

Signing the lease for the Squannacook River Rail Trail



Townsend



Groton

The nature of the rail trail business

Philip Henslowe: Mr. Fennyman, allow me to explain about the ~~theatre~~ rail trail business. The natural condition is one of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster.

Hugh Fennyman: So what do we do?

Philip Henslowe: Nothing. Strangely enough, it all turns out well.

Hugh Fennyman: How?

Philip Henslowe: I don't know. It's a mystery.



Outline

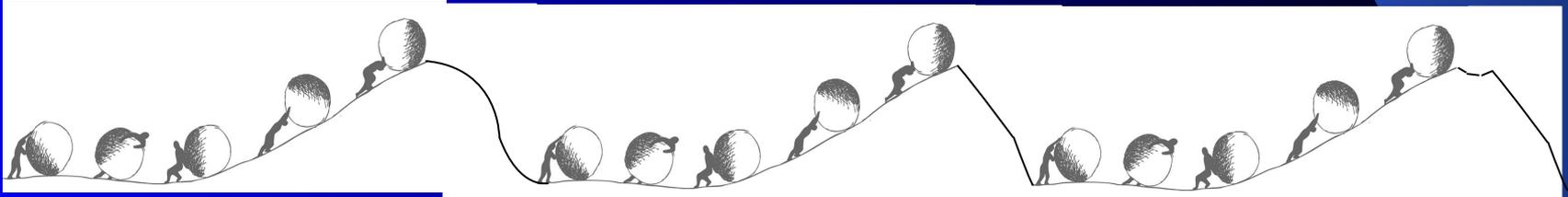
Towns will sign the MBTA
lease (2002-2007)



DCR will sign the MBTA
lease (2007-2014)



Squannacook Greenways
signs the MBTA lease
(2014-)

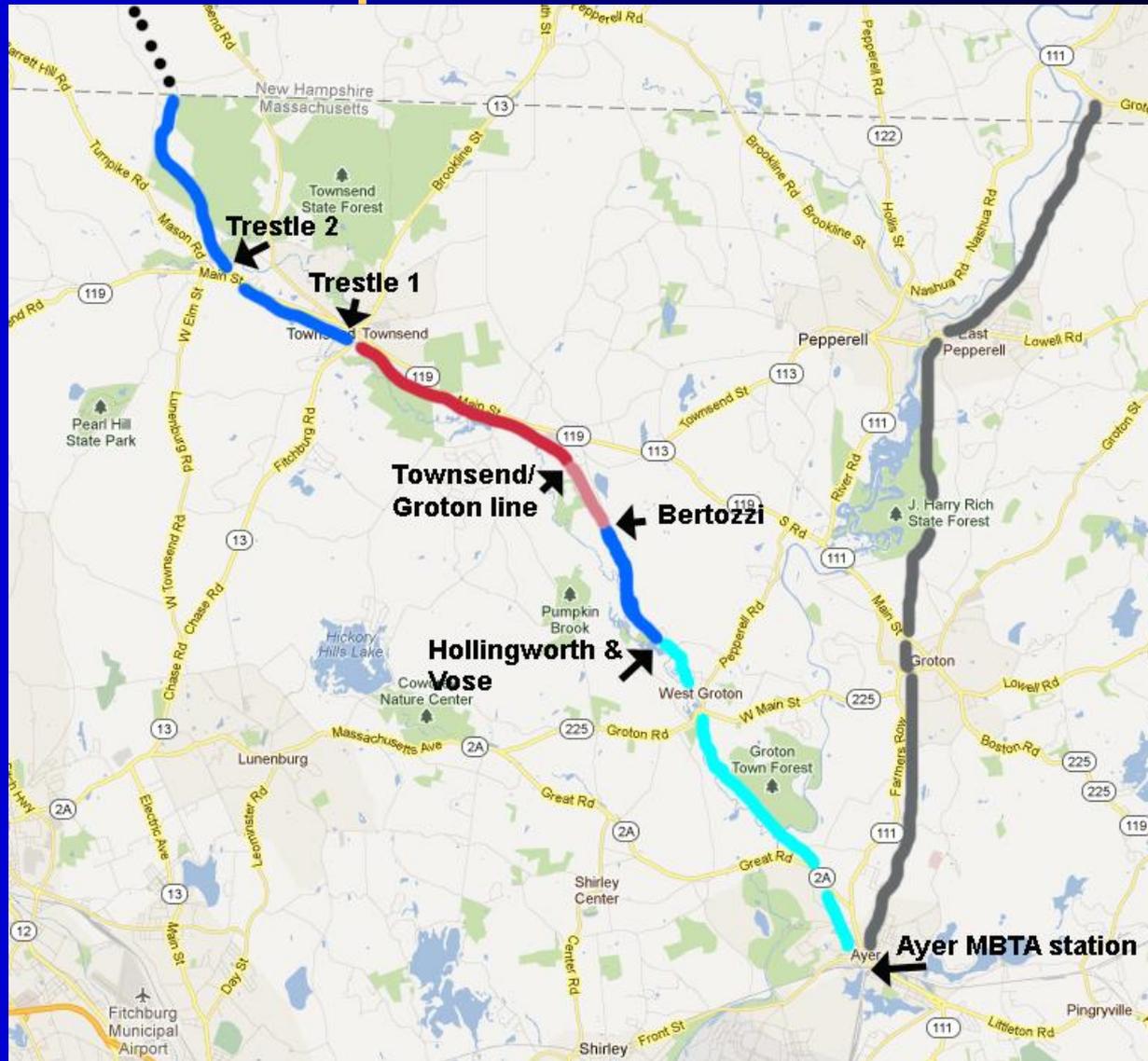


Stage 1 – Town will sign lease

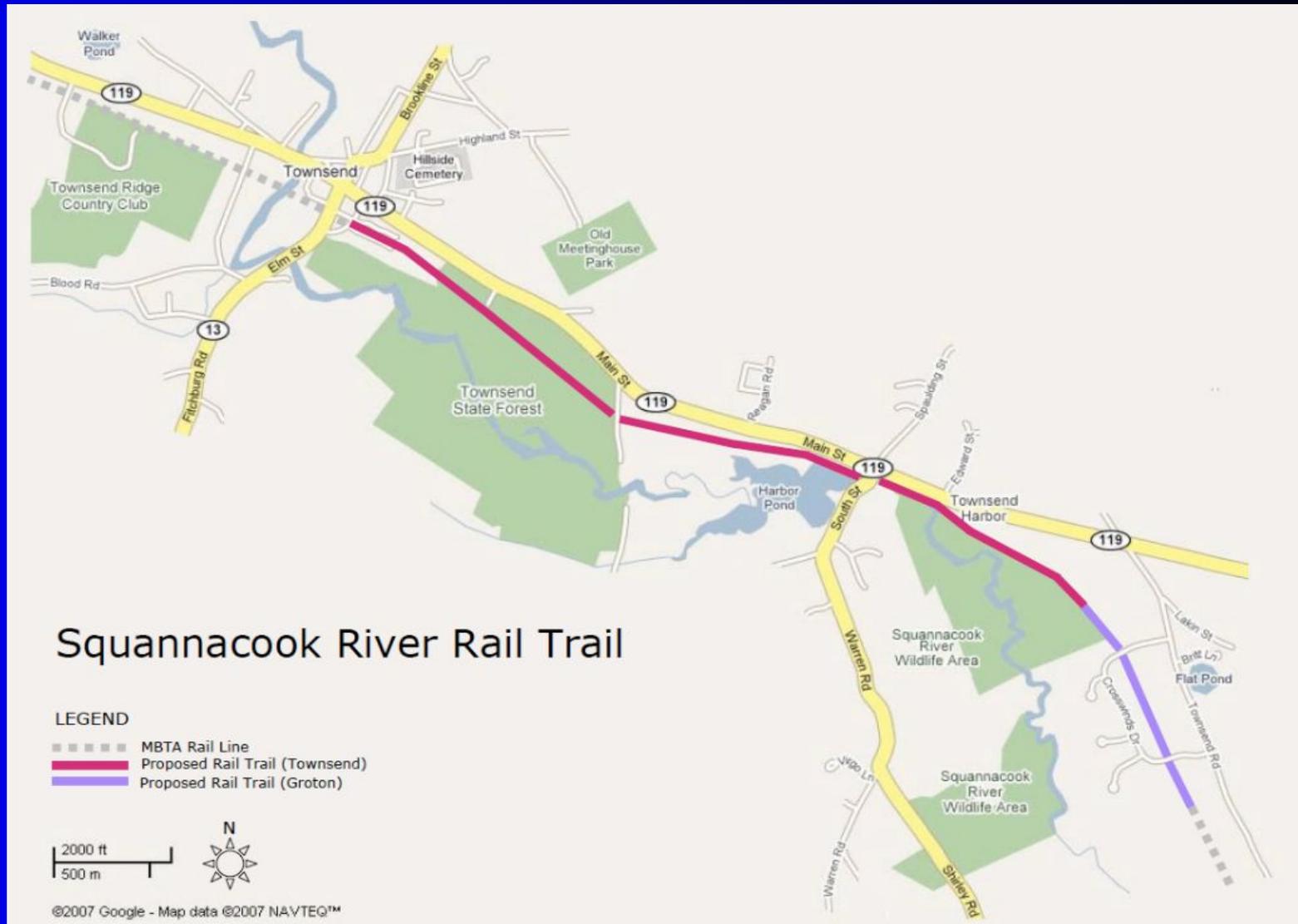
- Minuteman the pattern for DCR rail trails
 - Cape Cod, Nashua River, Ashuwillticook, Norwottuck, etc.
 - Paved, Federal highway money, ~\$1 million/mile
- If towns follow that pattern:
 - They cover \$100 K/mile engineering cost
 - They sign MBTA lease
- First pattern for SRRT



Squannacook River Rail Trail possibilities

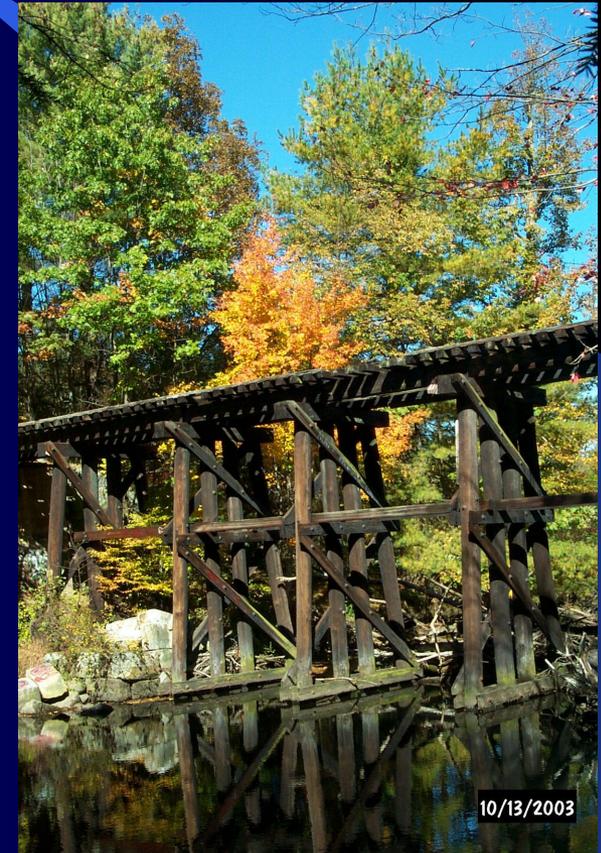


Trail as alternative to Route 119



Why only 3.7 miles?

- West of Townsend center - engineering challenges of two trestles and two state highway crossings
- Endangered species issue (Blandings Turtle) habitat beyond Bertozzi
- 3.7 miles a challenge enough

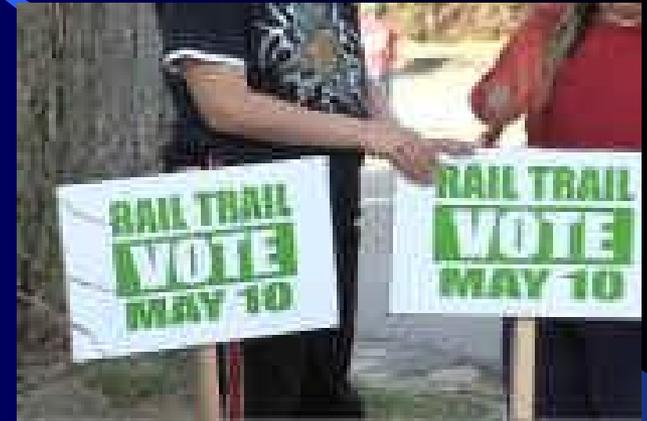


Towns signs lease (2002-2007)

Pros	Cons
Congressman Olver got earmark for four rail trails	Extremely tight town budgets, especially in Townsend
Popular at the polls	Abutter concerns
Paralleled Route 119 – transportation alternative	Concerns about environmental liability
Nashua River Rail Trail was a great success	Concerns about government spending
Only game in town we knew of	Concerns about town's ability to do maintenance
Preliminary engineering study completed in 2007	

Rail trail popular support

- In May 2006, Townsend voted 1021-259 to support the rail trail in non-binding referendum
- In Oct 2007, Groton town meeting unanimously approved \$10,000 in funding for preliminary environmental and engineering study



Preliminary environmental and engineering study

- Addresses issues important to towns' decision
- Townsend's portion paid for with \$20,000 recreational trails grant
- Groton voted unanimously at 2007 fall town meeting for \$10,000 in CPA funds



Safe road crossings



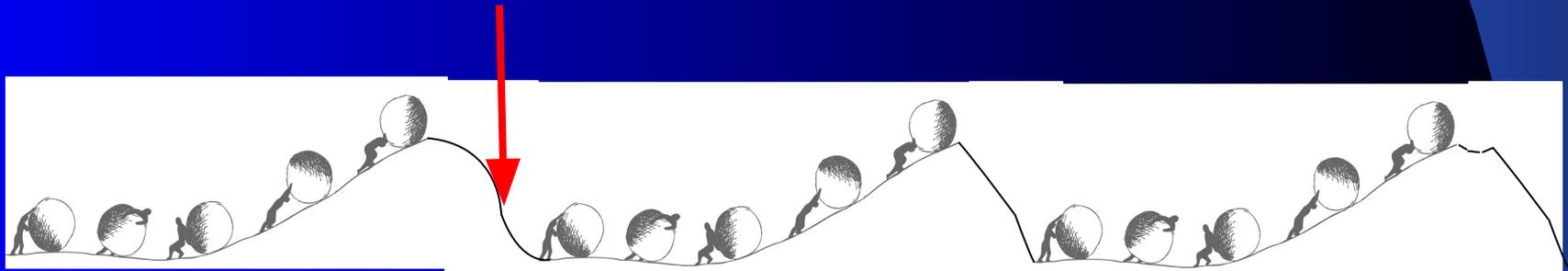
Impact on abutters



Culvert evaluation

Town trail – bottom line (2007)

- MBTA lease required town to accept environmental liability
 - Town briefed by Steve Winslow
- Townsend, possibly Groton, unwilling to accept costs of \$100k/mile and liability
- A new approach is possible...



Stage 2: New model – Wachusett Greenways

- Non-profit building stone dust rail trail in West Boylston, Sterling, Rutland, etc.
- No use of federal highway funds

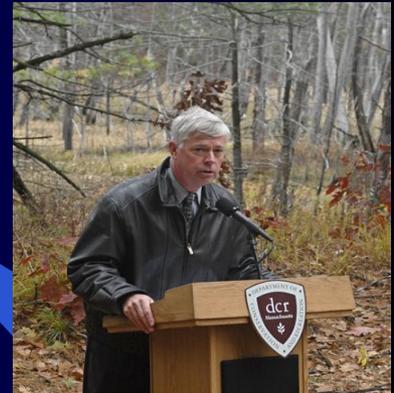


DCR will sign the MBTA lease (2007-2014)

- Groton and Townsend form town committees to study how to move forward
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation announces it is negotiating Waltham-Bolton line with MBTA
- Debate is between MassHighway and Wachusett Greenways/DCR approach

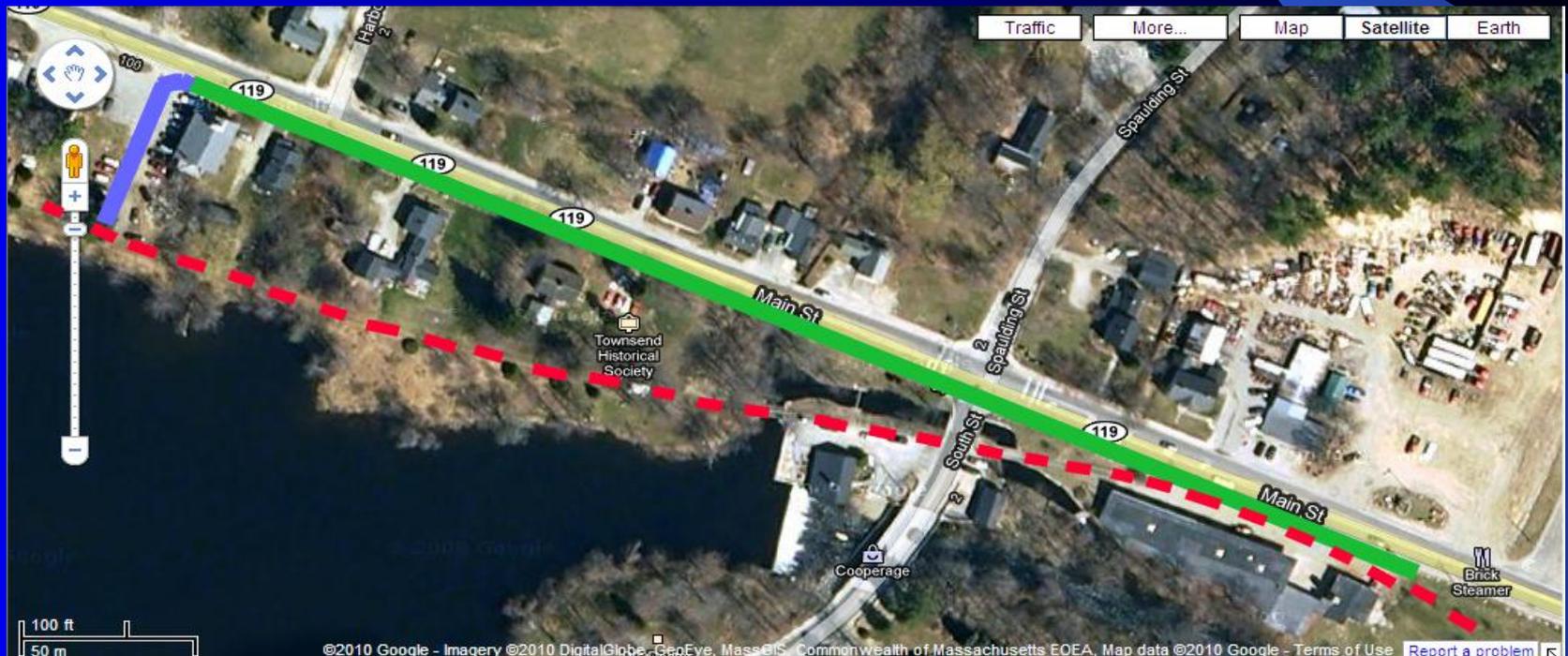
Negotiations with DCR

- Lasted from 2007-Jan 2014 (three DCR Commissioners)
- Novel idea for DCR, lots of legal considerations
- As of mid-June 2013, it looked like we had a plan
 - DCR signs MBTA lease
 - Squannacook Greenways leases from DCR



Final report of town committees - 2011

- Recommended Non-profit/DCR approach over MassHighway
- Recommended ~1000 foot reroute of trail



Conversion to non-profit 2011

- Named Squannacook Greenways to parallel Wachusett Greenways
- 501c3 status granted by IRS in March 2012
- www.sqgw.org
- Board members from Townsend, Groton, Ashby

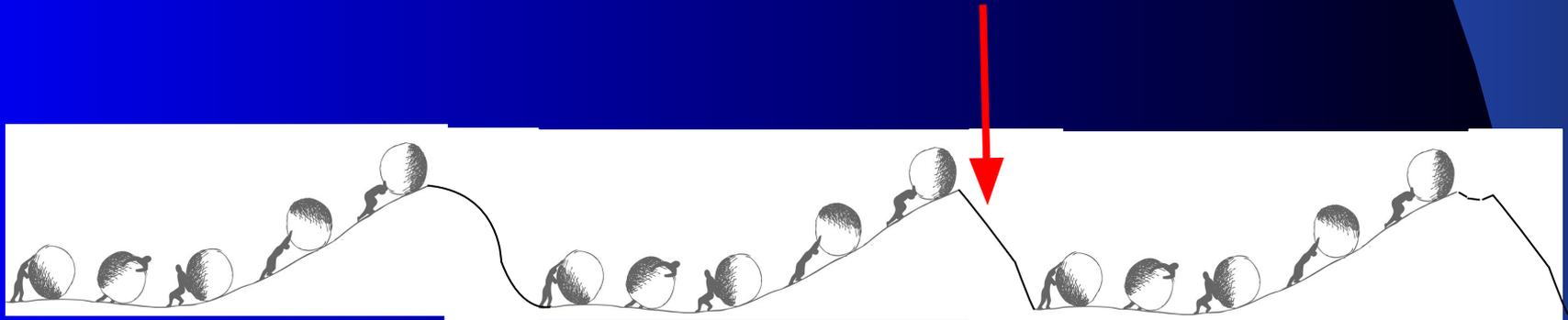


Winning CFNCM grant

- Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts
 - \$18K
- Focus on health benefits for community youth
- Originally seed money for capital campaign
 - Useful when next imminent disaster approached

Mid 2013 – Problems with DCR approach

- Obscure state law limits DCR to leasing for five years
 - Related to sweetheart deal from the 1960's
 - Would have taken act of state legislature to overcome



Critical meeting at the state house – Jan 2014



Andy Sheehan
Townsend town
administrator



Carly Antonellis
(Senator Flanagan's office)



Kaitlyn Hyslip
Rep Harrington's office



Senator Donoghue



Bob LaVita
Transit Reality/MBTA



Mark Boyle
MBTA



Tom LaRosa
DCR



Bill Rideout
Sq Greenways

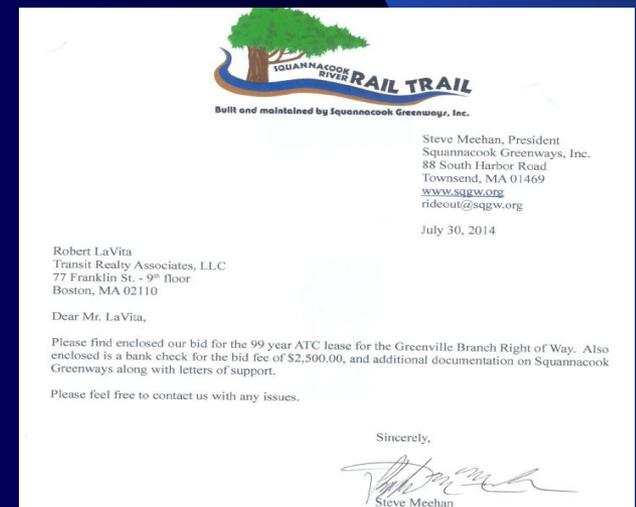


Peter Cunningham
Sq Greenways

+ two representatives from Department of Transportation

Stage 3: Public bid to lease the rail bed

- The lease excludes all rights except building a rail trail
 - MBTA retains rights to also lease to utilities
- Very formal bidding ceremony July 31, 2014
- Shockingly, one bidder.
- We bid \$99, but also had to pay \$2,500 bidding fee as the winning bidder



After review by even more lawyers...

- Lease is finally signed by Squannacook Greenways March 1, 2015
- Approximately 12 years have passed since the project began

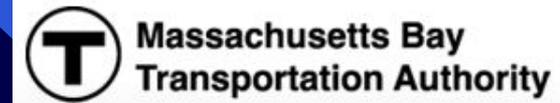
Bailey's Restaurant
Townsend, MA



Non-profit with MBTA lease

- Cons:
 - General liability insurance required
 - About \$5K/year
 - \$2,500 bid fee
- Pros:
 - Donations tax deductible
 - Avoids town meeting issues
 - Can be more flexible than town committees

Thanks to the many supporters who really made it possible



Senator Donoghue



Senator Flanagan



Representative Harrington



Congresswoman Tsongas



Steve Winslow



Congressman Olver



And many more...