

2021

# CHESHIRE RAIL TRAIL SOUTH PLAN

Prepared by Southwest Region Planning Commission

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SWRPC

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# Acknowledgements

The Cheshire Rail Trail South Plan represents a team effort. Building a shared vision for the trail's future requires the participation of many individuals and organizations, including over seven hundred individuals that participated in the Plan's online survey, interviews and Plan working group meetings.

# Disclaimer

The preparation of this document has been financed in part through grant[s] from the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, under the State Planning and Research Program, Section of Title 23, U.S. Code. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Photos by Southwest Region Planning Commission



# Project Overview

The Cheshire Rail Trail South Plan is an effort to address challenges and opportunities along the Trail (also known as the Cheshire Recreational Trail) from its intersection with the Ashuelot Rail Trail in Keene through Swanzey, Marlborough, Troy, Fitzwilliam, and Rindge roughly 21 miles to the Massachusetts State line (<https://arcg.is/1DKXje>). The rail line was opened in 1849 and abandoned in 1972. Following abandonment, the corridor was purchased by the State of New Hampshire through a 1994 funding round of the Federal Highway Administration's Transportation Enhancement Program<sup>1</sup> and is managed by the New Hampshire Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation (Bureau of Trails).

In addition to the State, there are a number of entities that have an interest or direct hand in the management of the Trail including the Monadnock Sno-Moles, local governments, non-profits, volunteer groups, and others. Taking into account the multiple users and interested parties, the Cheshire Rail Trail Plan is an effort to promote a collaborative approach to managing and improving the Trail over time through the development of a common vision for how the Trail could reach its full potential in the future. With support from a wide spectrum of the Trail's stakeholders, goals, objectives and implementation strategies have been developed to guide collaborative efforts over the next ten years and beyond.

Development of the Cheshire Rail Trail South Plan included various tasks conducted between October of 2020 and June of 2021 including:

- Development of a webpage to promote activities and share results ([www.swrpc.org/cheshire-rail-trail-south](http://www.swrpc.org/cheshire-rail-trail-south)).
- Forming a project working group to assist Southwest Region Planning Commission staff in identifying goals, objectives and needs; liaising with their communities and constituents; and providing input on activities.
- Convening three working group meetings focused around promotion of an online survey, as well as goals related to the project and the Trail; results of data collection activities; and finalizing Plan components.

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<sup>1</sup> New Hampshire Department of Transportation, "New Hampshire State Trails Plan," May 20, 2005, <https://www.nh.gov/dot/programs/bikeped/documents/StateTrailsPlanFullReport.pdf>.

- Developing and promoting an online survey to learn about Trail issues, trip types, destinations, and other information.
- Performing counts of people walking and biking at various points along the trail.
- Conducting interviews with a variety of stakeholders focusing on information relative to plans for improvements, needs, promotion, land use issues, previous planning activities and more.
- Maintaining crowd-sourced interactive maps of the area documenting challenges and opportunities and Trail photos.

To learn more about the results of various activities not included in the body of the Plan, please also consult the appendices and webpage.

## Vision, Goals and Objectives

A vision statement is a concise articulation of an ideal future. It establishes and communicates the target state that guides planning activities. Informed by data collection efforts and outreach, the following vision statement was developed by SWRPC in conjunction with the Plan's working group.

The Cheshire Rail Trail, from Keene to Fitzwilliam, will function as a continuous transportation and recreation corridor that is scenic, accessible, safe, and welcoming to a wide variety of users - local residents and visitors alike. The Trail will connect seamlessly to a variety of other rail trail and trail systems in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Trail facilities will balance the needs and priorities of the Trail's many stakeholders, including state agencies, municipalities, landowners, user groups, businesses, and non-profit organizations, who will work collaboratively to maintain and develop the Trail as a shared public asset. The Trail will be widely celebrated as a valuable resource that enhances the surrounding area's quality of life, ecology and economic vitality.

SWRPC staff and the Plan's working group defined goals and objectives built upon the vision statement - broad statements that express general priorities and specific activities that will contribute to fulfilling a goal.

**Goal 1:** Increase awareness of the Trail, among both local residents and visitors.

**Objective 1:** Develop and distribute promotional materials such as printed trail maps and brochures about the Trail, within communities as well as outside of the region. Digital resources, such as websites, apps, or social media presence, should also be considered.



- Objective 2: Establish a consistent Trail brand rooted in the history and unique characteristics of the surrounding communities and the State's trail network. A Trail brand could include elements such as a logo, standardized colors, graphics, and other design features that could be used on signage, maps or other promotional materials.
- Objective 3: Collaboratively design and implement a standardized, year-round wayfinding system using a combination of signs and maps both on the Trail and at nearby points of interest (e.g. village centers) with the cooperation and collaboration of the NH Bureau of Trails.
- Objective 4: Install signage that advertises the Trail to motorists passing by Trail crossings.
- Objective 5: Integrate the Trail with community and school activities, events and curriculum.
- Objective 6: Coordinate mapping activities, updates and promotional activities with relevant State partners, the private sector (such as Google Maps) and others.
- Objective 7: Take advantage of the NH Division of Travel and Tourism Development's marketing program and other resources to promote the Trail.

**Goal 2: Increase use of the Trail as an alternative for trips made by car.**

- Objective 1: Integrate the Trail with the surrounding roadway network, with a focus on improving connections between the Trail and key points of interest, including downtowns/village centers, schools and residential neighborhoods.
- Objective 2: Develop and maintain a trail surface easily traversed using a variety of transportation modes and by people of all ages and abilities.
- Objective 3: Establish employer-based programs at locations within biking and walking distance of the Trail that offer incentives or amenities (e.g. secure and convenient bike parking) to walk or bike as opposed to drive.

**Goal 3: Expand opportunities for physical activity and outdoor experiences.**

- Objective 1: Improve connections to natural areas and hiking trails (e.g. Metacomet-Monadnock), other rail trails (e.g. the Ashuelot Rail Trail, Monadnock Recreational Trail and the North Central Pathway) and other nearby trails (e.g. Jonathan Daniels Trail).
- Objective 2: Establish access points from the Trail to publicly-accessible waterbodies.

Objective 3: Promote the Trail as part of both individual health, wellness and community health improvement initiatives.

Objective 4: Protect sensitive habitats and natural resources along the Trail corridor.

**Goal 4: Enhance regional and local economies.**

Objective 1: Promote the Trail as a tourism and recreation destination.

Objective 2: Work with employers to promote the Trail as a recruitment and retention benefit.

Objective 3: Work with relevant groups/organizations to organize and advertise on-Trail events.

Objective 4: Promote context-sensitive land uses that complement the Trail. Nearby complementary land uses might include retail establishments, tourism-based industries, restaurants, lodging, or residential neighborhoods. In more rural areas, open space and agricultural land uses may be most appropriate.

**Goal 5: Create an on-Trail experience that is accessible, safe and welcoming for all ages, abilities and user groups.**

Objective 1: Enhance safety at Trail/road crossings.

Objective 2: Educate users regarding trail etiquette and regulations through posted signs and other outreach methods.

Objective 3: Add and enhance amenities at trailheads and along the Trail with items such as bicycle repair stations, dog waste bags, seating, etc.

Objective 4: Clearly delineate the public right-of-way from abutting privately-owned parcels.

Objective 5: Identify areas where on-trail encroachment poses an issue and work with landowners to address encroachment of private property onto public land.

Objective 6: Consider installation of lighting at Trail crossings and other locations where appropriate.

Objective 7: Maintain a clean environment through a potential Trail adoption program, routine maintenance, trash/recycling receptacles, and by establishing user expectations.

Objective 8: Ensure that trailheads offer parking areas that accommodate a variety of users and vehicles (including bicycles, vans, buses, trailers).

Objective 9: Ensure safety of users through enforcement activities by local and State agencies.

Objective 10: Implement best practices relative to the design of facilities and their accessibility by individuals with disabilities.

**Goal 6: Facilitate communication and collaboration among Trail stakeholders.**

Objective 1: Engage in continuous coordination with a wide variety of stakeholder groups for the purpose of effective maintenance, project development, marketing, advocacy, fundraising, and more.

Objective 2: Strengthen the connections between snowmobile clubs and non-motorized user groups through joint participation in maintenance activities through the NH State Parks Volunteer Coordinator.

Objective 3: Provide input to and coordinate with the State of New Hampshire Bureau of Trails and Department of Transportation on planning activities, issues and improvements.

Objective 4: Encourage communication and coordination about a variety of activities happening on the Trail (including birds counts, trash clean-up, educational opportunities and more).

**Goal 7: Address challenges related to funding improvements and maintenance.**

Objective 1: Advocate for increased funding and coordination at the State level.

Objective 2: Seek funding opportunities and partnerships with landowners, utilities, developers and others to support improvements and ongoing maintenance.

## Implementation Plan

The planning process included a variety of data gathering and public engagement activities, all of which provided useful information about the existing conditions of the Trail, how the Trail is used and managed today and how stakeholders would like to see the Trail improved in the future.

The purpose of the implementation plan is to translate the vision, goals and objectives into specific recommended projects. The implementation plan also seeks to incorporate stakeholder and working group feedback about particular improvements that they would like to see made on the Trail or connecting roads and pathways.

The following table provides a summary description of seventeen individual projects along the Trail that were identified as part of this planning effort. This section is followed by a map series showing the location of potential projects.

Projects included in the implementation plan are currently listed without a priority ranking. Implementation of listed projects will require Trail stakeholders to prioritize projects according to perceived need and available resources. Developing and undertaking a prioritization process, therefore, would be a beneficial next step towards Plan implementation. Project prioritization could occur under the auspices of a friends of the Trail group, with the whole Trail taken into consideration. Particular Trail-related groups could also prioritize projects within their geographic area of interest.

All implementation projects, regardless of the funding mechanism, will require coordination with Trail owners and managers – the New Hampshire Bureau of Trails and New Hampshire Department of Transportation. However, all Trail projects can benefit from the input and resources of multiple groups. For new and unfunded projects, consider some of the many communities, groups and organizations that participated in the development of this Plan:

Name	Areas of Interest, Responsibility and Potential Coordination
New Hampshire Bureau of Trails	All Trail improvements and connections, maintenance agreements, volunteer coordination, funding
Municipal departments, staff and officials in Keene, Swanzey, Marlborough, Troy, Fitzwilliam, Rindge, and Winchendon, MA	Project planning, maintenance, funding, education and outreach
The Monadnock Sno-Moles and Keene Sno-Riders	Project planning, maintenance, funding, connections to other rail trails
Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative	General promotion and regional coordination
Monadnock Cycling Club and New England Mountain Bike Association	Interests include events, group rides, considerations for people biking
Cheshire Medical Center	Promotion of active living and healthy behaviors

Name	Areas of Interest, Responsibility and Potential Coordination
Greater Keene and Peterborough Chamber of Commerce	Connections to visitors and businesses
North Central Pathway	Interest in connectivity to the Massachusetts trail network
Historical Society of Cheshire County	Educational programming, expertise in promoting history and historical assets
Monadnock Happy Trails Association and NH Horse Council	Accommodations for people riding horses and accessing the Trail with trailers
Monadnock Conservancy	Adjacent landowner, outdoor programming and education
Keene State College and Antioch University	Educational programming, assistance with future study and research
Southwest Region Planning Commission and Montachusset Regional Planning Commission	Technical assistance, data collection, coordination, long range planning



## List of Projects

#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
1	Bartholomew Ct. Connector	Selected for New Hampshire's Transportation Alternatives Program funding in 2019, the City of Keene will construct an approximately 810-foot multiuse path connecting the Cheshire Rail Trail with Marlboro St., which is also targeted for bicycle and pedestrian improvements through the same project. According to New Hampshire's 2021-2030 Ten Year Plan, engineering for the project is scheduled to take place in 2024, with construction to occur in 2025.	Keene	Connecting Roadway/Path	Funded	City of Keene
2	Transportation Heritage Trail	The Transportation Heritage Trail will be the next development phase of the Cheshire Rail Trail within the City of Keene. This section, which totals nearly 1.1 miles in length, will begin at the terminus of the previously completed Industrial Heritage Trail (IHT), which ends at Eastern Avenue. While the IHT celebrates Keene's history as an industrial and manufacturing hub, the Transportation Heritage Trail (THT) will pay homage to the evolution of transportation technology	Keene	Trail Surface Improvement	Fundraising in process	City of Keene

#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
		<p>through the decades. The central feature of this project will be the adaptive reuse of three historic bridges. The THT is currently recognized in the City of Keene's 2021-2027 Capital Improvement Plan.</p> <p>To the west, the Trail will reuse the Robert J. Prowse Memorial Bridge to cross NH Route 101. This bridge previously carried traffic over Interstate 93 in Londonderry and is being made available for reuse by the NHDOT. In the center, the Trail will feature the existing Stone Arch Bridge, which will be rehabilitated with historically appropriate railings. The City anticipates reusing its Island Street Bridge (a Baily truss bridge) to carry the Trail over Swanzey Factory Road. Along the Trail, the historic bridges will form the context for educational signage and static displays related to the history of transportation and how transportation systems have shaped today's built environment.</p> <p>In order to maximize opportunity to seek out funding from various grant programs and</p>				

#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
		<p>contributions from non-profit organizations, the project will be completed in several phases. In 2025, a roadside trailhead off of Swanzey Factory Road will be constructed and safety railings installed on the Stone Arch Bridge. Funding in 2026 will allow the rail bed from Eastern Avenue to Rt. 101 to be improved and embankment on the north side of Rt. 101 to be prepared for the Prowse Bridge. In 2027, the historic Prowse Bridge will be relocated from temporary storage in Londonderry to its new home in Keene. The schedule outlined above will be contingent upon the availability of grant funds and private donations.</p> <p>In 2021, the City applied to the State's Transportation Alternatives Program ("TAP") to rehabilitate the trail segment extending from Eastern Avenue to NH 101, including connections to Marlboro Street and Chapman Road. As of Plan publication, the application is pending.</p>				

#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
3	Trail surface improvements, Keene-Swanzey TL to Webb Depot Rd.	Approximately 3.7 miles of Trail surface improvements from the Keene-Swanzey TL to Webb Depot Rd. in Marlborough. The Trail surface will be upgraded to hard pack stone dust and drainage improvements where needed. The project is part of a TAP proposal submitted by the Town of Swanzey and selected for funding in 2018. Preliminary engineering is scheduled to begin in 2021 with construction anticipated to begin in 2024, according to the State of NH 2021-2030 Ten Year Plan.	Swanzey	Trail Surface Improvement	Funded	Town of Swanzey
4	Swanzey Ashuelot-Cheshire Rail Trail Connector	Currently, both rail trails in Swanzey run north-south, with no off-highway route connecting the two. A proposed 5.2-mile route along Marcy Hill Road (a class VI road) and across Keene Dillant-Hopkins Airport land has been under discussion for some time (depicted route in the following map is a gross approximation). If the route were constructed, it would establish an approximately 15-mile loop that runs through the center of Keene. This project is also	Swanzey	Connecting Roadway/Path	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails

#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
		included in the Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail Implementation Plan.				
5	Trail surface improvements, Webb Depot Rd. to Marlborough-Troy TL	Upgrade approx. 1.7 miles of Trail surface to packed stone dust. Wet areas exist that would benefit from drainage improvements.	Marlborough	Trail Surface Improvement	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails
6	Trail surface and drainage improvements, Marlborough-Troy TL to Water St.	This approximately 2.1-mile Trail segment extends from Troy's northern edge to its town center. While, as a whole, the Trail segment isn't one of the roughest or most poorly drained sections, it does include some rough terrain and wet spots. The section could benefit from improving Trail surface with packed stone dust, ditch work and perhaps some culvert improvements.	Troy	Trail Surface Improvement	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails
7	Trail surface and drainage improvements, Water St. to Troy-Fitzwilliam TL	This approximately 1.6-mile Trail segment extends from the Troy town center and historic train depot to the Town's southern edge. The Trail surface becomes notably rougher and drainage becomes more of an issue about 2,400 feet from the Troy-	Troy	Trail Surface Improvement	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails



#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
		Fitzwilliam town line. The whole segment would benefit from resurfacing with packed stone dust. Portions may require ditch work and other drainage improvements.				
8	Trail surface and drainage improvements, Troy-Fitzwilliam TL to NH 119	This approximately 2.8-mile Trail segment extends from Fitzwilliam's northern edge, past Rockwood Pond, and ends at NH 119. It includes some significant drainage issues in the vicinity of Rhododendron Rd. The trail surface is especially rough near the Troy-Fitzwilliam town line and in the approach to NH 119. The original railroad corridor is blocked by the raised road bed of NH 119, which is about 15-20 feet higher than the surrounding terrain. A rough incline has been constructed so that Trail users can cross the road. The whole segment, but especially this area near NH 119, would benefit from being resurfaced with packed stone dust. Ditching and other drainage should be installed at other points along the segment.	Fitzwilliam	Trail Surface Improvement	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails
9	Trail surface and drainage	This approximately 1.7-mile Trail segment includes some of the roughest terrain, most	Fitzwilliam	Trail Surface Improvement	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails

#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
	improvements, NH 119 to Collins Pond Rd.	notably in the vicinity of NH 119 and Collins Pond Rd. Drainage is also quite poor in areas, such as east of West Lake Rd. and along the edge of Collin's Pond. The whole segment would benefit from resurfacing with packed stone dust. In very rough areas, additional grading work may be necessary to create a smooth Trail surface. Ditching and other drainage work is needed along major portions of the segment. The segment also includes a problematic road crossing at Royalston Rd. The Trail slopes steeply on either side of the roadway, presenting a hazard/challenge for certain Trail users.				
10	Potential trailhead and parking at Fitzwilliam Depot	Currently, no designated parking exists at or around the Fitzwilliam Depot. Work with Town officials to designate parking on town-owned land or work with adjacent private property owners. Parking could be accompanied by other trailhead amenities (e.g. wayfinding kiosk or signage).	Fitzwilliam	Trailhead/Parking	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails
11	Trail surface and drainage	This approximately 1.8-mile Trail segment extends from Collins Pond Rd. to Templeton	Fitzwilliam	Trail Surface Improvement	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails

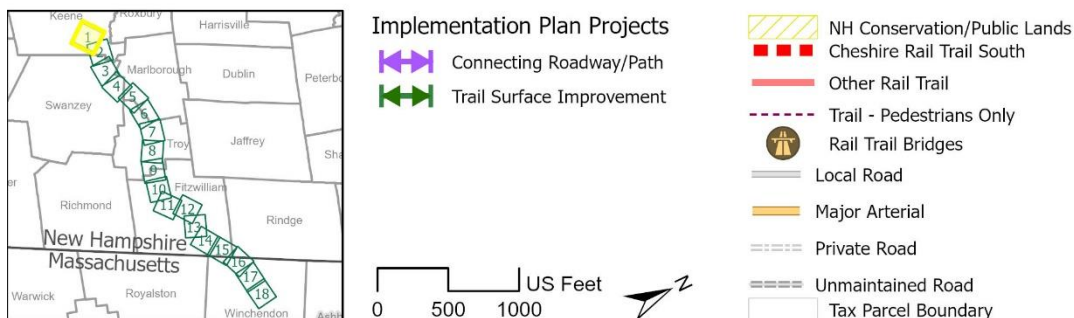
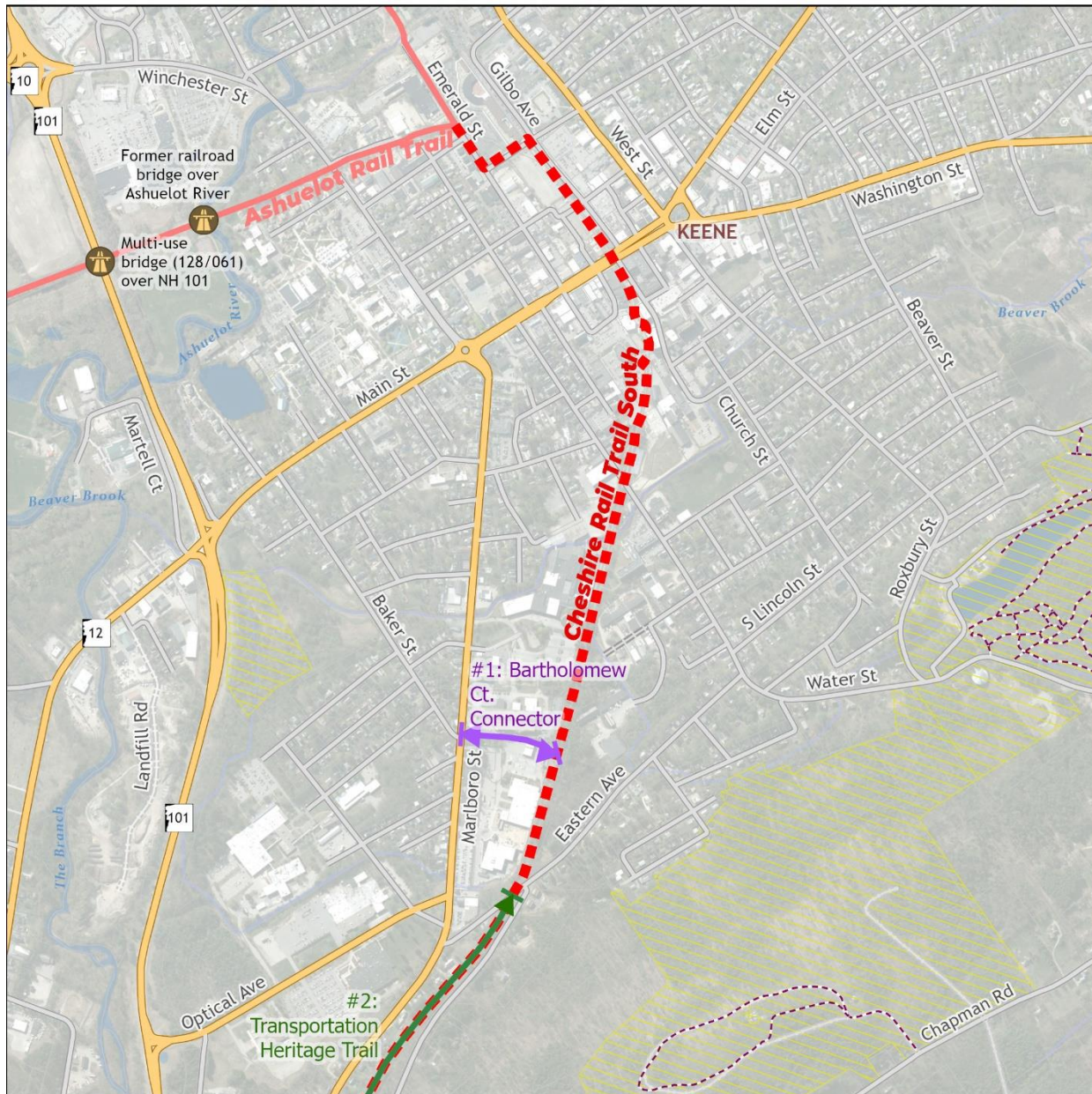
#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
	improvements, Collins Pond Rd. to Templeton Tpke.	Tpke., the rough western terminus of planned improvements by the Monadnock Conservancy. The entire segment would benefit from being surfaced with packed stone dust. Trail terrain is most notably rough within 3,000 feet or so of the segment's southern terminus. Ditch work and spot drainage improvement may also be needed.				
12	Trail surface and bridge improvements, Templeton Tpke. to Templeton Turnpike Rd.	This approximately 2.2-mile Trail segment has been targeted for improvements by the Monadnock Conservancy, which owns the 77-acre Chamberlain Conservation Area along the northern side of the Trail. The Conservancy has already replaced a bridge over Sip Pond Brook and installed a parking area off of Old Turnpike Rd., along with a small connector trail granting access to the Trail. With support from the NH Bureau of Trails' Recreational Trails Program, the Conservancy has several improvements planned for construction in 2021. A wood bridge spanning Scott Brook east of Templeton Tpke. will be completely replaced. Several culverts will be replaced to improve	Fitzwilliam	Trail Surface Improvement	Funded	Monadnock Conservancy

#	Name	Description	Municipality	Category	Funding Status	Project Contact
		drainage. As funds permit, the Trail will be resurfaced with stone dust.				
13	Trail surface improvements and renovation, Old Turnpike Rd. to NH-MA state line	While the Monadnock Conservancy is making improvements to the Trail west of Old Turnpike Rd., an approx. 0.8-mile segment remains to the east, where it crosses NH 12 and proceeds to the NH-MA state line. To the west of NH 12, the railroad corridor requires vegetation clearing and significant work to reestablish a sound trailbed. It should be noted that prior to crossing the NH-MA state line, an approximately 250-foot section of the Trail passes through the Town of Rindge. The entire segment would benefit from being surfaced with packed stone dust.	Fitzwilliam	Trail Surface Improvement	Unfunded	Bureau of Trails

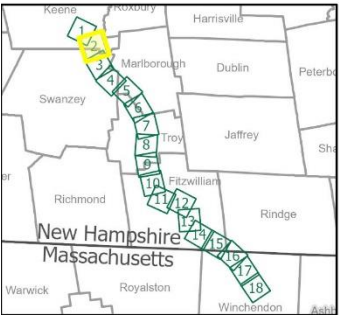
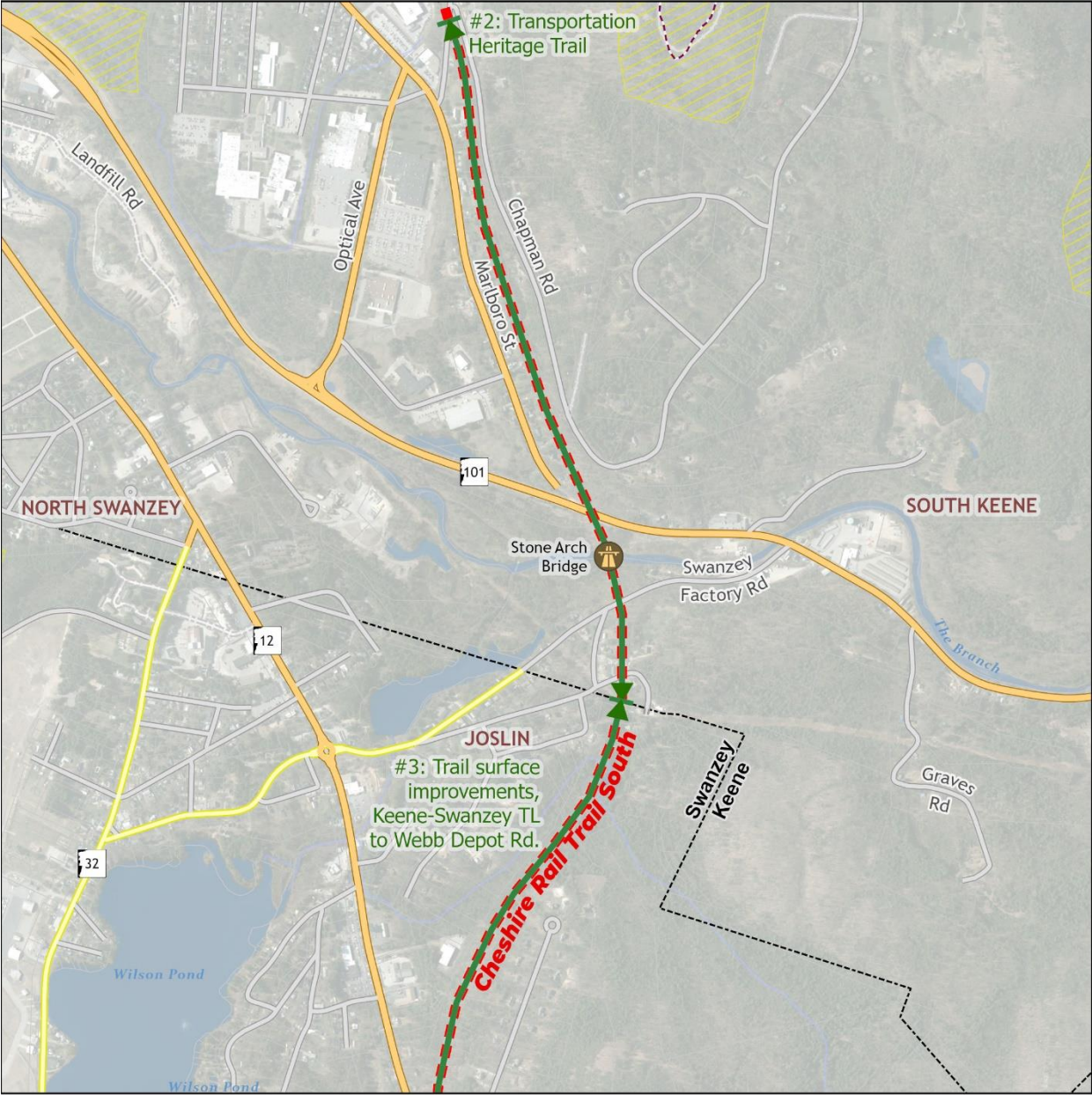
# Plan Maps

# Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Implementation Plan

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Implementation Plan Projects

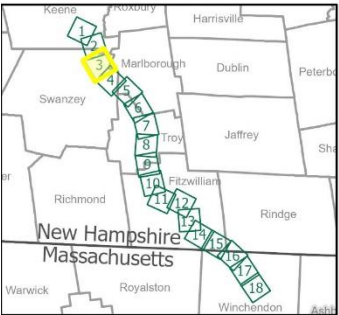
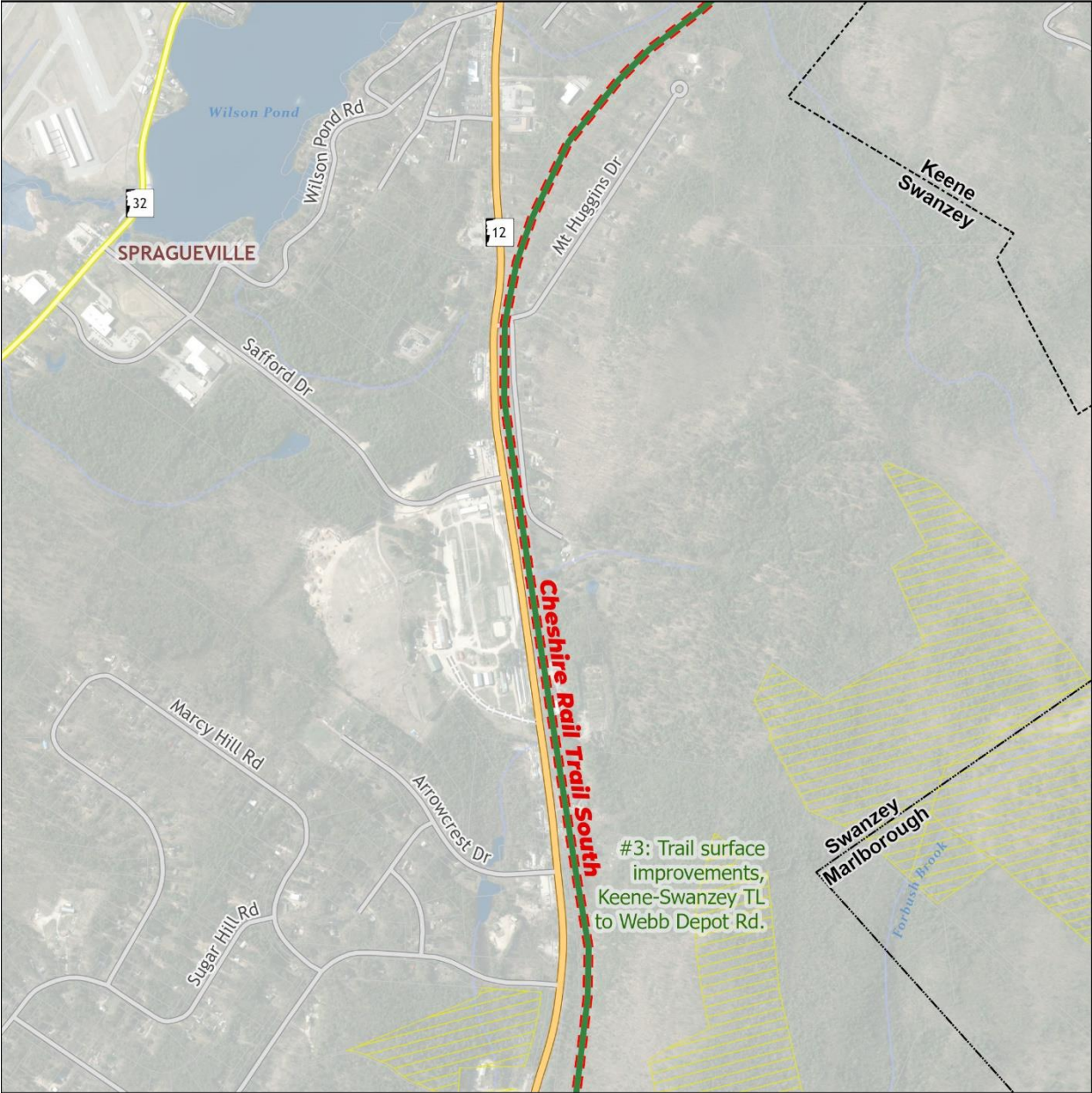
Trail Surface Improvement

- NH Conservation/Public Lands
- Cheshire Rail Trail South
- Trail - Pedestrians Only
- Rail Trail Bridges
- Local Road
- Major Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Private Road
- Unmaintained Road
- Tax Parcel Boundary

0 500 1000 US Feet







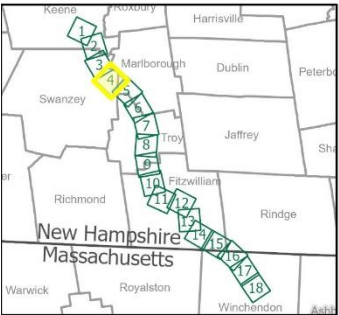
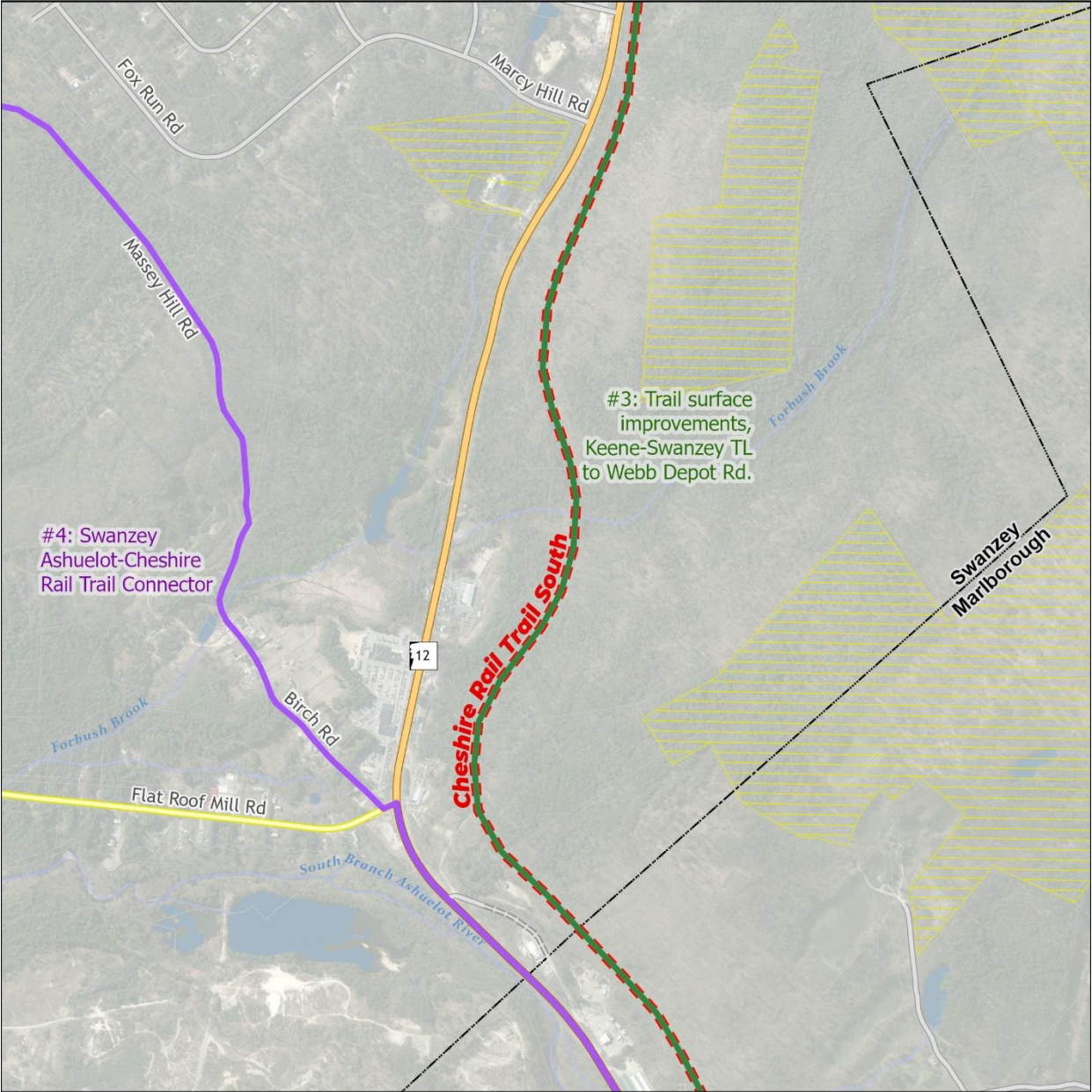
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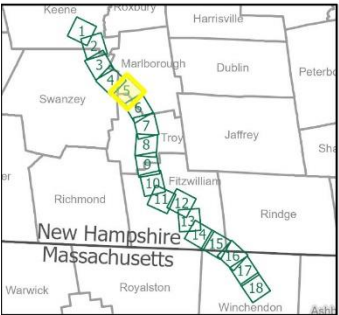
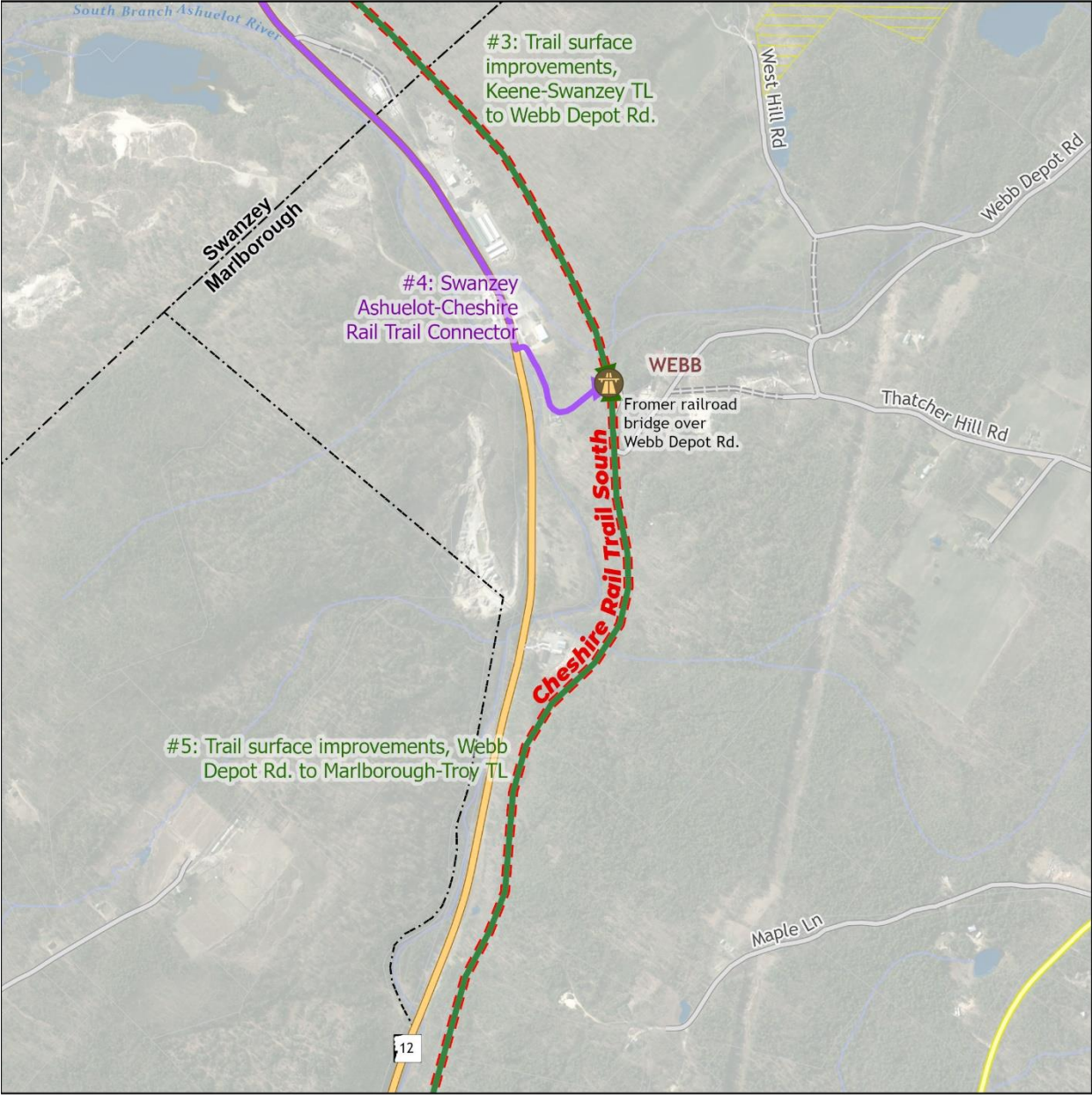
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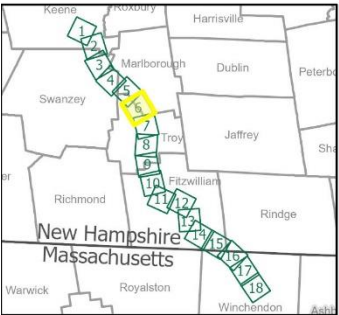
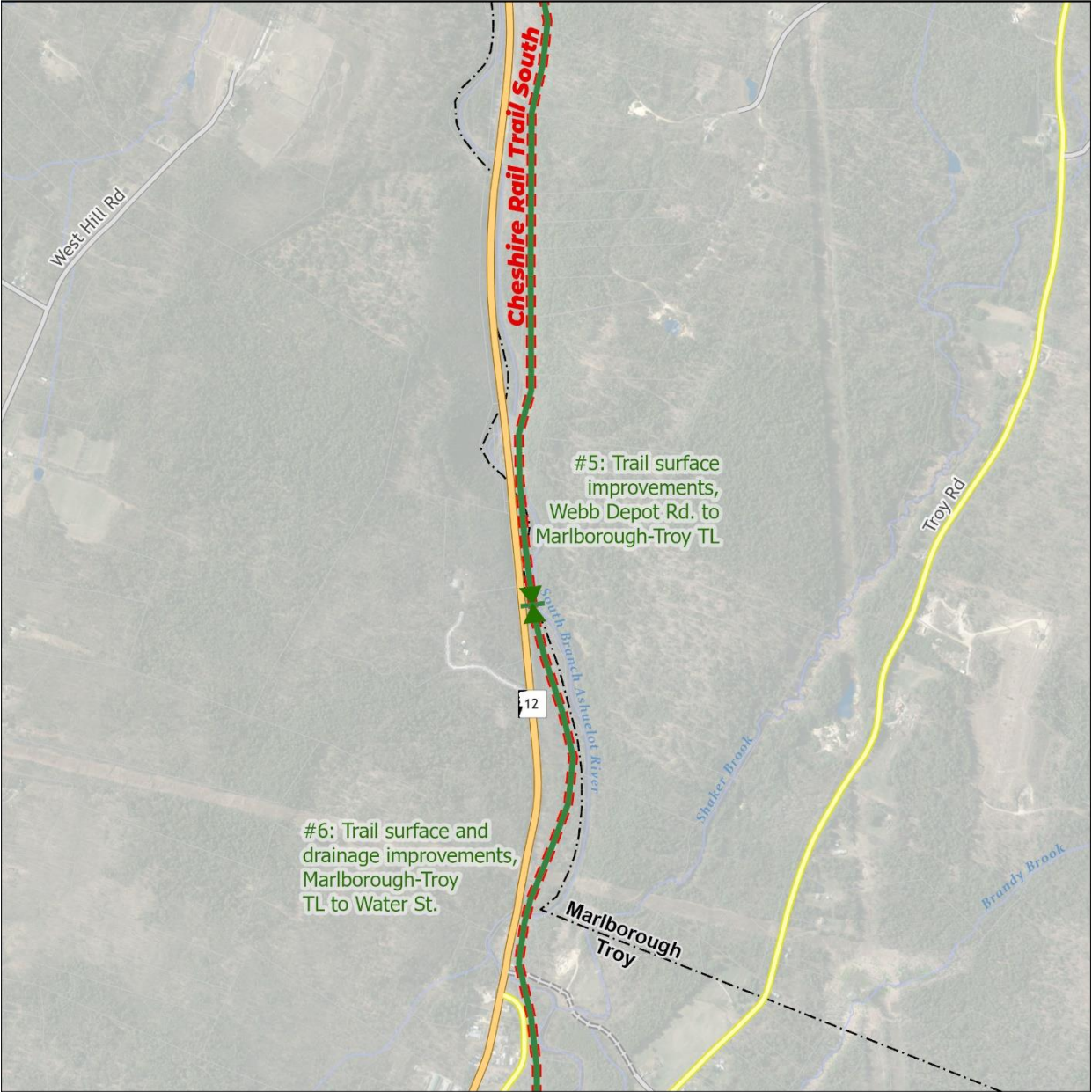
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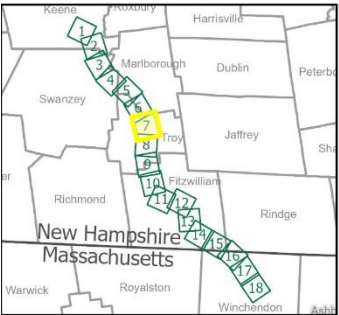
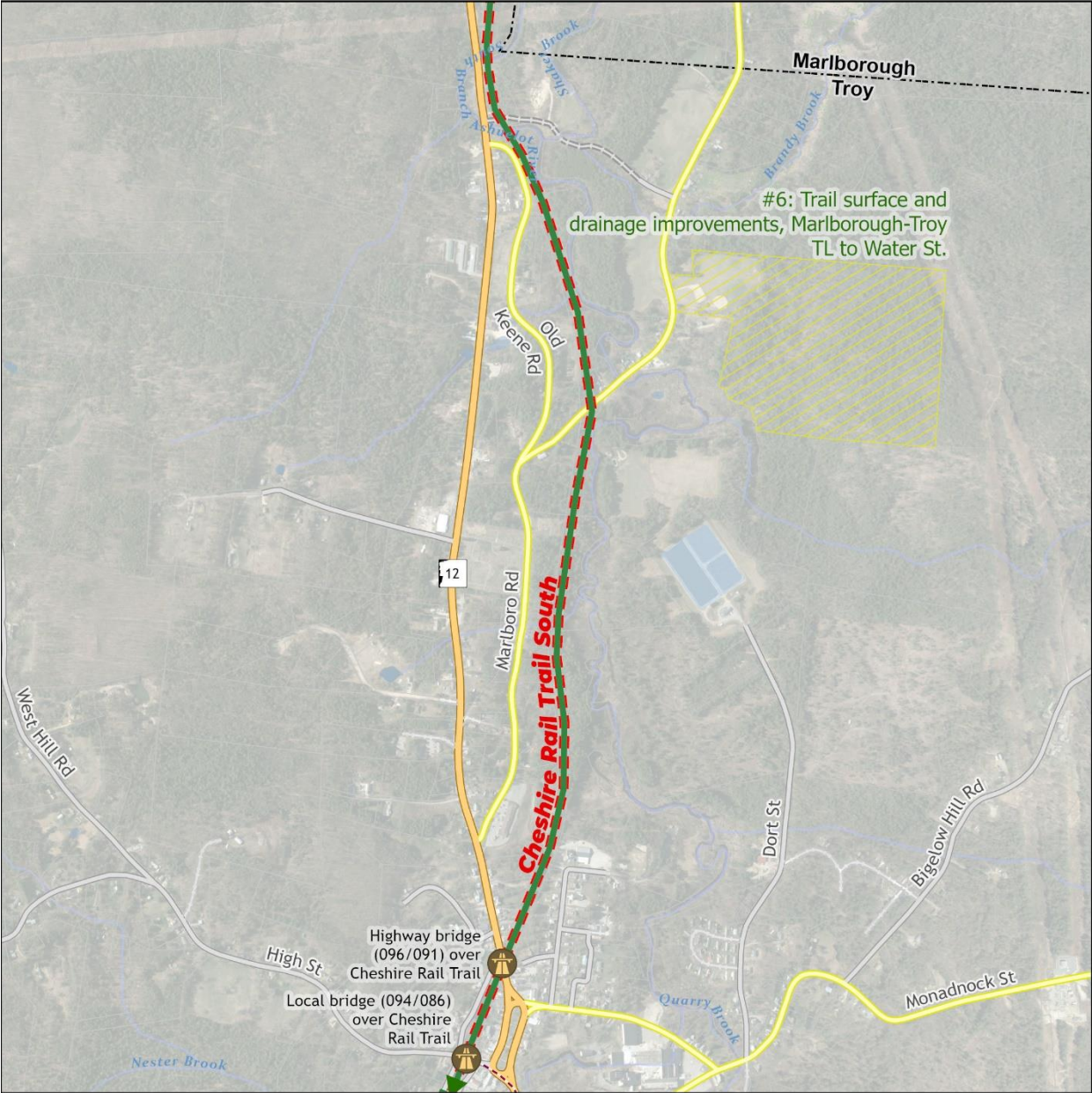
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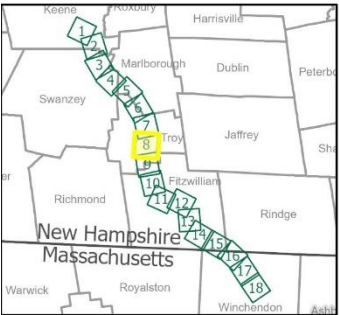
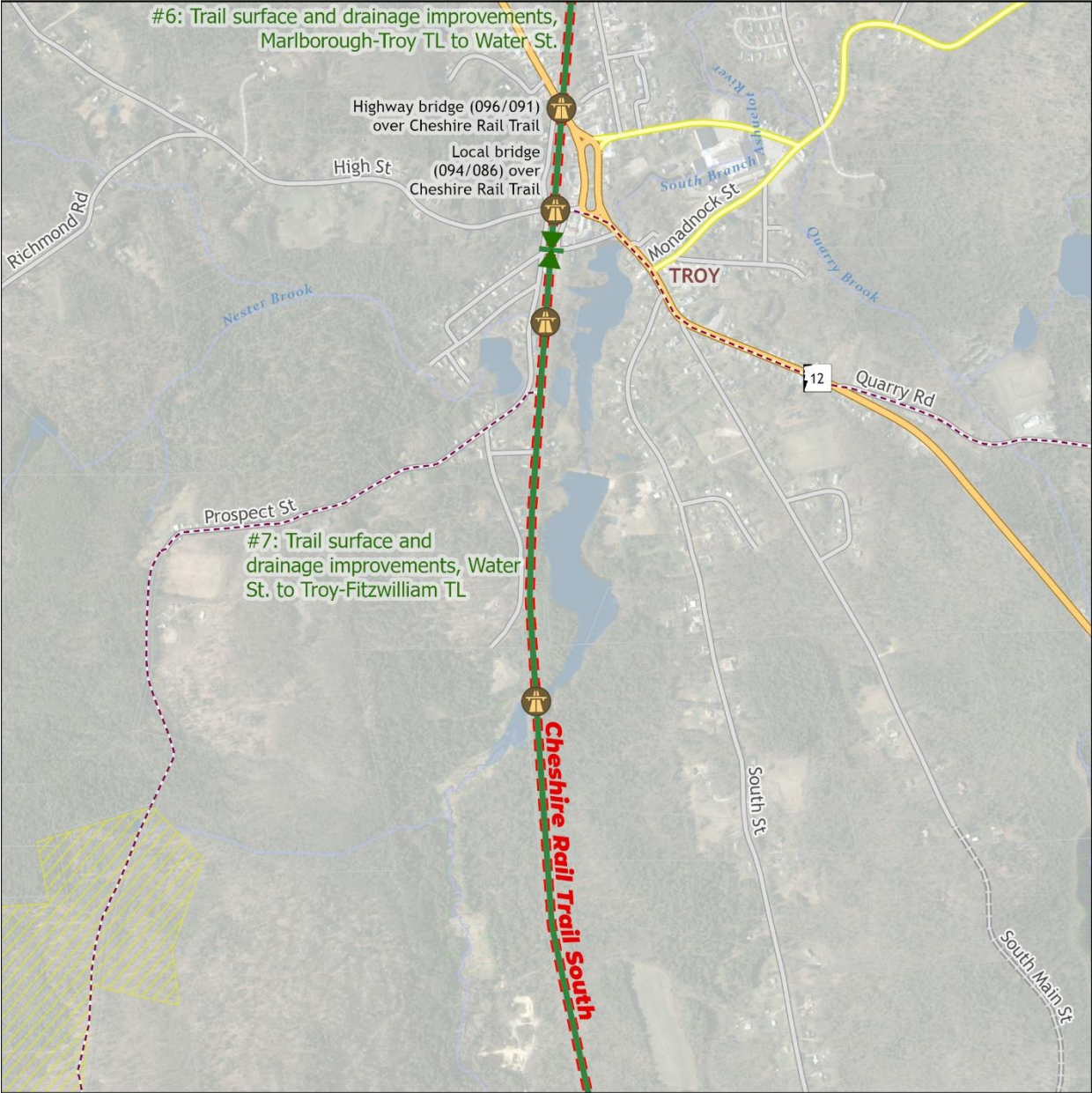
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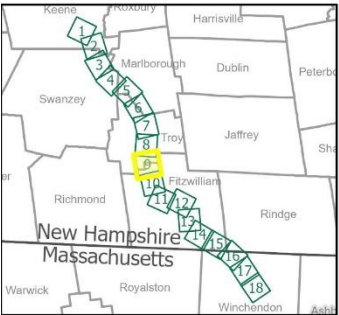
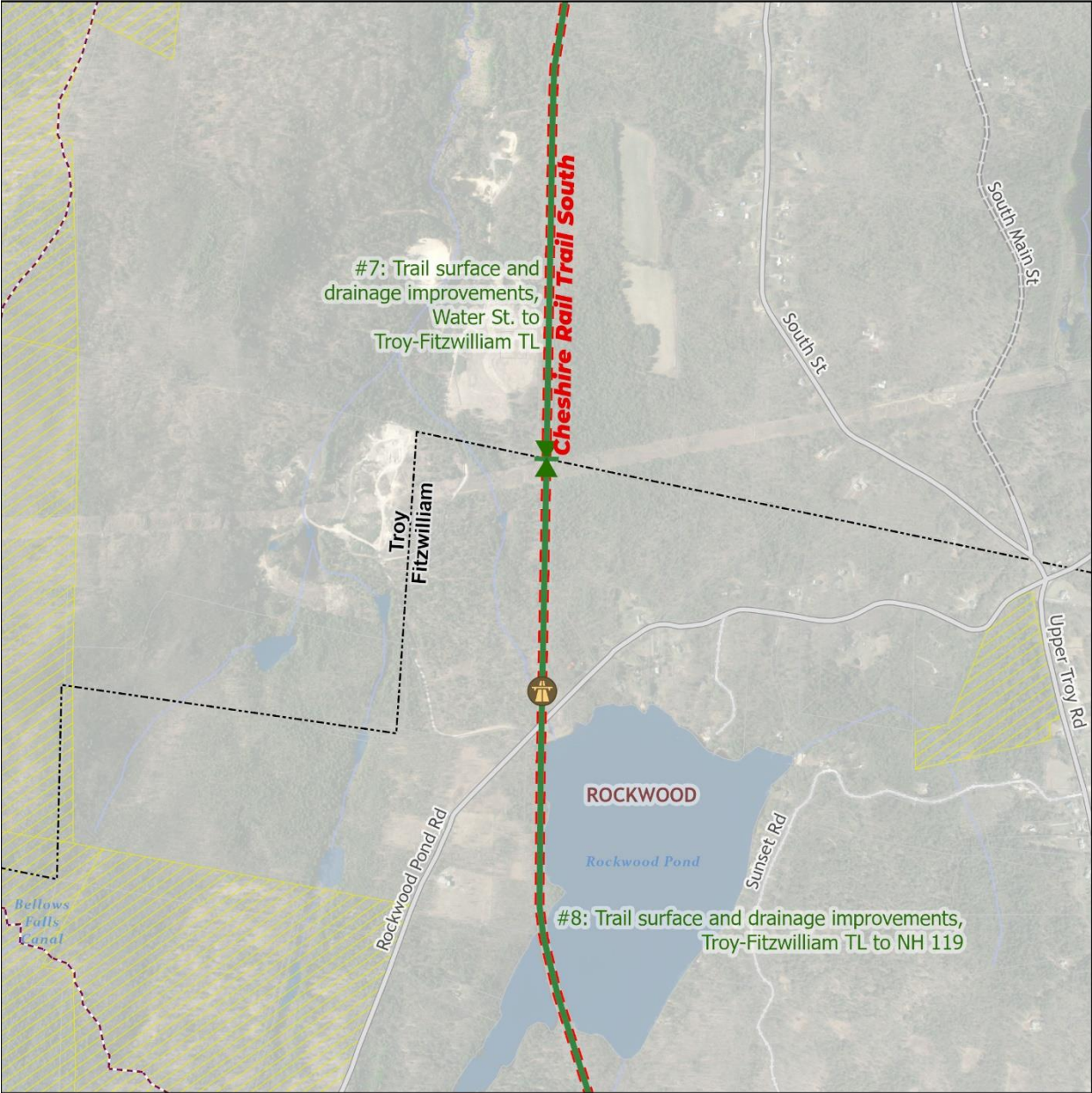
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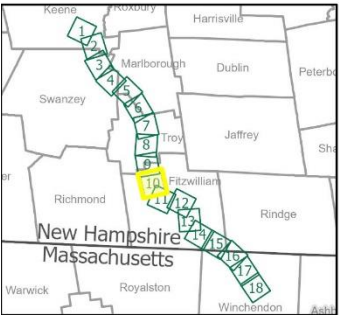
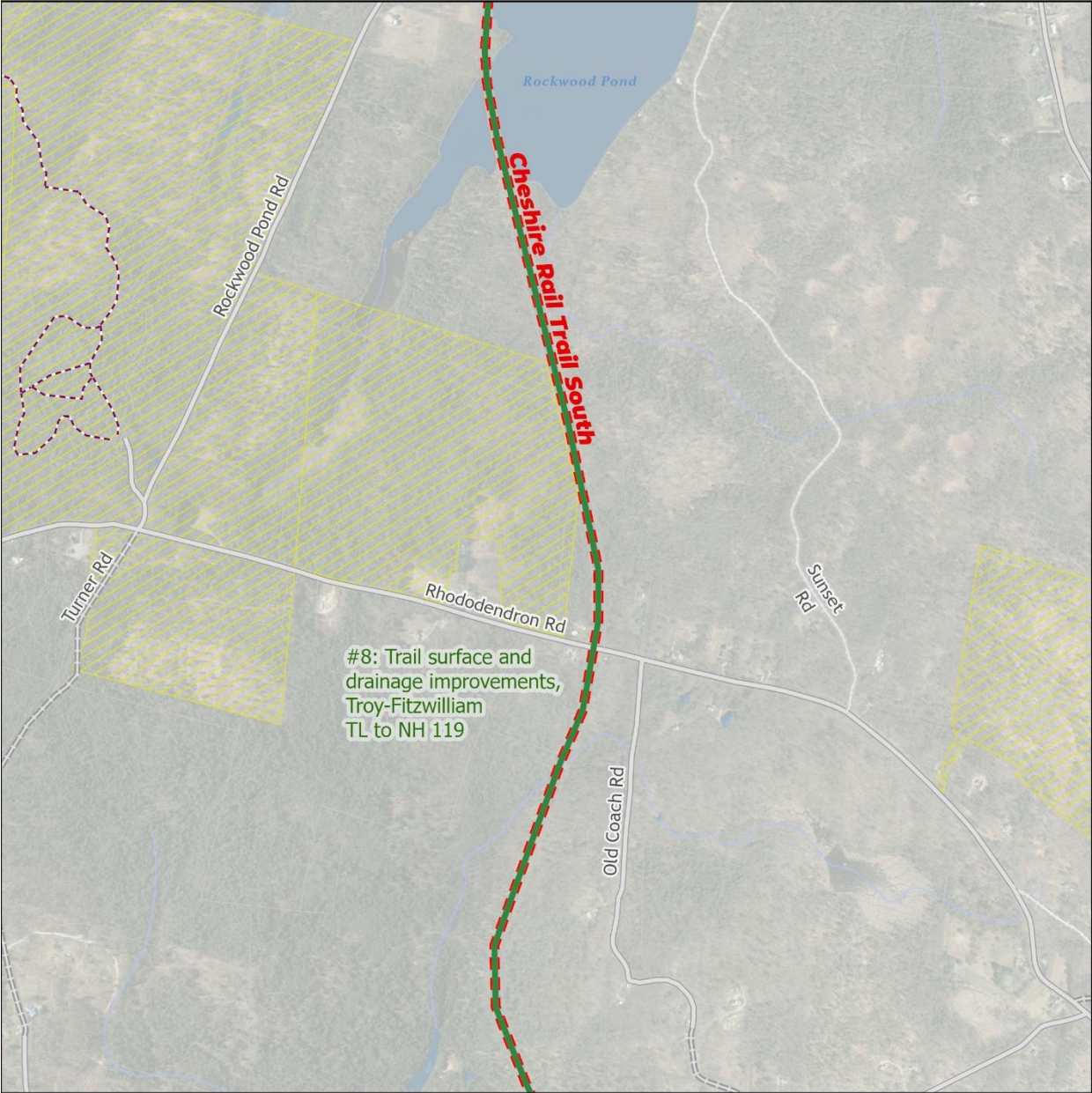
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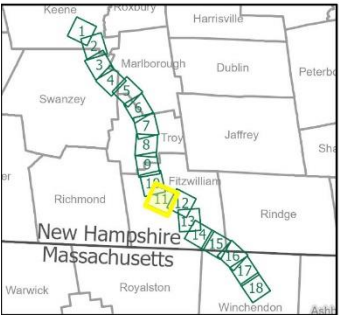
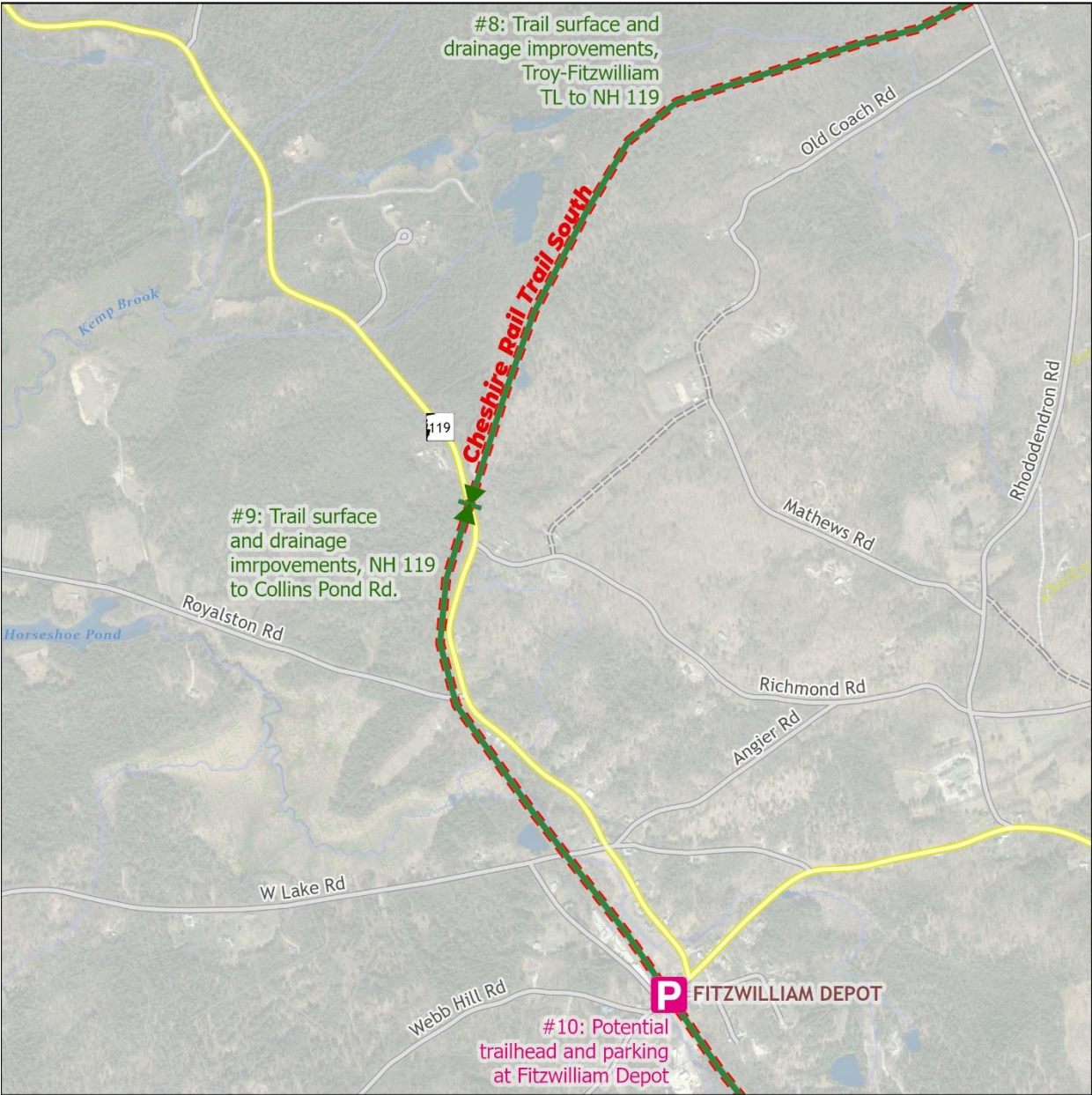
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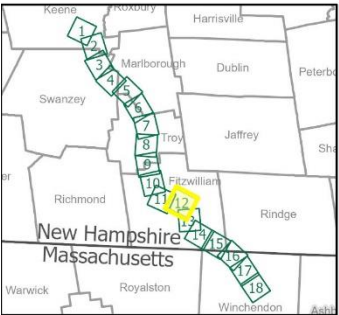
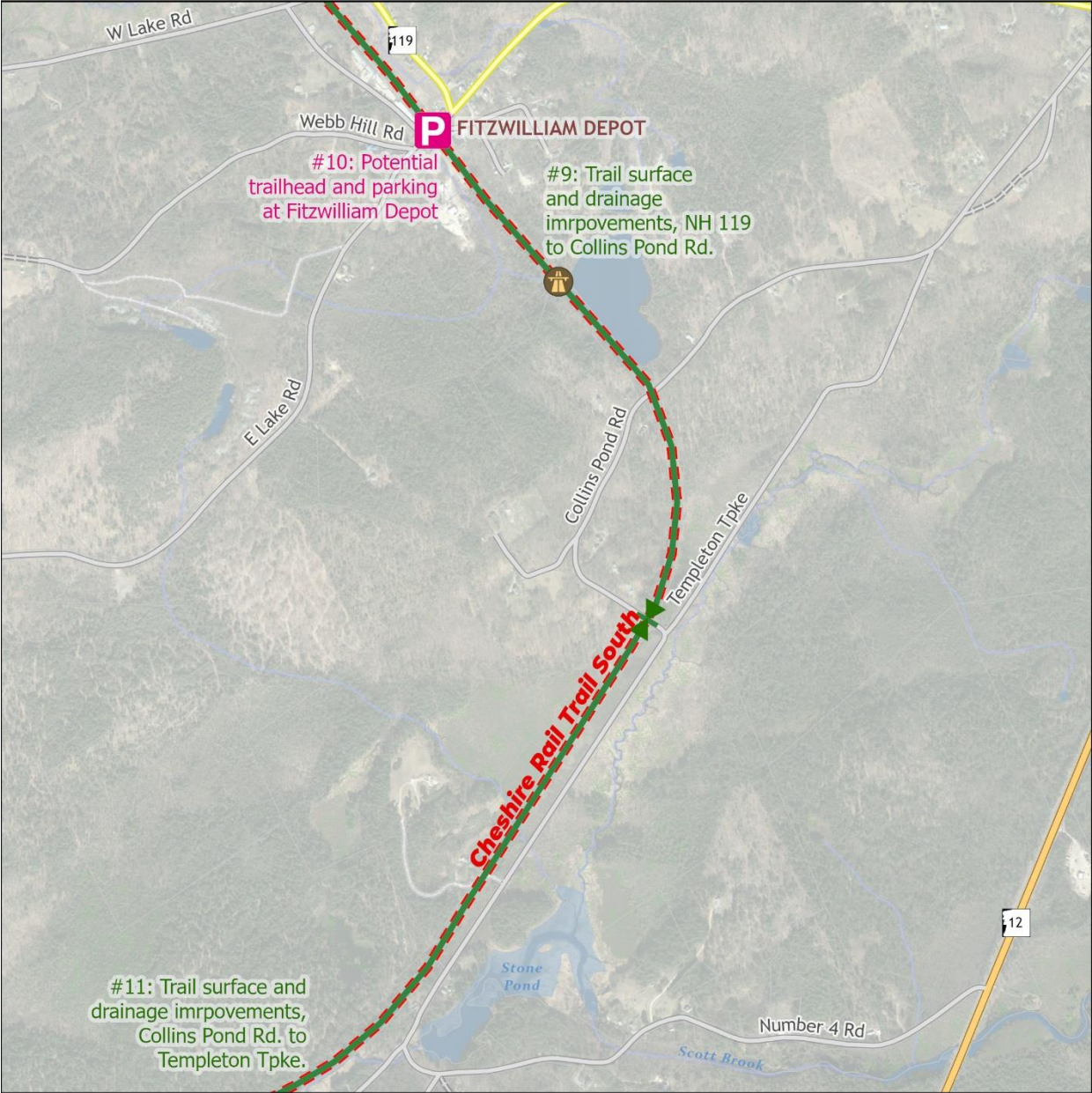
Implementation Plan Projects

- Trail Surface Improvement
- Trailhead/Parking

- NH Conservation/Public Lands
- Cheshire Rail Trail South
- Local Road
- Minor Arterial
- Private Road
- Unmaintained Road
- Tax Parcel Boundary







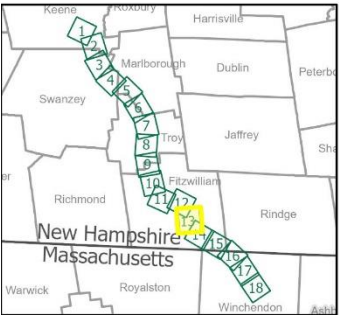
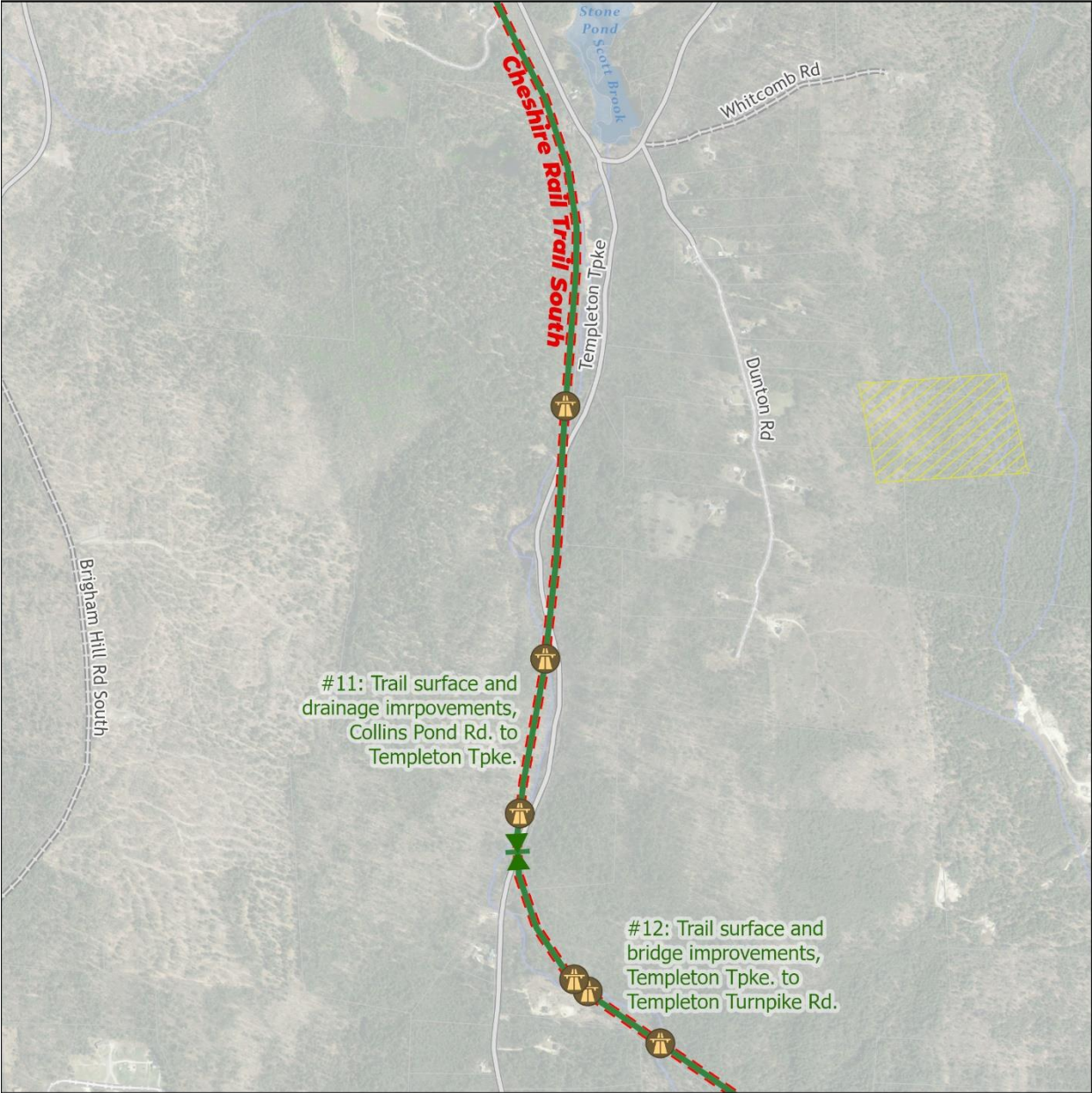
Implementation Plan Projects

- Trail Surface Improvement
- Trailhead/Parking

- Cheshire Rail Trail South
- Rail Trail Bridges
- Local Road
- Major Arterial
- Minor Arterial
- Private Road
- Unmaintained Road
- Tax Parcel Boundary







Implementation Plan Projects

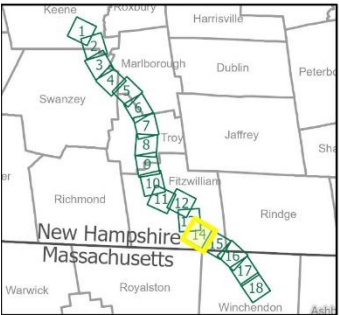
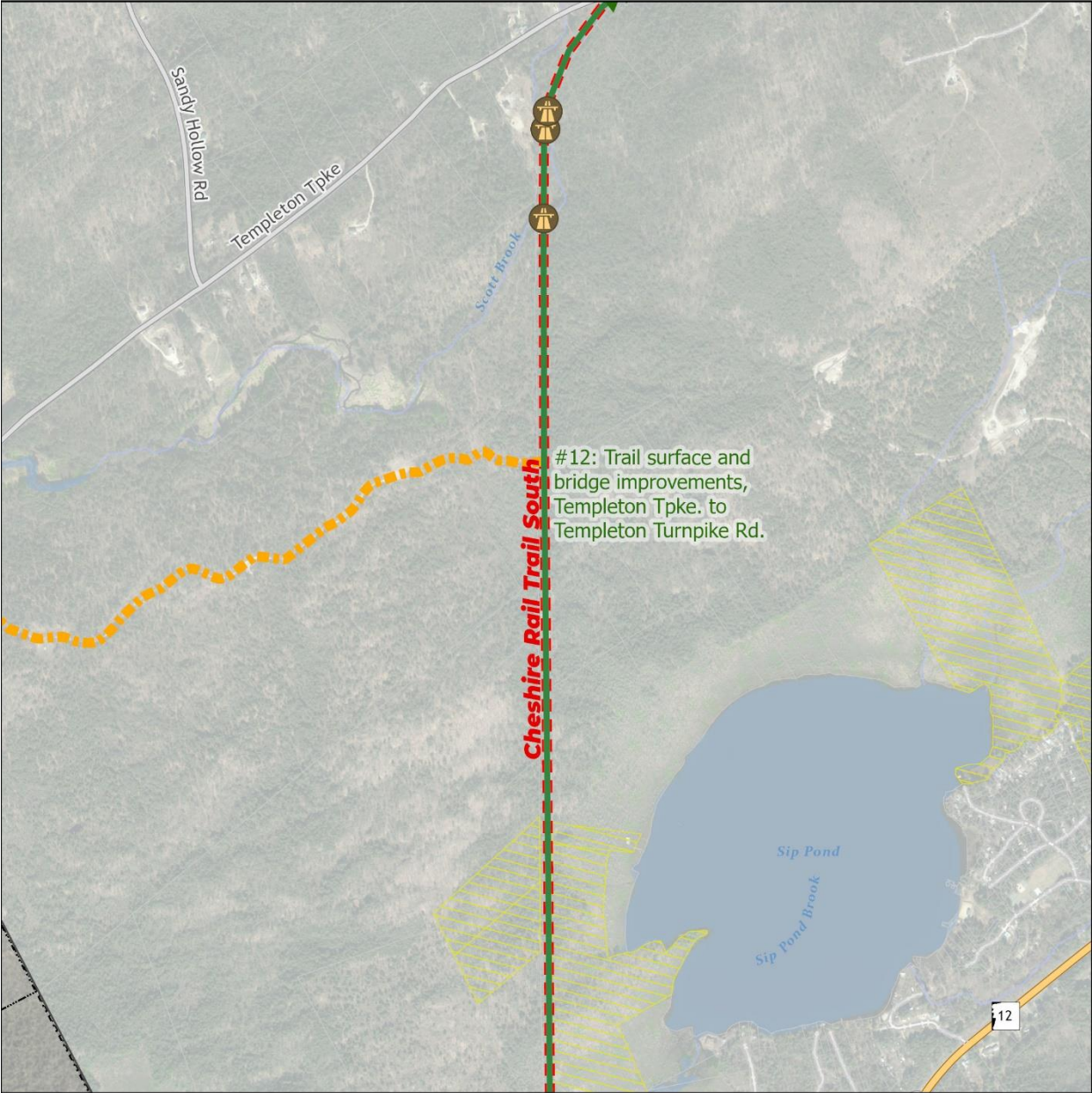
Trail Surface Improvement

- NH Conservation/Public Lands
- Cheshire Rail Trail South
- Rail Trail Bridges
- Local Road
- Private Road
- Unmaintained Road
- Tax Parcel Boundary

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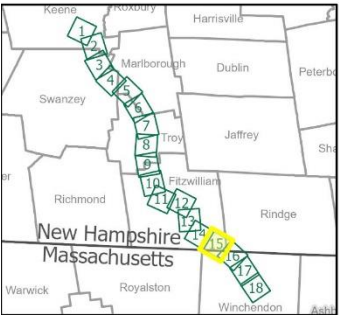
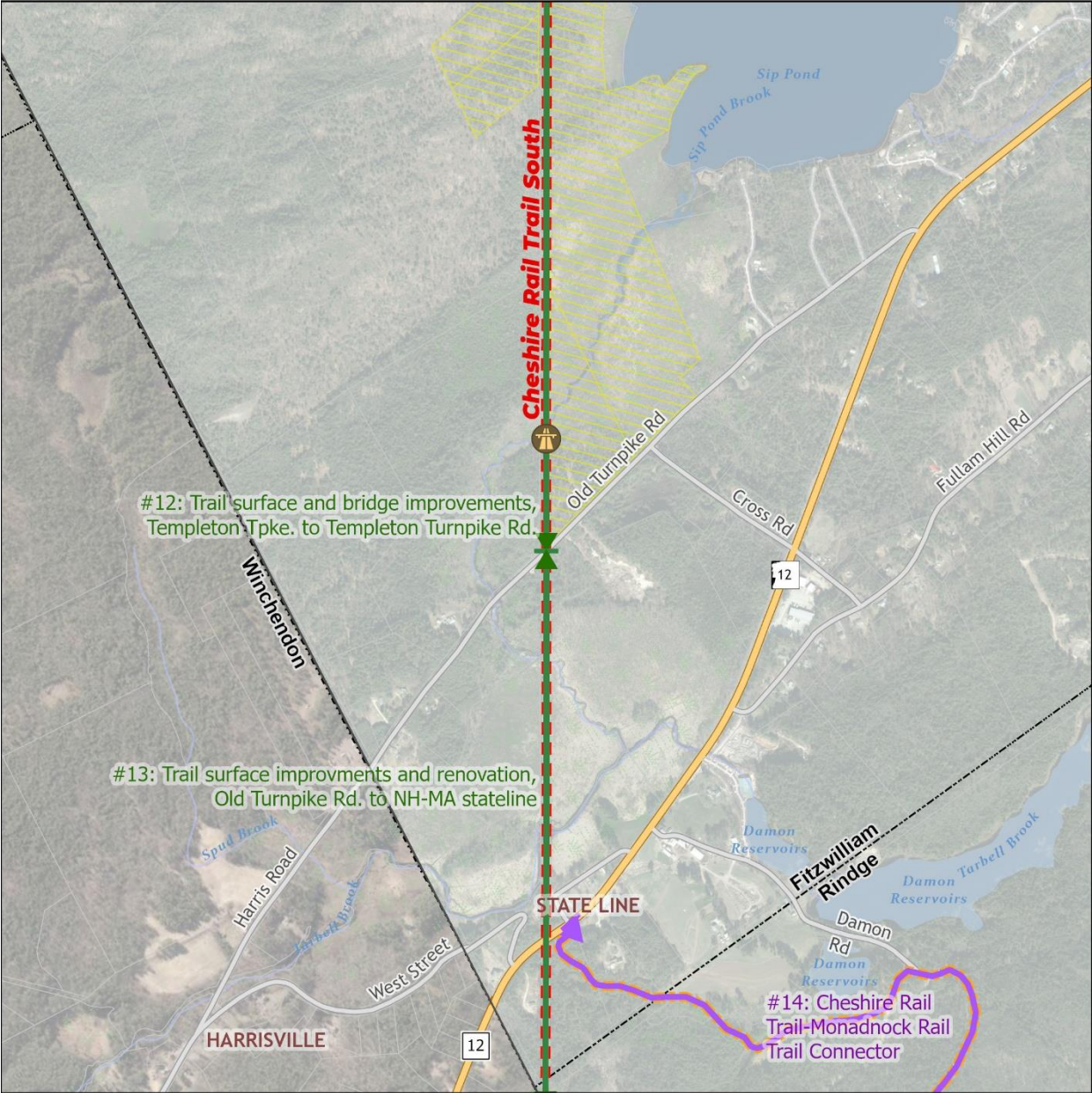
Implementation Plan Projects

Trail Surface Improvement

- NH Conservation/Public Lands
- Cheshire Rail Trail South
- Trail - Snowmobiles Allowed
- Rail Trail Bridges
- Local Road
- Major Arterial
- Private Road
- Tax Parcel Boundary







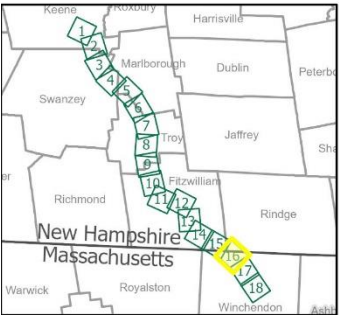
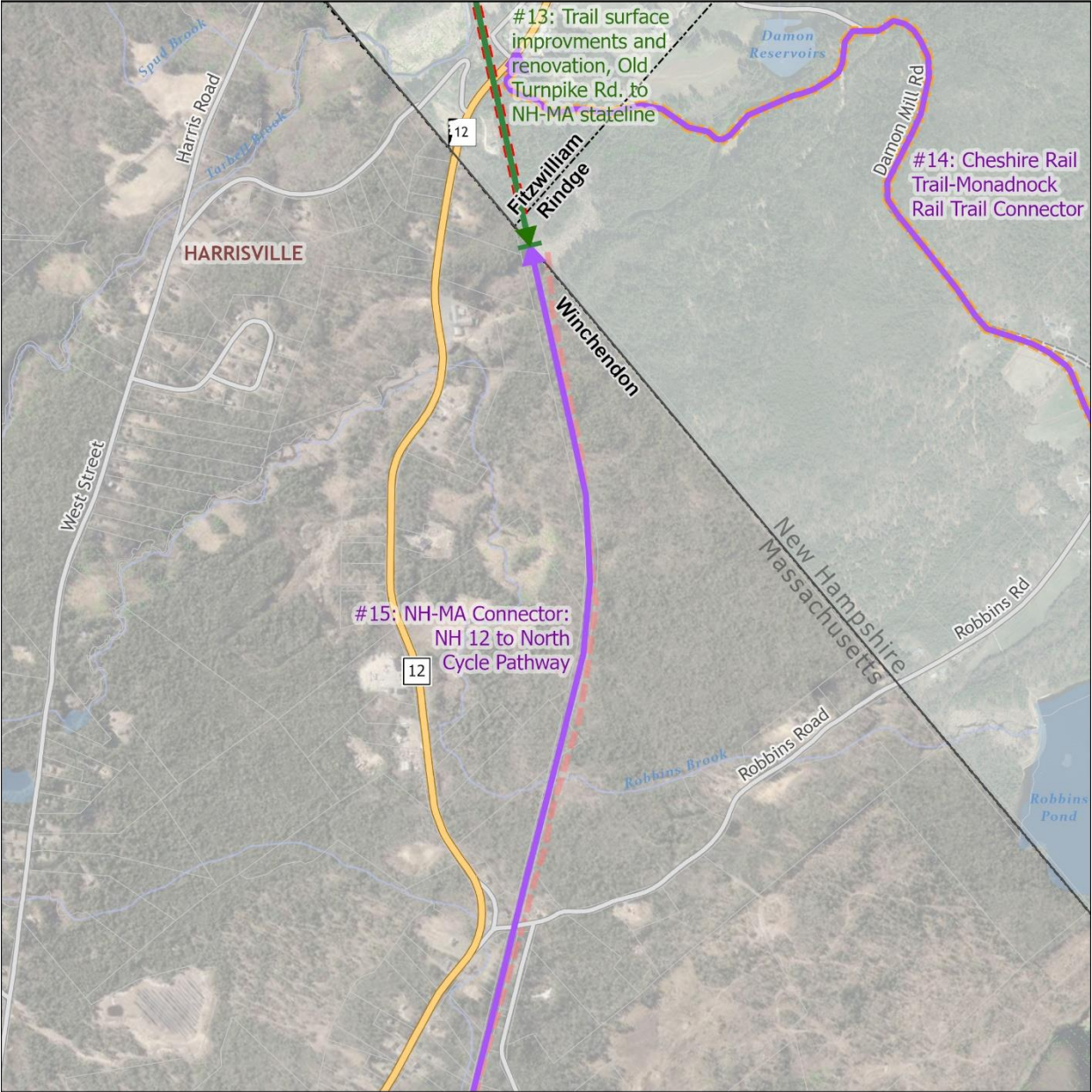
Implementation Plan Projects

- Connecting Roadway/Path
- Trail Surface Improvement

- NH Conservation/Public Lands
- Cheshire Rail Trail South
- Trail - Snowmobiles Allowed
- Rail Trail Bridges
- Local Road
- Major Arterial
- Private Road
- Unmaintained Road
- Tax Parcel Boundary







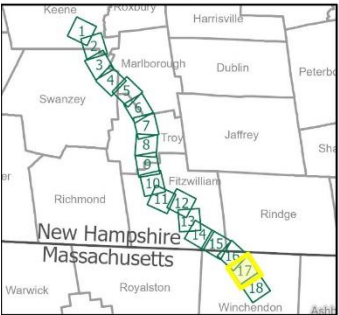
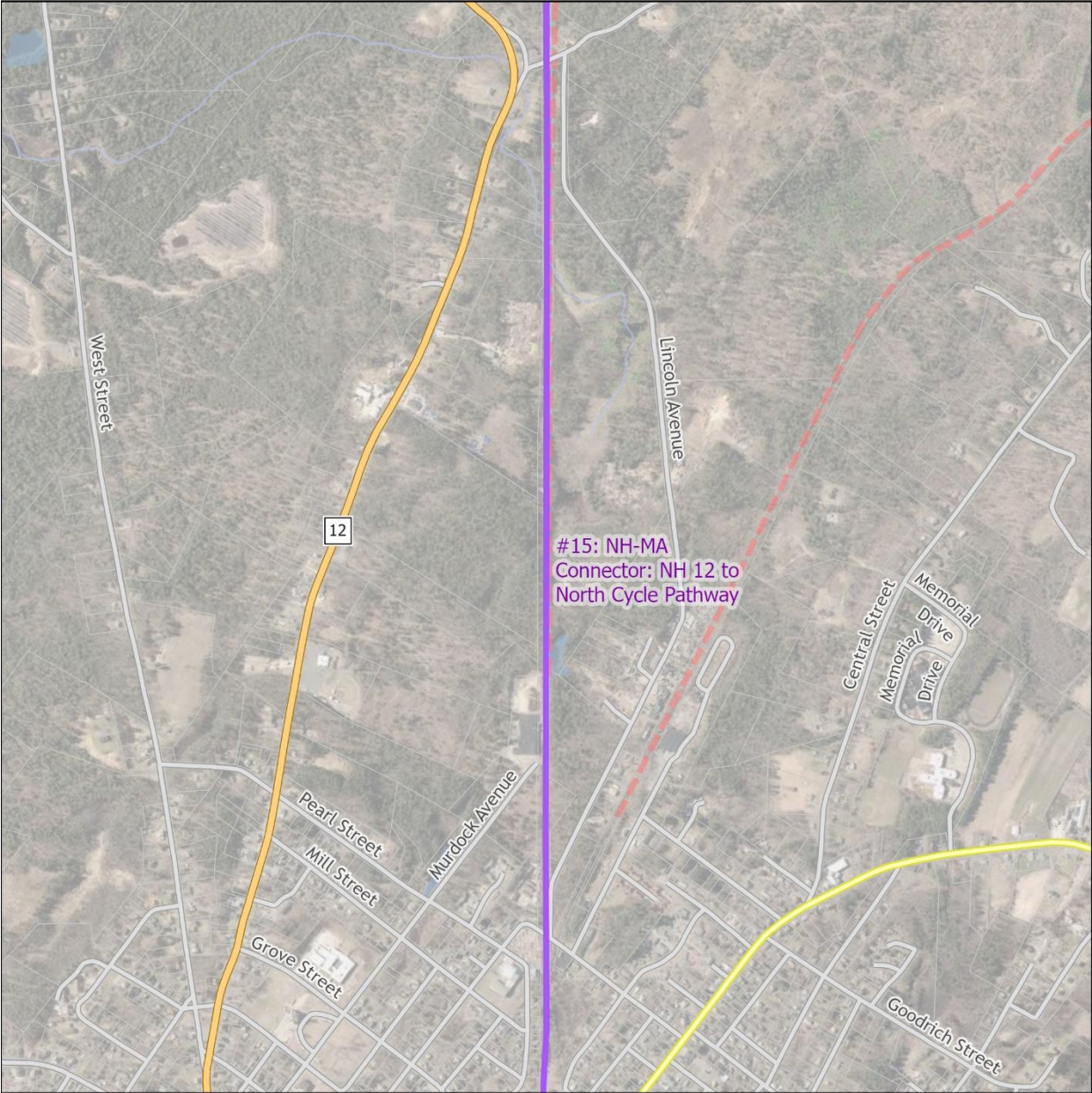
Implementation Plan Projects

- Connecting Roadway/Path
- Trail Surface Improvement

- Cheshire Rail Trail South
- Trail - Snowmobiles Allowed
- Inactive RR Corridor
- Local Road
- Major Arterial
- Unmaintained Road
- Tax Parcel Boundary







Implementation Plan Projects

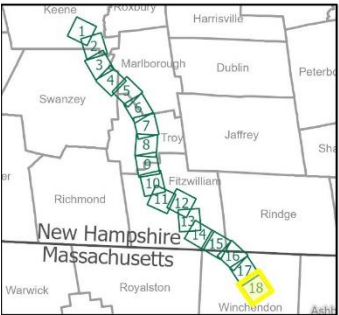
Connecting Roadway/Path

Inactive RR Corridor  
Tax Parcel Boundary

0 500 1000 US Feet









Implementation Plan Projects

 Connecting Roadway/Path

 Existing Multiuse Trail  
 Tax Parcel Boundary



# Maintenance Resources

Trail maintenance needs can vary significantly, depending on surface material, the amount/type of trail traffic, drainage issues, trailside vegetation, and other considerations. Referencing maintenance activities and costs for other rail trails, however, can provide a useful baseline for estimating costs to meet basic maintenance needs on the Trail. In its 2015 publication *Maintenance Practices and Costs of Rail-Trails*, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) surveyed 200 trails groups on a variety of trail-related topics, including maintenance<sup>2</sup>. Forty percent of respondents supplied annual trail maintenance budget information, which RTC used to estimate average trail maintenance costs for different trail surface types.

As Trail surface conditions exist today, about 1.6 miles have an asphalt surface and 18.6 miles are unpaved. According to RTC, annual costs for maintaining an asphalt surface are \$1,971 per mile and \$1,066 per mile for an unpaved surface. Assuming that maintenance costs for the Trail would be the same as the survey sample average, this results in an annual maintenance cost estimate of \$3,154 for the asphalt section of the Trail and \$19,828 for the unpaved portion; a total of \$22,982 for the entire Trail. Estimates account for only routine repairs, not major projects. Estimates include labor hours assigned an hourly rate. With volunteer contributions, cash expenditures for trail maintenance could be significantly lower.

As with total maintenance costs, the specific activities required to keep a trail in good condition will vary from trail to trail. Again, however, referencing maintenance budgets from other rail trails, it is possible to construct a typical trail maintenance budget that can serve as a useful baseline. The table below presents the percentage breakdown of a typical rail trail maintenance budget and is adapted from the same RTC publication cited above. The sample budget includes some activities, such as maintenance of toilets, that do not currently apply to the Cheshire Rail Trail. It excludes others, such as snow grooming, that are important to current Trail users.

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<sup>2</sup> Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, "Maintenance Practices and Costs of Rail-Trails," June 2015, <https://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?id=6336>.

### Typical Trail Maintenance Budget<sup>3</sup>

Maintenance Activity	Percent of Budget
Surface clearing of trail	10.8%
Mowing	12.0%
Vegetation management (leaf clearing, pruning, etc.)	11.2%
Keep trail-side land clear of trash and debris	11.5%
Whole tree removal	5.4%
Application of herbicides or pesticides	2.3%
Clearing of drainage channels and culverts	5.4%
Surface maintenance of parking areas	2.7%
Litter clean up, trash cans	2.7%
Maintenance of toilets at trailheads	13.0%
Maintenance of toilets along the trail	1.2%
Trailhead parking snow removal	1.1%
Repair/maintenance of signs	6.3%
Recovery from illegal acts of vandalism/dumping	5.3%
Other trail maintenance activities	9.1%
Total	100%

<sup>3</sup> Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 28.



# Funding Resources

Plan implementation will likely require combining a variety of funding sources: government grants, grants from private entities, local fundraising, and other finance options. The following sections describe some funding sources that could support Trail enhancements. Funding sources that could support improvements to related facilities (e.g. connecting sidewalks) are also included.

## *Government Grants*

Government grants can be an important source for trail project funding. In New Hampshire, the vast majority of grant funding is derived from federal sources. Local match is a requirement for most programs.

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT – HOUSING AND PUBLIC FACILITIES GRANTS

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provides funding support to a variety of projects that benefit low- and moderate-income households. CDBG Housing and Public Facilities Grants can be used to build different types of public infrastructure, including pedestrian infrastructure. In order for a rail trail project to qualify for CDBG funding, the municipality would need to show that the project benefits primarily low- to moderate-income households. Although typically used for housing rehabilitation and job creation for low- and moderate- income individuals, CDBG funds may potentially support accessibility connections between low- and moderate-income residential neighborhoods and trail facilities. SWRPC provides technical assistance to municipalities and, therefore, is a source of information on the use of CDBG funds.

For more information, visit: <http://www.nhcdfa.org/block-grants/types-of-grants>

### U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY RECREATION ECONOMY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Recreation Economy of Rural Communities planning assistance program helps communities to develop strategies to revitalize “Main Streets” through outdoor recreation, including connections to trails. Special consideration is given to small towns, economically disadvantaged areas like Opportunity Zones (a portion of Keene is eligible) and areas within the service area of the Northern Border Regional Commission (including all of Cheshire County).

For more information, visit: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/recreation-economy-rural-communities>

### **NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS - OUR TOWN PROGRAM**

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Our Town Program supports “projects that integrate arts, culture and design activities into efforts that strengthen communities by advancing local economic, physical and/or social outcomes.” Past projects include the design of local wayfinding systems. The program could also be considered a possible funding source for historic and cultural projects along the Trail, including the design and installation of interpretive resources.

For more information, visit: <https://www.arts.gov/grants-organizations/our-town/grant-program-description>

### **NORTHERN BORDER REGIONAL COMMISSION - ECONOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) is a federal-state partnership that focuses on economic and community development in the most distressed counties in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Cheshire County is included in the NBRC service area. The Economic and Infrastructure Grant Program supports a variety of infrastructure project types, including those related to transportation, conservation, tourism, and recreation. In the past, NBRC has made awards to trails projects.

For more information, visit: <http://www.nbrc.gov/content/economic-infrastructure-development-investments>

### **NH BUREAU OF TRAILS - GRANT-IN-AID PROGRAM**

According to the NH Bureau of Trails, “the purpose of the Grant-In-Aid (GIA) Program is to provide assistance to organized, non-profit off highway recreational vehicle (OHRV) clubs, snowmobile clubs and political subdivisions (such as towns and municipalities) for projects that will benefit the ridership of OHRVs and snowmobiles.”

For more information, visit: <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/trails-bureau/grants/grant-in-aid>

### **NH BUREAU OF TRAILS - RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM**

According to the NH Bureau of Trails, the “Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a competitive grant program that offers funding for quality public trail projects throughout New Hampshire.



Limited grants are available for motorized, non-motorized and diversified trails. Eligible projects include maintenance and restoration of existing trails, purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment, construction of new trails, development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkages. Applicants may be non-profit organizations, private groups or government entities.”

For more information, visit: <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/trails-bureau/grants/recreational-trails-program>

## **NH DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION - CONGESTION MITIGATION AND AIR QUALITY (CMAQ)**

The CMAQ program provides grant funding to support projects that reduce congestion and improve air quality. Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects are eligible under the program, but in order to score well, an application would need to demonstrate that proposed activities would promote mode shift from auto transportation to walking and bicycling. Consequently, applications should emphasize the transportation benefits of proposed activities rather than recreational benefits. For example, improvement of a trail segment between a residential neighborhood and village center may encourage local residents to walk or bike rather than drive when running daily errands.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/planning/cmaq/index.htm>

## **NH DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION - TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM (TAP)**

The goal of the federally-funded TAP is to “provide choices for non-motorized users that are safe, reliable, and convenient.” The competitive program has in the past funded rail trail projects, including the planned improvement of the both the Cheshire Rail Trail and Ashuelot Rail Trail in Swanzey as well as a new connecting pathway between Marlboro Street and the Trail in Keene.

For more information, visit:

<https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/planning/tap/index.htm>

## **NH DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION - TEN YEAR PLAN**

Every two years, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation proposes a plan for improvements to the State’s transportation system. The Plan includes allocations to the RTP, CMAQ, and TAP (see above) as well as a regional allocation. Although the current application

and scoring process puts rail trails at a scoring disadvantage compared to highways and bridges, there is the potential for such projects to be funded (as was the case for Keene's "South Bridge" over NH 101).

For more information, visit: <https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/planning/typ/> and <http://www.swrpc.org/typ>

## NH LAND AND COMMUNITY HERITAGE INVESTMENT PROGRAM

This State program allocates \$3,500,000 per year for both land conservation and historic preservation projects. Grant rounds open in the spring of each year. Awards along the Trail include the railroad depot in Troy.

For more information, visit: <https://www.lchip.org/index.php/for-applicants/for-historic-resource-applicants>

## NH STATE PARKS - LAND & WATER CONSERVATION FUND

This federal program provides 50/50 matching grants to state and local governments for the purpose of acquiring and/or developing public outdoor recreational areas and facilities. The NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, Office of Community Recreation is responsible for managing the program, which has a funding request minimum of \$25,000 and maximum of \$200,000.

For more information, visit: <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/community-recreation/land-water-conservation-fund-grant>

## NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE – RIVERS, TRAILS, AND CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The National Parks Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects around the country.

For more information, visit: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/index.htm>

## *Grants from Private Entities*

In addition to government programs, grants from private entities (e.g. foundations) are another potential source of trail project funding. A list of private entities that may support trail-related projects follows below. The Foundation Directory Online, a proprietary database of grant making institutions, is a helpful resource for researching sources of private funding. Libraries and colleges in some cases offer public access to the Directory.

### **AMERICA WALKS – COMMUNITY CHANGE GRANTS**

Since 2015, America Walks has offered an annual grant round offering \$1,500 to projects creating or supporting physical activity and active transportation.

For more information, visit: <https://americawalks.org/community-change-grants>

### **COGSWELL BENEVOLENT TRUST**

Cogswell Benevolent Trust funds a wide variety of projects in New Hampshire. The organization has funded park improvements, community recreation programs, outdoor recreation programs, and acquisition of property for conservation purposes.

For more information, visit: <https://cogswellbenevolenttrust.org>

### **MONADNOCK ALLIANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION (MAST) - COMPLETE STREETS IMPLEMENTATION**

Beginning in 2017, MAST made awards to local municipalities for complete streets implementation projects, including sidewalk construction, installation of bicycle facilities and intersection safety improvements. Although trails are not a focus area of the program, it could be an appropriate funding source for projects that improve connecting on-street pedestrian and bicyclist facilities. Proposals that seek to improve segments of the Trail to provide a safe alternative to adjacent roadways may also be eligible. The program is currently supported by a gift through the NH Charitable Foundation. For information about the prospect of future funding rounds, interested parties should contact SWRPC.

For more information, visit: [www.mastnh.org](http://www.mastnh.org)

### **NH CHARITABLE FOUNDATION - COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM - EXPRESS GRANTS**

This competitive grants program awards project support (a set of activities conducted during a specified period of time and with clear deliverables that further the organization's mission or

build organization capacity) of \$5,000 or less to eligible organizations. Trail projects have received the award in the past.

For more information, visit: [www.nhcf.org/how-can-we-help-you/apply-for-a-grant/express-grant-program](http://www.nhcf.org/how-can-we-help-you/apply-for-a-grant/express-grant-program)

#### **RAILS TO TRAILS CONSERVANCY - DOPPELT FAMILY TRAIL DEVELOPMENT FUND**

Grants from the Doppelt Family Trail Development fund awards around \$85,000 annually to support a variety of rail trail projects, including trail construction, design work, and marketing and outreach.

For more information, visit: [www.railstotrails.org/our-work/grants/doppelt](http://www.railstotrails.org/our-work/grants/doppelt)

#### **ROY A. HUNT FOUNDATION - GENERAL GRANT**

General grants from the Roy A. Hunt Foundation can support a wide range of activities. Past awards have included park infrastructure improvement projects in the State of New Hampshire. Award amounts tend to be modest, around \$5,000.

For more information, visit: <https://rahuntfdn.org>

#### **THE TIMKEN COMPANY CHARITABLE AND EDUCATION FUND**

Applying entities must have 501(c)3 status. The foundation has made awards in the past for renovating recreational facilities. The average grant amount is about \$10,000.

For more information, visit: [www.timken.com/about/global-citizenship/timken-company-charitable-educational-fund-grant-program](http://www.timken.com/about/global-citizenship/timken-company-charitable-educational-fund-grant-program)

### *Other Funding Sources*

Grants, either from public or private institutions, will often need to be combined with other funding sources in order to fully support trail projects. Some of those funding sources are summarized below.

#### **TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (TIF)**

TIF is a tool that municipalities sometimes use to finance infrastructure improvements in a targeted area, usually referred to as a district. Establishing a TIF district involves specifying district boundaries and assessing property values within those boundaries. Taxes from any incremental increase in property value are then used to fund specified infrastructure improvements within district boundaries. When utilizing TIF, municipalities often issue bonds

to fund improvements, and then use the expected incremental increase in property taxes to pay down the bond debt.

Currently, the Trail does not pass through any existing TIF districts. If a municipality did wish to use TIF to support rail trail improvements, those planned improvements would need to be included in a TIF District Plan, a document that describes the infrastructure projects to which any increment in tax revenue would be dedicated. Since the success of TIF depends on an increase in property values, it is a financing strategy more appropriate in areas targeted for new or infill development.

## **MUNICIPAL TRANSPORTATION AND IMPROVEMENT FUND**

Under RSA 261:153-VI, local municipalities may require a surcharge of up to \$5 for each vehicle registration. Proceeds from local vehicle registration fees may be used to make improvements to the local transportation system, including pedestrian and bicyclist facilities.

## **THE LOCAL CROWD MONADNOCK**

The Local Crowd (TLC) Monadnock is the Monadnock Region's local crowdfunding platform. TLC Monadnock describes the platform as follows: "Individuals or groups create fundraising campaigns that contain a specific funding goal and timeline to fund a current project. Supporters can contribute to the campaign both financially and through in-kind contributions. All are encouraged to share the campaign with their own community and social network." The TLC Monadnock can offer education and technical assistance not typically available with other larger crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter or Indiegogo. TLC Monadnock accepts proposals for campaigns on a rolling basis.

For more information, visit: <https://monadnocklocal.org>

# Design Resources

The following tables list a selection of design guidance and best practices in trail design, construction and maintenance from federal, state and other sources. The resources provide general guidance for improvements and are not a replacement for a thorough review or evaluation by an engineer, landscape designer, or other relevant trail professional.

## General Resources

Name	Author	Description
<a href="#">Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities</a> (4 <sup>th</sup> edition, 2012)	American Association of State and Highway Transportation Officials	The guide provides information on accommodating people biking on the road and on shared use paths as well as considerations for signage, parking and the operation and maintenance of such facilities.
<a href="#">Urban Bikeway Design Guide</a> (2 <sup>nd</sup> edition, 2014)	National Association of City Transportation Officials	Provides design guidance for bicycle infrastructure in levels (required, recommended, or optional) based on practices from around the country.
<a href="#">Guide for Improving Pedestrian Safety at Uncontrolled Crossing Locations</a> (2018)	United States Department of Transportation; Federal Highway Administration	Guide for selecting and installation countermeasures at uncontrolled crossing locations, includes trails.
<a href="#">Manual on Uniform Traffic Code Devices for Streets and Highways (MUTCD)</a> (2009)	United States Department of Transportation; Federal Highway Administration	The MUTCD defines standards for traffic control, signage and other measures on roads, bikeways and private roads open to public travel

# Accessibility Resources

Name	Author	Description
<a href="#">Standards for Accessible Design</a> (2010)	Department of Justice	The document contains standards for new facilities that can be accessible by individuals with disabilities.
<a href="#">Final Guidelines for Outdoor Developed Areas</a> (2013)	United States Access Board	The architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board guidelines cover technical requirements for camping facilities, picnic facilities, viewing areas, trails, and beach access routes constructed or altered by or on behalf of federal agencies.
<a href="#">Proposed Guidelines for Pedestrian Facilities in the Public Right-of-Way</a> (2011)	United States Access Board	The architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board guidelines cover the design, construction and alteration of pedestrian facilities in the public right-of-way that ensure facilities are accessible by individuals with disabilities
<a href="#">Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails</a> (2012)	United States Department of Agriculture; Forest Service	The guidelines contain useful concepts to maximize accessibility in outdoor recreation areas and on trails.
<a href="#">Wetland Trail Design and Construction</a> (2007)	United States Department of Agriculture; Forest Service	The resource provides guidance related to trail construction in the vicinity of wetlands.



## Snowmobile-specific Resources

Name	Author	Description
<a href="#">Guidelines for Snowmobile Signing and Placement</a> (2014)	International Association of Snowmobile Administrators	The guide provides sign designs, guidance on placement and examples of sign use.

## Equestrian-specific Resources

Name	Author	Description
<a href="#">Equestrian and Car Parking</a> (2008)	New Hampshire Horse Council	Informational document and recommendations related to the design considerations of accommodating horses and horse trailers in parking areas.
<a href="#">Equestrian Design Guidebook for Trails, Trailheads, and Campgrounds</a> (2007)	United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service	The guidebook provides practical guidelines for a variety of recreational environments that provide access to people riding horses.

## New Hampshire State Agency Resources

Name	Author	Description
<a href="#">Wetlands Best Management Practice Techniques For Avoidance and Minimization</a> (2019)	New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services	The resource covers various methods of avoiding or mitigating impacts to wetlands during development (including for bike paths, footpaths, trails, and boardwalks).

Name	Author	Description
<a href="#">NH Trail Construction and Maintenance Manual</a> (2017)	New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development; Division of Parks & Recreation; Bureau of Trails	Adapted from a similar Maine publication, the manual provides guidance on best management practices related to maintenance of trails, bridges and drainage infrastructure.
<a href="#">Snowmobile Guidelines for Trail Signing</a> (2016)	New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development; Division of Parks & Recreation; Bureau of Trails	The NH Bureau of Trails developed these Guidelines as a resource for snowmobile club members that are charged with the responsibility of signing the club's trails. Its purpose is to describe techniques for posting state supplied standardized signs to promote uniformity of trail signing throughout the State.
<a href="#">Your Guide to Promoting Walking and Bicycling Accommodations in New Hampshire</a> (2016)	New Hampshire Department of Transportation	Guide to planning and designing improvements for walking and biking including mixed-used paths (such as rail trails).
<a href="#">Historic Stone Highway Culverts in New Hampshire Asset Management Manual</a> (2009)	New Hampshire Department of Transportation; Bureau of Environment	The manual provides culvert owners and others practical inspection and maintenance plans as well as guidelines for repair.

## Other Resources

Name	Author	Description
<a href="#">Trails for the Twenty-First Century</a> (1993)	Charles Flink, Kristine Olka, Robert Searns and Rails to Trails Conservancy	The book is a resource for planning, designing and managing trails.
<a href="#">Restoration of Historic Granite Mileposts on the Northern Railroad Line</a> (2019)	Edwin R. Hiller, Andover Historical Society	The guide contains a milepost survey of another Boston & Maine Railroad route in New Hampshire and methods to restore their lettering and numbering consistent with their original designs.
<a href="#">Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Guidebook</a> (2003)	National Crime Prevention Council	The guidebook provides design and management strategies relative to sight lines, lighting, isolation, signs, and other considerations understood to reduce incidence and fear of crime.
<a href="#">With People in Mind: Design and Management of Everyday Nature</a> (1998)	Rachel Kaplan, Stephen Kaplan and Robert Kaplan	The resource provides design and management considerations for various natural settings and covers content about wayfinding, trails, views, and other topics.

# Appendix A: Literature Review





**DATE:** December 10, 2020  
**TO:** Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Working Group  
**FROM:** SWRPC Staff  
**RE:** Existing Conditions Assessment – Literature Review

To help assess the existing conditions for the Cheshire Rail Trail South, SWRPC staff reviewed and compiled a series of planning documents and policies relevant to the trail. Materials reviewed include *The New Hampshire State Trails Plan*, *Southwest Connects: Southwest Region Transportation Plan*, municipal master plans, safe routes to school plans, complete streets policies, trail maintenance guides, relevant State statutes, and use agreements relating to the trail. Materials were also compiled from local, regional and state sources relating to the Cheshire Branch rail bed in Massachusetts. A full list of reviewed materials can be found attached to this memo.

### **Findings**

- Every community along the Cheshire Rail Trail South has identified the trail as a major recreational and transportation amenity in their formal planning documents. Some communities, such as Keene, Swanzey and Marlborough, recognize the benefits of having the regional multi-modal corridor as well as the necessity of improving the trail.
- Investment in the trail is active and ongoing, particularly in the section of trail extending from Eastern Avenue to NH 101 in Keene and sections of the trail in Swanzey. Both of these projects are included in NH's FY 2021-2030 Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan, and are also projects that were selected for grant funding under the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). The Monadnock Conservancy has also successfully applied for funds from the New Hampshire Department of Natural and Cultural Resources' (DNCR) Recreational Trails Fund for trail improvements from Old Turnpike Road to Templeton Turnpike in Fitzwilliam.
- The City of Keene plans to carry out a \$2.5 million dollar project entitled *The Industrial Heritage Trail*, which will involve erecting preconstructed bridges over NH 101 and Swanzey Factory Road as well as rehabilitating the Stone Arch Bridge. The project is slated for completion in fiscal year 2025, and represents a major improvement for trail connectivity.
- In 1998, NHDOT entered into a cooperative agreement with the NH Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) that granted DRED the authority to use and maintain the state's rail trail system. In 2017, DRED merged with the NH Department of Cultural Resources to become the DNCR, which continues to manage the majority of the state's rail trails, including the Cheshire Branch Rail Trail outside of Keene.
- The *New Hampshire State Trails Plan* was adopted in 2005 and is currently in the process of being updated by NHDOT. Although the Plan notes that NHDOT acquired rail corridors

to preserve future opportunities to develop railroad transportation, it states that future rail use is not likely on the Cheshire Branch for the foreseeable future. The Plan recommends that trail improvements focus on segments within downtown areas, that link municipalities, and that connect with other trail segments - strategies that could apply to the Cheshire Rail Trail South.

- New Hampshire state law provides legal protection to both owners of property that grant public access for recreational purposes, as well as to groups or individuals that maintain trails for public recreation (as long as a fee is not charged).<sup>1</sup> This should mitigate liability-related concerns of having volunteer trail maintenance or improvement groups working on the trail.
- Previous regional planning efforts for the NH 12 Corridor have identified that the improvement of trail conditions along the Cheshire Rail Trail South is a priority for communities along the corridor.
- While no connection currently exists between the Cheshire Rail Trail South in New Hampshire and any developed trail system in Massachusetts, a section of the Cheshire Branch rail bed further south is in the process of being developed into a multi-use trail connecting Winchendon and Gardner, MA. This trail is listed as part of the Commonwealth's "high comfort" bicycle network. Improving and expanding the "high comfort" bicycle network is a high priority for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Winchendon, MA's master plan currently has a goal to connect the rail trail with the Cheshire Rail Trail.

## **Recommendations**

- Consider developing an online collection of trail-related plans and documents. Such a collection could serve as a valuable resource for grant proposals and project planning, especially for potential projects that span municipal borders.
- Encourage that municipalities in which the trail is located to share any relevant grant application materials, cost estimates and project plans. Such materials could be included in an online collection of trail-related materials and prove a valuable resource to municipalities who have yet to make significant trail improvements.
- Consult relevant literature review items during the development of goals, objectives and an implementation plan.
- Research prior grant applications for improvements along the trails (whether they were successful or not) to gain an understanding on funding challenges for the Cheshire Rail Trail South.

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<sup>1</sup> NH RSA 508:14

Title and Date	Description
State Documents	
<a href="#">NH Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan</a> , Adopted 2019	<p>The <i>NH Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan</i> (SCORP) was developed by the NH Department of Natural &amp; Cultural Resources and officially adopted in 2019. The purpose of the SCORP is to identify New Hampshire’s outdoor recreation needs, as well as serve as the guiding planning document for the state of New Hampshire on matters of outdoor recreation. Adoption of the SCORP is also a prerequisite for U.S. National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant funding, which has funded \$40 million in New Hampshire outdoor recreation projects over the course of its half-century history. Priorities identified in the document include Connecting People to the Outdoors, Consistent Stewardship and Conservation, Economic Vitality, and Education, Ethics, and Benefits. Of these goals, many apply indirectly to rail trails such as Cheshire Rail Trail South, but goal 4 under “Economic Vitality,” which is to “Leverage the benefits of trails and other connectivity projects as they relate to social and economic vitality,” speaks directly to the development of trails to maximize local economic impact.</p> <p>As part of the development of the SCORP, municipal officials across the state were surveyed on their perception of the availability and adequacy of outdoor recreation amenities. Of those surveyed, 46% indicated that multi-purpose trails were unavailable or inadequate, and 65% indicated that bike lanes and paths were unavailable and inadequate. Municipal officials surveyed also valued both the maintenance of existing parks and recreation areas (97% found important) and the building of more greenways and trails (78% found important).</p>
<a href="#">NH State Rail Trails Plan</a> , Adopted May 2005	<p>The <i>NH Statewide Rail Trails Plan</i> was developed by NHDOT in collaboration with NH DRED, now known as the NH DNCR. Chapter One includes an inventory of abandoned rail corridors and includes maps and a summary of existing conditions for each of the 23 abandoned rail corridors owned by the State of New Hampshire. Chapter Two pertains to trails other than State-owned rail trails, e.g. rail trails owned by other entities, other multi-use trails and pathways adjacent to roadways. Chapter Three provides information on state, regional and local plans that relate to trails. Chapter Four includes a set of guidelines for future trail development, maintenance and management. It also includes a summary of public comments received during the public outreach process, including a high volume of comments from the Southwest Region regarding the Ashuelot and Cheshire Rail Trails. Additional detail on the existing conditions of the Cheshire Rail Trail is found on page A-22 of the document. The Plan notes that both</p>



	the NHDOT and the City of Keene are owners of different parts of the trail. A contentious issue noted in this plan is the potential conflict between non-motorized, ATV and snowmobile users of State-owned rail trails.
<a href="#">Final SB 80 Trail Report</a> , Published 2015	Published in 2015, this report represents the final recommendations of a committee established in the NH State Senate to study the use of abandoned railroad beds for recreational purposes (i.e. rail trails). The committee worked over a year and a half to identify specific recommendations relative to the NH State Rail Trail Plan as well as on financing and maintenance of rail trails. In general, it was strongly recommended that the NH State Rail Trail plan be updated every decade. Other specific recommendations in the committee report included the establishment of a tier system for proposed projects as well as close collaboration with regional planning commissions in the development of project proposals and the tier system. Proposed elements suggested by the committee for a Rail Trail Plan update included design standards, GIS trail mapping, mapping for trail access and parking, and standards for trail crossings. A highlight of the committee report was the recommendation to conduct an economic impact analysis of the value of trail usage, which has since been created and is included in this literature review.
NH State Rail Trails Plan Update, Adoption Pending	As of writing, the NH Department of Transportation is in the process of updating the original <i>NH State Rail Trails Plan</i> adopted in 2005. NHDOT has published a project website, which can be found at <a href="http://www.nhrailtrailsplan.com">www.nhrailtrailsplan.com</a> .
<a href="#">NH 2021-2030 Ten Year Plan</a> , Adopted July 2020	<p>Adopted in 2020 as a result of NHDOT's two-year planning process, the <i>FY 2021-2030 Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan</i> has several projects that directly or indirectly impact the Cheshire Rail Trail South. The document begins with a summary of the New Hampshire House of Representatives bill which adopted the Plan, as well as an overview of the Ten-Year plan budget and a high-level breakdown of funding priorities. The majority of the document after these high-level summaries is a list of projects alphabetically by town name, listing the municipality, project number, route/road, category, and finally the project phases and funding years.</p> <p>Keene has two projects that will affect the Cheshire Rail Trail listed in the plan. The first project is the reconstruction of NH 101 from Swanzey Factory Road to Branch Road. The Cheshire Rail Trail crosses NH 101 slightly west of the proposed reconstruction project. Preliminary engineering for the project is listed to begin in 2022, with construction beginning in 2029. The second project that will directly affect the Cheshire Rail Trail in Keene is the construction of a trail between Marlborough Street and the Cheshire Rail Trail, including improvements to Marlborough Street. Construction is scheduled for 2024-2025 and the total project cost is estimated at \$681,132.</p> <p>Swanzey also has a project listed on the Plan for the construction of a multi-use path on abandoned rail corridors on the Ashuelot Trail and improvements to the Cheshire Rail</p>

	Trail. Preliminary engineering is programmed for 2021, with construction in 2024. The total project budget for the Swanzey project is estimated at \$829,446.
<a href="#">New Hampshire DOT Statewide Pedestrian &amp; Bicycle Transportation Plan and Economic Impact Study. Technical Memorandum #4.</a> Adopted January 10, 2020	This memorandum was developed by NHDOT as an update to the Statewide Pedestrian & Bicycle Transportation Plan, originally published by NHDOT in May of 2000. The document focuses on the economic impacts of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the State of New Hampshire. The memorandum used the IMPLAN economic model to estimate induced or “multiplier” impacts, as well as direct spending impacts by local consumers and/or the state and subsequent indirect impacts. After establishing the methodology, the memorandum provides detailed results on the economic impacts of capital investment, expenditures of bicycle and pedestrian-oriented businesses, economic impacts of bicycle tourism, benefits of non-motorized travel, and property values. Ultimately, direct capital investment in pedestrian and bicycle impacts leads to \$20.7 million in economic impact. Bicycle and pedestrian oriented businesses create \$35.4 million in annual sales, and indirect spending effects from supplier purchases and employee spending leads to an estimated \$78.9 million in annual economic impact. Bicycle tourism across the state leads to \$28.1 million in total spending, 85% of which was from two-night stays.
<a href="#">NH Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.</a> Adopted May 2000	<p>Developed by NHDOT in cooperation with the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, the <i>NH Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan</i> serves as an element of the state’s overall transportation plan. The overarching goal stated in the document is to recognize, support and encourage bicycling and walking as a form of transportation. NHDOT also outlines a number of goals specific to bicycle infrastructure in the State, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NHDOT “will provide a safe and efficient means of bicycle travel throughout the State”;</li> <li>• “NHDOT will actively provide for the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians in all highway projects where possible,” and;</li> <li>• “The NHDOT will consider bicycle/pedestrian concerns in all projects.”</li> </ul> <p>To reach the goal of providing safe and efficient bicycle travel throughout the State, NHDOT proposes the development of a statewide bicycle route system in this document. This system would be derived from public participation, and be comprised of a primary system of routes for inter-regional travel, and a secondary system of bicycle routes for intra-regional travel. The primary system would be the responsibility of NHDOT, and secondary systems would be developed by each regional planning commission. Implementation steps and funding sources, as well as clear guidelines for the facilitation of public input are provided in the plan. While much of the information in the plan is currently outdated, what the plan does establish is a clear process for NHDOT to include bicycle and pedestrian considerations in their work, as well as an established process for regional planning commissions to utilize in the establishment of inter-regional bicycle networks.</p>

New Hampshire Statewide Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan, Adoption Pending	Starting in 2019, NHDOT began to draft the <i>NH Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan</i> . While a Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan was adopted in 1995 and updated in 2000 as part of the State's Long-Range Transportation Plan, this effort represents the first stand-alone planning effort for a statewide bicycle and pedestrian plan. The focus of the new plan is to develop a network of bike facilities on state roadways and to address gaps in the sidewalk network. In addition, the update plans to articulate new policies, programs and infrastructure projects intended to increase walking and bicycling in all regions of New Hampshire.
<a href="#">NH ATV Trail System Plan</a> , Adopted 2003	Adopted by the NH DRED, this plan calls for providing designated seasonal trails for ATVs and trail bikes, identifies major issues related to developing and managing these trails for use by wheeled OHRV during the snow-free months, and offers suggestions for addressing these issues. There are two trail systems designated for OHRV use in Cheshire County: Pisgah State Park (20 miles) and Troy Trails (60 miles). The plan recommends connecting these trail systems using existing infrastructure whenever possible, such as class VI roads and utility ROW. Troy Trails was operated by Little Monadnock Family Trails and spans Troy, Fitzwilliam and Richmond, NH, but currently the trail system is not in operation.
<a href="#">RSA 215-C: Snowmobiles</a> , Last modified in 2017	Located under Title XVIII (Fish and Game) of the New Hampshire Revised Statutes, Chapter 215-C governs snowmobile licensing, operation and state highway crossings. Perhaps most notably, Section 215-C:8 specifies that the speed limit on approved snowmobile trails is 45 mph, where no speed limit is specified.
<a href="#">RSA 508:14, Landowner Liability Limited</a> , Last modified in 2006	Under state law, landowners, including governmental entities, who permit users to use trails free of charge are not liable for personal injury suffered from trail use, unless the harm was caused intentionally. Individuals or organizations that perform maintenance on trails for public recreation are not liable for personal injury, in the absence of "gross negligence or willful or wanton misconduct."
<a href="#">RSA 212:34, Duty of Care</a> , Last modified in 2011	This statute provides both public and private landowners with additional protections when they grant free-of-charge recreational access.
<a href="#">New Hampshire Bureau of Trail Best Management Practices</a> , Revised in 2017	A useful publication for citizen groups interested in performing trail maintenance. Topics covered include but are not limited to permitting, grading, trail surfacing, flagging, and brush clearing.
<a href="#">NHDOT Cooperative Agreement</a> , Executed in 1998 between NH DOT and NH DRED	NHDOT owns title to the land underlying the entire extent of the Cheshire Branch Rail Trail. For most of the trail, NHDOT entered into a cooperative agreement with the NH DRED, a defunct agency whose trail-related responsibilities now fall under the purview of NH DNCR. The cooperative agreement specifies trail maintenance responsibilities.
Regional Documents	
<a href="#">Southwest Connects: Southwest Region Transportation Plan 2014 - 2035</a> , Adopted January, 2015	<i>Southwest Connects</i> represents the pre-eminent transportation planning document for the Monadnock Region, and as such presents a regional transportation vision, as well as supporting goals and objectives aimed to achieve that vision. Much of the vision presented in the Plan relies on the statement that "in the future, the Southwest Region's



	<p>network of major highways, rail right-of-way, airports and other transportation features will look much the same as they do today” (p.4). This is particularly relevant to rail trails who use existing right-of-way, and the vision statement explicitly mentions that “new modes of transport will utilize the regional transportation network and public right-of-way to make room for.... safe bike routes” (p. 4). Other goals and objectives relevant to rail trails include the goals of the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Objective 2.B), improvement of mode of transportation choices (Objective 3.C), preservation of rail right-of-ways (Objective 2.E), encouraging bicycle and pedestrian connectivity (Objective 3.D), and the promotion of complete streets (Objective 4.C). After the vision statement, the rest of <i>Southwest Connects</i> is structured around 8 major corridors in the region, of which the Cheshire Rail Trail South is considered part of the NH 12 South corridor. The plan identifies the Cheshire Rail Trail South as being in fair to good condition, with some major crossings posing a barrier, and states that “spot trail improvements, regional cooperation and marketing could improve recreation and economic development opportunities for area towns” (p. 91).</p>
<a href="#">Monadnock Region Future: A Plan for Southwest New Hampshire</a> , Adopted 2015	<p><i>Monadnock Region Future</i> is the primary planning document for the Monadnock Region, and is structured around four primary themes: Community Vitality, Economic Prosperity, Stewardship, and Preparedness. Each theme area presents specific goals and objectives, as well as data and specific trends related to the subject. The theme areas and their goals and objectives all are connected to, and are in support of the vision for the region outlined in the plan, which comprises a “Southwest Region where thriving communities rich in culture, educational opportunities and natural resources, work together to support a resilient and robust regional economy, which offers residents freedom of choice and embraces our heritage and distinct sense of place” (p. 13). Under Community Vitality, a specific goal related to rail trails include increasing non-motorized transportation options and creating additional multi-use trails are specific goals recommended to support the goal of enhancing access to goods, services, and other destinations. Other goals that relate to rail trails in the Plan include maintaining adequate infrastructure under Economic Prosperity, with the specific objective of improving transportation infrastructure to support the development of a diversified transportation system and improving the condition and availability of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.</p>
<a href="#">Monadnock Region Rail Trails Collaborative</a>	<p>Self-described as “an informal group made up of representatives of local municipalities, non-profits and volunteers that recognize the value in collaborating on shared goals and interests for improving the regional rail trails,” the Monadnock Region Rail Trails Collaborative (MRRTC) is an advocacy group with the mission “to restore and maintain the Cheshire, Ashuelot, and Fort Hill rail trails throughout the Monadnock Region and to connect southwest New Hampshire, via the rail trails to Bellows Falls, VT, Brattleboro, VT and Winchendon, MA”. On its website, the MRRTC maintains a series</p>

	<p>of general implementation plans for rail trails throughout the region, including one for the entirety of the Cheshire Rail Trail. For Cheshire Rail Trail South, the MRRTC highlights the rehabilitation of a section of the trail spanning from Swanzev Factory Road in Keene to Webb Depot Road in Marlborough. The rehabilitation for this section is funded by a TAP Grant to be constructed in 2025. The MRRTC also highlights the City of Keene's rehabilitation/construction of the trail from Marlboro Street to Swanzev Factory Road, with an expected timeline of 2023-2027. The final section highlighted for improvement is the section from Old Turnpike Road to approximately Sips Pond in Fitzwilliam, which is the subject of a Recreational Trails Program grant application and will start construction in 2021 if the grant application is approved.</p>
<p><a href="#">Greater Monadnock Region Community Health Improvement Plan,</a> Published 2015</p>	<p>A product of the Greater Monadnock Public Health Network, the <i>Greater Monadnock Region Community Health Improvement Plan</i> (CHIP) is an offshoot of the <i>New Hampshire State Health Improvement Plan</i>, and aims to provide a written framework to focus and solidify the activities in the Greater Monadnock region to improve the health of the community. The plan centers around eleven community health improvement priority areas, and identifies specific goals within each priority area, such as reducing obesity, decreasing prescription drug misuse and reducing tobacco use. Some specific goals and strategic objectives speak directly to the importance of recreational facilities such as rail trails, and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal: Foster an accepting community that supports positive behavioral health. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strategic Objective: Increase safe and convenient options for physical activity within communities.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Goal: Reduce adult and childhood obesity in the Region. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ implement programs, projects and policies that increase physical activity opportunities in early childhood settings, schools, workplaces, food pantries, neighborhoods, and public and private recreational facilities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><a href="#">Monadnock Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL)</a></p>	<p>A regional effort in collaboration with Healthy Monadnock and part of a statewide network, Monadnock HEAL represents a community initiative to address unhealthy habits and lifestyles for residents of Cheshire County. A critical goal of the group is the promotion of active living for both youth and adults.</p>
<p><a href="#">NH 12 South Corridor Study,</a> Published 2015</p>	<p>Prepared in 2015, the study focuses on the NH 12 South corridor which includes Cheshire Rail Trail South. In the executive summary of the study, drainage and surface condition improvements were recommended for Cheshire Rail Trail South to increase safety and add recreational opportunity for multiple users. Improved trailhead parking and signage was also identified as a need for the trail. A major component of the corridor study is a summary of findings for existing conditions of traffic and intersections, demographics, economics, community planning efforts and regulations, as well as summaries of environmental and historical resources along the corridor. An analysis of</p>

	<p>future conditions and recommendations is also provided for each community in the corridor. As part of the recommendations for the study, the corridor study advisory committee identified the unimproved nature of Cheshire Rail Trail South as an issue for every community along the NH 12 Corridor. The lack of improvement was noted to make the trail unsuitable for some users. The recommendation for every community relating to Cheshire Rail Trail South includes improving wayfinding, signage and roadway crossings and the preparation of applications to the Transportation Alternatives Program and the Recreational Trails Program, as well as coordination with the Monadnock Region Transportation Management Association (now called the <a href="#">Monadnock Alliance for Sustainable Transportation</a>) to initiate and promote a Cheshire Rail Trail Coalition. Specific recommendations include suggested improvements to the NH 101 crossing in Keene, the improvement and establishment of a parking area and trail head at the Marlborough/Troy town line, improving and designating the parking area and trailhead at the railway depot property in Troy, and collaborating with the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission and Massachusetts DOT to connect the trail across the state line in Rindge.</p>
Local Documents	
<p><a href="#">Keene Comprehensive Master Plan</a>, Adopted September 2010</p>	<p>Adopted in September of 2010, the <i>Keene Comprehensive Master Plan</i> is separated into four sections. The first section is an introduction to master planning and an overview of the planning process and its context in regional and state plans, followed by a community vision statement and six focus areas. The third section describes the existing conditions of the City. The final section represents the Plan itself, including twenty topic specific chapters. The importance of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is reiterated multiple times throughout the Plan, including in the vision statement where the Plan envisions “pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure... is present throughout our community and... places import on people rather than automobiles”. In the transportation chapter of the plan, former rail lines were identified in the very beginning of the chapter as having a major impact on the City and its built form, and the Plan calls for the increased monitoring of condition and use of bicycle and pedestrian facilities as an important part of the regional transportation network. Later in the Plan, a connection from Eastern Avenue towards NH 101 is a specific recommendation for the construction of a new pathway, as proposed by the Keene Bicycle and Pedestrian Path Committee.</p>
<p><a href="#">Keene Active and Passive Recreation Plan</a>, Adopted June 2012</p>	<p>Developed by the City of Keene Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cemeteries and an ad hoc committee in collaboration with GreenPlay, LLC, the plan is split into six distinct sections. The plan begins with an executive summary and moves into an introduction and planning context, focus areas and values, key findings, recommendations, and finally implementation. Two items identified as key issues for Keene’s passive and active recreation speak directly to Cheshire Rail Trail South in this document; coordinating active transportation and recreation and trail connectivity and monitoring levels of service for parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities. In the public</p>



	<p>outreach for the development of the plan, connectivity and alternative transportation was listed as one of the top five community issues for the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cemeteries to focus on. While none of the recommendations specifically mention Cheshire Rail Trail South, the recommendations of “Convene a cross-sector Active Recreation/Transportation Working Group” and “Promote use of existing pathway and trails system through public information sources, utilizing trailhead signage, print, and web-based resources” both speak specifically to issues experienced along the Cheshire Rail Trail. (pp. 43).</p>
<p>Keene Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, Adopted 1999 (update in process)</p>	<p>Enabled formally by resolution passed by the Keene City Council in 1996, the Bicycle and Pedestrian master plan is intended to be prepared by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Path Advisory Committee in collaboration with the Planning Department and Planning Board to be incorporated as a chapter in the City of Keene’s master plan. While an update is in progress as of writing, the most recent version of the Bicycle and Pedestrian master plan was completed in 1999. Below is a summary of several elements of the Plan as it relates to the Cheshire Rail Trail.</p> <p><b>Goals and Objectives related to rail trails:</b> Goal 5 of this plan is “To assure the integrity of the former railroad corridors are developed for transportation enhancement and recreational use” (p. 4). Objective 4 is “To incorporate existing paths, paths approved for construction and former railroad corridors into a city-wide network of bicycle/pedestrian paths,” and Objective 8 is “To link the City with neighboring towns, states and regional routes into a network of bicycle/pedestrian paths” (pp. 4).</p> <p><b>User Groups Described in this Plan:</b> User groups described in the Plan include bicyclists, pedestrians, in-lane skaters/skateboarders, cross-country skiers, snowmobiles, and equestrians. According to this Plan, the Keene Sno’Riders utilize the Cheshire Branch rail bed for the operation of snowmobile routes. A primary interest and concern of the Keene Sno’Riders is creating a safe connection between the Cheshire Branch and the Ashuelot rail beds. This is also a concern for the equestrian community. Uses identified for the Cheshire Branch rail bed include walking, mountain biking, cross country skiing, horseback riding, and snowmobiling.</p> <p><b>Pathway Design, Management &amp; Funding:</b> Section IV of the Plan includes recommended design considerations, pathway rules and regulations, and maintenance considerations. Page 18 of the document includes a “Path System Safety Checklist,” and this section also includes a description of trailside amenities which mentions the need for consistent signage of the trail system.</p> <p><b>The Pathway System:</b> This Plan is composed of two elements: (1) the Keene Bicycle/Pedestrian Path System consisting of bike paths, bike lanes and “Share the Road” signs; and, (2) the Statewide System of Bike Routes, Multi-Use Paths, and Rail-to-Trail Recreational Corridors. The Plan notes that these facilities must be interconnected to enable all non-motorized users to travel to various parts of Keene as well as to adjoining towns and other regional destinations. The Cheshire Branch rail</p>

	bed from Main Street east to NH 101 and west to NH 9/10/12 is listed as a “Priority A Corridor”, or the highest priority of project and recommended to be given the highest priority for resources and construction in the plan. The Cheshire Branch Rail Trail northwest of NH 9/10/12 and Cheshire Branch Rail Trail south of the NH 101 crossing are also listed as “Priority B Corridor” projects, which are given secondary priority for project development, funding and construction.
<a href="#">Keene Complete Streets Policy</a> , Adopted November 2015	Established in resolution R-2015-40 passed by the Keene City Council, the complete streets policy calls for all City-owned transportation facilities, transportation improvements and project phases to be utilized as an opportunity to create safer, more accessible streets for all users. Acquisition and construction are also included as strategies to incorporate complete streets guidelines where existing right-of-ways or infrastructure is insufficient. While not directly addressing rail trails, this policy represents a substantial change to the way the City maintains and develops the street network which connects to Cheshire Rail Trail South.
<a href="#">Keene Complete Streets Design Guidelines</a> , Adopted 2015	Developed in collaboration with Southwest Region Planning Commission, Keene’s design guidelines outline a series of street design recommendations for consideration when working in the public right-of-way. While not a requirement of specific street designs, the guidelines provide flexible guidance for City staff to consider in transportation projects. The guidelines are organized by a street typology created for Keene which includes slow streets, gateway streets, bicycle streets, neighborhood streets, rural streets, and a transit street overlay. Each street type comes with a list of streets in Keene which match the description, a diagram of a possible configuration for that type of street, as well as specific bulleted considerations for the design of that street such as bicycle lane width, travel lane width, pavement markings, green buffers, and other suggestions.
<a href="#">City of Keene 2020-2025 Capital Improvement Plan</a> , Adopted January 2019	The capital improvement plan outlines capital investments to be made by the City of Keene from fiscal year 2020 through fiscal year 2025, and includes a major capital improvement project for the Cheshire Rail Trail. The project, entitled the <i>Transportation Heritage Trail</i> project, is the next phase in the ongoing development of the City of Keene’s existing Cheshire Rail Trail System. The central feature of the project is the adaptive reuse of three historical bridges, including the use of the Robert J. Prowse Memorial Bridge formerly used in Londonderry as a trail crossing for NH 101. The project also anticipates using the current Island Street Bridge to provide a crossing over Swanzey Factory Road, and finally improvements will be made to the Stone Arch Bridge. The project is anticipated to span from fiscal year 2022 to 2025, and has a total project budget of \$2.5 million. Complete construction of the project is contingent upon the availability of grant funds and private donations.
Marlborough Master Plan, Land Use, Population & Housing and Vision Chapters, Adopted July 2013	Adopted in 2013 as a partial update to the Town of Marlboro’s master plan, these chapters represent goals and objectives on the topics of Land Use and Population & Housing, as well as a comprehensive vision statement reflecting the results of a public

	<p>visioning session. During the visioning process for this update, the maintenance and creation of recreational trails was highlighted by Marlborough residents as an area of importance. In relation to the Cheshire Rail Trail South, there is a specific goal listed under the subject area of recreation and social opportunities in the land use chapter of the plan that states “existing trails in Town should be clearly identified in order to facilitate continued usage; in addition, other multi-purpose recreational trails should be developed and, where possible, connect to existing trails, as well as trails that go beyond Marlborough’s boundaries” (p. 12).</p>
<p><a href="#">National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Stone Arch Bridge.</a> Submitted June 2012</p>	<p>Submitted in June of 2012, this document is the registration form submitted to the National Register of Historic Places for the Cheshire Rail Trail’s Stone Arch Bridge. The document provides a detailed overview of the Stone Arch Bridge’s history, architectural details and significance as a historical resource. As outlined in the registration form, Stone Arch Bridge represents a significant recreational and cultural resource along the Cheshire Rail Trail South.</p>
<p><a href="#">Swanzy Master Plan Update.</a> Adopted 2003</p>	<p>Swanzy’s master plan contains thirteen chapters on topics ranging from demographics to recreation, resource conservation, and beyond. A focus of the plan is the explicit definition of “rural character” as it relates to the Town of Swanzy, and how that definition is a major base for the rest of the master plan. The recreation chapter of the plan is most relevant to the Cheshire Rail Trail South and includes a specific goal to “develop multi-use corridors toward Keene to enable... travel by alternative means than the automobile, as well as jogging, biking, etc.” (p. 48). The Route 12 corridor is highlighted as a potential multi-use corridor under this goal, which includes the Cheshire Rail Trail South through Swanzy. The transportation chapter of the master plan also includes targets relevant to the Cheshire Rail Trail South. Two targets that are relevant to the trail are to “Coordinate with adjacent towns to ensure inter-municipal pedestrian/trail system connections” and to “Convene a committee to assess the existing sidewalk and trail network for adequacy, determine future needs and identify appropriate ways of addressing these needs” (p. 27). An update is currently also in the process for Swanzy’s master plan but has not concluded at the time of writing.</p>
<p><a href="#">Swanzy Complete Streets Policy.</a> Adopted October 2015</p>	<p>Adopted by the Swanzy Board of Selectmen in Fall of 2015, Swanzy’s complete streets policy directs the Town of Swanzy to approach every transportation improvement and project phase as an opportunity for making the public right-of-way more accessible for all users. The policy also directs annual reporting from the Director of Public Works in the Town to include a summary of how each applicable project advanced the goals of the policy. While not a policy that directly impacts rail trails, the policy would impact the network of streets around the Cheshire Rail Trail South through Swanzy and would help improve the connectivity for bicycles and pedestrians from users of the trail to the Town of Swanzy’s transportation network.</p>
<p>Swanzy Complete Streets Design Guidelines, Adopted 2015</p>	<p>Similar to Keene’s Complete Streets Design Guidelines, the document begins with a general overview of the concept of complete streets, and then dives into a series of</p>

	<p>recommendations based on street typology. The guidelines outline four types of streets in the typology: collector, compact neighborhood, residential, and rural. Each type of street then has a suggested streetscape design with visual examples, followed by a detailed set of recommendations for design of the roadway zone including travel lane widths, vegetation, access management features and more. Each street under Town ownership is also classified under one of the street types within the street typology.</p>
<p><a href="#">Troy Master Plan Update,</a> Adopted March 2007</p>	<p>Troy's most recent master plan update is organized into four major sections. The plan begins with an introduction outlining the need for a master plan and highlighting the major economic and social change within the Town since the last update. The next section represents the future land use plan, which is comprised of a vision statement and a series of goals and objectives for land use in the Town. There are three specific objectives listed under the future land use plan which directly reference or impact the rail trail. The first objective is under the umbrella of Community Facilities and is to "explore public access between the Depot property, rail trail and Sand Dam recreation area" (p. 28). Under the "Historic, Cultural, and Recreational Resources" section, the plan also identifies the objective to "Develop and implement the means by which to enforce speed limits for snowmobiles and OHRV's using the rail trail through the Village and surrounding neighborhoods" (p. 56). Under the Economic Development and Transportation goals and objectives sections, the plan discusses the need to develop a pedestrian access plan for Troy Village and the surrounding neighborhood.</p>
<p><a href="#">Troy Complete Streets Policy,</a> Adopted 2016</p>	<p>Completed in collaboration with Southwest Region Planning Commission, Troy's complete streets policy directs the Town to incorporate complete street principles into planning documents, policies and transportation projects. Troy's policy specifically focuses on ensuring that the streets and roadways in the Village Center are "convenient, safe and accessible for all transportation users". The policy also specifically directs the Town's Road Agent to review the <i>Troy Complete Streets Planning and Design Guidelines</i> prior to any work within the Troy Village Center.</p>
<p><a href="#">Troy Complete Streets Planning and Design Guidelines,</a> Published 2016</p>	<p>The Town of Troy, in collaboration with Southwest Region Planning Commission, developed a series of design guidelines as part of their complete streets policy. The guidelines provide an overview of complete streets and their benefits as well as the components of complete streets. The guideline also provides an overview of which streets within the Village of Troy are within the scope of the Town's complete streets Policy and design considerations for each component of the street. Unlike other complete street guidelines in the region, Troy's guidelines suggest a suite of design considerations which apply to all roads covered by the Policy, as opposed to presenting a hierarchy of complete streets.</p>
<p><a href="#">Fitzwilliam Master Plan,</a> Adopted January 2012</p>	<p>Fitzwilliam's master plan, last updated in 2012, is organized into five primary sections. The Plan begins with a community vision statement, and then transitions into a future land use plan followed by population and housing, community facilities, and historic and cultural resources. While the Cheshire Rail Trail South is identified as a major</p>



	recreational resource for the Town, there are no direct recommendations or goals as they relate to the trail in the Plan.
<b>Massachusetts Documents</b>	
<a href="#">Massachusetts Bicycle Transportation Plan,</a> 2019	Prepared by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the plan provides an overview of existing conditions in the State of Massachusetts and an action plan structured around six initiatives to address bicycling needs in the State. In the plan, the Cheshire Branch rail bed that extends into and connects Winchendon and Gardner, MA is listed as part of the “High Comfort Bike Network”, of which the expansion is a key priority in the plan. The rail bed north of Winchendon extending into New Hampshire is not listed as part of the network. While many of the initiatives and priorities in the plan speak to the importance of expanding the “High Comfort Bike Network” and expanding daily bicycle trips, no particular projects are identified in the plan.
<a href="#">Working Towards the Future: Montachusett Metropolitan 2020 Regional Transportation Plan,</a> Adopted July 2017	Prepared and adopted by the Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization, the document represents the long-term transportation plan for the Montachusett MPO region from 2020 to 2040. It includes a number of chapters focusing on different aspects of the transportation system, including a chapter on bicycle & pedestrian travel which provides a review of existing and proposed bicycle and pedestrian transportation options in the region. The bicycle and pedestrian chapter of the document describes the Massachusetts section of the Cheshire Branch rail bed as the “North Central Pathway.” The rail bed has been partially improved between the Towns of Winchendon and Gardner, MA, and the plan recommends a multi-phased project to connect the two communities. While in the mapping section of the plan, it is indicated that a northern expansion is a potential future trail project, development of the trail north of Winchendon is not explained in detail in the plan.
Winchendon Draft Master Plan, In progress	While not officially adopted, Winchendon’s update to their master plan includes a goal in their open space chapter: “Strategy OS 2.2: Identify areas for trail and open space linkages, including connecting routes to NH and other communities” . No such goal is present in the version of Winchendon’s master plan adopted in 2001.

## **Appendix B: Public Outreach Memos**

### Online Survey Memo





# ***Southwest Region Planning Commission***

37 Ashuelot Street,

Keene, NH 03431

603-357-0557 Voice

357-7440 Fax

**DATE:** May 28, 2021  
**TO:** Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Working Group  
**FROM:** SWRPC Staff  
**RE:** Online Survey Results

In order to learn about trail issues, trip types, destinations, and other information about the Cheshire Rail Trail, SWRPC launched an online survey made available via the project webpage on November 9, 2020. The survey was open through February 7, 2021 and was advertised via SWRPC newsletters, Facebook and through e-mail lists used for the current as well as a previous Ashuelot Rail Trail planning project. This memo summarizes key survey results, including who responded, how respondents use the Trail and which issues were identified as priorities, opportunities and concerns. In total, 737 individuals responded to the survey. The number of respondents to each question is indicated by the letter *n*.

## **Background Information**

*Question 1: How close is Cheshire Rail Trail South to your home? (n = 737)*

Most respondents lived within either walking or biking distance of Cheshire Rail Trail South, with 252 (34%) indicating that they live within walking distance, 218 (30%) indicating that they live within biking distance, while 267 (36%) indicated that they don't live within either walking or biking distance of the trail. It should be noted that the survey left the terms "walking distance" and "biking distance" up to the interpretation of each respondent.

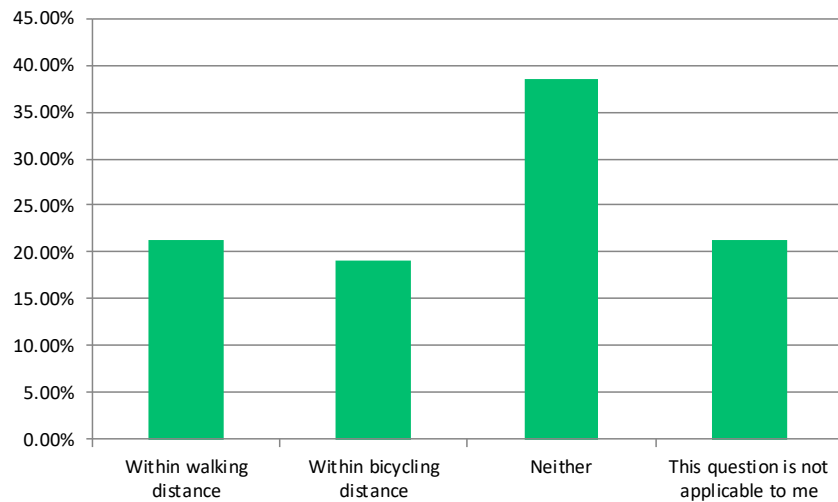
*Question 2: In what ZIP code is your home located? (n = 737)*

Residents in most communities located along Cheshire Rail Trail South were well represented in the survey results, with the exception of Marlborough, where only eight residents supplied responses.

<b>Zip Code</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	
<b>03447</b>	Fitzwilliam, NH	141	(19.1%)
<b>03431</b>	Keene, NH	124	(16.8%)
<b>03461</b>	Rindge, NH	68	(9.2%)
<b>03446</b>	Swanzey, NH	55	(7.5%)
<b>03465</b>	Troy, NH	50	(6.8%)
<b>01475</b>	Winchendon, MA	29	(3.9%)
<b>03452</b>	Jaffrey, NH	23	(3.1%)
<b>03470</b>	Winchester/Richmond NH	21	(2.8%)
<b>03071</b>	New Ipswich, NH	17	(2.3%)
<b>01430</b>	Ashburnham, MA	12	(1.6%)
<b>03467</b>	Westmoreland, NH	10	(1.4%)
<b>03608</b>	Walpole, NH	8	(1.1%)
<b>03455</b>	Marlborough, NH	8	(1.1%)
	Other	171	(25.4%)

*Question 3: How close is Cheshire Rail Trail South to your work? (n = 734)*

A plurality of respondents - 282 (38%) - did not work within walking or biking distance of the trail, while 156 (21%) worked within walking distance and 140 (19%) within bicycling distance.



*Question 4: In what ZIP code is your work located? (n = 660)*

A plurality of respondents worked in the City of Keene, reflecting its role as a central employment hub within the region. Workers in Fitzwilliam were also well represented within survey results.

Zip	Community	Respondents	
03431	Keene, NH	178	(27.0%)
03447	Fitzwilliam, NH	73	(11.1%)
03446	Swanzey, NH	36	(5.5%)
03461	Rindge, NH	36	(5.5%)
03452	Jaffrey, NH	20	(3.0%)
03465	Troy, NH	19	(2.9%)
01475	Winchendon, MA	18	(2.7%)
03458	Peterborough, NH	14	(2.1%)
03470	Winchester/Richmond, NH	14	(2.1%)
01440	Gardner, MA	13	(2.0%)
01420	Fitchburg, MA	11	(1.7%)
	Other	228	(34.5%)

*Question 5: Have you used Cheshire Rail Trail South? (n = 737)*

Most respondents - 536 (73%) - had used the trail within the last 12 months, while 128 (17%) had used the trail more than 12 months ago. A smaller number of respondents, 73 (10%), had never used the trail.

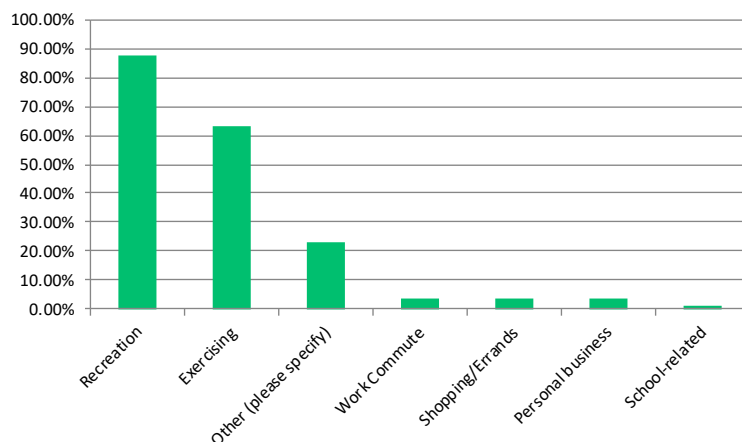


## Recent Visitors Questions

Only respondents who had used the trail within the last 12 months (according to their answer to question 5) were prompted to answer questions 6-8. Respondents were instructed to think about their “use of the trail in the last 12 months when responding to the following questions.”

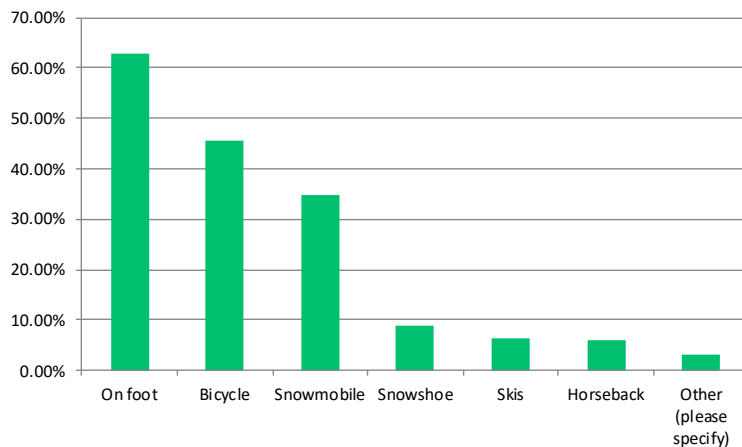
*Question 6: What was the purpose of your trip(s)? Select all that apply. (n = 522)*

The most common trip purpose among respondents was recreation related, with exercise following as the second-most common trip purpose. A fairly small number of respondents use the trail for commuting, personal business, shopping, or school. Most of the respondents who selected “other” indicated a particular mode of travel along the trail (e.g. snowmobile, horseback riding). Other trip purposes also included trail maintenance, dog walking, historical study, bird watching, and time with family.



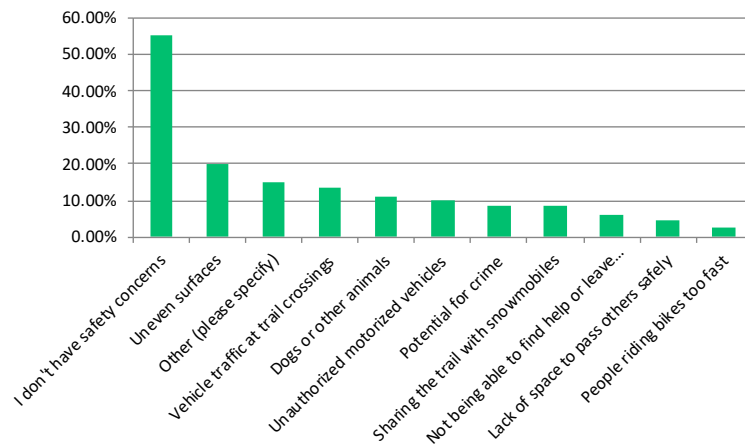
*Question 7: How did you travel along the trail? Select all that apply. (n = 522)*

The most common mode of travel among respondents was on foot, followed by bicycle and snowmobile. Some respondents who selected “other” indicated that they had used ATVs on the trail or wish they could use ATVs on the trail.



*Question 8: Do you have concerns about your safety when using the trail? Select all that apply. (n = 522)*

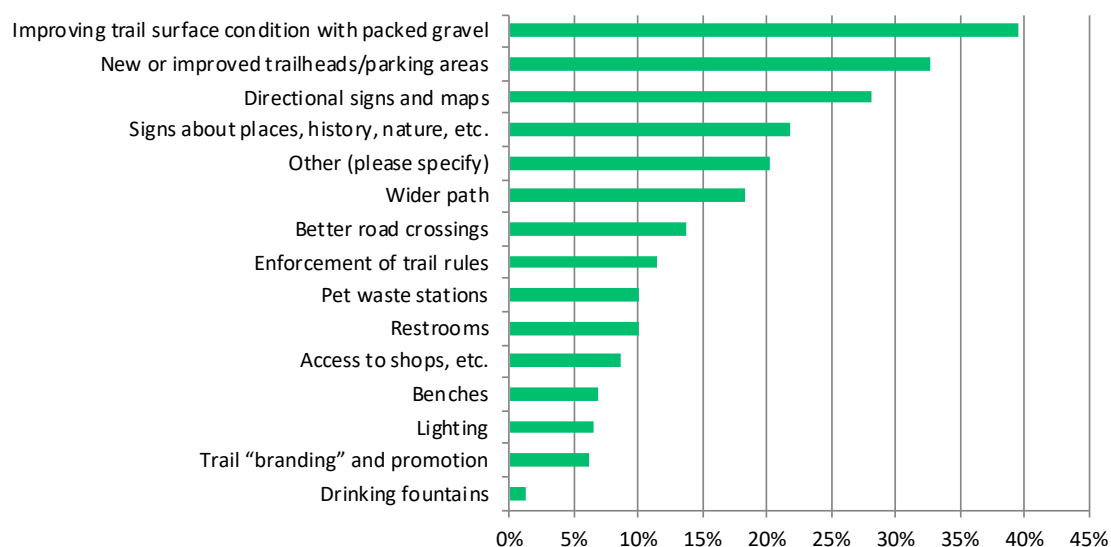
Most respondents, 522 (55%), didn't have safety concerns related to the trail. Among respondents who did have safety concerns, "uneven surfaces" ranked as the most common source of concern. Respondents who marked "other" cited a variety of concerns, including off-leash dogs, bridge deck conditions (especially for equestrian use), lack of trail signage (and inability to indicate location to emergency services), trash/litter/broken glass, bicyclists failing to announce themselves from behind, and people wearing headphones.



## Trail Priorities, Challenges, and Opportunities

*Question 9: Which of the following trail improvements would you describe as a "top priority?" Select up to 3 options. (n = 679)*

The most frequently cited priority among respondents was improving the trail surface with packed gravel, followed by improved trailheads/parking areas and directional signs and maps. Many Respondents who marked "other" cited ATV/OHRV access as a priority. (ATV use is restricted by the funding source that originally supported acquisition of the railroad corridor). Other priorities included trash collection/litter prevention and bridges over major roadways (e.g. NH 101). Several respondents expressed a desire to preserve the "natural setting" of the trail by avoiding the installation of unnecessary amenities, which could pose maintenance challenges over the long term.



*Question 10: Please mention any additional assets or opportunities along the trail. (n = 288)*

Respondents supplied a variety of answers to this open-ended question, including the following assets and opportunities:

- Permitting ATV/OHRV use on the trail. Several respondents noted how opening the trail up to these motorized uses could potentially generate revenue for trail maintenance.
- Promoting and marketing the trail as a recreational asset.
- Improving wayfinding signage and installing mileage makers.
- Enhancing connections between the trail and town/village centers. Improving the connection to the Cheshire County Fairgrounds was also identified as a need.
- Mowing the trail during the summer to prevent exposure to ticks.
- Enhancing and promoting connections with other trails, including the North Central Pathway in Winchendon, MA.
- Overnight camping.
- Access for equestrians, including trailer parking.
- Preserving snowmobile access to the trail.

Several respondents indicated that they thought there was no need for change on the trail.

*Question 11: Please describe any additional problem areas or concerns that you have relative to the Trail. (n = 284)*

Respondents supplied a variety of answers to this open-ended question, including the following problem areas and concerns:

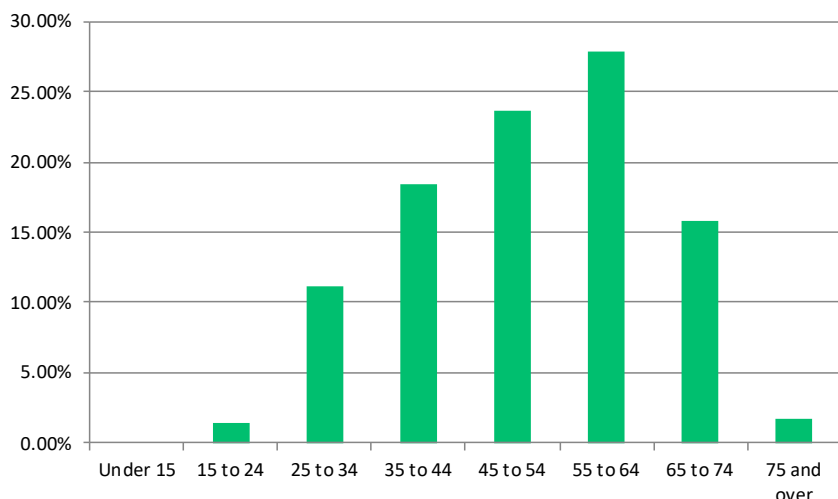
- Restriction of ATV/OHRV access and, conversely, unauthorized ATV use on the trail.
- Safety at road crossings.
- Dumping on the trail.
- A lack of maintenance by user groups other than snowmobilers.
- Crime and personal security. Unauthorized camping on abutting properties, including illegal harvesting of firewood.
- Lack of connecting snowmobile trails in Keene.

Many respondents indicated that they had no additional trail-related concerns.

## Respondent Information

### *Question 12: How old are you? (n = 679)*

Compared with the overall population of Cheshire County, older middle-aged individuals were overrepresented among survey respondents. About half (51.4%) of survey respondents fell between 45 and 64 years old, whereas the same age group constitutes only 28.5% of the total population of Cheshire County.



### *Question 13: What is your gender? (n = 675)*

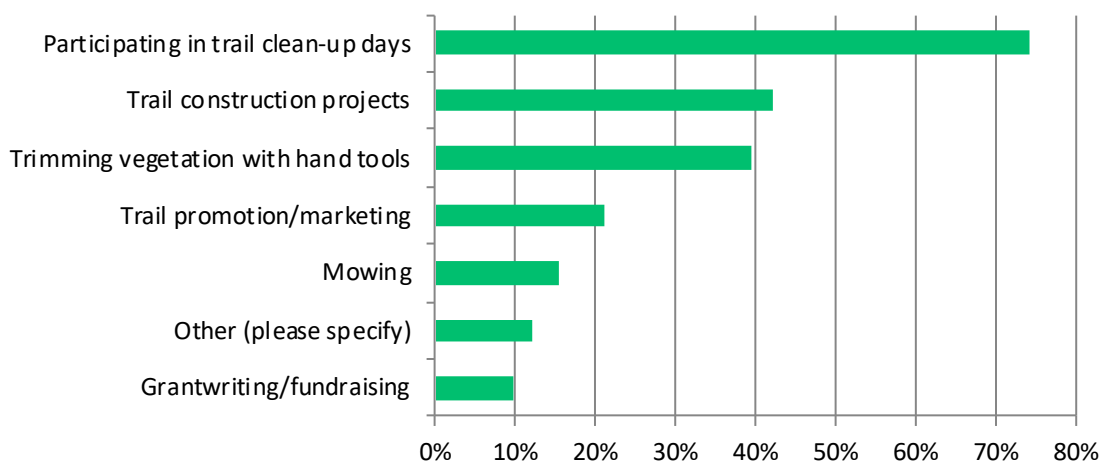
Respondents skewed somewhat male, with 58% of respondents identifying as male and 41% as female.

### *Question 14: Would you like to stay connected to hear about trail-related updates or opportunities to volunteer on trail-related projects? (n = 679)*

A majority of respondents (66%) indicated that they were interested in receiving updates on trail-related volunteer opportunities.

### *Question 15: Numerous volunteer and public participation activities are available. Please indicate your willingness to participate in any of the following activities below. (n = 355)*

Many respondents - 263 (74%) - indicated that they'd be willing to participate in trail clean-up days. Some respondents indicated that they'd be more willing to volunteer their time if summertime motorized access were allowed.





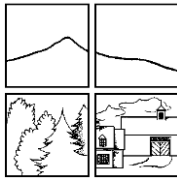
## Findings

- While some respondents indicated that they use the trail for transportation purposes, the vast majority use it for exercise and recreation.
- The survey saw relatively little engagement from Marlborough residents, perhaps reflecting the fact that the trail hugs the town's southwestern boundary and does not pass near any population or commercial centers. Additional outreach may be necessary to cultivate support for trail improvement among community members.
- There seems to be little awareness among some survey respondents about *why* ATV/OHRV use is prohibited on the trail. Communicating with stakeholders about the origin of the restriction may help mitigate perceptions that motorized users are somehow being excluded by state agencies or other user groups. (The restriction was put in place due to the provision of the federal funding source used to purchase the railroad corridor).
- Many respondents expressed general willingness to volunteer for trail-related activities. At the same time, some respondents recognized that most or all of trail maintenance responsibilities falls on snowmobile club members. There seems to be potential for other groups to provide support on trail maintenance tasks.
- Upgrading the trail surface to packed gravel was by far the most frequently cited priority among respondents. Trail amenities such as restrooms, lighting, and benches was typically seen as much lower priorities or even undesirable, since those amenities would create a need for ongoing maintenance.

## **Appendix B: Public Outreach Memos**

### Key Stakeholder Memo





**DATE:** May 28, 2021  
**TO:** Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Working Group  
**FROM:** SWRPC Staff  
**RE:** Stakeholder Interviews

In order to better understand past, current and planned work along Cheshire Rail Trail South, SWRPC staff conducted several interviews with state agency staff, municipal staff and officials, as well as other organizations with an interest in trail development and management. Interviews also served as an opportunity to gather stakeholder perspective on trail-related challenges and opportunities for improvements.

Interviews summarized in this memo represent one tool among several used to collect stakeholder input over the course of the study. Interviewees represent a limited sampling of stakeholder groups, which was contingent their availability. In preparing for the interviews, SWRPC staff developed a set of questions to guide interviews, although specific discussion topics varied from group to group, depending on particular areas of interviewee interest. Those questions are attached to this memo.

This memo summarizes input gathered from the following groups.

1. New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Bureau of Rail and Transit.
2. Monadnock Sno-Moles.
3. Monadnock Regional Rail Trail Collaborative (MRRTC). The interviewee is also a member of the Swanzy Rail Trail Advisory Committee.
4. The Town of Fitzwilliam. Interviewees included municipal staff as well as members of the Conservation Commission and Recreation Commissions.
5. Monadnock Conservancy.
6. The Town of Winchendon, MA.
7. Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), whose service area includes Winchendon, MA.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, with the exception of the NHDOT interview, which was conducted via e-mail. The interview with representatives of the Monadnock Sno-Moles was conducted via e-mail in addition to Zoom.

#### **NHDOT Bureau of Rail and Transit**

Since NHDOT owns the abandoned railroad corridor on which Cheshire Rail Trail is located, its input perhaps warrants special consideration. However, given that NHDOT's purview extends across the state, questions posed to NHDOT staff were applicable to the state's rail trails in general rather than Cheshire Rail Trail South specifically. Questions, along with paraphrased responses, were as follows.

- *Would NHDOT/Bureau of Trails approve the use of wildlife camera for monitoring unauthorized use of the trail for motorized vehicles, dumping, or other unpermitted activities? Has NHDOT/Bureau of Trails had any conversation w/trail stakeholders regarding enforcement of trail rules?*

To date, NHDOT hasn't considered this issue. To explore the question further, NHDOT would need to consult with the state Attorney General's office to verify that there aren't legal restrictions that would preclude deployment of cameras. In agreements that NHDOT has executed with municipalities elsewhere in the state to manage sections of rail trail, the municipality is charged with enforcing rules governing trail use.

- *If a group of trail user groups/municipalities wanted to install branded signage along a segment of trail, is there a particular process that they're required to follow?*

NHDOT has used the following language in agreements executed with municipalities to maintain and development sections of rail trail:

The Permittee shall obtain and install, at its expense, all signage along the Rail-Trail as shown on a Signage Plan to be developed by the Permittee. The initial Signage Plan and any subsequent revisions to the Plan shall be submitted by the Permittee to the Bureau for approval prior to installation. Any revenue generated through sponsorship of mile marker signage along the Rail-Trail shall be paid to the Department and shall be appropriately apportioned to communities along the Rail-Trail.

The NH Bureau of Trails—which administers much of the state's rail trail system through a Cooperative Agreement with NHDOT—may approach this issue differently.

- *Would NHDOT/Bureau of Trails be open to providing gate keys to trail users other than the snowmobile clubs? (The question has been raised by equestrian groups.)*

Most or all of the rail trail corridors with gates are administered by NH Bureau of Trails, so this decision would likely rest with them.

- *Who determines whether motorized vehicles are allowed on the rail trails and how is that determination made? (It's my understanding that for segments of RR corridor acquired w/federal transportation enhancement funds, restrictions are placed on use by motorized vehicles. Are there other factors that come into play?)*

Beyond the federal funding source used to acquire the railroad corridor, it is unlikely that further restrictions would be placed on motorized use by NHDOT, who would not be well-positioned to enforce such restrictions. NH Bureau of Trails is unlikely to place restrictions on motorized use, since motorized users contribute Bureau of Trails operations and trail maintenance activities.

- *Would it be possible, even if unlikely, for RR corridor purchased w/federal transportation-enhancement funds to revert to active railroad use? What about RR corridor purchase w/other funding sources?*

All railroad corridors, regardless of the funding sources, are acquired with the intent that the corridor may be used for future rail restoration. Rail trail use is only permitted as an interim use. Rail Trail Agreements are clear in their interim intent and include language relative to this.

- *There are numerous instances where rail trails cross state highways, many of which are quite dangerous for trail users to negotiate. If a trail group is interested in improving safety at a state highway crossing, what's the best way for them to advocate for enhancements? Are there examples of NHDOT improving safety at crossings? If so, what measures were implemented?*

It is recommended that questions on this matter are directed to NHDOT Bureau of Highway Design. Sally Gunn may be an appropriate point of contact at the current time.



- *Does NHDOT's relationship with Bureau of Trails regarding rail trail management cover all NHDOT-owned RR corridors, or just some? (In other words, are there any cases where a trail maintenance group would establish a direct relationship w/NHDOT rather than working through Bureau of Trails).*

NHDOT either enters into an agreement with Bureau of Trails or a municipality; not all NHDOT-owned rail corridors are subject to a Cooperative Agreement, some are covered by NHDOT-Municipality Rail Trail Agreements. NHDOT does not have any agreements, and does not plan to, with individual trail maintenance groups. For municipal rail trail agreements that NHDOT enters into, it is the municipality's responsibility to maintain and if they subcontract out maintenance, it is incumbent upon them to enter into such agreements and address insurance requirements, among other issues.

### **Monadnock Sno-Moles**

The Monadnock Sno-Moles is a snowmobile club that has been in existence since the 1970's and currently consists of over 300 members that utilize the Cheshire Rail Trail year round. This rail trail, however, makes-up a minority of the club's approximately 100 miles of trails within their jurisdiction. During the summer and fall activities include scheduled work parties. During the winter, the group leads large outings and conducts grooming activities. Other work includes patrols and a variety of maintenance duties related to: trail surface, drainage, bridges, parking areas, and directional signage. The groups maintenance responsibilities on the Cheshire Rail Trail extend from approximately the Keene/Swanzey line south to Route 12 in Fitzwilliam near the Massachusetts state line. For wintertime use, the group maintains a trail across a variety of public and private properties to the Monadnock Recreational Trail in Rindge.

SWRPC staff learned during the interview that with the exception of a recent Monadnock Conservancy project, the snowmobile club has not been asked to participate in other improvements and essentially operates independently. At the same time there is a strong interest in collaborating on improvements aligned with the needs of their members.

The club is almost entirely reliant on volunteers to donate building materials, equipment and time for repairs and improvements. At times, local contractors are hired to do certain work that is cost-prohibitive (such as work requiring heavy equipment like dump trucks, excavators and brush hogs). This history has earned the club relationships and knowledge about many companies and individuals to meet these needs. This is partly out of necessity - the club is required to maintain and at times replace grooming equipment for wintertime use and is the only activity they are compensated directly for by the State of New Hampshire. However, this varies depending on the equipment used as well as the weather. Funding to the club is provided in part by membership dues as well as through the State's competitive Grant-In-Aid and Recreational Trails Program – both of which require a local match.

The Sno-Moles don't work with municipalities regularly other than permitting related to bridge construction. Although they have a positive working relationship, interviewees felt maintenance of the trail has not been a priority for municipalities. For example, they do not contribute to club activities directly with funding or "in-kind" through maintenance like brush hogging.

The club has extensive experience meeting with adjacent landowners, especially in the areas of Fitzwilliam and Rindge that make the connection between the Cheshire Rail Trail to the Monadnock Recreational Trail for wintertime use. There is a strong interest to establish similar relationships and rights to connect to the Ashuelot Rail Trail at the northern extent of the corridor. However, route possibilities have not been fully explored. The process to obtain permissions through agreements for use of public property is also subject

to change over time (such as when a parcel of land is sold). For that reason, it is desirable that trails follow a public road or trail right of way.

The group also provided the following written responses:

- *What Trail maintenance/development is club involved in/with?*

The Monadnock Sno-Moles club developed and made usable the entire rail bed after rails were removed from (Cheshire branch) Fitzwilliam state line to Stone Arch Bridge Marlborough/Swanzey and from Jaffrey to MA state line including connections between the two rail beds. Work included three bridges Monadnock branch and six bridges including an abutment on Cheshire branch; filling and ditching for flooded areas and low-lying bed areas thru rock ledges; bypasses where tunnels and bridges had been removed or filled-in. The club performs annual maintenance consisting of trimming, cutting, grading, upgrading, and repair. The club also opens and closes annually for winter use 60 gates on the corridor; 36 from Keene to Mass. state line with the balance on the Monadnock branch and Annett State Forest.

- *What equipment does club currently use too maintain trail? Benefit from additional equipment?*

The club owns and operates three commercial tracked grooming machines and two wide track snowmobiles along with the appropriate drags and accessories. It has brush cutting equipment and numerous hand tools limbers and saws. It utilizes volunteered and donated equipment from club members in the form of excavators, tractors, mowers, trucks for hauling, etc. to perform maintenance or repairs. Additional dedicated equipment would be beneficial removing reliance on donated and volunteer equipment.

- *Are there opportunities for other trail users to support club efforts? From of?*

There are opportunities for other trail users to support snowmobile club efforts. Historically, involvement in the majority of this trail has been very limited with a notable recent exception being work done by the Monadnock Conservancy in Fitzwilliam, all efforts have been limited to the Monadnock Sno-Moles. For that reason, support in the form of volunteering, materials and coordination is needed.

### **Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative (MRRTC)**

MRRTC is a volunteer group spearheaded by Swanzey Rail Trail Advisory Committee member Mike Kowalczyk. Formed in 2020, MRRTC's core members include representatives from the City of Keene and Town of Swanzey. The group's mission focuses on rehabilitating rail trails in Cheshire County: the Ashuelot Rail Trail, the Cheshire Rail Trail, and the Fort Hill Recreational Trail. Over the past year, Mike Kowalczyk has been conducting outreach to municipalities and trail user groups to share MRRTC's vision of an improved rail trail network in Cheshire County that connects with adjacent regions in Vermont and Massachusetts.

MRRTC has helped organize smaller work groups or "legs" of MRRTC that focus on particular sections of the rail trail network. One group is focusing on the Ashuelot Rail Trail, particularly in Winchester and Hinsdale, as well as the Fort Hill Recreational Trail. Another group is concentrating on the northern section Cheshire Rail Trail in points north of Keene, as well as possible connections across the Connecticut River to Bellows Falls, VT. A similar group has yet to coalesce along the southern section of the Cheshire Rail

Trail. The Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project was identified as a good opportunity to establish such group.

One priority of the MRRTC is to create a comprehensive cost estimate for needed rail trail improvements across the network. Cost estimates could include items like trail surface improvements, bridge renovations, wayfinding signage, trailhead and parking improvements, as well as permanent trail counters. At the time of interview, a methodology for developing cost estimates was still a work in progress. Preliminary figures, however, for trail surface improvements had been developed. Surface improvements were assumed to include establishment of a packed stone dust surface as well as drainage enhancements. A figure of \$25/linear foot was assumed for trail segments that required “simple” upgrades, i.e. segments that did not require extensive vegetation clearing or terrain alterations. “Complex” upgrades were estimated to cost \$40/linear foot. Estimates were based on past rail trail projects in Swanzeey as well as an assumed increase in labor/materials costs.

The cost estimates will be useful for project planning, but they are also critical for communicating with potential supporters and funders. MRRTC intends to solicit project funding from both granting entities as well as private organizations, such as major employers. Having specific figures in hand will help potential supporters understand in concrete terms what is needed and how their contribution would fit into the overall vision for a connected rail trail network in Cheshire County and beyond.

In regard to trail management, MRRTC sees snowmobile clubs as organizations well-positioned to own and oversee the use of equipment needed for trail mowing, ditching, and other maintenance activities. Since snowmobile clubs maintain segments of trail across municipal boundaries, it may make more sense for them to acquire trail maintenance equipment than it would for each municipality to do so. Members of other trail user groups could then join the snowmobile clubs in order to address trail maintenance activities that might not be high priority for snowmobile users. For example, for snowmobile use, mowing and vegetation clearing is only necessary once a year, prior to the start of the winter season.

### **Town of Fitzwilliam**

Comments from Town of Fitzwilliam staff as well as members of the Conservation Committee and Recreation Committee focused on how the quality of the trail surface discourages its use as a recreational resource. The trail’s rough, uneven, and sandy surface is difficult to run or jog on in many places. Kids as well as adults can find it challenging to bicycle on the trail. Poor drainage was also cited as a concern. It was noted that the Town of Fitzwilliam does not have a recreation center, making outdoor recreational resources like the Cheshire Rail Trail all the more important for meeting the needs of residents.

The importance of considering trail connections was another theme that emerged over the course of conversation. Connecting with trails in Winchendon, MA was generally appealing, in part because such a connection could provide an alternative to running on the road network. Although the Cheshire Rail Trail and Monadnock-Metacomet Trail intersect in Troy, that connection was also seen as important to interviewees. It was also noted how both the Cheshire Rail Trail and the Monadnock-Metacomet trail function as segments of the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail. Connecting ATV trails in Fitzwilliam have led to unauthorized motorized use of the Cheshire Rail Trail.

Relative to parking, interviewees noted how no parking signs had been posted at the Fitzwilliam Fire Station to discourage use of a nearby quarry as a swimming hole.

Overall, interviewees expressed interest and support for trail improvements and were interested in participating in the planning process moving forward.

### **Monadnock Conservancy**

The Monadnock Conservancy owns and manages the Chamberlain Conservation Area, an approximately 77-acre tract of protected land that borders on the Cheshire Rail Trail south of Sip Pond in Fitzwilliam. A spur trail on the property connects the Cheshire Rail Trail to a small peninsula on the edge of Sip Pond. In order to improve access to the property, the Conservancy recently made improvements to a parking area off of Old Turnpike Road. While planning for that project, coordination with the Monadnock Sno-Moles (the local snowmobile club) shifted thinking on parking lot design and the scope of the project. Supported in part by a NH Bureau of Trails Recreation Trails Program (RTP) Grant, the project focused on creating a horseshoe-type parking lot that would accommodate both snowmobile and equestrian trailers. The project also included creation of an access trail from the parking area to the rail trail, replacing one bridge on the Cheshire Rail Trail and re-decking another, making improvements to the spur trail, clearing some vegetation on the trail corridor, installing three culverts to fix drainage issues, and making trail surface improvements.

The Mondadnock Conservancy was awarded another round of RTP funding to support additional improvements on the Cheshire Rail Trail, which are slated for implementation in 2021. Planned improvements include replacement of a bridge over Scott Brook (just east of Templeton Turnpike), installation of several culverts to fix drainage issues, and trail surface enhancements, which will involve bringing crushed gravel to re-crown the trail and firm up sandy locations. The segment targeted for surface improvements is approximately two miles in length. In certain sections only a skim coat of a few inches of gravel will be needed, while in other 6-12 inches may be necessary.

Somewhat complicating trail surface improvements, there is a historic, dry-masonry railroad bridge to the east of the bridge slated for replacement. Also spanning Scott Brook, the historic bridge is not designed to support the heavy hauling equipment that may be required to bring in gravel. Consequently, either smaller vehicles will need to be used, or equipment will need to access the trail from the southeast via the lot on Old Turnpike Road.

The spur trail on Chamberlain Conservancy Area land is also of historical interest. The peninsula where the northern end of the trail terminates is the former site of an ice cutter's cabin or lodge. A railroad spur at one point served as an access point to load ice harvested from the pond.

Regarding trail management, ongoing maintenance of the Cheshire Rail Trail in the area is led by the Monadnock Sno-Moles. The Monadnock Conservancy does work with a limited set of volunteer trail stewards to maintain trails on its properties, but it doesn't have a standing network of trail volunteers that it can mobilize at any given time. Currently, volunteer activities are limited to those that don't involve power tools. During recent years, the Conservancy has been working towards establishing a risk management policy that may allow volunteers to take on expanded responsibilities in the future.

### **Town of Winchendon, MA and Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)**

The Town of Winchendon, MA is located just south of Fitzwilliam, across the Massachusetts-New Hampshire state line. MRPC is the regional planning agency, similar to SWRPC, whose service area includes the Town of Winchendon. Discussion with Winchendon planning department staff and MRPC transportation staff focused on possible strategies for connecting the Cheshire Rail Trail with the trail network in Winchendon.

The Cheshire Rail Trail ends where it intersects NH 12 in Fitzwilliam, but the abandoned railroad corridor continues southeast into Winchendon, passing briefly first through Rindge. Once the railroad corridor crosses the MA-NH state line, it transitions from public to private ownership, with the owning entity listed as Pan Am Southern LLC. Town of Winchendon planning staff noted that the Town hasn't had any recent



communications with that entity but would be willing to reach out to inquire about any plans that might exist for the corridor and whether there's potential for converting it to trail use.

Generally, Town of Winchendon staff expressed enthusiasm for exploring potential connections between the Cheshire Rail Trail and the North Central Pathway in Winchendon, whose northern terminus is located on the southeastern edge of downtown Winchendon and on the shore of Whitney pond. The Ware River Trail intersects with the North Central pathway just after it passes over Whitney pond. The North Central Pathway is a paved facility while the Ware River Trail remains in largely an unimproved state. If the Cheshire Rail Trail were to connect with both of these trails, users would be able to continue on for miles, either towards Gardner, MA via the North Central Pathway or in the direction of Templeton, MA and points southward via the Ware River Trail.

MRPC staff noted how the state funding environment in Massachusetts may be somewhat different than in New Hampshire. For example, in awarding state funding, MassDOT often requires that trail improvements include paved facilities, which can significantly raise the costs of trail projects.

### **Recommendations**

Consider the above information in the development of goals and objectives and any future outreach or project development activities.

**1) Previous trail planning**

- a) Please describe any municipal plans or policies that directly or indirectly address maintenance, development, or use of the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail.
- b) Has your municipality coordinated with or consulted other groups, organizations, agencies, consultants, etc. on trail-related planning or development? Examples could include a local school, trail-focused group like a snowmobile club, State or federal agency, outside municipality or body, etc. If so, please describe.
- c) Has your municipality identified opportunities for integrating use or development of the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail with community or economic development goals (e.g. public health, housing, recreation, tourism?). If so, please describe.

**2) Previous improvements**

- a) Please describe any capital improvements your municipality has made on the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail. If possible, include information about project dates, costs, funding sources, and outcomes.
- b) Would you be willing to share with SWRPC and/or other municipalities documents from past capital projects (e.g. budgets, site plans)?
- c) What funding mechanisms (e.g. government programs, private foundations, tax revenue) has the municipality pursued to support trail development or maintenance? Please describe.

**3) Trail programming**

- a) Does your municipality use the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail for public programming or activities? If so, please describe, including lead department, program frequency, and participation rates.

**4) Trail promotion**

- a) How do you promote or publicize the trail?

**5) Land use**

- a) What nearby land uses are **currently** or **could be** enhanced by the presence of the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? Please describe specific locations/examples for the following categories:
  - i) Parks
  - ii) Rivers/ponds/lakes
  - iii) Natural/conservation land
  - iv) Housing
  - v) Community facilities (e.g. library, schools)
  - vi) Businesses/commercial development
  - vii) Other
- b) What nearby land uses that *conflict with* the presence of the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? Please describe specific locations as well as any potential mitigation measures that your community has considered.
- c) What development or redevelopment opportunities exist along or near the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail?

**6) Encroachment**

- a) Are you aware of any encroachment onto the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail right of way? If so, please describe, including locations, severity, and any countermeasures taken (e.g. signs, education).
- b) To what degree has trespassing from the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail onto adjacent private property been an issue? Please describe problematic locations and any countermeasures taken.

**7) Trail-town Connections**

- a) How easy or difficult is it for visitors to find and access downtown, town centers or village areas from the trail? Please address the following:
  - i) Can people use sidewalks to travel from the trail to downtown/town centers/village areas?
  - ii) Can people biking use other trails, on-road bike lanes, or sharrow-marked roadway to travel from the trail to downtown/town centers/village areas?
  - iii) Is there wayfinding signage that directs trail users towards downtown/town centers/village areas?
- b) How easy or difficult is it for trail users to access the trail from:
  - i) Residential areas
  - ii) Schools
  - iii) Key businesses outside of downtown or central business districts
  - iv) Parks and natural areas
  - v) Waterfront recreational areas
  - vi) Lodging facilities, e.g. bed and breakfasts and hotels
- c) Where do snowmobiles connect to the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail from other trails? How about destinations such as gas stations, convenience stores or restaurants?
- d) Does the municipality have plans to improve connections between the trail and key town destinations? Please explain:

**8) Trailheads and parking**

- a) What locations are used as “trailheads?” Please describe each location.
- b) Is there a need for additional parking or other improvements at trailheads? What are specific improvements that have been proposed?
- c) Do trailhead parking areas accommodate larger vehicle or vehicle/trailer combinations such as those carrying horses or snowmobiles?

**9) Maintenance**

- a) Does your municipality perform any of the following maintenance activities on the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? For each task, please indicate “yes” or “no” as well as frequency. To the extent you are aware of unit costs (time and money), please share.
  - i) Mowing
  - ii) Grading
  - iii) Filling washed out or wet areas

- iv) Repaving
  - v) Snow removal
  - vi) Clearing fallen boughs or downed trees
  - vii) Replacing/fixing signage
  - viii) Repainting crosswalks
  - ix) Repairing Bridges
  - x) Other
- b) Does your municipality coordinate with volunteer groups who perform maintenance on the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? If so, please describe formal or informal processes for coordinating on-trail maintenance.
- c) Is there anything else that you would like to add about trail maintenance?

**10) Enforcement**

- a) Describe concerns and experiences related to safety and law enforcement (including violations of trail rules).

**11) Future trail development**

- a) Is your municipality planning on making future improvements to the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? If so please describe planned activities, funding source(s), and timeframe.

**12) What did we miss?**

- a) Feel free to share anything else you would like to highlight about the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail



- **Trainings/support**
  - Does your agency/office provide groups with training related to trail maintenance, improvement, funding? What is the timing, audience, and general content?
- **Previous trail planning**
  - Not including the State Trails Plan, please describe any plans or policies that directly or indirectly address maintenance, development, or use of the Ashuelot Rail Trail.
  - How do you coordinate with or consult with other groups, organizations, agencies, consultants, etc. on trail-related planning or development? Examples could include a local school, trail-focused group like a snowmobile club, State or federal agency, municipal entity, etc.
- **Previous improvements**
  - Please describe any capital improvements your agency has made on the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail. If possible, include information about project dates, costs, funding sources, and outcomes.
  - Would you be willing to share with SWRPC documents from past capital projects (e.g. budgets, site plans)?
  - What funding mechanisms, if any, has your agency pursued to support Southern Cheshire Rail Trail development or maintenance? Please describe. Examples might include federal sources, state-appropriated monies, agreements with municipal entities, or public-private partnerships. Feel free to discuss any notable funding mechanisms employed on other State-owned rail trails.
- **Trail programming**
  - Does your agency use the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail for public programming or activities? If so, please describe, including lead department, program frequency, and participation rates.
- **Trail promotion**
  - How does your agency promote or publicize the trail?
- **Land use**
  - Are you aware of nearby land uses are **currently** or **could be** enhanced by the presence of the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? Please describe specific locations/examples for the following categories:
    - Parks
    - Rivers/ponds/lakes
    - Natural/conservation land
    - Housing
    - Community facilities (e.g. library, schools)
    - Businesses/commercial development
    - Other
  - Are you aware of land uses that *conflict with* the presence of the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? Please describe specific locations as well as any potential mitigation measures that you have considered.
  - Are you aware of other particular development or redevelopment opportunities that exist along or near the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail?

- **Encroachment**

- Are you aware of any encroachment onto the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail right of way? If so, please describe, including locations, severity, and any countermeasures taken (e.g. signs, education).
- To what degree has trespassing from the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail onto adjacent private property been an issue? Please describe problematic locations and any countermeasures taken.

- **Trail-town Connections**

- Are you aware of particular areas where better access to the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail has been requested or is needed? If so, please describe.
- Where do snowmobiles connect to the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail from other trails? How about destinations such as gas stations, convenience stores or restaurants?
- Have you considered ways to improve connections between the Trail and any key destinations? Please explain:

- **Trailheads and parking**

- What locations along the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail are used as “trailheads?” Please describe each location.
- Is there a need for additional parking or other improvements at trailheads? What are specific improvements that have been proposed, if any?
- Do trailhead parking areas accommodate larger vehicle or vehicle/trailer combinations such as those carrying horses or snowmobiles?

- **Maintenance**

- Does your agency directly perform any of the following maintenance activities on the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? For each task, please indicate “yes” or “no” as well as frequency. To the extent you are aware of unit costs (time and money), please share.
  - Mowing
  - Grading
  - Filling washed out or wet areas
  - Repaving
  - Snow removal
  - Clearing fallen boughs or downed trees
  - Replacing/fixing signage
  - Repainting crosswalks
  - Repairing Bridges
  - Other
- Does your municipality coordinate with volunteer groups who perform maintenance on the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? If so, please describe formal or informal processes for coordinating on-trail maintenance.
- Is there anything else that you would like to add about trail maintenance?

- **Enforcement**

- Describe concerns and experiences related to safety and law enforcement on the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail (including violations of trail rules).
- **Future trail development**
  - What future improvements are planned for the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail? If so please describe planned activities, funding source(s), and timeframe.
- **What did we miss?**
  - Feel free to share anything else you would like to highlight about the Southern Cheshire Rail Trail.

- **Respondent Information**

- What is your name? If more than one person is contributing to this survey response, please indicate the name of each respondent.
- For which group/organization are you responding?
- What is/are your position(s) within the group/organization (e.g. volunteer, member, president)?

- **Group Information**

- In what year was your organization founded?
- How frequently does your group/organization meet? (Please include both off-trail and on-trail gatherings.)
- How many individuals are members of your group/organization?

- **Trail User Survey**

- To your knowledge, how many members of your group/organization have taken the Plan for [Cheshire Rail Trail online Trail User Survey](#)?
- If you haven't done so already, would you be willing to promote the online survey to your group/organization's membership?

- **Trail Use**

- What do members of your group do on the Cheshire Rail Trail? Please select all that apply.
  - Walk
  - Hike
  - Jog/Run
  - Bike
  - Cross-country ski
  - Snowshoe
  - Snowmobile
  - Dogsled
  - Other (please describe)
- Which sections of the trail does your group use the most? If possible, use specific landmarks or cross streets to describe trail sections. If needed, please reference the online map [here](#).
- Which trail access points do members of your group/organization generally use when visiting the trail? Please describe access points referencing landmarks and/or cross streets. If needed, please reference the online map [here](#).

- **Trail Conditions/Facilities**

- There are many ways to improve the trail. Please rank the following trail improvement, with number one represent your top priority. If you *oppose* a listed improvement, select "Opposed" from the drop-down menu.
  - Wider path
  - Benches



- Lighting
- Directional signs and maps
- Trail etiquette signs
- New or improved trailheads/parking areas
- Better road crossings
- Access to shops, etc.
- Improving trail surface condition with packed gravel
- Trail “branding” and promotion
- Trail patrols/enforcement
- Restrooms
- Drinking fountains
- Signs about places history, nature, etc.
- Pet waste stations
- If you would like to describe in more detail your priorities listed above, please do so here. Also feel free to describe trail priorities *not* listed above. If possible, please identify specific locations for potential improvement by referencing landmarks and cross streets. An online map of the trail is available [here](#).
- **Trail Stewardship**
  - Does your group/organization volunteer time to help with any of the following management tasks on the Cheshire Rail Trail? If so, please describe location, frequency, and equipment used.
    - Mowing
    - Cutting back trailside brush
    - Removing downed trees
    - Maintaining trail surface (grading, maintaining drainage features)
    - Repairing bridges
    - Picking up trash
    - Snow grooming
    - Other (please specify)
  - If given the opportunity, would members of your group/organization volunteer time help with any of the following activities on the Cheshire Rail trail? (Choices: Yes, No, Maybe, Already Doing)
    - Mowing
    - Cutting back trailside brush
    - Removing downed trees
    - Maintaining trail surface (grading, maintaining drainage features)
    - Repairing bridges
    - Picking up trash

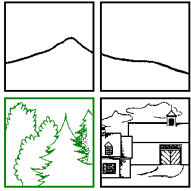
- Grooming
- Other (please specify)
- Would members of your group/organization consider paying an annual fee to help maintain the trail? (If members of your group already pay a fee, e.g. through snowmobile registrations, please describe whether group members would be willing to contribute additional dollars, if it meant funding additional trail improvements.)
- **Coordination**
  - Has your group/organization coordinated with other groups/organizations on trail maintenance or development? Hypothetical examples include a snowmobile club working with a town parks and recreation department to trim brush or an equestrian club working with a cycling club to raise money for trail improvements. Please describe any coordinated efforts in which your group/organization has participated.
  - Would your group/organization be interested in establishing a trail user group focused on improving the trail for all permitted users?
  - Would members of your group/organization be interested in organizing fundraisers with other trail user groups to support improving the trail?
- **Balancing the Needs of Multiple Groups**
  - Please describe how use of the Cheshire Rail Trail by members of your group/organization are compatible or incompatible with the following groups (Choice: Compatible, Incompatible - Why?):
    - Walkers/hikers/joggers
    - Bicyclists
    - Cross-country skiers
    - Snowshoers
    - Snowmobilers
    - Equestrians
    - Mushers (dogsledders)
    - OHRV users: ATV riders and trail bike riders
    - Other (please specify)
  - What on-trail changes might improve compatibility between your group/organization and other trail users?
- **Connectivity**
  - Does your group use the Cheshire Rail Trail to connect to other trails? If so, please provide the name and location of any trails that you access from the Cheshire Rail Trail.
- **Education**
  - Would members of your organization be interested in participating in any of the following trainings, should they be offered?
    - How to coordinate with state agencies and local government on volunteer-led trail maintenance and development

- Developing a trail maintenance plan
  - Trail maintenance techniques
  - Recruiting volunteers for rail trail maintenance
  - Leading on-trail volunteer events
  - Fundraising for rail trail projects
- **Anything else?**
    - If you have additional thoughts or opinions related to the Cheshire Rail Trail, please feel free to share them here.
  - **Contact Information**
    - What is your email address? (If available, please provide an organizational e-mail address?)
    - If applicable, what is the web address of your organization's website?

# **Appendix C: Project Working Group**

## Meeting 1





***Southwest Region Planning Commission***  
*37 Ashuelot Street      Keene, NH 03431      603-357-0557      Fax 357-7440*

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## **Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Working Group**

**December 1, 2020  
4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

Join by Computer: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83853283920>

Join by Phone: 646-558-8656

Meeting ID: 838 5328 3920  
Password: 993674

## **Agenda**

- I. Welcome & Introductions (10 minutes)
- II. Project Scope & Timeline (10 minutes)
- III. Your Vision (15 minutes)
- IV. Online Survey, Resources and Project Promotion (15 minutes)
- V. Next Meeting
- VI. Adjourn



# **Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Working Group Meeting #1**

## **Meeting Summary**

**December 1, 2020**

**Present:** Matthew Bachler, *Town of Swanzey*; Sherry Bean, *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission*; Rick Brackett, *Monadnock Conservancy*; Michael Branley, *Town of Swanzey*; Jesse Creedy Powers, *Division of Parks and Recreation, NH Department of Natural and Cultural Resources*; Tom Duston, *Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail Coalition*; Steve Fortier, *Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce*; Mary Guild, *Town of Troy*; Paul Kotila, *Town of Fitzwilliam*; Mike Kowalczyk, *Swanzey Rail Trails Advisory Committee/Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative*; Don Lussier, *City of Keene*; Tracy Murphy, *Town of Winchendon*; Charles Redfern, *NH Rail Trails Coalition*; Frank Richter, *Pathways for Keene*; Larry Robinson, *Town of Marlborough/Southwest Region Planning Commission*; Avis Rosenfield, *NH Horse Council/NH State Trails Plan Stakeholder Advisory Committee*; Rowland Russell, *Antioch University New England*; Will Schoefmann, *City of Keene*; Laura Susmann, *New Hampshire Horse Council/Monadnock Happy Trails Association*; Bruce Tranter, *Monadnock Sno-Moles*; Rick Ward, *Town of Winchendon*; Kevin Woolley, *Town of Fitzwilliam*.

Staff members present were Henry Underwood, *GIS Specialist/Planner* and Todd Horner, *Planner*.

### **I. Welcome & Introductions**

Henry Underwood welcomed attendees to the meeting at approximately 4:00 p.m. and introductions were made. Referring to a map and PowerPoint presentation, he explained that the intent of the Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project is to plan for the Cheshire Rail Trail from its intersection with the Ashuelot Rail Trail at Emerald Street in Keene south to the Massachusetts state line. Connections to the former railbed in Massachusetts and other trails would also be of interest.

Avis Rosenfield provided an introduction to the [New Hampshire State Trails Plan update](#), a parallel and related effort.

### **II. Project Scope & Timeline**

Henry Underwood explained that the current NH State Rail Trails Plan identifies over 300 miles of State-owned trails, with approximately 90 miles in the Monadnock Region, including the Cheshire Rail Trail. He said the Plan refers to the “Cheshire Branch” as having a total of 42 miles between the Massachusetts state line and a point near the intersection of NH 12 and NH 123 East in Walpole. According to the Plan, the railroad opened in 1849 and was abandoned in 1972, featured right-of-way widths between 82.5 feet and 99 feet, and includes 36 bridges. He said the corridor was purchased using federal funds by the State in the 1990’s and wintertime use by snowmobiles is allowed throughout the majority of the corridor (the exception being portions of the trail in the City of Keene).

Henry Underwood said the purpose of bringing a working group together is to develop a 10-year plan (Plan) for the trail, including a vision, goals, and objectives as well as specific projects. Attendees reviewed a tentative timeline for the planning project, which aims to conclude by May of 2021. He pointed out that throughout the timeline, memos and other products would be sent to the group for review and feedback. He further summarized individual components and descriptions of tasks within the project, including potential roles and responsibilities of the Working Group, which includes representatives from the five host

communities: Keene, Swanzey, Marlborough, Troy, and Fitzwilliam. He noted that the Working Group is scheduled to meet three times over the course of the project to cover the following topics:

1. Project scope, a vision for the trail, the online survey, and project promotion.
2. A presentation on the results of SWRPC's existing conditions assessment, as well as a discussion about draft goals and objectives, and an implementation plan.
3. A discussion about the final draft of the Plan, project prioritization, and next steps relating to Plan promotion and implementation.

Henry Underwood then described the proposed existing conditions assessment, public outreach approach, planned needs analysis, and other Plan components.

Tom Duston asked how current ideas like a bridge over NH 101 in Keene or improving the section near Eastern Avenue in Keene would appear in the Plan. Henry Underwood said these were examples of projects that would appear in the Implementation Plan. Mike Kowalczyk confirmed that connections to other trails like the North Central Pathway in Winchendon, MA would be part of discussions and project ideas in the Implementation Plan.

Frank Richter asked about the next steps beyond completion of the Plan. Henry Underwood said that it would be up to individual communities and others to consider formal adoption or inclusion of the Plan as part of an existing planning document such as a master plan. Implementation of the project ideas themselves would vary based on ownership and maintenance responsibilities in an area, the type of improvement, available funding, and other factors.

### **III. Your Vision**

Henry Underwood asked attendees to think about their top goals related to the Trail. These initial priorities would be used to assist staff in developing draft goals, objectives and strategies. Construction ideas as well as projects around things like signage or public awareness would be beneficial. The following comments were made:

- City of Keene:
  - o The proposed connection and overpass of NH 101 (locally referred to as the Transportation Heritage Trail Project).
  - o Partnering with the Town of Swanzey in the area near Joslin Station Road and the larger upcoming trail improvement project (funded through the NHDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program).
  - o Improving the integrity and safety (railings and other features) of the Stone Arch Bridge.
  - o Improvement of the section of trail between the existing Eastern Avenue trailhead south to the future overpass location (currently Phase I of the Transportation Heritage Trail Project).
  - o Swanzey Factory Road trailhead parking and a potential trail overpass.
  - o Partnering with the Town of Swanzey on ideas for branding, signage and funding sources that could be utilized regionwide for consistency.
- Town of Swanzey:
  - o Support for the Transportation Heritage Trail Project improvements already mentioned.
  - o Improved access such as through parking areas to make it easier for people to get onto the trail.
  - o Creating an easy-to-navigate funding guide to jump-start implementation.
- Mike Kowalczyk:
  - o Swanzey Factory Road overpass.
  - o Connection with the North Central Pathway in Winchendon, MA.
  - o Improving parking.

- Larry Robinson:
  - o Establishing a parking area near Webb Depot Road near the overpass.
  - o Protecting the historic bridge that passes over Webb Depot Road.
  - o Looking in the vicinity of the NHDOT Troy Patrol Shed (164 Monadnock Highway) for an additional access point.
  - o Improving the former Brnger property (304 Monadnock Highway, Swanzey, Map 16 Lot 4) – currently abandoned.
- Paul Kotila:
  - o Improving the crossing on NH 119. The crossing was formerly a tunnel that was filled in. The former railbed leading to the crossing is unusable due to drainage issues.
  - o Addressing the slope issues at the at grade crossing at Royalston Road resulting from the removal of the stone arch bridge.
  - o There is a difficult crossing and connectivity issue at the southern end of the trail at NH 12.
  - o There is a need for more information to be provided to the public about finding and navigating the Trail as well as cultural and historical information associated with sections of trail.
- Kevin Woolley:
  - o The Trail condition is in need of improvement (there are areas that are excessively sandy and not passable with normal bikes).
  - o Clean-up along the Trail is needed (e.g. he noted a washing machine on the side of the Trail).
- Laura Susmann:
  - o Equestrian access is very important, including large enough parking areas for horse trailers (the Chamberlain Conservation Area in Fitzwilliam is a good example). The Trail would benefit from a number of these areas throughout the length of the Trail.
  - o Ensuring bridges are safely built for horses (esp. width and weight).
  - o A printable, pocket-size trail map in addition to trailhead kiosks would be beneficial since many areas do not have adequate phone or GPS reception.
  - o Any opportunities to head south into Massachusetts from the Chamberlain Conservation Area.
- Avis Rosenfield:
  - o Promoting good etiquette on the Trail by various users (e.g. who yields to whom).
  - o Signage to indicate mile marker, town name, street name.
- Rick Ward:
  - o Connecting the Cheshire Rail Trail would effectively extend the Trail to an already “excellent” connection from Winchendon, MA to Gardner, MA.
- Tracy Murphy:
  - o A trail connection to New Hampshire would be a major asset to a large population in town that snowmobiles use.
- Tom Duston:
  - o Improving but at the same time avoiding excessive signage (including advertising).
- Bruce Tranter:
  - o Connecting the Cheshire Rail Trail to the Ashuelot Rail Trail just south of Keene would benefit snowmobiles, equestrians and others. Groomers currently have to turn around just south of the Keene City line. Chuck Redfern suggested Senator Jay Kahn and the Swanzey-affiliated snowmobile club as partners to explore an east-west connection to the Ashuelot Rail Trail.
  - o Discussing the potential for snowmobiles to continue into the City of Keene to reach a connector trail (for the purpose of going around Keene).
  - o Working with Bureau of Trails/snowmobile clubs to approve signage.

- Continuing to improve safety at highway crossings (the Sno Moles were successful in having signage installed on NH 119 and US 202, but pedestrian beacons and a marked crosswalk were denied).
- Examining routes to navigate through or around Winchendon, MA by snowmobile that avoid busy streets.

#### **IV. Online Survey, Resources and Project Promotion**

Henry Underwood reviewed a variety of online resources and requested help from attendees to promote the [project webpage](#), [online survey](#) and [Challenges & Opportunities Map](#).

#### **V. Next Meeting**

Henry Underwood said he would initiate a meeting poll for dates in January or February and alert participants of the time via e-mail and the project webpage.

#### **VI. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

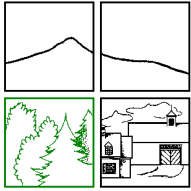
Henry Underwood  
GIS Specialist/Planner

# **Appendix C: Project Working Group**

## Meeting 2







***Southwest Region Planning Commission***  
*37 Ashuelot Street      Keene, NH 03431      603-357-0557      Fax 357-7440*

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## **Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Working Group**

**February 24, 2021  
12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.**

Join by Computer: <http://bit.ly/Feb24CRTSWG21>

Join by Phone: 646-558-8656

Meeting ID: 882 6713 2446  
Passcode: 788638

## **Agenda**

- I. Welcome
- II. Updates on Existing Condition Assessment and Public Outreach Activities (15 minutes)
- III. Discussion on Draft Goals & Objectives, Implementation Plan (60 minutes)
- IV. Other Matters
- V. Next Meeting
- VI. Adjourn

# **Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project Working Group Meeting #2**

## **Meeting Summary**

**February 24, 2021**

**Present:** Matthew Bachler, *Town of Swanzey*; Andy Bohannon, *City of Keene Parks & Rec Department*; Rick Brackett, *Monadnock Conservancy*; Craig Della Penna, *The Murphys Realtors*; Tom Duston, *Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail Coalition*; Paul Kotila, *Town of Fitzwilliam*; Mike Kowalczyk, *Swanzey Rail Trails Advisory Committee/Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative*; Bridget Likely, *Appalachian Mountain Club*; Kathryn Lynch, *Town of Hinsdale*; Charles Redfern, *Pathways for Keene/NH Rail Trails Coalition*; Larry Robinson, *Town of Marlborough/Southwest Region Planning Commission*; Rowland Russell, *City of Keene Bicycle Pedestrian Pathway Advisory Committee/Antioch University New England*; Will Schoefmann, *City of Keene*; Bruce Tranter, *Monadnock Sno-Moles*; Rick Ward, *Town of Winchendon, MA*; Shelley Winters, *New Hampshire Department of Transportation Bureau of Rail & Transit*; Kevin Woolley, *Town of Fitzwilliam*.

Staff members present were Henry Underwood, *GIS Specialist/Planner* and Todd Horner, *Planner*.

### **I. Welcome & Introductions**

Henry Underwood welcomed attendees to the meeting at approximately 12:00 p.m. Using presentation slides, he reviewed the goals of the project, study area and estimated timeline. He invited individuals who were not able to attend the first project meeting or did not have time to share their top goals for the next ten years to share them with the group.

- Chuck Redfern shared that rehabilitating the 216-foot Prowse Memorial Bridge and installing it along the trail over NH 101 in Keene was among Pathways for Keene's top priorities.
- Rowland Russell added that in addition to safe crossings over both NH 101 and Swanzey Factory Road an additional Keene priority was establishing wayfinding and branding along the entire trail. Another priority was adding amenities and services at key points and parking areas – things like bike repair stations, directions to water and bathrooms or even providing these amenities along the trail.
- Paul Kotila shared that priorities in Fitzwilliam include improving trail surfaces in areas. In some cases areas are impassible in the summer due to drainage issues. One section exists between Royalston Road and NH 119. A second section exists south of NH 12 to Massachusetts. Improving crossings and safety at NH 12 and NH 119 are also priorities.
- Mike Kowalczyk added that in the future the trail connection to Winchendon, MA should be restored to take advantage of other improved trails in that area (e.g. River Trail and Mass Central Rail Trail). He also pointed out that there are a couple of areas where roads or drainage issues (and the lack of a bridge or tunnel) require trail users to bypass the original corridor and scenic parts of the corridor.

### **II. Updates on Existing Condition Assessment and Public Outreach Activities**

Henry Underwood updated attendees on the results of the online survey and thanked them for their help promoting the opportunity in their networks. He said over 700 responses were received that would be used to inform priorities and projects and even serve as an outreach tool for future planning or volunteer efforts.

He said a complete summary would be published on the project website in the spring and provided selected findings:

- Just over half of respondents worked within walking or biking distance of the trail (51.2%) and closer to two-thirds live within walking or biking distance (63.8%).
- When asked about use of the trail during the last year, the most common trip purposes were recreation (87.6%) and exercising (62.8%). A small minority of respondents indicated they used the trail for their work commute (3.8%) or shopping/errands (3.5%).
- The most popular modes of travel by respondents were on foot (62.8%), bicycle (45.4%) and snowmobile (34.7%).
- Most respondents indicated they did not have safety concerns related to the trail (55.0%) however many respondents identified uneven surfaces (20.1%), vehicle traffic at trail crossings (13.4%), dogs or other animals (10.9%), encountering unauthorized motorized vehicles (10.2%) and other potential concerns.
- A demographic analysis of the age of respondents and U.S. Census Bureau data for Cheshire County indicated that younger individuals (under the age of 24) were underrepresented in the survey responses and individuals ages 35-64 were overrepresented when compared to the population as a whole.
- Overall, the top three potential improvements for the trail were: Improving Trail Surface Condition with Packed Gravel (39.5%), New or Improved Trailheads/Parking Areas (32.7%) and Directional Signs and Maps (28.1%).
- Almost half of the participants (355) indicated they would be willing to participate in a range of volunteer activities like clean-up days, construction, trimming vegetation, and more.

Henry Underwood listed and briefly summarized one-on-one interviews conducted thus far by Todd Horner of SWRPC staff. The list of interviewees included:

- New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) Bureau of Rail and Transit.
- Monadnock Regional Rail Trail Collaborative (MRRTC). The interviewee is also a member of the Swanzey Rail Trail Advisory Committee.
- The Town of Fitzwilliam. Interviewees included municipal staff as well as members of the Conservation Commission and Recreation Commissions.
- Monadnock Conservancy.
- The Town of Winchendon, MA.
- Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC), whose service area includes Winchendon, MA.

Craig Della Penna addressed questions and concerns related to improving the trail surface in Massachusetts. In the 1990s, communities as well as the State transportation agency (MassDOT) understood that a paved surface was required. That has since been changed to allow for stone dust. Stone dust is the recommended surface treatment in other states. Craig Della Penna further commented that the Mass Central Rail Trail (south of Winchendon, MA) is the longest rail trail in the northeast and there is a large opportunity for New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Vermont to look at making trail connections on a much larger scale. Henry Underwood responded that SWRPC's planning project was intended to be a parallel and complementary effort to the State of New Hampshire's own planning projects.

### **III. Discussion on Draft Goals & Objectives, Implementation Plan**

Henry Underwood introduced the next discussion around a vision, goals and objectives that would be included in the Cheshire Rail Trail Plan. Mike Kowalczyk suggested the vision be revised to include an element about connecting the trail to other destinations outside of the State. Some attendees provided a

“thumbs up” to indicate the draft vision was satisfactory. Henry Underwood encouraged participants to submit additional feedback and comments in the chat following the meeting.

Attendees reviewed and provided feedback on six draft goals and objectives. First, attendees pointed out missing items and the need for clarification with respect to the goals:

- Rowland Russell commented that there needs to be a goal about connectivity to other trail systems.
- Tom Duston asked about where use of all-terrain vehicles (ATV) fit into the discussion about goals and objectives, specifically Goal 5 mentioning “all user groups.” Henry Underwood replied that this phrase refers to existing permitted user groups. Shelley Winters commented that this corridor was acquired through funding from the Federal Highway Administration’s Transportation Enhancements program and that it does have a motorized use restriction that prohibits ATVs. It would be a very cumbersome process for this to be changed and would require action by each municipality. She further commented that to her knowledge no community in the nation had successfully achieved this status change. Henry Underwood commented that at this point there have been survey responses in favor of a change, however, it has not come up in discussions with municipal officials.
- Mike Kowalczyk added that a goal and/or objective dedicated to maintenance is needed. Paul Kotila agreed and said funding, including funding for maintenance should also be addressed in a goal and/or objective.
- Paul Kotila commented that the list of goals and objectives was very long and not prioritized. He said in terms of implementation, prioritization will be needed and may have differing results depending on where trail stakeholders are geographically (e.g. priorities for Keene versus priorities for Fitzwilliam). He said to be successful, the plan should provide guidance in this area. Henry Underwood responded that this context can be provided in the final Plan deliverable as well as through guidance at the third meeting.

Attendees reviewed and provided feedback on objectives related to **Goal 1: Increase awareness of the trail, among both local residents and visitors.**

- Chuck Redfern commented that the [Granite State Ambassadors](#), recognized by the State of New Hampshire, hosts an event each year at [The Big E](#). They have asked for promotional materials (e.g. “rack cards”) related to rail trails to distribute at the event. He also asked if the State was working to develop standard trail signs. Shelley Winters clarified that since this trail is managed under a cooperative agreement with Bureau of Trails that they would have the responsibility to lead this effort. Henry Underwood stated that this new information could be used to adjust Objective 7.
- Craig Della Penna shared a story of a [New York report](#) that showed one trail was so busy that it impressed the governor to the extent that the State took on 400 miles of additional trail improvements in 4 years and completed them in December of 2020. In Massachusetts, this led to meetings of the *Trails Team* by Governor Baker and agencies with trails in their jurisdictions. The outcome resulted in “silos” being removed and funding being increased.

With respect to **Goal 2: Increase use of the trail as an alternative for trips made by car**, attendees provided the following comments:

- Mike Kowalczyk asked about the role of businesses to provide facilities to encourage people to walk or bike (e.g. lockers, showers, bike parking, storage).
- Rowland Russell spoke in support of calling out bike parking and bike garages as specific amenities.

- Tom Duston reminded attendees that “mixed mode” trips were important to think about (for example, a commuter driving some distance and using the trail for a part of their trip). These users will benefit from improved parking areas and new navigation signage.

Attendees reviewed and commented on **Goal 3: Expand opportunities for physical activity and outdoor experiences.**

- Bridget Likely commented that the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail should be added to the list of connecting trails.

Attendees reviewed but did not provide comments on **Goal 4: Enhance regional and local economies.** With respect to **Goal 5: Create an on-trail experience that is accessible, safe and welcoming for all ages, abilities and user groups,** attendees offered a number of comments:

- Rowland Russell suggested specifying amenities within the objective (bike repair, map kiosks, seating, etc.).
- Bridget Likely pointed out that although the goal area mentions accessibility there isn’t an objective that address Americans with Disabilities Act (ACT) standards or related needs directly. Henry Underwood commented that resources related to accessibility provided in a separate project will be beneficial in drafting a new objective.

Attendees reviewed and commented on **Goal 6: Facilitate communication and collaboration among trail stakeholders** and its related objectives:

- Chuck Redfern said that an issue in our region was that smaller towns were often fiscally constrained, making it difficult for large project funds. He mentioned that communities may be able to creatively fund such projects. As an example, he shared that the large solar array planned for Fitzwilliam would be operated by a large national company that may have ways to fund improvements in such “host” communities through grants or donations. Hinsdale’s cooperation with Brattleboro on the Connecticut River Bridge projects may be another opportunity to present funding needs. Otherwise, local match requirements will be an issue. He also commented that trail improvements take time – Keene’s project took 20 years to develop.
- Mike Kowalczyk contributed that Goal 6 was a good “home” for an objective specific to maintenance, funding maintenance, and collaboration on maintenance.
- Paul Kotila said there was a need to address ways of achieving the objective that could be measured over time. Additionally, terms such as “enhance” lack clarity on what actually needs to happen. He suggested replacing the objective about joining efforts of Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative with “continuous, ongoing interaction with the variety of groups that relate to the trail in order to...” Henry Underwood noted one of SWRPC’s previous trail planning efforts featured a variety of potential performance measures, however, the current project would not allow time to develop and agree on specific measures for each objective.

Henry Underwood encouraged attendees to continue to contribute to and promote the project’s Challenges and Opportunities interactive map as a way to identify specific projects that would be listed in an implementation plan.

#### **IV. Other Matters**

Henry Underwood asked if attendees had general questions about the project or updates related to the trail to share.



- Rick Ward updated the group that the Town of Winchendon requested assistance from the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission with help performing a feasibility study to connect the North Central Pathway to New Hampshire as well as other points westward in Massachusetts.
- Tom Duston advocated for the need to add restrooms or privies along the trail which can often be low maintenance.
- Paul Kotila asked about the composition of the Working Group and SWRPC's experience with other cross-town efforts. Henry Underwood explained that this varies depending on the project and that the current effort is less formal than other efforts.
- Andy Bohannon advocated for the continued focus on connecting to Massachusetts trails and that the City of Keene was becoming more and more a destination for mountain bikers. He impressed upon attendees the need to brand and market the trail system in its connectivity would be critical in attracting people to the area and especially to local downtowns. He said he was in the process of requesting technical support from the University of New Hampshire's [Downtowns & Trails](#) program related to this objective. He expected discussions to continue following the pandemic.

## **V. Next Meeting**

Henry Underwood said he would initiate a meeting poll for the third and final project meeting.

## **VI. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Henry Underwood  
GIS Specialist/Planner

# **Appendix C: Project Working Group**

## **Meeting 3**



**Cheshire Rail Trail South Planning Project  
Working Group Meeting #3**

**Meeting Summary**

**June 2, 2021**

**Present:** Sherry Bean, *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission*; Andy Bohannon, *City of Keene Parks & Recreation Department*; Debbie Briscoe, *NH Horse Council Trails Committee*; Tom Coneys, *Monadnock Sno-Moles*; Tom Duston, *Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail Coalition*; Jay House, *Swanzey Rail Trails Advisory Committee*; Paul Kotila, *Town of Fitzwilliam*; Charles Redfern, *Pathways for Keene/NH Rail Trails Coalition*; Rowland Russell, *City of Keene Bicycle Pedestrian Pathway Advisory Committee/Antioch University New England*; Alexis Rudko, *New Hampshire Department of Parks and Recreation Bureau of Trails*; Kevin Woolley, *Town of Fitzwilliam*; Tricia Zahn, *Cheshire Medical Center*.

Staff members present were Henry Underwood, GIS Specialist/Planner and Todd Horner, Planner.

**I. Welcome**

Henry Underwood welcomed attendees and started the meeting at approximately 11:00 a.m.

**II. February 24, 2021 Meeting Summary**

There were no comments related to the meeting summary.

**III. Existing Condition Assessment and Public Outreach Activities**

Henry Underwood informed attendees that memos related to the online survey and seven one-on-one interviews were provided in the meeting packet and were available on the project webpage. The memos expand upon findings shared at the previous meeting. He said that attendees, particularly those representing municipalities, may be interested in responses from only their community and could contact him to request the information.

Henry Underwood provided updates on various other data collection activities. Last fall, Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) staff designed and piloted a condition assessment that included condition ratings of the Cheshire Rail Trail South (Trail) as well as photos. Next he provided a demonstration on how to utilize interactive maps at the project website to view the results.

Henry Underwood provided an update on automated Trail counts of people walking and biking conducted during the summer and fall of 2020. He said that reports were delayed and would be released via the project webpage as the data was made available by the equipment vendor. He provided a demonstration of where to find the reports as well as how to read the report information using a report for a study site north of Rockwood Pond Road in Fitzwilliam.

Rowland Russell complimented the interactive maps and asked if it would be possible to make a “living” map that continued to accept contributions. Henry Underwood said that the current *Challenges and Opportunities* interactive map allows public comments and photos and that he would internally discuss the ability to continue to maintain and promote the map. Rowland Russell elaborated that the maps were a good start to a permanent interactive map of the Trail and that others may find value in continuing to

contribute them. He encouraged SWRPC to consider being the host for the information (including photos, points of interest, etc.).

#### **IV. Plan Elements**

##### **a. Final Draft of Vision, Goals & Objectives**

Henry Underwood said that in the last meeting the group reviewed a draft vision, goals and objectives related to the Trail. The final draft shared with the packet addressed specific feedback provided during the previous working group meeting including mentioning connectivity to other trails or destinations in the vision, adding an objective focused on Trail accessibility and more. He asked if there was additional feedback on the content.

Rowland Russell commented that Goal 5 would benefit from listing specific types of amenities, particularly trailhead amenities like bike repair stations, dog waste bags, seating, etc.

Alexis Rudko reminded attendees about the process to include permanent improvements on or within the State's property. Such improvements require formal approval by the New Hampshire Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, who manage the Trail on behalf of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT). This includes any and all improvements including things like lighting, signage and bike repair stations. She advised the group that the Bureau of Trails was in early dialog with Mike Kowalczyk and others about standardizing signage that could be used on the Trail. She said there was precedent for bicycle repairs stations and the Bureau of Trails was in the midst of an approval process for a location on the Presidential Trail. The approval process is critical to ensure improvements do not crowd the Trail experience or end up being damaged by snow grooming equipment. Johanna Lyons, State Parks Planner, should be considered a resource and guide to this process.

Chuck Redern asked if Alexis Rudko could speak in more detail about the process and timeline. Alexis Rudko explained that the process varies based on the improvement. She commented that something like a bicycle repair station would not require extensive review. To initiate the process a proposal would first be provided to Johanna Lyons who would collect necessary details to schedule and initiate a review by the Department Director at a Department or State "lands meeting." The process can take about four months due to existing meeting schedules. Things like kiosks, parking improvements, trail connections would take substantially longer and may require easements. Approval by the NHDOT can take years.

Tom Coneys emphasized the need for a better way for different user groups to communicate with each other about work efforts. Alexis Rudko commented that Jesse Creedy Powers is a NH State Parks Volunteer Coordinator that works with non-motorized users like equestrians and bicycle clubs and can facilitate connections between motorized and non-motorized user groups. Volunteer coordination by the State includes obtaining formal approval (through a memorandum of agreement with the State) to do work on the Trail. Both Tom Coneys and Alexis Rudko complimented the collaboration of the Monadnock Conservancy in their work to receive approval for and improve conditions in Fitzwilliam. Rowland Russell felt Goal 6 and its objectives covered this need sufficiently. He suggested a separate objective aimed at less technical work like Trail user counts, wildlife counts and trash pickups.

Andy Bohannon provided feedback on the Goal 5, Objective 6 to "maintain a clean trail environment through a trail adoption program, routine maintenance, trash/recycling receptacles, and by establishing user expectations." He said that the City of Keene has had both positive and negative experiences with trail adoption and would like to share details if a program is being considered elsewhere. He also expressed concern about adding maintenance responsibilities to municipalities.

Tom Duston commented that trail adoption has been used successfully in the Town of Chesterfield for approximately ten years. The feeling of ownership has led to sustained commitments and active work like picking up brush and reporting missing markers. He recalled there being a model used by the State elsewhere and there was good potential for use along the Trail.

#### **b. Final Draft of Implementation Plan**

Henry Underwood explained that the Implementation Plan consists of two parts: a table or list of specific projects and a companion interactive map. He provided a demonstration on how to utilize the map to view project locations and other details. Todd Horner added that some project ideas were present on the table or list, however, they could not be mapped (e.g. project #16).

Rowland Russell pointed out that some of the text in the table is not shown in the map. Also, he asked if the connection between Eastern Avenue and the former bridge abutment in Keene should be described as continuing on the former rail bed. Todd Horner indicated the original language for the project was in the City's approved capital improvements plan.

Henry Underwood utilized the interactive map to briefly summarize the projects from north to south. He asked for attendees to review the draft list and provide written feedback via e-mail.

Tom Coneys suggested adding a project contact to each item. This could assist readers of the Plan in connecting with Trail owners or other entities that may have existing plans to do work. Chuck Redfern suggested the Monadnock Rail Trail Collaborative as a group that would be beneficial to include. Alexis Rudko suggested that Bureau of Trails be listed as a contact for all unfunded projects as they would be required as part of the approval process, may advertise funding opportunities and may consider project improvements as part of the Bureau's own annual maintenance plans. She noted that inquiries related to projects should be directed to the Bureau of Trails main office as opposed to District staff.

Todd Horner asked for attendees to consider whether or not they would like to be listed in addition to a primary project contact as a way of indicating who would be interested in collaborating or coordinating on implementation in a certain area. Tom Coneys added that seeing unfunded projects and having contacts could be an asset to obtaining future donations and funding.

Tom Duston, who serves as Administrator for the Wantastiquet-Monadnock Trail Coalition observed that their group does not currently include representation from the snowmobile clubs yet the trail overlaps with the Trail Keene through Water Street in Troy. He also added that the Coalition is working well and contains representation by the State, landowners and many others.

Rowland Russell commented that it may be beneficial to add a table to the map and/or plan that lists various organizations and where their respective areas of responsibility and coordination lie.

#### **V. Next Steps**

Attendees briefly discussed promotion of the Plan. Following completion of the document, SWRPC will make printed copies available and announce its availability on the project webpage via e-mail and social media. Chuck Redfern encouraged SWRPC to find a way to promote the Plan or make it available at events like Earth Day and to "go to them." Jay House agreed with Chuck Redfern saying that promotion of the Plan should be viewed as an ongoing need and suggested something like a press conference to announce completion. She also encouraged the group to consider "cross sector partnerships" to promote the Plan.



Henry Underwood provided an example method of prioritization that may be used in prioritizing Trail ideas. He also explained that starting in the summer, SWRPC would not be taking on a project based on a specific trail or section of trail, however, they would be available to assist communities with coordination. He asked attendees if people would like to work in a new or existing group and how they would like to meet. Rowland Russell commented that a semi-annual meeting involving stakeholders from around the region would be beneficial. Jay House added that many of the tools recently used to collaborate across distance could be beneficial going forward.

Henry Underwood said that SWRPC is targeting the end of June as an internal deadline to finalize this and other Plan components. He asked attendees to review and provide e-mailed feedback in the next week and would follow-up with an e-mail reminder.

## **VI. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Henry Underwood  
GIS Specialist/Planner