Exploring the Rail Trail Network around Northampton 2008 – 2009

To help ensure the safety and well being of everyone on the trail:
1. Stay on the trail
2. Keep to the right
3. Proceed single file in a straight line
4. Alert others when passing
5. Stop at crosswalks
6. Keep dogs leashed and pick up waste
7. Respect private property

Membership Information
Please consider joining FNTG. Your tax-deductible membership helps to support our efforts on behalf of the trail network throughout Northampton.

Membership Fees:
• Student/Low income $10
• Individual $20
• Family $30
• Sponsoring $50
• Conductor $100
• Engineer $250

Mail checks to: FNTG, 351 Pleasant St. Suite B #117 Northampton, MA 01060-3998

Welcome to our trail network. The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways is a community based non-profit organization devoted to improving the expanding rail-trail network in our small city. We have made this map to help you safely enjoy these recreation and transportation paths.

We are working to build out the trail network in Northampton, as well as new trails that connect with neighboring communities and eventual paths to New Haven, CT and Boston.

This trail was originally constructed in 1868 as part of the New Haven & Northampton Railroad which later was acquired by the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad—most commonly known as the New Haven Railroad (NH). This became its Williamsburg Branch.

The corridor from New Haven was actually built as a canal all the way to Northampton in the 1840s. Converted to a railroad shortly after and called the Canal Division of the New Haven Railroad, it had both freight and passenger trains until the early 1920s, when passenger operations ceased.

As it came into Northampton, the Canal Division joined with the Boston & Maine Railroad’s Conn. River Division at the beautiful H.H. Richardson-designed—Union Station, which today has two restaurants and a night club—but no passenger service.

The night club (The Tunnel Bar) is built in the fire-glazed brick passage-way under the station that connected the B&M side of the station with the New Haven Railroad side. Both the NH and B&M headed north past the station and then the NH branched away to the west side of Route 5 at where the Acme Auto Body is currently located.

Remains of the footings for the overpass over Route 5 are still visible here. The Stop & Shop and the other commercial development just to north sit on top of what once was the New Haven’s classification yard and engine servicing facilities. A branch from this yard complex led to Williamsburg—hence the name Williamsburg Branch.

In 1962, during the last bankruptcy of the New Haven Railroad, a mile segment of the branch was abandoned from the terminus at Williamsburg back down into Florence where there were still a couple of viable freight customers including a coal-fired power plant at the U.S. Veterans Administration Hospital.

In 1969, Penn Central Railroad took operations over from the New Haven and they were eager to do away with marginally performing branch-lines like this one.

So, with the conversion of the Veterans Hospital power-plant to oil—as well as the conversion of other local rail-served coal plants (Smith College and State Hospital), this caused the line to be shut down, and it was cut back all the way back to downtown Easthampton. Two years later, in 1971, the land of the branch-line was sold to Massachusetts Electric Company who ran a power transmission line on parts of the corridor.

In the mid 1970s, the City decided to run a sewer line down the right of way and at the same time—create a bikeway on the bed of the old railroad.

After many meetings and spirited debate, the bike-way opened in 1983, making this rail-trail the oldest municipally operated rail-trail in New England.

Guidelines

Many thanks to our sponsors:

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A B&B on the rail trail
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