

Rail Trail ready for use

By Liz Mineo/Staff Writer
The Framingham Tab

Posted June 24, 2005

FRAMINGHAM — A hiking and cycling fan, Mark Lamkin joined the Framingham Cochituate Rail Trail Committee in 2001 hoping the rail trail would be for everyone's benefit.

Lamkin, who joined the group representing the Framingham Pedestrian Bicycle Advisory Committee, wanted not only hikers and bikers to use the 4-mile rail trail. He wanted joggers, dog walkers, parents pushing baby strollers and even roller-bladers to enjoy the scenic trail that goes from the village of Saxonville to downtown Natick.

After four years of hard work, in which the committee had to convert a mostly inactive railroad into a useful piece of property, people can begin to have a taste of the rail trail.

Lamkin, who has been the committee's chairman for over two years, expects to open the first section of the trail late this summer. It'll be a preview of what the rail trail would be like when it reaches completion in five more years, said Lamkin.

The rail trail will be smaller than the Minute Bikeway that runs through Bedford, Lexington, Arlington and Cambridge, but the Cochituate Rail Trail will have some unique features and provide opportunities for healthy recreation and transportation for local residents.

"It would provide a very nice asset to the town," said Lamkin. "We are converting a wasted area into a usable area, which will bring enormous benefits to the public. Children can walk to school, people can ride their bikes to the malls, and workers who work nearby can enjoy a pleasant walk during their lunch break."

The first section of the trail, which will be open in a few more weeks, will be a three-quarter mile trail going from Old Connecticut Path to Rte. 30 and Speen Street across from Home Depot. The rail trail goes by several commercial buildings, including the American Cancer Society and TJX's corporate offices. In the past, the rail trail connected Roxbury Carpet Company in Saxonville to the Boston-Albany main line in downtown Natick.

Committee members are busy these days trying to get everything ready for the opening of the Framingham section. Two safe crossings are yet to be installed as well as a traffic signal on Old Connecticut Path. The main challenge, obtaining easement from the rail property owners, was overcome when the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority gave a permanent easement, which allows trail construction from Rte. 30 to Massachusetts Turnpike. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, which is the other owner of the rail road, also gave a lease and licenses to the committee. Work in the Natick section of the rail trail is lagging behind.

The Cochituate Rail Trail has come a long way in four years, and Lamkin feels happy about it. Two signs FUTURE Cochituate Rail Trail www.CRTrail.org mark the trail's entrance at the street across the parking lot at 500 Old Connecticut Path.

"It's going to take five years to get to having a paved trail," said Lamkin. "But when we get there, we'll have a grand celebration with town officials and representatives from the state agencies, and people walking and riding their bikes."

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Mark Lamkin is shown standing in front of the entrance to the Cochituate Rail Trail off Old Connecticut Path. (Staff photo by Ed Hopfmann)