

Pony Truss Trail

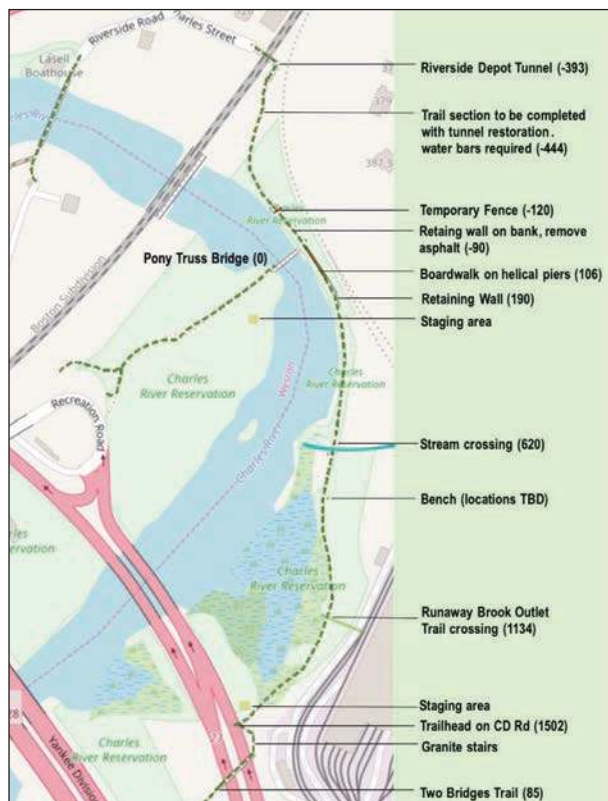
By Ted Chapman, Riverside Greenway Working Group, Project Manager

Four years of hard work by the Riverside Greenway Working Group reached the first tangible manifestation this spring with the opening of the 2000-foot-long Pony Truss Trail along the south side of the Charles River adjacent to the Riverside MBTA station. This trail is the first installment of the Riverside Greenway — three miles of accessible and recreational trails along the banks of the Charles between Lyons Field in Auburndale and the Trestle Bridge connecting the villages of Newton Lower Falls and Wellesley Lower Falls. This project was made possible with support from the Newton Conservators and funding from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) — Recreational Trails Program and the Solomon Foundation.

The entire length of the Pony Truss Trail lies within the 100-foot wetland buffer of the Charles River, providing beautiful views of the river, the vegetated shorelines, and the historic infrastructure crossing the river. The trail has been used since the mid-1800s to provide access from the Riverside Depot to the recreational opportunities along the Charles River. They include the Riverside Recreation Area in Weston, now Riverside Park, across the Pony Truss Bridge, and boathouses on the Newton side of the Charles. The trail is paralleled above by what was the Lower Falls Branch of the Boston-Albany Railroad, now a spur line connecting the Framingham MBTA Commuter Rail line to the Riverside MBTA station. This track created steep grades with high erosive potential. Over time, parts of the trail became impassable.



This ribbon cutting ceremony on June 17, 2021 celebrates the opening of the Pony Truss trail with the DCR Commissioner Jim Montgomery, Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Representative Kay Kahn, Herb Nolan of the Solomon Foundation, and Ted Chapman.



Schematic showing the Pony Truss bridge.

The Restoration

For most of its length, the trail is a grade rolling with elevation changes in the range of plus or minus 10 feet, which required only routine measures to restore an adequate crown to the tread. But there were several challenging areas:

- For 210 feet upstream from the Pony Truss Bridge, the trail was narrow, and the slope of the bank was steep enough that conventional trail restorations would be unstable and environmentally damaging. The restoration team from Conservation Works and Terramor elected to replace the existing tread with an 85-foot-long boardwalk supported by helical pilings. From 106 to 210 feet upstream, retaining walls/cribbing support the downslope.
- Just downstream of Pony Truss Bridge and the existing wood retaining structure, significant riverbank erosion was restored with large stones, matching those on the downstream side of the bridge abutment. This erosion was partly due to this trail section being previously paved with asphalt, which was broken up and covered with base-pack graded for proper drainage.
- At the outflow of the Runaway Brook as it emerges from its course under the Riverside MBTA Station, the trail needed to be routed over the top of the outflow pipe. This required retaining walls to prevent erosion and two sets of overlapping granite stairs to negotiate the grade change. The City of Newton DPW donated granite for these structures recycled from the old Newton North High School.
- At the junction with the Connector-Distributor (CD)

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Road (next to the onramp from Grove Street to 95/turnpike), a spur to the Two Bridges Trail begins to the left, rising steeply uphill to reach the bridge's abutment 30-feet above. A planned set of overlapping granite stairs at this site had to be postponed due to the parcel's complex ownership, permits could not be prepared in time.

As part of the restoration, several species of native plants were installed in the most disturbed areas to create beauty and diversity, and prevent erosion. New plantings included *Ilex verticillata* (winterberry holly), *Itea virginica* (Virginia sweetspire), *Comptonia peregrina* (sweet fern), *Lindera bezoin* (Northern spicebush), *Nyssa sylvatica* (blackgum, tupelo), *Leucothoe fontanaesians* (dog hobble, fetterbush), *Viburnum nudum* (Possumhaw viburnum). These new plantings complement the rich existing native flora: majestic *Quercus rubra* (red oak), *Pinus strobus* (white pine), *Juglans nigra* (black walnut), *Carya glabra* (pignut hickory), *Carya ovata* (shagbark hickory), sapling *Castanea dentata* (American chestnut), *Clethra alnifolia* (sweet pepper bush), *Viburnum acerfolium* (maple leaf viburnum), *Vaccinium angustifolium* (low bush blueberry), *Monotropa uniflora* (Indian pipe), and wildflowers including *Aureolaria pedicularia* (fernleaf false foxglove), *Hibiscus moscheutos* (swamp rose mallow), and *Chimaphila maculata* (striped wintergreen).



PHOTO: TED KUKLINSKI

A selection of granite stairs along the Pony Truss Trail.

Management of moderate populations of invasive species including *Ailanthus* (tree of heaven), Japanese knotweed, barberry, oriental bittersweet, common and glossy buckthorn, burning bush, and garlic mustard was begun under the leadership of Katherine Howard.

The Pony Truss Trail provides a less than moderately easy hike — bike ride in its current condition. A loop begins at Riverside Park in Weston, across the Pony Truss Bridge, upstream in the trail to the CD road, turning right to return to Riverside Park over the Charles River on the sidewalk of the CD road. The path is not ADA compliant and requires negotiating several sets of rustic stairs. A wayfinding sign at the CD Road and an informational kiosk on the bridge will help orient and guide you. The sign at the bridge provides several historical highlights and images. To walk, park at Riverside Park in Weston, which is best accessed from Newton Lower Falls from Concord Street to Park Road in Weston and Recreation Road on the north side of the Leo J. Martin Golf Course.



PHOTO: TED CHAPMAN

One section of the Pony Truss trail leads from the Pony Truss Bridge toward its exit below the Riverside MBTA terminal.

As components of the Riverside Greenway are gradually built over the next five years, the west-end of the trail will merge with a new shared-use path constructed in association with the Riverside Station Development along the CD road from Grove Street to Riverside Park and extending to the Lasell Boathouse Bridge, which is scheduled to be replaced in 2022. In addition to the rustic granite stairs at the CD road junction, an ADA-accessible ramp will be constructed from the shared-use path to the Two Bridges Trail, which will connect to Wellesley on a shared-use way through the Leo J. Martin Golf Course or the street grid in Lower Falls.



PHOTO: TED KUKLINSKI

Indian pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*)

The Pony Truss Trail downstream from the bridge will be connected to the DCR's Lasell Boathouse Park either by a restored Riverside Depot Tunnel or possibly a trail and boardwalk,

both routes going under the Framingham commuter rail line. A footpath from the DCR park will connect to Pigeon Hill. A 'neighborhood way' on Charles, Auburn, and Bourne Streets will reach the new multi-use Commonwealth Avenue Carriageway between Lyons Field, the DCR Boathouse parking area, and Norumbega Road in Weston.

Mark Development's \$3 million commitment will fund these future upgrades in conjunction with the Riverside Development, the Mass DCR, and the City of Newton with funding from the Community Preservation Fund and Mass DOT. A list of walks and a link for more details about the Riverside Greenway projects, including a slide show and drone video from the 2018 presentation at the Newton Library, can be found on the Newton Conservators' website: <https://newtonconservators.org/property/riverside-greenway/> ♦