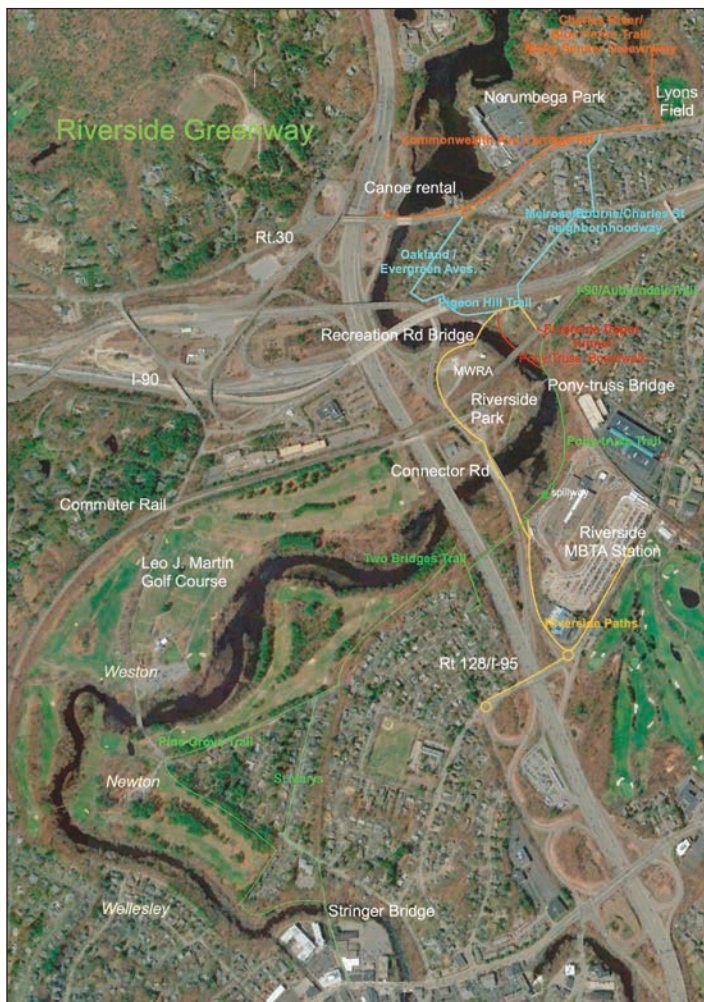


Riverside Greenway Update – November 2024

By Ted Chapman, Riverside Greenway Working Group, Project Manager

Editor's Note: Please see the online version of the newsletter to see the details of these maps.

The Riverside Greenway Working Group (RGWG) formed in 2017 to actualize a vision spelled out in the “1975 Charles River Pathway Plan,” a vision of a network of trails along the Charles River between Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale. This 1975 report arose from the “1969 Newton Recreation/Open Space Plan,” which sought to build on the work of Charles Elliot, who in 1892 founded the Metropolitan Park Commission (later MDC, and now DCR) to preserve as publicly owned open space much of the banks of the Charles River. The open space plan established three goals:



Graphic image of the elements of the Riverside Greenway
Courtesy Ted Chapman

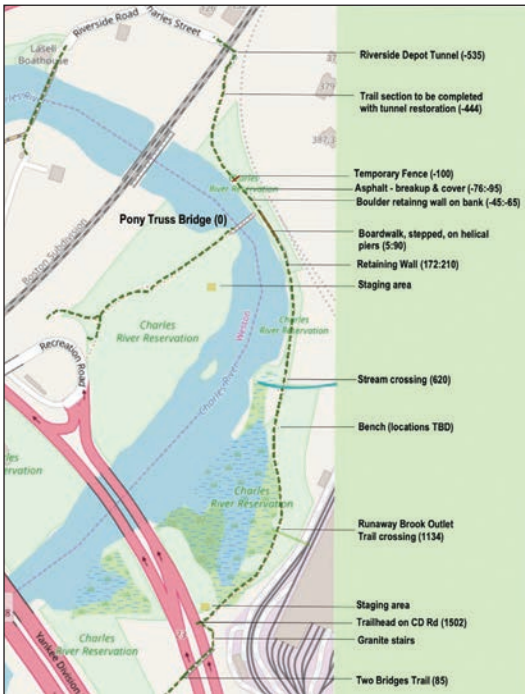
1. To have a continuous footpath along the Charles River
2. To conserve the banks of the Charles in as natural a setting as possible

3. To add to outdoor recreational and educational opportunities available to the city

Some of the trails described in 1975 have already been actualized by the Blue Heron Trail which runs a continuous route from Watertown Square to Lyons Field in Auburndale, and nearly continuous from Quinobequin Road in Waban, through the Cutler Park Reservation to Millennium Park in Roslindale. The most significant gap in the trail system is the Riverside Greenway. We have named it the Riverside Greenway because going back to the 1850s, this was the area known as the Riverside Recreation Grounds, nicknamed ‘the Rec.’ The following report will describe the remarkable headway being made to create the infrastructure to fill this gap.

The individual construction feats to complete the Riverside Greenway continuous route from Auburndale to Quinobequin Road in Waban have received individual names:

- The Marty Sender Greenway, phases 1 and 2 (2022/2024)
- The Commonwealth Ave Carriageway (2026)
- The Auburndale Links
 - Melrose/Bourne/Charles Streets/I-90 Underpass (2025)
 - Recreation Road/Stoller Boathouse Bridge (2025)
 - Riverside Depot Tunnel
 - Pigeon Hill Trail (2030)
- Pony Truss Trail and Bridge
- Riverside Trails
 - MWRA link (2025)
 - Pony Truss-Charles River Park Boardwalk (2023)
 - Two-Bridges Trail and connections to Lower Falls/Leo J. Martin/Riverside MBTA Station
 - Riverside Development Trails
 - CD Road shared-use path (2028)
 - Grove Street separate-use trail (2028)



Pony Truss Trail schematic Courtesy Ted Chapman

The big picture is that the Pony Truss Trail was opened in 2022. It is a beautiful .3 mile walk along the south side of the Charles River from Riverside Park to the SC Road abutting the Riverside MBTA station. By 2026, a continuous accessible

bike/pedestrian route from Riverside Park downstream to the Charles River Path in Waltham will be functional. The upstream accessible routes from Lower Falls and the Riverside MBTA station will come online with the Riverside Development in 2027-8.



Marty Sender Boardwalk: The boardwalk on the Marty Sender Greenway below Lyons Field

A detailed update of each of these elements follows, with hyperlinks for further details and visuals. The **Marty Sender Greenway** extends through Auburndale Park adjacent to the Charles River from the gate, marked by the Blue Heron granite pillars, on Islington Road at Lyons Field to the Waltham City line. Phase 1, completed in 2023, restored a 10-foot-wide stabilized stone dust path with tactile edging made of coarse stones. Phase 2 was completed in July 2024 and included a 610-foot-long

boardwalk over a perennial wet area, reconnecting the hydrology of Lyon's field to the wetland and extensive native wetland plantings. Phase 3, which will complete the path to the Waltham border, will soon begin planning.

The **Commonwealth Ave. Greenway** is a monumental project from Lyons Field to a new roundabout being built



Commonwealth Ave Carriageway Full design. Graphic image of the Commonwealth Ave Carriageway between Lyons Field and Auburn St. where it will merge with the replaced Rt 30. Charles River Bridge. Courtesy Ted Chapman

in association with the replacement of the Route 30 bridge over the Charles River. MassDOT will build a shared-use path on this bridge that connects to the boat launch area on Norumbega Road. This Commonwealth Avenue project was designed by the city and paid for by Federal Transportation Improvement Funds. This huge commitment to bike and pedestrian transport will remove the two west-bound car lanes of Commonwealth Avenue and convert them to a park with separated bike and pedestrian paths. Now under construction, the estimated finish date is mid-2026. The Commonwealth Ave Bridge and new roundabout at Auburn Street will follow. On the south side, a third of the way to Lyons Field, there is a curb break and eventually a flashing pedestrian crossing beacon side that will be the connection to the **Melrose-Bourne-Charles Street Neighborhood Way**.



Stoller Bridge/Pigeon Hill Rd.: The Recreation Road/Stoller Boathouse Bridge under construction with the I-90 Pigeon Hill Trail construction in the background.

This neighborhood way will utilize the existing street grid in Auburndale to connect to the **Charles River/Pigeon Hill Park**. The city transportation planning team is working with the RGWG team, neighborhood abutters, and Newton DPW to design and construct traffic calming/safety measures that will allow safe passage between the Commonwealth

Avenue Greenway, through the I-90 tunnel to the Charles River/Pigeon Hill Park. The park, owned by the Mass DCR, will undergo restoration when bridge construction

Continued on page 6

is complete. The restoration will include improvements to the path system connecting the Auburndale links and to the white house at 107 Charles Street, which hosts multiple AA meetings each week.



Pigeon Hill I-90 West: Looking west from Pigeon Hill, the new piers for I-90 east roadway are rising across the Charles River 40 feet south of I-90s current location. The Pigeon Hill Trail will run under this roadway.



Pigeon Hill I-90 east: Looking east from Pigeon Hill the steel foundation for the abutment under construction; the Pigeon Hill Trail will run downhill on a shelf created to the right (river side) of the new abutment.

grade 5%), allow a trail with a maximum grade of 11%. This trail will reestablish the historic connection between the river and the neighborhood of Pigeon Hill and eventually will provide a connection for recreational users to the Commonwealth Avenue Greenway and DCR Boathouse, canoe, kayak, and paddle board rental facility.

The third Auburndale link, which has been studied in detail by the RWGW with MassTrails funding, is the restoration of the **Riverside Depot Tunnel**, which crosses under the Worcester branch of the MBTA commuter rail and connects to the Pony Truss Trail. The fourth link, an alternative route to the tunnel, would connect with the Pony Truss Trail on a

The four **Auburndale Links** options take off from the park. The primary accessible route for the park is the **Recreation Road/Stoller Boathouse Bridge**, which is

nearing completion, scheduled to open in Spring 2025. This 16-foot-wide bridge will carry users to the DCR-owned MWRA bypass path. Above the park on the north, the Mass Pike (I-90) is currently being rebuilt by MassDOT at a cost of \$730M.

The completed construction will accommodate the second of the links — a RGWG project to restore the **Pigeon Hill Road** as a trail. This trail will meet Forest Service accessibility guidelines (FSTAG). These guidelines, which are not as stringent as the ADA guidelines (max

grade 5%), allow a trail with a maximum grade of 11%. This trail will reestablish the historic connection between the river and the neighborhood of Pigeon Hill and eventually will provide a connection for recreational users to the Commonwealth Avenue Greenway and DCR Boathouse, canoe, kayak, and paddle board rental facility.



PHOTO: TED CHAPMAN

Pony Truss Bridge:

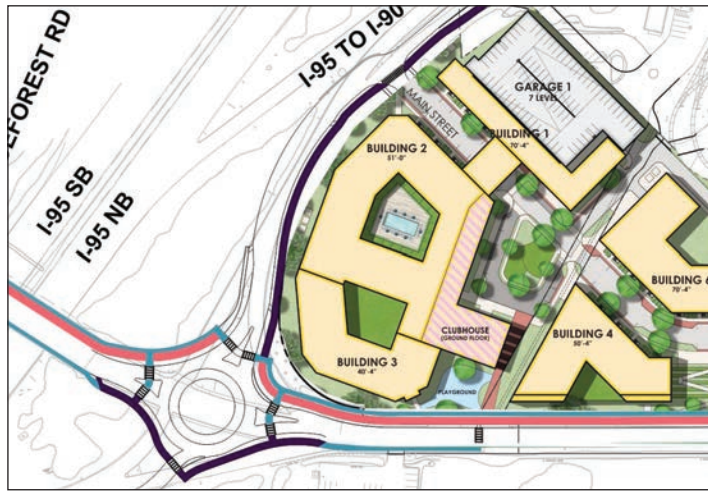
The Pony Truss bridge seen from atop the Commuter Rail Bridge. On the right bank was the boathouse for the Riverside Recreation Grounds, now a beautiful display of swamp rose-mallow Hibiscus moscheutos in July and August.

boardwalk in the Charles River under the iconic commuter rail bridge. The construction of an at-grade boardwalk in the Charles River between the Pony Truss Trail downstream from the Pony Truss Bridge to the Charles River /Pigeon Hill Park is the route favored by Mass DCR because it would be ADA compliant, making it eligible for federal funding. The construction of one or both options is part of the Riverside Development special permit negotiated by Mark Development in 2021 with funding as part of the 2021 Riverside mitigation package totaling \$3M.

The fourth iteration of a plan to develop the Riverside MBTA station is currently being resubmitted by Mark Development as a smaller, all-residential project. This size reduction will also reduce the mitigation package approved in 2021 by 30%, dropping the funding of the Riverside Trail Projects to \$2.1M. The projects to be paid for by these mitigation funds include the Depot Tunnel or Boardwalk, the CD road - MWRA connection, the connection between the Two Bridgers Trail and new path on the CD road, and finally 100% design of the Two Bridges Trail. This last item, which itself is estimated to cost \$1.5M, is listed the highest priority in the agreement signed between Mark Development and Mass DCR, DOT, and MBTA. The RGWG will seek to renegotiate these priorities to allow for actual construction of trail infrastructure rather than spending the bulk of the funds on a design for which there is no foreseeable funding in sight.

The RGWG identified the Two Bridges Trail as the most appropriate route connecting Lower Falls and the Leo J. Martin golf and cross-county skiing operation to the Riverside MBTA station. In 2017, RGWG was awarded a MassTrails grant of \$37K and hired the BSC Group to do a conceptual plan of the trail. This study estimated the construction costs to be just short of about \$1M. In 2021

DCR and Mark Development put that number at \$3.5M beyond the \$1.5M design cost. In 2020 Mass DCR funded the Lower Falls Shared-Use Trail Feasibility Study to access how to connect the Two Bridges Trail through the golf



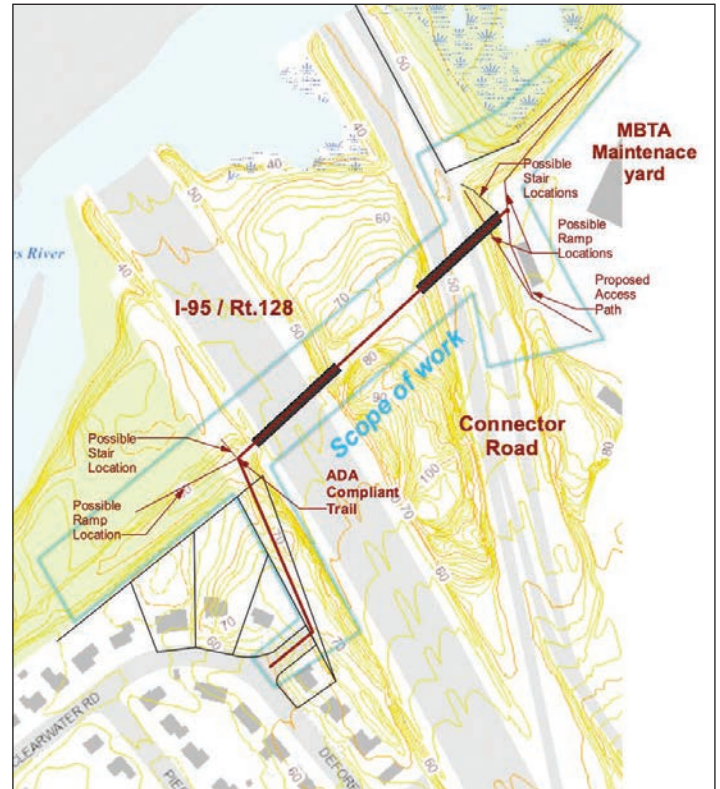
*Riverside paths at I-90-N ramp
Graphic image of the bike-pedestrian Riverside paths at the I-90 north bound ramp. Courtesy Ted Chapman*

course to the Blue Heron Trail along Quinobequin Road. The total cost estimated for this project was over \$8.5M. Clearly these costs are out of reach of current funding sources.

The positive news is that Mark Development will be building a safe route from Riverside to the Lower Falls street grid — a separated bike and pedestrian path on Grove Street in front of the development, through a new roundabout at the location of the I-95/Rte. 128 northbound ramp. At the roundabout, there will be a connection to the shared-use path that will run adjacent to the current CD road to Riverside Park in Weston. The separated path on the north side of Grove Street. will cross I-95 to a second new roundabout at the I-95/Rte.128 southbound exit at Asheville Street. This new trail system will provide a long-awaited safe connection between Lower Falls and the Riverside Greenway, though it lacks the recreational advantages of the Two Bridges Trail.

For the hale and hardy, there is an existing connection along railroad right-of-way across the Two Bridges Trail that crosses the CD road and I-95/Rt 128 open for foot traffic. Access requires a scramble up the embankment at the Pony Truss Trail trailhead on the CD road. At the west end of the Two Bridges Trail, there are paths to the golf course and DeForest/Clearwater Streets in Lower Falls. The street grid along Pine Grove and St. Marys Street connects to the segment of the Blue Heron Trail from Concord St, across the Trestle Bridge to Wellesley Hills. From there,

walkers can access the Wellesley trail system, and going east on Washington Street (Rt.16 and over the Cordingly Dam path to the paths on Quinobequin). Relatively safe access to Quinobequin could also be achieved at the I-90/Ashville roundabout by Mass DOT painting a shared-use path on the access road (Quinobequin East) between Grove and Washington Streets. This route is not mentioned in the 2020 DCR Study.



Schematic showing the placement of the Two Bridges Trail. Courtesy Ted Chapman

The mission of the RGWG is “to create connection and restore the legacy” of this beautiful part of the Charles River for both recreational and off-road transportation purposes. We have important collaborators in meeting these goals: Mass DOT, DCR and MBTA, the cities of Newton and Waltham, the towns of Wellesley and Weston and their trails advocates and department staff, and Solomon Foundation, and most importantly Newton Conservators. When we look at the map of the improvements underway and envisioned, they link to efforts in adjacent towns. For instance, the Town of Weston has designed and received TIP funding to build a three-mile, Route 30 shared-use path from I-90 to the Wayland border. Wellesley and Waltham each have more than 100 miles of trails that will be accessed through the Riverside Greenway. We are grateful for what has been accomplished in eight years and look forward to completing this trail network. ♦