For decades the citizens of Fall River and New Bedford have been promised commuter rail service. A design was developed and approved in 2002 by the Executive Office of Transportation but never built due to lack of funding. This was one of many attempts over the years to provide the service to Fall River and New Bedford. The justification for the project is not only to provide commuter rail service but also to provide economic stimulus for one of the most economically depressed areas of the state.

The current effort of the South Coast Rail Project (SCR) was started in 2005 and has progressed to the point where three of the sixty-four originally proposed routes have been selected; the Stoughton route, the Attleboro bypass route and a bus service to Boston via Route 24. The project is to be federally funded and because of this the Army Corps of Engineers will make the final selection of the route. This decision has been delayed twice by the Corps and is now tentatively scheduled for June, 2010.

There were definitive criteria established by the Executive Office of Transportation and Army Corps of Engineers for the selection of the route. The following spreadsheets depict the results of extensive research and study by the EOT to evaluate the criteria. This information along with an Environmental Impact Study done by the Corps will be used to determine the route.

After reviewing this data it seems obvious to me that the Stoughton route is the preferred route but the decision will be made by the Army Corps of Engineers and on their schedule.

If the Attleboro Route is selected it will have significant impact on Mansfield. It will require the construction of the Attleboro bypass, a strictly commuter track to connect the Attleboro Secondary Line to the NY/NH Main line corridor in Mansfield. The bypass is three miles long and will run through Norton, Attleboro and Mansfield, connecting to the Main Line just west of Gilbert Street in Mansfield. This third set of tracks will then be added to the existing two sets of tracks on the Main Line to Boston. This will require the taking of land and buildings along the main line from Gilbert Street to the Foxboro town line. It will require the widening of all the bridges and underpasses along the route, the relocation of the train station, land taking in the Great Woods Conservation Area and in a Priority Protection Area between Gilbert Street and the Attleboro and Norton town lines. The bridges that will be widened are at North Main Street, Route 106. It will also require the placement of the through trains on the NY/NH Main line.

If the Attleboro route is selected it will have significant impact on Mansfield.

| South Coast Rail .. coming to a town near you? | by Leonard Flynn |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Attleboro</th>
<th>Stoughton</th>
<th>Rapid Bus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electric</td>
<td>Diesel</td>
<td>Electric</td>
<td>Diesel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Time to New Bedford (minutes)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Time to Fall River (minutes)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Daily Trips</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Daily New Trips</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Peak Period Departures/Arrivals (each terminal)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak Period Frequency (minutes)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Daily Boardings</td>
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<td>8,040</td>
<td>9,580</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Daily Transit Passengers</td>
<td>5,300</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>5,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Time Performance¹</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ These are the On-Time Performance measures for all trains arriving at South Station.
² The On-Time Performance measure for the Rapid Bus Alternatives were obtained for the non-holiday weekday peak periods.
South Coast Rail Position

The Board of Directors voted to publicly oppose the South Coast Rail Mansfield route. Although we don’t oppose the project itself, the route through Mansfield will devastate many acres of protected land and cause havoc during the construction phase. (See article on page 1)

Conservation Articles at Town Meeting

There are several important conservation articles planned for this year’s Annual Town Meeting. (Check the town web site at www.mansfieldma.com for date.)

The first is to transfer land in the rear of Gilbert Street from the control of the Selectmen to the Conservation Commission. A second asks to take an adjacent, owner unknown parcel, by Eminent Domain. The parcels, mostly wetlands, abut both sides of the MBTA rail line. Having this land under Chapter 40 Section 8C will help protect the Welsh wells and make it more difficult for the South Coast Rail project to use the Mansfield route. If this article passes we should try to get a Conservation Restriction for the NRT at the next Town Meeting. A third article is to correct the deeds on several parcels in the Great Woods, placing them under Chapter 40. For some reason the language was not added to the deeds when the land was acquired.

A forth article asks the Town to give the NRT Conservation Restrictions on several parcels of land in the Great Woods. Some parcels abut Route 495 and others are along the MBTA Rail line.

Finally, a fifth article is to transfer three parcels in the Great Woods from the control of the Selectmen to the Conservation Commission.

Please attend Town Meeting and support these articles.

Rumford River Bridge

I asked Harry Chase to write an article on the bridge at the Judy’s Lane entrance to the Great Woods. (See his notebook on page 3). I want to bring to everyone’s attention the need to replace the bridge with one that will last. I have received estimates as high as $50,000 for replacement with a steel beam support system. (I think we paid under $500 to build the bridge in 1978). It is doubtful that the Town will fund the project considering the economic times. We are looking into grants. I hope to be able to reconstruct the bridge for a lot less than the estimates.

Trail Marking

It’s time to remark the trails in the Great Woods. Send me an e-mail at info@nrtma.com if you can help.

Welcome back!

Elizabeth Leidhold has returned as our Mansfield Conservation Agent. Elizabeth is a graduate of University of Connecticut, with a B.S. in Renewable Natural Resources. She also understands the role of land trusts as a Board Member of the Mattapoisett Land Trust.

She is the Director of the Marion Natural History Museum and a part-time director of the Buzzards Bay Action Committee. Her experience includes working for the towns of Mashpee, Lakeville, Mattapoisett, Dartmouth, and the City of New Bedford as conservation agent.

Elizabeth is a member of Society of Wetland Scientists Association of Massachusetts Wetland Scientists, Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, Society of Soil Scientists of Southern New England, and the Audubon Society.

We look forward to working with her in the future.

Conservation History

Natural Resources Trust build a bridge across the Rumford River
August 16, 1978 (l-r) Lenny Flynn, Tom Fiske, Howard Fiske, Stephen Holford, Eric Butler, and Lou Andrews

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Betty Roche
John Russo
Jane Sheehan
Deborah Snyder
Harry’s Notebook  by Harry B. Chase, Jr.

Rumford bridge is falling down

The only access to the 106-acre Taylor's Hill conservation area south of Willow Street starts with a footpath at the end of Fisher Lane.

The path leads over the Rumford River bridge and past Cobbler’s Corner, where in 1640 one of Myles Standish’s survey crew repaired his shoes.

But the Rumford bridge, like London Bridge of old, is falling down. If it goes, the people of Mansfield will have no way to reach the land they bought and paid for.

That would be unfortunate, because the preserved tract, which includes Taylor’s Hill, the nearby Taylor’s spring and groves of stately pines, is one of the prettiest woodlands in town.

The need for a river crossing was recognized in early times. Willow Street’s original 1731 layout followed the present Lane, crossed the Rumford to Cobbler’s Corner, then turned north to School Street.

Though hardly more than a bridle trail, this road and the Rumford bridge served the public for decades, until Willow Street was rerouted to its present location. Then the roundabout path and the bridge reverted to private ownership.

When I began hiking the Great Woods more than 70 years ago, I’d cross Rumford River on a timber bridge 21 feet long, built of planks spiked across joists supported on mortared fieldstone abutments. It was a sturdy structure; once I saw a pickup truck pass safely over it.

The Fisher family of Fisher Lane owned the bridge and used it as access to their 133-acre woodland property. They also recognized the right of others, who might not own land in the woods, to “pass and repass” (in the legal language) over the bridge.

In 1935 Mrs. Florence Boltz of South Main Street generously allowed the Boy Scouts of Mansfield to camp on her Taylor’s Hill acreage. Some years later, she permitted construction of a 22-by-28-foot Scout cabin on the property.

By then I was a Scoutmaster, and our troop made frequent use of Camp Boltz. All four Mansfield Boy Scout troops used the Rumford bridge to reach the camping area.

One morning in March 1953 I arrived at the bridge to find it gone. I learned later that juvenile wreckers had ripped up the planks and joists and floated them down river, leaving no way to cross.

The Fishers were deeply upset, as the vandalism severed their only access to land their family had owned since 1767. Scouts and others who walked in the woods were seriously inconvenienced.

For the next 15 years we reached Camp Boltz by means of a longer path over private property. But this unofficial access was never secure and eventually was closed.

Between 1976 and 1994 the Town of Mansfield’s Conservation Commission bought the nine parcels making up the Taylor’s Hill woods, including the bridge site.

Natural Resources Trust volunteers Leonard Flynn, Lou Andrews, Tom and Howard Fiske, Stephen Holford and Eric Butler in 1978 built a new bridge across the Rumford (see Conservation History), using two town-donated utility poles as girders, with a wooden walkway and protective railings.

Renewed vandalism damaged this bridge also. In 1992, when I took an elderly visiting historian to see the bronze plaque at Cobbler’s Corner, there were so many gaps in the deck that we crossed by shoving two loose boards ahead of us and precariously hopping from one to another.

In the mid-nineties the bridge was restored by former DPW Director Dan Clifford and a crew from his department. Recently the railings have been broken away and one of the supporting poles has snapped, allowing the bridge to sag to one side.

Unquestionably a new bridge is needed. Conformance to modern safety codes means that its underframe should be steel, which has the added advantage of being vandal-proof.

The 100-yard footpath leading to the bridge, which every year becomes increasingly choked with poison ivy and brush, needs to be trimmed to its full width of 50 years ago. Gravel should be dumped in a few soggy spots on the path.

Mansfield’s attractive and historic Taylor’s Hill area already meets one universally accepted principle for conservation woodlands: It has a single, easily controlled means of access.

But the access is worthless without a safe bridge over Rumford River.

The bridge today.
Route 140, School Street, Elm Street and Gilbert Street. This construction will take years to complete, cause unimaginable traffic problems for years throughout Mansfield and will not provide any benefit to the town.

The South Coast Rail Project is an investment in future transportation infrastructure that could be funded with stimulus money and provide future economic and environmental benefits for all of South East Massachusetts.

For a comprehensive description of the project go to the South Coast Rail web site at www.southcoastrail.com.

We’re on the Web:
www.nrtma.org

Membership

The NRT welcomes new members!

Our dues are $25.00 per year.

Dues can be sent to:
Natural Resources Trust
545 South Main Street
Mansfield, MA 02048

2010 Dues
are payable now.
Membership is only $25.00.
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