: Alignment does not intersect with any mapped wetlands. No impacts anticipated.

Impervious Area

Rec Park Path and Local Streets: No increase

Cultural Resources:

No impacts

Utility Impacts: No major impacts anticipated. It is possible the location of some power poles would be adjusted.

Estimated Project Cost:

Section 1, Rec Park Path and Local Streets = \$167,464 (10’ wide path)

Discussion

Rec Park Path and Local Streets is recommended. It is feasible and would offer users an appealing and safe route with a direct connection to the Bennington Recreation Center. It is likely the Town could construct the 305-foot-long path across existing pavement as a locally funded project at a fraction of the above cost (which is for a federally funded project).

The No-Build alternative would not meet the project’s Purpose & Need, because it would not connect the Trolley Line Path to Bennington’s path system.



Path along old trolley bed in Section 2 in the Town-owned Greenberg Headwaters Park.

SECTION 2: GREENBERG HEADWATERS PARK

Main Street/Route 9 to Morgan Street via Greenberg Headwaters Park.

Alternatives Overview (only one in this section)

- *Greenberg Headwaters*: Follows the historic Trolley Line from Main Street through land owned by the Town of Bennington. Most of the alignment in section 2 is now used as an unpaved public path.
- No other feasible alternatives were identified for this section.

Section Length in Miles

Alternative A = 1.07 miles

Land-use context:

C-1 Natural Zone

Features

The alignment traverses a park and connects to walking paths and boardwalks over wetlands. Kayak/canoe launches provide boating access to the Walloomsac River

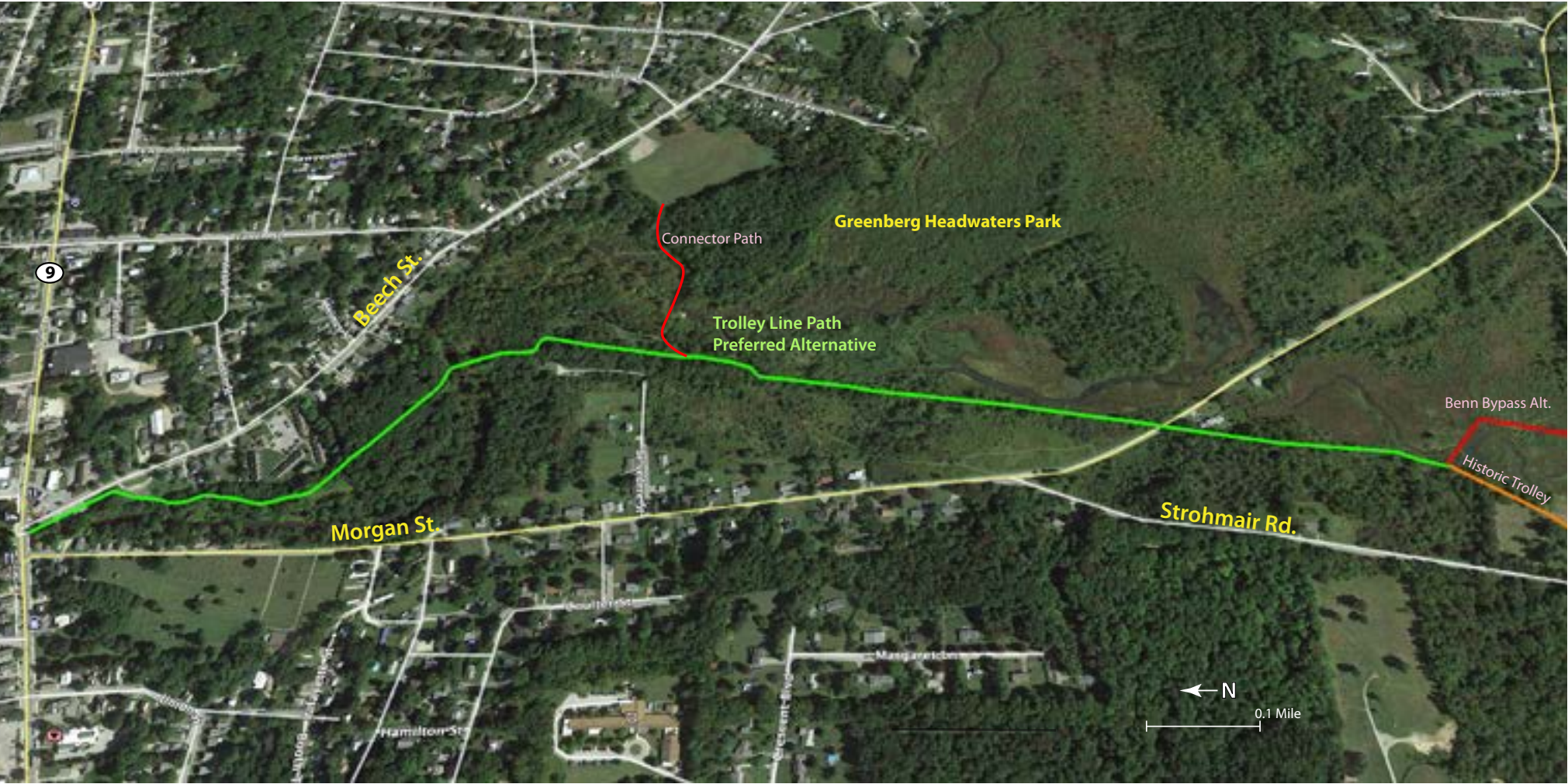
Trip Generators:

Direct Connections

- Greenberg Headwaters Park

Indirect Connections

- Residential neighborhoods to the east and west of the park.



Section 2: Greenberg Headwaters Park

Connecting Paths:

Greenberg Headwaters Park paths

Elevation Change/Grade

The alignment is fairly flat with a gradual slope. Elevation at northern end of section = 732 feet. Elevation at southern end of section = 807 feet. Difference = 75 feet. Average slope = 1.3%

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

This section is completely separated from motor vehicle traffic except at one road crossing.

Stressful Road Crossings

Morgan St. AADT not available. Speed limit = 35 MPH

Right-of-Way Impacts

All of the land in Section 2 is owned by the Town of Bennington and open for public recreational use.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams (link to environmental impact map)

A perennial stream crossing occurs at Barney Brook and a river crossing occurs at the Walloomsac River. It is not clear if a new bridge will be needed at Barney Brook or if the existing Beech Street bridge can be adapted. A new bridge across the Walloomsac River to replace the original trolley bridge is needed, which will require coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program. The original abutments are in poor condition and may need to be replaced.

Portions of Section 2 are within the River Corridor and the FEMA AE Flood Zone. Construction in the River Corridor would require coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program.

Wetlands

Portions of the proposed path Section 2 intersect extensively with mapped Class II Wetlands. Wetlands delineation, a wetlands permit, and mitigation may be required.

Impervious Area

A new 10-foot-wide paved path would create approximately 57,680 square feet of new impervious surface.



Old trolley bridge abutment in Section 2.

Cultural & Historical Resources

The path alignment in this section is in an undeveloped area and there would be no known impacts to cultural and historical resources. It is likely that an Archaeological Resources Assessment would be required.

Utility Impacts: No major impacts anticipated. It is possible the location of some power poles would be adjusted.

Cost:

Section 2 = \$2,834,182 (10’ wide path)

Discussion:

Greenberg Headwaters is feasible because all of the land is owned by the Town of Bennington and much of the alignment is already a public path. The biggest obstacle is replacing the trolley bridge over the Walloomsac.

The No-Build alternative would not meet the project Purpose & Need, because it would not connect the Trolley Line Path to Bennington’s path system.



Section 2: Overgrown trolley bed.

SECTION 3: MORGAN STREET TO FULLER ROAD

This section utilizes the abandoned trolley line to connect Morgan St. to Fuller Rd.

Alternatives Overview

- Trolley Bed – Historic
- Trolley Bed + State ROW: Follows historic trolley alignment with a small jog into state ROW to avoid impacts to private houses.
- Bennington Bypass: The route utilizes land acquired, cleared, and leveled by the State of Vermont for a new highway (the southern leg of the Bennington Bypass).

Section Length in Miles

- *Trolley Bed* = 1.32 miles
- *Trolley Bed + State ROW* = 1.58 miles
- *Bennington Bypass* = 1.53 miles

Land-use Context:

C-1 Natural

Features

Natural environment with views of forests, mountains, streams.

Trip Generators:

Indirect Connections (via Monument Ave.)

- Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (region’s largest employer)
- Bennington Monument (3 miles)
- Old First Church (2.6 miles)

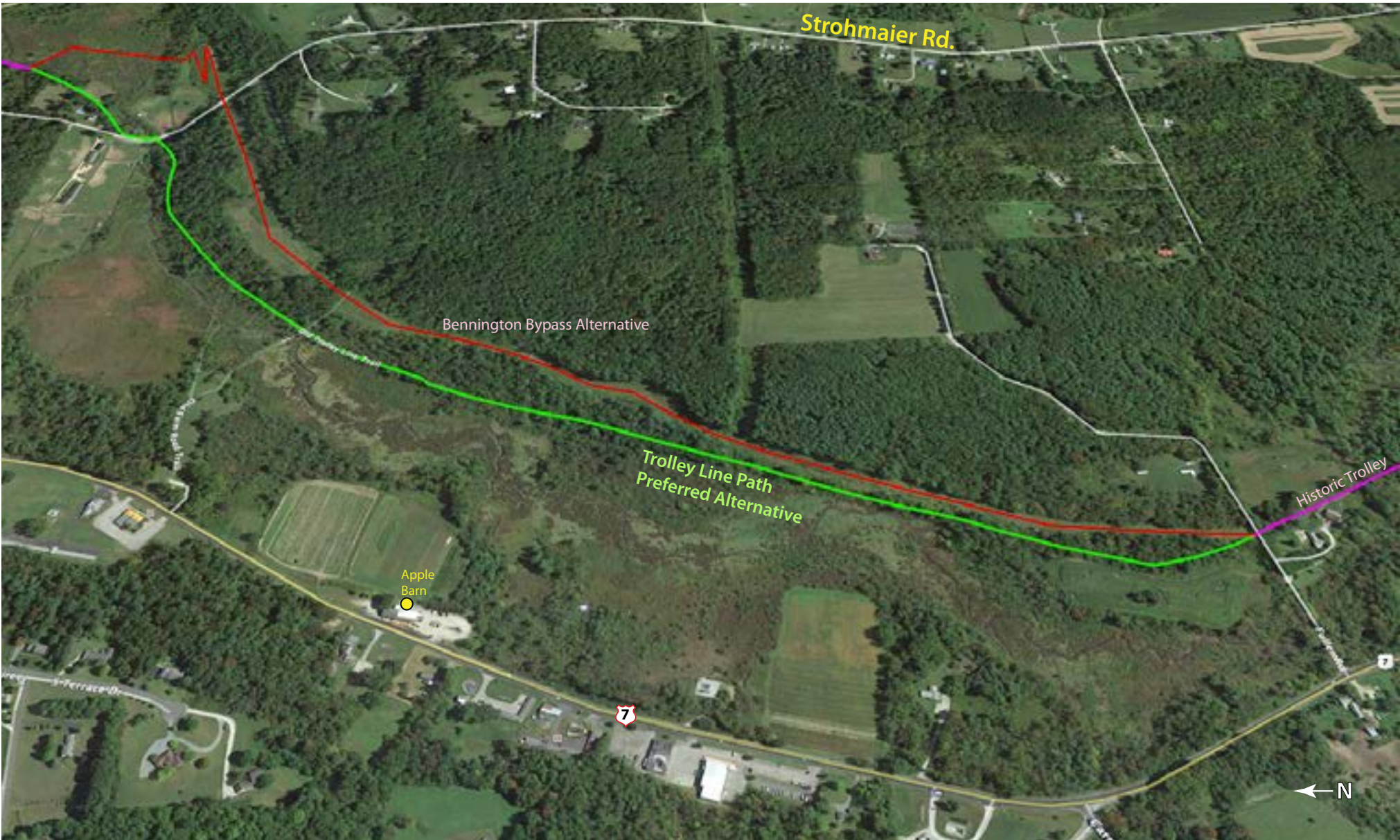
We recommend creating a 0.34 mile connecting path to Monument Ave. Extension to create a low-stress route to the Southwestern Vermont Medical Center and Old Bennington.

Connecting Paths:

One World Conservation Center paths

Elevation Change

Trolley Bed – Historic and *Trolley Bed + State ROW* alternatives are fairly flat: a gradual climb from 752 feet at the northern end to 782 feet at the southern end for a difference of 40 feet over a distance of 6,997 feet (average slope approximately 0.57%).



Above: Section 3; below: land cleared for Bennington Bypass; top right: view of trolley bed from bypass; bottom right: public path along trolley bed at the One World Conservation Center.

Bennington Bypass has a significant slope from the wetland at the base of the bypass (elevation 752 feet) to the top of the bypass (elevation 806 feet) – a steep climb of 54 feet over a distance of 250 feet for an approximate slope of 21.6%.

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

Yes

Stressful Road Crossings

The path crosses one low-volume road (Strohmaier Rd.). AADT not available. Speed limit = 35 mph.



Right-of-Way Impacts

Most of this section is owned by the State of Vermont, which acquired land for a currently abandoned southern bypass project, and by the Town of Bennington, which maintains and provides access to the trolley line as a public path at the OneWorld Conservation Area. The preferred alignment along the historic trolley line would impact **three** private properties. Impacts to private parcels could be mitigated by deviating from the optimal alignment.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

Portions of Section 3 are within the River Corridor and the FEMA AE Flood Zone. Construction in the River Corridor would require coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program. One stream crossing occurs at Jewett Brook, but new infrastructure is not likely needed because the path will be on-road.



In some locations, the trolley bed is at the bottom of two slopes.



Wetlands

Portions of the proposed path Section 3 intersect extensively with mapped Class II Wetlands. Wetlands delineation, a wetlands permit, and mitigation (such as boardwalks) may be required.

Impervious Area

A new 10-foot-wide paved path would create approximately this amount of square feet of impervious surface:

- *Trolley Bed – Historic* = 69,710 sf
- *Trolley Bed + State ROW* = 67,410 sf
- *Bennington Bypass* = 72,520 sf

Cultural Resources

The path alignment in this section is in an undeveloped area. There would be no known impacts to cultural and historical resources. It is likely that an Archeological Resources Assessment would be required for Alternative 3-A. Alternative 3-B is on an area filled for the uncompleted Bennington Bypass.

Utility Impacts

No major impacts anticipated. It is possible the location of some power poles would be adjusted. The alignment crosses an electric transmission line corridor, but the project would not impact it.

Cost

Trolley Bed – Historic = \$3,245,806
Trolley Bed + State ROW = \$4,035,735
Bennington Bypass = \$3,906,431

Discussion:

Trolley Bed – Historic has the advantage of being flatter. The *Bennington Bypass* alternative would require building a path that swoops down from an elevation of 800 feet to 760 feet to connect to the historic trolley bed north of Middle Pownal Road (also known as Strohmaier Road). It would also require the construction of a boardwalk approximately 640 feet long to span a wetland. The unbuilt Bennington Bypass highway project has not been formally canceled – it’s still on the books. The Federal Highway Administration would have to allow the change of project scope from a highway to a shared-use path. The historic trolley bed goes near two houses, so it may be necessary to diverge from the historic alignment for a short distance to avoid impacts to the property owners.

SECTION 4: FULLER ROAD TO POWNAL CENTER

This section connects Fuller Road to Pownal Center.

Alternatives Overview

Fuller Road to Pownal Center utilizes the historic trolley alignment. No other feasible alternatives were identified for this section.

Section Length in Miles

4.21 miles

Land-use Context

C-1 Natural Zone, C-2 Rural Zone



Features

Natural environment with views of forests, mountains, streams, and a large pond.

Trip Generators:

- Indirect Connections*
- Residential streets east of path

Connecting Paths

None

Elevation Change

The elevation is 782 feet at the northern end and 960 feet at the southern end for a difference of 178 feet over 19,554 feet. The average slope is approximately 0.9%

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

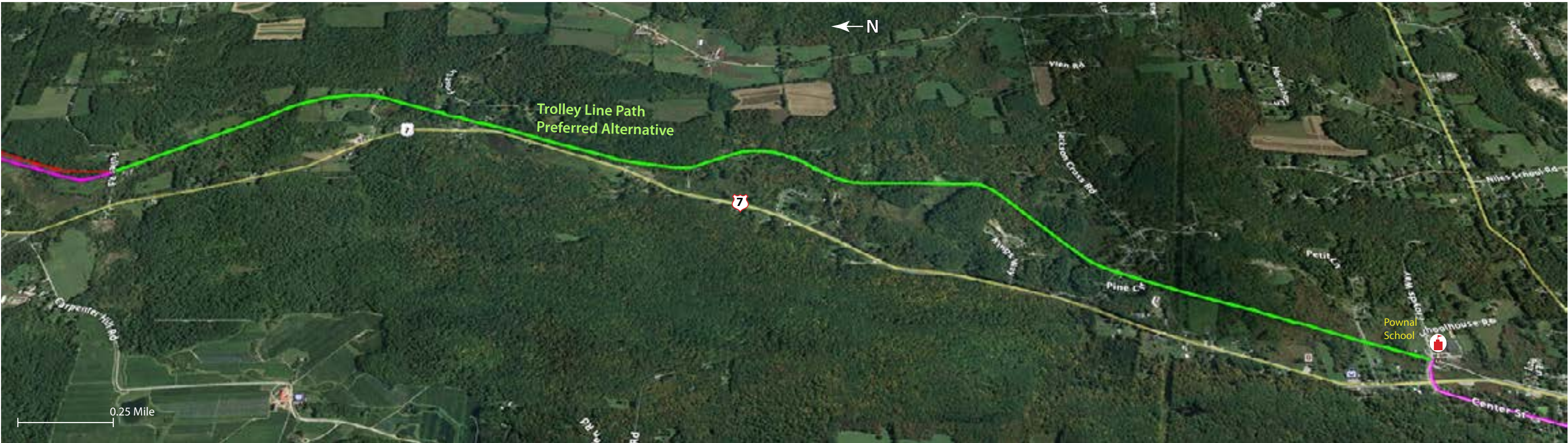
Yes

Stressful Road Crossings

The alignment crosses 5 roads with low traffic volumes and low speed limits. The busiest of the five, Jackson Cross Road, has a speed limit of 30 mph (AADT is not available).

Right-of-Way Impacts

All of the impacted land in Section 4 is privately owned and would require getting permanent easements from **twenty-three** property owners. Four of the twenty-three properties are commercial, and the remainder are residential. A portion of the path would be on Peaks Pine Rd, a dead-end, public



Section 4



Trolley bed in Section 4

road providing access to residences that was developed over the trolley bed foundation. The trolley line runs through a mobile home park, which has repurposed a short tract of trolley bed for an internal access road. The path would pass within 75 feet of eleven homes, six of which are mobile homes in the mobile home park off Jackson Cross Rd. A difficulty in this section is that the trolley line passes along the property line dividing neighboring parcels. In most cases, this fact doubles the number of easements required to repurpose the trolley bed. It may be necessary to deviate from the original trolley alignment in places to avoid or minimize ROW impacts.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

There are 7 total stream crossings in Section 4, and at least four but possibly more require new, short bridges, which will require coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program. All original abutments are in poor condition and may need to be replaced.

Portions of Section 4 are within the River Corridor and the FEMA AE Flood Zone. Construction in the River Corridor would require coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program.

Wetlands

Portions of the proposed path Section 4 intersect extensively with mapped Class II Wetlands. Wetlands delineation, a wetlands permit, and mitigation may be required.

Impervious Area

A new 10-foot-wide paved path would create approximately 176,640 square feet of new impervious surface in Section 4.

Cultural Resources

The path alignment in this section is in an undeveloped area on previously disturbed ground and there would be no known impacts to cultural and historical resources. It is likely that an Archaeological Resources Assessment would be required.

Utility Impacts

No major impacts anticipated. It is possible the location of some power poles would be adjusted. The alignment crosses an electric transmission line corridor, but the project would not impact it.

Cost

Estimated project cost for Section 4 is \$10,146,586 for a 10-wide paved path.

Discussion

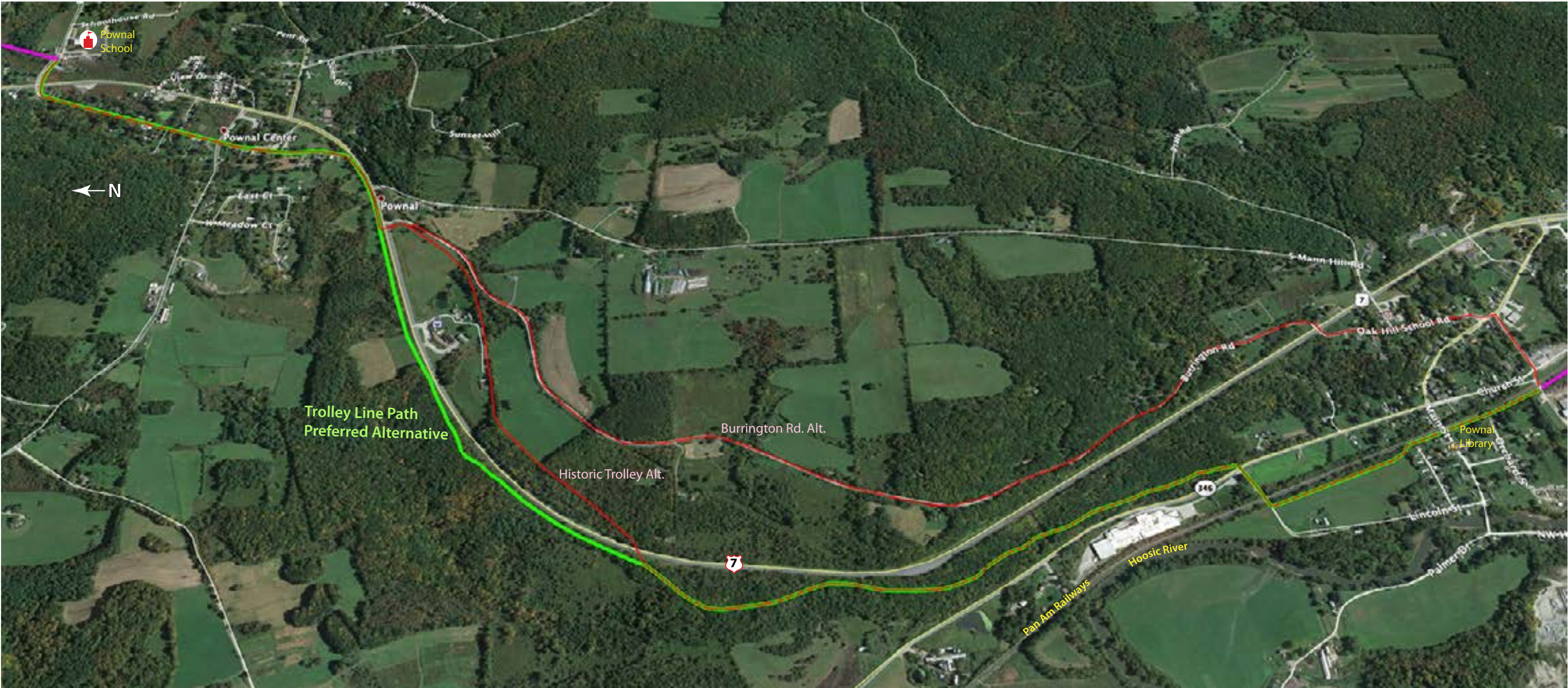
Alternative *Fuller Road to Pownal Center* is recommended. No other feasible alternatives were identified for this section.

SECTION 5: POWNAL CENTER TO MAIN STREET, POWNAL

This section features a big elevation change from 980 feet in Pownal Center to 560 feet in the Hoosic River valley.

Alternatives Overview

- *Center Street & West Side of Route 7*: Utilizes Center Street (a low-volume, low stress street), continues just west of Route 7, and then follows the historic trolley line down a large embankment at an angle to the plateau below.



Section 5



Trolley bed in section 5

- *Burrington Road*: Uses low-volume roads and a short path section along Route 7 to reach the valley floor.
- *Historic Trolley Bed*

Section Length in Miles

Center Street & West Side of Route 7 = 3.35 miles
Burrington Road = 3.31 miles
Historic Trolley Bed = 3.27 miles

Land-Use Context

C-1 Natural Zone, C-2 Rural Zone, C-3 Suburban Zone

Features

Views of mountains, fields, trees, rock faces, and the Hoosic River. Center Street in Pownal Center is a historic village center.

Trip Generators:

- Direct Connections*
- Pownal Center: residences, businesses, town office
 - Pownal Elementary School
 - Oak Hill Children’s Center
 - Pownal residences, businesses, post office, library, churches

Connecting Paths

Quarry Hill Path

Elevation Change/Slope

Three alternatives have long, steady grades. The elevation at the northern



Trolley bed seen from Route 7

end of Section 5 is 980 feet, and the southern end’s elevation is 560 feet for a difference of 420 feet over approximately 17,500 feet for an average slope of about 2.4%.

Center Street & West Side of Route 7 and *Historic Trolley Bed* descend 180 feet into the valley from Route 7 to Route 346 for about 5,500 feet for a slope of about 3.3%.

Burrington Road has the most climbing and descending. Burrington Road climbs 140 feet above Route 7 before descending to intersect with it.

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

Center Street & West Side of Route 7

- 2.748 miles of separated path and 0.6 miles of low-stress street.

Burrington Road

- 0.276 miles of separated path and 3.03 miles of low-stress street.

Historic Trolley Bed

- 3.275 miles of separated path.

Right-of-Way Impacts

- Preferred alignment *Center Street & West Side of Route 7* requires permanent easements from **eleven** property owners.
- *Burrington Road* requires no permanent easements.
- *Historic Trolley Bed* requires **sixteen** permanent easements.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

Very minor sections of Section 5 alternatives fall within the River Corridor and the FEMA AE Flood Zone. Opting for the alternate route that passes through the River Corridor would require coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program. A total of 5 perennial stream crossings occur in Section 5. For two crossings, the path is on-road so those are not likely to require new infrastructure. One crossing may require a small bridge or culvert, and two crossings will require large bridges, less due to the size of the streams and more due to the surrounding topography.

Wetlands:

All three alternatives have small areas that intersect with a mapped Class II wetland. The *Historic Trolley Bed* alignment has the most wetland impacts. Wetlands delineation, a wetlands permit, and mitigation may be required.

Impervious Area

A new 10-foot-wide paved path would create approximately the following square feet of new impervious surface:

Center Street & West Side of Route 7 = 145,110 sf

Burrington Road = 14,590 sf

Historic Trolley Bed = 172,810 sf

Cultural Resources

The path alignment in this section is in an undeveloped area on previously disturbed ground and there would be no known impacts to cultural and historical resources. It is likely that an Archaeological Resources Assessment



The Cattle Pass where the trolley bed comes down near Route VT346.

Two picutres taken from Lincoln Street in Pownal near Route 346. Above: possible locaction of rail-with-trail. Below: this field might be an alternative to rail-with-trail.



would be required. Alternatives A&C utilize Center St. in Pownal which has historic structures, but this will be an on-street signed route and will not impact the structures.

Utility Impacts

No major impacts anticipated. The alignments cross 3-phase power lines at least 4 times, but the project would not impact them. It is possible the location of some power poles would be adjusted.

Cost

For a 10-wide paved path, the estimated project cost for Section 5 is:

Center Street & West Side of Route 7 = \$7,200,353

Burrington Road = \$1,356,894



Center Street in Pownal runs parallel to Route 7, is a low-traffic, low-stress street and a Designated Historic District.

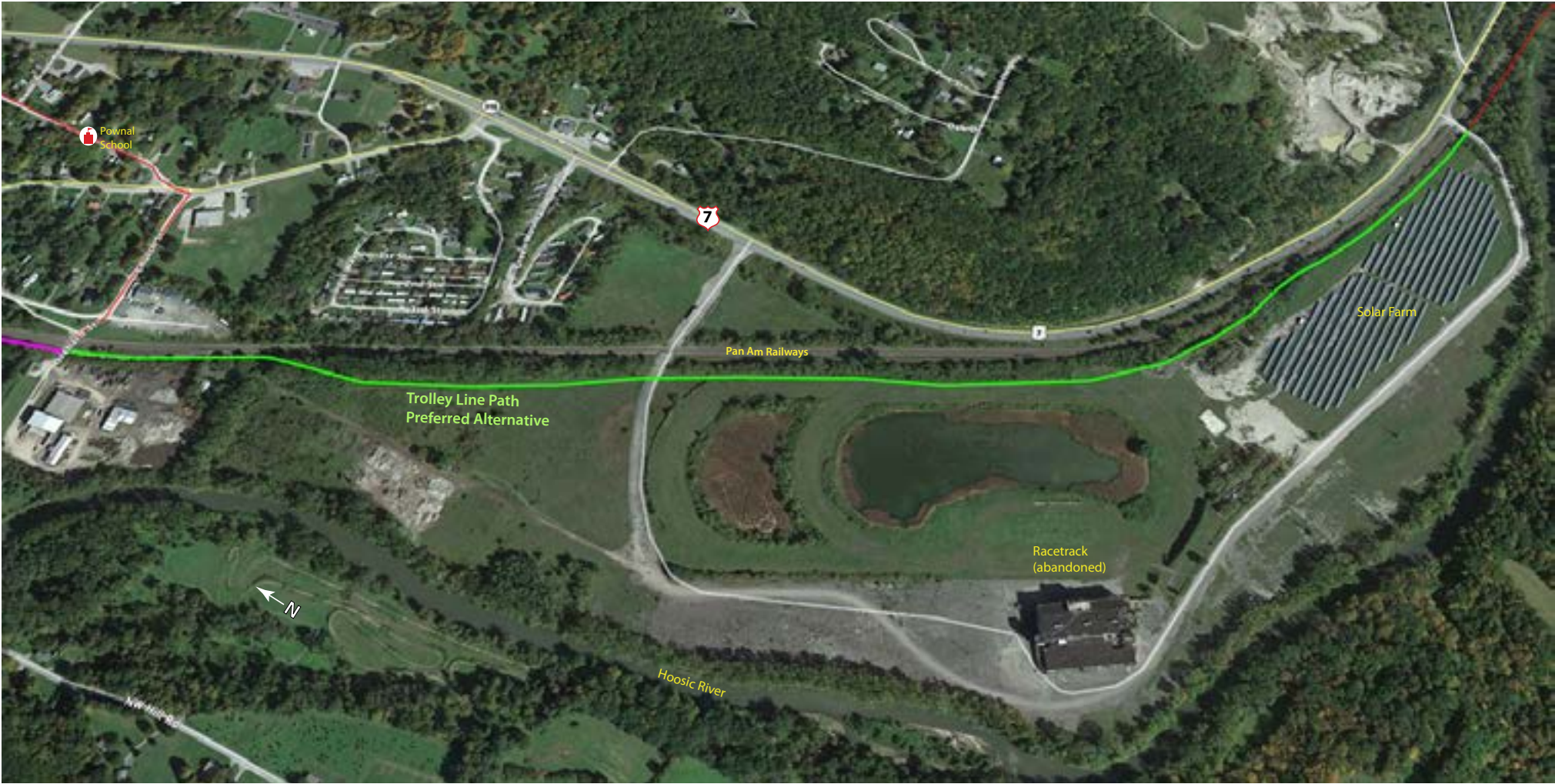
Historic Trolley Bed = \$8,756,433

Discussion

Burrington Road is the least expensive and would not require any permanent easements, and while most of it is on low-stress streets, it would still offer path users a compelling experience. This alternative would require two bike/ped underpasses under Route 7 because the 50-mph speed limit makes it unsafe for at-grade pedestrian crossings. A disadvantage of *Burrington Road* is that it has the steepest grade, a disadvantage for cycling. *Center Street & West Side of Route 7* may provide the best experience for path users because most of it is fully separated path and has a gentler slope.



This sign, originally on the trolley power house, and now in the Pownal Town Clerk's office, describes the elevation change from Pownal Center to Pownal Village in the valley below.



SECTION 6: RACETRACK & SOLAR FARM

Alternatives Overview

Racetrack & Solar Farm is a fully separated path across a flat area that was formally used for the Green Mountain Racetrack (now abandoned).

No other feasible alternatives were identified for this section.

Section Length in Miles

1.14 miles

Land-Use Context:

C-2 Rural Zone

Features

Views of mountains and racetrack ruin.

Trip Generators:

Direct Connections

- Green Mountain Mobile Home Park

Connecting Paths:

None

Elevation Change

The section is flat. The beginning and ending elevations are 560 feet.

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

The path is separate in this section.

Stressful Road Crossings

None

Right-of-Way Impacts

Section 6 would require permanent easements from **three** property owners.



The abandoned Green Mountain Racetrack is visible to the right.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

A section of the alignment is within the River Corridor, although there is existing infrastructure (solar installation) between the river and the proposed path alignment where it intersects the River Corridor. Sections of the alignment are also within the FEMA AE Flood Zone. There is one stream crossing, but due to the path’s proximity to the PanAm railway, new infrastructure is likely not needed.

Wetlands:

Path Section 6 does not intersect any mapped Class I or II wetlands. Additional mapping may be necessary to confirm no impacts to wetlands.

Impervious Area

A new 10-foot-wide paved path in Section 6 would create approximately 60,160 square feet of new impervious surface.

Cultural Resources

The path alignment in this section is in an undeveloped area on previously disturbed ground and there would be no known impacts to cultural and historical resources. It is likely that an Archaeological Resources Assessment would be required.

Utility Impacts

No major impacts anticipated. The proposed alignment would pass close to a solar generation facility and cross 3 phase power lines at least 3 times, but the project would not impact these facilities. It is possible the location of some power poles would be adjusted.

Cost

The estimated project cost for a 10’ wide paved path in Section 6 is \$2,805,604.

Discussion

This section is fairly straight forward. A historic cemetery and solar farm limit alignment options at the southern end.



SECTION 7: SOLAR FARM TO STEINERFILM PROPERTY

Connects the solar farm in Pownal, VT to a point 0.3 miles south of the Massachusetts border.

Alternatives Overview

- Rail with Trail:* The path would run on the edge of the railroad berm, sited so it does not impede rail operations.
- West of Tracks:* The path would run along the midpoint or near the bottom of the rail berm on its west side.
- East of Tracks:* The path would run at the base of the rail berm on its east side.

Section Length in Miles

- Rail with Trail* = 1.25
- West of Tracks* = 1.22
- East of Tracks* = 1.26

Land-Use Context:

C-2 Rural Zone, C-3 Suburban Zone

Features

The West of Tracks and *Rail with Trail* alternatives offer dramatic mountain vistas and river views. The *East of Tracks* alternative lacks these views because they are blocked by the rail berm.

Trip Generators

Businesses and residences along Route 7 and residential neighborhoods east of Route 7

Elevation Change

The north end is an elevation of 564 feet, and the southern end is 623 feet, for a change of 59 feet over a distance of 6,500 feet (average slope of less than 1%).

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

All alternatives are separated from motor vehicle traffic.

Right-of-Way Impacts

- Rail with Trail* requires **one** permanent easement.
- West of Tracks* requires **two** permanent easements.
- East of Tracks* requires **six** permanent easements.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

The *West of Tracks* alignment passes through the River Corridor and FEMA AE Flood Zone. The embankment of the railroad tracks should limit the geographic reach of the River Corridor. Permitting for this section will require careful consideration of impacts to the river in coordination with the Agency of Natural Resources Rivers Program. There are two stream crossings, but due to the path’s proximity to the PanAm railway, new infrastructure is likely not needed.

Wetlands:

The 3 alignments do not intersect with any mapped Class I or II wetlands in Vermont, but the *West of Tracks* alignment does intersect with a mapped wetland complex once in Massachusetts. Path development will have to comply with MA DEP permitting requirements.

Impervious Area

A new 10-foot-wide paved path would create approximately the following square feet of new impervious surface:

- Rail with Trail* = 62,210 sf
- West of Tracks* = 64,640 sf
- East of Tracks* = 66,610 sf

Cultural Resources

The path alignment in this section passes alongside existing railroad infrastructure and disturbed areas. There are no known impacts to cultural and historical resources.

Utility Impacts

No major impact anticipated. The alignments do pass in proximity to 3-phase power lines, but should not impact those facilities. It is possible the location of some power poles would be adjusted.

Cost

- Rail with Trail:* \$3,079,094
- West of Tracks:* \$3,013,444
- East of Tracks:* 3,101,154



The narrow strip of land west of the railroad tracks offers dramatic views of the Hoosic River, but is a challenging site to build a shared-use path.



In one short section, the river is close to the rail berm.

Discussion

This is a technically challenging section. An active freight railroad runs along a high berm in a narrow strip of land between the Hoosic River and Route 7. In several places, businesses and houses back almost to the edge of the berm. There is very little space for a path. Rail with Trail is the preferred alternative. The rail berm is flat, offers great views, and would avoid River Corridor impacts. However, it would require support from the railroad,



The strip of land between the river and the railroad.

which may be unlikely. West of Tracks is the next most desirable alternative, because it offers great views of the Hoosic River, the separation from high traffic areas, and avoidance of railroad crossings. Although it would be technically challenging, often paths that overcome site challenges with creative solutions offer the most compelling experience for path users.



There is very little space between the rail and Route 7 (in the upper right).



The recently built Neponset River Greenway has elegantly solved site challenges.



This bicycle path in Italy has made its challenging site a feature.



Much of Section 8 is on Town-owned land.



SECTION 8: STEINERFILM TO ROUTE 7 BRIDGE

This section is from the Steinerfilm property to the Route 7 Bridge.

Alternatives Overview

Steinerfilm to Route 7 Bridge alignment was the only alternative identified in this section. It runs just to the west side of the railroad right of way.

Section Length in Miles

Steinerfilm to Route 7 Bridge = 0.98 miles

Land-use Context

C-2 Rural Zone, C-3 Suburban Zone

Features

This section is mostly wooded.

Trip Generators

Businesses and residences along Route 7 and residential neighborhoods east of Route 7.



Route 7 Bridge over the Hoosic



Edge of Williamstown Transfer Station

Connecting Paths

Bridges Pond public access area.

Elevation Change

The north end is an elevation of 623 feet, the southern end is 630 feet, change is 7 feet over a distance of 5,100 feet for an average slope of less than 1%.

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

All alternatives are separated from motor vehicle traffic.

Right-of-Way Impacts

Section 8 requires just **one** permanent easement, though access concerns at the commercial property serving some federal clients with strict security requirements may prove a challenge to negotiate.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

The entirety of Section 9 is within the FEMA AE Flood Zone. Massachusetts has no comparable regulation to that for Vermont River Corridors. Project development will have to comply with MA DEP permitting for flood hazard areas. There is one stream crossing at Broad Brook, but due to the path’s proximity to the PanAm railway, new infrastructure is likely not needed.

Wetlands

The alignment intersects with 4 mapped wetland complexes. Path development will have to comply with MA DEP permitting requirements.

Cultural Resources

The path alignment in this section passes in proximity to existing railroad infrastructure as well as through some undisturbed and riparian areas. There are no known impacts to cultural and historical resources.

Utility Impacts

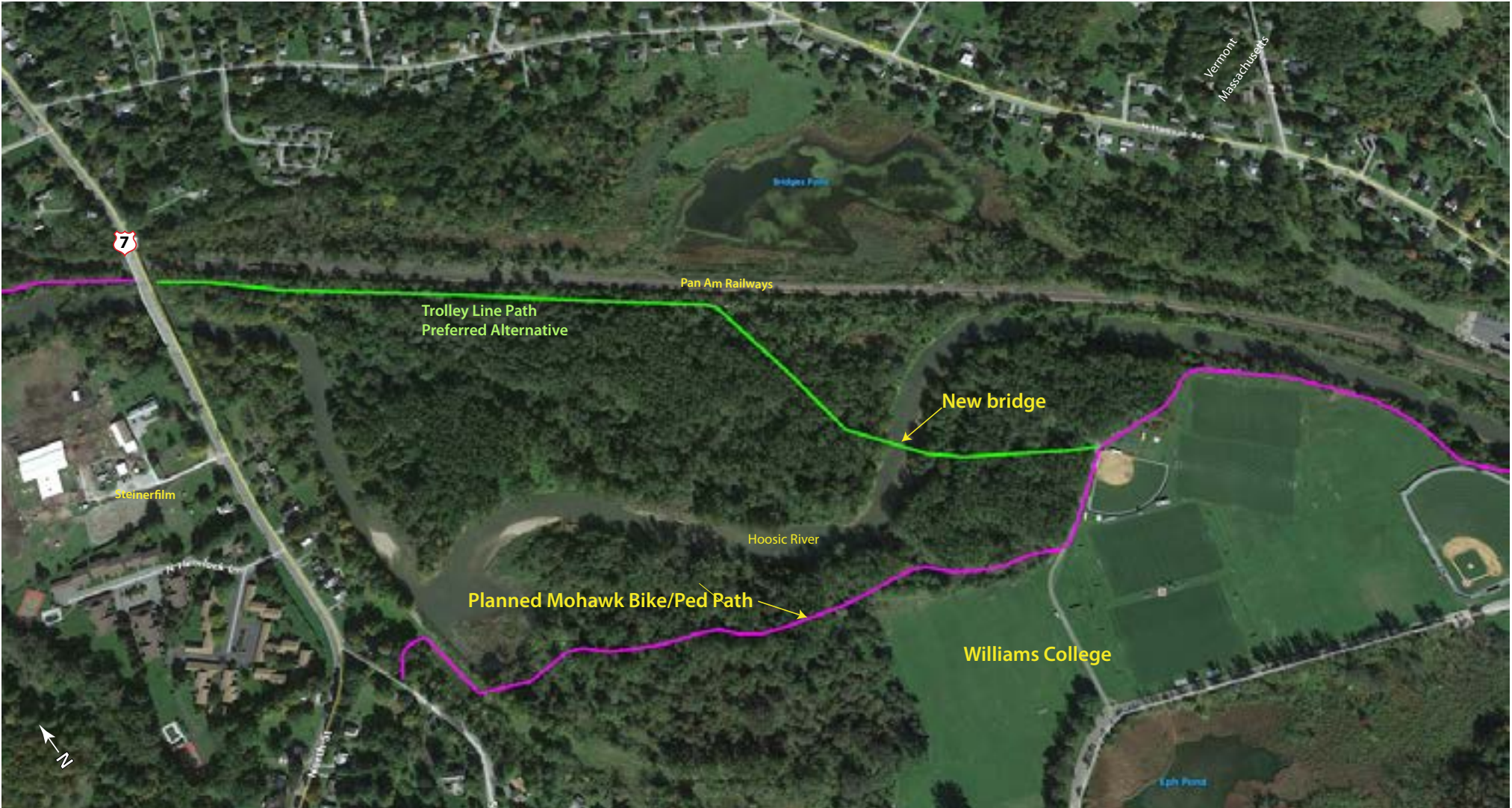
No impacts to utilities are anticipated.

Cost

\$2,613,250

Discussion

The *Steinerfilm to Route 7 Bridge alternative* is feasible. With the exception of the Steinerfilm parcel, the Town of Williamstown owns all of the necessary right of way.



SECTION 9: CONNECTION TO MOHAWK BIKE/ PED PATH

Connects the Trolley Line Path to the Mohawk Bike/Ped Path

Alternatives Overview

New Bridge over Hoosic River: Goes under the Route 7 Bridge and along Town owned land and crosses the Hoosic River via a new bridge to connect to the Mohawk Bike/Ped Path.

Section Length in Miles

New Bridge Over Hoosic River = 0.63 miles

Land-use Context

C-2 Rural Zone, C-3 Suburban Zone

Features

Hoosic River views

Trip Generators

- Williamstown: residential neighborhoods and businesses
- Williams College
- Hoosic River access
- Williamstown: downtown business district
- The Clark Art Institute (internationally renowned art museum)

Connecting Paths

Mohawk Bike/Ped Path

Separation from Motor Vehicle Traffic

The proposed alignment is separated from motor vehicle traffic.

Right-of-Way Impacts

The land is owned by the Town of Williamstown.

Floodplain/River Corridor/Streams

The alignment intersects with a floodplain. Roughly 550 feet of the preferred New Bridge alignment passes through the 100-year flood zone as it



The preferred path alignment is accross a former landfill site owned by the Town.



The Hoosic River near the proposed bridge location.

crosses the Hoosic River. There are no River Corridor regulations in MA. The preferred New Bridge alignment crosses the Hoosic River, which will require construction of a large bridge.

Wetlands

The alignment intersects with a mapped wetland complex, including the preferred alignment. Path development will have to comply with MA DEP permitting requirements.

Cultural Resources

The path alignment in this section passes in proximity to existing railroad infrastructure as well as disturbed landfill and riparian areas. There are no known impacts to cultural and historical resources.

Utility Impacts

No impacts to utilities are anticipated.

Cost

Section 9 = \$2,152,012

Discussion

The Williamstown Select Board voiced preference for the *New Bridge over Hoosic River* alternative.



Williams College athletic field near where the Trolley Line Path and the Mohawk Path would intersect.

IMPLEMENTATION

OWNERSHIP AND MAINTENANCE

The Trolley Line Path would serve a dual purpose – transportation *and* recreation. Because it would be transportation infrastructure that spans multiple municipalities, it could be owned and maintained by VTTrans and MassDOT. VTTrans’ vision statement, “A safe, reliable, and multimodal transportation system that grows the economy, is affordable to use and operate, and serves vulnerable populations” supports owning and maintaining multimodal transportation infrastructure like the Trolley Line Path that can be used by all Vermonters, even those who cannot or do not drive. VTTrans’ Strategic Goals #2, “Grow Vermont’s economy by providing a safe, reliable, and efficient transportation system in a state of good repair,” and Goal #3 “Transition to an energy efficient, advanced technology transportation system,” would be well served by a path that provides safe infrastructure that encour-

age modes more efficient than driving, particularly e-bikes, which employ advanced technology and are far more efficient than cars and trucks, even those powered by electricity.

Alternatively, because the path would also be used for recreation, it could be owned and maintained by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (FPR) and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Recreation (DCR), which owns and maintains shared-use paths across the state, including the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, which the Trolley Line Path would link to.

The path could also be owned and maintained by a non-profit, or by the municipalities the path crosses through. However, because the path is a public good that would be expensive to develop, and because the project area spans multiple municipalities and states, we recommend state development, ownership and maintenance.

Maintenance activities would include resurfacing, landscaping, picking up litter, repairing amenities (benches, signs, map kiosks, etc.), clearing drainage structures, and removing fallen trees and branches. Winter maintenance (snow plowing, salting and sanding) would be optional. The advantage of keeping the path clear of snow and ice is that it would have year-round utility as a transportation facility. The advantage of not clearing snow and ice is that the path could be used for cross-country skiing. Snowmobiles would damage a paved path but might be allowable if the surface is gravel.

In Vermont and Massachusetts, state support for comparable greenways has a solid track record of success. The 26.4-mile Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail (MVRT) in northwestern VT is owned by the State of Vermont and is maintained by VTTrans and VT FPR with oversight provided by the regional Northwest Vermont Rail Trail Council. The 19.8-mile Delaware & Hudson Trail in western VT is owned by VTTrans and leased to FPR to manage with the oversight of the D&H Trail Advisory Council and assistance from the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST). As noted previously, the 12.7-mile Ashuwillticook Rail Trail in western MA is owned by the State of Massachusetts and managed by MA DCR.

In other cases, a hybrid ownership /maintenance model among state agencies and local organizations has been effective. The hybrid ownership / maintenance model is exemplified by the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) in northern VT, which is owned by the State and maintained by VAST. To date, 34 miles of this 93-mile path have been developed by VAST, and VTTrans committed in the fall of 2020 to funding accelerated construction of the remainder of the path by 2022 with a mix of federal funding (\$11.3 million) and specially-allocated State funding (\$2.8 million). For the LVRT, VAST will retain primary maintenance responsibility for the full pathway.

RIGHT OF WAY

Right of way will be a significant challenge to building the path – perhaps the most challenging part of the project. The ROW for the trolley reverted back to the property owners after the Berkshire Hills Trolley Company disbanded, and the **preferred path alignment** crosses 43 privately owned parcels, plus various sections of Pan Am Railway’s ROW and multiple municipally-owned parcels, which were not included in the abutter mailing.

To gauge property owner sentiment, each of a total of 57 property owners were **mailed an informational letter and survey** in the fall of 2020. As of 10/22/2020, 24 responded (42% response rate). Regarding support for the project generally, roughly 30% of respondents reported feeling positive about the project, 30% were undecided, and 40% were opposed. Of respondents, 3 properties are currently willing to grant access easements, 7 properties would possibly grant easements after receiving more information, and 14 stated they are not willing to grant easements.

A breakdown of mailed survey response by Town is:
Bennington: 8 properties contacted. 7 responded to survey. 1 respondent possibly willing to grant easement, 6 not willing.
Pownal: 47 properties contacted. 16 responded to survey. 3 willing to grant easement. 6 possibly willing. 7 not willing.
Williamstown: 2 properties contacted. 1 responded to survey. Not willing to grant easement.

The preferred alternative also has a long section in land owned by the Pan Am Railway. One track is active, and one track removed allowing space for a rail-with-trail. Dialogue has been initiated with representatives of Pan Am Railway to see if they would be amenable to easements in various areas of the project. This report will be updated with their response.

It is unlikely that all property owners along the 14-mile alignment will grant easements for the Trolley Path. In some cases, it may be possible to detour around properties. Because the project is large and many easements are required, we recommend that a state agency such as VTTrans administer the project to make use of the experience and in-house capacity the Agency has to pursue large-scale ROW acquisition.

We also recommend acquiring donated easements from willing property owners immediately, and before any more formalized project ROW phase begins, because properties change hands and the wishes of current landowners who support this project should be formalized as opportunity arises. Easements acquired before a formal ROW phase should be done in a way that meets FHWA ROW requirements so they will be deemed valid if the project receives federal funding at some point in the future.

Traffic Management

The project will mostly be off roads and traffic management will not be a significant part of the project. The traffic management plan will be needed where the path crosses roads and highways. The traffic management plan is typically developed by the contractor.

Project Development

Scenario 1: Build the complete project at once

In this scenario, the project is identified by the VTrans and MassDOT as a capital project and designed, permitted, and constructed as a single project – similar to the way a new highway project is constructed. A big disadvantage of this approach is that it is slow – the ROW acquisition and the state’s project development process for such a large project would take many years – perhaps even decades to complete, and the public need, in terms of economic development, public health, safety, accessibility and climate is now.

Scenario 2: Build the project in phases

An alternative to building the project all at once is to build it in phases, which is often how large path projects are developed in the United States. Possible phases are:

1. Create a safe, signed, interim, walking and cycling route between the two project termini: downtown Bennington and the planned Mohawk Bike/Ped Path. The interim route could consist of a network of low-stress roads, protected bike lanes on high-stress roads, and low-cost, temporary gravel paths on municipally owned sections of the trolley line.
2. Gradually replace the on-road sections of the route with low-cost gravel paths by acquiring donated easements. Temporary, low-cost timber bridges can be used for stream crossings.
3. Replace the interim route with a paved path and permanent bridges. This could be done in several phases as funding and ROW become available.

Project Timeline

Scenario 1: Build the complete project at once with federal/State funds

Federally funded bike/ped projects typically take 5-7 years to build in Vermont, though the LVRT is an example of a project prioritized by the State to be built on an accelerated timetable. Because the Trolley Line Path is a big project with many unknowns and variables, it is difficult to develop a realistic schedule. The schedule below shows a seven-year project development period.

1. Scoping Study Acceptance/Preferred Alternative Endorsement

- (2021)
2. Conceptual 25% Plans
3. Public Informational Meeting
4. NEPA Documentation (CE) Approval
5. Completion of Project Definition
6. 60% Plan Development
7. Re-evaluation of CE
8. Right of Way
9. Final 85% Plan Development
10. Re-evaluation of CE
11. Contract 100% Plans
12. Formal Authorization to Proceed
13. Procurement of Construction Services
14. Construction (2028)

Scenario 2: Build the project in phases

1. Scoping Study Acceptance/Preferred Alternative Endorsement (2021)
2. Develop interim safe cycling and walking route using public ROW (2021-2023)
3. Incorporate gravel path sections on private land where property owners are willing to donate easements. (2024-2026)
4. Construct paved Trolley Line Path in sections to replace interim route (2026-2036)



Trolley tracks in Pownal Center.



The Interim Ninja Path in Bennington could serve as a blueprint for a phased development of the Trolley Line Path. The interim path was created by volunteers for the public to use while the federally-funded paved project is developed. The single-track gravel path is rideable on most bicycles.



Temporary, low-cost timber bridge constructed by the Town of Bennington for the Ninja Path. It will be replaced with a much larger steel bridge when the federally-funded project is built.