

Public Workshop Minutes
Walden Woods Project – Public Workshop 2: Alternatives
January 27, 2007, 2-5 pm
Lincoln Town Hall, Lincoln, Massachusetts

Agenda

This was the second of three workshops to be held as part of the Walden Passage Feasibility Study. This second workshop focused on presenting the findings of the study to date and presenting three proposed alternative locations that will be the focus of the study. The comments and questions raised by the public during this meeting will be used by the project team to help make a final decision on the preferred location for the passage structure that will be presented at the next public workshop (June 7, 2007) as well as in the final study report.

2:15-3:00 Introduction and presentation by UMass staff

1. Introduction: Personnel, Scope, Schedule
2. First Public Workshop Summary)
3. Wildlife Issues (Paige Warren)
4. Engineering Issues (Sergio Brena)
5. Cultural Landscape Issues (Ethan Carr)
6. Process: Alternative Crossing Locations

3:00-4:00 Discussion: Break out into three teams to discuss location alternatives

4:00-4:45 Team presentations of overall group discussion and responses to the proposed location alternatives.

Introduction, Project Background, and Location Alternatives Presented by Jack Ahern, UMass

Meeting mediation by John Mullin, UMass

Meeting called to order at 2:15 pm by Jack Ahern

Project Background and Goals

Jack Ahern introduced the project background. In 2004, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) awarded a Transportation, Community and System Preservation Program (TCSP) grant to fund a feasibility study of a highway overpass for aq recreational and wildlife crossing of Route 2 in Concord, Massachusetts. The feasibility study, initially proposed by the Walden Woods Project, is now managed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the Regional Planning Council for the Boston Metropolitan region. The MAPC has contracted with an interdisciplinary team from UMass Amherst to examine the feasibility of establishing a *combined wildlife-recreation passage* within a *pre-defined* study area: Crosby's Corner to the Sudbury River, centered on State Route 2 in Concord MA. The study will consider alternatives and recommend a *preferred alternative*.

Project goals: To explore and analyze the feasibility of establishing a combined wildlife and pedestrian crossing of Mass. State Route 2 in Concord, MA. The study will examine the proposed crossing in neighborhood, town, region and national perspectives and consider associated benefits and impacts on:

- transportation
- wildlife movement

community/neighborhood issues, concerns and opportunities
recreational use
the economy of the host communities and the region

In summary, there are multiple perspectives that will be considered on this project: wildlife, vehicular and pedestrian safety, community issues, and access and aesthetics.

The three alternative locations that will be the focus of the study were presented:

Location 1: Brister's Hill area, adjacent to the Concord Landfill - this location would involve a combined recreational/wildlife overpass structure.

Location 2: Existing Railroad Underpass – this proposed location would include widening the existing underpass and using data from Rails-with-Trails movement to create a safe passage for humans and wildlife.

Location 3: Adjacent to Sudbury River – this proposed location would involve replacing the existing Sudbury River Route 2 bridge to allow for passage under Route 2, as well as to potentially include boardwalk structures for human passage.

Dr. Paige Warren, a Research Professor of Wildlife Biology at UMass, presented the importance of connectivity for wildlife. The study looks at the species that are considered to be present in the study area. Each species is being ranked on the likelihood of using a passage structure as well as the type of passage structure the species would use. Tracking data from Mass Audubon and a local volunteer group will be compiled and analyzed.

Sergio Brena, a Professor of Civil Engineering at UMass, presented the engineering concerns and criteria that will be looked at when determining the preferred location alternative. The study is looking at two potential crossing types, overpass and underpass. The crossing type affects engineering decisions and cost will be dependent on site features. Aspects considered will include: site grading, abutment location, soil conditions, aesthetics, type of vegetation to be supported, crossing width, and existence of intermediate supports to .

Dr. Ethan Carr, a Cultural Landscape Professor at UMass, presented the importance of this study as it pertains to the Cultural Landscape of Concord and the larger metropolitan region. The study will look at cultural connectivity and potential for new interpretive experiences. Connections to existing trails will be examined, as well the historical themes of Walden Woods and the many other important cultural resources of the area.

Comments and questions that were raised following the presentations included:

- look at Hanscom – Minuteman underpass for “lessons learned”
- consider looking at Native American trails (Concord Antiquarian)
- concerns over whether wildlife and humans can use the same structure;
- what animals will be focused on being served by the passage structure?
- what is the driver for wildlife - demonstrate and identify the destinations wildlife will use;
- show how the passage structure will work through presentation of data;
- consider renaming project to lessen impact on Walden;

- find a way to maximize opportunities and minimize impacts;
- talk to MBTA to see if we can reverse their “anti- rails with trails” mentality;
- Clarify what is meant by connectivity;
- Look at existing Sudbury River trails

Break-out Group Discussions: Location Alternatives

Attendees were formed into three groups; each team was assigned to discuss a location alternative. Each team was asked to list out all the strengths and opportunities of each their assigned location, as well as the weaknesses and threats associated with the location alternative and then rank the top strength and the top weakness. Following a 45 minute discussion, each team was asked to choose their top strength/opportunity and their top weakness/threat. One representative from each team presented the findings to the entire workshop. Based upon the presentations from each team, the top strengths and weaknesses for each location are as follows:

Location 1: Brister’s Hill/Landfill area

Strengths/Opportunities:

- Reestablish Walden Woods as a larger reservation
- Buildable with respect to Route 2 (less due process) Does not require shutdown or Rt. 2
- Practicability
- Closest to Bay Circuit, Thoreau/Emerson Amble, Brister’s
- Away from available parking (not too convenient)
- More available space on either side for wildlife—best amount of space for scale
- Creating more of a ‘whole’ complete cultural landscape by eliminating Route 2 cutting through.
- Model for other areas-most rich cultural/ecological landscape
- Best for pedestrian use
- Respects historic tradition
- Bicycle connection on Route 2
- Best for accomplishing all goals of project
- Good location for adjusting/lowering Route 2

Weaknesses/ Threats

- Too far east for wildlife and people
- Wildlife (opening access to humans)
- Limited connections on North
- No parking
- Parking at cul-de-sac/residential area will increase
- Fragile ecosystem
- Limited benefits to wetland species (all upland in this area)
- Impacts of increased human use (Don’t under estimate numbers)
- Impacts on existing residential neighborhoods

**Top Strength/opportunity:* Creating more of a ‘whole’ complete cultural landscape by eliminating/lessening presence Route 2.

**Top Weakness/threat:* Negative impacts on fragile ecosystem and increased human use in area

Location 2: Railroad underpass

Strengths/opportunities

- Best for people—they are already walking there
- Wildlife is already there—deer, coyote, fox, moose
- Density of people—a strength for people, not for wildlife
- Parking might be available at high school
- There could be a train stop there
- Historic significance of Thoreau's 'Deep Cut Woods'
- It is in Walden Woods area
- It is not an overpass so there would not be issues with people throwing stuff from the highway.
- Arena farms might be changing
- Bridge might be in need of repair
- Another access point to Walden Reservation that can be monitored
- Human/wildlife could be separated by tracks
- Good opportunity to track wildlife and people
- Could bring coyotes

Weakness/Threats

- People walking into Walden Reservation which has a carrying capacity
- Possibility that playing fields will be developed in the area.
- Parking at high school might not be possible
- MBTA regulations
- Safety along train tracks
- Can only be on the east side
- Some species might be less likely to use because of trains
- Hard to take land out of state reservation—how much would plan be on Walden Reservation land?
- Least opportunity for connectivity for wildlife
- Not very sexy or flashy—too pedestrian
- NW corner of Walden Reservation has 6 vernal pools (some sedge vernal pools)
- Wetlands might be impacted
- Town playing fields proposal only has a 100' buffer between Route 2 and the fields
- Bus depot relocation
- Coyotes—pet predation
- Increase movement of wildlife might increase wildlife disease issues—the site is close to school and neighborhoods

**Top Strength/opportunity:* 1. Railway was already identified as important for wildlife in Open Space and Recreation Plan (Concord, 2004) 2. Easy to implement—existing structure/low cost.

**Top Weakness:* Regulatory issues - including MBTA, Mass Highway and that it might be build on state land

Location 3: Sudbury River

Strengths/Opportunities

- Can be built—existing structure needs to be rebuilt
- Good for wildlife traffic along river (Low and high water stages)

- Better for wildlife because not as desirable for people
- Types of species that may use make it compelling
- Cannot get to Walden Reservation
- Opportunity for river type wildlife
- Look at Concord Open Space Plan
- Could be additional site as it has to be rebuilt
- Traffic calming on river
- River Access/ area not normally used
- Accelerate bridge repair
- Landbank (across river) site could be accessed
- Wetlands/floodplain regulation
- Connect to new potential trails
- Making people aware of the river and wildlife
- Alliance with hospital to open up pedestrian access

Weaknesses/Threats

- Furthest away from existing trails and cultural assets
- Northward connection is weak (bad for people)
- Can't get to Walden Pond
- Very wet (need to be all board walk)
- No place for parking
- Doesn't connect to anything on the southern side
- Would violate existing conservation ordinances
- Difficult to achieve pedestrian access—not good for people
- Increased speed on river
- Easter Mountain Lion
- Movement on Rt. 2 and traffic management
- Archeological Site
- Bike path through wetland
- Pedestrian/ Recreation use in Wetland area

**Top Strength/opportunity:* Opportunity for riverine wildlife

**Top Weakness:* Not amenable (attractive) for pedestrian/recreational use

The points discussed in the individual group meetings will be considered by the UMass team during the decision making process for the preferred alternative.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, meeting attendees were asked to provide final comments/thoughts based on the presentations and discussions generated during the meeting:

- Project has to be innovative/attractive in order to get funding
- Need a plan to illustrate how animals and humans will coexist
- Sudbury River site does not show the best corridor connections – need to demonstrate animal movement
- Overpass in Brister's Hill most likely of the three alternatives to get federal funding – overpass could have a profound influence on rest of the country
- Think big regarding opportunities
- Brister's Hill is best location based on trail connections

- Watch for overburdening Walden State Reservation (regarding parking)
- Wildlife should be number 1 priority
- Work with Mass. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Be more specific regarding usage and plan (e.g. parking)
- Be careful of unintended consequences
- Provide more facts and figures regarding safety issues, wildlife/human use, etc.
- Be careful of cultural significance, make sure funds are used correctly
- Consider that railroad and Sudbury River bridge will likely be rebuilt anyway, therefore focus on Brister's Hill as an additional passage and as an aside push for widening of the underpasses when rebuilding the underpasses
- Provide data regarding whether the wildlife and humans will use the same structure
- Focus on only one preferred alternative, don't plan for "fallbacks"
- Take advantage of existing infrastructure, piggyback on other projects

Next Steps

UMass will take public comments into consideration when determining the preferred alternative that will be presented in the final study report. Draft report sections will be submitted to the Advisory Board for review in early March. At the next Public Workshop to be held in June, UMass will be presenting to the public the research findings as well as the preferred location and design.

Next Public Workshop Meeting: Saturday, June 2, 2007, 2-5 pm, Concord Middle School – Peabody Building, 1231 Old Marlboro Road, Concord, MA

Please visit the project website for updates:

www.umass.edu/waldenpassage

Attendees:

Public: Virginia Bennett, Steve Winter, Tony Centore, Harry Beter, Joe Wheeler, Jonathan Keyes, Brad Stoler, Julia Pugh, Dagmar Guthke, Lois Siegelman, Patty Hecht, John Colman, Kurt Tramosch, Tom DeNormandie, Jane Layton, Joan Ferguson, Tim Oldfield, Linda McMillan, Sue Klem, Kathryn Garcia, Avram Kality, Peter Speert, Diana Abrashkin, Denise Morrissey

Project Advisory Board Members Present: Kathi Anderson, Matt Burne, Buzz Constable, Delia Kaye, Jack Lash, Dinny McIntyre, Nancy Nelson,

UMass attendees: Jack Ahern, Sergio Brena, Ethan Carr, Beth Fenstermacher, Lee Jennings, Zenia Kotval, John Mullin and Paige Warren

Meeting Minutes by Beth Fenstermacher and Lee Jennings, UMass