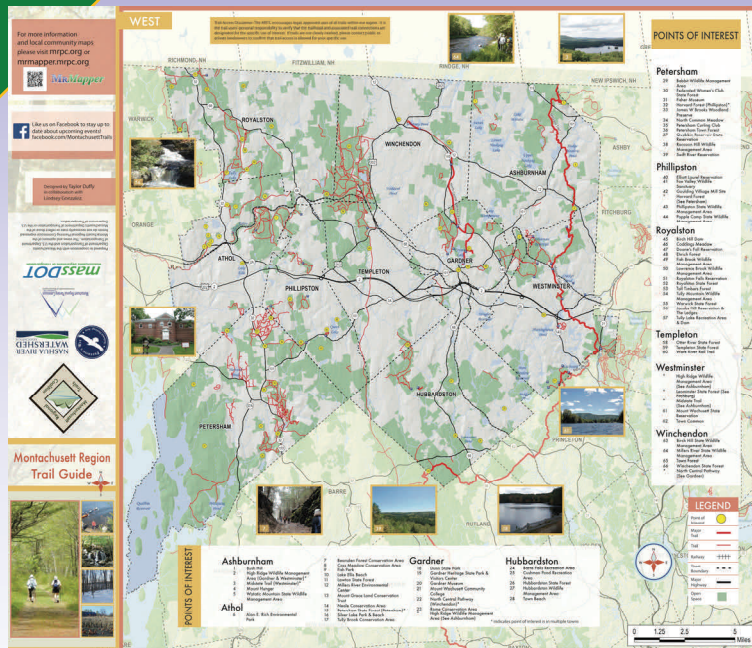




Chapter 10 - BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN



Chapter 10 – Bicycle & Pedestrian

Introduction

Increasing concern for air quality, energy conservation, rising fuel costs, and the health benefits of getting outdoors is leading to renewed interest in multi-modal transportation in the Montachusett Region and throughout the state. The MRPC has been working toward a more sustainable transportation system by educating and promoting transportation mode choice throughout the region. This chapter will review existing and proposed Bicycle and Pedestrian transportation alternatives while focusing on the importance of mode shift.

Right Now

Bikeways

Bikeways are special routes and/or facilities established to facilitate the movement of bicycles as an energy efficient transportation and/or recreational mode of travel. The Montachusett Region has a limited number of bicycle facilities due to a lack of funding for such projects.

The Montachusett region has many roadways that would benefit as a bike route. Major routes such as Route 2A, 12, 140, 101, & 119 would be ideal transportation routes for on-road bicycling. Unfortunately, most of these roadways consist of high traffic, speeding and narrow road widths which would pose a safety concern.

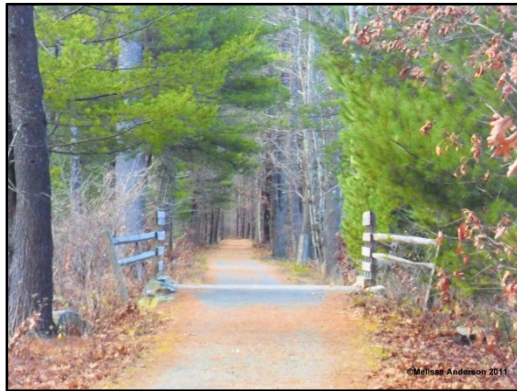
In 2008 Massachusetts developed a “Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan”. This plan, which is currently being updated, consists of existing and proposed bikeways and recommendations regarding bicycling in Massachusetts. There are many reasons for improving bicycle transportation – safety, health, environment, mobility, congestion and demographics, to name a few. The Massachusetts Department of Transportation endorses the “five E’s” for successful bicycle planning;

- Engineering – Bicycle programs should follow good planning and design practices
- Education – educate bicyclists and motorists
- Encouragement – encourage people to ride bicycles safely
- Enforcement – enforce the rules of the road
- Evaluation- evaluate programs and projects



Existing Bikeways include –

- Mass Central Rail Trail – (Clinton/Sterling)** This trail has been extended to Sterling Center along the Fitchburg & Worcester RR right-of-way, which ran from Sterling Junction through Sterling Center to Pratt's Junction. An estimated 21 miles of this trail are already open. The Sterling section is complete from Gates Road (where there is parking) north across the Quag bridge to the Sterling Cider Mill (where there is parking) at Waushacum Avenue/Newell Hill Road. It is hoped that the Sterling rail trail can be extended through Sterling Center north to the Police Station. The Mass Central Rail Trail is planned to extend from Northampton to Boston, and has been completed locally from Rutland to West Boylston (with some gaps). Part of the Sterling trail may likely serve to connect the Mass Central Rail Trail from West Boylston around to the north of the Wachusett Reservoir to Clinton, Berlin, Hudson, etc. and to Boston.



- Nashua River Rail Trail – (Ayer/Groton)** This trail is a former railroad right of way that travels 11 miles through the towns of Ayer, Groton, Pepperell and Dunstable. Managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the trail was officially opened to the public on October 25, 2002.



- **North Central Pathway** – (Gardner/Winchendon) This recreational trail connects the communities of Gardner and Winchendon. The trail was broken down into phases to ease the development process.

Phase 1 – Dedicated paved trail from Park Street past Crystal Lake to Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC)

Phase 2 – Using existing roads from MWCC, Kelton & Stone Streets to Route 140

Dunn Park Spur – Existing roads from MWCC to Dunn Park with dedicated connector at the Middle School

Phase 3 – 3.2 miles paved from Route 140 to Old Gardner Road in Winchendon

Phase 4 – Downtown Winchendon to Glenn Allen Street

Phase 5 – \$1.7 Million dollar project that is currently underway and consists of 2.1 miles starting at North Ashburnham Road to Glennallen Street (Rt. 202).

Phase 6 – Proposed connector between Stone Street & Rail bed. Currently listed on the Draft 2016-2019 TIP for 2017.

Phase 7 – Proposed along Park Street to old rail bed, ending where Phase 3 begins.

When completed, this trail will provide the region with a link to many other recreational sites and activities including Dunn Pond, Gardner High School Athletic Facilities, Mount Wachusett Community College, Gardner Municipal Golf Course, the Gardner Veterans Rink, and many more.



Pedestrians

The majority of the communities in the Montachusett Region are rural in nature with small downtown areas. The areas typically contain sidewalks within the major activity centers. The urban communities have a more extensive infrastructure within the central business districts that facilitates pedestrian circulation. Efforts have been made to improve pedestrian access by means of sidewalk improvements, crosswalk delineation, and construction of handicapped ramps, improved lighting, and connections to municipal parking lots. Designated fixed route bus stops are also common along the sidewalks providing a connection between different modes of travel.

Like the bikeways/routes, pedestrian facilities in the Montachusett Region are also limited due to a lack of funding. During these tough economic times, communities tend to focus their monies elsewhere. Local communities have expressed interest and support of improved pedestrian ways, often in connection with potential bikeways, but they lack adequate funding for the design and construction of these facilities.

Programs such as Safe Routes to School and Complete Streets may be useful for communities interested in expanding the walkability for their residents. In the spring 2014, Governor Patrick signed the Transportation Bond Bill into law, which authorizes \$50 million in complete streets funding for cities and towns.

The Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Program is managed by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). This program helps to educate students and parents on the value of walking and bicycling for travel to and from school. The program collaborates with schools, superintendents, public officials, principals, teachers, parent-teacher organizations, and neighbors to encourage safe, healthy trip options.

“Complete Streets policies require all road construction and improvement projects to begin with evaluating how the street serves all who use it – pedestrians, cyclists, public transportation vehicles and passengers, trucks and automobiles. An effective complete streets policy should prompt transportation agencies to:

- Restructure procedures to accommodate all users on every project
- Re-write design manuals to include the safety of all users
- Provide training for planners and engineers in balancing the needs of diverse users



- Establish performance measures to gauge how well the streets are serving all users.”
(www.completestreets.org)

Trails

Using Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) funds, the MRPC was able to conduct a region wide trail inventory. Through public outreach, local meetings and data collection, the MRPC was able to gather trail data for each of their 22 communities plus Devens. This data was broken down into three categories:

- Existing Formal – Trails that are open to the public.
- Existing Informal – Trails that exist but are not open to the public. These trails are likely on private or environmentally sensitive land.
- Potential – These are trails that are not currently in existence but that have potential for development in the future.

At the time of this document, the MRPC currently has over 700 miles of existing formal trails throughout the region.

In 2014, the MRPC, with the help of the Montachusett Regional Trails Coalition (MRTC), published a Montachusett Regional Trail Guide. This guide includes all of the Existing Formal Trails along with local cultural and historical points of interest. The MRTC also partnered with Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area and formed the monthly “Connecting Communities” trail events. These events support the MRTC’s goals of promoting local, and often underutilized, trails throughout the region.

Looking Back

Within the Montachusett Region, several communities have worked to develop trails and bicycle paths and/or ways. A few are currently in operation with several more planned for expansion or construction. Transportation enhancement funds have been utilized as a mechanism to implement several of these bicycle and/or pedestrian ways. Enhancement projects have been submitted to the MRPC through an established project selection procedure. These projects have been allocated funds through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) process.

The MRPC has continued its Trail Inventory Project through the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) funded by federal and state monies. The MRPC started this project in the Spring of 2005 in an effort to better identify existing and proposed trails in the region. These reports list mostly hiking trails but also include bikeways and rail trails. Once we successfully inventoried all




22 of our communities, a regional trail guide was developed as a resource for residents and visitors.

The Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition (MRTC) was also established in April 2012 at the completion of the Trail Inventory project. This group meets monthly and is focused on connecting people with the outdoors through local and regional trails. In June 2014, with the help of Freedom's Way National Heritage Area, the MRTC began a series of monthly trail events named Connecting Communities. These events have been very successful at getting people aware of and out on the regions existing trails and learning some interesting facts about the area's history and culture.

Challenges



There were many comments related to walking and biking at our public input meetings. These comments were broken down into categories and incorporated into the goals and objectives section of this document. Some of the challenges that came out of these comments include:

- How do we improve user awareness along all transportation networks through better identification, pavement markings and signage with an emphasis on bicycle and pedestrian routes?
 - How do we increase travel options within the region through the promotion of trails, Complete Streets, transit, land use and their interactions?
 - How can communities maintain and monitor trails that provide transportation options throughout the year?
 - How do we promote economic advantages of the regional trail network and recreational destinations?
 - What are the major trail connections needed throughout the region?
 - How do we promote an improved local review process that addresses issues related to Complete Streets, trail development, sidewalk implementation and mobility improvement as well as mode shift options within their community?
 - How can we increase and encourage a shift from single occupant vehicles to transit, bicycle and pedestrian modes through improved transit, van/car pool and trail options?
 - How do we improve infrastructure, i.e. sidewalks, benches, shelters, shared lanes, etc., along competing modes to encourage increased usage?
- 



Moving Forward – Addressing the Challenges

There are a number of ways that the MRPC can assist our member communities with answering/addressing these challenges. Some related projects and planning tasks are already listed in related documents. These projects include:

Current Proposed Bikeways/Rail Trails within the Montachusett Region:

- **Ashburnham Rail Trail** – (Ashburnham) The Ashburnham Rail Committee is still working toward a goal of a safe, non-motorized route between Ashburnham Center and South Ashburnham. This recreational route will benefit residents and visitors primarily as a safety measure since there are essentially no sidewalks along this very busy 2.5 mile section of Route 101.

The Committee is working toward two major aspects of this project:

1. Completing the engineering and design of the 2.5 mile section of the Rail Trail, which will provide users convenient access to the many existing businesses and services of Ashburnham center, as well as providing excellent opportunity for future growth in this area. Along the route, the Rail Trail would offer access to the Post Office, municipal soccer fields, J.R. Briggs Elementary School and the William J. Bresnahan Scouting and Community Center. It has taken approximately 10 years to get this short piece purchased and/or accessible for their use.
2. At the South Ashburnham termination of the current Rail Trail described above, the ultimate goal is to connect the Ashburnham Rail Trail to the North Central Pathway of greater Gardner and Winchendon via the abandoned Cheshire Branch of the former Boston & Maine Railroad. With this connection, Ashburnham would be a major entryway to a tri-state network of rail trails.

Progress on the 2.5 mile section of the trail has been difficult, slow and expensive. However, the piece described above is vital to the overall goal of the Committee, primarily as a safety measure for the Town and additionally to increase public visibility and funding opportunities for acquisition of the Cheshire Branch.

To date, the Town has acquired ownership and/or rights to the majority of segments that comprise the Rail Trail. In 2007, a 25% Design Plan Technical Proposal was completed for the Committee by Fay, Spofford & Thorndike LLC, and an application for an Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation was submitted to the Ashburnham Conservation Commission. Challenges that lie ahead for completion of the Rail Trail include:

- Parking and access point delineations



- Clearing, grading and surface preparation
- Bridge surface reconstruction at Whitney Pond
- Bridge construction or bypass at the washed-out gulley behind the soccer fields
- Road crossing measures at Rt. 101
- Municipal, State and Federal permitting

These issues and others are anticipated to be addressed in the next engineering Design Phase report, for which the Rail Trail committee and others are currently seeking donations and grant funding.

The financial and economic situation has left them with few options of moving forward with these expensive and major projects. Funding and grant money is limited for such a short but vital section of a rail trail. That is why the Cheshire Line is such an important piece in their plan.

With greater awareness of the incredible asset they have in their town, they hope to keep their dream of a Tri-State Rail Trail alive.



- **Squannacook River Rail Trail** – (Townsend/Groton) In January 2015, the non-profit Squannacook Greenways signed a lease with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to develop the Squannacook River Rail Trail on an abandoned portion of the Greenville spur of the Fitchburg line. The Greenville spur leaves the Fitchburg line just a few hundred yards west of where the Nashua River Rail Trail begins in Ayer. It continues north into Groton, where the officially abandoned portion begins at Hollingsworth and Vose. From there it continues through Townsend into Mason, NH, where it becomes the Mason Rail Trail. The entire spur is 14.2 miles, and the presently abandoned length is 9.4 miles.

For now, Squannacook Greenways is looking to develop a 3.7 mile section of this rail bed between the Bertozzi Wildlife Area in Groton to Depot Street in Townsend center. This 3.7 mile section multi-use recreational trail will parallel the scenic Squannacook River and will connect



the town centers of Townsend Harbor and Townsend Center, two historical districts, two shopping centers, the North Middlesex Regional High School, and several major open space/conservation areas (notably Townsend State Forest and the Squannacook River and Ash Swamp Wildlife Management Areas). In Townsend, this trail closely parallels the bicycle and pedestrian unfriendly Route 119, providing a long-desired safe alternative to that state highway for non-motorized travel.

The non-profit Squannacook Greenways was formed with major support from the Nashua River Watershed Association and Wachusett Greenways. Squannacook Greenways is the first non-profit in the state of Massachusetts to sign a lease to construct a rail trail with the MBTA. Much more information is available at sqgw.org.



- Twin Cities Rail Trail** – (Fitchburg/Leominster) The CSX corridor proposed as the Twin Cities Rail trail would connect downtown Leominster and downtown Fitchburg. The corridor runs along Route 12 for a majority of its length. Running north from Leominster's center at Main Street, it passes Doyle field and is within walking distance of the North Leominster train station and Whitney Field Mall. It runs through the Water Tower shopping plaza, crosses Route 2, runs adjacent to another shopping plaza, then crosses Hamilton Street before eventually crossing into Fitchburg, where it runs adjacent to The Falls at Arden Mills and ends at the base of the Water Street bridge in downtown Fitchburg, across from the Intermodal train and bus station and behind the Market Basket shopping Plaza.





Working with the Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition

The MRPC is partnered with the Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition (MRTC) in support of their mission of “enriching the lives and communities within its boundaries by advancing the development of diverse, high quality trails and greenways.” One of the major aspects of developing this mission is to

create trail connections; whether it is connecting trails within a community, region, state or beyond. The MRPC has developed a task, using its 2015/2016 Unified Planning Work Program, that will identify and prioritize major trail connections throughout the region. The goal of this task is to help develop these connections in order to create more trail awareness in the area, more transportation options, and improve the local economy.

The MRTC also has a goal of creating awareness for existing trails and trail networks. Part of this goal was to publish community trail maps as well as a regional trail guide that can be distributed statewide. This project was completed in the Fall of 2014. The trail guide is scheduled to be updated every five years.



Performance Measures-

- Revise, update and distribute a Regional Trail map, in coordination with the Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition (MRTC), by 2020.
- Establish a top 5 list of prioritized trail connections, within and across communities, in 4 years with updates every 4 years.

Complete Streets

The MRPC has in the past, and will continue to, conduct Complete Street type projects throughout the region. These projects may be specific to Complete Streets or may focus on Walkability or Safe Routes to School. All of these projects have the goal of public awareness and project creation to make our communities more bike and pedestrian friendly.

Performance Measures-

- Reduce the Regional EPDO and percentage of fatal and injury crashes among vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians over a 10 year period.
- Increase the number of communities involved in the Safe Routes to School program.



- Increase the number of Complete Street certified communities within the region. Seek to have a majority of communities formally certified within 10 years.
- Increase the number of bicycle facilities, ex. Bicycle racks and lockers and on board bus racks, at transit centers within 12 years.



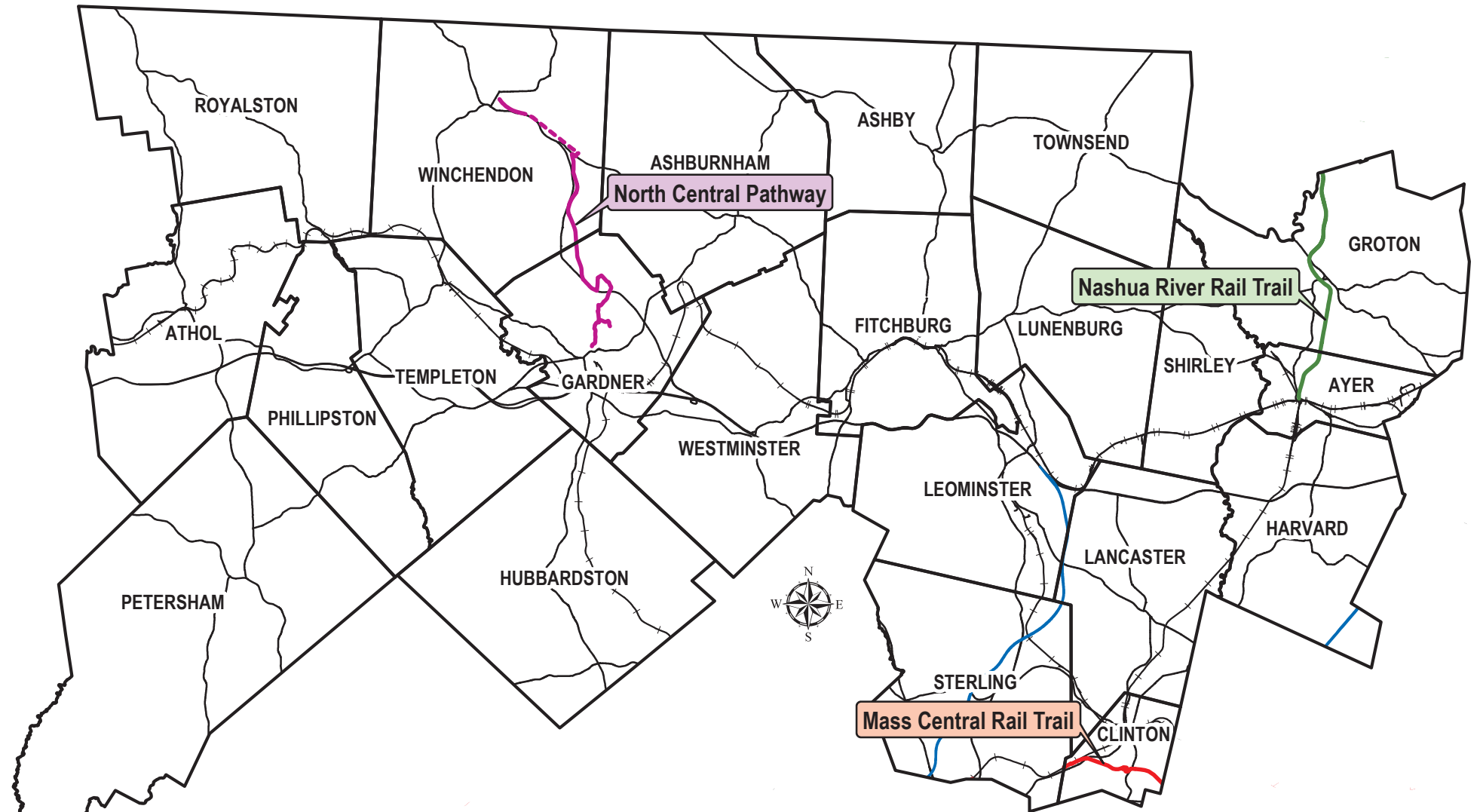
Action Items

Action	Next Steps	Outcome
Implement the Twin City Rail Trail	Currently listed on the 2019 TIP	Fully constructed trail
Prioritize and implement trail connections	Currently a UPWP task for 2016	Potential TIP projects for long distance trail or significant connections
Complete Streets	Study areas that would benefit from Complete Streets projects & encourage communities to become Complete Streets Certified	Potential UPWP tasks that could generate possible TIP projects that would create multi model options in the Montachusett Region and improve safety for cyclist and pedestrians.
Continued Involvement with the MRTC	Assist with promoting existing trails and analyze future trail development	Improved trail maps and guides, increased public awareness and involvement and future trail development



MRPC: RTP 2016

Existing Bikeways/Rail Trails



DATA SOURCES: MassGIS, MassDOT and the MRPC.

DISCLAIMER: The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. All data are representational and are not adequate for boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-based analysis.

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For more detailed maps of these trails please
visit the MRPC website – www.mrpc.org

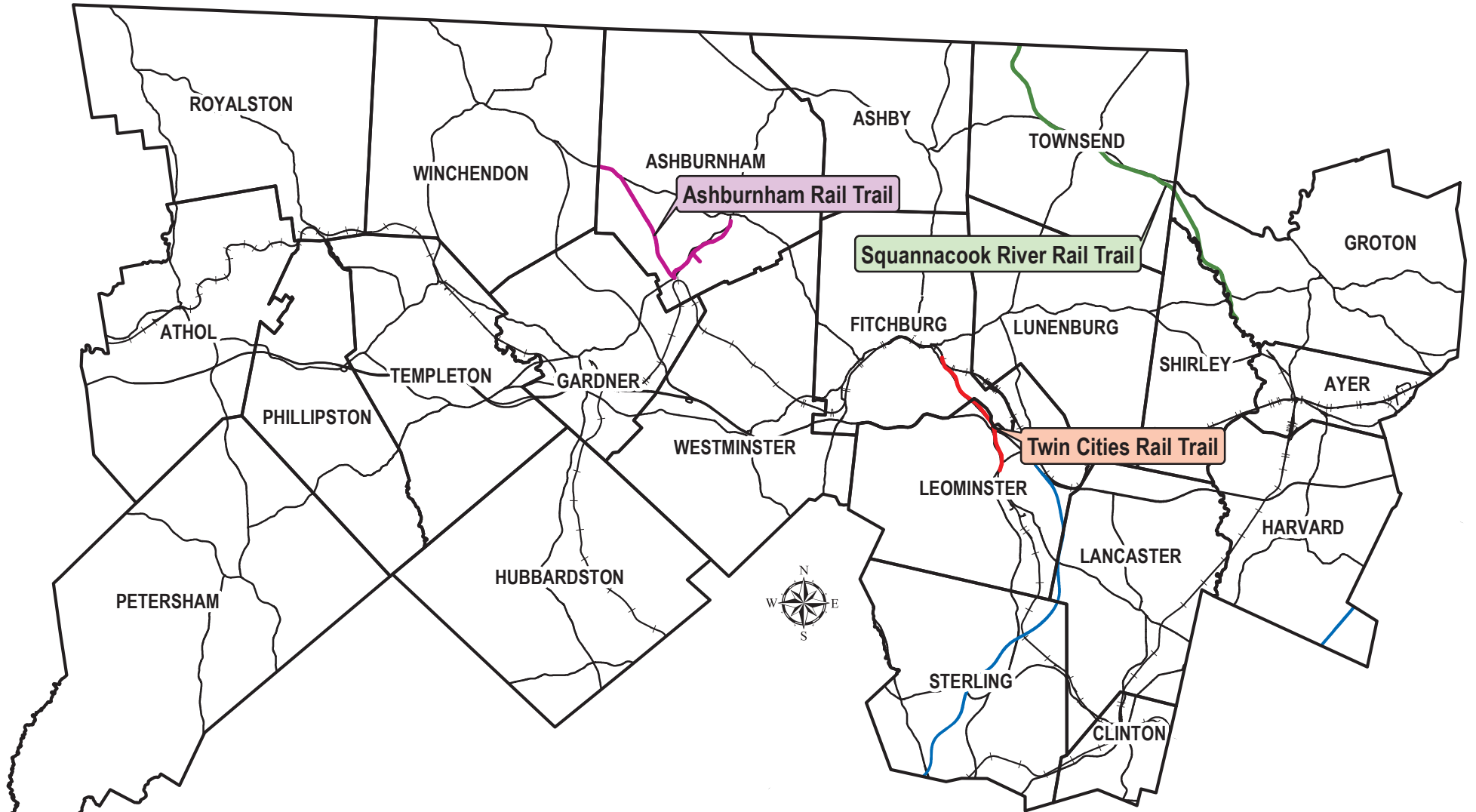


Legend

- Community Boundaries
- ~ Active Rail Service
- ~ Interstate Routes
- ~ US & State Routes
- Mass Central Rail Trail
- Nashua River Rail Trail
- North Central Pathway- Existing
- North Central Pathway- Under Construction

MRPC: RTP 2016

Proposed Bikeways/Rail Trails



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Legend

- Community Boundaries
- Active Rail Service
- Interstate Routes
- US & State Routes
- Ashburnham Rail Trail
- Potential Squannacook River Rail Trail
- Twin City Rail Trail