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- Brad Buschur, Groundwork Lawrence
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All other photos provided by Essex National Heritage Commission unless otherwise noted.
Executive Summary

Since the earliest days of its use by Native Americans, settlers, entrepreneurs, and everyday people, the Merrimack River has defined the character, heritage, and economy of the Merrimack Valley region in Massachusetts. Bounded by 17 communities with a resident population of nearly 522,000, the Merrimack River flows 50 miles easterly from the New Hampshire border to the Atlantic Ocean.

More than ever, community leaders see the river corridor as an opportunity to address the region’s recreation, health, and alternative transportation needs. Central to the ability of the Merrimack River Trail to fulfill these objectives is the promise of reconnecting people with nature.

The Merrimack River Trail Reconnaissance Planning Study, undertaken at the encouragement of the Merrimack Valley communities, is a strategic planning project focused on re-imaging the Merrimack River Trail as one of the region’s outstanding recreational assets: a 50-mile long bicycle and pedestrian trail along the Merrimack River.

The MVPC and the ENHC jointly prepared this reconnaissance-level planning study of the Merrimack River Trail with assistance from Brown Walker Planners, Inc. The study was funded in part by a Recreational Trails Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The planning methodology included meetings with local trail advocates and community officials, interviews with key stakeholders, review of planning and regulatory documents, research on related
initiatives, and numerous field visits.

This study report contains an introduction, discussion of the existing and potential trail routes in all 17 Merrimack River Trail communities, a set of conclusions, and a list of recommendations. The report is illustrated with maps and photographs. Each participating community received copies of the report, which is also available on the MVPC and ENHC websites.

The Merrimack River Trail has its origins in the early 1990s, when the Merrimack River Watershed Council teamed with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program to establish the vision of a regional trail running the length of the Merrimack River in both New Hampshire and Massachusetts. In addition to garnering support for the shoreline trail, the effort resulted in the creation, designation, and marking of several sections of off-road foot trails as documented in two guidebooks.

The re-imagined Merrimack River Trail will utilize the region’s largest natural feature – the Merrimack River – as the spine of a long-distance, on- and off-road bicycle and pedestrian trail network that will connect 17 Merrimack Valley communities to the developing statewide, New England, and even national trail system.

Underpinning the study’s conclusions is the strong sense that despite the initial productive work performed in the 1990s, the average Merrimack Valley resident is likely unaware of the Merrimack River Trail. In the absence of vocal advocacy for a well-defined regional vision for the trail, interest and, in most cases, use of the trail has been less than desirable, especially given the proximity of the trail to the river and the trail’s potential as a recreational and transportation amenity. Additionally, it is clear that the several sections of the existing Merrimack River Trail are underutilized due to the overt concerns regarding on-trail safety.

In response to these and other conclusions the planning team, with input from the study’s many participants, proposed a number of recommendations. While some are specific to individual communities, most reflect a regional perspective.

Many of the recommendations are intended to achieve the same overall outcome – the introduction or re-establishment of the Merrimack River Trail into the public consciousness. Only by growing the local audience for the trail can the foundation be laid for a sustained regional effort focused on the long-term development of the Merrimack River Trail.

Recommendations supporting this primary goal are presented in four categories: Organizational (e.g., forming a strategic regional partnership), Planning (e.g., designating local trail segments), Trail Enhancements (e.g., marking designated trails), and Awareness (e.g., organizing on-trail activities).

Finally, it is believed that implementing the recommendations will increased awareness of the river and lead to the meaningful stewardship of its irreplaceable natural, historic, and cultural resources.
Introduction

The Merrimack Valley region of Massachusetts is one of great contrasts: expansive tracts of forested uplands, cultivated farmland, large post-industrial cities, small classic New England towns and villages, and the Great Marsh, New England’s largest salt marsh.

Linking these varied heritage landscapes is the region’s largest natural feature – the Merrimack River, a critically important ecological and environmental resource renowned for its beauty and role in shaping the region’s nationally significant industrial and cultural history. Over the years it has represented life, energy, transportation, prosperity, pollution, degradation, and now more than ever, recreation.

While visible to the passerby in many locations, substantial portions of the river are visually and physically inaccessible to the public, keeping its natural resources and beauty tucked away from many residents and travelers. Creating greater access along its shore will allow more people to experience first-hand the natural beauty of this expansive, yet often hidden resource. It is hoped that the increased awareness of the river and its story will encourage greater stewardship of its irreplaceable natural, historic, and cultural resources.

Merrimack River Trail would address the need to better connect local residents and visitors to destinations as diverse as open space and recreational facilities, businesses, public services, schools, and transportation. Evidence of this need is demonstrated by the fact that several sections of the trail already exist and several more are in varying stages of development, leaving only a few off-road sections in the conceptual stage.

For the purposes of this study, the Merrimack River Trail is being newly envisioned as an approximately 50-mile, multi-use greenway extending from the New Hampshire/Massachusetts border in Tyngsborough downriver through Dracut, Chelmsford, Lowell, Tewksbury, Andover, Methuen, Lawrence, North Andover, Haverhill, Groveland, Merrimac, West Newbury, Amesbury, Newburyport, Salisbury, and Newbury. According to the 2010 Census, the 17 Merrimack River Trail communities have a combined population of approximately 521,775 residents. Twelve of the communities lie within the congressionally designated Essex National Heritage Area.

In order to function as the backbone of an extensive on- and off-road bicycle and pedestrian trail system, a re-imagined Merrimack River Trail will need to utilize existing and future off-road footpaths as well as existing roads and sidewalks. Extending beyond the region, the Merrimack River Trail will link to the emerging statewide Bay State Greenway trail system through its connections to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, Concord River Greenway, and Border to Boston Trail. Beyond the state’s borders it will connect to the New Hampshire Heritage Trail and 3,000-mile East Coast Greenway.

This document is intended to introduce the concept of further developing the Merrimack River Trail as a recreational and transportation resource for area residents and visitors alike. It is not meant to be a single or standalone document for implementation, but rather a stepping off point for additional inspiration, analysis, and planning at regional and local levels.

Regional Planning Background

The vision for the Merrimack River Trail originated in the late 1980s, with a concentrated period of planning and implementation occur-
ring the following decade when the Merrimack River Watershed Council, with support from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, undertook a regional effort in both Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The effort principally entailed organizing local, municipal and volunteer support for the expansion and maintenance of off-road footpaths. The effort resulted in the designation and marking of several sections of trail, and culminated in the publication of two guidebooks, the first focusing on the trail in Massachusetts (1992)
1, and the second (1995) covering the trails in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.2

In subsequent years the Merrimack River Trail/Greenway was identified as a regional priority in Commonwealth Connections, the 2002 blueprint for development of a statewide trail and greenway network published by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (formerly Department of Environmental Management), Appalachian Mountain Club, and National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program.

More recently, trails in the Merrimack Valley are seen as integral elements of the larger Bay State Greenway, a 740-mile, seven-corridor, on- and off-road bicycle trail system recommended in the Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan (2008) prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT).

In addition, information sources such as the popular Rubel Bike Maps and the region’s cycling clubs have identified significant portions of the on-road route discussed in this report as suitable for cyclists.

Development of the Merrimack River Trail is consistent with the land conservation and recreation goals established by the America’s Great Outdoors initiative. Launched by President Obama in 2010, the administration’s agenda for protecting the country’s natural heritage focuses on the creation of a grassroots partnership between the federal government, states, and local communities. A central tenet of the America’s Great Outdoors campaign calls for reconnecting people with nature through expanded and enhanced recreational opportunities such as trails and greenways.

The current Merrimack River Trail reconnaissance planning initiative (2011) began with a series of meetings with trail advocates and community officials to identify existing, planned, and potential trails, and assess planning considerations, including community goals, regulatory issues and municipal and fiscal capacities. Additional information was obtained through interviews with key stakeholders, review of municipal planning and regulatory documents, research on related initiatives of local and regional trail organizations, and several field visits.

Following the initial data gathering process, volunteers recruited by the Merrimack River Watershed Council and MVPC went into the field to gather location data using hand-held global positioning system (GPS) technology. Pictometry (aerial oblique photography) was utilized to better understand trail features and access points for open, closed, and proposed sections of the trail. The MVPC prepared comprehensive maps using geographic information system (GIS) technology.

Staff from the MVPC, ENHC, and Brown Walker Planners, Inc. analyzed the local data, assessed potential routes, and produced a set of preliminary recommendations for further actions by local and regional partners.

A draft report containing community by community descriptions, maps, photos, conclusions, and recommendations was circulated to approximately 35 local and regional study participants for review and comment. An electronic copy of the report was posted on the websites of the MVPC and ENHC.

Community Profiles

Note: To improve the readability and consistency of this report, the trail descriptions contained in this section are presented in a standard format. The individual community descriptions begin at the New Hampshire border and progress down river community by community. In addition, the expressions “left bank” and “right bank” refer to the respective side of the river as though the reader is traveling down river.

Note: Throughout the report reference is made to the Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding program. Signed into law in 2000, the CPA allows communities to create a local Community Preservation Fund to raise money through a surcharge of up to 3% of the real estate tax levy on real property for open space protection, historic preservation and the provision of affordable housing. The act also creates a significant state matching fund, which serves as an incentive to communities to pass the CPA. Subject to individual circumstances, trail projects may be eligible for CPA funding. For more information go to http://commpres.env.state.ma.us/content/cpa.asp

Tyngsborough

Situated on the New Hampshire border, Tyngsborough is a rural to suburban residential community of approximately 12,000 residents. The Merrimack River is a tremendous scenic amenity as it travels approximately five miles through the center of the community but has limited public access due to the dominance of steep banks and a variety of other land uses. An active railroad line hugs the Merrimack River’s right bank for nearly its entirety and where it doesn’t the river abuts farmland and one conservation property. The left river bank is lined with private properties from the New Hampshire/Massachusetts border to the Tyngsborough Bridge and south of the bridge is further bordered by Route 113.

Trail Route

There are currently no existing or planned trails along the Merrimack River in Tyngsborough, though Route 113 is a popular route for cyclists and provides the most viable option for trail development at this time.

At the New Hampshire state line, the northernmost end of the Merrimack River Trail is planned to connect with the developing New Hampshire Heritage Trail, a conceptualized 230-mile continuous trail linking communities between the Massachusetts and Canadian borders.

Left Bank

Paralleling the Merrimack River’s left bank from the New Hampshire line to the Tyngsborough Bridge, Route 3A tracks inland on Frost Road and offers limited views to the Merrimack River. Riverfront Park (aka Frost Road Park) located just north of the Tyngsborough Bridge opened in May 2011 as the town’s only public open space on the left bank of the river. Restricted to use by Tyngsborough residents only, the park provides boat access, a short trail, and picnic and informal recreation space.

South of the bridge Route 113/Pawtucket Boulevard runs directly along the river. This road has good river views, and ample shoulders for cycling with a posted vehicle speed of 45 mph.

Given the challenging cycling conditions on Route 3A, consideration should be give to designating the Sherburne Nature Center as either
the informal beginning or perhaps the gateway to the Merrimack River Trail. The 80-acre town-owned property is located on Coburn Road a short distance from Rt. 113. The estate features parking, hiking trails, and a nature center.

Developing a connection to the nearby 1,140 acre Lowell-Dracut-Tyngsborough State Forest (primarily used for hiking and mountain biking) should also be a local priority.

**Right Bank**

The right bank of the Merrimack River in Tyngsborough is largely inaccessible with the exception of the Hunter Property on River Road, a town-owned property managed by the Conservation Commission that has some parking and a trail system that includes sections along the river.

**Planning Considerations**

Development of the Merrimack River Trail in Tyngsborough would further the town’s goals of developing an open space corridor/trail system (2004 Master Plan) and establishing greenways for recreation and habitat networks with a focus on creating local and regional links (2009 Open Space and Recreation Plan). Riverfront access is also an important consideration for the town which looks to the owners of large undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels including the Vesper Country Club, Greater Lowell Technical High School and Chapter 61 lands to maintain open space along the river.

The Tyngsborough Recreation and Parks Department and Conservation Commission through its Forest and Trails Committee would be responsible for leading trail planning efforts for the town.

Funding sources for trail planning and development identified in the town’s Open Space and Recreation Plan include Community Preservation Act (CPA) monies, town budget and state and federal grants.

**Summary**

The Merrimack River Trail in Tyngsborough is likely to be an on-road trail along the river’s left bank sharing Route 3A from the New Hampshire border to the Tyngsborough Bridge, and Route 113 from the bridge south. It is recommended that the town consider incorporating the Sherburne Nature Center into the trail route and otherwise consider designating a roadside trail where right-of-way width and conditions would allow it.

**Recommendations**

- Consider designating Route 113/Pawtucket Boulevard as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Consider designating a roadside trail where right-of-way width and conditions would allow it.
- Consider incorporating the Sherburne Estate into the trail route as the gateway to the Merrimack River Trail.

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3 Chapter 61: Massachusetts current use programs (Ch. 61, Ch. 61A, and Ch. 61B) were created to give preferential tax treatment to those landowners who maintain their property as open space for the purposes of timber production, agriculture or recreation.
Dracut

Dracut, situated between New Hampshire and the Merrimack River, evolved from a farming community to a manufacturing town, to today’s suburban community of nearly 30,000 residents. The Merrimack River forms the town’s two mile long southern boundary, though its shoreline is dominated by Route 110. While providing good views of the river, the route’s posted 45 mph limit is routinely exceeded. Scattered, predominate riverfront uses include commercial businesses and single family residences.

Trail Route

*Left Bank*

Due to the steep slope conditions and the road’s close proximity to the river, an off-road trail is highly unlikely. Pedestrian and bicycle access along the Merrimack River may only be possible along Route 110. This route (between Lowell and Methuen) was reduced from a four to two-lane highway in recent years in an effort to increase safety by reducing vehicle speeds. Accommodating bicycle and pedestrian access should entail an examination of road’s cross section with an eye to reducing the travel lane widths and further separating vehicles and non-motorized users.

Planning Considerations

The town believes that economic development and environmental justice communities could be served through the development of trails along the River. In addition the town’s open space plan supports trail development.

The Dracut Conservation and Recreation Department and Planning Department would lead trail planning efforts. The majority of land along the river is either owned by the town or by New England Power. If a “complete streets” reallocation of Route 110 is planned, MassDOT would have principle jurisdiction, since Route 110 is a state highway.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) has been identified as a potential funding source for trail development in Dracut.

Summary

Route 110 in Dracut offers the traveler some of the finest river views along the entire route. However, the lack of space between the river and Route 110 throughout most of the town requires looking to the road right-of-way to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, though the route’s posted 45 mph speed limits is a significant impediment to widespread use. Municipal officials might consider contacting MassDOT to pursue the design and installation of a separation barrier between the travel lane and wide shoulder lane. Identifying river access points for paddlers should also be considered in areas where some open space exists along the shoreline.

Recommendations

- Consider designating Route 110 as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Consider fostering more on-road biking by posting “bike lane” or “share the road” signage along Route 110.
- Consider fostering more on-road biking by installing separation barriers or markers along Route 110.
- Identify river access points for paddlers in areas where some open space exists along the shoreline.
Chelmsford

Chelmsford is a scenic suburban community of over 34,000 residents with settlement patterns ranging from dense village centers developed during the Industrial era to large residential subdivisions following construction of Interstate 495. Chelmsford also has a diversity of business and employment generators including computer related businesses, research and development, as well as national and local retailers. The Merrimack River creates the town boundary between Chelmsford, Tyngsborough and Lowell and provides over two miles of riverfront. Primary land uses along the riverfront include a railroad corridor, agricultural land, and single family residences.

TRAIL ROUTE

Right Bank

There are currently no existing trails along the Merrimack River in Chelmsford and the potential for trail development along the river is limited by the existing rail line and other private uses.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

While actively pursuing trail initiatives such as the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail elsewhere in town, there are currently no plans for trail development along the Merrimack River in Chelmsford. The Chelmsford Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, has stated however that it would support trail development through Chelmsford if it were to become feasible. If commuter rail is extended to New Hampshire and a new transit station opened in North Chelmsford, the community may want to consider enhancing bicycle and pedestrian accessibility in this area, which could also provide better transportation and recreational opportunities along the Merrimack River.

SUMMARY

Given the limitations for trail development along the Merrimack River in Chelmsford, this plan recommends that support for development along the opposite bank in Lowell is the most useful plan of action. In addition, the Town of Chelmsford should continue to seek opportunities for creating waterfront access as land uses change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pursuant to the development of a new commuter rail station, consider enhancing bicycle and pedestrian accessibility in this area.

Lowell

The fourth largest city in Massachusetts, Lowell developed in the early 1800s as a planned manufacturing center around the Merrimack River. By midcentury it hosted the largest industrial complex in the United States however, 100 years after Lowell was developed the city began to lose its manufacturing base. In the 1950s the city’s last textile plants closed and more than two decades of economic difficulties followed.

Since the 1970’s, Lowell has been renewing itself with a focus on its cultural heritage. Today, with a population of over 103,000, Lowell remains committed to aggressive planning and redevelopment with initiatives focused on its historic downtown, the waterfront, neighborhoods, transportation systems, and the city’s priority development sites.

The community of Lowell straddles the Merrimack River which flows for over six miles through various commercial, institutional, municipal, and residential areas. Major roadways hug the river’s left bank but public parks and esplanades have been carved into the shore, leaving only scattered private properties between the roadways and the river. The right bank of the Merrimack River through Lowell is dominated by railroad tracks on the western side of the city and then becomes the edge of educational campuses and private properties before being given over to public space and trails through the center
of the city. As it nears the city’s eastern border it returns to private land through a residential neighborhood.

**TRAIL ROUTE**

*Left Bank*

The Merrimack River Trail along the left bank of the Merrimack River in Lowell begins on **Route 113/Pawtucket Boulevard** at the Lowell/Tyngsborough line. Located just before the Rourke Bridge, Lowell Heritage State Park provides public boat access and parking to accommodate over 60 vehicles.

Lowell Heritage State Park continues downriver of the Rourke Bridge where the **Vandenberg Esplanade/Pawtucket Boulevard Walkway**, owned and managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), continues for two miles to Mammoth Road and Pawtucket Falls. The paved walkway provides access to the historic Bellegarde Boathouse, Rynne Beach, and a swim area managed by the City of Lowell, and a boat ramp and parking area managed by DCR on Pawtucket Boulevard.

At Pawtucket Falls a trail continues along the river’s edge but it is well below the street surface, is difficult to see, and due to the embankment between the street and trail provides limited opportunities to move off the trail back to the road. The **Route 113/VFW Highway** here provides another trail option between Pawtucket Falls and Beaver Brook. At Beaver Brook, the **Centerville Riverside Trail/North Bank Walkway** is an off-road trail that runs nearly to Duck Island near the Lowell/Dracut town line.

**Right Bank**

Access to the Merrimack River on its right bank immediately entering Lowell from Chelmsford is unlikely at this time due to the rail line that runs along the water’s edge. The rail line moves inland downriver from the Rourke Bridge, where Middlesex Street turns into Pawtucket Street, and gives access to **Sheehy Park Extension**, a riverfront trail system that parallels the street and moves through Sheehy Park providing views of the Pawtucket falls dam and boathouse, as well as parking.

From Sheehy Park, the trail continues briefly on Pawtucket Street to Pawtucket Canal. The proposed **Pawtucket Canal Greenway** would follow the Pawtucket Canal inland and connect a number of open spaces leading ultimately to the Lowell National Historic Park downtown.

Beyond the Pawtucket Canal is **Spalding House Park**, another public riverside resource. Owned and operated by the City of Lowell, the Spalding House Park sits behind circa 1760 Spalding House, owned and managed by the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust. This provides a trail connection to the Northern Canal Walkway and steering clear of the busy Pawtucket St./School St. intersection.

Further downriver, Pawtucket Street also leads to **The Riverwalk** (The Mile of Mills or Yankee Division Walkway). This one-mile trail hugs the right bank of the Merrimack River connecting Northern Canalway, UMass Lowell, LeLacheur Park, Tsongas Arena, and the Boot Cotton Mills and Museum. Parking is available at various locations downtown including public parking garages at LeLacheur Park and...
Tsongas Arena.

While not directly along the Merrimack River, Northern Canal Walkway and Western Canalway (roughly .6 miles), complete a loop with the Riverwalk between the Tsongas Arena and the UMass Lowell terminus.

The **Concord River Greenway** Park officially opened in 2010 and is another linear resource that connects to the Merrimack River Trail. Visitors can access the greenway at the Davidson Street parking lot off of East Merrimack Street, across from the Lowell Memorial Auditorium. This short landscaped section includes art and interpretive signage while providing scenic overlooks at the Concord River. Visitors may also access the greenway at the downriver end from Lawrence Road by the Lowell Cemetery. The middle sections of the Concord River Greenway Park are still under development and are designed to include a bridge to/from Centennial Island.

Currently, there is no connection between The Riverwalk (The Mile of Mills) and the Concord River. However, it is possible to walk along city streets, cross Bridge Street and utilize the **Jack Kerouac Park** to get to East Merrimack Street and the Lowell Memorial Auditorium where the Pennacook Trail begins. Eventually, there will be a trail behind Mass Mills 3 and a bridge over to the Auditorium that will then connect the Concord River Greenway Park with the Merrimack River.

The Pennacook Trail is the final right shore trail section in Lowell, offering over 1-1/2 miles of trails directly along the Merrimack River. Built atop a sewer interceptor line covered with rip-rap, the trail begins behind the Lowell Memorial Auditorium on East Merrimack Street and continues downriver to near the Lowell/Tewksbury line. This is cleared at least once annually by the Waste Water Department. Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust and the Bay Circuit Trails are actively mapping this route, which has an easement for public access along most of its length.

**Planning Considerations**

The City of Lowell is actively pursuing trail and walkway development throughout the city and specifically along its rivers and canals. In doing so the city often works in partnership with the National Park Service and the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust.

Trail planning meets the city’s recreation, public access and economic development goals. The city Department of Planning and Development and the Lowell Parks Department are both involved in the various aspects of trail planning.

Clear public access and signage to overcome the appearance of privacy are important considerations for trail development in Lowell. Also the ecology of the river is a focus for the city.

**Summary**

The system of trails along and connecting to the Merrimack River in Lowell is well established with few breaks. In total there are approximately two miles of trails and five river crossings along Lowell’s riverfront. These public spaces provide both access to the river and connections to nearby historic, cultural and natural resources. Pawtucket Boulevard and VFW Highway along the Merrimack River’s left shore both have wide shoulders and sidewalks. Sidewalks are not continuous along the entire route, but off-road trails provide some of these connections.

Lowell should study ways to improve sight lines and access to and from the existing walkway along the river’s left bank from Pawtucket Falls to Beaver Creek.
During the investigation it was noted that in the 1990s discussions had taken place with representatives of St. Mary Cemetery and the Trull Brook Golf Course and Tennis Center regarding the routing of the trail over their respective riverfront lands. While the talks were characterized as open and positive, and one map was found noting that walkers are permitted on the golf course during winter months, there doesn’t appear to be a final resolution on the trail’s permanent disposition related to the two properties.

**Planning Considerations**

The 2009 Tewksbury Open Space and Recreation Plan includes goals specific to the Merrimack River including developing a long-term acquisition plan for priority parcels, establishing a greenway, and seeking additional public access. CPA monies have been identified as a potential funding source for trail planning and construction.

**Summary**

River Road, identified as a previously dedicated section of the Bay Circuit Trail and the Merrimack River Trail, travels along the Merrimack River in Tewksbury, but at a distance of one-third to two-thirds of a mile away. Opportunities for closer interaction with the river include a privately held cemetery, undeveloped at the river’s edge that could be considered a potential site for river access. Also the riverfront golf course near the Tewksbury/Andover line allows access to walkers during winter months.

**Recommendations**

- Seek to clarify the opportunity for establishing and maintaining a trail along the Merrimack River on land owned by St. Mary Cemetery and on land owned by Trull Brook Golf Course and Tennis Center.

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**Tewksbury**

Tewksbury’s early agricultural landscape has given way to suburban and commercial development and now is largely built out supporting a population of approximately 30,000. The Merrimack River is Tewksbury’s northern boundary for one mile. Shoreline land uses include a utility right-of-way, a condominium development, an undeveloped section of St. Mary Cemetery and the Trull Brook golf course.

**Trail Route**

**Right Bank**

The Merrimack River Trail runs concurrent with the Bay Circuit Trail in Tewksbury. Locally, the trails begin at the Merrimack River on the Lowell/Tewksbury line and parallel the town boundary south to River Road where they travel northeasterly on the road before returning to the river at the Tewksbury/Andover line via an off-road route.
Andover

Andover enjoys a balance of land uses within its municipal boundaries including industry, commercial and retail, and educational institutions. It also supports a residential population of over 33,000, and is home to one of the oldest conservation organizations in the country, the Andover Improvement Society (AVIS), founded in 1894. Through the efforts of AVIS, the Andover Conservation Commission, The Trustees of Reservations, and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, over 5,000 acres of open space has been preserved in Andover.

With just over five miles of shoreline, the Merrimack River serves as the town’s northern border. Nearly all of the riverfront is protected land; exceptions being the largely undeveloped Society of Friars’ property near the Andover/Tewksbury line and the business park just east of Interstate 93.

Trail Route

Right Bank

Walkers have the good fortune to be able to traverse a lengthy shoreline across three contiguous “reservations.” Spalding Reservation (16 acres), owned by AVIS, is located closest to the Tewksbury/Andover line. In accordance with rights-of-way agreements, the trail connects to Deer Jump Reservation via lands owned by the Society of Friars (St. Francis Seminary) and the New England Public Service Company.

Deer Jump Reservation (147 acres), also owned by AVIS, continues via rights-of-ways from Spalding Reservation to west of Interstate 93. A conservation easement connects this parcel to the Merrimack River Reservation.

The Merrimack River Reservation (76 acres), owned by the Town of Andover and overseen by the Andover Conservation Commission, extends east from approximately Brundrett Avenue to the Andover/Lawrence line.

The Town of Andover, in cooperation with Phillips Academy and the Greater Lawrence Technical High School, is seeking to improve public access to the town’s property on the Merrimack River via the Heffron right-of-way and to pave the way for improved recreational opportunities for the region.4

The Bay Circuit Trail is a prominent recreational amenity in Andover. It covers approximately 16 miles running from Harold Parker State Forest in North Andover to Andover’s border with Tewksbury on the Merrimack River. Andover’s Bay Circuit Trail route links seven AVIS reservations5, numerous town conservation properties, two state forests, and private lands belonging to Phillips Academy and the West Parish Cemetery. The Bay Circuit Trail shares the same route as the Merrimack River Trail from the Tewksbury/Andover line to the eastern edge of Deer Jump Reservation.

River Road in Andover generally parallels the Merrimack River at some distance and provides a continuous on-road option for cyclists between Tewksbury and Lawrence. The road itself is in good condition, but shoulders are generally narrow and there are no sidewalks.

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4 Andover Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2009.
5 AVIS properties restrict use to pedestrians only.
**Planning Considerations**

The Andover Master Plan recommends strengthening its trail system throughout town, establishing new boat launch sites on the Merrimack River and acquiring permanent protection of the Deer Jump Trail. The 2009 Andover Open Space and Recreation Plan notes that public access to the riverbank in Andover is assured via the Merrimack River and Bay Circuit Trails.

An overlay district is being proposed for the River Road area (Society of Friars’ property) that may provide additional trails.

Trail planning and development is led by the town’s Planning and Conservation Divisions. It is also supported by Andover Village Improvement Society (AVIS), and the Andover Trails Committee, a citizens committee that also includes members of the Conservation Commission, the Appalachian Mountain Club, AVIS, the Bay Circuit Alliance, and The Trustees of Reservations.

**Summary**

The Town of Andover and the Andover Village Improvement Society have collectively preserved about four of the five miles of Merrimack River frontage in Andover to create a greenway and publicly accessible trail system. They continue to work proactively to secure passage rights for the remaining parcels.

**Recommendations**

- Focus on securing access rights as a means to expand and enhance the existing trail system.

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**Methuen**

Methuen has historically enjoyed success in farming, trade and industry and today is a densely developed residential community of approximately 45,000 as well as an employment generator in the region. The Merrimack River in Methuen, which straddles and surrounds the City of Lawrence on two sides, forms approximately seven miles of the of the city’s southern border; for nearly four miles west (upriver) of Lawrence and just over three miles east (downriver) of Lawrence. The river’s edge supports a variety of land uses including residential, commercial, agricultural, municipal, transportation, and open space.

**Trail Route**

**Left Bank**

There are no previously designated Merrimack River Trail routes in Methuen; however an option exists for an on-road route with some river access and views.

From the Dracut line and west of Lawrence, **Route 110** (Lowell Boulevard/Street and Riverside Drive), generally runs parallel to the river’s edge, but are mostly distanced by private and inaccessible municipal uses with a few exceptions.

Just before Interstate 93, at the intersection of Lowell Street and Riverside Drive is the waterfront site of the former **Bea’s Sandwich Shop**. The Bea’s parcel was acquired by the city in 2001 utilizing state Self-Help...
grant funds to create public access to the river. In 2007, the city was awarded a $250,000 grant from the Massachusetts Office of Fishing and Boating Access to create boat access, a riverfront park, parking and lighting.

Just beyond Interstate 93, the trail route could follow Riverside Drive with river access provided at Methuen Riverside Park, but is otherwise removed from the river. The roadway provides a wide shoulder for cyclists but has limited views of the river.

East of the Lawrence line, users of the Merrimack River Trail would encounter the first significant gap in the trail. For experienced cyclists only, an option for maintaining any perceived continuity with the trail is to continue on Route 110 through heavily developed residential and commercial areas until it meets the river again near the Haverhill town line, a distance of approximately four miles.

There is an isolated sliver of green space along the Merrimack River at the Methuen/Haverhill line but existing trails there are limited to those within Schruender Park along Riverview Boulevard. Schruender Park is a public park providing small craft access though the riverbank is very steep.

**Planning Considerations**

Acquiring additional riverfront land and improving access to the river were noted in the 2001 Methuen Open Space Plan as important goals.

A complete streets reallocation of the right-of-way of Route 110 could be considered and would greatly enhance bicycle and pedestrian activity.

**Summary**

West of Lawrence, Riverside Drive and Water Street in Methuen provide an option for an on-road lane.

East of Lawrence, there is a buffer of green space along the river that may provide an opportunity for a trail section going beyond Schruender Park. Alternatively, an on-road trail may be possible on Riverview Boulevard and other residential streets near the river or for experienced cyclists on Route 110, which is more removed from the river but meeting it again at the Methuen/Haverhill line.

**Recommendations**

- Consider designating Route 110 as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Consider fostering more on-road biking by posting “bike lane” or “share the road” signage along Route 110.
- Consider fostering more on-road biking by installing separation barriers or markers along Route 110.
- Consider a “complete streets” reallocation of the right-of-way of Route 110 to enhance bicycle and pedestrian activity.

**Lawrence**

Lawrence was built in the 1840’s as the nation’s first planned industrial city. The massive mill buildings lining the Merrimack River, the Great Stone Dam, clock and bell towers are all a tribute to Lawrence’s industrial heritage. Today Lawrence remains an urban center with a population of over 76,000 living within its 7.4 square mile footprint. The Merrimack River flows for about four miles through Lawrence dividing it nearly in half. Riverfront land uses include historic mills, dams, neighborhoods, institutions, a landfill and parks and open spaces.

**Trail Route**

*Left Bank*

On the Merrimack River’s left bank the Merrimack River Trail has the
option to continue from Methuen on-road along Riverside Drive and Water Street to the O’Leary Bridge (Broadway/Rt. 28). Another option is to use the North Bank Trail, an informal trail between the Lawrence pumping station near the Riverside Drive/ Marble Street intersection and the O’Leary Bridge.

At the O’Leary Bridge, Canal Street offers a mile-long pedestrian promenade that follows the North Canal to the Spicket River, where the Spicket River Greenway begins at Oxford Park. About midway along the promenade on the opposite side of the street is the Lawrence Heritage State Park which features a restored boarding house with two floors of interactive exhibits telling of the site’s and the city’s history.

It should be noted that there exist opportunities for establishing two parks on the island which exists between the river and canal. One immediately to the west of the Union Street bridge (Duck Bridge) and second at the confluence of Spicket and the Merrimack Rivers. Additional opportunities exist to connect the parks via a pathway.

Across the canal, just downriver from the O’Leary Bridge, the self-contained, five-acre Pemberton Park offers walking trails along the canal and views of the Great Stone Dam as well as the Merrimack River.

As referenced in the 1992 guidebook, Dogwood Park once offered over two miles of wide riverfront trail extending from the area south of Canal Street to the Lawrence/Methuen line. However, capping and redevelopment of the adjacent former waste incinerator site, access restrictions imposed by the adjoining Lawrence Correctional Alternative Center, and its generally isolated location at the end of Commonwealth Drive have left the trail significantly shortened, overgrown, and unused.

**Right Bank**

On the right bank of the Merrimack River, Riverfront State Park runs from the Lawrence/Andover line to the O’Leary Bridge. Owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the 49-acre park includes a waterfront trail, a variety of courts, the Abe Bashara Boathouse for community sailing, a boat ramp, and swimming area.

Just downriver from Riverfront State Park and the O’Leary Bridge (Broadway/Rt. 28), planning is taking place for the Riverwalk, a 1.2 mile pedestrian walkway from the Great Stone Dam to Interstate 495. Design plans are 50% complete and project partners City of Lawrence, Groundwork Lawrence, and DCR are coordinating legal research and documentation to establish access agreements for public use of the Riverwalk. Following construction the trail will become part of the DCR state park system.

**Planning Considerations – Local and Regional**

The City of Lawrence’s Community Development and Planning Departments are the lead agencies for trail planning in Lawrence. Groundwork Lawrence, a local affiliate of a national non-profit dedicated to city building, partners with and supports the city in trail
The Merrimack River is North Andover’s northern boundary for over two and a half miles. Most of this shoreline is dedicated to a commuter and freight railroad corridor, an industrial park, an airport and some residential development.

**Trail Route**

**Right Bank**

There are currently no existing trails along the Merrimack River in North Andover due to the close proximity of the MBTA commuter rail line. From the North Andover/Lawrence line the only viable option for a trail is on-road along Merrimack Street to Sutton Street, and then Osgood Street (Route 125), to pass by the airport and other industrial uses into Haverhill. While locating a trail between the rail line and river has been suggested more analysis needs to be undertaken to assess the suitability, feasibility, and safety of such an alignment.

**Planning Considerations**

Safety and access will be key components of a viable on-road or off-road trail system.

If North Andover proceeds with mixed-use development at Osgood Landing along Route 125, the town may want to consider the idea of creating a multi-use path along the railroad tracks to connect that neighborhood with the downtown.

**Summary**

While there have not been any potential trails identified along the Merrimack River in North Andover, there may be sufficient land between the railroad and the river to support a riverside trail at some point in the future. However, given the isolated nature of the location it is likely that significant safety and access issues would need to be addressed.

**Recommendations**

- If the Osgood Landing project proceeds consider creating a multi-
use path along the railroad tracks to connect that neighborhood with the downtown.

- Further investigate the delineation of an off-road trail between the railroad and the river.

**Haverhill**

With beginnings as a farming community, the City of Haverhill evolved into a major industrial center in the 19th century and beyond. Today, Haverhill is an urban center dominated by commerce and industry and is home to over 61,000 residents.

The Merrimack River, a prominent feature at the city’s center, provides over ten miles of shoreline that supports a diversity of land uses: commercial, residential, transportation and infrastructure facilities, as well as parks and open spaces.

**Trail Route**

*Left Bank*

Along the left bank of the Merrimack River the Merrimack River Trail passes through a mix of urban, suburban, and rural landscapes. Entering Haverhill from Methuen, River Street (Rtes. 110/113) offers a good option for an on-road trail. Shoulders here provide space for seasoned cyclists and glimpses of the river are offered occasionally. Reallocation of the right-of-way along Route 110/113 has the potential for creating a separated path through the area.

Opened in the 1990s but now closed, the Hannah Dustin Trail was developed as an off-road pedestrian path that began at the river’s bend near the intersection of River Road and Western Avenue. The mile-long trail paralleled Western Avenue before passing under Interstate 495 and paralleling Bank Road. Today, the trail is overgrown with vegetation and barely visible.

From the intersection of Bank Road and River Street, the Merrimack River Trail would likely revert to an on-road lane to the urban core where the City of Haverhill is developing the loop trail. Two sections of the downtown Riverwalk (left bank) are open to the public. A 400-foot section can be accessed from the river-side parking lot at the intersection of Merrimack Street and Railroad Avenue, while a little further downriver a 300-foot section may be accessed behind the Haverhill Bank on Merrimack Street. **Washington, Merrimack, and Water Street** (Rtes 110/113) provide an on-road option for continuing the Merrimack River Trail to the Buttonwoods Trail.

**The Buttonwoods Trail** was originally developed as a nearly two and a half mile long stretch starting near the intersection of Water Street and John Ward Avenue and ending at Riverside Park. Though signed and featuring a hardened surface, the first section of the Buttonwoods Trail is now in disrepair and for the most part inaccessible to the public due to a combination of factors: its location well below road level, limited access routes, and poor visibility or site lines to and from the trail. Designating an adjacent, entirely on-road route would be a sensible alternative to the current Buttonwoods Trail alignment. **Water Street** already provides beautiful views of the
river with sidewalks extending all along the river side of the trail and partially on the opposite side. Road widths vary, narrowing where the trail would bear right onto Riverside Avenue, but wide enough for the most part to make bike lanes an option. The on-road designation would also be in keeping with the city’s desire to create on-road bike routes throughout the city. The existing western entrance to the trail (across from the Haverhill Historical Society) could be maintained as a water access point as it is popular with fishermen.

At the end of the Buttonwoods Trail, the city owned Riverside Park and its associated loop trails are open year round. Beyond Riverside Park access to the river is limited. Old Ferry Road could take cyclists to East Broadway which generally parallels the river’s left bank at a distance without providing visual or physical access until Rocks Village Historic District near the Haverhill/Merrimac border.

Right Bank

The right bank of the Merrimack River is considerably shorter than the left bank in Haverhill. There are no trail connections from the North Andover line to the Comeau Bridge due to the presence of the MBTA commuter rail line. Beginning at the bridge, the .4-mile Bradford Rail Trail constitutes the right bank section of the Riverwalk, a loop trail incorporating both banks of the river between the Comeau Bridge and Basiliere Bridge (Rt. 125). Developed on a former rail line running alongside the Merrimack River, this initial section of the Bradford Rail Trail, which features a stone dust surface, officially opened on September 13, 2011. Funding is being sought for additional design and construction.

The City of Haverhill is interested in extending the Bradford Rail Trail east along the Old Georgetown Branch where it would pass through Groveland and connect to the 28-mile regional Border to Boston Trail in Georgetown. The MVPC conducted a feasibility study of this section of trail in 2011.

Planning Considerations

Development of the Merrimack River Trail would support both economic and recreation goals in Haverhill.

The Mayor’s Office and the city’s Department of Economic Development and Planning are the lead agencies for trail planning and development. Support organizations include the Bradford Rail Trail Committee, Haverhill Trails Committee, Haverhill’s Brightside and Team Haverhill.

Summary

Haverhill has the greatest amount of river frontage along the Merrimack River of all the communities it passes through. The city has been challenged by maintenance issues for developed portions of the trail, requiring at least one section to close. Where appropriate, creating lower-maintenance on-road options would provide more consistent and safe public access to the river.

Recommendations

- Consider moving the designated sections of Merrimack River Trail from existing riverside routes to more visible on-road and sidewalk locations.
- Consider designating the Bradford Rail Trail as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Consider designating River Street (Rtes 110/113), the Riverwalk, Washington, Merrimack, and Water Street, the Buttonwoods Trail, Riverside Avenue, Riverside Park, Old Ferry Road, and East Broadway as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Consider fostering more on-road biking by posting “bike lane” or
“share the road” signage along Route 110.
- Consider fostering more on-road biking by installing separation barriers or markers along Route 110.

**Groveland**

The Town of Groveland has retained much of its rural landscape while supporting a rural and suburban resident population of over 6,000.

Approximately two miles of Groveland’s northern boundary is formed by the Merrimack River. Primary land uses along the shore-front include single family residences, agricultural lands, commercial properties in the town center and town properties including a cemetery, recreation area and a school. In addition, the town controls several parcels of land along the shore and is interested in protecting additional parcels.

**Trail Route**

**Right Bank**

There are currently no designated Merrimack River Trail trails in Groveland. However, there is interest in developing the Old Georgetown Branch that extends east from Haverhill (Bradford Rail Trail) through Groveland and Georgetown where it could connect to the 28-mile, regional Border to Boston Trail.

Following the trail from Haverhill, pedes-

Haverhill and Groveland have the opportunity to develop the Old Georgetown Branch into a multi-use path.

Downriver from Groveland’s center, resident-only river access is available at the Pines Recreation Complex. In addition, there may be potential to develop a waterfront trail linking the Pines with the Riverview Cemetery just downstream.

**Planning Considerations**

Groveland’s 2008 Open Space and Recreation Plan notes the town’s desire to create a town wide trail system and to incorporate a “river theme” at the Pines Recreation Complex to give the town center a sense of place by focusing on the assets of the Merrimack River.

**Summary**

The Merrimack River has a generally gentle shoreline in Groveland, but no public trail and limited water access. Main Street and Route 113 travel closely along the Merrimack on either side of the town center and could serve as on-road segments of the Merrimack River Trail.

**Recommendations**

- Consider designating portions of the Old Georgetown Branch and Main Street as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Pursue development of the Old Georgetown Branch as a rail trail.
Merrimac

Merrimac’s well preserved 19th century village center hints of its early history of manufacturing, while the rest of the town is given over to rural residential development including historic farms and modern subdivisions supporting around 6,500 residents. The northern bank of the Merrimack River for about two miles is the town’s southern boundary. Private residences and town roads are the primary land uses along the Merrimack River. A few publicly owned parcels can be found on the river, but access is not pronounced and is severely limited by lack of parking and steep banks.

Trail Route

Left Bank

There are currently no existing trails along the river in Merrimac though River Road is well used by cyclists despite being a popular cut-through for motorists to Interstate 495.

The portion of River Road between Middle Road and Skunk Road, near the Merrimac/Amesbury border, has been closed due to the impacts of the Mother's Day flood of 2006. Major improvements to the road will be required to address safety issues and allow the road to reopen. It may be possible to improve the cyclist and pedestrian environment in conjunction with these improvements.

Planning Considerations

Merrimac’s 2006 Open Space and Recreation Plan notes the town’s desire to establish an open space corridor along the Merrimack River riparian corridor.

Summary

While improving and creating river access is seen as a viable and desirable goal by the Town of Merrimac, any improvements will likely be governed by the costs and schedule of repairing the flood damaged River Road.

Recommendations

- Consider designating River Road as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Advocate for pedestrian and cyclist accommodations when redevelopment options downriver of Skunk Road are studied.

West Newbury

West Newbury is generally a semi-rural residential community with no industries and relatively few commercial establishments. The Merrimack River provides an outstanding scenic presence defining nearly six and a half miles of West Newbury’s northern boundary. River Road hugs the river along most of its journey through West Newbury; other river front land uses include single family homes, agriculture, schools and a limited amount of protected public open space.
TRAIL ROUTE

Right Bank

Chestnut Hill Farm, near the West Newbury/Groveland border is owned by the Essex County Greenbelt Association and offers a short loop trail for pedestrians only. Main Street (Rt. 113) offers an on-road route through West Newbury as it generally parallels the river but from a considerable distance. Bridge Street leads back toward the river where cyclists can cross the Rocks Village Bridge into Haverhill and travel on the north bank of the Merrimack River through Merrimack and Amesbury.

However, just before the bridge one can turn right onto River Road, a quiet, low volume and low speed road with exceptional views of the river. At the intersection of River and Coffin Streets, one can follow Coffin Street back to Main Street, or pedestrians and off-road cyclists can continue straight towards the River Road Trail that leads .6 miles through the town-owned Riverbend Conservation Area to Way to the River Road. Parking for a limited number of cars is available at the upriver end of the River Road Trail. A canoe launch and parking for one or two cars is also available near Way to the River Road at the trail’s downriver end.

From Main Street just before the West Newbury/Newburyport line on-road trail users could turn left onto Emery Lane which provides a connection to existing sections of the Merrimack River Trail in Maudslay State Park in Newburyport.

The river’s edge from Way to the River Road to Maudslay State in Newburyport is in private ownership. The West Newbury Open Space committee has identified a potential trail linking those two destinations.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

A long term goal of the Open Space and Recreation Plan is to create a town-wide trail system.

The West Newbury Open Space Committee is the lead town agency for trail planning. It is well supported by the Board of Selectmen, and the Conservation Commission. The Essex County Trail Association is an active participant and partner in trail advocacy, funding, and maintenance.

SUMMARY

West Newbury is actively pursuing trail development throughout town (see westnewburyopenspace.net/WestNewbury_OpenSpace_Trails.htm). Several public properties offer off-road trails and water access. River Road provides an exceptional cycling experience along the river as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider designating Main Street, Bridge Street, River Road, Coffin Street, River Road Trail, Way to the River Road, and Emery Lane as the Merrimack River Trail.

View along River Road in West Newbury

Riverbend Trail, West Newbury.
Amesbury

A former farming and mill town, Amesbury has a population today of over 16,000 and is largely rural to suburban residential with a compact city center and a substantial inventory of protected and undeveloped land. The Merrimack River creates Amesbury’s southern border for over four miles. Land uses along the river’s edge are primarily residential, with some commercial, limited open space and roads.

Trail Route

Left Bank

There are currently no off-road riverfront trails in Amesbury though Pleasant Valley Road, Merrimac Street and then Main Street hug the river’s right bank offering exceptional visual access. Along the route, an easement along the water’s edge at the redeveloped Hat Factory and Alliance Park offer opportunities for direct public access to the river.

From Main Street, on-road links can be made along Old Merrill St, Merrill up to the proposed entrance of the Whittier Bridge trail and then crossing Route 110 to access the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail. Or pedestrians and cyclists can cross the river via the Hines and Chain Bridges to get to Newburyport. Additional on-road links from Main Street to the north provide a connection to the Riverwalk, a one-mile rail trail linking downtown Amesbury with the Carriagetown Marketplace on Macy Street (Rt. 110). Municipal officials and advocates are working to establish all or part of an off-road trail link between the Riverwalk and the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail.

Planning Considerations

Chapter 91 regulations are seen an important tool to help the city provide riverfront access as land use changes occur along the Merrimack River.

The Powow Riverwalk is an integral component in the Coastal Trails Network (CTN), a 30-mile system of on- and off-road trails linking the communities of Amesbury, Newburyport, Newbury, and Salisbury.

Summary

The primary opportunity for a riverside trail in Amesbury is a bike lane on Pleasant Valley Road, Merrimac Street and Main Street. Each of these contiguous roads runs closely along the shores of the Merrimack River providing exceptional visual access. In addition, limited traffic and low speeds allow a safe, comfortable ride for most cyclists.

Recommendations

- Consider designating Pleasant Valley Road, Merrimac Street, Main Street, and the Riverwalk as the Merrimack River Trail.
Newburyport

Newburyport has evolved from a working seaport to a historic community with a diversity of land uses including an active downtown focused on the tourism industry, an industrial park, and a resident population of over 17,000. Creating over six and a half miles of shoreline, the Merrimack River is the focal feature of Newburyport. Land uses along the river’s edge include residential, commercial including docks and marinas, municipal facilities and public parks and open space.

Trail Route

Right Bank

The signed shoreline trail in Maudslay State Park is part of the original Merrimack River Trail designated in the 1990s. The 476-acre park, which abuts the West Newbury town line and is accessible from West Newbury’s Emery Lane, has a trail system that ranges from gravel carriage paths to single track trail over a variety of terrain and are generally open to all but motorized vehicles.

As it relates to the massive Whittier Bridge/I-95 Improvement Project, municipal officials are discussing with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) the creation of a shoreline footpath underneath the Interstate 95 highway bridge connecting the city’s Spring Lane water treatment facility with the park at Moseley Woods. The $285M state project is slated to begin in 2013 with construction expected to last four to six years. Maudsday State Park and the water department property could additionally be linked on-road via Pine Hill, Old Ferry, and Spring Lane roads.

Moseley Woods is a city-owned, waterfront park that features walking trails, play structures, and picnic facilities. The park’s entrance sits at the intersection of Merrimac Street, Spofford Street, and Moseley Avenue, the site of a proposed roundabout intended to improve crossing conditions for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Merrimack Street, though narrow and heavily traveled, is the most currently viable trail route from Moseley Woods to the shoreline parks and trails leading downriver to the city’s central waterfront.

Cashman Park is a city-owned park with a riverfront path that connects to the Clipper City Rail Trail via a wooden boardwalk. The park has two boat ramps (for motorized and non-motorized watercraft) as well as a playground, sports courts, and abundant free parking for both residents and nonresidents.

The first open phase of the Clipper City Rail Trail extends 1.1 miles from the Merrimack River to the MBTA commuter rail station on the Newburyport/Newbury line. At the river the rail trail turns downriver and crosses under the Route 1/Gillis Bridge, linking to an informal pathway through the Waterfront West Overlay District, an area of commercial boat yards and other marine-oriented businesses, to the city’s central waterfront featuring Waterfront Park and a quarter-mile long boardwalk.*

A future shoreline trail will extend from the downriver end of the boardwalk to the Joppa Park, an approximately mile-long route through a commercial and industrial area not formally open to the public.

Further along Water Street, Joppa Park is a small passive riverside park with views of the Merrimack River, seating and a small garden.

From this point on the Merrimack River Trail follows Water Street.
and the Plum Island Turnpike for approximately three miles until reaching the Atlantic Ocean on Plum Island in Newbury. From this point, the Merrimack River Trail continues on Northern Boulevard and into the Newburyport portion of Plum Island until it terminates at the north end of island.

*As an alternative, once under the Route 1/Gillis Bridge, trail users can easily reconnect with Merrimac Street and continue all the way to the Merrimack River Trail’s end on Plum Island.

**PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

In recent years the City of Newburyport has produced a Master Plan and Waterfront Strategic Plan that identify a long-range strategic goal of improving public access to the river by securing easements along the river’s shoreline. In implementing this strategy the City has focused on expanding outward from the community’s central waterfront, which features two popular facilities: 1,100-foot wooden boardwalk and Waterfront Park. Upriver, by developing shoreline connections such as the Clipper City Rail Trail link under the Route 1/Gillis Bridge, the boardwalk to Cashman Park, and walkway behind the Towle Building. The downriver focus is on developing the former City Branch railroad corridor into the next phase of the Clipper City Rail Trail. The 1.7-mile corridor links the central waterfront to Joppa Park before turning inland towards the MBTA commuter station. In this regard, the City has concentrated efforts on assembling a contiguous corridor via purchases, permanent easements, and long-term licenses. Preliminary design is slated to begin in the fall of 2011.

In all of the above, the state Chapter 91 regulations provide the city with an important tool for preserving access to the shore of the Merrimack River.

The Clipper City Rail Trail is an integral component in the Coastal Trails Network (CTN), a 30-mile system of on- and off-road trails linking the communities of Amesbury, Newburyport, Newbury, and Salisbury. Portions of the CTN, including the Clipper City Rail Trail, are also part of the 28-mile Border to Boston Trail.

The city’s Planning and Development Office will continue to drive trail planning and development with support from the Parks Commission and the Harbormaster. The nonprofit Coastal Trails Coalition is a strong regional advocate.

Funding sources for trail development in Newburyport include CPA, state and federal transportation funds, and funding from State Seaport Advisory Council, as well as local banks, businesses and charitable organizations.

**SUMMARY**

The City of Newburyport has an important opportunity to maximize public access to its waterfront as it redevelops within the Waterfront West Overlay District. Regulations here are intended to help guide development with a focus on public access. This is a critical connecting site for continuous public access to the river’s edge.

Merrimac Street and Water Street make up another important link between public open spaces as well as a connection to the Plum Island Turnpike bike lane. While these are challenging roads for cyclists, efforts should be made to increase access and safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Consider designating all or appropriate portions of Maudslay State Park, Pine Hill Road, Old Ferry Road, Moseley Woods, Merrimac Street, Cashman Park, wooden boardwalks, Water...
Street, Joppa Park, Plum Island Turnpike, and Northern Boulevard as the Merrimack River Trail.

- Consider strategies for improving safety along Merrimack Street, Water Street, Plum Island Turnpike, and Northern Boulevard.
- Continue development of waterfront trails as described in the Master Plan and Waterfront Strategic Plan.

**Salisbury**

Beginning as a farming and fishing village, and enjoying its heyday as a lively beach town, Salisbury today is a rural coastal community of over 8,000 residents with a redeveloping beach front, commercial and residential neighborhoods, a state reservation that welcomes over 200,000 visitors a year and over 800 acres of protected open space.

The Merrimack River is Salisbury’s southern border offering nearly six miles of shoreline. The majority of this shoreline is salt water marsh (the Great Marsh); other land uses include residential, commercial (principally marinas), and state and federally protected lands.

**Trail Route**

**Left Bank**

The Merrimack River’s sensitive, undeveloped shoreline environment precludes developing a trail along the river’s edge. However, connections to the river are seen to have great importance.

From Main Street in Amesbury it is possible to link via roads and sidewalks with the **Salisbury Point Ghost Trail**, a 1.8 mile rail trail extending from Rabbit Road on the Amesbury/Salisbury line to the Salisbury Square area near the intersection of Routes 1, 1A, and 110. From this intersection one can proceed along the wide shoulders of **Route 1A** for two miles to reach the Salisbury Beach State Reservation adjacent to where the Merrimack River flows into the Atlantic Ocean.

Municipal officials and advocates are working to establish all or part of an off-road trail link between Amesbury’s Riverwalk and the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail as part of the massive Whittier Bridge/I-95 Improvement Project being undertaken by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). Plans for the $285M project already include an on-bridge bicycle and pedestrian facility with ramp and sidewalk links to the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail.

The **Old Eastern Marsh Trail** is an accessible, multi-use trail that stretches 1.4 miles from the left bank of the Merrimack River to the Mudnock Road neighborhood. From here, on-road routes such as Mudnock Road, Ferry Road, and Beach Road may be taken to the Salisbury Point.
Ghost Trail or Route 1A destinations such as Salisbury Beach State Reservation and Salisbury Beach. The trail is an integral component in the Coastal Trails Network (CTN), a 30-mile system of on- and off-road trails linking the communities of Amesbury, Newburyport, Newbury, and Salisbury. Portions of the CTN, including the Old Eastern Marsh Trail, are also part of the 28-mile Border to Boston Trail.

In 2012, MassDOT is expected to begin construction of waterside trail connection under the Route 1/Gillis Bridge to the Old Eastern Marsh Trail. The project will significantly improve safety by creating a more direct and secure link over the Merrimack River and between the Old Eastern Marsh Trail and the Clipper City Rail Trail in Newburyport.

In the long term, the Town of Salisbury and the City of Newburyport have discussed undertaking a joint feasibility study of alternatives for a river crossing that examines the Route 1/Gillis Bridge and the former Boston and Maine Railroad Bridge over the Merrimack River.

**Planning Considerations**

Trail development has been identified as a primary goal by the 2008 Master Plan, 2006 Open Space and Recreation Plan and by the Board of Selectmen in their annual goals.

The Salisbury Office of Planning and Development leads rail trail planning and development with outstanding support from its Board of Selectmen and the Department of Public Works.

Trail funding and support comes from a variety of sources including state and federal grants, town resources, regional advocates, and commercial supporters including SPS New England and the Timberland Company.

**Summary**

Due to the sensitive character of the Merrimack River’s left bank shoreline in Salisbury, the Merrimack River Trail is planned to follow Ferry and Beach Roads to Salisbury Beach State Reservation where the Merrimack River empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

Connections across the river to Newburyport are a high priority in trail development.

**Recommendations**

- Consider designating the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail and Old Eastern Marsh Trail as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Consider designating all or appropriate portions of Mudnock Road, Ferry Road, and Beach Road as the Merrimack River Trail.

**Newbury**

Newbury is a rural residential community with approximately 7,000 residents, very limited commercial enterprise, and about half its land protected open space. The Merrimack River’s right bank shoreline moves through two and half miles of Newbury, where land uses include marshes and beaches, protected natural areas, and seasonal and year round homes.

**Trail Route**

**Right Bank**

The Plum Island Turnpike is designated as an on-road bicycle and pedestrian route that follows the Merrimack River from Newburyport into Newbury.
Though used frequently, the Plum Island Turnpike bicycle lanes can be challenging for less experienced cyclists as traffic is often heavy and travel speeds are generally high. There may be an opportunity to improve conditions with wider lane allowances or by developing a separate, multi-purpose, off-road trail alongside the Plum Island Turnpike.

On the Plum Island Turnpike, the Bay Circuit Trail intersects and runs concurrent with the Merrimack River Trail beginning near the Newburyport/Newbury line. The northern terminus of the 200-mile Bay Circuit Trail is the Atlantic Ocean on the eastern edge of the Plum Island Turnpike in Newbury.

From this point, the Merrimack River Trail continues northerly on Northern Boulevard and into the Newburyport portion of Plum Island until it terminates at the north end of island.

**Planning Considerations**

Newbury’s Trails Committee leads trail planning and development in Newbury with support of the Planning Department. To date, the committee’s focus has been on the Bay Circuit Trail and connections to it.

The town’s Open Space and Recreation Plan recommends participating in regional trail planning and development efforts including the Merrimack River Trail, Border to Boston Trail, Bay Circuit Trail and Newburyport’s Clipper City Trail. It also recommends pursuing continued improvements and accommodations for pedestrians and bicycles on the Plum Island Turnpike, and increasing public access points to rivers and estuaries for portable watercraft.

Funding sources have not yet been identified for potential trail projects in Newbury.

The Plum Island Turnpike is an integral component in the Coastal Trails Network (CTN), a 30-mile system of on- and off-road trails linking the communities of Amesbury, Newburyport, Newbury, and Salisbury.

**Summary**

Improving conditions along the existing Plum Island Turnpike and Northern Boulevard will assure a strong trail ending as the Merrimack River reaches the Atlantic Ocean.

**Recommendations**

- Consider designating the Plum Island Turnpike and Northern Boulevard as the Merrimack River Trail.
- Consider strategies for improving safety along the Plum Island Turnpike and Northern Boulevard.
Chapter 91 Waterways Licensing Program

In Massachusetts, waterways activities such as shoreline construction are regulated in accordance Massachusetts General Law Chapter 91, the Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act. Overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), the waterways licensing program is a tool for protecting and promoting public use of tidelands and other waterways, including the Merrimack River.

As it relates to the development of additional waterfront sections of the Merrimack River Trail, compliance with Chapter 91 licensing regulations merits important legal and procedural consideration. As an indicator of the potential magnitude of the issue, a cursory examination of the licenses revealed an estimated existing 100 licenses in Newburyport alone. The scope of the current planning project did not allow for an in-depth examination of the existing licenses or research into future licenses.

It is recommended that those communities interested in further developing the Merrimack River Trail along the river’s shoreline should identify specific locations where licenses need to be investigated at the MassDEP offices in Boston.

Conclusions

The inspired partnership efforts of the Merrimack River Watershed Association, National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, and numerous communities resulted in the development of an off-road recreational amenity that is still enjoyed by many some 20 years after its creation.

However, in recent years the absence of consistent, vocal advocacy for the continued development and stewardship of the Merrimack River Trail as a regional recreational and transportation facility has resulted in the vision largely disappearing from the collective consciousness. This principal conclusion is supported by several of the report’s other key findings:

1. The popular perception of the current Merrimack River Trail as a single regional trail is limited. Knowledge and understanding of the trail, if it exists at all, is primarily as a local resource.

2. The greatest likely prognosticator of the trail’s use is a person’s sense of on-trail safety. It is believed that many prospective users may not use the existing trail due to feelings of 1) **seclusion** on sections screened from public view and with few points of access, 2) **isolation** on sections with limited sightlines and low volumes of use, 3) **neglect** on trails featuring graffiti and exhibiting a lack of cleanliness, and 4) **fear** when in the presence of the vagrants or witnessing unlawful acts.

3. The overall character of the Merrimack River Trail is of a single linear path with limited connections to other trails or local destinations.

4. Portions of the existing Merrimack River Trail in urbanized areas such as Lowell, Haverhill, and Newburyport have the greatest level of use, whereas, with the exception of Andover, rural and open areas experience significantly less use.

5. Use of the Merrimack River Trail appears to be greatest where ready access to the trail is available and easily identified.

6. Though currently limited to a couple locales, organized trail-related activities such as guided walks and races increase usage and help to displace unlawful activities.

7. Trail usage is appears to be greatest when integrated with other resources, such as parks and playgrounds.
8. Some sections of existing developed trail are or appear to be abandoned or overtly neglected.

9. While the Merrimack River is visible in numerous locations along its 50-mile course, the general public’s unrestricted access to the water itself is limited to fewer than a dozen beaches and boat ramps.

**Recommendations**

The initial trail planning and building campaign of the late 1980s and early 1990s resulted is several segments of trail being developed, designated, and marked as the Merrimack River Trail. With portions of the original trail still in use today, there is a good foundation on which to expand, enhance, and steward an on- and off-road trail system extending the length of the Merrimack River in Massachusetts.

Central to the success of this enterprise is the re-initiation of a sustained regional effort focused on the long term development of the Merrimack River Trail. Many of the following recommendations are made with this primary objective in mind.

**Organizational Recommendations:**

1. The 17 Massachusetts communities bordering the Merrimack River should mutually agree to willingly participate in a joint planning and coordination process to advance development of the Merrimack River Trail. It is further recommended that the strategic alliance be codified in a written Memorandum of Agreement endorsed by the chief elected official or body of each community.

2. Convene no less than annually a regional summit of Merrimack River Trail stakeholders to update, assess, and plan for the long term protection, development, and stewardship of the Merrimack River Trail. Principal organizers of the meeting could include the MVPC, ENHC, Northern Middlesex Council of Governments, and Merrimack River Watershed Council. Stakeholders could include municipal representatives (staff and/or committee members), nonprofit organizations, friends groups, and interested individuals.

3. Consideration should be given to applying to the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program for assistance organizing a regional Merrimack River Trail initiative, establishing a regional vision and goals, and a slate of complementary strategic activities.

4. Local communities should consider coordinating volunteer “adopt a trail” programs as a means of providing neighborhood groups, local businesses, and the general public with the opportunity to help foster a friendly environment for trail users by supporting maintenance and activities along the trail.

**Planning Recommendations:**

1. Local advocates and municipal staff should pursue local designation and acceptance of the newly recommended on- and off-road segments as official sections of the Merrimack River Trail. In certain cases this will entail coordinating with state agencies or other appropriate parties.

2. Regional and local organizations and municipalities should research and apply to funding programs for trail protection, development, and management. Possible sources include programs administered by:

   A. Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
• Recreational Trails Grants Program

B. Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services
• Massachusetts Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity Program (LAND)
• Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities Program, Conservation Partnership Program (PARC)
• Landscape Partnership Program

C. Massachusetts Environmental Trust
• Massachusetts Environmental Trust Grant Program

D. The Conservation Fund
• Kodak American Greenway

E. Bikes Belong Coalition
• Bikes Belong Grant Program

3. Local communities should consider conducting a community-wide survey to determine the level of interest in developing the Merrimack River Trail in each community.

4. Local communities should consider conducting a trail count on the existing designated sections of the Merrimack River Trail. The Central Transportation Planning Staff of the Boston Metropolitan Organization has a template which could be utilized.

5. Local communities hosting existing sections of the Merrimack River Trail should consider performing research on crime statistics along the trail to determine the number and nature of crimes that have previously occurred and institute policies and strategies for addressing these issues.

6. A regional entity or state agency should consider creating a Merrimack River recreational management plan that addresses a range of issues that impact development of the Merrimack River Trail – use, safety, education, etc.

7. Local communities should consider strategies for fostering land conservation and trail development, such as obtaining trail easements.

Trail Enhancements Recommendations:

1. A regional entity should coordinate with local officials to mark all existing and newly designated trail segments with Merrimack River Trail blazes.

2. A regional entity should coordinate with local officials to install guide signs to direct people to the Merrimack River Trail.

3. A regional entity should coordinate with local officials to install location identification signs marking destination locations on the Merrimack River Trail – parks, boat ramps, etc.

4. Local communities should coordinate with local officials to identify parking locations for trail patrons who drive to trail, and install Merrimack River Trail parking signage.

5. Local communities should inspect and repair fences where they exist.

6. Local communities should consider the installation of public art around the access points to the Merrimack River Trail.

7. Where appropriate in urbanized areas, local communities should increase -trail safety by improving or installing crosswalks and lighting.
8. A regional entity should coordinate with local communities regarding the installation of informational kiosks with a large map of the Merrimack River Trail at strategic/popular access points.

Awareness Recommendations:

1. A regional entity should coordinate the aggregation and creation of a central source of information on the Merrimack River Trail, its location, layout, points of access, etc.

2. A regional entity should consider coordinating the creation of a downloadable trail route (GPS) for distribution on state, regional and local websites; and possibly the production of a similar smartphone application.

3. A regional entity should consider coordinating an annual walk of Merrimack River Trail as part of an existing event such as National Trails Day and Essex Heritage Trails & Sails weekends.

4. Local communities should investigate opportunities for the Merrimack River Trail to be promoted as “area attractions” or recreational resource on trail finder websites, chamber of commerce websites and guidebooks, etc.

5. Local communities should consider incorporating the Merrimack River Trail into existing community events such as races and youth activities.

6. Local communities should annually remind local law enforcement officials that the trail exists.

7. Local communities should bring attention to the ecology of the river when possible.
## Recommendations at a Glance

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## Awareness

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<th>Consider designating Route 113/Pawtucket Boulevard as the Merrimack River Trail.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider designating a roadside trail where right-of-way width and conditions would allow it.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider incorporating the Sherburne Estate into the trail route as the gateway to the Merrimack River Trail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyngsborough</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dracut</td>
<td>Consider designating Route 110 as the Merrimack River Trail.</td>
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<td>Consider fostering more on-road biking by posting “bike lane” or “share the road” signage along Route 110.</td>
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<td>Identify river access points for paddlers in areas where some open space exists along the shoreline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelmsford</td>
<td>Pursuant to the development of a new commuter rail station, consider enhancing bicycle and pedestrian accessibility in this area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowell</td>
<td>Continue development of planned trails.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider ways to improve sight lines and access to and from the walkway along the river’s left bank (name) from Pawtucket Falls to Beaver Creek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tewksbury</td>
<td>Seek to clarify the opportunity for establishing and maintaining a trail along the Merrimack River on land owned by St. Mary Cemetery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Seek to clarify the opportunity for establishing and maintaining a trail along the Merrimack River on land owned by Trull Brook Golf Course and Tennis Center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andover</td>
<td>Focus on securing access rights as a means to expand and enhance the existing trail system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methuen</td>
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<td>Consider a “complete streets” reallocation of the right-of-way of Route 110 to enhance bicycle and pedestrian activity.</td>
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<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Consider designating of Riverside Drive, Water Street, Canal Street, Pemberton Park, Riverfront State Park, and the future Riverwalk as the Merrimack River Trail. Consider investigating on-road trail options between Canal Street and the Lawrence/Methuen line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Andover</td>
<td>If the Osgood Landing project proceeds consider creating a multi-use path along the railroad tracks to connect that neighborhood with the downtown. Further investigate the delineation of an off-road trail between the railroad and the river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haverhill</td>
<td>Consider moving the designated sections of Merrimack River Trail from existing riverside routes to more visible on-road and sidewalk locations. Consider designating the Bradford Rail Trail as the Merrimack River Trail. Consider designating River Street (Rtes 110/113), the Riverwalk, Washington, Merrimack, and Water Street, the Buttonwoods Trail, Riverside Avenue, Riverside Park, Old Ferry Road, and East Broadway as the Merrimack River Trail. Consider fostering more on-road biking by posting “bike lane” or “share the road” signage along Route 110. Consider fostering more on-road biking by installing separation barriers or markers along Route 110.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Groveland</td>
<td>Consider designating portions of the Old Georgetown Branch and Main Street as the Merrimack River Trail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merrimack</td>
<td>Consider designating River Road as the Merrimack River Trail. Advocate for pedestrian and cyclist accommodations when redevelopment options downriver of Skunk Road are studied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Newbury</td>
<td>Consider designating Main Street, Bridge Street, River Road, Coffin Street, River Road Trail, Way to the River Road, and Emery Lane as the Merrimack River Trail.</td>
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<td>Consider designating Pleasant Valley Road, Merrimack Street, Main Street, and the Riverwalk as the Merrimack River Trail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newburyport</td>
<td>Consider designating all or appropriate portions of Maudslay State Park, Pine Hill, Old Ferry, Moseley Woods, Merrimack Street, Cashman Park, wooden boardwalks, Water Street, Joppa Park, Plum Island Turnpike, and Northern Boulevard as the Merrimack River Trail.</td>
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<td>Consider strategies for improving safety along Merrimack Street, Water Street, Plum Island Turnpike, and Northern Boulevard.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Continue development of waterfront trails as described in the Master Plan and Waterfront Strategic Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury</td>
<td>Consider designating the Salisbury Point Ghost Trail and Old Eastern marsh Trail as the Merrimack River Trail</td>
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<td>Consider designating all or appropriate portions of Mudnock Road, Ferry Road, and Beach Road as the Merrimack River Trail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newbury</td>
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Legend

Merrimack River Trails
- Open Trail
- Planned Off-Road Trail
- On-Road Route
- Bike Lane

Other Trails
- Beach
- Boat Ramp
- Entry
- Parking
- Restroom
- Signed as Merrimack River Trail
- Commuter Rail Station

Commuter Rail
- Rail Lines

Interstates
- Major Roads

Major Roads
- Local Roads

Local Roads
- Municipal Boundaries

Municipal Boundaries
- Open Space

Open Space
- Hydrographic Features

Hydrographic Features
- Streams

Streams

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Prepared December 12, 2011  SAL
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Bike Lane

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Town of Merrimac
Merrimack River Trail Network

Legend
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Prepared December 12, 2011  SAL
Merrimack River Trail Network

Legend

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Prepared December 12, 2011, S4G
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City of Newburyport and Towns of Newbury & Salisbury
Merrimack River Trail Network

Legend
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