

**Minuteman Bikeway Extension**  
**Frequently Asked Questions (Condensed)**  
**11.2.2022**  
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**Question:** Why do we need to pave the Reformatory Branch Trail? Many people use it and love it as-is.

**Answer:** This Project is fundamentally about safety and access. It makes it possible for residents of all ages and abilities to travel between neighborhoods and across Town on a safe, shared, car-free path. It meets Bedford's community goals of increased connectivity and accessibility. Along the Reformatory Branch, the Project proposes to take the existing dirt path and create a 12' wide paved path, with stone dust shoulders along 75% of the length of the trail, and wooden railings along areas of steep embankments. Pedestrian-activated crosswalks signals will be provided at the Railroad Ave and Hartwell Road trail crossings, and an underpass constructed to allow the trail to pass under Concord Road/Route 62 and eliminate the road crossing.

The paved area will provide greater accessibility for those with mobility limitations, such as people using wheelchairs and people who need a more stable walking surface. The Town is acting on the 2010 Town Meeting Vote that opted to pave the trail, as well as feedback from residents who want to use the trail but can't under current conditions. These improvements would make it possible for them to enjoy the trail as others do now, while maintaining access to the miles of unpaved trails that are accessed from the Reformatory Branch Trail. The paving will also make the path accessible for more of the year, by eliminating the potential for large puddles and muddy conditions after rain events or snow melt. The stone dust shoulder will provide a separate path for walkers and runners that will significantly reduce the potential for conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians.

For a fuller description of the Project, including a five-minute animation of the full plan from Depot Park to Concord Road, please check out the video explanation prepared by Select Board Chair Emily Mitchell, [available via Bedford TV](#) and [documents on the Project website](#).

**Question:** Why is the Town pursuing eminent domain? Will people lose large portions of their backyards?

**Answer:** Eminent domain is a process of compensation whereby a government acquires land or easements from private owners for a specific public use. During an in-depth title review process for this Project, the Town discovered that it did not own a fee interest (i.e., ownership) of the entire 75-foot-wide Reformatory Branch Rail Trail corridor. No one affiliated with the Town, nor abutting owners, were aware of this history until recently, and abutters had not been assessed or paying taxes on these parcels within the former rail right of way that were assumed to be Town-owned. In using the eminent domain process, the Town must pay the owner the highest market value price for their property, as set by an independent appraiser. In all cases, the Town strives to achieve a "friendly taking" by working with each property owner to meet their needs. The parcels and easements to be acquired, both permanent and temporary, can be seen on the color-coded [Land Acquisition Aerial View](#) map on the Project website, and broken down the following ways:

### **Temporary Easements:**

- **Properties backing on to the Reformatory Branch Trail:** With the exception of the Bonnievale Drive and Concord Road properties noted below in the area surrounding the Route 62 underpass and ramp, all temporary easements fall within the 75-foot-wide former rail corridor.
- **Bonnievale Drive:** 10 & 12 Bonnievale Drive have temporary construction easements.
- **Concord Road:** 402 Concord Road, 421 Concord Road, 424 Concord Road, and 423 Concord Road have temporary construction easements.
- **Railroad Avenue/Commercial Avenue:** All impacted properties have temporary construction easements in their front yards.

### **Permanent Easements and/or Land Takings:**

- **Properties backing on to the Reformatory Branch Trail:** All land acquisitions and easements are along the trail itself and within the former 75-foot-wide railroad right-of-way, with the exception of the Evans Ave Sewer Pump Station.
- **Bonnievale Drive Properties:** No permanent easements. Land being acquired in fee is solely within the former rail corridor.
- **Concord Road Properties:** 423 Concord Road requires a permanent easement for the relocation of a utility pole guy wire (support wire). 402 Concord Road (Bedford Children's Center) requires a permanent easement for a guy wire, a section of guard rail, and the relocation of overhead wires. Land being acquired in fee is solely within the former rail corridor.
- **Railroad Avenue/Commercial Avenue:** With the exception of the Taylor & Lloyd and Bikeway Source commercial properties, all permanent easements in this area are for the relocation of utility poles/overhead wires, and one relocation of a fire hydrant. There are no land acquisitions.

**Question:** Where is the money for this Project coming from? Are there additional costs to taxpayers that aren't covered by the state?

**Answer:** As a state/federally funded Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Project, the Town is responsible for design and right of way costs, and the TIP grant pays for the \$11M in anticipated construction costs including any cost overruns. At Annual Town Meeting in 2022, voters approved the use of Community Preservation funds to purchase the land and easements required for the Project. Temporary construction easements needed for the sidewalk on the north side of Railroad Avenue will be covered by Chapter 90 funds or the Town's regular Transportation Improvement budget, since sidewalks cannot be funded through the Community Preservation Act. The Town is also responsible for construction costs unrelated to the Project, specifically about \$200K is requested by the Facilities Department to install conduit underneath the trail for future fiber optic expansion. Other than typical routine maintenance, there are no ongoing costs to the Town.

**Question:** What is the environmental impact of this Project?

**Answer:** It feels counterintuitive to promote an infrastructure project as environmentally friendly when it involves removing trees and laying asphalt. But the single most effective thing we can do to combat climate change, as individuals and as a community, is to cut back on driving. A single car produces more carbon emissions in a year than 150 mature trees can absorb, so reducing car trips has a greater

impact on our carbon footprint as a whole. By making non-car travel easier, safer, and more convenient, this Project makes it possible for more people to reduce short car trips for more of the year, which makes a huge impact on our sustainability efforts in the short and long terms.

The Project has received approval from all relevant local and federal environmental permitting agencies, including Bedford's Conservation Commission and MassDEP. These approvals included review of the most recent regulatory mapping of wetlands, FEMA floodplains, and endangered and rare species, including the Blanding's Turtle. The proposed design and mitigation strategy for the project was found to have no permanent detrimental impacts to any protected resource. The Commission has mandated the hiring of an Environmental Site Supervisor to monitor the Project, ensure proper protection of the resource areas, and submit monthly progress reports to the Commission.

Approximately 4.34 acres of vegetation would be cleared along the existing Reformatory Branch Trail, which was used as an active freight line until 1962. While the total number of acres sounds extensive, the Project is primarily pushing back the forest and brush along approximately 1.7 miles of the former rail bed to accommodate a new paved trail. All trees proposed for removal will be tagged and inspected to ensure compliance with the plans before any cutting takes place. Currently, 68 trees will be planted as replacements. The Town will also work with the Arbor Resource Committee and any abutter to plant additional trees after construction.

To better understand the visual impact, Town staff tagged trees to the east of the Lavender Lane trail crossing to demonstrate the extent of the proposed tree removal within that particular area. To the west of Lavender Lane, Town staff also marked out the area to be cleared to construct the proposed 15-space parking lot. Most of the larger, older trees that currently form the canopy and provide shade to the path will remain. Any canopy that is lost is likely to grow back over time. We can see examples of this regrowth on the existing Minuteman Bikeway and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail where sections were built as recently as 2018 in Westford, Carlisle, and Acton.

**Question:** Will the path be under construction for four years? Will the Town relinquish all control to MassDOT and the contractor?

**Answer:** Temporary easements are being purchased from affected landowners and will be valid for four years, though it will only take approximately two construction seasons (roughly April to November) to complete the entire two-mile Project. The "clock" starts running on the easement as soon as it is recorded at the Registry of Deeds, and additional time is added at the end for contingencies. MassDOT rules also require the Town to purchase temporary easement areas beyond the limit of work, so workers standing in these areas are not trespassing.

The 100% design plans explicitly outline what contractors are to build and what standards must be met. Contractors cannot, however, be told how to build the Project (i.e., dictate the "means and methods," including which specific steps or types of equipment must be used). The Town will work closely with MassDOT throughout bidding, contracting, and construction, much as we do now with the Middlesex Turnpike project, another TIP-funded project that is still ongoing and was also many years in the making. As is standard on large projects, the Town of Bedford will hire its own construction inspector to oversee work, ensure conformance with the plans, and represent the Town's interests on site on a daily basis.

**Question:** How many more people would use the trail if it's paved? How can we ensure that cyclists don't travel too fast or block the path for pedestrians?

**Answer:** We have heard from many residents who cannot use the path in its current state, but would welcome the opportunity to use it if it were paved. We know that shared-use paths encourage non-auto transportation for recreation and commuting by providing a protected route. A MassTrails commissioned study in 2021 found that path users on the existing Minuteman Bikeway substituted 50,291 one-way motor vehicle commuter trips with active transportation trips from July to October 2019, which equated to 74,834 fewer vehicle miles traveled over this four month period. This study also showed that the vast majority of these users (~90%) walked or biked to access the trail. The paved portion and the stone-dust shoulders provide clear options for people to use different sections of the path, depending on their preferred means of travel. The twelve-foot-wide paved portion will have line striping down the center to separate users heading in different directions. The Select Board and the Bicycle Advisory Committee have plans for helpful signage and user education to remind walkers, bikers, and others to practice courtesy on the path.

**Question:** Will the path be plowed in the winter? What other maintenance would the paved trail need?

**Answer:** Plowing will be determined at a later date, taking public feedback into consideration. There may be an option to leave half of the width unplowed by using a narrow sidewalk plow, which would allow cross-country skiers to use the unplowed portion. In terms of ongoing maintenance, off-road asphalt has a much longer lifespan than our streets and highways. Smaller repairs will be handled through the annual DPW Highway Division operations budget, as they are now for the Minuteman Bikeway and Narrow Gauge Rail Trail. To provide a sense of the longevity, the Minuteman, built in 1992–1993, was repaved once in 2014 with a "mill and overlay" preservation treatment.

**Question:** Can we vote to make the Railroad Avenue improvements but not do the rest of the Project?

**Answer:** No. The Project was selected for competitive grant funding as a whole package, and proposed and developed over time by the Town to meet long-standing goals for improved connectivity and infrastructure. Railroad Avenue is a Town-owned road (unlike state routes 62 or 4/225) and is not a realistic candidate for state or federal funding on its own. If the Railroad Avenue improvements were a standalone project, the anticipated cost in 2022 dollars would be approximately \$3.2 million based on the 100% design plans. The project would need to be added to the capital budget, displacing other planned high-priority projects and pushing the cost onto Bedford taxpayers. Additionally, drainage improvements and even the sidewalk would still require easements from private properties on both Railroad Avenue and Commercial Avenue. Deviations from the current design would require additional funding for the Town's consultants to update the plans.