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NATURAL EXPERIENCE

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Air Line State Park
Trail Region

MASTER PLAN

A partnership between Air Line Trail State Park, Connecticut Resource Conservation & Development, Connecticut Department of Energy & Environment, and Connecticut Greenways.



Connecticut
Resource Conservation
& Development Area



CONNECTICUT




GREENWAYS

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Air Line State Park Trail Region

MASTER PLAN

— *June 2023* —

A stylized graphic of a leafy branch in the top left corner, rendered in a dark blue color against the background.

“Outsiders sometimes assert that Connecticut lacks a unique state identity because we’re stretched too thin by the powerful cultural gravity of New York City and Boston. But if I were asked to describe our identity, I would gush lovingly about how our physical landscape lies at the taproot of our historic statehood and invigorates culture today.”

— ROBERT M. THORSON

CONNECTICUT MAGAZINE, NOV. 1, 2022



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Our gratitude to [Stan Malcolm](#) for providing so many of the photos in this report and capturing the worthwhile outcomes of Connecticut's conservation efforts.



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction



The Air Line State Park Trail Region is comprised of the twelve towns that host the Air Line State Park Trail corridor and spans the width of eastern Connecticut, from Portland to Thompson.

Connecticut, which is a roughly rectangular shape, extends approximately 90 miles, east to west and 55 miles, north to south. With a 2022 population of 3,626,205, Connecticut ranks 29th nationally in total population and 4th in population density. This high-density ranking reflects population densities in western Connecticut and also its urbanized areas. Eastern Connecticut is distinctive for its acreage dedicated to rural landscapes, agriculture, small villages, compact urbanized areas, and a cultural heritage that still typifies the characteristics described by Robert Thorson as those areas in Connecticut where “the physical landscape lies at the taproot of our historic statehood and invigorates culture today.”

The estimated total population of the Air Line State Park Trail Region’s twelve towns is 110,413 with an average population density of 250 people per square mile. By comparison, the region surrounding the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, a multi-use trail that travels north-south from Granby to New Haven, CT, has an average

population density of 1,375 people per square mile, discounting the urban center of New Haven. With a significant landscape absent of large-scale development, vast acreage of forests and streams, small villages, rural landscapes define the Air Line State Park Trail Region. The Air Line State Park Trail experience coincides with a freshness of immersion into nature, celebration of unique small towns and small compact urban centers.

Within the 408 square mile Air Line State Park Trail Region, the 64-mile-long multi-use Air Line State Park Trail winds through hills and valleys of Connecticut’s rural scenic landscape. The existing trail and the proposed trail section from Portland to East Hampton traverse this eastern landscape from the Arrigoni Bridge

The Air Line State Park Trail experience coincides with a freshness of immersion into nature, celebration of unique small towns and small compact small urban centers.



The **total population** of the region’s twelve towns is **110,413**, with an **average population density of 250 people per square mile**. By comparison, the region surrounding the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail has an average population density of 1,375 people per square mile.

on the Connecticut River to the northeastern corner of Thompson, where it intersects with the Tri-State Marker of the border of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. A portion of the trail is designated as a National Recreation Trail and a large portion of the region is overlaid by "The Last Green Valley," a nationally designated region where conservation management efforts continue to positively impact eastern Connecticut's unique identity as a conservation region in New England. The Region also encompasses influence areas such as the East Coast Greenway, the Hop River State Park Trail, the Storrs Campus of the University of

Connecticut, and the Eightmile River Watershed (see Figure 1).

In November 2018, a group of forty-five enthusiastic Air Line State Park Trail stakeholders and supporters from each of the twelve towns in the Region, influence areas and representatives of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) convened a roundtable discussion at the library meeting room in Hebron, Connecticut. Over the course of two hours, a group conversation developed on the merits, issues and concerns associated with the Air Line State Park Trail and its future. Discussion and questions, some without clear answers, focused on the questions below.

At the end of the roundtable session, the group unanimously agreed to move forward with a proposal to begin a master plan process that would optimally coordinate trail stewardship between the twelve towns of the Air Line State Park Trail and CT DEEP to answer the questions outlined at the meeting. So began an expansive partnership to explore these questions and find methods or solutions to improve and grow the Air Line State Park Trail and unite the towns/stakeholders of the Air Line State Park Trail Region. The planning and research process has been insightful and dynamic, involving a working team of consultants, town officials, trail committees, educators, land use and conservation planners, scientists, trail



EARLY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ALSPT TRAIL AND ITS FUTURE



How could towns work collaboratively with the CT DEEP for continuity of maintenance and conditions on the trail?

How does CT DEEP successfully manage a linear state park for increased use by trail users? What type of CT DEEP staffing is available to support ongoing maintenance & infrastructure, emergency management, signage & wayfinding and amenity services for trail users?



How can towns of the Air Line State Park Trail Region, as well as numerous passionate trail focused stakeholders, work together to advocate and improve the trail infrastructure as well as the safe and reliable experience for the trail user?



Are municipal and regional land use/economic growth/conservation policies supporting the trail services and the Air Line State Park Trail Region?



What are the strengths and weaknesses of the trail's infrastructure system and connections to the town centers?



What is the value of the Air Line State Park Trail to the twelve towns as an economic driver for tourism and tourist-based business as well as a potential commuting route?



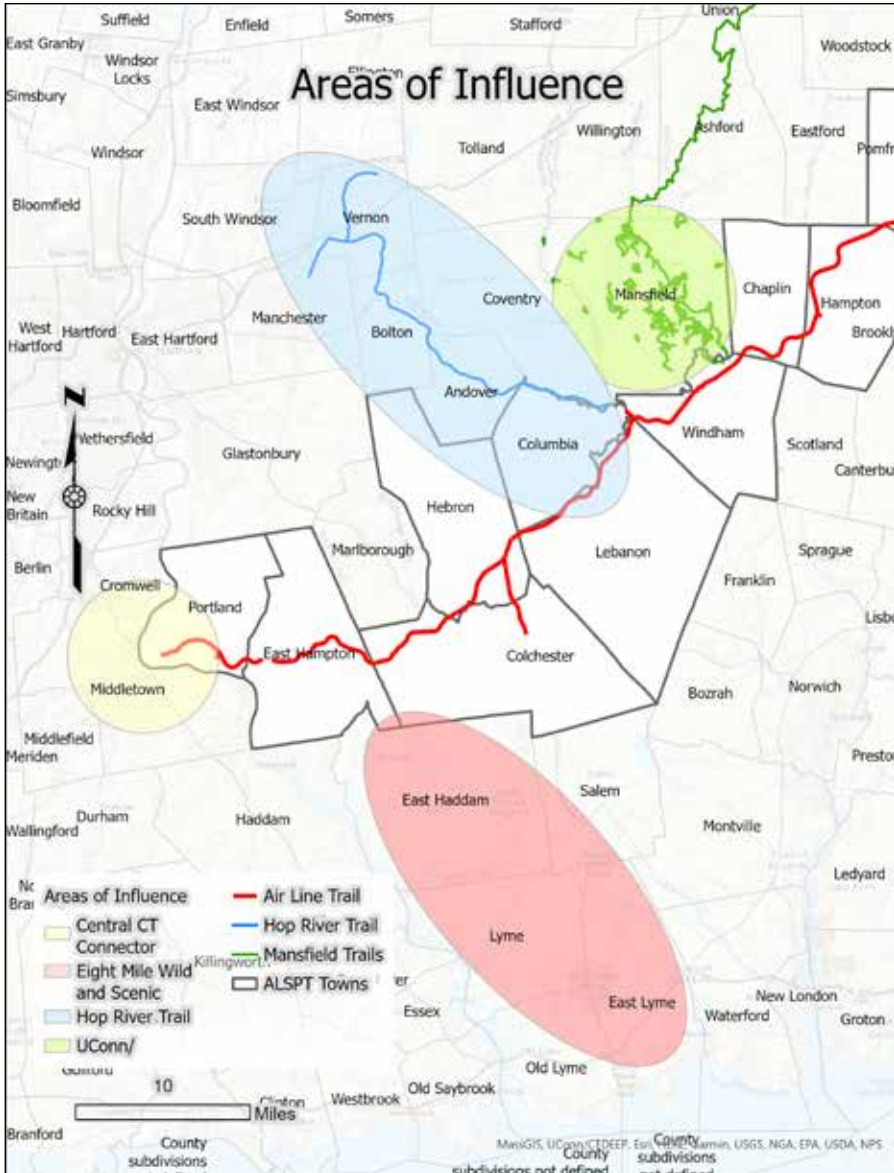
Overall, how can the twelve towns that adjoin the trail work together and leverage economic benefit from this amazing 63-mile recreational trail and promote it as a tourism asset in eastern Connecticut?

FIGURE 1

Map A: Master Plan Area Overview



Map B – ALSPT Region Influence Areas



enthusiasts, neighboring trails, towns, and regional partners.

This Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan, inspired by that first meeting, is the product of three years of surveys, research, mapping, site visits, professional evaluation of economics, land use, infrastructure, and marketing analysis.

Interviews with numerous stakeholders and public meetings provided input during the planning process at each stage. The process also included analysis and surveys of natural resources of the trail and acreage adjacent to the trail which are an important and defining characteristic of the Air Line State Park Trail experience.

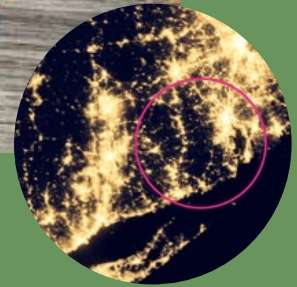
The planning process sought to engage town residents, businesses, partner organizations, tourism groups and CT DEEP in a synergistic exploration of the issues, concerns, and possibilities for improved and continued positive experiences for the trail user and the towns that host the Air Line State Park Trail. However, there were stalls and starts in the public engagement process as the Covid-19 pandemic coincided

Local residents' enthusiasm for the trail has been integral to the success of several initiatives by the Town of Thompson and the Last Green Valley.

with three years of research and writing of the plan. Youth engagement and participation by universities in trail planning were put on hold and are reflected as a next step recommendation.

The planning process relied on the large number of Air Line State Park Trail Region Task Force participants and their support in feeding information back to the communities. Local residents' enthusiasm for the trail, including youth, has been integral to the success of several initiatives by the Town of Thompson and The Last Green Valley. The "Tackle the Trail" race sponsored as a fundraiser by Quinebaug Valley Community College is a great example of an educational institution leveraging the trail system for a good cause. Additionally, the Eastern Regional Tourism District of the Connecticut Tourism Office monetarily supported a regional cooperative pocket map/tourism guide for eight of the towns in the region.

As the process for improving conditions, continuity and reliability of the Air Line State Park Trail unfolds, there are numerous tasks and steps required to build the expansive potential and vision of the Air Line State Park Trail Region. This plan aspires to encourage and support leadership from the Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee, the twelve towns, partner organizations and CT DEEP to make the region a dynamic, safe, and culturally enriching experience to residents and visitors.



LAST GREEN VALLEY

The Last Green Valley is a 35-town National Heritage Corridor in eastern Connecticut and south-central Massachusetts. At night, the region appears distinctively dark amid the urban and suburban glow when viewed from satellites or aircraft. The Last Green Valley is half the size of Grand Canyon National Park and more than ten times that of Acadia National Park, the largest national park in the northeast. Forest and farmland make up 84% of its almost 707,000 acres, yet it lies only an hour from three of New England's four largest urban areas.

[LEARN MORE](#)

AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL REGION MASTER PLAN

Planning for regional and local coordination for economic growth, conservation, cost savings, maintenance, infrastructure, tourism and marketing

Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee

Contributes to oversight and final recommendations for 12 town ALSPT Region Master Plan. Assists with project outreach, participates on project committees, works with consultants, advocates for plan. Membership includes: CT DEEP representatives, elected officials, conservation commissions, bike-trail organizations, land trusts, horse councils, winter sports clubs, outdoor clubs, public works, tourism organizations, land use and economic development staff, chambers of commerce, trail-oriented business owners, influence corridor organizations. Staffed by CTC&D and sub-consultants.

Conservation Committee

Team of regional environmental volunteer experts to provide support and recommendations:

- Evaluate system of natural resource protection in the trail region: coordination, wildlife habitat, forestry, watersheds, buffers
- Best practices for public amenities
- Coordination with CT DEEP, CT Land Trusts, & Town Conservation Commissions
- Support sustainability of viewsheds and ecotourism

Infrastructure and Municipal Leadership Committees

Representatives from town government (elected officials, planners, public works officials, park supervisors, & engineers) to inform and support:

- Manage costs of maintenance and improvements
- Advocate for municipal concerns, regional and town solutions, and contributions for trail conditions
- Collaborate with CT DEEP on communication network for public alerts, managing stakeholder involvement

Sustainable Economics, Marketing and Land Use Committees

Team of local and regional economic expert volunteers and stakeholders who can provide project support and recommendations:

- Articulate why people should visit the ALSPT Region
- Initiate a regional marketing campaign, logos, website development, business support, and land use innovation for growth and preservation
- Determine impact of local and regional influence corridors

MASTER PLAN EVALUATION OF COORDINATION

CT DEEP

- Owner oversight of Air Line State Park Trail
- Ongoing property maintenance
- Infrastructure funding and planning
- Permitting, construction and coordination with municipal projects (streamlined)
- Coordinate with ALSPT Regional Organization for infrastructure, funding, fundraising, marketing, and public communication protocols - rules - regulations

ALSPT Regional Organization

Nonprofit organization of resident stakeholders

- ALSPT event coordination, fundraising and marketing
- Coordinate with CT DEEP, 12 town local governments, local trail committees and partner organizations
- Maintain ALSPT Region website
- Support towns toward regional ALSPT land use and economic policies
- Work with partners and stakeholders to promote conservation objectives and infrastructure maintenance and new improvements

Local and Regional Government

- Appoint and support members of ALSPT Regional Organization
- Support local trail committees and contribute to regional ALSPT organizations
- Foster initiatives and Master Plan recommendations
- Support regional cost savings for ALSPT improvements
- Coordinate with CT DEEP and ALSPT Regional Organization on public alerts and communications

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



PARTNERS IN ALSPT REGION MASTER PLAN



12 towns in Air Line State Park Trail Region



17 scientists specializing in natural resources and wildlife



11 professional consultants with a range of environmental & professional specialties

This master plan is the product of a request from the twelve towns of the Air Line State Park Trail Region to the Environmental Review Team (ERT) Program of the Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Area (CT RC&D). CT RC&D provided matching funds and applied on behalf of this twelve-town collective for a Recreation Trails Grant from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP). A grant was awarded to CT RC&D in 2019 to produce an Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan. Without the generous support of CT DEEP, this plan would not have been possible.

CT RC&D also supported the plan development process with a dedicated project manager/professional planner to coordinate a team of

consultants and support the Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee with the development of the final master plan.

Additionally, the twelve towns were able to engage an ERT program through CT R&CD comprised of seventeen professional natural resource and wildlife scientists and eleven professional consultants specializing in landscape architecture, engineering, land use planning, economic research and analysis, trail surveys, marketing, website design, governance, and watershed analysis. The ERT program is a free land use support and planning service funded by CT DEEP's Passport to the Parks Program and CT RC&D for Connecticut municipalities and land trusts with a goal to map and analyze baseline natural resources and land use data

toward best management land use policy and site preservation or park development.

The twelve towns of the Air Line State Park Trail Region and CT RC&D would like to acknowledge and express appreciation for the important work of the Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee as well as the following individuals and organizations who contributed their knowledge, insights, professional expertise, and time to the Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan. Their professional contributions and dedication to the process were critical to the full analysis of the Air Line State Park Trail Region to ensure this trail system is built, promoted, and maintained through a collaborative process.

Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee



The members of the twelve-town Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee provided invaluable synergy to the collective knowledge that supports the trail system as well as collaboration between the twelve trail towns, the numerous trail committees, and the partner stakeholders of the trail. Numerous members already knew each other and had worked together in the past, but new relationships and introductions were also created.



We would like to thank all of the committee members who contributed to the content of this Master Plan, including an acknowledgement of extra time and support provided by Ann and Frank Zitkus, Stan Malcolm, Dick Symonds, Monique Wolanin, Charlie Obert, Jennifer Kaufman, Laurie Giannotti, Kim Bradley, Sam Gold, Jeremy Hall, Craig Bryant, John Hankins, Phil Chester, Sal Rizzo, Louis Pear, Maureen Nicholson, Tyra Penn, Karen Durlach, Janet Booth, Steve Solokowski, and John Bolduc for their extensive volunteer hours to hike, bike, walk, study, write, research, photograph and contribute to the content of this plan and the Air Line State Park Trail Region website.



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- Representatives of neighboring influence areas near the ALSPT who supplied energy and synergy to build support for the plan.
- The invaluable town staff of the twelve ALSPT towns who gave time, expertise, and insights to the research and planning process.

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- Chaplin/David Stone
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- Colchester/Demian Sorrentino, AICP
- Columbia/Debra Fiske
- Columbia/Mark Walter
- Columbia/Beth Lunt
- Columbia/Ann Dunnack
- Columbia/Tom McGrath
- CT Horse Council/Diane Ciano
- CRCCD/Jane Brawerman
- CRCCD/Kelly Starr
- CRCOG/Robert Aloise, P.E.
- CRCOG/Michael Cipriano, AICP, CZEO
- CRCOG/Maureen Goulet
- CRCOG/Matt Hart
- CT Audubon/Sarah Heminway
- CT Audubon/Andy Rzeknikiewicz
- CT Land Conservation Council/Amy Paterson
- CT DEEP/Kim Bradley (UConn 2019-2022)
- CT DEEP/David Buckley
- CT DEEP/Joe Cassone
- CT DEEP/Brian Hess
- CT DEEP/Ann Kilpatrick
- CT DEEP/Michael Lambert
- CT DEEP/Nate Piche
- CT DEEP/Matthew Quinn
- CT DEEP/Tom Tyler
- CT DEEP/Laurie Giannotti
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- ECCD/Dan Mullins
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- Hebron/Brian O'Connell
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- Jonah Center/John Hall
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- Portland/Ryan Curley
- Portland/Nate Foley
- Portland/Louis Pear
- Portland/Sari Rizzo
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- Putnam/Carly De Luca
- Putnam/Bruce Fitzback
- Putnam/Angela Kneeland
- Putnam/Scott Moorehead
- Putnam/Barney Seney
- Putnam/Travis Serrine
- Putnam/Elaine Sistare
- Putnam/Delpha Very
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- RiverCOG/Janice Ehlemeyer
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- RiverCOG/Rob Haramut
- SCCOG/Sam Alexander, AICP
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- Thompson/Karen Durlach
- Thompson/Chris Elkinson
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- Thompson/Tyra Penn
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- Jane Flynn: Financial Administration
- Andrea Peres: Project Kickoff-Outreach Support
- Stan Malcolm: Volunteer Project Photographer (Performance Vision)
- Kelly Collar: Mad River Creative – Report Final Design and CT RC&D Project Website Management
- Rob Lloyd: TechNet Computing
- Hannah Hurwitz: Logo Design/Social Media Coordination



Environmental Review Consulting Team

The Environmental Review Team provided a team approach to analysis of the natural resources of the Air Line State Park Trail, which are outlined in Appendix A. CT DEEP generously provided staff with senior expertise in specific subject areas as noted below and worked closely with the other professional team members. Professional team members provided insights and expertise in their specific subject knowledge area and worked well as a team to provide an overall integrated overview of the natural resources and wildlife of the Air Line State Park Trail Region.

- Randolph Steinen, PhD, Geologist
- Hank Gruner, Herpetologist
- Dennis Quinn, Herpetologist
- Charlotte Pyle, PhD, Ecologist
- Ed Pawlak, Soil Scientist
- Chris Allan, Soil Scientist
- Kip Kolesinkas, Soil Scientist
- Todd Mervosh, Invasive Species
- CT Audubon/ Andy Rzeznikiewicz
- CT DEEP/ Kim Bradley, Rec Trails
- CT DEEP/ Matthew Quinn – Park Management
- CT DEEP/ Tom Tyler – Park Management
- CT DEEP/ Laurie Giannotti, Rec Trails
- CT DEEP/ Matthew Goclowski - Fisheries
- CT DEEP/ Nathan Piche - Forestry
- CT DEEP/ David Buckley – Parks Management
- CT DEEP/Joe Cassone - Fisheries
- CT DEEP/Brian Hess - Wildlife
- CT DEEP/Ann Kilpatrick- Wildlife
- Eastern CT Conservation District/ Dan Mullins
- Eastern CT Conservation District/ Jean Pillo
- CT River Coast Conservation District/Kelly Starr

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Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan Consultant Team

At the outset, the 12 Town ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee could have hired one consulting engineering, planning or landscape architecture firm to complete this master plan. Instead, it decided to endorse a more complex, holistic process that involved numerous voices and partners to ensure the planning process was fully vetted by varied opinions and insights. Toward that end, the committee was able to secure the services of a team of talented firms

and individuals who contributed to the research and writing of this master plan. Through their combined contributions, the plan transcends municipal, regional, ideological, and governmental boundaries to reflect recommendations that support the Air Line State Park Trail Region and the collaboration required by numerous entities to fully realize the vision of the completed Air Line State Park Trail Corridor.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, ENGINEERING, INFRASTRUCTURE

- Kevin Grindle, ASLA, PLA – Barton & Loguidice
- Mark Zessin, P.E. – Barton & Loguidice

WEBSITE – WAYFINDING – MARKETING

- Pete Hary – Quinn and Hary Marketing
- David Quinn – Quinn and Hary Marketing

ECONOMIC RESEARCH – DEMOGRAPHICS – ANALYSIS

- Kevin Hively – Ninigret Partners

TRAIL USER COUNTS AND TRAIL USER SURVEYS

- Kim Bradley - UConn Extension – Trail Coordination
- Emily Wilson – UConn Extension – CLEAR – GIS
- Laura Brown – UConn Extension – Economics
- Aaron Budris – Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments

LAND USE ANALYSIS AND ZONING

- Amy Petrone, AICP, CZEO

REGIONAL HERITAGE TOURISM AND TRAIL ACCESSIBILITY

- Lois Bruinooge - The Last Green Valley
- Fran Kefalas – The Last Green Valley



VISION AND GOALS

Thirteen Connecticut bridges and two seasonal ferries cross the Connecticut River unifying the eastern and western halves of Connecticut. The Connecticut River creates a geologic, physical, and cultural divide between eastern and western Connecticut. Affinity toward the New York metropolitan region infuses the regional culture and land use patterns west of the river. To the east, the influence of Boston and New England and the mostly rural landscape create an entirely different atmosphere.

Travelling across the river into eastern Connecticut, life takes on a slightly altered outlook from Connecticut's fast-paced region to the west. While the western half of the state focuses on urbanized issues of sustainable growth, development density, shortage of housing and the ever-changing pace of a highly populated region, eastern Connecticut maintains a reputation as an escape to open spaces, rural landscapes, lower population density and under optimized historical nooks and crannies of small village centers.

From the historic resorts of East Haddam, Lebanon, and East Hampton, where city dwellers travelled by riverboat to vacation in the early 1900s to the back roads and ghost towns of the early settlers where evidence of old settlement

patterns are still found in the landscape, stone walls still delineate boundaries and farms provide the breadbasket of locally grown produce, livestock, and milk. It's a quiet part of the state, practicing smart growth yet seeking innovation and supporting higher education and technology centers. The residents are dynamic, diverse, and grounded in confidence that their protected landscapes and housing opportunities can sustainably support a slow growing, diverse population.

The Air Line State Park Trail (ALSPT) is the region's recreational gateway corridor, traversing the breadth of eastern Connecticut. Along with its partner, the Hop River Trail that links Manchester to the junction with the ALSPT in Willimantic center, the ALSPT epitomizes the eastern Connecticut regional experience, especially for the trail user. It winds through the region's villages with their small businesses and coffee shops, the vineyards, the farms, the diverse and dynamic Willimantic center, the country backroads, state forests and parks, and the hospitable low-key residences of eastern Connecticut.

It is an unrealized and emerging asset to the state with its opportunity to showcase the quieter side of Connecticut.



Travelling across the river into eastern Connecticut, life takes on a slightly altered outlook from Connecticut's fast-paced region to the west.



The importance of this linear state park to the state and the region was the incentive for the ALSPT Region Master Plan. The plan is distinct from ongoing work of the park's owner, CT DEEP, which maintains and monitors the park property. This master plan is designed to gather the most current information and insights from numerous sources and organizations that influence the trail's future as a functioning well maintained multi-use trail of over sixty-four miles and recommend actions to coordinate with CT DEEP to quickly build out the trail and optimize amenities and maintenance.

THE PLAN IDENTIFIES THESE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE TWELVE TOWNS OF THE AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL REGION AND CT DEEP

- Recommendations toward systematic maintenance coordination with CT DEEP
- Collaboration on maintenance, safety systems, service amenities, a schedule of infrastructure improvements to complete the trail, and
- Recommendations for how to build economic and tourism growth through a sustainable conservation based trail corridor in collaboration with the state, local wayfinding, website and social media marketing and land use policy that supports the viewshed and conservation resources of the trail.

Colchester Historic Rail Station: Terminus of ALSPT Colchester Spur originally serviced rail travel and freight for nearly 80 years thru Willimantic and Middletown.

HISTORY OF THE TRAIL AND THE TOWNS

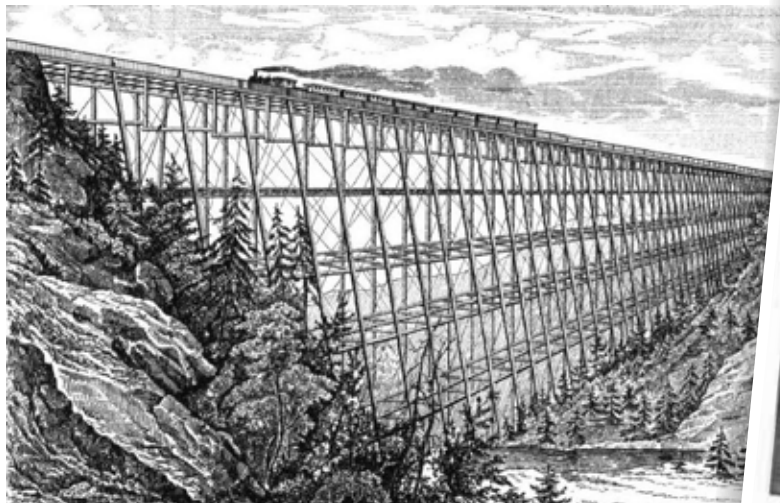
As the twelve towns and the CT DEEP look toward the future for the Air Line State Park Trail, the trail experience is inspired by its history as a railroad. The name of the rail line and the trail is derived from drawing a straight line through the air between Boston and New York City, hence Air Line Railroad or Air Line Trail. Similar to the effort to build out this multi-use trail, the rail line construction from the 1840s to the 1870s involved challenging terrain, bridges, voluminous cuts and fills to ensure a flat grade for a train's journey from Boston to New York City. The first attempt began in 1846, with the chartering of the New York and Boston Railroad Company, but progress

stalled as the company failed during the Panic of 1857. In 1867, a group of investors decided to try again, chartering the New Haven, Middletown and Willimantic Railroad Company. Ultimately, the Air Line Railroad was leased by the rapidly growing New York, New Haven and Hartford (NYNH&H or NH) Railroad, in 1882.

Specific challenges for the new railroad involved construction east of Middletown, CT, and further into the terrain of eastern Connecticut. This region was an especially challenging run for the Air Line Railroad as the landscape demanded a serpentine rail bed. Despite the limited technology of the day, expansive cuts through the hillsides

were accomplished in combination with equally massive "fills" in the valleys to keep the rail bed at grade. Nowhere was this more apparent than at the expansive bridges, or viaducts, over Flat Brook and Dickenson Creek in East Hampton and Colchester respectively. Only 1.2 miles from each other, these stream valleys were first crossed by lengthy bridges. The Rapallo viaduct needed 800 feet of length to cross Flat Brook, and the Lyman Viaduct, just to the east, needed 1,000 feet to span Dickenson Creek. Today, trail users benefit from the broad scenic trail views from these bridges that were filled for safety reasons. Further east, construction challenges continued for this new rail

The name of the rail line and the trail is derived from drawing a straight line through the air between Boston and New York City, hence Air Line Railroad or Air Line Trail.



line from the Town of Windham to the Connecticut border toward the connection with Boston. A major obstacle for the Air Line Railroad in this section was the crossing of the Quinebaug River in Putnam, CT. Engineering and fortitude prevailed, and construction was complete in August of 1872. Within a year, the reality of the direct rail line link with a time of less than six hours was complete.

Intermittent rail traffic for passengers built up until 1876 when the first dedicated passenger run was scheduled. The new railroad could only be effective if it offered time savings from the pre-existing shoreline route. By 1885, with an

Ultimately, time, new technology and cost conspired toward the demise of the Air Line Railroad. This winding bucolic engineered train route required continued upgrades. The cost for new infrastructure was prohibitive.

hour savings on the six-hour coastal run from New York to Boston, the New England Limited on the Air Line Railroad was established. The era of the Ghost Train was a particular highlight of the Air Line Railroad (see next page). But ultimately, time, new technology and cost conspired toward the demise of the Air Line Railroad. This winding



bucolic engineered train route required continued upgrades. The cost for new infrastructure was prohibitive. In 1898, the NH Railroad system that operated the shoreline rail system purchased the line which hasten the downfall of the Air Line Railroad. Passenger service of the Ghost Train era concluded on May 17, 1902, when service defaulted to the Boston to New York City shoreline rail system.

By this point, most trains used the Shore Line Railroad, with the Air Line Railroad being used mainly for a few oversized and heavy freight trains. In 1955, the bridge over the Quinebaug River was washed out, severing the line just west

of Putnam. The financially strapped NH Railroad, could not justify the cost to repair the bridge, and thus abandoned the line from Pomfret to Putnam in 1959. Intermittent sections of rail from Portland to Thompson remained in use until the early 2000s, when they were removed to make way for the Air Line State Park Trail. The only portion of the original rail line still in use in Connecticut runs periodic freight from New Haven to Portland with the Providence and Worcester Railroad short line.

The Famous Ghost Train of the New York and New England Railroad

On March 16, 1891, the opulent White Train, a luxury passenger train of the New York and New England Railroad, pulled out of Summer Street station in Boston on its first run, set to arrive in Grand Central Station in New York City in six hours. The Boston Herald reported that people lined the route through the city and suburbs “and gazed with mingled curiosity and delight at its handsome appearance.”

The train was pure Gilded Age splendor – its parlor cars were fitted with velvet carpets, silk draperies, and white silk curtains. The chairs were upholstered in gold plush; full-length glass mirrors were installed at each end of the cars. The coaches were heated with steam piped directly from the locomotive, an improvement over the fat-bellied stoves used in ordinary coaches. Pintsch gas lights brightly illuminated the coaches, replacing oil burning lights normally in use.

The dining car’s menu included baked striped bass with Italian sauce, roasted spring lamb, ribs of beef, sauté of chicken with mushrooms, and a wide array of vegetables, salads and desserts, with every fine wine and liquor available. There is no question that this luxury train was meant to serve the exquisite tastes of the robber barons and financial kings of the time.

The White Train’s name was literal – all of the cars were painted white. On its first run the crew, which included the famous locomotive engineer

Gene Potter, wore white coats or overalls, white caps and white gloves. As time passed, when the white cars traveled through the countryside, particularly at dusk or in the evening, observers came to refer to it as an “eerie apparition.” Thus, the White Train was soon better known as the Ghost Train.

Prior to the 1880s travel between the financial centers of New York City and Boston usually involved steamships along Long Island Sound, connecting with trains in New London, Connecticut, or Fall River, Massachusetts. The NY&NE’s New England Limited was initially successful but by the late 1880s began to lose ridership to the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad’s Shore Line trains, which included the Gilt Edge and the Shore Line Flyer.

To bring back customers to its inland route the NY&NE transitioned the New England Limited into the White Train, which was touted as the height of luxurious travel. The White Train was actually two trains, each leaving New York or Boston at 3 p.m., arriving at the other city at 9 p.m. The NY&NE found the cost of keeping the white cars clean to be exorbitant, and the Ghost Train lasted just four

and a half years. Its last run was on October 20, 1895, and was succeeded by the Air Line Limited. That same year the NY&NE was taken over by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. The



The Ghost Train lives on in legend as one of the Gilded Age’s most opulent and noteworthy trains.

Air Line Limited ran until 1902, and passenger service ended on the old Air Line route by 1937.

The Ghost Train lives on in legend as one of the Gilded Age’s most opulent and noteworthy trains.

by Laura Smith, [UConn Archives](#)

Revisiting the Great East Thompson Train Wreck of December 1891



Hundreds of passengers were injured. All four engines were destroyed, as were the sleeper and a baggage car...

by Laura Smith, UConn Archives

The Town of Thompson has created an historic monument and information station on the Air Line Trail near another notable historic event of the Air Line Railroad. Known as “The Great East Thompson Train Wreck,” it involved four trains of the New York & New England Railroad: the Long Island and Eastern States Express from New York to Boston; the Norwich Steamboat Express from New London to Boston; the Southbridge Freight, a local train to Southbridge, Massachusetts; and freight train no. 212.

It started with the eastbound 212. To keep it from delaying the eastbound Long Island and Eastern States Express and the Steamboat Express, conductor William Dorman got orders in Putnam, Connecticut, to shift to westbound track no. 1, pass East Thompson and switch back to the eastbound track no. 2 in East Douglas, Massachusetts, 19 miles away. But no one notified the East Thompson station that an eastbound train was on the westbound track. As the train crew was coupling cars to the

Southbridge freight train on the westbound track, Dorman’s freight train slammed into the engine. Several cars jackknifed and one was thrown across both tracks.

Moments later, the Long Island and Eastern States Express rounded the curve at about 50 mph and crashed into the thrown car on track no. 2. The engine spun around, vaulted off the embankment, struck a telegraph pole and crashed. Steam plowed the soft gravel for about 150 feet and destroyed a home.

That crash killed Express engineer Harry Tabor and fireman Jeremiah Fitzgerald of Boston. Dazed trainmen tried to send a flagman to signal the Norwich Steamboat Express, but it was too late. That train barreled around the curve and drove nearly 8 feet into the rear Pullman sleeper of the Long Island and Eastern States Express, setting the sleeper and engine cab on fire. All this occurred in the space of 5 minutes.

Hundreds of passengers were injured. All four engines were destroyed, as were the sleeper and a baggage car, and the track was torn up for about 500 yards east of the passenger station.



CHAPTER 2

Needs Analysis

AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL TYPOLOGIES








The Air Line State Park Trail is an ongoing linear infrastructure project that began when the State of Connecticut took ownership of it in 1969. As a multi-use rail trail and linear state park and as segments have been completed over time, the trail has been described in the various sections shown at right.

Within each of these trail sections, trail bed conditions vary from passable for hikers or horseback riders, compacted stone dust for multiple uses included bicyclists with hybrid tires and bicyclists with aggressive tread tires for mountain biking. There are sections near the



more urbanized center of Windham that are paved and the newest addition in East Hampton will be a boardwalk carrying trail users over a significant gap in the trail, a drainage area designated as wetlands by the Army Corps of Engineers. There are incomplete sections extending from the current terminus in Portland to the Arrigoni bridge and a section between Pomfret and Thompson travelling through Putnam's commercial center, which is another more urbanized section of the trail (see Figure 2A).

CURRENT SECTIONS OF THE AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL

-  **Southern Air Line State Park Trail**
25 miles
East Hampton to Windham, designated as a National Recreational Trail
-  **Northern Air Line State Park Trail**
21 miles
Windham to Putnam, which also encompasses a segment of the East Coast Greenway
-  **The Thompson Section**
6.6 miles
Thompson to the Massachusetts state line.[1]
-  **Colchester Center Spur**
3.6 miles
A spur to Colchester village center, designated as part of the Air Line trail.
-  **The Portland Section**
2.3 miles
A maintained portion of the trail that connects to the southern end of the state park at the town line with East Hampton

Trail & Connections to Adjacent Trails — Trail Characteristics

FIGURE 2A

	ASPHALT PATH	RE-ADAPTED ROADWAY	CONCRETE PATH	BOARDWALK	CRUSHED GRAVEL	NATURAL SURFACES	MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL	FOOT TRAIL
								
SURFACE	10+ ft. asphalt path	Either 8 ft road-side bike path (sidewalk possible) or gravel roadbed	5-10 ft wide path (Farmington Heritage Trail photo above is 8 ft wide)	5-8 ft wide wood, composite or concrete boards	5-12ft rushed limestone or similar stone dust compacted	3-4 ft natural graded surface	Ungraded natural surface for both trail hiking and mountain bikes	3-4 ft natural surface – graded or ungraded
AVERAGE COST	\$150-\$200K per linear mile	Low cost for markings – shared road pavement or reused roadbed	\$35/sq ft estimated	\$40/sq ft	\$50/sq ft	\$5/sq ft	Under \$5/sq ft exempting ramp construction	Under \$5/sq ft
NOTES	Most durable option for bicycling but relatively incompatible for horse riding and similar activities	Not to be used for road grades exceeding 10% for long stretches – avoid excessive grades	Durable option – intensive construction process	Good for location with designated critical resources or difficult crossings (wetlands, habitat)	Crushed stone paths built to ADA accessibility guidelines – unless installed properly with drainage system, will erode	Defer to specialist with experience with trail building guidelines for maintenance and reducing erosion	Defer to specialist with experience with trail building guidelines for maintenance and reducing erosion	Defer to specialist such as conservation districts or other trail builders to avoid erosion and damage
USE	High traffic, high use trails that are part of a multi-modal transportation network - ideal for urban settings	Urban settings or where bike racks can be used for connections to town centers or other ALSPT partner properties	Heavy use, helpful in areas prone to erosion for stabilization of slope	Minimal length applications for bridges and trail areas with sensitive resources or inability to lay pavement	Rails to trails for long distance rural travel and minimal grade-disclosure on tires required for safe passage - multi-use – horse friendly	Applicability for access paths to ALSPT Trail from neighboring partner properties (land trusts, towns, others)	Applicability for special mountain bike areas adjacent to ALSPT	Access from ALSPT to trail business locations or shelters where erosion and slope precludes cycle trail

Where the Air Line State Park Trail travels through rural areas, there is less opportunity to access services, safety connections, emergency services, cell service, food, water and amenities. Road suitability for biking on state roadways, between town centers/services and the trail, is an important component to be addressed for the region.

The diagram in Figure 2B denotes service center locations. Nine miles is an optimal travel segment between service centers. This plan provides analysis and recommendations about how towns can optimize their proximity to the trail for economic growth as trail town service and tourism centers with concepts for linking the trail user to town services. Attractions and amenities via state and local roads are paramount to both the positive experience of the trail user and the town to build economic growth from tourism and visitors.

The population of ALSPT visitors is as diverse as the conditions offered by the ALSPT trail, whether the visitor is a novice or expert cyclist, a mountain bike cyclist, a hiker, a runner, an equestrian, snowshoer, a long-distance walker or a cross-country skier.

This accompanying typology chart and map depict the variety of trail conditions of the Air Line State Park Trail and the connections that trail users may find when accessing adjacent properties of land trusts, state parks or forests, visitor centers, town-owned property or businesses that are adjacent to the trail. These typologies provide the following guidance for constructing the trail to meet standards for safety, accessibility, and reliability for maintenance over the long term (see Figure 2C):

- Map and communicate trail conditions on each segment of the trail to ensure trail-users are utilizing the trail with safety and accessibility as a priority.
- Provide conceptual trail connections to neighboring partner properties showing the best access by trail users to the business or venue via an adjunct trail system.
- Identify safe routes for bikeway connections on local and state highways to town centers.
- Provide a storyboard for shared use between the state, towns, and trail committees to identify, depict and locate appropriate amenities such as bike racks, signage, water stations and rest-repair stations.

FIGURE 2B: Proposed Service Centers Along Trail



Existing and potential service centers on the Air Line State Park Trail at no less than 10 miles between service points (exempting Colchester Spur). Service points denote drinking water, bathroom stops, rest areas, connections to food service options, as well as medical services.

Air Line State Park Trail Region Typology — Trail Use

FIGURE 2C



1

Walking

Daily and seasonal walking route provide health benefits and socialization



2

Running

Flat unpaved surface ideal for running, either expert or beginner, and fundraising events



3

Day or Thru Hiking

Connectivity to State Forests and State Parks as well as long distance thru hiking



4

Accessible Outdoors

Surface conditions improvements continue to promote accessibility on trail



5

Cross Country Skiing

Year round options on trail; cross country skiing and snow provide consistent surface

Snowshoeing

Snowshoeing provides family fun and connections to state forests and parks

6



Bicycling

Relatively flat inclines to support short or long distances for beginner to expert cyclists

7



Mountain Biking

Connections to adjacent property mountain bike trail systems

8



Access

Easy access for forest management, emergencies, hunting and fishing, research projects

9



Education

Birding, youth events, public education: geology, ecology systems and archaeology

10



NATIONAL RECREATIONAL TRAILS DESIGNATION



The United States Department of the Interior named the southern section of the Air Line State Park Trail a national recreation trail in 2002.

To complete this designation for the full length of the sixty-four miles of the Air Line State Park Trail, including the section in Portland, the trail must be complete and fully maintained for passage to receive funding toward programming and infrastructure.

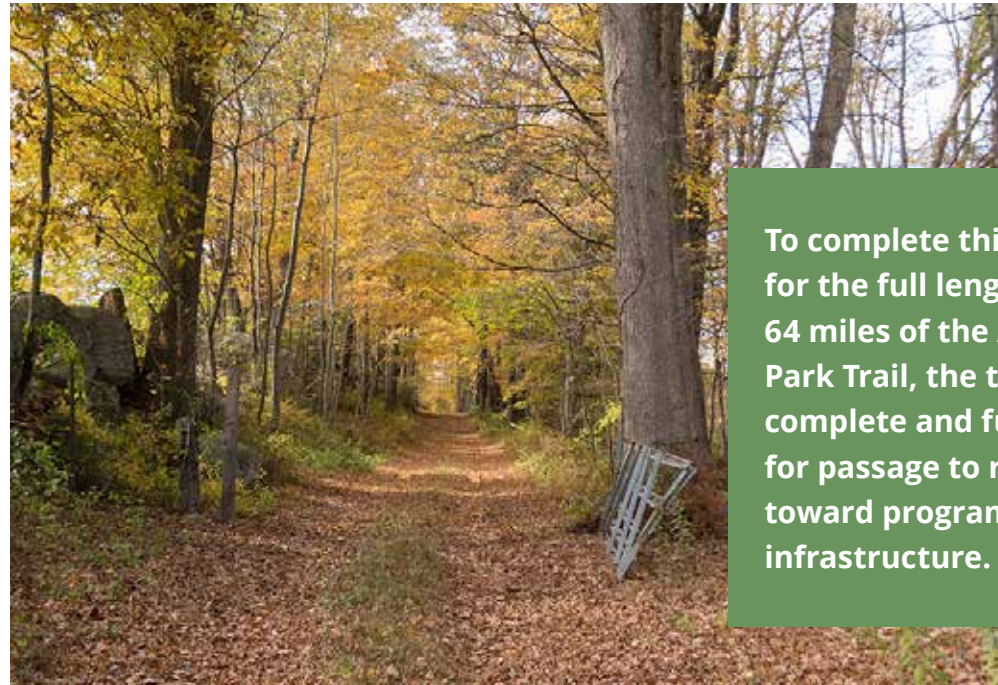
Each National Recreational Trail (NRT) must demonstrate that it represents its region, supports a diverse community, and is among America's best trails. NRTs can be nominated by anyone, but must be supported by the State of Connecticut, which owns the property, and be endorsed by the state's State Trail Administrator, CT DEEP. The trail must be open to public use, have no gaps, and be designed, constructed, and maintained according to best management practices, in keeping with the use anticipated. Trails that demonstrate state-of-the-art design and management are especially encouraged to apply for NRT designation. The advantage of designation includes promotion, technical assistance, and networking to increase use and support of the trail.

The goal is to promote the use and care of existing trails and stimulate the development of

new trails to create a national network of trails and realize the vision of "Trails for All Americans." The designation of the full extent of the Air Line State Park Trail and the Portland connector trail is a goal of the completion from the Arrigoni Bridge in Portland to the Tri-State Marker in Thompson.

As an example of the benefits of National Recreational Trail Designation or designated as a region or trail nationally, the Town of Thompson worked closely with the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program (RTCA)

of the National Park Service. RTCA supports community-led, close to home outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation projects across the nation. They provide technical assistance to environmental and outdoor recreation projects in New England (primarily Massachusetts, Maine, and Connecticut). Their Boston office assisted the Town of Thompson, CT toward trail and town enhancements, with a historic education signs and development plans at "The East Thompson Great Train Wreck" site on the ALSPT.



To complete this designation for the full length of the 64 miles of the Air Line State Park Trail, the trail must be complete and fully maintained for passage to receive funding toward programming and infrastructure.

DATA COLLECTION AND FIELD INVESTIGATION

The planning process was fortunate to have a great team of firms and individuals dedicated to the future of the trail. The data collection and field research involved four separate engagement subsets to bring together data that would inform the full findings and recommendations of the Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan. Integration of the four subsets of research between the four research teams was managed by the project planner with support from consulting team and CT DEEP (see Figure 2D).

The process involved numerous interviews with each of the towns, the CT DEEP, stakeholders, trail committees, virtual roundtables, field and site tours of the trail towns and influence areas. More detailed data from the research is located within the appendices of this plan. Based on a reader's interest, there is more in-depth analysis of conservation, land use, resources, economics, town information and infrastructure in the appendices as well.

The main Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan document presents an executive summary of the process and findings for each segment. The effort was also fortunate to have the services of the UConn Extension Service Trail Census program, which provided extensive data counts and conducted surveys with visitors on the trail.

While this plan provides a compendium of research and findings, there remains significant work to fully engage the public and government agencies in supporting the buildout and marketing of the Air Line State Park Trail Region. As awareness and popularity of the trail increases, trail usage and feedback from visitors will provide additional information to the Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee.

FIGURE 2D:

Four Engagement Subsets for the Air Line State Park Trail Region



CONSERVATION

- Identify community and state conservation goals for the trail system, adjoining forests, open space
- Analysis of conservation based infrastructure required for trail maintenance and new builds.
- Inventory of archaeology, access, watershed, farming, fisheries, forest continuity, wildlife, herpetology, pollinator pathways, and invasive species



INFRASTRUCTURE

- Survey of trail conditions, road suitability and connections to town centers and services
- Analysis for stormwater management, watershed protection, ADA accessibility, and parking
- Research on optimal locations for restrooms, drinking water, cell service and wayfinding



ECONOMICS AND LAND USE

- Research and analysis of demographics, business sectors, workforce, tourism data
- Review of land use policies, zoning, and regional and state policies
- Evaluation of similar economic based trail corridor plans, success and challenges



LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

- Review of municipal capabilities to support regional leadership of twelve town alliance
- Interview with trail committees and partner organizations to assess commitment to an alliance
- Outline CT DEEP guidance and relationship with towns and partner organizations

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

In addition to the first meeting between the 12 towns of the Air Line State Park Trail, partners and CT DEEP, a project overview meeting was conducted with CT DEEP leadership to ensure participation as the property owner. All interested stakeholders participated and contributed to various concepts of an Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan prior to submitting an application for a Recreational Trails Grant.

Once Recreational Trails Grant funding was awarded by CT DEEP for the project, the newly formed Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee held its first meeting in February 2020, one month before the Covid-19 pandemic closed town halls, schools, and workplaces. The ensuing challenges to public involvement were mitigated by ongoing communication with the committee and a growing stakeholder group. Emails and virtual meetings were utilized to update the committee about ongoing research and new developments. The project team created a newsletter to formalize awareness of the master plan process and unify readers, towns, and stakeholders toward a common purpose. A logo and webpage were created for the project with social media posts and emails directing interested parties to information about the master plan and how to contribute content and concepts.

The initial project planning scope sought to engage youth from both high school and colleges near the Air Line State Park Trail as an educational experience. While there was interest by several high school educators in creating curriculum around research associated with the Air Line State Park Trail,



the Covid-19 pandemic created difficulties in coordination and attendance at the trail meetings. The Last Green Valley, the Town of Thompson and other partners took the initiative to engage youth through summer camps that based fun and learning on the Air Line State Park Trail. Additionally, diversity and associated statistics were evaluated with potential for creating a welcoming and inclusive trail experience for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) trail visitors and bilingual sign and wayfinding information for the trail recommendations in the plan were developed to further engage the public. In the future, there is more that can be accomplished with respect to youth and diversity engagement in planning for the trail.

The Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee initially had 24 active participants. To mitigate the inability to gather in-person for public meetings and focus groups, additional participants and stakeholders were sought out. The initial Air Line State Park Trail Stakeholder Committee expanded to a stakeholder group with over 130 participants informing the planning process. This group was regularly updated by email with new developments and research. By 2021, additional outdoor meetings were conducted at specific site locations to talk about conservation resources, partner organizations connections, management issues and infrastructure/maintenance planning.

After the research process concluded in December 2022, project planning staff from CT RC&D with support from the consulting team hosted four separate 1-hour virtual late afternoon workshops in January 2023. The focus of the workshops was to review findings, tentative recommendations and plan structure with the Air Line State Park Trail stakeholders and participating members of the public. The goal was to elicit comments and suggestions from participants to prepare the final draft of the Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan. The workshops were videotaped and posted on the project's webpage.

The Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee grew from 24 active participants to more than 130 members, despite the challenges of the pandemic.





CHAPTER 3

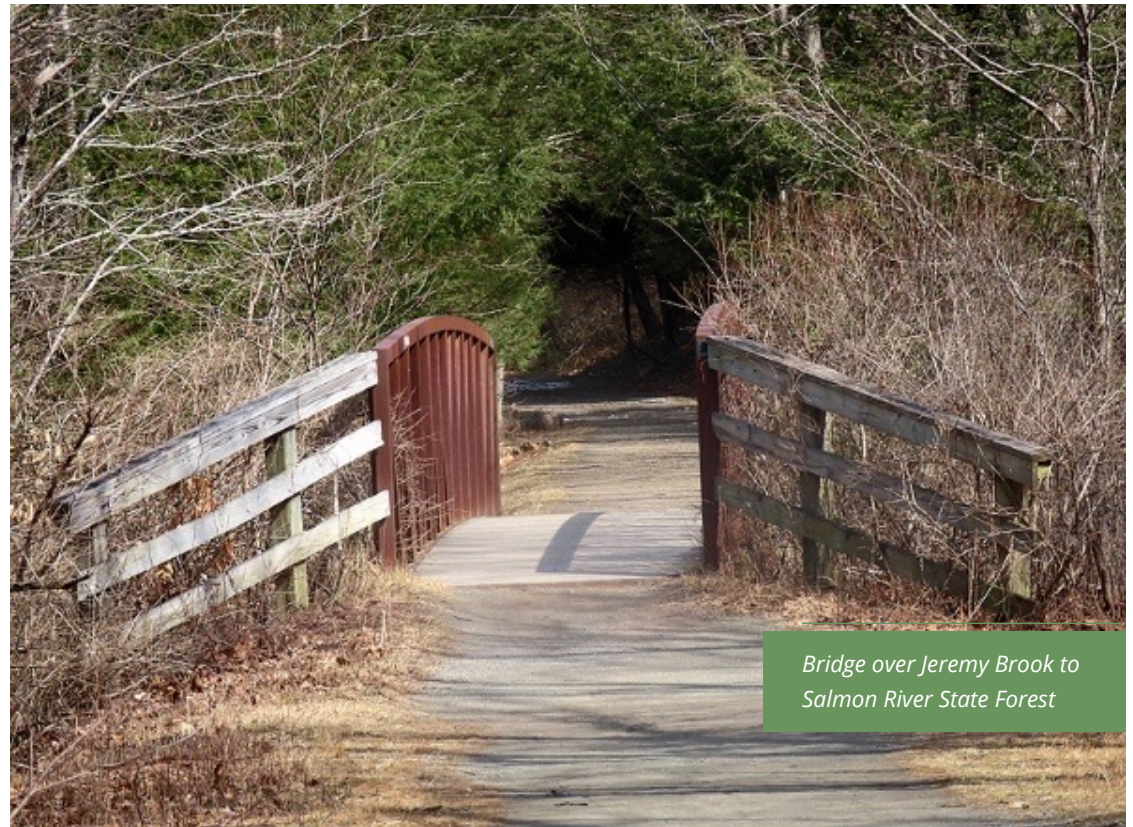
Air Line State Park Trail Region Conservation

OVERVIEW OF AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL REGION

For the most part, the Air Line State Park Trail (ALSPT) Region is sparsely populated with small towns, rural residential development, and conserved lands. From the nearest points of the ALSPT Region, the urbanized area of Worcester is located 30 miles north of the region, the City of Hartford is 30 miles to the west and the New London-Groton region is 30 miles to the south. The smaller urbanized area of Windham (Willimantic) serves as the central urban axis for the ALSPT as well as its junction with the Hop River Trail (see Figure 3A).

A geographic description of the Air Line State Park Trail Region and neighboring towns is as follows: “The landscape includes agriculture, including both pasture and livestock grazing, and cropland. Major crops include hay, corn for silage, nursery stock, greenhouse products, dairy, livestock, some poultry, sweet corn, potatoes, other vegetables, and tobacco. Forest cover is significant, including upland sites and some wooded wetlands, and there are both larger, unbroken tracts of forest and smaller, fragmented forests. Generally, the current climate is humid and continental, slightly colder and with a slightly shorter growing season (120-160 days) than bordering lowland regions. Precipitation is slightly lower than more coastal areas, but still high (40-50 inches annually) and roughly equally-distributed year-round. Late summer to early fall averages sunnier, with the rest of the year being overcast roughly half the time. <https://bplant.org/region/801>

Of the many multi-use trails in Connecticut, the Air Line State Park Trail is an exceptionally unique corridor. While the



Bridge over Jeremy Brook to Salmon River State Forest

“What I like most about the trail is the beautiful scenery; we do photography on the trail. Look forward to when it will connect through to Cobalt & Portland. I use it primarily for running and walking. It’s great to have a nice long walk in nature in the shade. We see all sorts of wildlife and enjoy seeing our neighbors on the trail.”

— TRAIL USER COMMENT, UCONN ALSPT TRAIL SURVEY

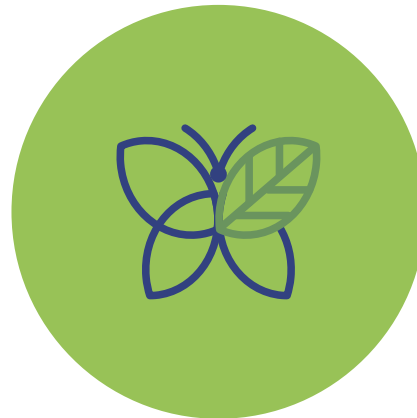
The trail provides a transformational continuity of riding, walking, hiking for miles and miles through vast acreage of rural landscape, rich diversity of topography, geomorphology, vegetation, forests, and wildlife

trail's primary feature is its designation as a state park, a linear one that currently extends from East Hampton to Thompson, it also serves as a rural recreation corridor and transportation system owned, maintained, and improved by the CT DEEP with cooperative support by other organizations and/or local municipalities. It connects and joins other trail systems in Connecticut, such as the Hop River State Park Trail, the Colchester Spur Trail, the Nipmuck, Goodwin & Natchaug hiking trails and various multi-use trails in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The trails of state forests and parks, land trusts, municipal open space and nonprofit outdoor centers branch off from this multi-use recreation corridor

providing trail users with numerous recreational opportunities. This network of interconnected trails is its own eastern Connecticut recreational trail transportation system.

In addition, its relative rural geography is in contrast to other multi-use trails, ones that are predominantly located in more urban and suburban sections of the state, west of the Connecticut River. Over 53 miles in length, 64 miles long with the Portland extension, the finished trail will ultimately traverse through twelve eastern Connecticut towns from the junction of the Arrigoni Bridge in Portland to the Tri-State Marker in northeast Thompson.

Finally, the trail provides a transformational continuity of riding, walking, hiking for miles and miles through vast acreage of rural landscape, rich diversity of topography, geomorphology, vegetation, forests, and wildlife. A trail user travels or can connect to a small village center or an eclectic college downtown, like that of Willimantic in Windham. The trail travels through or near two remote State parks and four sprawling State Forests, also managed by CT DEEP's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Connecting neighbors include vast conserved lands owned by the Connecticut Audubon Society, the Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust, the Eastern Connecticut Forest Landowners Association (ECFLA) & the Wolf Den Land Trust (WDLT) and the Windham Land Trust as well as town owned parks and open space.

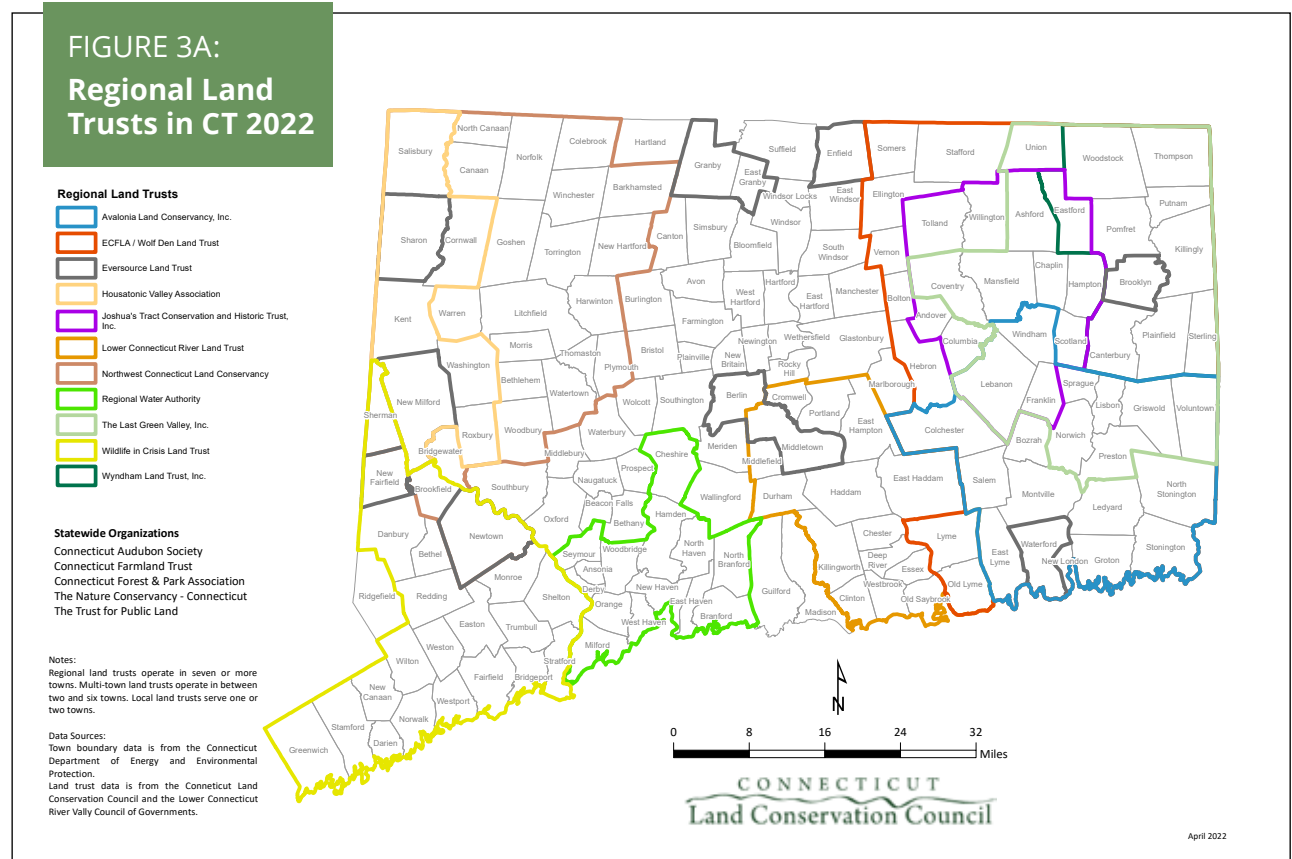


EXISTING OPEN SPACE SYNERGY & COLLABORATION

There are numerous land trusts in the Air Line State Park Trail Region. The Wyndham Land Trust, the Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust, the Middlesex Land Trust, and the Avalonia Land Conservancy are regional trusts with significant acreage preserved in the state. Figure 3A depicts Connecticut land trust organizations and how blocks of open space properties of varied organizations can provide larger acreage conservation blocks for forest continuity and habitat.

Additionally, other organizations such as the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, the Last Green Valley, and the Connecticut Audubon Society deliver conservation support to the region as well as preservation guidance and partnership opportunities. Policies, projects, and research by these organizations, as well as the larger land trusts with support from smaller land trusts and towns, deliver a synergistic understanding of the trail's impact and priorities for conservation and outdoor tourism with neighboring open space and conservation properties.

In addition, The Last Green Valley's open space map project offers a data source for creating mapping throughout the ALSPT Region with support from the four Councils of Governments



(COGs) (see Figures 3B and 3C). Expanding this type of mapping for the Air Line State Park Trail Region cooperatively with The Last Green Valley would provide important land use and conservation data for planning and implementation of trail improvements and connectivity to other properties. Overall, the ALSPT system is supported by many

organizations that recognized the definable conservation experience of the trail system and partnered properties. Along with CT DEEP as owner, regulating, managing, and permitting, there is momentum in place to implement the concept of building the ALSPT as sustainable conservation based trail experience for trail visitors (see Figure 3D).

FIGURE 3B

Pomfret Conservation Focus Area



Existing Open Space Trail Connecting with Air Line State Park Trail

The ALSPT system is supported by many organizations that recognized the definable conservation experience of the trail system and partnered properties.

The Role of Land Trusts in Connecticut



Land trusts are nonprofit, community-based organizations dedicated to the permanent protection and stewardship of land for public benefit.



They work closely with landowners, communities, and other nonprofits to conserve land through acquisition or gifts of property or through conservation agreements (called conservation easements). Land trusts are supported through charitable donations and use funds for a variety of purposes in support of their mission.



Land trusts have an ongoing responsibility to care for the land they conserve, ensuring that the conservation agreements (conservation easements) are upheld and public conservation areas and/or nature preserves are taken care of forever.



More than 130 land trusts currently serve the communities of Connecticut, representing the third most land trusts of any state in the country. Collectively protecting and managing property with significant natural, recreational, cultural, and scenic resources, land trusts range in size from small, all-volunteer organizations to those with professional staff.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW TEAM PROCESS



With such a wealth of existing knowledge about land conservation in the ALSPT Region from public and private agencies and landowners, the Environmental Review Team (ERT) process was a perfect match for this Master Plan's conservation goals on collaboration and coordination of insights and recommendations. CT RC&D's Environmental Review Team Program provides free natural resource assessment to towns and land trusts for their properties. In this program, professional volunteer consultants evaluate property and natural resources, transportation access, determine state, regional and local land use consistency and deliver recommendations toward best management practices for resources or species of significance. For the 12 Town ALSPT Master Plan, CT RC&D funded a 20% match from the ERT program toward the CT DEEP's Recreational Trail Grant funds.

The ALSPT Region Master Plan research included an ERT natural resource survey, inventory, and recommendations. While conservation of the natural resource experience is evident throughout the trail system, ERT professional consultants focused on the three conservation focus areas of Hebron, Lebanon and Pomfret. The investigations in these three areas provides an example of how to evaluate site specific concerns during trail construction, permitting and maintenance. The ALSPT travels through these two focus areas and associated properties as well as through the Salmon River State Forest and properties of the Connecticut Audubon Society, Wyndham Land Trust, and Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust.

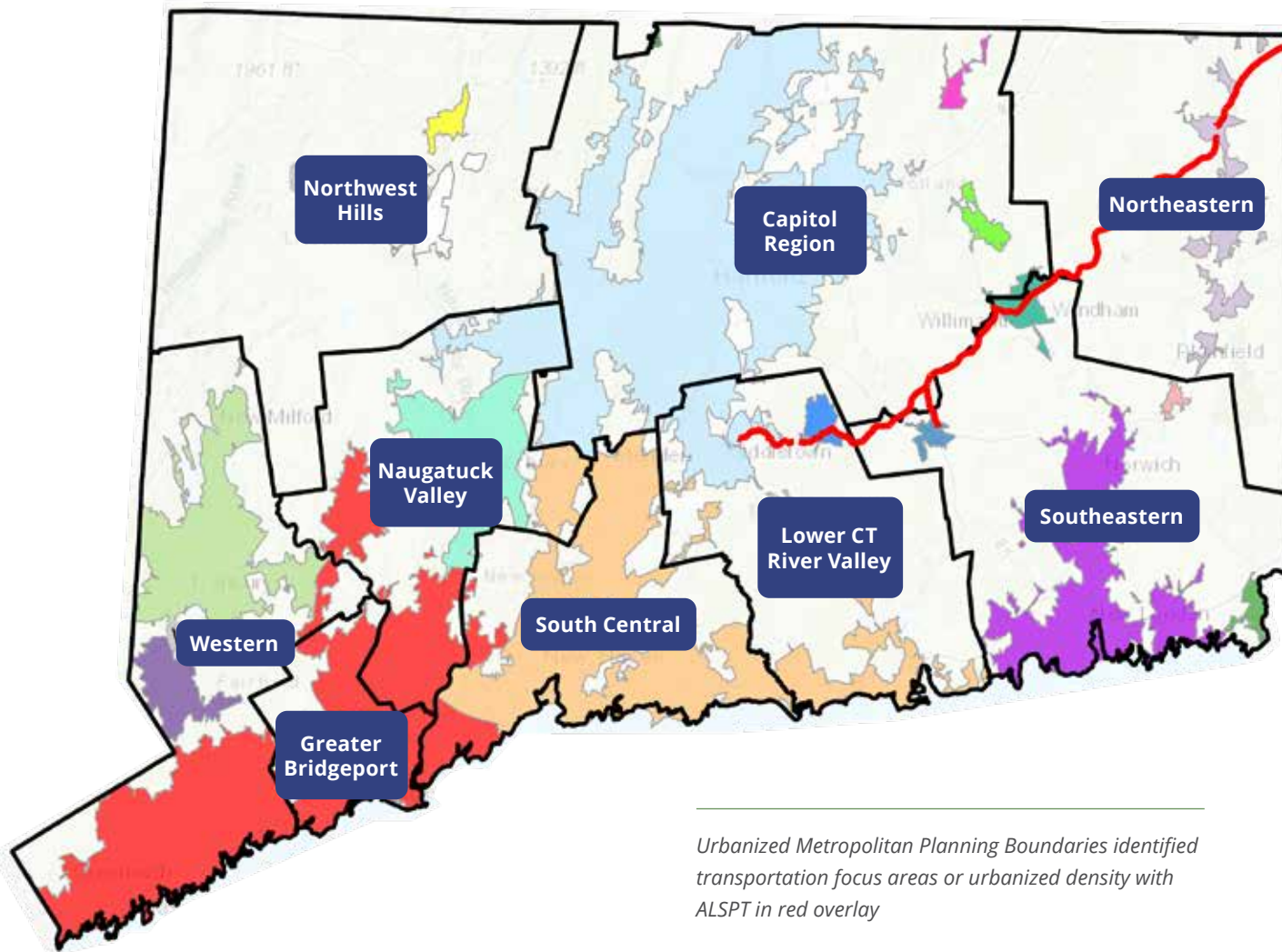
The ERT analysis and recommendations illustrate best practices in management of critical areas for natural resource protection near the trail so that

ERT Teams on site tours. A: Pomfret ERT Team evaluates off-trail connections between service venues, the connections to Pomfret's recreation properties and off trail – trail bike course and partnered relationships with neighboring land trusts. B: Pomfret ERT Team. C: Hebron ERT Team at Raymond Brook – connection to Hibbert property site visit with town officials. D: ERT Team in Lebanon evaluating agriculture connections, impacts, and opportunities from the ALSPT Trail.

trail users would both benefit from the ongoing preservation of the rural scenic landscape and access to wildlife observation and other eco-tourism-based activities near the trail. Many of the recommendations found in this section are derived from these three area natural resource inventory surveys. The full report of the team for these properties can be found in Appendix C. You can also read the [Hebron Bernstein-Hibbert ERT report](#), a more in-depth report that was produced in partnership with the Town of Hebron.

FIGURE 3C

Council of Government and Urban Areas



Urbanized Metropolitan Planning Boundaries identified transportation focus areas or urbanized density with ALSPT in red overlay

URBAN AREAS

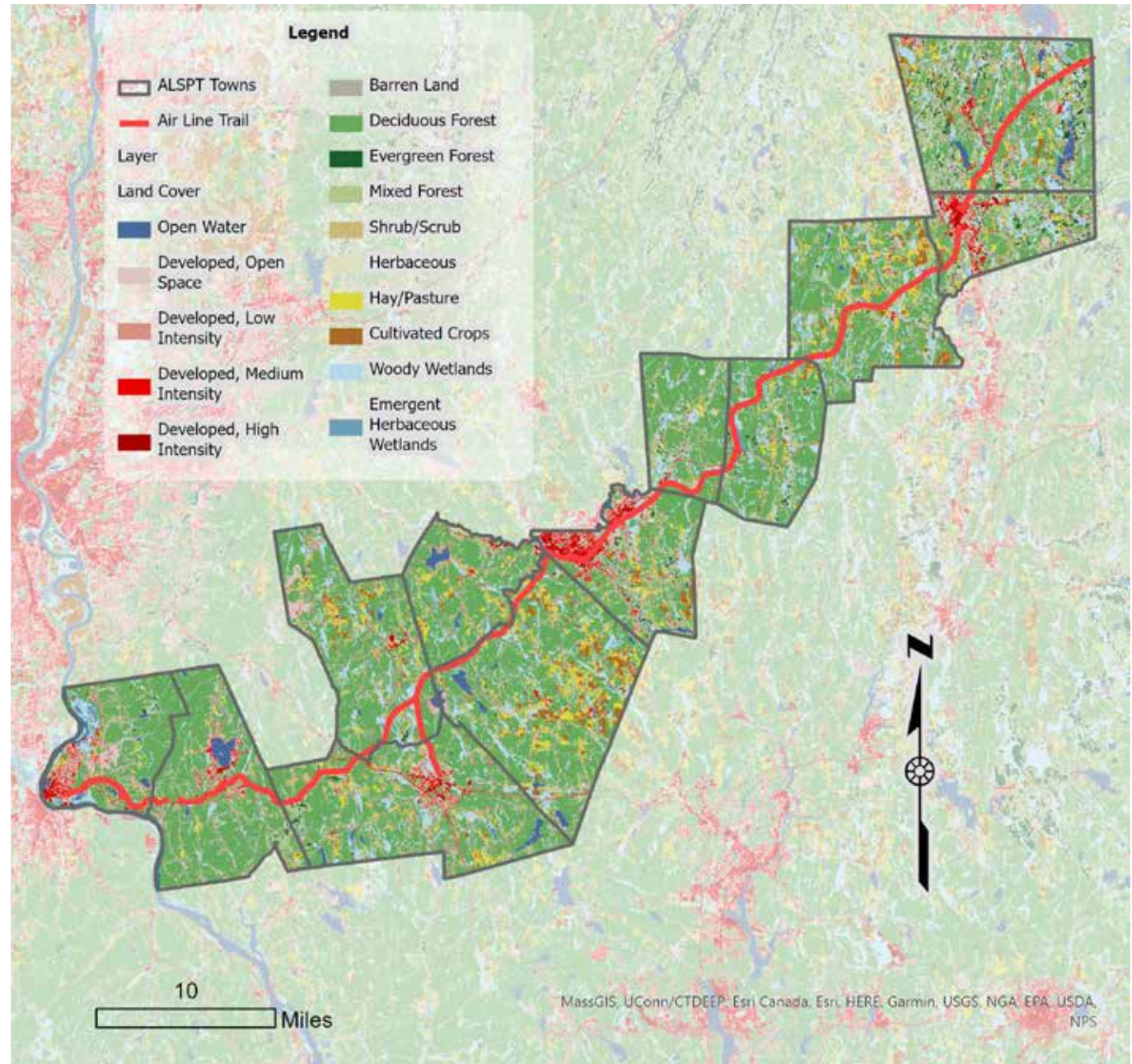
- Bridgeport-Stamford, CT-NY
- Colchester, CT
- Danbury, Ct-NY
- Hartford, CT
- Jewett City, CT
- Lake Pocotopaug, CT
- New Haven, CT
- Norwich-New London, CT
- Putnam-Killingly, CT
- Ridgefield, CT
- Springfield, MA-CT
- Stafford Springs, CT
- Storrs, CT
- Torrington, CT
- Waterbury, CT
- Westerly, RI-CT
- Willimantic, CT
- Winsted, CT
- Worcester, MA-CT
- Air Line Trail

Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, USGS, NGA, EPA, NPS

FIGURE 3D

Land Cover in the ALSPT Region

This land cover map is a composite of land uses in the region. While it doesn't depict preserved open space properties, the land use components of properties have been classified into probable current land use. The UConn Extension's CLEAR Program has made progress in this mapping method with a series of land use cover maps to depict land use change over time. This initiative along with similar mapping produced by The Last Green Valley and with support from Councils of Government is a good baseline for mapping the open space and natural resources of the ALSPT Region.



Environmental Review Teams Inform Trail Planning



As this current planning process unfolded, conservation research with partner organizations created an understanding of the options, limitations, and requirements with partnering and adjacent open space properties from the Air Line State Park Trail.

The teams in both Hebron and Pomfret included CT DEEP district managers, foresters, wildlife specialists, fisheries experts, the Conservation District’s watershed scientists, a geologist, two soil scientists, land trust representatives, two herpetologists, an ornithologist, agriculture-soil scientist, pollinator, and invasive species experts as well as support from the Councils of Governments and town officials. (see acknowledgement list in Chapter I for list of dedicated ERT professionals and volunteers) The team worked through varied seasons to evaluate site conditions and provide the inventories, overviews, and recommendations. Summaries are included in this chapter and the full text is available in Appendix C.

As this current planning process unfolded, conservation research with partner organizations created an understanding of the options, limitations, and requirements with partnering and adjacent open space properties from the Air Line State Park Trail. An example is pictured in Figure 3E. In this location, the ERT team, specifically the team members from the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, provided feedback on the need to fully assess the advantages and disadvantages to improving a trail connection from the Air Line State Park Trail to the We-Li-Kit Farm Ice Cream Stand, a popular refreshment

stop in Pomfret. The business could be a highlighted designation on the Air Line State Park Trail, but the signage and routing would need to be fully evaluated. Nearby Route 97 is classified as, “more suitable,” for bike traffic by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) and would provide an option for cyclists to travel to the business. The question is what proficiency of cycling would the cyclists need to have, i.e., should children on small bikes use this route?

As noted in the diagram and explained in the ERT report, “The southernmost connection to the ALSPT starts out almost perpendicular to the slope. Erosion was noted on parts of the trail. Installation of water bars across the grade on an angle is recommended to dissipate any accumulated flow to reduce trail erosion. Due to the existing condition of the trail, it is not recommended that the trail to We-Li-Kit Ice Cream Stand be promoted for bike travel.”



Access to We-Li-Kit Ice Cream Stand for trail users from Air Line State Park Trail through Wyndham Land Trust, Gellert, and Valentine Properties — EVALUATION BY J. PILLO, WATERSHED MANAGER, EASTERN CT CONSERVATION DISTRICT

This example illustrates the decisions for each section of the trail that access adjacent properties of business. In this case, several decisions as well as coordination between the Wyndham Land Trust, the Town of Pomfret, the We-Li-Kit Ice Cream Stand, CT DEEP and CT DOT are required for two possible options:

- 1 At the intersection of the ALSPT and Brooklyn Road, wayfinding signs could be posted noting access to the ice cream stand. The signs might read: Travel by bike to We-Li-Kit Ice Cream Stand via Route 97. Further up the trail, there is a bike stand and walking path to We-Li-Kit Ice Cream Stand.
- 2 Avoid Route 97 as a travel way by not signing the way to Route 97 from Brooklyn Road (people would have to double back to re-enter the ALSPT). Install bike rack, bench and signage noting We-Li-Kit Ice Cream Stand at the walking path location on the Air Line State Park Trail.

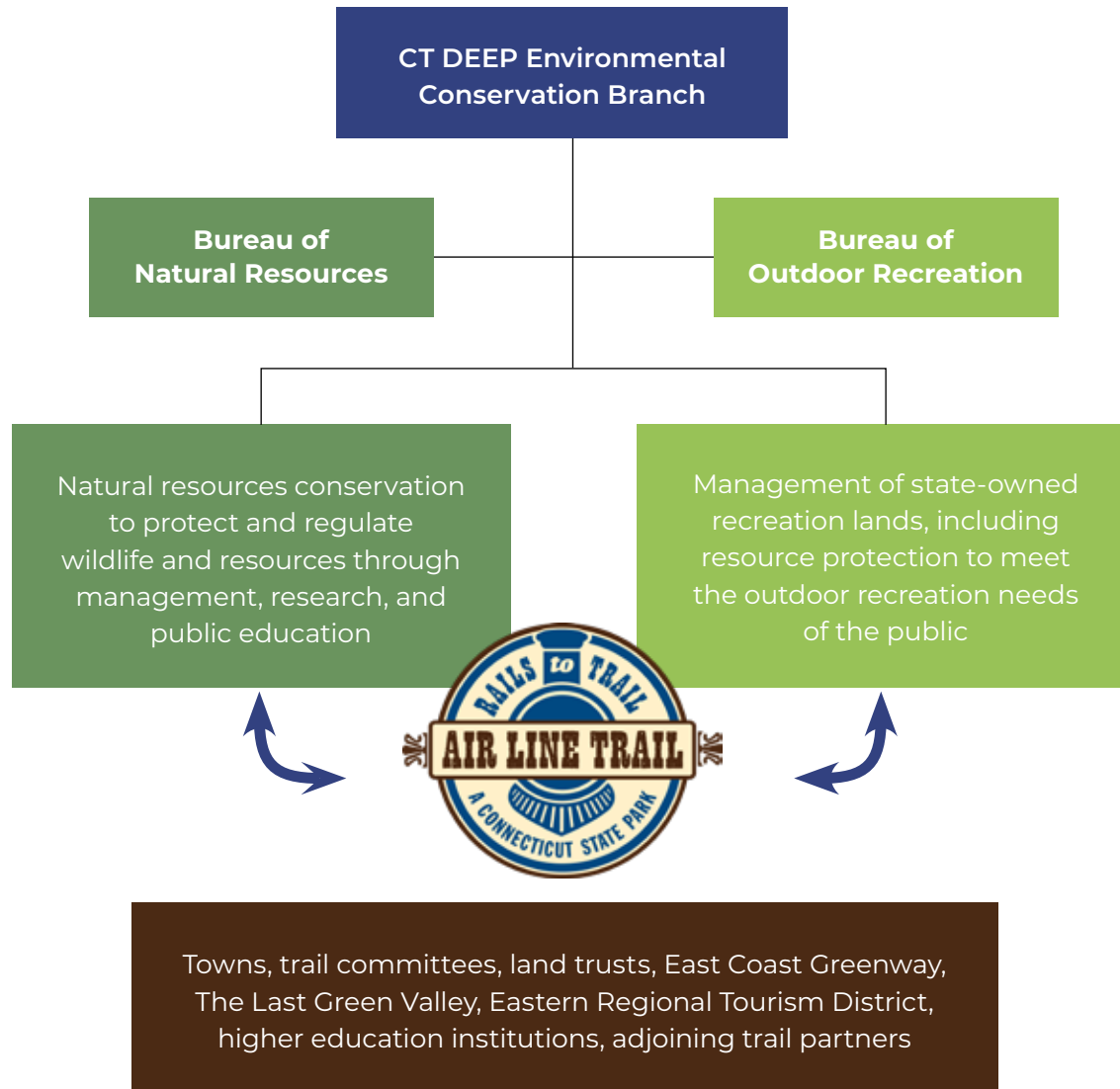


FIGURE 3E

Possible Trail Access to Businesses

- A** Cycling/pedestrian state road
- B** Cross section slope on existing trail through Gellert property
- C** Wider trail section on route
- D** Area of investigation

FIGURE 3F: Synergistic Management of the Trail System



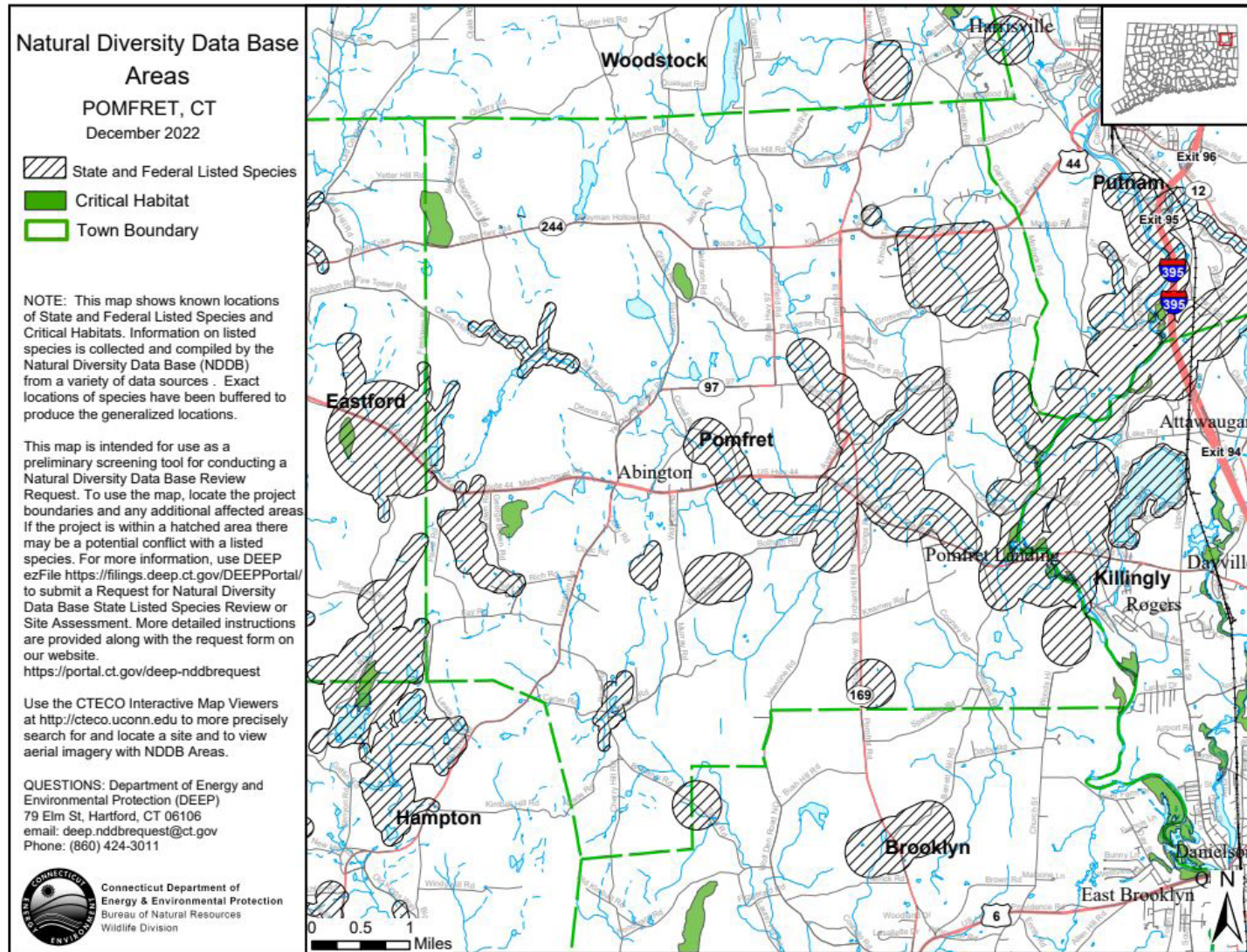
Integration of conservation management for Air Line State Park Trail

As the ALSPT and associated open space is so vast, the ALSPT Master Plan’s ERT visited and inventoried only two specific conservation focus areas, relying on the expertise of the CT DEEP to inform and support protection of the resources and habitats throughout the larger trail system. This in-depth analysis of two specific conservation areas offers insights into resources, methods and anticipated natural resources in the area. It also illustrates the need for a coordinated team approach between wildlife, fisheries, forestry specialists within the CT DEEP, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and partnering organizations, land use officials, town leadership and stakeholders toward managing the trail and neighboring properties.

The CT DEEP, as the owner and maintainer of the Air Line State Park Trail system, currently has very limited staff and resources to manage increased daily usage of the trail system and potential impact on natural resources, water quality and habitat that would result from increased usage. Like other trail systems in the state and nationwide, there is, and will be, an ongoing need for coordination, adaptability, and flexibility on the part of CT DEEP within the agency and also with towns, trail committees and partners to build a synergistic management of the trail system (see Figure 3F).

FIGURE 3G

Natural Diversity Data Base Areas, Pomfret CT



CT DEEP's Bureau of Natural Resources and Bureau of Outdoor Recreation synchronize their work to support analysis of the trail system as well as state forest and parks. They work closely with towns, partner organizations and agencies as well as adjacent property owners. One example is CT DEEP's Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) where property owners and researchers can find access to information on critical or endangered species and their habitat. The ALSPT trail system has many areas of NDDDB species significance. The section of the trail in Pomfret (Figure 3G) shows these areas as dashed or green shapes overlaid on the road system. The NDDDB is one example of the information and data available at CT DEEP. To fully evaluate and map a section of the trail, go to the [ezFile website](https://portal.ct.gov/deep-nddbrequest) and create a user account to build a map of the specific area and locate species of concern.

CT DEEP's Natural Diversity Database allows property owners and researchers to access to information on critical or endangered species and their habitat.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conservation goals of the Air Line State Park Trail planning process are woven into interconnections of the best management practices for trail maintenance, new infrastructure, trail use design and land use policy/zoning adjacent to the trail. Visitor

and use dynamics as well as maintenance and construction can potentially have an impact on the eco-systems near the trail, the viewsheds that support the tourism marketing of the trail, and water quality.



Conservation Goals



Identify and amplify the conservation characteristics that promote the natural resource wealth of the trail system



Implement sustainable and innovative practices for natural resource protection & reduction of natural hazard impacts



Ensure the trail user continues to learn about & experience the natural resources of the Air Line State Park Trail Region



Inventory baseline natural resources near the trail that require special conservation and protection, adjacent land use and new infrastructure

RECOMMENDATIONS: Natural Resource Conservation

- 01** Management and planning for stormwater, drainage and soil erosion is ongoing and critical for water quality management, costly flooding and maintenance expenditures, habitat for water dependent wildlife. Even the smallest cuts and fills to create walking paths, install benches, bike racks and other improvements should consider soil disturbance and the potential for significant erosion.
- 02** Several information signs at key locations of interest should be installed identifying the geologic history and geographic context of the trail and the region.
- 03** To ensure management of water quality and waste, collaboration between the CT DEEP, ALSPT towns and adjacent partner organizations could provide solutions for bathroom stops and drinking water stations.
- 04** Always seek professional advice from experienced, licensed individuals. CT DEEP Service Foresters are a great place to start. Private consulting foresters also provide technical advice and services.
- 05** For trail connections, infrastructure, forest management or habitat protection project, work closely with CT DEEP toward a plan.
- 06** Where private contractors are hired, understand the conservation trail goals as part of the agreement in writing. A work order, service agreement or contract sets the terms and helps manage expectations. An important element of these agreements is insurance, which protects both the landowner and the service provider. Again, work closely with CT DEEP.
- 07** Monitor Natural Diversity Database Review recommendations to avoid negative impacts to threatened, endangered and/or of special concern species. This may include specific working timeframes, areas to avoid, and habitat elements to preserve.
- 08** For forest management, thoroughly prepare the site. This includes marking property boundary lines, marking trees to cut, marking trees to leave, marking trails, designing water crossings (if necessary), and designating access points. A well-prepared site will increase operator efficiency, avoid negative impacts to the land and residual trees, avoid potential conflicts and manage expectations on how the project will be carried out.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Natural Resource Conservation

- 09** Follow best management practices for water quality while harvesting forest products. This may include water bars, temporary bridges, and sediment control structures such as hay bales or silt fences. This applies to recreational trail construction/maintenance as well.
- 10** If present, manage invasive species prior to and/or after any tree cutting by mechanical or chemical means.
- 11** Self-guided explorations (“Biking or Hiking for Biodiversity”) could help people to explore some of the biological diversity and habitats along the northeast portion of the trail. Activities are divided into (1) “habitat call-outs”, designed to provide information related to various upland and wetland habitats, and land uses along the trail, and (2) “wildlife observations”, designed to engage people in active explorations employing various senses and technologies, especially smart phones.

- 12** Pollinator pathways are an ideal way to educate the public about the importance of pollinators. The Air Line State Park Trail is a sixty-three-mile potential pollinator pathway. It is easy to envision. Map or discuss specific locations that could provide starting points toward building a larger landscape of pollinators. The Trail offers multiple ways to develop a pollinator pathway. Different types of habitat enhancement will make sense in different places and for different groups of people.
- 13** All trail contributors and management should review the natural resource inventory and overview outlined in Appendix C as a baseline toward a natural resource management plan for the trail. CT DEEP should consider obtaining special grant funding to create a natural resource management plan.



RECOMMENDATIONS: General Policy

- 01** The Air Line State Park Trail has provided access to state forestlands and wildlife management areas for management purposes. Traditionally, the trail has been used for management access. However, full discussion of increased trail use by visitors and the need for access to these forests and wildlife management areas should be fully coordinated and evaluated within the next three years.
- 02** Mapping and accurate geospatial data is recommended to provide an understanding of the geography and trail usage data. Create a coordinated geospatial database and mapping to allow for timely trail and natural resource system assessment for permitting, maintenance issues, trail usage, and communications.
- 03** Promptly identify, treat, and remove invasive vegetation along the trail corridors to limit its spread.
- 04** Create a workable calendar and system toward the routine removal trash and litter from the trail.
- 05** Create signs to remind trail users to pack out their garbage and dog waste.
- 06** Monitor illegal use of trails by motorize vehicles and, where appropriate, add barriers to keep unauthorized vehicles off the trail.
- 07** Monitor the creation of illegal side trails, promptly remove them and work with adjacent property owners cooperatively with towns to educate through brochures and outreach, permitting, the positive role of adjacent property owners and the conservation goals of the trail.

RECOMMENDATIONS: General Policy

08 Hunter access to state forestlands and wildlife management areas via the Air Line State Park Trail requires discussion and coordination. Hunting is an important recreational activity, a conservation tool, and is a key component in forest management. That said, to minimize conflict of use and access for both recreational trail users and hunters, an established protocol for safety and information sharing needs to occur with hunters and the visiting public.

09 As trail usage by recreational visitors continues and increases, it is of vital importance that an ongoing communication network be established for the regional trail system between the CT DEEP, towns, trail committees and various partner organizations. See leadership and governance recommendations in Chapter 4.

10 Rules and regulations both on the trail and access to adjoining properties should be adequately signed at connection points, on information trail signs and on the Air Line State Park Trail Region website.

11 Contract with specialists and utilize the most up-to-date stormwater management design alongside trail, permitted side trails and parking areas (rain gardens, stormwater retention, erosion control, flooding)

12 Use the aforementioned Air Line State Park Trail geospatial database to ensure ongoing access to relevant information, access points to partner properties, and location of signage on and near the trail. This will create a quickly accessed positive experience for both all contributors to trail management, trail users and the neighboring partner properties.





CHAPTER 4

**Infrastructure
and Maintenance**

OVERVIEW

The Air Line State Park Trail with the Portland Extension will ultimately create a 64-mile corridor from the center of Portland’s business district to the Tri-State marker in Thompson. Within this uninterrupted corridor, the state park trail system winds through twelve towns, a diverse assortment of hills and valleys, rural communities and urban centers and local roads and interstate highways. This diversity in the natural and built environment in which the trail bisects creates numerous opportunities for visitors to experience this unique state park. The next step focuses on developing strategies and recommendations for infrastructure improvements and routine maintenance that are necessary to assure park visitors have a lasting and positive impression of this state park.

The primary short term goal for the park’s regional continuity requires member towns, CT DEEP and project stakeholders to work together to close the existing gaps in the park. The trail communities of Thompson, Putnam, Windham, East Hampton and Portland continue to plan for and implement final projects to fill un-navigable gaps, which will ultimately complete this park system. To finish this state-owned park, the cost has been augmented by 20% match funding from towns to CT DEEP Recreational Trail Grants. The ALSPT towns also provide municipal funding to support maintenance and support of the trail system.

As these towns and CT DEEP work together and move toward completion of these gaps in the trail system, continuity in the reliable baseline trail conditions will significantly enhance the safety, security and positive experience for the trail user.

This Master Plan describes the importance of the Air Line State Park Trail to the overall economic growth of the region’s tourism economy. The towns and associated trail committees as well as trail advocates have expressed the importance of completing this east to west recreational and transportation corridor that spans eastern Connecticut.

The ALSPT Task Force and project team have worked with the towns and CT DEEP to define appropriate criteria for determining near-term opportunities for improving continuity of the trail as well as connections to town services critical to the trail user experience. This chapter seeks to outline the highlights of those discussions, surveys, and inventories to provide a summary of recommendations to enact the goals described below.

INFRASTRUCTURE GOALS FOR THE AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL REGION STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE



Analyze amenities and services available to trail users and optimize access to off-trail amenities



Implement sustainable and innovative practices for natural resource protection & reduction of natural hazard impacts



Increase cost efficiency for new infrastructure and maintenance through collaborative planning



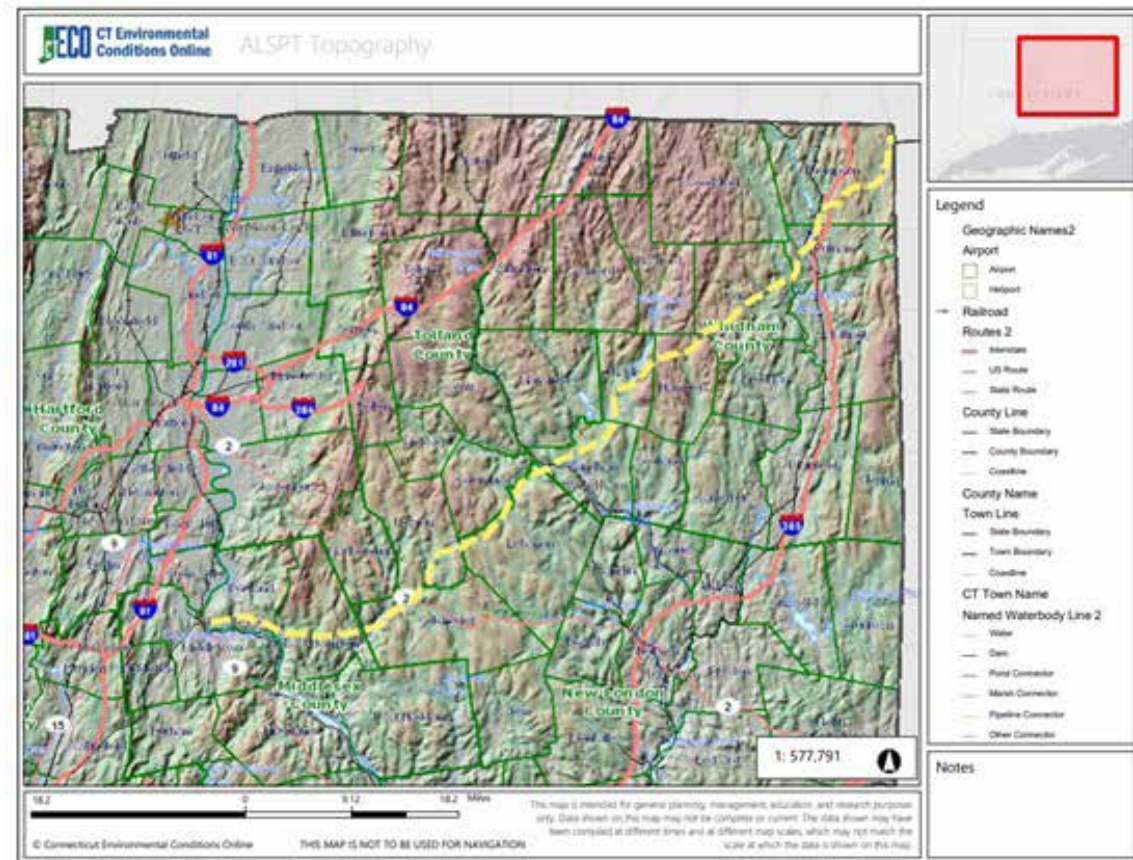
Identify optimal partnerships to obtain trail funding for continuity of trail conditions & new infrastructure

GEOGRAPHY OF THE ALSPT REGION

New ALSPT cyclists riding from East Hampton toward Willimantic will notice the ease with which they cycle northeast only to realize the return trip is doggedly exhausting as the gentle upward slope of the trail creates an ongoing need to peddle. It's a workout.

Eastern Connecticut and the geography of the Air Line State Park Trail is characterized by the narrow river valleys and the low hills of the Eastern New England Upland, also referred to as the Eastern Highlands (see Figure 4A). The characteristic upland extends from East Hampton and the hills of Portland to the tri-state marker in Thompson and onward to Worcester Massachusetts. The land slopes downward from northwest to northeast and is characterized mostly by large swaths of forested uplands, stream valleys and plateaus of agriculture fields. Other than Willimantic, East Hampton, Portland and Putnam central business districts, the trail skirts through or near small village centers.

FIGURE 4A: Topography of ALSPT Region



New ALSPT cyclists riding from East Hampton toward Willimantic will notice the ease with which they cycle northeast only to realize the return trip is doggedly exhausting as the gentle upward slope of the trail creates an ongoing need to peddle.

The Air Line State Park Trail, when constructed as a rail line, took advantage of varied stream valleys to avoid cut and fills around highpoints near the route such as below Bull Hill in Colchester. Here the route follows the valley of the Salmon River and in Columbia below Post Hill near the border of Lebanon and Columbia (see Figure 4B).

While this creates a singular level ride experience, the ALSPT's topographic landscape also presents unique challenges for infrastructure, road crossings, and maintenance. Rolling gently through a mostly rural landscape, the trail often crosses stream, rivers, and wetlands. Neighboring hillside sometimes acts as a drainage basin and flood the trail during rainstorms or winter to spring melt. This is best illustrated in East Hampton, where a section of unfinished and impassable trail was designated as wetlands by the Army Corps of Engineers due to its function as a collection area for Gate Hill drainage before traveling to Mine Brook (see Figure 4C).

FIGURE 4B: Topographic Heat Map of Salmon River State Forest

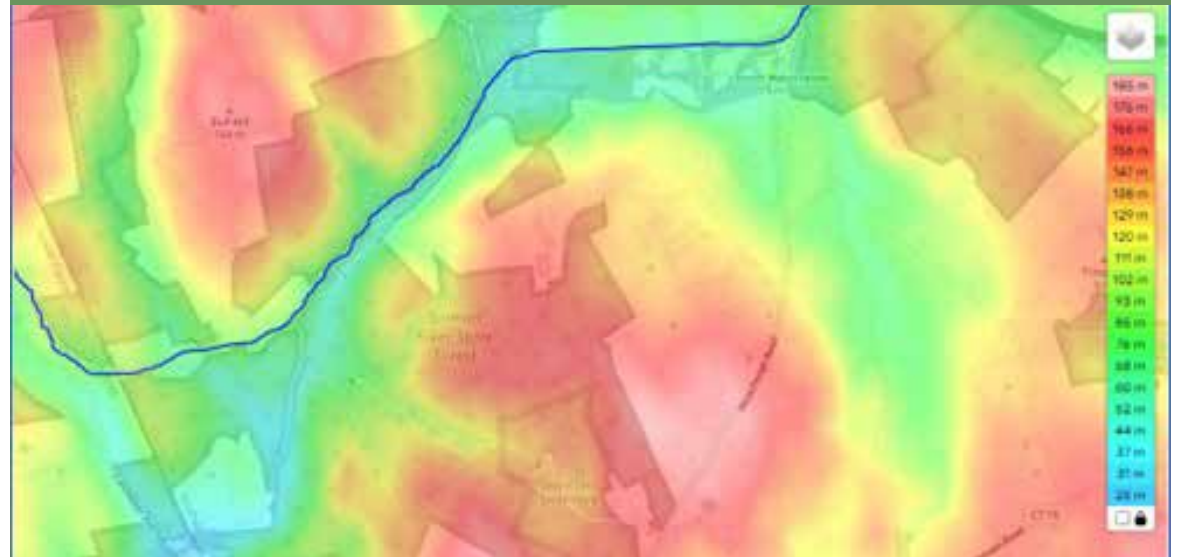


FIGURE 4C: Topographic Heat Map of East Hampton Gap



INFRASTRUCTURE ALSPT ROLES

A number of stakeholders will play a role in planning and maintaining the infrastructure of the Air Line State Park Trail Region. The information below illustrates the varying levels of involvement and collaboration.



COMPARATIVE STATE MULTI-USE TRAILS

The Air Line State Park Trail and the state parks and forests adjacent to its boundaries are under the operation and purview of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The CT DEEP manages 110 state parks, 32 state forests, 92 wildlife management areas, 5 wildlife sanctuaries, 7 natural preserve areas, 117 boat launch ramps, 140 miles of shoreline, 9 miles of sandy beach and one coastal preserve (per the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan | SCORP 2017-2022). The Air Line State Park Trail is one of several state owned parks with multi-use trail systems and is on an ever-growing list of Officially Designated Connecticut Greenways (see Figure 4D).

Of the numerous Connecticut State Parks and Forests many allow for multi-use trail options, including biking. The two Connecticut multi-use trail systems most comparable to the Air Line State Park Trail are the Naugatuck River Greenway Trail and the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. Both of these long distance linear trail systems are planned and managed by organizations who work cooperatively with CT DEEP. They are not, in and of themselves, a complete state park system. The Air Line State Park Trail remains unique in its operational management by CT DEEP. This can be attributed to the build out and planning associated for these three trails over the last twenty years.

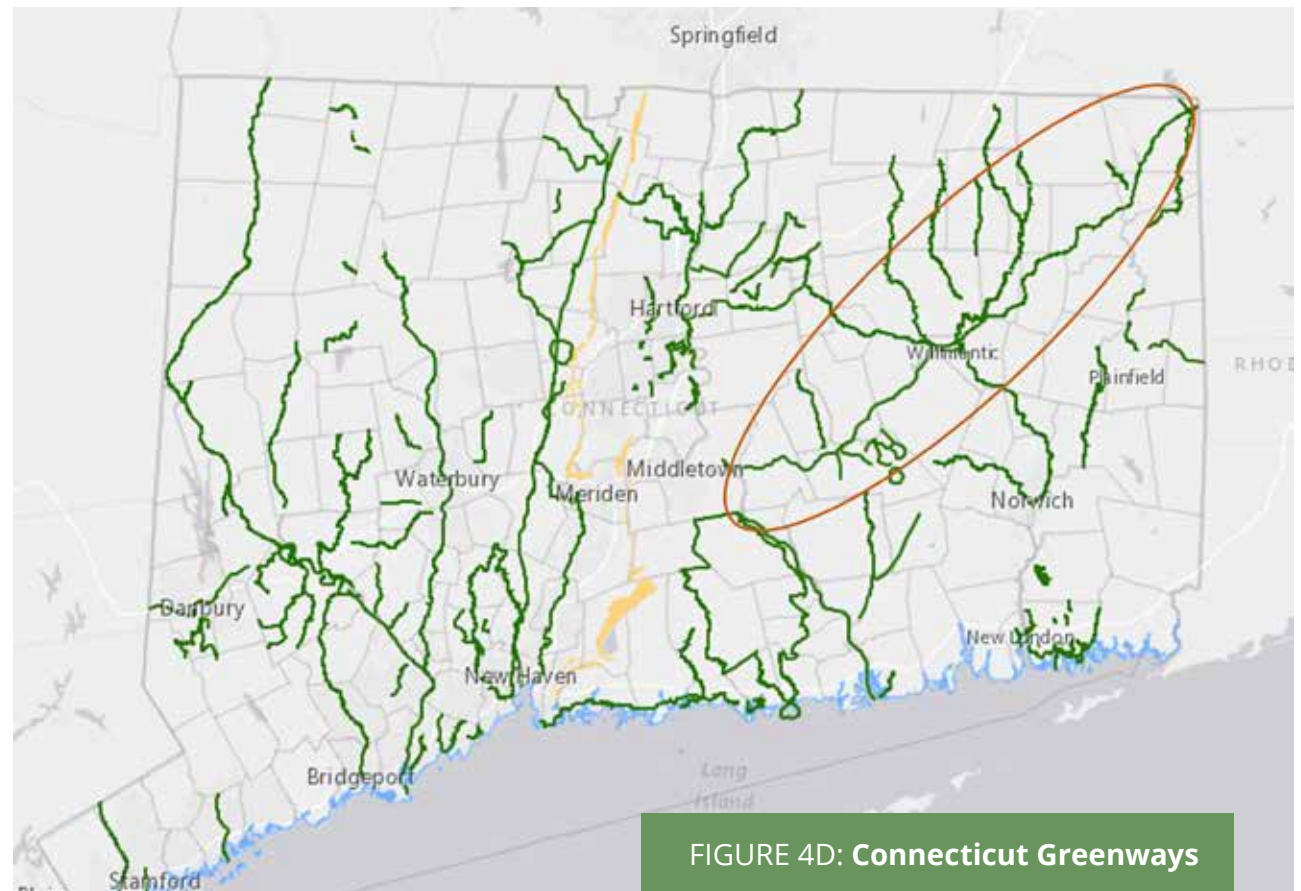


FIGURE 4D: Connecticut Greenways

A comparable planning document written by the Naugatuck Valley Council of Government took the lead for its member towns to design a systematic improvement plan for infrastructure and maintenance which leverages funding from multiple sources. The Farmington Canal Heritage

Trail organically grew with planning by towns and trail committee enthusiasts over many decades. In addition, the Hop River State Park Trail, which is forming as a regional trail organization, has many similarities to the Air Line State Park Trail and the region in terms of goals and management.



NAUGATUCK RIVER GREENWAY TRAIL

The NRG Trail, a non-motorized multi-use trail, is being developed that will follow the river for 44 miles through all 11 Naugatuck River communities: Litchfield, Harwinton, Thomaston, Watertown, Waterbury, Naugatuck, Beacon Falls, Seymour, Ansonia, and Derby. Multi-use trails can be seen as bike and pedestrian highways and are typically 10-12' wide and have a paved or hard surface. The NRG Trail will connect green spaces and places throughout the corridor. It will provide

a non-motorized transportation option, support tourism and economic development, and improve the health and quality of life of residents. The NRG Trail is being developed by the towns and cities along the route, funded by state and federal grants along with local funds. The process is being aided by the NVCOG and the Northwest Hills COG that are helping to develop trail routing, conduct planning studies, and provide grant assistance.



HOP RIVER STATE PARK TRAIL

Similar to and connecting with the Air Line State Park Trail in Windham (Willimantic Center), the Hop River State Park Trail "is a former railroad line transformed into a multi-use trail that winds 20.2 miles through the towns of Manchester, Vernon, Bolton, Coventry, Andover, and Columbia. Like a pathway through time, this serpentine path passes among modern subdivisions and crosses roads, but mostly takes the trail user along a remote, quiet and long unused path through the eastern Connecticut countryside." It also is a designated state park where CT DEEP managed park infrastructure and maintenance with ongoing planning needs

and concerns similar to those listed in this plan. Currently a Hop River Trail organization is forming as a nonprofit to advocate for trail improvements, wayfinding, and increased connections to the Hop River towns. The Hop River Alliance (HRA) relies on the enthusiastic volunteers of bikeway committee in each town to build synergy within the HRA. A formal Master Plan for the Hop River Trail State Park region, similar to this plan, has yet to be developed for the trail and the region. The HRA hopes to begin a master planning process in the near future, and there are opportunities for collaboration and positive outcomes between HRA and ALSPT regions.



FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE TRAIL

The Farmington Valley Trails Council oversees the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail planning and infrastructure development as well as marketing, maintenance scheduling, and [website](#).

“The FCHT has been designated a Community Millennium Trail under the federal Millennium Trails Initiative based upon its special value to the communities it serves. Six town governments and staff cooperated in the creation of the trail development committee and in providing the 20% matching funds not supplied by ISTE. The first sections of the “Farmington Valley Greenway” were paved in Simsbury and Farmington beginning in 1993/4. The mission is to build, maintain, beautify, and connect off-road multi-use trails throughout central Connecticut communities.” Our primary goal is to finish the 80.3-mile Farmington Canal Heritage Trail from Massachusetts to New Haven and the 16.1-mile Farmington River Trail, of which more than 75 % is now complete. Sections in Hamden and Cheshire are designated on CT DEEP’s website as a state park. The fifty-six miles of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) and the eighteen miles of the Farmington River Trail constitute the most picturesque and historic greenways in New England. The Connecticut section from New Haven to Suffield runs through eleven towns and connects with many more biking and walking trails.”

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING AND NEEDS



With a state park trail system that extends 53 miles and adding another fifteen miles for the Colchester Spur and the Portland Extension, routine trail maintenance and long-term infrastructure improvements require a coordinated and cost effective long term plan.

No single organization can succeed in managing a linear trail system. Similar to a Connecticut Department of Transportation's surface highway

Connecticut's multi-use trails require special planning and maintenance management procedures as they are open and traveled with varied methods by the public daily and year round.

system, numerous partners, state, regions, towns, and agencies with access to funding must work together to ensure the long term reliability and safety of Connecticut's state-owned multi-use trails system. There is over a hundred years of successful management of non-linear state parks and forests. Boundaries are such that it is easier to close the park to the public.

As local and tourism destinations, Connecticut's long distance linear multi-use trails require special planning and maintenance management procedures as they are open and traveled with varied methods by the public daily and year round. While multi-use trails are tourism and park like designations, they require specialized maintenance and management as reliable safe travel ways with road crossings, parking areas, signage and drainage infrastructure based on ongoing public use.

There are numerous examples nationwide of state agencies partnering with nonprofits toward planning and building expansive trail systems. The Palmetto Conservation Foundation commissioned the Palmetto Trail Statewide Master Plan to plan for and build out a 425 mile long multi-use trail across South Carolina. While the foundation spearheads the management of varied state owned, public or nonprofit owners of sections of

trail, there is a planned strategy with state agencies toward trail buildout, mapping, and maintenance. The Air Line State Park Trail will also require this type of across organization synergy and planning.

Maintenance, enforcement, and management challenges in ALSPT are inherent in the shape of the park along with exceptionally low levels of available ALSPT trail staff, as well as an ongoing need for multi-use trail maintenance equipment and training. Despite the current Passport to Parks funding program, additional specialized capital for the ALSPT including annual monetary allocations for an ALSPT dedicated staff person for management is essential for the safety and positive experience of the trail visitor. CT DEEP has experience in park systems and management of public expectations and maintenance. CT DEEP already successfully manages vast acreage within Connecticut Parks and Forests. To successfully manage this multi-use trail system, the agency will require legislative support and yearly strategic planning for maintenance and trail management. A new initiative to enact continuity of funding and maintenance would require leadership and advocacy from the member towns, the four Council of Governments and leaders of the ALSPT Region.

The ALSPT Region in partnership with CT DEEP can create a yearly or bi-yearly communications roundtable to address management and maintenance by CT DEEP, municipal partners and stakeholder groups. This step is critical to the long-term success and continued advancement of the Air Line State Park Trail and its viability as a tourism region. The ongoing issues of infrastructure and maintenance activities and concerns have been evaluated through interviews with towns and the CT DEEP. The following sections address common and singular concerns for the Air Line State Park Trail.



PARKING AND ACCESS

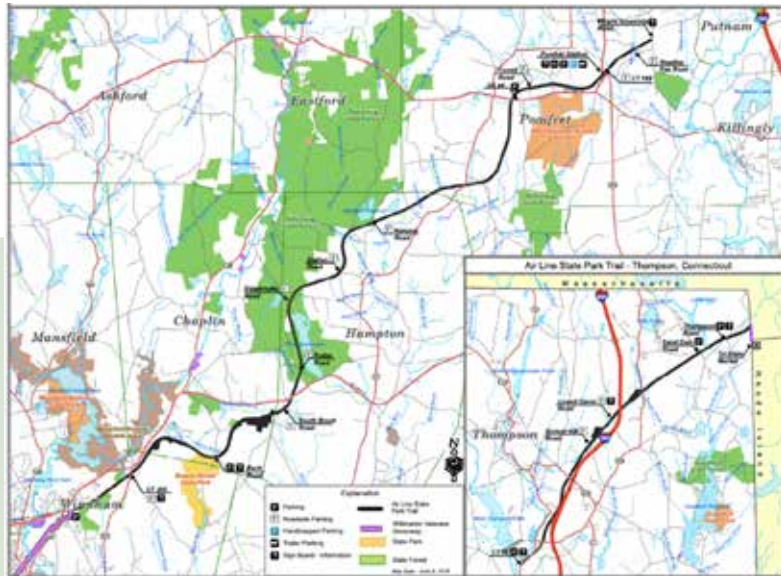


FIGURE 4E

Northern Section of ALSPT with Official Parking Areas Depicted

State parks throughout our state are generally comprised of a contiguous land area serviced by a single large parking lot or possibly, a selection of smaller lots. This configuration allows for CTDEEP staff to conveniently monitoring park access, easily observe parking conditions and have direct oversight for required maintenance activities as they relate to parking. The Air Line State Park Trail does not provide this same opportunity to CTDEEP’s park managers. Parking and trail access is comprised of improved parking areas at deliberate locations combined with numerous improvised parking locations scattered throughout public rights-of-way and private properties.

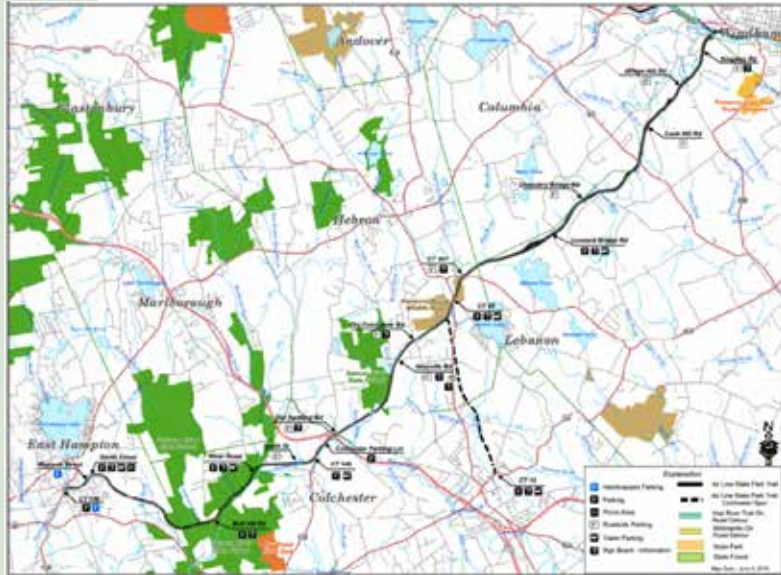


FIGURE 4F

Southern Section of ALSPT with Official Parking Areas Depicted

Connecticut’s [website](#) identifies at least 32 parking areas along a 50-mile section of the 64-mile-long trail. This large volume of parking options provides opportunities and also challenges to ALSPT access. Many of these locations have been a primary focus during numerous interviews with CT DEEP park staff, town representatives and project stakeholder.

They also represent a significant focus area for proposed ALSPT improvements within this chapter’s recommendations. With numerous official parking areas, there is an opportunity to interact positively with the public for amenities, information and public outreach (see Figures 4E and 4F).

Improved Parking and Access

The primary access for a large number of park visitors is through improved parking areas that generally contain parking for ten or more vehicles and provide safe and convenient access to an improved trailhead. These parking areas are evenly and well dispersed through the corridor, approximately 4-7 miles apart. Many parking areas are located near population centers, state highways or natural landmarks. They are also generally thought of as the park's regional trailheads and serve as popular destinations for group outings and organized trail events.

At many state and local road crossing locations, there are parking areas that are both formal and informal. Several of the more informal parking and road crossing

locations are characterized by very steep inclines from the trail to the road crossing point. Storm water runoff from the roads has created gravel/sand build-up at the bottom of the inclines. These spots are very hazardous for cyclists and inaccessible for wheelchairs or those who have limited mobility.

Due to the ALSPT's increasing popularity and high frequency of use, these locations require a higher level of maintenance and oversight by the CTDEEP and CTDOT on state routes and collaboration with municipal staff. There is generally a focus on the following off-trail resources at these locations, but consistent funding and staffing at CT DEEP needs support from the ALSPT Region and the member towns.



Route 85 ALSPT Parking Area:
A significant gathering point for groups in Hebron, CT

ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENTS TO THESE LOCATIONS INCLUDE:

- Improved arrival and departure points to and from the trail in the parking lots/areas to ensure safety of trail users. This would include sight lines, reduction of steep inclines to and from the trail crossing, signage, and stormwater management near parking areas with conservation based infrastructure.
- Improved all-weather parking surfaces such as gravel, millings, or pavement along with traffic safety components such as timber guiderails, boulders, or other vehicle barriers
- Public informational signage/kiosks containing general park rules and maps or possibly trail-head specific information such as notifications of downed trees or trail closures
- Park amenities such as pavilions, toilet facilities, picnic tables, trash cans, benches, flag poles and where parking areas are large enough, a permitted vendor for food and drink.
- Routine patrolling performed by state and local police departments including environmental conservation police officers.
- Posting the number of spaces and locations of parking areas on the ALSPT Region website and CT TrailFinder.

Unimproved Parking and Access

Unimproved parking and access points are located adjacent to nearly all at-grade crossings where the trail intersects a state or local road. These informal points of access provide convenient locations for visitors to access the park by way of small parking areas, turnouts along the shoulders of state and local roadways and via pedestrian pathways formed by frequent foot travel. Their locations vary in size, configuration, and level of amenities; however, many of them are frequent sources of concern as noted in the previous section.

The roles and responsibilities of state and local officials, issues of public safety, security, maintenance requirements

and property ownership are an ongoing discussion that requires strategic planning on a yearly or bi-yearly basis, collaborative support for ensuring funding for maintenance and where possible new infrastructure. Design consistency in trail conditions and parking areas would overall improve consistency and ease of maintenance for the parking areas and also the trail.

All parking areas and access points serving the park should provide the user with a safe and enjoyable experience; however, many of these informal locations routinely have site related constraints that prevent this goal from being realized (see next page).



LOCATIONS OF LARGE IMPROVED PARKING

Town	Location	# of Spaces
Portland	Middle Haddam Road	20
East Hampton	Smith Street (Cranberry Bog)	20
Colchester	Rte. 149 (Westchester Road)	15
Hebron	Rte. 85 (Church Street)	35
Windham	Bridge Street	20
Pomfret	Rte. 44/169 (Pomfret Station)	20
Thompson	Rte. 12 (Riverside Drive)	10

Smith Street (Cranberry Bog) – Popular starting point with quick access to the Lyman Viaduct Overlook, East Hampton, CT





*Sand Dam Road,
Thompson, CT*

CONDITIONS EXIST AT SOME PARKING SITES THAT AFFECT SAFETY AND ENJOYMENT OF TRAIL USERS

- Poor sight lines that typically restrict safe roadway access.
- Topographic limitations that prevent areas such as parking spaces, drive aisles and park entrances from complying with geometric standards and code requirements.
- Grading and drainage limitations that prevent the installation of appropriate stormwater drainage and infrastructure improvements to promote best management practices and the implementation/installation of water quality improvements.
- Compliance with property ownership resulting in encroachment onto private properties and state/local rights-of-way.
- Reduced access for maintenance activities that contribute to poor surface conditions and vegetation management issues.
- Poor soil quality and adverse growing conditions that prevent the growth of strong native plantings and support the growth of invasive plant species.



*Chewink Road
Informal parking
and trail approach
requires a bridge
project similar to
Pomfret Station,
Chaplin, CT*

ROADWAY INTERSECTIONS

The Air Line State Park Trail Region contains approximately 62 roadway intersections, and this number is expected to increase as Portland's trail continues to extend west to the Connecticut River and Putnam continues to close the gaps in the park through the downtown business district. These intersections are fairly evenly distributed throughout the ALSPT corridor and include:

- at-grade (level) crossings
- depressed crossings where the trail is below the road
- elevated crossings where the trail is above the road
- crossings where the trail and road are already separated by bridges or culvert crossings.

In a dated but still relevant study for CT DEEP, the University of Connecticut Landscape Architecture Advanced Design Studio assisted CT DEEP in developing an inventory of Trail-Road Crossings and Major/Minor Intersections from Windham to Thompson in the park (see Figures 4G, 4H and 4I).

FIGURE 4G

UConn Landscape Architecture Program Diagram of Composite Road Crossings for North Section of ALSPT

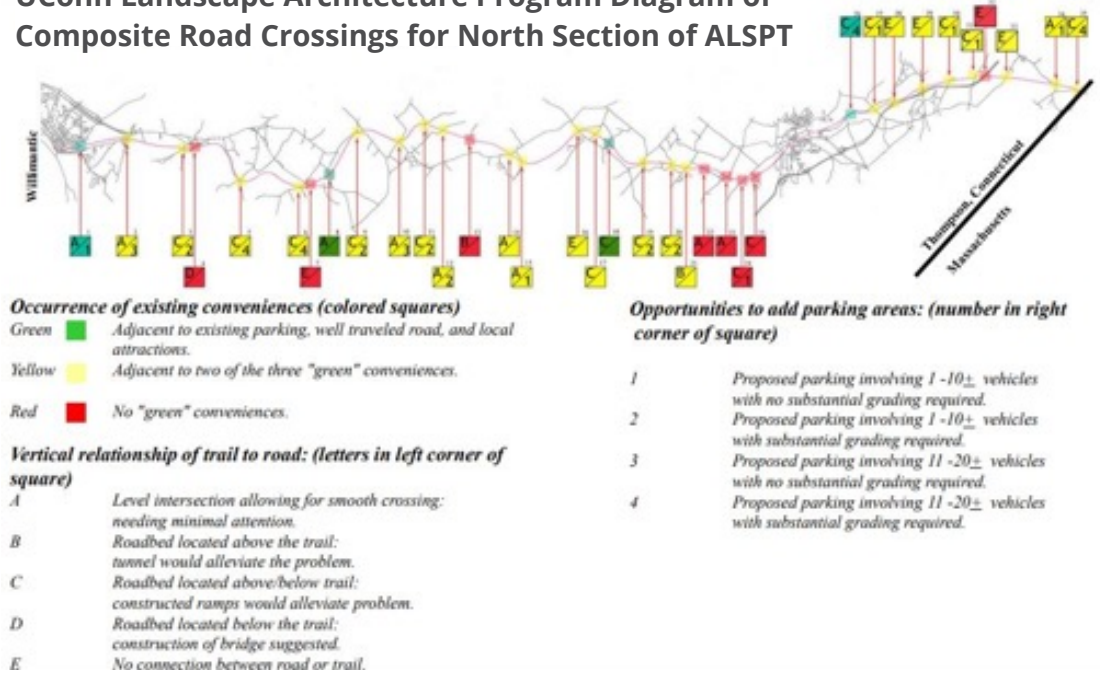


FIGURE 4H

UConn Landscape Architecture Program of Major and Minor Intersections for North Section of ALSPT

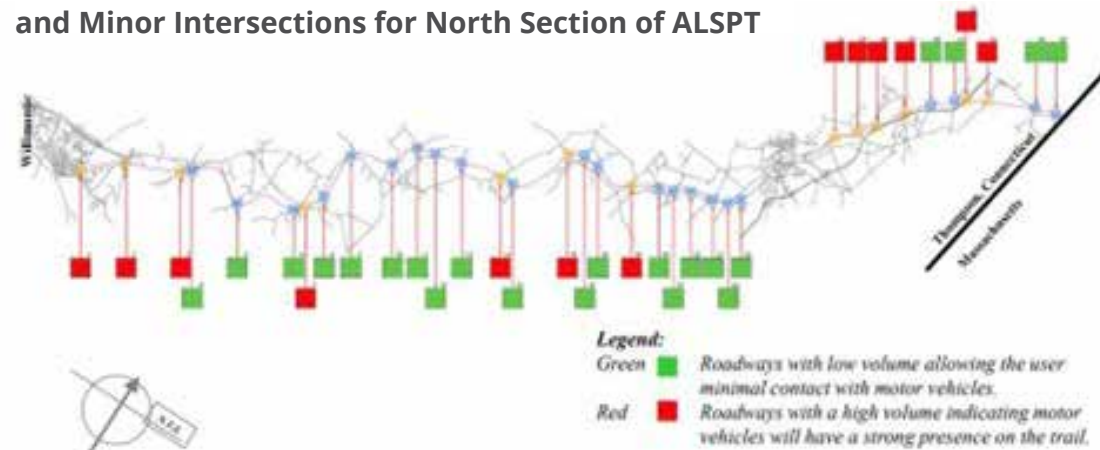
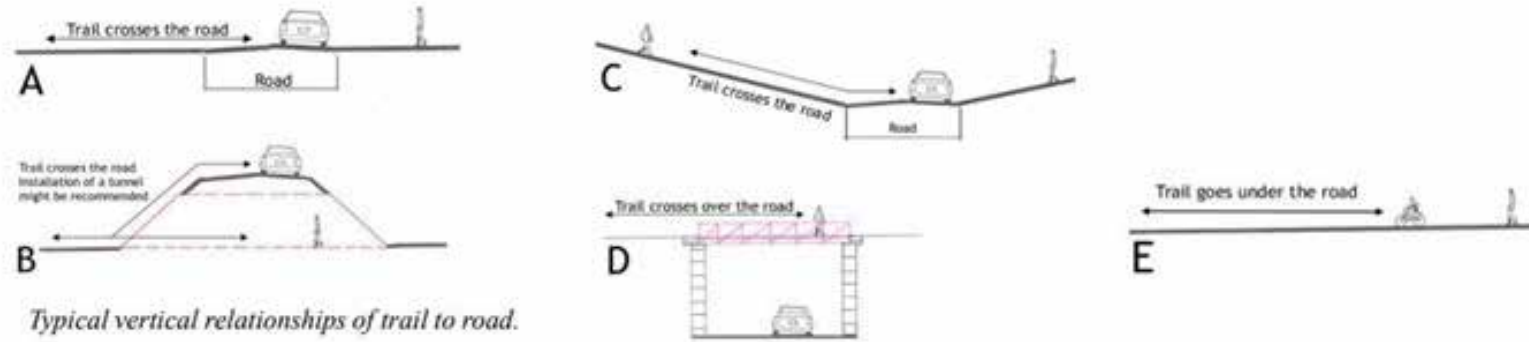


FIGURE 4I

UConn Landscape Architecture Program - Sectional Analysis of Trail Crossing



Additionally, the roadway intersections in the ALSPT range from low volume local roads with average daily traffic volumes less than 100 to interstate highway systems with counts that exceed 21,000 vehicles per day. (See Figure 4J)

These intersections have been the focus of numerous conversations with CT DEEP Parks Division, town public works and elected officials, Council of Government representatives and project stakeholders. They represent a significant focus area for proposed ALSPT improvement recommendations. Local and state resources are committed to making on-going intersection improvements through scheduled seasonal maintenance programs and longer-term infrastructure improvements, but there is significant work to be accomplished toward reliable infrastructure that is easier and cost effective to maintain.



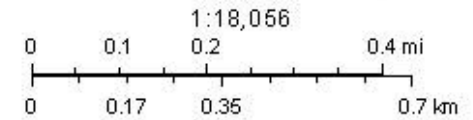
Example of a road crossing along the Air Line Trail State Park

FIGURE 4J

Traffic Monitoring Station Viewer: CT DOT Average Daily Traffic for Interstate 395 in Thompson, CT



April 27, 2023



Drainage Improvements

The park's trail system relies heavily on drainage infrastructure installed during the railroad's original construction in the 1800s, and many of the remaining features are in remarkably good condition. Original drainage features that range from simple dry-stacked stone culverts to elaborate mortared brownstone headwalls and culverts can be found throughout the corridor and offer unique opportunities for visitors to look back in time and envision the original construction efforts that made this park a reality.

This corridor has seen a significant impact caused by an increase in built development since the railroad's original construction. This growth in structures and roadways has led an increase to impervious coverage and a resulting decrease in pervious areas that allow stormwater to recharge into the ground. Negative impacts from increased runoff can be seen throughout the corridor.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF RUN-OFF

- Existing trail-side drainage swales being diverted blocked by intersecting roadways or offsite development.
- Slope or embankment failures due to an increase in stormwater from offsite.
- Erosion of the trail's surface due to stormwater running onto the trail's natural stone dust surface. These conditions may cause severe

erosion very quickly due to the stone dust surface of the trail being highly erodible.

- Existing drainage pipes and culverts becoming undersized and unstable due to the increase in storm events and stormwater volume.

A significant amount of the corridor's trail is either built adjacent to or through existing wetlands and watercourse or constructed below the existing elevation of the surrounding land area. This construction was necessary to overcome Connecticut's steep terrain. However, this construction also requires numerous man-made drainage improvements to evacuate existing

water from the corridor and to mitigate the effects of storm related damages. These historic conditions combined with an average running slope of the trail not exceeding 6" of rise for every 100' of run (0.5% slope) result in numerous areas that experience intermittent ponding and seasonal flooding on the trail today. These focus areas require continued state and local resources to perform large scale infrastructure improvements such as culvert/bridge replacements and trail elevation through reconstruction, routine maintenance such as trail resurfacing, drainage swale cleaning and vegetation management to assure safe passage within the trail corridor.



Draining culverts in Portland, CT. Original drainage features can be found throughout the corridor and offer an opportunity for visitors to look back in time and envision the original construction efforts that made this park a reality.

FIGURE 4K

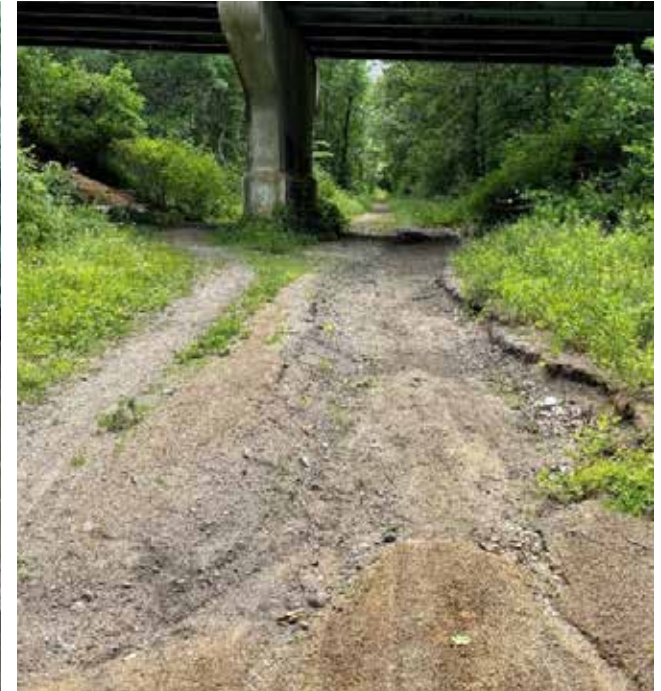
Degrees of Stormwater Damage and Runoff from Upland impervious Surfaces and Buildings.



ALSPT Trail surface erosion from rain event



Major storm event flooding on ALSPT in Lebanon



Trail erosion from highway stormwater in Thompson

These focus areas require continued state and local resources to perform large scale infrastructure improvements such as culvert and bridge replacements and trail elevation through reconstruction and routine maintenance.

Trail Surfaces



FIGURE 4L

Historic Photos of ALSPT Conditions at Acquisition by CT DEEP

- 1- East view near Old Colchester Road
- 2- Bridge over Judd Brook
- 3- West view of Raymond Marsh

The Air Line State Park Trail is constructed on a former rail bed and significant portions of this existing infrastructure are intact and functional. The trail's finished surfaces are comprised of either natural stone dust/ screenings in rural areas or bituminous asphalt in urban conditions. These surfaces are installed on a compact layer of earthen fill, stone ballast and processed aggregate base materials. The type of railroad bed construction was installed to support the railroad tracks and has been in place for

over a century. Therefore, it provides an optimal base for the trail's construction. Work since 1997 and earlier has been based on the historic structure of the rail and trail improvements. While bridges and underpasses, drainage and parking were a major source of required funding, clearing and expansion of stone dust surfaces have been an affordable mechanism for expanding the trail's usefulness since 1997 (see Figure 4L).

The CTDEEP and the ALSPT municipal partners understand that sections of the trail are part of the East Coast Greenway (ECG) and the ECG strives to create a safe and accessible infrastructure for all user groups (see Figure 4M). The trail's surfaces need to be easy to navigate, and withstand harsh weather conditions such as wind, rain and snowstorm events and be cost effective to maintain (see Figure 4N). Working within those parameters, the trail's typical cross sections include:

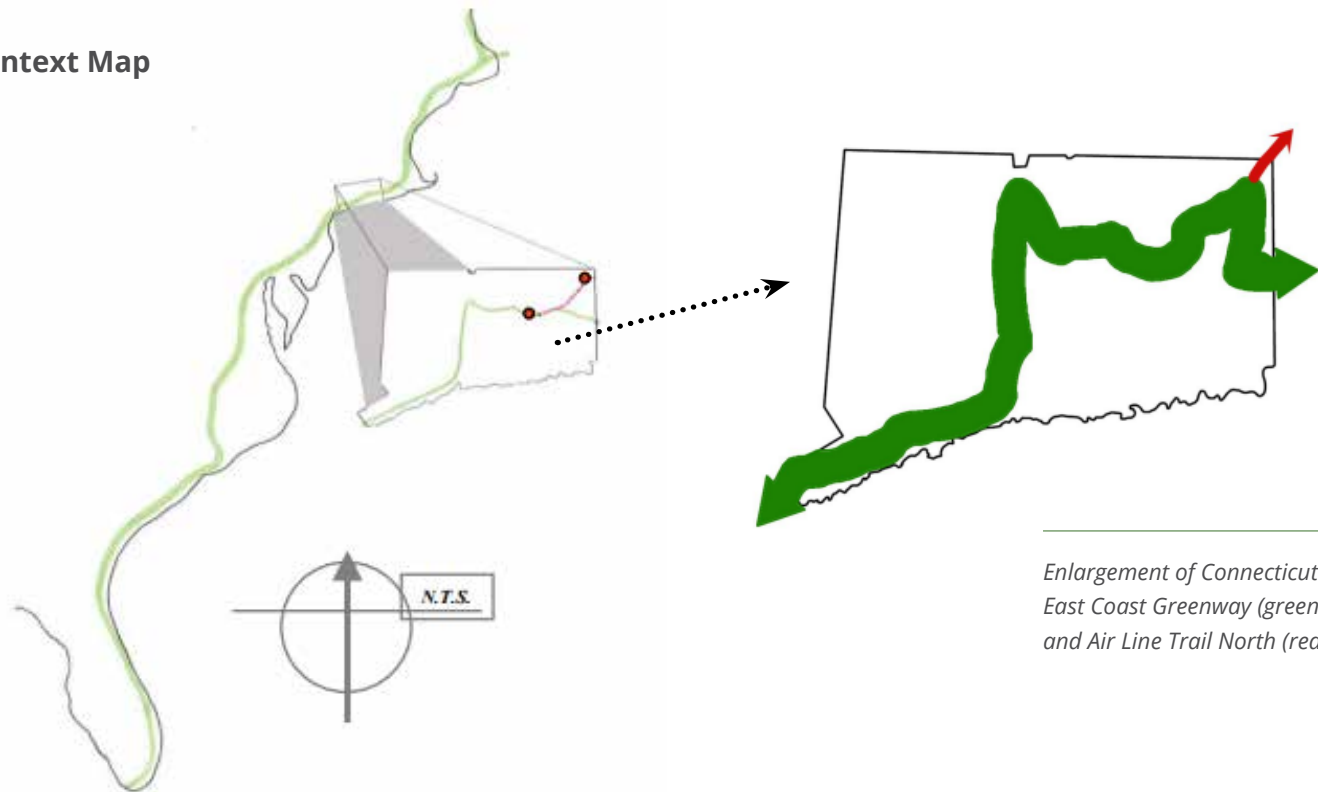
- A ten-foot wide (minimum) multi-use pathway constructed with a stone dust/screenings surface that is installed at a maximum cross slope of 2%. Variations in color and texture may occur in these surfaces due to local availability but all materials shall comply with the industry's standard material specifications.
- A two-foot wide (minimum) shoulder seeded with perennial grass seed and possibly native plantings such as wildflowers.
- Bituminous pavement in place of stone dust where conditions require an impervious surface.
 - The trail is excessively steep,
 - Erosion is prevalent and stormwater runoff would erode natural trail surfaces
 - Areas where a natural trail surface wouldn't be recommended, such as urban centers, along the shoulders of roadways and within floodplains.

FIGURE 4M

National/Regional Context Map

“When deciding which surfact is suitable for a trail project, consideration should be given to the environmental context of the trail, expected volume of users, and user groups: pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders, rollerbladers, equestrians, and others.”

— EAST COAST GREENWAY DESIGN GUIDE

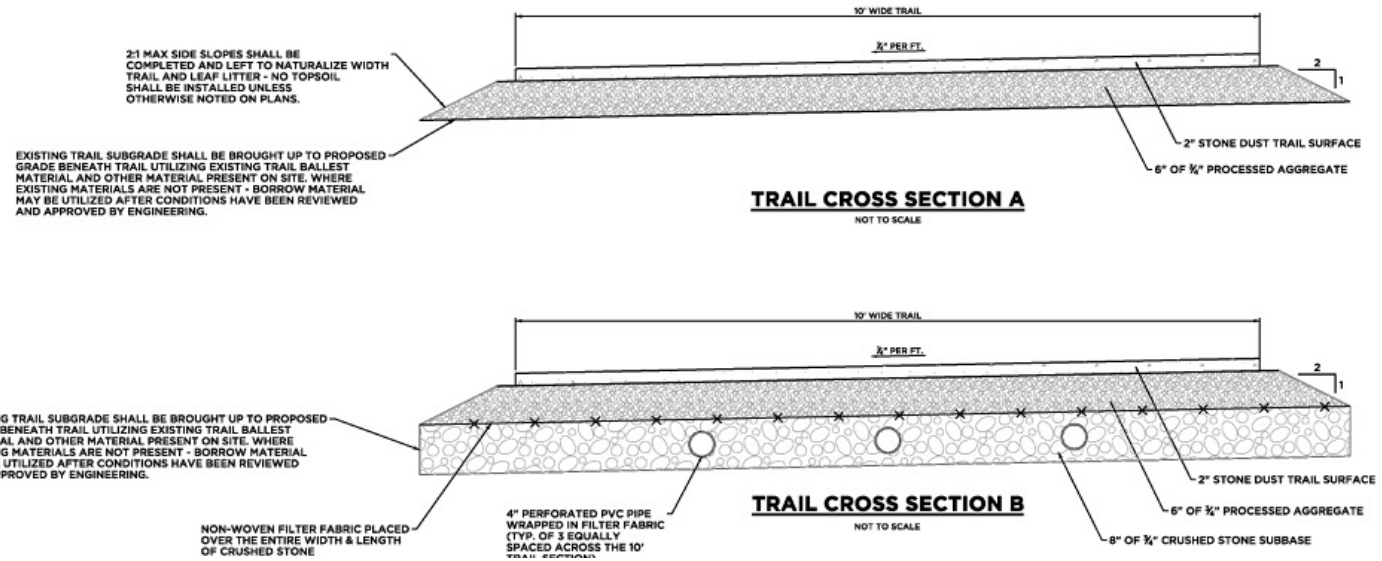


Enlargement of Connecticut with East Coast Greenway (green line) and Air Line Trail North (red line).

FIGURE 4N

UConn Landscape Architecture Program Schematic

Schematic shows trail cross section for gravel trail to reduce erosion.



Stone dust installation in East Hampton (left) and Hebron (right), CT.

PHOTOS: K. GRINDLE AND S. MALCOLM



Trail Surface Options

When considering routine trail maintenance or planning for long-term trail improvements, it is important to consider the appropriateness of the trail surfaces to the geology and adjacent slope or soil conditions (see Figure 4O). These recommendations contribute directly to the user experience and cost effective long-term maintenance for the CT DEEP and municipal partners.

Stone Dust/ Screenings	<p>Natural trail surfaces are typically used when funding constraints are a major consideration. These surfaces require more frequent maintenance than alternate materials, but are preferred in rural settings where user groups such as trail runners and equestrian riders prefer softer trail surfaces. Natural trail surfaces are</p>	<p>pervious and will allow stormwater to infiltrate. This is beneficial to the environment, as there will not be high rates of runoff from the trail. However, these trails will remain wet for longer periods of time after storm events and will be easily damaged by heavy use during wet periods of the year.</p>
Bituminous Pavement	<p>Paved trail surfaces are recommended where funding constraints are not present, as they're more expensive to install, but offer a longer service life than alternate natural surfaces. User groups including skate boarders, rollerbladers, people with strollers and commuters typically prefer pavement.</p> <p>Surface water runoff from paved trails will exceed the volume of run-off from non-paved trails. This run-off may need to be collected in green infrastructure design swales that promote conservation habitat, into subsurface piping and/or structures to be conveyed to stormwater basins for storage and infiltration. Stormwater run-off may be mitigated by the use of permeable or porous pavement materials. However, these alternative materials would require additional site investigations and would add to the</p>	<p>overall project costs in the short term, but may have long term cost effectiveness. Paved surfaces are typically installed within the Air Line State Park Trail where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail grades are excessively steep, such as approaches to existing roadway intersections. • Erosion is prevalent and stormwater runoff would negatively affect natural trail surfaces. • A natural trail surface wouldn't be recommended, such as urban centers • Trails are constructed in areas susceptible to flooding such as floodplains or adjacent to watercourses. These areas may contain waters flowing at a high velocity that could erode natural trail surfaces.
Concrete & Timber	<p>The trail crosses natural and made-made features along the corridor that require bridges, boardwalks or underpasses to maintain the continuity of the trail. These engineered structures contain surface materials such as pre-stressed concrete panels and timber decking. It's also anticipated that engineered decking</p>	<p>materials will be used in the future, to construct and replace natural wood decking within this corridor. There are also locations where the trail is co-located on existing sidewalk networks that contain conventional poured concrete sidewalks within the trail's urban centers.</p>



FIGURE 40

Varied Surface Conditions of the Air Line State Park Trail

1 - Gravel 2 - Natural Soil Base 3 - Stone Dust
4 - Pavement (bituminous has been use for trail approach to reduce erosion in Portland)

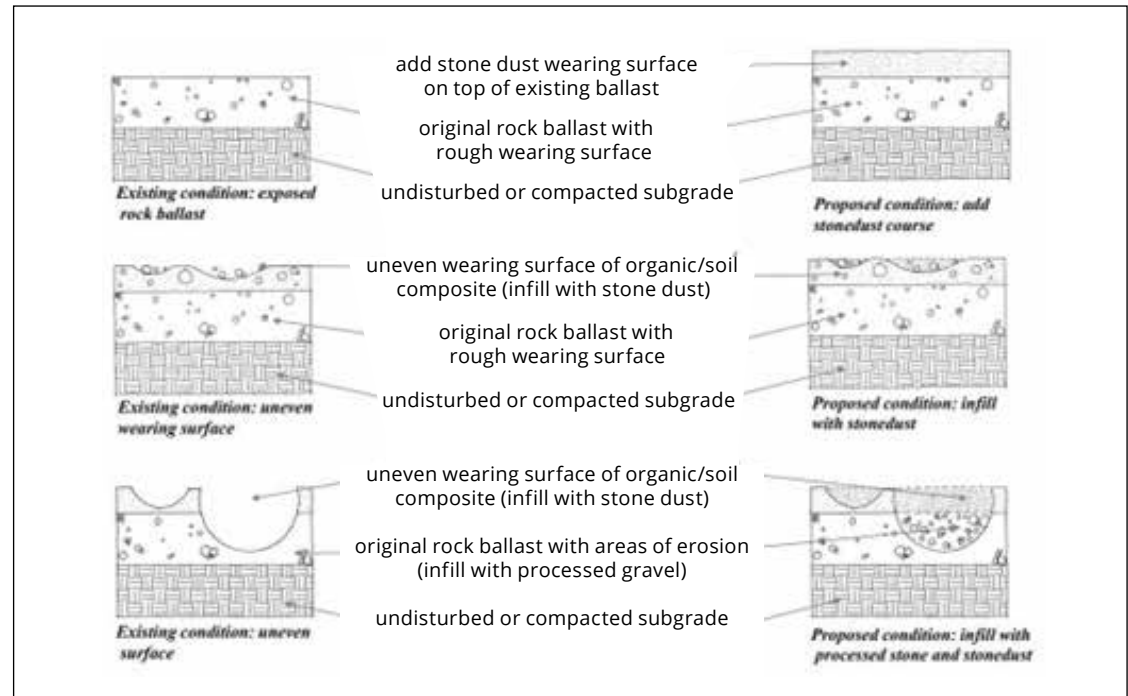
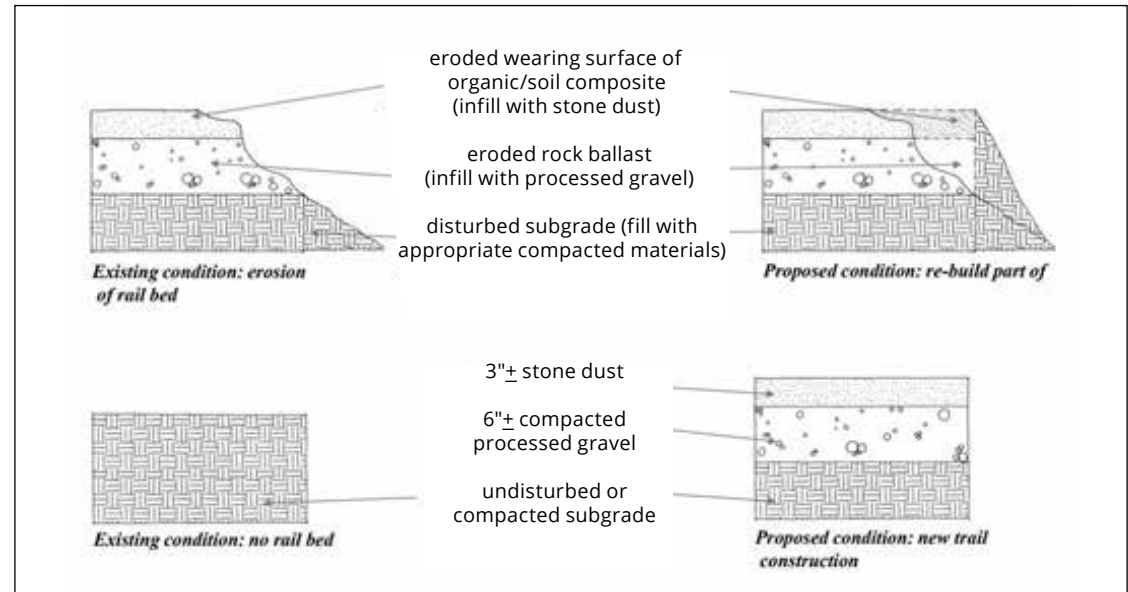
FIGURE 4P

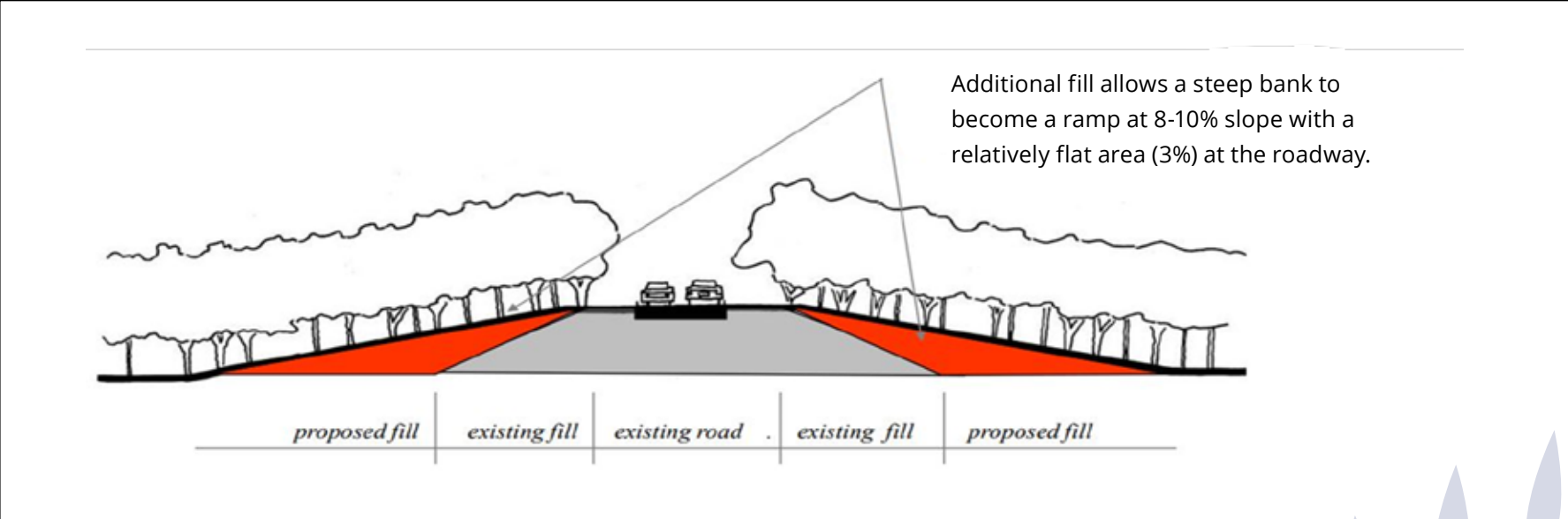
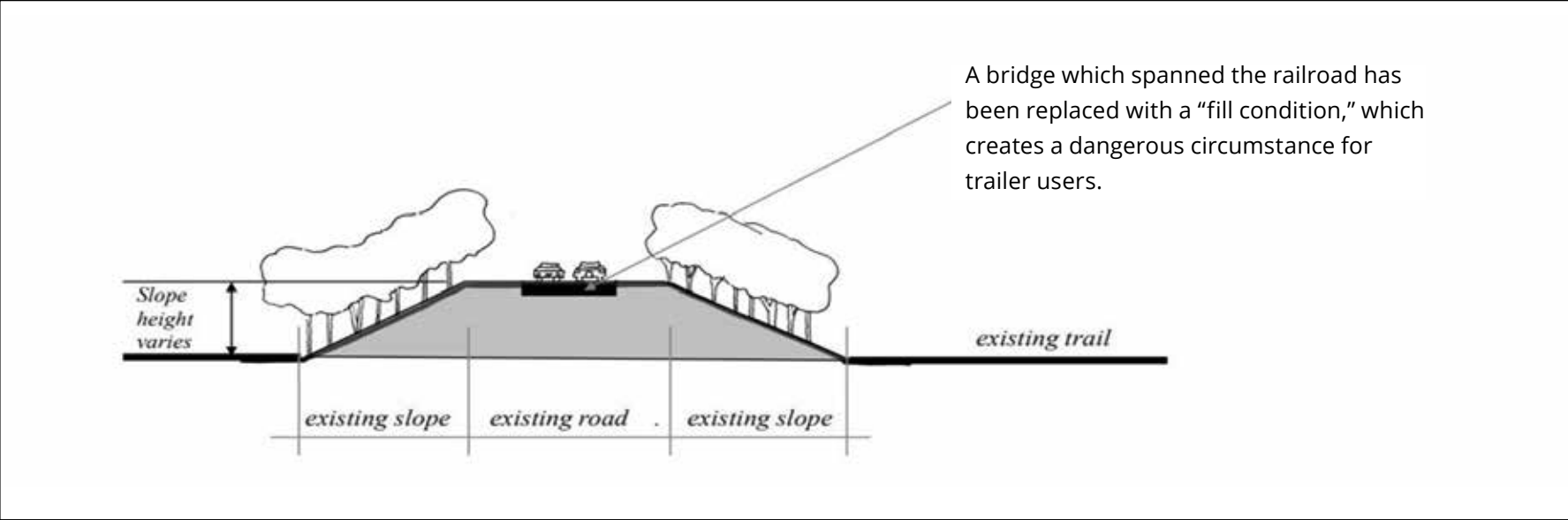
Cross Section and Slope Design

Cross section and slope design from UConn Landscape Architecture Program are still relevant for consideration in planning. Specialized engineering and landscape architecture plans would be required for future implementation

The maintenance, installation and improvement of the trail's surface conditions consumes a significant amount of time and resources in this state park. Recent State Projects #172-421 (Air Line North materials only), #111-124 (Air Line North Pedestrian Trail Crossings), #163-194 (Air Line and Hop River Trail Extensions in Windham), and multiple CT DEEP Recreation Trail Grants and smaller state and local budget allocations have been used to make much needed improvements to the trail's surface.

The goal in long term coordination and design for the future is cost effectiveness and conservation of resources to ensure that almost \$10,000,000 of infrastructure improvements implemented since 1997 are maintained, enhanced, benefit of the trail user and support cost efficient maintenance.





Trail Bridges

The topography and landscape of the ALSPT has required and will continue to require new bridge infrastructure to ensure ease of passage and safety of trail users. Bridge design and use of historic structures can also create viewsheds of scenery and experience for the trail user. (See Figure 4Q)

While many sections of the trail have been improved with new bridge infrastructure, a focus on key locations for safety is warranted (see Figures 4R and 4S).

FIGURE 4Q

Bridges Along the ALSPT

From accessibility to safety to history and scenic views, bridges of all types enhance the experience of the trail. The former bridge of the Lyman Viaduct was filled to create a scenic overlook. Small culvert bridges evoke the quaintness of the trail, and bridges over un-negotiable roads provide safe passage to trail users.



FIGURE 4R

Bridge Construction

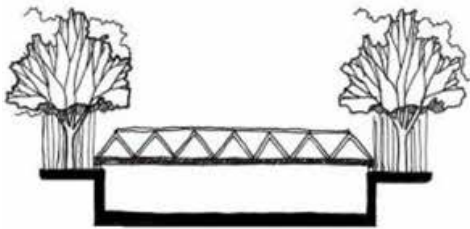
ALSPT and Chewink Rd intersection in Chaplin is a good example of prioritizing bridge construction to improve safety and maintenance. A bridge system similar to Pomfret's new bridge over Route 44 would mitigate trail erosion and storm water onto Cheswick Road



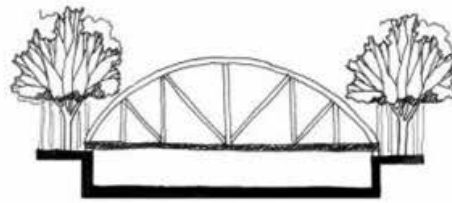
FIGURE 4S

Bridge Types

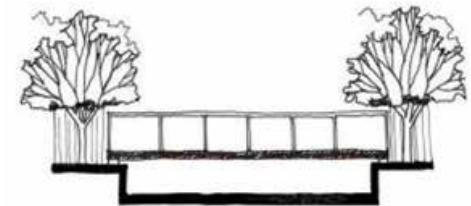
There are numerous types of bridge structures. Some of the most-popular and cost-effective include girder, beam and bow string girder. A schematic sketch and a brief description and cost information for each type follows. Relevant design for bridges should improve and not detract from the trail experience. Engineering and landscape architecture plans would be required for future bridge design on the trail. (Source: UConn Landscape Architecture Program)



The **lattice girder** comes in steel with a span range of 10' – 25' at a cost of \$150 – \$250 per linear foot. The same bridge construction in laminated timber can span between 5' – 15' at a cost of \$650 – \$800 per linear foot.



The **bow string girder** comes in steel with a span range of 15' – 30' at a cost of \$400 – \$500 per linear foot. The same bridge construction in laminated timber can span between 5' – 20' at a cost of \$650 – \$800 per linear foot.



The **continuous beam** comes in steel with a span range of 8' – 20' at a cost of \$200 – \$450 per linear foot. The same bridge construction in laminated timber can span between 15' – 30' at a cost of \$650 – \$800 per linear foot.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT IN THE ALSPT REGION

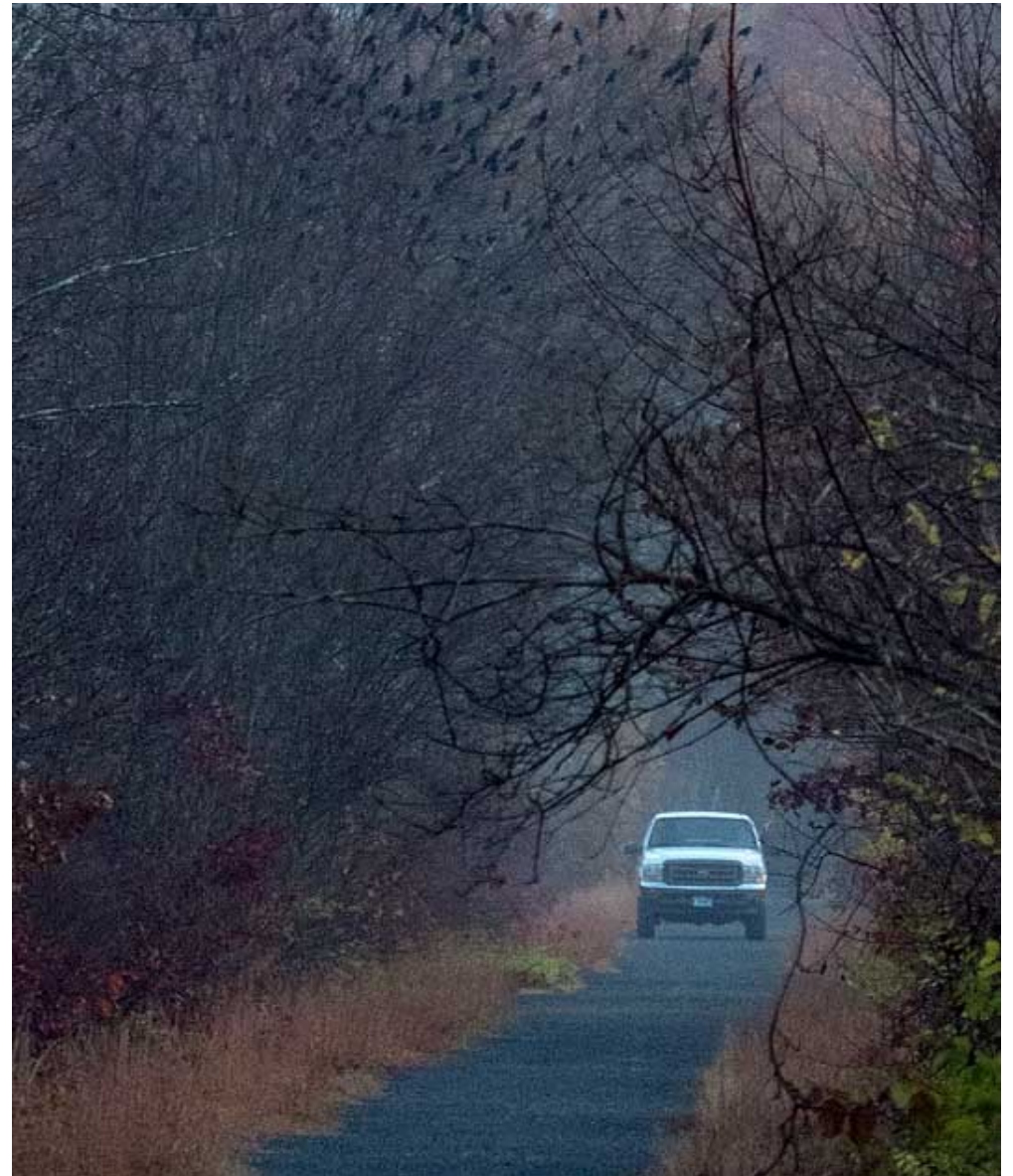
Vegetation management in the Air Line State Park Trail can be addressed through multiple approaches.

SEASONAL MAINTENANCE

Seasonal maintenance is performed to create a horizontal and vertical “clear zone”, that is maintained in order to provide a user friendly and inviting experience for trail users as well as safe and secure access for emergency response personnel. This work is routinely undertaken by municipal public works/ highway departments, recreation departments and through volunteer efforts.



Above, a maintenance crew uses an ATV for clearing trees and brush in Pomfret. Right, tree cover in need of clearing from the trail in Lebanon.



STORM DAMAGE

Storm damage response is performed to clear the corridor of downed trees and brush after seasonal storm events. This work is necessary to make the trail passible as soon after a storm as possible and is often performed by CTDEEP staff along with municipal public works and highway departments. Additional efforts to clear smaller downed trees and brush are commonly undertaken by trail users and volunteer groups who may use social media platforms or other means to organize trail clearing and trail clean-up events.

HAZARDOUS TREES

The Hazard Tree Mitigation Policy (Sec. 17 of Public Act 22-143) provides CT DEEP a framework for addressing hazardous trees, which have been stressed by a number of natural events such as the spongy moth outbreak beginning in 2015 and persisting through 2017 in eastern and central Connecticut and the emerald ash borer first discovered in the state in 2012. [View the state's Mitigation Policy here.](#)



Ongoing management activities keep the Air Line State Park Trail safe and appealing for visitors. 1 – Invasive management 2 – Vegetation management; 3 – Tree management; 4 – Invasive vegetation removal

ADDITIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES

From the engineering and planning in Putnam, Pomfret, and Thompson in the north to the major boardwalk connection in East Hampton that will link to the Portland Connector, building out the gaps in these sections on the trail is a reasonable objective in the next three to five years. Add to that a continued extension from the current Portland terminus at Butler Gravel and streetscape design in Willimantic and the full 64 miles of trail will be passable.

The important concurrent steps are to build out the trail conditions for 64 miles so there is reliable continuity all along the trail. In that design and build phase, it is worth recognizing the need for

important trail amenities. This subset of planning and wayfinding deserves a focused strategy by the ALSPT Region, CT DEEP and stakeholder partners. While there may be other amenities, this plan summarizes those amenities suggested in workshops and interviews with stakeholders, trail committees and CT DEEP.

TRAIL AMENITIES

The Air Line State Park Trail is a unique State Park in its length and diversity. So when looking at the ALSPT amenities, it is critical that improvements provide a user-friendly experience for visitors. They should be distributed intentionally and evenly through the park, follow consistent

aesthetically pleasing design parameters and be accessible to all users. Beyond their utilitarian nature, trail amenities contribute profoundly to the user experience and may often be the subject of a user's reviews when speaking with friends and family.

Informational signage highlighting historic landmarks along the trail such as the East Thompson train wreck and the infamous ghost train along with amenities such as viewing platforms and seating, which bring attention to the preserved open lands, and natural habitats along the trail make this state park a one-of-a-kind experience.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAIL AMENITIES HIGHLIGHTED ABOVE, ONE MUST ALSO RECOGNIZE THESE FEATURES ARE OFTEN:



Removed from the park through acts of vandalism



Overlooked during maintenance and improvement projects in order to prioritize more critical infrastructure spending



Not installed at the locations or in the frequency that trail users and community stakeholders would like



The first items removed from trail construction budgets due to cost saving measures

The subject of improving or installing amenities along the trail often arises when local municipal partners, stakeholder groups, civic organizations or private donors express interest in contributing to the trail community. Improvements to the trail's amenities play key roles in supporting the economics of the trail highlighted in chapter 6 along with the marketing, branding and wayfinding highlighted in chapters 7 and 8.

These generous contributions typically involve requests from volunteers leading trail clean-up days, local businesses donating items such as bicycle repair stations, Eagle Scouts seeking to perform their Service Project within the park or private donors requesting the installation of a memorial bench, etc. The abundance of these requests, combined with the personal meaning that many of them have, exemplifies the importance this trail has to so many people in our community. It is important to remember that the State's rules and regulations must be followed when proposing improvements on state property. However, creative opportunities to promote and enhance the trail's existing and future amenities should be explored to the furthest extent possible.

Amenities are commonly thought of as items such as way-finding and informational signage and site furnishing such as benches, bike-racks and bicycle aid stations, etc. However, existing amenities along the Air Line Trail are so much more. There are also the categories of restrooms, waste management, cell service, call boxes and emergency management.



Amenities are commonly thought of as items such as way-finding and informational signage and site furnishing such as benches, bike-racks and bicycle aid stations. However, existing amenities along the Air Line State Park Trail are so much more.

Restrooms and Drinking Water

Restrooms are a required amenity on the ALSPT, ideally situated at each official parking lot managed by either CT DEEP or a town. There are options toward permanent or temporary, portable restrooms as well as advantages and disadvantages to each option. The importance of restroom facilities cannot be overstated. Seasonally, CT DEEP contracts to situate portable restrooms at strategic locations in state parks. The ALSPT trail optimal locations are near parking areas on highly travel state roads and maintenance/vandalism can be a challenge. It will require collabo-

ration and partnership between hosting properties, whether state, town, nonprofit or business. The ALSPT Region might emulate the composting toilet study in the Farmington Heritage Canal Trail (see Appendix E) and should consider working with neighboring University of Connecticut engineering students toward solutions (see Figure 4T). As many of these towns are designated as rural within the USDA grant and loan program, they may be eligible for funds to build these types of community facilities on the town owned property.

MANAGEMENT AND ENGINEERING FOR MANUFACTURING

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ADVISORS
Craig Calvert

SPONSOR
LOOLOO

It's More Than Just a Porta Potty: Development of the Revolutionary Smart Portable Toilet

This interdisciplinary project aimed to develop a revolutionary portable toilet unlike anything already on the market. It has a modular design that is easy to assemble and includes features such as a waste management system and solar powered device charging capabilities. LooLoo will work with organizations already in the humanitarian aid sector to help those communities in need, specifically the homeless and disaster-affected or developing communities. These communities often struggle to accommodate their members' needs for a place to safely go to the bathroom, a privilege many people take for granted. This often causes health risks to develop due to open defecation in public facilities and water sources. The engineering design process in this project consisted of an iterative cycle of providing requirements, researching and presenting design solutions, reviewing those proposed designs, providing feedback, and repeating. Through this process the structural materials were narrowed down to those with the greatest balance of cost, weight, strength, and environmental resilience. The electrical components have been evaluated and modified multiple times to achieve an optimal design for power storage and output, while minimizing the cost. The waste management system minimizes bad odors while allowing for efficient storage, removal, and reuse. The business plan outlines the recommended marketing plan, distribution plan, and manufacturing plan for LooLoo to continue with in the future.





FIGURE 4T

Creative Solutions for Restrooms

Left, UConn Student Senior Project Engineering Team designed a smart portable toilet. Right, an accessible portalet on a concrete pad.

STRATEGIES FOR RESTROOMS ALONG ALSPT

- A permanently accessible restroom station with available drinking water may be a solution to deter vandalism and overuse. The systems designed at these locations could potentially be compostable systems powered by solar energy due to site constraints for a full septic system.
- Create accessible portable toilet system facilities at high visibility parking lot locations where contracted food vendors are also present. The business as part of the contract could open and close the portable toilets enclosure at sunrise and sunset.
- Install April to November accessible portable restroom stations within enclosures at more remote locations at parking lots on town owned roads or in adjacent state parks. Arrange with town officials to periodically monitor the area and public works to unlock and lock enclosure in the morning and end of day. Investigate options for facilities similar to CT DEEP restrooms at state parks and forests.
- Contract with one or two local businesses in village or town centers to provide accessible public access to their restrooms. Funds paid to these businesses could go toward daily cleaning and maintenance. The added benefit to the business is the targeted visit would lead to additional food or retail purchases.

Cell Phone Signals and Charging Stations

Cell phone service on the trail is not reliable in many locations. This can create a safety issue for visitors who rely on their phone for location, directions, and information about the trail. As part of a next-step action in the building of amenities, work with service providers to survey signal strength over the length of the trail and identify solutions

toward improved signal strength if possible. Charging stations for bikes, wheelchairs, or automobiles should be considered at each parking area. Identify security options through interviews with other multi-use trail systems in Connecticut and nationally.



Emergency Management Along 12 Towns of ALTSP Region

While the trail system is owned and managed by CT DEEP, emergency response to situations on the trail is generally tied to each of the twelve towns through which the trail travels. There are mutual aid agreements between towns to provide additional support to each other. CT DEEP coordinates with towns for these types of situations and there are additional options that can be explored to optimize safety and response to emergencies on the trail. Work closely with the CT Department of Emergency

Management and Homeland Security Regions 3 and 4 and the town representatives on these boards, to create an emergency response plan to support town response personnel. There also may be funding to build emergency response building at remote locations to house a trail sized rescue vehicle, defibrillator, and other medical equipment for emergency responders. These trailside buildings could also hold maintenance equipment for clearing impediments, such as downed trees, on the trail.



Visual Amenities and Shelter

- Interpretational art such as trail-side installations and murals.
- Ornamental plantings such as pollinator gardens, garden club and master gardener installations.
- Stormwater treatment areas including but not limited to rain gardens.
- Trail signage such as mile markers, education, historical and town/state boundary markers.
- Shelters such as gazebos and pavilions.
- Trail art incorporated into unique bike racks and fix-it stations (East Hampton example)
- Kiosks and informational signage identifying urban centers, local businesses and nearby preserved open spaces.
- Marquees such as East Hampton's trail sign that extends over the trail at the Smith Street cranberry bog trailhead parking area.
- Ornamental flagpole installed through an Eagle Scout project at Portland's Middle Haddam Road trailhead parking area.

Existing structures along the ALSPT Region

1 — Shelter on Trail, Lebanon, CT, allows for shade and shelter from rainstorms; 2 — Newly Built Pomfret Station; 3 — Trailside Community Oriented Public Art



RECOMMENDATIONS: Maintenance

Effective trail management and maintenance are critical components of establishing and sustaining a successful trail system to ensure a safe and reliable trail user experience. Identifying practical and cost-effective strategies for trail management and maintenance on the Air Line State Park Trail which are sustainable over time is crucial to the long term successes of this unique park system. For that reason, the recommendations and strategies for trail management and maintenance along the Air Line State Park Trail and associated state and local road crossings outlined below are based upon the trail's current conditions.

01 Establish clear channels of communication between CT DEEP, the 12 Town ALSPT Alliance and Municipal Leaders and maintain these channels through regular correspondence and reoccurring meetings between CT DEEP's park management and municipal officials.

02 Email a quarterly newsletter from CT DEEP staffers to inform municipal leaders of items such as upcoming scheduled maintenance, events requiring local collaboration, recent enforcement actions, etc.

03 Consider a dedicated trail wide maintenance day, coordinated by CT DEEP and the ALSPT Region/member towns. Similar to a training event, engage the public awareness and interest in the trail through something similar to DEMHS Citizen Corp Training, the Appalachian Mountain Club or Maine Conservation Corp, provide basic training through CFPA, CT DEEP and CTDOT for trail committees and interested public to participate in weekend trail cleanup. Coordinate with trails day.

04 Hold hybrid biannual meetings (February, before major trail use seasons of Spring/Summer/Fall and October, for funding strategies and infrastructure planning) to allow CT DEEP staff and trail stakeholders address key issues in the operations management of the trail. These meetings would provide an opportunity for members of the trail community and public to engage with state and local leaders.

05 Develop a clear strategy for developing continuity in design and management throughout the trail corridor from Portland to Thompson. This effort would establish a unified vision for the park and provide the towns of East Hampton to Thompson with a clear understanding of CTDEEP's objectives for the trail. Since Portland is not technically part of the state park, these efforts would provide Portland with suggested guidelines to follow as they continue to expand their trail west to the Connecticut River. This effort would be in collaboration with the urbanized areas of Willimantic and Putnam who are working to close their gaps in the trail.

06 Create a comprehensive set of design guidelines for trail designers and maintainers. These guidelines would establish standards for materials, construction methods, the materials and locations for site furnishings and recommend amenities that may be used to reinforce the trail's branding throughout the corridor. The guidelines would be derived from industry standard trail design manuals and CTDOT documents such as: AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities; National Association of City Transportation Officials Urban Bikeway Design Guide; and the State of Connecticut DOT's Standard Specifications for Roads, and Bridges Facilities & Incidental Construction Form 818.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Maintenance

- 07** Define the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder. As the number of visitors to this park grows and the demand for expanded services becomes more apparent, this recommendation becomes critical to the future successes of the park.
- 08** Develop and/or strengthen maintenance protocols and arrange memorandums of understanding between CT DEEP and all towns adjacent to the ALSPT. These agreements need to outline the trail's maintenance and infrastructure requirements in a comprehensive manner including a clear framework of responsibilities that addresses the scope, timing and frequency of items including but not limited to: seasonal trail mowing, leaf removal, clearing storm damage, repairing and improving the trail surfaces, litter removal, public safety and enforcement patrols, and seasonal public safety improvements such as vegetation removal to maintain sight lines and snow removal from trailhead parking areas.
- 09** Investigate a methodology for towns to be reimbursed for the time & materials they contribute to the Air Line State Park Trail. These contributions often come in the form of local public work's departments contributing staff hours, equipment time/ operating costs and materials costs to maintain local sections of their trail and related amenities such as parking areas, signage, and trail crossings. A majority of the municipalities reiterated this request and many expressed frustrations that their local public works budgets were being negatively impacted to maintain this unique state park whereas they would not be expected to provide maintenance to a more conventional state park.
- 10** Develop a funding strategy for Recommendation #9, looking at the CTDOT's [Town Aid Road Program](#), a program that funds the construction, improvement and maintenance of roadways through grant payments based on calculations that factor in the town's population and miles of improved/unimproved roadway. A program such as this would work hand in hand with the recommended maintenance agreements to direct state funds to the towns based upon the linear mileage of trail, which they are responsible for maintaining.
- 11** Establishing this program and seeking a permanent revenue source to fund it would be a collaborative effort that could be spearheaded by the ALSPT Region Alliance and rely on the resources of the four councils of government who help manage the transportation planning funds for these trails: Lower Connecticut River Valley COG, Southeastern Connecticut COG, Capital Region COG, and Northeastern Connecticut COG.
- 12** Establish a mechanism where materials needed for trail maintenance such as process aggregate earth materials, stone dust or stone riprap may be supplied at no charge or at a reduced rate to the member towns. This would still encumber the town's labor and equipment however it would lessen the burden on local operating budget for maintaining the trail.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Town-Based Recommendations

The Air Line State Park Trail Region Master Plan Consultant Team met with stakeholders and representatives from each of the twelve towns. These meetings were set with no time constraints and allowed for site visits and in depth conversations. The project planning team's objective was to listen and take the opportunity to see and hear firsthand what was on the minds of the people who are by default, the local ambassadors, and stewards of this trail. The general agenda to these meetings were as follows:

- Site walks led by trail committees to observe maintenance needs
- Discussions with municipal leaders to review funding opportunities
- Conversations with economic development officials regarding making regional connections to spur growth
- Meetings with public works staff where the question of "who's responsible for this?" was often a topic of conversation when discussing particular maintenance activities.

The lively requests for maintenance assistance and the breadth of ideas for infrastructure improvements at these meetings was extraordinary and extensive notes and photos were collected by the project planning team. These findings are summarized in Appendix A.

SHORT TERM GOALS

- Initiate bi-annual meetings, led by ALSPT Region Alliance and CTDEEP to review upcoming seasonal maintenance protocols and projects identify funding mechanisms and plans for major infrastructure
- Create a sign manual and standards for sign placement to assist maintenance crews with design and installation
- Develop a standard for mile markers, where is Mile - 0.0 and work closely with Hop River Trail Alliance toward mile marker planning
- Install town boundary markers and clearly denote intersection names or convenience and emergency purposes
- Post consistent signage at all trailheads to inform users of park hours, rules and regulations for pets and their waste, etc.
- Add informational signage to promote features along the trail - such as nearby preserved lands and historic sites (include photographs)
- Consider opportunities for local businesses or civic organizations to sponsor the trail - Similar to Connecticut's 'Adopt a Highway' program
- Improve the trail surface through Hampton to provide continuity for users on Air Line - North
- Complete the removal of hazard trees adjacent to the trail, throughout the corridor
- Install drainage improvements where trailhead parking lots are negatively impacting local roads (Chewink Rd in Chaplin is of particular note)



RECOMMENDATIONS: Town-Based Recommendations



MID-TERM GOALS

- Replace gates to make them all uniform and make sure all gates are clearly marked 'No Parking' to allow emergency access at all times
- Provide improved access for persons with disabilities, this includes adding compliant parking spaces and trailhead access
- Improve parking lots including resurfacing, improved drainage, expansion for more vehicles, better sight lines and paved aprons
- Create additional parking areas for large vehicles such as recreational vehicles (RVs) and horse trailers
- Improve intersection signage and trail crossing conditions with better signage and painted crosswalks
- Make meaningful attempts at the state level to close the remaining gaps rather than relying on local advocates and policy makers
- Make funding available at the state level to care for this regional treasure rather than relying on grant funds to improve this state park
- Make connections to urban centers to promote economic development (Hebron & Columbia are of particular note)
- Acquire easements over adjacent properties where trail improvements are anticipated to impact private property (drainage/access/etc.)
- Fund an amenities installation study to secure infrastructure grant where possible for restrooms, cell service, charging stations and emergency utility structures.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Town-Based Recommendations

LONG-TERM GOALS

- Pursue the installation of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) where the trail crosses roadways with high traffic volumes and/or poor sight lines (the intersections that generated this comment are Rt. 207 & Rt 87 in Lebanon)
- Construct trailhead parking at the Rt. 87 trail crossing in Lebanon
- Complete trail construction to close all remaining gaps (East Hampton, Willimantic & Putnam)
- Work with DEMHS Regions 3 & 4 to determine the trail's capabilities to mitigate the effects of natural or man-made disasters in the region
- Design and install pedestrian bridges over Rt. 203 in Windham and Chewink Rd in Chaplin.
- Establish a protocol for performing annual inspections on all trail infrastructure including bridges, culverts, pipe crossings, hand railings and etc. to prioritize infrastructure spending.
- Consider replacing natural wood decking and railings with engineered wood products or possibly concrete to extend their service life and reduce long-term maintenance costs
- Install paved aprons with proper drainage improvements at all crossing where the trail intersects a paved roadway
- Review the feasibility of paving portions of the trail where the grades are too steep to prevent erosion
- Install public restrooms and potable water filling stations at impactful locations within the corridor

ESTIMATING MAINTENANCE COSTS

Maintenance costs within the Air Line State Park Trail vary significantly based upon a variety of factors such as the existing trail's condition, the age of existing infrastructure, and intensity of the trail's use along with the nature of the desired improvements. For the purposes of this plan, the cost estimate relies on the consultant team's knowledge of the overall park system, recent construction costs and the opinion that regular maintenance contributes to the long term success of the park. The following estimates are assembled as a cost per linear foot/per mile however, they are general in nature. A detailed breakdown of the cost estimates by town along with an inventory of every location where the trail crosses a public roadway are included in Appendices A and B.



CHAPTER 5

**Land Use and
Zoning Guidance**



East Hampton Village, looking at the entrance to Air Line State Park Trail

The trails allows diverse groups of individuals to experience the outdoors, the towns and landscapes that are valued by all. The diversity of trail use ranges from health, exercise, socialization, solace, comfort, peace, rest, or renewal.

The value of the multi-use trail in the Air Line State Park Trail (ALSPT) Region is profound, varied, and individual. The trails allows diverse groups of individuals to experience the outdoors, the towns and landscapes that are valued by all. The diversity of trail use ranges from health, exercise, socialization, solace, comfort, peace, rest, or renewal. The trail experience may be focused on going fast, slowing down, pushing personal limits, returning to something familiar, traveling to a destination, interacting with natural resources, observing wildlife or merely a meander on a path to no particular destination.

With so many options for trail experience that reflect the diversity of human needs of the people who use the ALSPT, careful consideration of the viewshed and adjacent land use is a significant component of trail planning. The ALSPT connects a community of trail users to their preferred modes of recreation, anticipating an experience that will bolster and revitalize them.

Land use adjacent to the trail has the potential to enhance or detract from that trail experience. This chapter provides guidance for land use officials in towns and regions to explore options for preserving the scenic viewshed, enhancing the gateway from the trail head to a village center, or working with businesses to connect with the trail and trail users in a visually positive way. The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of existing zoning districts near the ALSPT in each town and examples of how land use planning in each town and for each zoning district can be modified to promote trail connections or buffers.

Planning Lifecycle of a Trail Project and Land Use Coordination

Significant funding is invested in trail construction and maintenance of the ALSPT yearly. Overall, from 1997 to 2023, over \$9,500,000 in grant funding from state and federal agencies has been awarded and invested in ALSPT infrastructure improvements and connecting trails to town centers. This dollar figure doesn't factor in the time and dollar amount for the 20% or greater match (more than \$1,743,192) required for the grant funding; the ongoing time of trail committee volunteers monitoring or assisting with planning, events, construction & maintenance; the planning support from the towns & Councils of Governments; or the infrastructure work and monitoring performed by CT DEEP staff.

Each trail project has a lifecycle from beginning to completion that can take years to complete. Given

these dollars and time invested, attention to adjacent land use is a component of this plan that warrants careful analysis by each town, the Councils of Government and the ALSPT Region. Various land uses of adjacent private property have the potential to accentuate the positive aspects of the trail experience, providing services and amenities. Some neighboring land uses are more of a challenge, requiring balance and negotiation with property owners to encourage a positive experience for the property owner, the trail user and the economic wealth of the town and region.

Bicyclists enjoying the Air Line Trail have access to bike repairs and supplies at Air Line Cycles in East Hampton, Conn.

1997

2023

\$9,500,547

received in federal and state funding for the Air Line State Park Trail for infrastructure improvements and connecting trails to town centers. This doesn't include the significant value of volunteers ensuring grant funding, planning and trail maintenance.



LAND USE PLANNING AND ZONING NEAR THE ALSPT

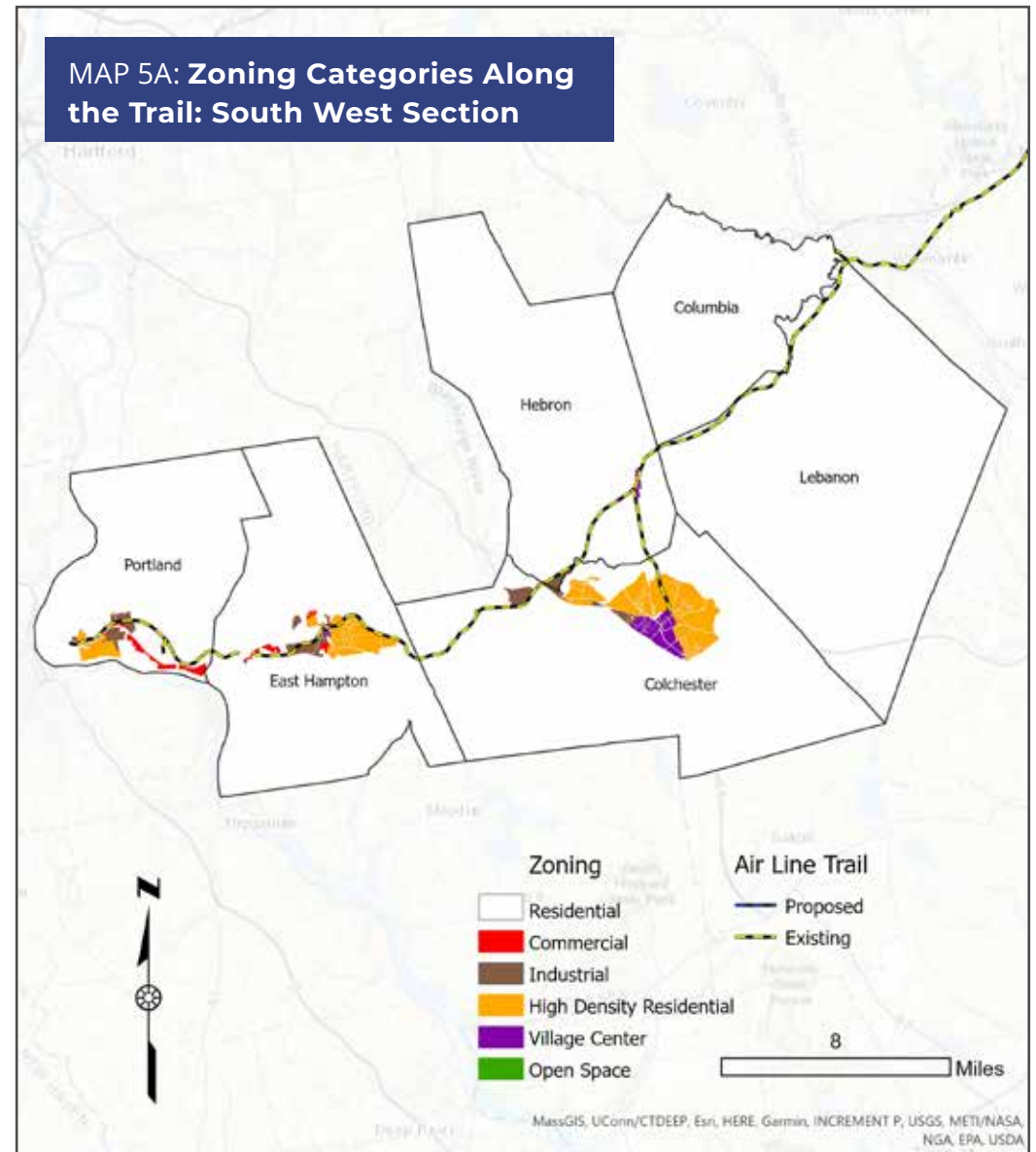
Each community along the trail has its own set of zoning regulations and maps. Here are general descriptions of the zoning districts and land uses along the trail from the western most town of Portland to the eastern most town of Thompson.

Portland, CT

The trail runs for about 2 miles in the southeastern portion of this town along properties that are in the Rural Residential zoning district, including YMCA Camp Ingersoll, the Keegan Property (22 acres purchased by the Town in 2016 that is a parking lot and trail head), and the Palmer Taylor Preserve (90 acres owned by Middlesex Land Trust) and runs just north of properties that are zoned for Designed Business and include an event venue, Saint Clements Castle & Marina. The Town plans to extend the trail into its downtown, which includes properties that are zoned for commercial, industrial and higher density residential uses.

East Hampton, CT

The trail runs east from a trailhead near the geographical center of town to the Salmon River State Forest property on the border with Colchester, along properties that are in rural residential and Village Center zoning districts. The trailhead is surrounded by many small businesses like Air Line Cycles and the Hair Corner as well as restaurants, a gas station and a bed & breakfast, and the trail runs by single family homes and protected open space properties like the Middlesex Land Trust's Sellew Preserve. The Town plans to extend the trail from its Village Center westward to Portland, an area that contains rural residential, commercial and industrial zoning districts and land uses.



Colchester, CT

The trail runs for 3 miles in the northern part of the Town along properties in the Rural Residential District and the Arterial Commercial District with a spur that runs for 3.5 miles from the trail intersection in Hebron along properties in the Rural Residential, Suburban, and Village zoning districts to Lebanon Avenue near downtown Colchester. The majority of the trail in Colchester runs along properties that are zoned for rural residential uses, suburban residential uses and agriculture, while a small portion runs along properties zoned for business, industrial, and mixed uses. In Colchester, the western portion of the trail runs along large tracts of land containing hundreds of acres in the Salmon River State Forest, the Town of Colchester and the Colchester Land Trust, and ends by North Westchester's Arterial Commercial Zoning District. In the spur that runs from the Raymond Brook Wildlife Management Area in Hebron, to Lebanon Avenue and near downtown, the trail runs along property owned by the Colchester Fish & Game Club, the Town of Colchester's Transfer Station and private homeowners.

Hebron, CT

The trail runs for 6-7 miles in the southern part of the Town along properties in rural residential districts, the Commercial Technology district and the Amston Village district. The majority of the trail runs along properties that are zoned for rural residential uses while a small portion of the trail runs along properties that are zoned for low-intensity technology & industrial uses, mixed uses and residential uses. A mixture of large and small tracts of land border the trail. The large tracts of land contain hundreds of acres of protected open space in the Salmon River State Forest and the Raymond Brook Wildlife Management Area, as well as public land owned by the Town of Hebron and the private recreation land owned by the Skungamaug Fish & Game Club. The smaller tracts tend to be those with single family homes.

Columbia, CT

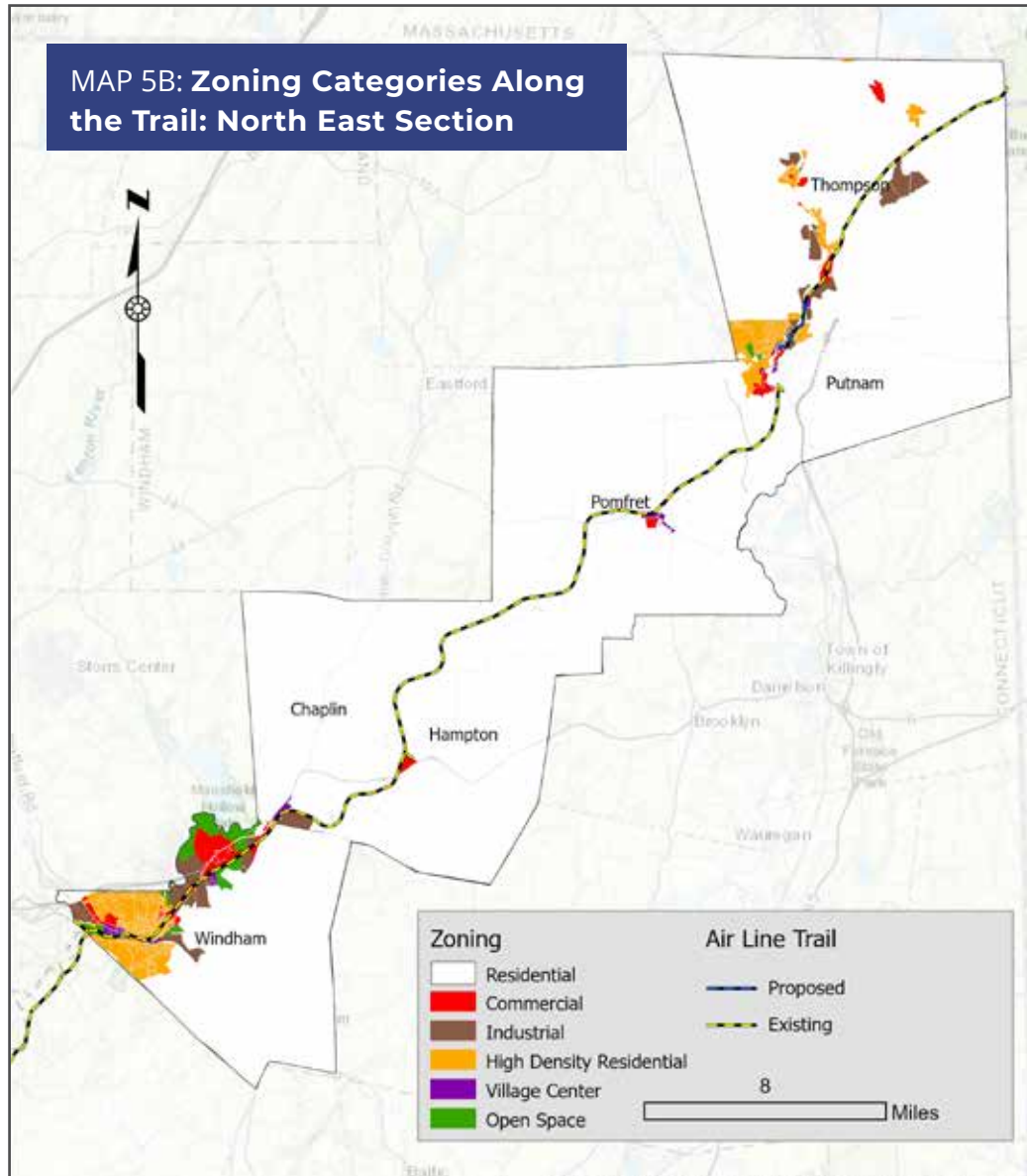
The trail runs for a very short time along the southern border of town in two places. Both locations are in the Residential Agricultural zoning districts that primarily contain residential uses and single family homes.

Lebanon, CT

The trail runs along the northern border of town along property in the Agriculture, Lake and Rural Agricultural Residence zoning districts. Land uses in the western part of the trail include vacant state land, forest land, Hebron Sportsman Club property, and Williams Pond, which has two campgrounds along its shores and 383 acres of vacant forest land that abuts the trail and runs along the western shore of the Pond. The eastern section of the trail runs along properties that contain vacant land or parcels that have single family homes on them. Just south of the trail, but not abutting it, is a 345-acre parcel of land that is owned by the Girl Scouts of Connecticut and is the site of the Girl Scout's Camp Laurel, which the Girl Scouts plan to sell in the future.



Williams Pond is one of a number of land uses in the western part of the Air Line State Park Trail.



Windham, CT

The trail runs along the northern portion of this Town along property in almost every type of zoning district in town. The trail connects with the Hop River State Park trail near the town's borders with the Towns of Columbia and Lebanon and then closely follows the Willimantic River for a couple of miles and runs along properties that include 36.85-acre Burdick Park, vacant highway land, public utilities, neighborhood businesses, higher density residential developments, and a park managed by the Willimantic Whitewater Partnership, which is a nonprofit dedicated to the restoration of the Willimantic River. The middle portion of the trail runs on the road for about .6 miles and then along the Willimantic Veterans Greenway for about 2.4 miles until it reaches the United Abrasives property. Then, the remainder of the trail runs in the northeastern section of town along larger properties, many of which are vacant state land, privately owned industrial developed & undeveloped land, conservation land like that of Joshua's Trust.

Chaplin, CT

The trail runs from the southwestern corner of town for a little over 3 miles to the southeastern portion of the Town along properties in every zoning district in Town (Corridor-Overlay (CO), Aquifer Protection (AZ), Business (B), Light Industry (L), and Rural Agricultural Residence (RAR)). About one-third of the trail runs along properties that are zoned for business, industrial, mixed uses and apartments and the remainder runs along properties that are zoned for rural residential uses and agriculture.

In Chaplin, the properties along the trail contain more dense development to the west and more rural development to the east. Many of the parcels south of the trail and in the Rural Agricultural Residence zoning district are vacant or currently classified as forest. Other parcels along the trail in town are protected open spaces like the Two Sisters Tract that features a trail and parking, and Beaver Brook State Park, which consists of 401 acres, most of which is in Windham, and privately owned recreation areas like the Fin, Fur & Feather Club, which has facilities for fishing, hunting, and shooting.

Hampton, CT

The trail runs for over 6 miles along the western portion of this town mostly through the RA-80 zoning district, but also close to the Business District on Route 6. The major land uses that the trail runs by are the Natchaug and Goodwin State forests. The trail also runs along the rear property lines of EASTCONN, which is a public, non-profit agency that serves local educational needs, the Hampton Mini-Mart, self-storage units, and some office space.

Pomfret, CT

The trail runs for about 6 miles from the southwestern corner to the northeastern corner of this town, mostly through the Rural Residential zoning district, but also by properties in the Business Village and Pomfret Street Residential zoning districts. The major land uses that the trail runs by are single family houses and hundreds of acres of protected open space owned by the Town of Pomfret, the Wyndham Land Trust and the Connecticut Audubon Society. The trail also runs alongside the Pomfret Town Hall, along the rear property line of a wholesale plant nursery and close by the Air Line Grill, a local restaurant.

Putnam, CT

There is currently a gap in the path of the trail in Putnam, between the Town of Putnam's River Trail and the Air Line Trailhead located on Riverside Drive in Thompson, CT. While no specific connecting route has been finalized yet, the general path of the connection options runs on the western side of town through downtown and near properties zoned for higher density residential uses, commercial, industrial, medical/office development like Day Kimball Hospital. On the western portion of the trail that is closer to the Pomfret town line, the trail runs along local roads and hundreds of acres of farmland and forest in the Agriculture Zoning District until it reaches the trailhead in Pomfret.

Thompson, CT

The trail runs diagonally from the southwestern corner of town to the northeastern corner of town, mostly through lower density residential and agricultural zoning districts. A more direct connection needs to be finalized between the trail in the southwestern corner of Thompson and the trail in Putnam, but people can connect to the trail head of Putnam's River Trail via local roads through low-density residential neighborhoods at this time. Short portions of the trail run by a cemetery, residential uses like single family homes and townhouses and commercially zoned property such, an aluminum windows manufacturer, a warehouse, a beauty salon, and a caterer.

Typology of Uses and Impacts

To examine the land use and zoning along the entire Air Line State Park Trail, the zoning districts in the communities along the trail were condensed into the following categories and are shown earlier on Maps 5A and 5B.

LOWER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL	HIGHER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL	INDUSTRIAL	VILLAGE CENTER	OPEN SPACE
					
<p>Single Family or Duplex near trail noted by large lot over 2 acres in size</p>	<p>Multi-family units adjacent to trail where site design encourages high density of more than 4 units per acre</p>	<p>Typical characteristics of rural and exurban commercial uses include plaza site design and strip zoning commercial with trail to rear of buildings and loading docks</p>	<p>Similar to commercial without the intensity of traffic impact, industrial properties tend to be larger complexes of single use buildings</p>	<p>Higher density (minimal or zero lot line zoning) trail travels through some of these zones and is adjacent to others, providing services and stop points for trail users</p>	<p>Rural private or publicly owned property ideally suited to provide viewshed and conservation experience for trail users and tourism marketing</p>
<p>Impacts on visual and management of trail: encroachment of buildings, non-permitted trail connections, erosion, agriculture run off, incompatible uses</p>	<p>Based on trail location, septic effluent, utilities, stormwater management, viewshed, screening, setback and unpermitted access to trail can impact trail without good site and architectural design</p>	<p>Coordination with owners for service opportunities to trail users and how to visually connect to the trail users. Site and architectural design can mitigate impacts for access, trail usage, safety and viewshed value</p>	<p>Communicating with owners can lead to sponsorships, visual connections, and site design compatible to trail viewshed. Site design at outset of permitting can provide options for mitigating stormwater, flooding, or erosion impacts.</p>	<p>Ideally constructed for ease of service and with marketing – tourism stop for trail users in region. Opportunities to grow small trail support businesses. Trail wayfinding and design to integrate into village center is critical</p>	<p>The defining land use for the trail and while private lands along the trail are mostly undeveloped along the trail, careful land use planning and zoning considerations can mitigate impacts from future development near or adjacent to the trail</p>
<p>High traffic, high use trails that are part of a multi-modal transportation network - ideal for urban settings</p>	<p>Urban settings or where bike racks can be used for connections to town centers or other ALSPT partner properties</p>	<p>Heavy use, helpful in areas prone to erosion for stabilization of slope</p>	<p>Minimal length applications for bridges and trail areas with sensitive resources or inability to lay pavement</p>	<p>Rails to trails for long distance rural travel and minimal grade- disclosure on tires required for safe passage - multi-use – horse friendly</p>	<p>Applicability for access paths to ALSPT Trail from neighboring partner properties (land trusts, towns, others)</p>

The majority of property along the trail is residentially zoned with most of it being in low density residential and agriculture zoning districts. In 10 of the 12 communities along the trail (Portland, East Hampton, Colchester, Hebron, Windham, Chaplin, Hampton, Pomfret, Putnam and Thompson), the trail runs along some commercial and industrial zoned property and/or through a downtown/village center. In the remaining 2 communities (Columbia and Lebanon), the trail does not run near property in commercial, industrial or village center zoning districts. Instead, it runs along the borders of these towns in low density residential and agriculture zoning districts.

Property along the trail is currently being used in all sorts of ways from single family homes to townhouses, forests to farms, municipal uses, as well as commercial and industrial businesses. There are also many properties, both large and small, along the trail that are currently vacant. The towns will need to plan for the future of the trail knowing that any property along the trail, except for the protected open space, may change its use in the future and become developed or redeveloped.



Property along the trail is currently being used in all sorts of ways from single family homes to townhouses, forests to farms, municipal uses, as well as commercial and industrial businesses.

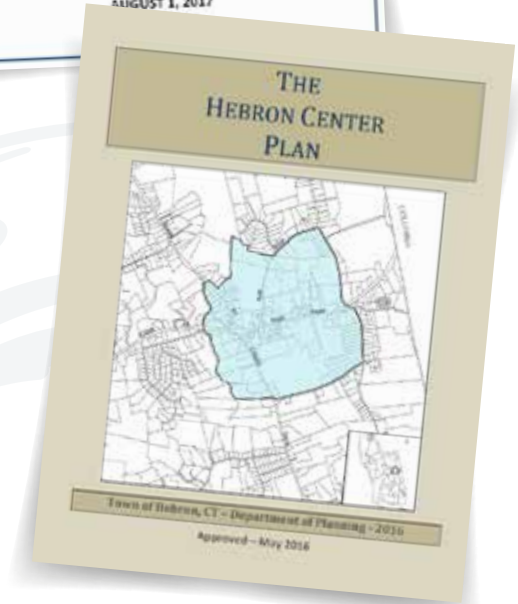
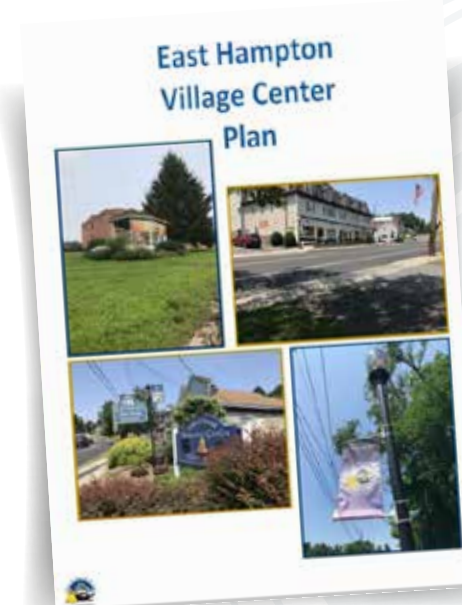
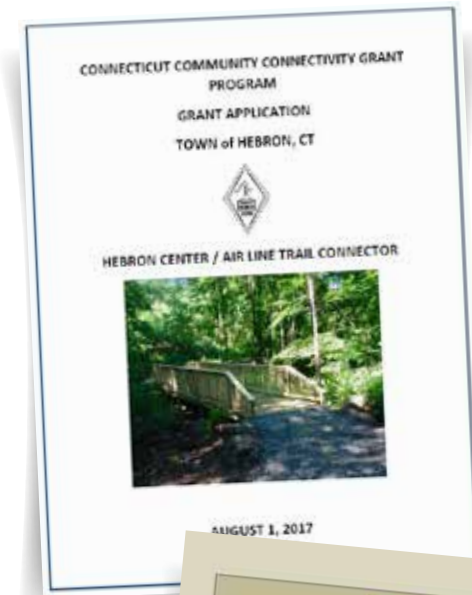
CORRIDOR AND SCENIC PROTECTION

Maintaining and enhancing the trail and the property along it is paramount to the success of the trail and its positive impacts on the communities through which it runs. Additionally, maintaining and enhancing connections to the trail through linkages with other trails, sidewalks, bicycle lanes/paths, and protected open space will also serve to improve the value of the trail to the towns and the region. Many of the

Several towns have actively moved to include trail proximity to their recent village improvement plans.

towns along the trail are already planning and encouraging future connections to the trail since they recognize it as a current and future asset. However, since so much of the property along the trail is currently vacant, it is hard to determine if the future use of those properties will have positive or negative impacts on the trail. As such, it would be useful for the towns to determine an appropriate level of management of the trail corridor to protect its scenic resources.

Additionally, incorporating the ALSPT into the design and land use planning for village districts or updates to each town's Plan of Conservation and Development can ensure the towns' and region's plans are consistent with state and regional planning goals. Several towns have actively moved to include trail proximity to their recent village improvement plans (see Figure 5C). The ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee should continue to review, with support of the Councils of Government through their transportation funding, consistency regionwide for trail corridor and scenic viewshed protection.



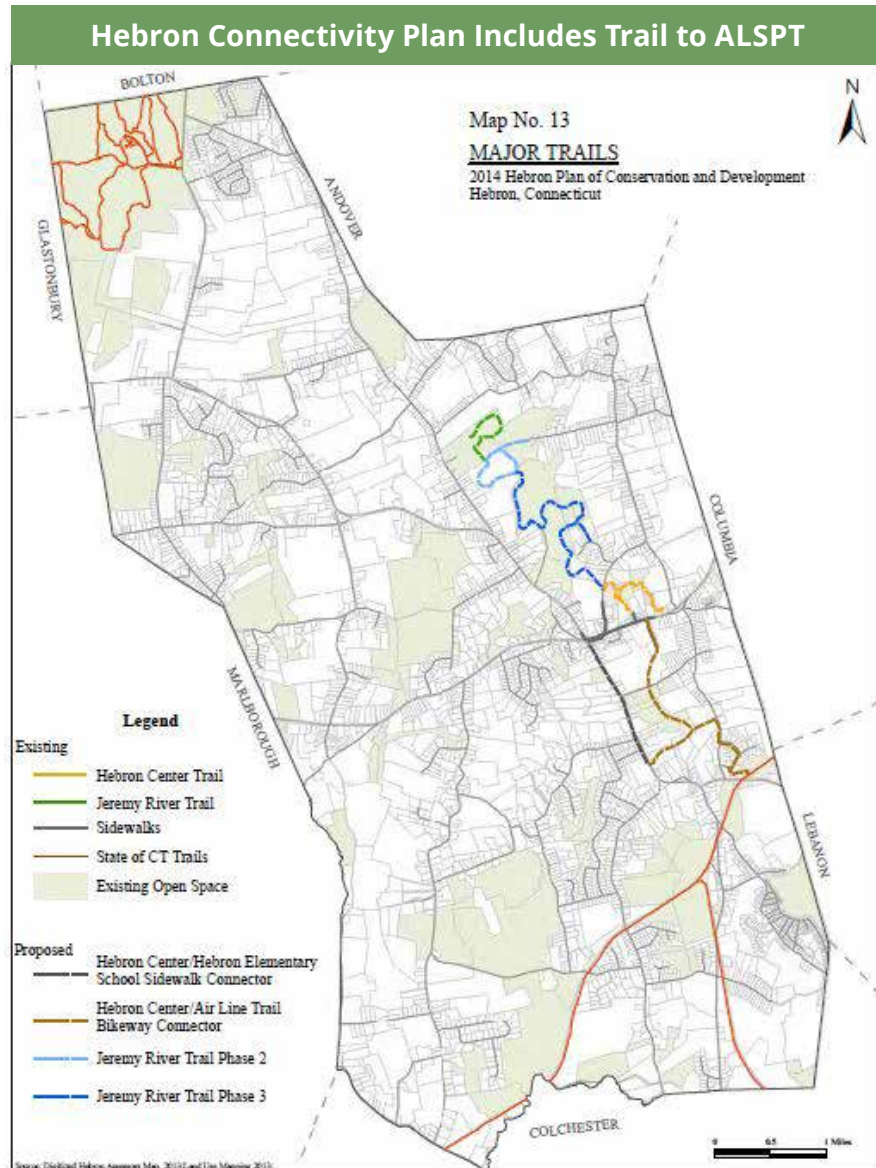
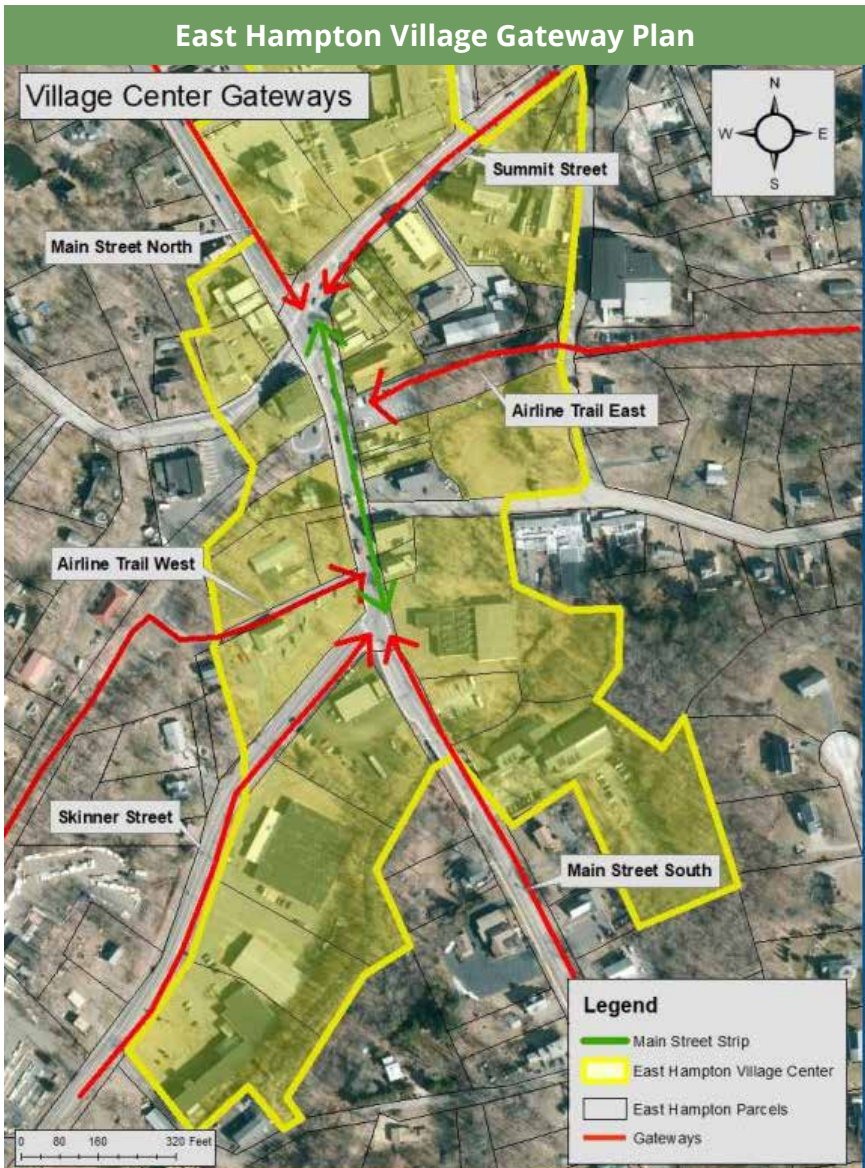


FIGURE 5C

As part of the East Coast Greenway, the trail is a key part of the Village Center in East Hampton, CT and proves itself as a unique asset with the bike and pedestrian traffic it brings to town. The ALPST is centerpiece of this plan. The Hebron Center Plan approved in 2016 led to a Connectivity Grant to CTDOT and an award of \$399,033 to connect the ALSPT to the Town Center.

COMPATIBLE AND INCOMPATIBLE LAND USE

While there are land uses that impact air or water quality and demonstrate clear incompatibility with trail use due to outdoor storage, industrial production or mining, there are numerous land uses ranging from residential to industrial that can be designed and managed to optimize their trail connections or promote the trail as a community asset. For instance, residential incompatibility is focused on encroachment on the trail with outbuildings and storage in the trail right of way. This conundrum is easily mitigated in new and future housing developments or subdivision approvals through buffer requirements and easements from the property owner to maintain a clear boundary between trail users and the neighboring property owners. To encourage existing residential property

owners to manage such encroachment, tax relief could incentivize adjustments in the boundary conditions that are presently in conflict.

For existing businesses, compatibility, vegetated buffers, and trail connections into their properties coordinated through CT DEEP could be encouraged through tax improvement districts via an overlay district. Similar to scenic byways, in which businesses support beautification, town elected officials, land use officials and economic development representatives could work together to develop a trail to business improvement plan. For future businesses, either retail or industrial, site design through special permits and an overlay trail district regionwide could provide the vision

to create synergy between the trail users and the businesses (see examples on the next page).

As will be noted in Chapter 9, Leadership and Implementation, an important recommendation suggests that the ALSPT Region Stakeholder Group obtain grant funding to support a planning-landscape architectural design study. This study would assist the twelve-town region by illustrating typology and methods to encourage property owners to build, design or re-design their sites with an eye toward beautification of the trail corridor and sustainably grow the economic wealth of the region. This would be a valuable study statewide and nationally as at the time of this planning study, there are no land use-trail planning studies evident through on-line research.

Similar to scenic byways, in which businesses support beautification, town elected officials, land use officials and economic development representatives could work together to develop a trail to business improvement plan.



Concept of Nearby Business Connection to ALSPT

BEFORE



AFTER



Route 85: Trailside Business Concept

BEFORE



AFTER



Potential concept for Trailside Accommodation

BEFORE



AFTER



Concept of ALSPT Adjacent Business Sponsorship and Scenic Improvement

BEFORE



AFTER



RECOMMENDATIONS: Land Use and Zoning

In order to manage the development and redevelopment of property along the trail corridor to enhance the trail, the twelve towns along the trail, with support from the Councils of Government could aim to:

- 01** Review and update their Plans of Conservation & Development to ensure consistency toward ALSPT improvements for future funding opportunities and include trail synergy components within the Plans' economic business district, transportation, and open space sections.
- 02** Where applicable, increase awareness of open space planning within the towns and evaluate properties for open space acquisition near the trail in cooperation with land trusts and CT DEEP.
- 03** Encourage linkages to the trail, other public trails, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes/paths.
- 04** Encourage development that is scaled and designed to strengthen the connection to the trail in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- 05** Encourage the provision of sidewalks in land development or re-development proposals to promote connectivity.
- 06** Develop appropriate vegetative buffers and setbacks for future development and re-development from the property line that abuts the trail.
- 07** Encourage trail friendly uses, such as horse stables, bike sales and repair retail near the trail.
- 08** Develop a common set of trail management guidelines.
- 09** Consider an overlay zoning district along the entire length of the trail in all the ALSPT towns to maintain and promote consistency of the future development and re-development along the trail.
- 10** Encourage the use of properties near the trail for overnight accommodations, including ancillary use of private homeowner occupied for short term rentals for visitors, tourists, etc.
- 11** Encourage local business activities near the trail, such as working with local agricultural producers to develop farmers' market opportunities near the trail.
- 12** Ensure that sign regulations have a measurable exemption to promote trail connectivity, trail support and promotion of businesses who sponsor the trail.
- 13** Amend zoning regulations to allow for official wayfinding signage for connectivity to town centers and promotion of the region and safety for trail users.





CHAPTER 6

Economics of the Trail

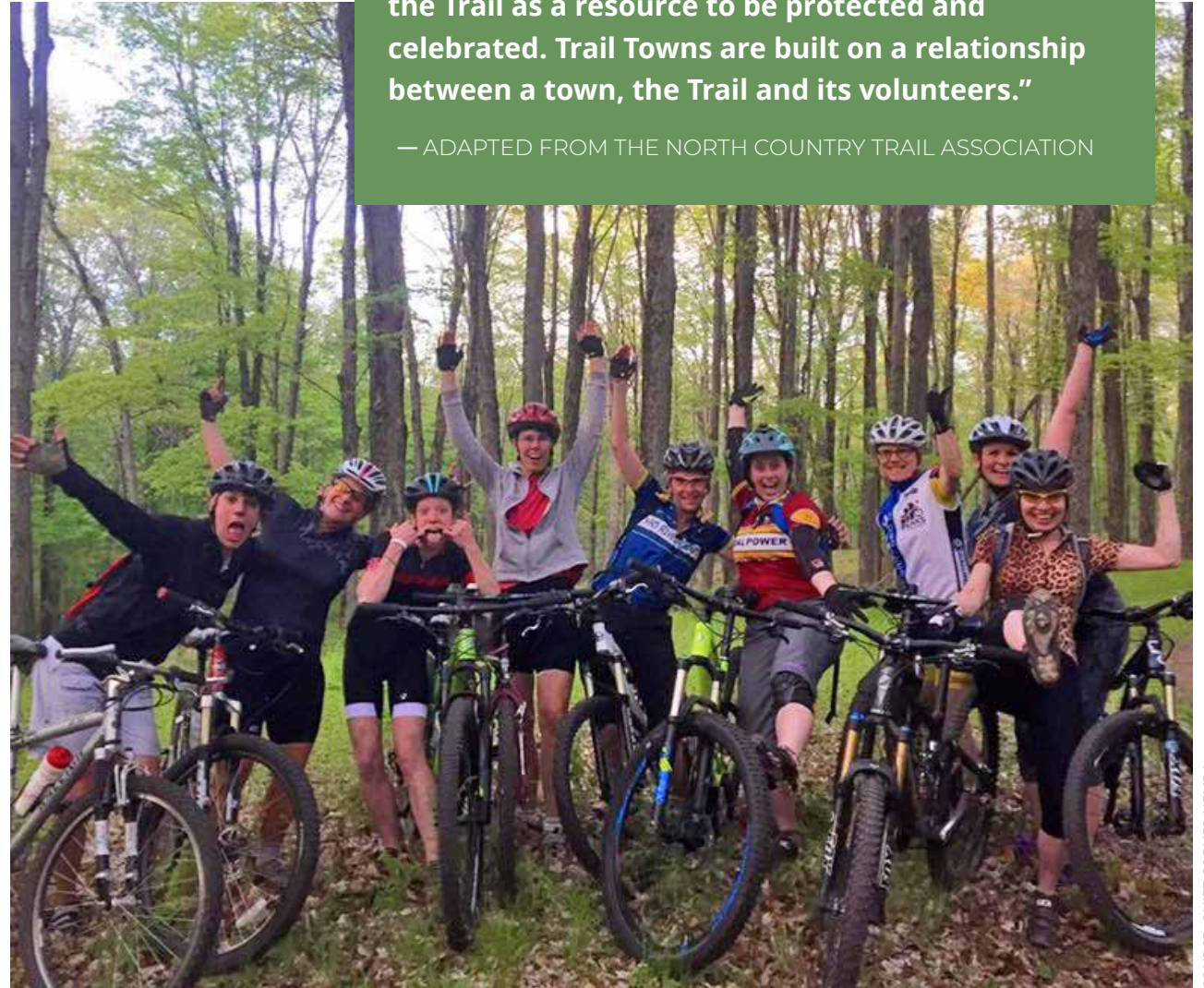
Communities across the state and country are realizing the economic potential of trails as highly desirable destinations that bring dollars into the places they serve. In addition to preserving critical open space and providing important transportation options, trails and greenways attract visitors from near and far—visitors who can facilitate job growth in tourism-related opportunities like restaurants, local stores, and lodging.

Communities around the country are increasingly utilizing this “Trail Town” model of economic revitalization that places trails as the centerpiece of a tourism-centered strategy for small-town revitalization. Trail Towns contain trails that are well connected to downtown businesses. Based on the well-known National Main Streets economic model, Trail Towns are literally inviting trail users to spend time and dollars in their community.

Researchers have found that the economic impact of this approach, also known as TrOD (Trail-Oriented Development) is significant, as shown in this [Rails to Trails Conservancy](#) article.

“A Trail Town is a community through which [a trail] passes that supports [trail users] with services, promotes the Trail to its citizens and embraces the Trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated. Trail Towns are built on a relationship between a town, the Trail and its volunteers.”

— ADAPTED FROM THE NORTH COUNTRY TRAIL ASSOCIATION



SOURCE: QUIET CORNER NEMBA

TRAIL AS ECONOMIC GROWTH CORRIDOR

Beyond small business development, wealth construction and economic prosperity, trails contribute to the local economy in a variety of ways through their economic impact, health and quality of life improvements, community health and safety improvements land conservation. Trails have been found to increase valuations & prices and decrease the time on the market for properties located close to them, as shown in the following examples throughout the country:

- ✓ The **Green Ribbon Preserve**, which is made up of 65 parcels, totaling 578 acres of protected land, and a 12.6-mile public trail, has a significant, positive impact on property values. There are 2,646 houses located within ½ mile of the Green Ribbon Preserve, and it is estimated that 13.5 percent of the property value of homes within a ½ mile of the trail is attributable to the proximity of the trail and preserved open space. This is higher than the county average of 2.95 percent. In other words, if the Green Ribbon Preserve and Trail were removed, the total assessment value of these homes would decrease by \$87 million or \$33,184 per house. This equates to an additional \$2.83 million in total annual property taxes (or approximately \$1,072 per property) generated for the municipalities and school districts. Additionally, the Wissahickon Creek and public trails located within the Green Ribbon Preserve are increasingly being used to market the area's real estate for its proximity to natural, green spaces.¹

- ✓ In suburban New Castle County, Delaware, homes within 50 meters of bike paths commanded a four percent price premium.²
- ✓ In **San Antonio, Texas**, neighborhood trails were associated with a two percent house price premium. Trails that were surrounded by greenbelts were associated with a five percent house price premium.³
- ✓ Twenty (20) studies that investigated the impact of trails on residential property values were reviewed. The results indicated that a small positive premium of between 3 percent and 5 percent was the most widespread outcome for a single-family home located next to a trail. However, there were outliers that suggested the premium might be as high as 15 percent in some cases, while in other contexts there may be a small negative impact.⁴
- ✓ In southwestern Ohio, the **Little Miami Scenic Trail** is associated with higher property values in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Up to a mile away from the trail, for every foot closer to the trail, property value increased by about \$7. A home a half mile from the trail would sell for approximately nine percent less than a home adjacent to the trail.⁵
- ✓ In rural **Methow Valley, Washington**, homes within one-quarter mile of trails benefited from a 10 percent price premium.⁶

1 Montgomery County Planning Commission. March 2022. Return on Environment: The Economic Impact of Protected Open Space in Montgomery County, PA

2 Racca, D. and A. Dhanju. 2006. Property Value/Desirability Effects of Bike Paths Adjacent to Residential Areas. University of Delaware, Delaware Center for Transportation Working Paper 188.

3 Asabere, P. and F. Huffman. 2009. "The relative impacts of trails and greenbelts on home price." The Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics 38(4): 408-419.

4 Crompton, John L. April 23, 2020. "The Impact of Trails and Greenways on Property Values." Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University.

5 Karadeniz, D. 2008. The Impact of the Little Miami Scenic Trail on Single Family Residential Property Values (Unpublished Master's Thesis). University of Cincinnati School of Planning.

6 Resource Dimensions. 2005. Economic Impacts of MVSTA Trails and Land Resources in the Methow Valley. Methow Valley Sport Trails Association.



Minuteman Bikeway



Nashua River Rail Trail

✓ Along a popular trail in **Austin, Texas**, the price premium ranged from 6 to 20 percent, depending on whether the neighborhood had views of the greenbelt surrounding the trail and whether it had direct neighborhood access to the trail.⁷ This price premium translated to roughly \$59,000 per year in additional tax revenue or five percent of the annual cost of trail construction and maintenance.⁸

✓ Homes sales were examined in the seven Massachusetts towns through which the **Minuteman Bikeway** and **Nashua River Rail Trail** run. Statistics on list and selling prices and on days on the market were analyzed. The analysis showed that homes near these rail trails sold at 99.3% of the list price as compared to 98.1% of the list price for other homes sold in these towns. The most significant feature of home sales near rail trails is that these homes sold in an average of 29.3 days as compared to 50.4 days for other homes.⁹

✓ In **Indianapolis**, researchers found that a high-profile, destination trail was associated with an 11 percent price premium for homes within a half mile of the trail. Other trails had no price premium.¹⁰

7 Nicholls, S., and J. Crompton. 2005. "The Impact of Greenways on Property Values: Evidence from Austin, Texas." *Journal of Leisure Research* 37(3): 321-341.

8 Crompton, J., and S. Nicholls. 2006. "An Assessment of Tax Revenues Generated by Homes Proximate to a Greenway." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 24(3): 103-108.)

9 Della Penna, Craig. January 25, 2006. "[Home Sales Near Two Massachusetts Trails](#)." The Murphys Realtors, Inc.

10 Lindsey, G., Man, J., Payton, S., and K. Dickson. 2004. "Property values, recreation values, and urban greenways." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 22 (3): 69-90.

The Importance of Trails to Connecticut Residents

In addition to their positive influence on property values, trails play an important role in Connecticut’s outdoor recreation offerings on which residents and visitors spend their time and money. In the 2017-2022 Connecticut Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), surveys indicate that trails are among the highest priorities of respondents.

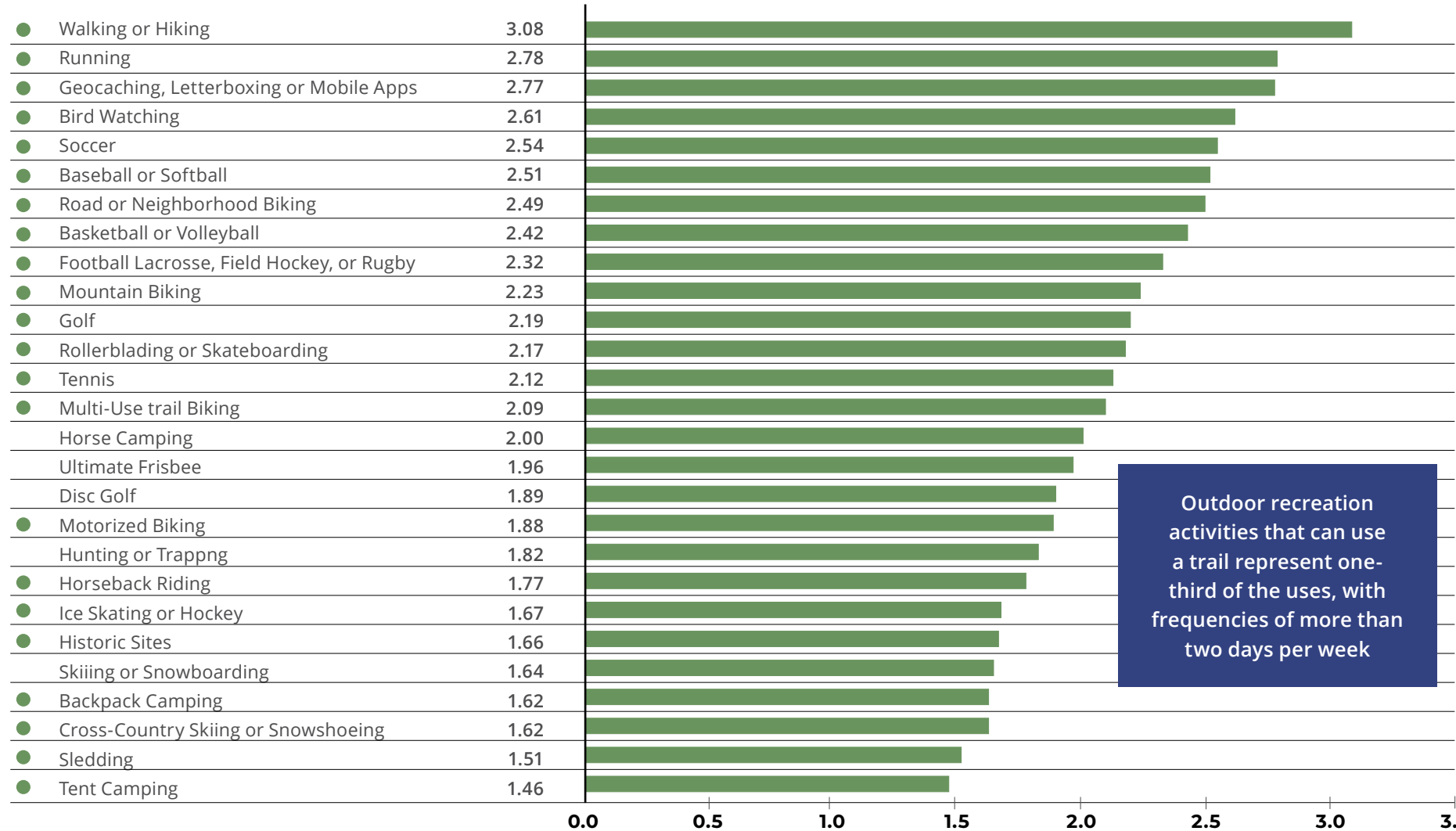
Paved multi-use trails are the most important recreational asset with almost 30% of respondents ranking them among the most important facilities to develop in municipal-owned outdoor recreation areas. See Figure 6A, which is the question and response survey from the 2017-2022 SCORP.

Q8: Please Select the three facilities most important to your household to develop in municipal-owned outdoor recreation areas.

FIGURE 6A: Response Category (Total N varies by Activity)	Most Important	2nd Most Important	3rd Most Important	ALSPT or Adjacent
Paved multi-use trails (N=550)	10%	8%	10%	●
Unpaved multi-use trails (N=333)	4%	5%	7%	●
Unpaved single use trails (N=207)	3%	4%	4%	●
ADA accessible Trails (N=88)	2%	2%	1%	●
Cross-country skiing or snowshoeing trails (N=74)	1%	1%	1%	●
Off-road motor, dirt biking, and ATV areas (N=94)	2%	1%	2%	
Picnic Areas/Shelters (N=608)	11%	1%	9%	●
Playgrounds (N=491)	9%	8%	8%	
Inclusive accessible playgrounds (N=155)	3%	3%	2%	
Baseball and softball fields (N=166)	3%	3%	2%	
Soccer, football, lacrosse and rugby fields (N=159)	3%	3%	2%	
Volleyball, tennis and basketball courts (N=205)	3%	4%	3%	
Golf Courses (N=138)	4%	2%	1%	
Disc Golf Courses (N=31)	<1%	1%	1%	●
Outdoor pools, water parks and splash pads (N=458)	8%	8%	7%	
Freshwater/saltwater swimming areas (N=332)	6%	6%	4%	●
Boating access for motorboating, jet skiing, sailing or paddlesports (N=82)	1%	2%	1%	
Snorkeling and scuba diving areas (N=30)	1%	1%	<1%	
Nature Preserves and bird watching areas (N=310)	5%	6%	4%	●
Historic sites and areas (N=373)	8%	6%	4%	●

Average Frequency of Participation In Land Based Recreation Activities Statewide

BY HOUSEHOLD, ON A SCALE FROM 1 (SELDOM) TO 4 (SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK)



Outdoor recreation activities that can use a trail represent one-third of the uses, with frequencies of more than two days per week

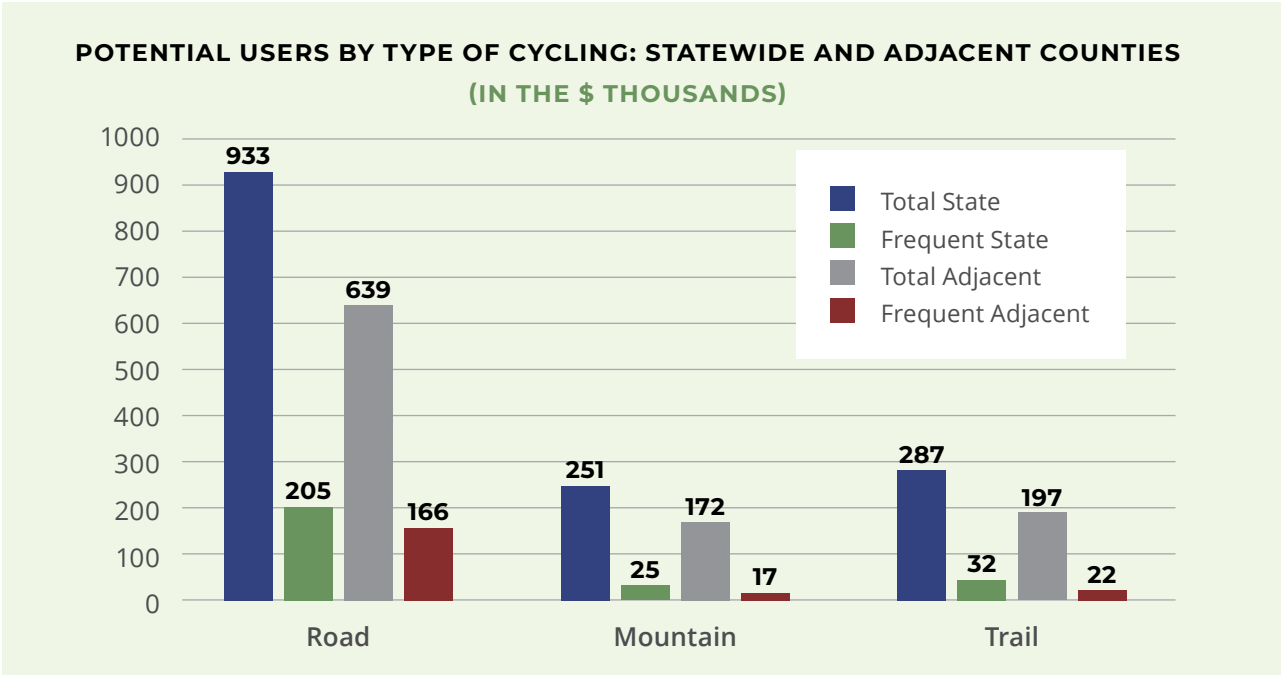
● Denotes Activities on ALSPT

Source: 2017-2022 Statewide Comprehensive outdoor Recreation Plan Data

FIGURE 6B

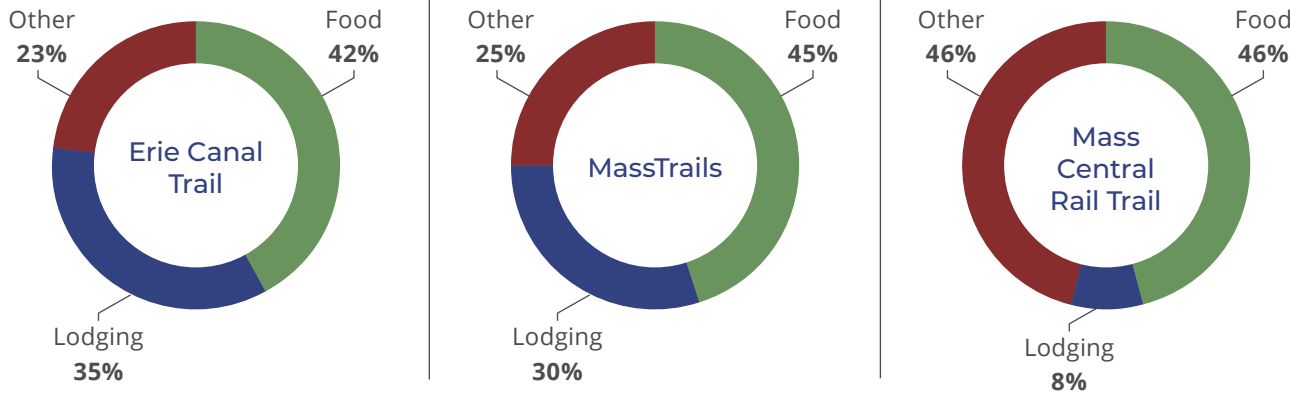
Expenditures by Cyclist Based on Bike Trail Category

Based on the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan utilization estimates, there is a potential pool of more than 900,000 riders who could use the trail (see table at right). This is assuming that adjacent counties represent a pool of bicyclists that is as large as 639,000 bicyclists or as few as 166,000, a pool of multi-use trail users as large as 197,000 and a pool of mountain bikers as large as 172,000. Similarly, the data implies that the total pool in host communities (those communities through which the Trail runs) is 24,000, with 5,000 frequent users, 7,500 trail uses (with more than 800 frequent users) and 6,600 mountain bikers (with more than 600 frequent users). Neighboring Massachusetts may add another 8,000 potential riders. It appears that if more of the ALSPT were paved and maintained, the potential user pool for the trail would increase.



While trails can be an important part of a region’s economy, spending levels of trail users vary dramatically because of the different profiles of each trail (see Figure 6B at right). For example, several Massachusetts trails serve as commuter pathways, so the travel-related spending by users on them is lower than on other more scenic trails. In contrast, the Erie Canal Trail in New York is more of a destination trail with a significant number of room nights generated by users with the average user spending \$185 compared to a maximum of \$13 for MassTrails.

DISTRIBUTION OF SPENDING BY USER SPENDING PROFILE



“Other” includes retail spending, gas, and other spending. **Source:** Economic Impact Studies of Erie Canal and MassTrails

The Air Line State Park Trail Master Plan Count and Survey Analysis Report, from the Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) at UConn Extension, that was finalized in September 2022, evaluated trail use on the Air Line State Park Trail to better understand how the trail is being used. Data were collected through long term and short-term infrared trail counters and 146 survey responses to a digital survey deployed through posters and lawn signs from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021. The major findings of the report are explained at right and many relate to future economic growth related to the trail.

The ALSPT user study found that food/restaurants were one of the most asked for amenities (in addition to camping and restroom facilities). This is consistent with the findings of the economic impact studies above. As noted earlier, the ALSPT 12-Town region is more dependent on the hospitality industry than Connecticut overall. So, any additional activity that generates incremental revenue is beneficial. Using MassTrails weekend maximum spending range of \$13 and using the spending distribution of Mass Central Rail Trail, which more closely resembles the ALSPT 12-Town region, the maximum potential annual spending from only cyclists would be approximately \$2,560,000, or 197,000 multi-use riders x \$13, and \$1,200,000 of that amount would likely be spent on food and beverages at nearby restaurants and bars.

Major Findings of the Air Line Trail State Park Master Plan Count and Survey Analysis Report

1

The Air Line State Park Trail is popular, with over 800,000 estimated uses in 2021.

2

There needs to be a better understanding of the reasons why people don't use trails like the Air Line State Park Trail and what would increase use of them.

3

There are opportunities to build connectivity between the Air Line State Park Trail, local trails, downtowns, business districts, schools and parks.

4

The majority of survey respondents did not patronize a business when visiting the ALSPT, but those that visited businesses identified many local businesses in East Hampton and Colchester where connections are easy. Communities and trail advocates could focus on understanding what amenities currently exist, what amenities bicycle users seek, and how trails might be better networked to attract longer distance tourism.

5

Based upon count data estimates and with survey responses, the three busiest parking areas and entrance points are Smith Street in East Hampton, Route 163 in Colchester, and Route 85 in Hebron. These areas can serve as focus areas for amenity enhancement and connection points. It also identifies the need to develop strategies to draw trail users to northern trail sections with connections to local businesses and downtown areas such as Willimantic, Pomfret, and Thompson, among others.

6

The need for increased trail user amenities, such as restrooms, mileage markers and signs, and improved maintenance is clear based on survey responses.

12-TOWN ECONOMIC REGIONAL INDICATORS

In general, employment & business data in the 12-Town Air Line State Park Trail region showed mixed results between 2015-2020 (see Figure 6C). In 2020, there were 2,897 businesses and 29,581 employees in the 12-Town region, representing a 9% increase in businesses over 2015, but a 9% decrease in employees since 2015. During this same time period, the number of businesses in the State of Connecticut increased by 7.6%, but the state lost 8% of its job base. In terms of wages, the region experienced a 10% increase in wages and an 18% increase in the average annual wage between 2015-2020, while the State as a whole saw smaller increases, a 7% increase in wages and a 16% increase in its annual wage.

While the ALSPT 12-Town region’s economy performed better than that of the state overall, its average wages were still \$25,000 below the statewide average despite the significant increase between 2015-2020. The region is also more dependent on tourism-related activity than the state, e.g., the hospitality industry (food service and accommodations) represents 8% of the Trail’s 12-Town regional employment versus only 6.2% of the state’s employment base.¹

¹ Data suppression in some communities makes comparison of the arts entertainment and recreation sector makes comparison across the entire tourism industry difficult.

FIGURE 6C

Change in Business and Jobs in the ALSPT Region

ALSPT Communities	Change 2015 - 2020			
	Businesses	Jobs	Total Wages	Average Wage
Chaplin	5	(84)	(\$1,009,961)	\$7,456.97
Colchester	38	(222)	\$23,476,412	\$9,385.95
Columbia	8	(12)	\$9,618,677	\$10,432.14
East Hampton	26	(16)	\$28,893,217	\$15,696.97
Hampton	12	105	\$4,132,424	\$1,663.96
Hebron	15	(184)	\$10,682,182	\$10,887.57
Lebanon	12	(39)	\$14,538,474	\$12,485.39
Pomfret	10	61	\$11,545,232	\$5,470.09
Portland	29	(159)	\$13,099,016	\$9,170.96
Putnam	17	(648)	\$12,716,770	\$7,615.60
Thompson	28	(325)	(\$7,299,726)	\$5,156.84
Windham	63	(1,552)	\$36,208,516	\$10,556.41

Source: NAICS Town Employment Data

COMPETITIVE FACTORS FOR THE REGION FOR TOURISM

The ALSPT already plays a significant role in many of the communities' local economies. Nearly every Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) of the communities along the Trail explicitly mentions the ALSPT as a key asset (see Figure 6D). Several communities also mention

expanded tourism as a key economic development initiative in their POCDs and a few communities explicitly mention the ALSPT as a development asset for recruiting talent and businesses.

FIGURE 6D

Elements of ALSPT Town Plans of Conservation and Development

ALSPT Communities	Elements of Plan of Conservation & Development				
	Specific Mention ALSPT	Trails Emphasis	Bike / Ped Mobility Improvements	Outdoor Recreation	Tourism Expansion
Chaplin	●		●		●
Colchester	●	●	●	●	
Columbia	●	●	●	●	
East Hampton	●				●
Hampton	●		●	●	
Hebron	●	●		●	●
Lebanon	●	●			●
Pomfret	●	●	●	●	
Portland	●	●	●	●	●
Putnam	●	●	●	●	●
Thompson	●				●
Windham	●	●		●	●

Inviting Visitors to Enjoy Agro-tourism Offerings

According to the Connecticut Office of Tourism FY23 Strategic Plan, tourism is the State of Connecticut’s 8th largest industry and supports 5.3% of all jobs and 84,254 people as of 2017. The tourism industry impacts many businesses including lodging, restaurants, transportation, retail businesses, and recreation businesses and employs one out of every 19 residents

in Connecticut. The communities in the ALSPT region are interested in promoting tourism, especially agro-tourism, as part of their local economic development initiatives. They see great value in their agricultural assets and would like to invite visitors to visit and enjoy them, as one can see in their Plans of Conservation & Development (POCD) (see Figure 6E).

FIGURE 6E

Excerpts from ALSPT Town Plans of Conservation and Development

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
Chaplin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community and Economic Development Commission supports promoting tourism, agritourism and cottage industries through protection and enhancement of the town’s natural resources and activities such as the Natchaug River, hiking trails and farms. The Commission is working with the boards of the Senior Center and Community Center to develop a Chaplin Arts and Cultural Center providing a destination for people to come and enjoy art, cultural events as well as many natural features like hiking trails, a pristine river to fish and kayak, opportunities for mountain bikers and skiers and allseason tourism, which from an economic development standpoint is our best asset. • The Community and Economic Development Commission supports the designation of local and state scenic road designations as a tool to increase tourism within the community. • Consider tourism and agritourism as an opportunity for economic development.
Colchester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westchester Village is intended to be a secondary village within Colchester which will meet many needs for basic retail shopping, tourism, and local services, especially for those residents of western Colchester. • Preservation of farmland offers opportunities for agro-tourism, a fast-growing CT travel industry segment. • Recognize and promote a “farm trail” with a variety of agricultural activities (Xmas trees, wine/grapes, cheese, chickens, flowers, horses, eggs, etc.
Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include agricultural business support in the town’s economic development strategies; support agricultural events and farmers markets.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
East Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle pathways for in-town travel, and transit services to other communities. • The Historical Society should continue to encourage house tours and other historic tourism initiatives as an element of East Hampton’s overall economic development strategy. • Promote recreational opportunities such as an expanded Air Line Trail or a golf course for residents with the ability to attract visitors from other areas. • Consider updated regulations to allow for Air BnB lodging accommodations. • Promote agricultural tourism by allowing flexibility for accessory agricultural uses. • Consider creating a Tourism Board to help in the promotion of tourist related activities. • The Town recently completed a project to develop an Air Line Trail trailhead in the Village Center. This new trailhead, along with an improved parking facility has increased tourism and pedestrian activity in the Village Center and provides additional off-site parking for Village properties. A new project which will begin in the coming year will extend the Air Line Trail westward toward Portland. Eventually, downtown Portland and the Village Center will be connected by the trail providing for increased tourism opportunities and better pedestrian access. • The Air Line Trail is a scenic resource and a major tourist draw. • With an expanded Air Line Trail being completed in the coming year and its proximity to the Lake as well as other outdoor recreational opportunities, East Hampton is poised to become a destination for the needs of those tourists.
Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Zoning and Subdivision Regulations and revise accordingly to ensure that they encourage and sustain agriculture, including agri-tourism and ecotourism. • Many rural New England towns have successfully marketed themselves as tourist destinations, and there are as yet untapped opportunities to attract day-trippers to food, farm, historic and nature related-venues. This may best be achieved through a multi-town effort to concentrate and publicize tourist opportunities. • Review and revise Zoning Regulations to encourage the reuse of large and historic agricultural properties for contemporary, economically viable uses, such as educational opportunities, art and craft production and sales, tourist opportunities, recreational opportunities, large event venues, etc. • Review Zoning Regulations to foster the economic contribution made by agriculture and value added agricultural products.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
Hebron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help support town festivals like Farm Day Tours and the Annual Maple Festival. • Promote the establishment of an annual Hebron Historical House / Sites Tour to increase interest in preserving these historic sites. • Promote Tourism and cross-promote other events happening in Town • Encourage tree farming as an agricultural use and consider instituting a town wide holiday festival to support this activity.
Lebanon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure that town ordinances, regulations, policies and actions support the continuation of agricultural use and small businesses. • Utilize town web site to include a list of and links to museums, annual events, agriculture, recreation, and businesses and prepare a town map that locates these features. • Maintain Economic Development Commission focus on establishing relationships with business property owners and promoting heritage tourism, agriculture, home-based and new businesses.
Pomfret	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to celebrate agricultural business in Town, including farms, through advertising. • Continue outreach efforts to farmers and agricultural businesses, and educate the public about the benefits of agriculture.
Portland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider promoting other forms of economic development such as hospitality, lodging, age-related housing and tourism. • Continue to support farms and farming in Portland.
Putnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the creation of other agricultural incentives for these areas, such as tax breaks or purchase of development rights, or zoning and/or economic development incentives that further encourage agricultural and/or agricultural-related land uses. Implement such incentives if deemed appropriate. • Make provisions in the zoning regulations to encourage agritourism, agritainment and non-traditional agriculturally-related activities in coordination with farming. • Address tourism, the arts and culture, and recreation and agritourism to serve as economic drivers.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
Thompson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop public events at key tourism and recreation sites. • Provide support for efforts to increase tourism to Thompson. • Organize and Conduct annual farm tours. • Develop cooperative partnerships to market and promote local recreation assets to potential visitors. • Develop & promote annual agritourism events. • Develop and support marketing infrastructure for local farmers.
Windham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicize Windham’s historic resources as a step to help protect, preserve, retain, and enhance existing historic sites to promote tourism. • Promote Windham as a regional hub for local food, with commercial kitchens (CLiCK), the Willimantic Food Co-op, and seasonal farmers markets. • Review zoning and other regulations for compatibility with farming and other agricultural support services (such as agritourism, events and festivals hosted at farms, etc.) as part of a comprehensive zoning re-write. • Build on Windham’s Unique Assets to Attract Visitors. • Provide a web-based calendar that lists cultural community events, promote events through image filled emails, and social media similar to Easton, PA. Build a contact list for emailing event news. • Ensure that tourists feel welcome and enjoy a quality experience when visiting Windham. • Continue to support the development of the Whitewater Park as an attractor of future recreational tourism. • Promote the East Coast Greenway, the Air Line Trail, and the entire recreation and trails system in Windham as a major attraction for businesses and entertainment. • Promote and celebrate Windham’s historic districts as tourism destinations with appropriate signage, and promotion of events such as Victorian Days and Windham Town Green events. • Promote and preserve historic buildings, both as housing and for tourism. • Celebrate and publicize recreational activities on the trails and rivers in Windham.

Working Toward Trail Improvements Across the Region

In addition to tourism, the communities in the region are also looking to maintain and improve the ALSPT and other trails, so that residents and visitors alike can enjoy them as shown below in action items related to trails, bicyclists, and pedestrians in the various Plans of Conservation & Development:

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<p>Chaplin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For any future improvements to the Rte. 198 bridge, the town should request safe bicycle and pedestrian access. Consider a viewing platform cantilevered on the side of bridge next to Diana’s Pool or safe access to the north bank where crowds gather. • Consider the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists in the review of all commercial and residential development, and in the development of town facilities where appropriate. • Work with DOT to increase pedestrian and bicycle safety along state routes by utilizing traffic calming techniques. • Seek funding to create a bicycle lane from Garrison Park on Route 198, across Route 6 and along Chewink Road to the trailhead for the Air Line Trail. • Investigate pedestrian linkages within the municipal core including Garrison Park, the town hall, the library, and the senior center. • Improve signage for existing trail heads and ensure good signage for proposed trails and bikeways. • Review the adequacy of parking at the Chewink Road/Air Line Trail head and at the Two Sisters Parcel on Route 6. • Maintain trail connections between Garrison Park and adjacent Joshua’s Trust property and Natchaug State Forest. • Maintain the stone dust trail around the pond.



Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development

Colchester

- Install signs promoting a “farm trail” and identify it as such on the Town webpage.
- Create an open space system where different open spaces are interconnected with trails within Colchester and to surrounding communities.
- Improve and promote the Air Line Trail and other trails.
- Continue to work with the State of Connecticut and the Norwich Public Utilities Department to develop public trails on their lands in Colchester.
- Ensure that the Town Center has a strong pedestrian focus and that driveways and parking areas do not adversely affect the pedestrian realm.
- Encourage shared access and public or private street interconnections to and through rear land to create more manageable block sizes, open up additional land for development, and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Promote the evolution of Westchester as a rural “hamlet” with a pedestrian-friendly flavor.
- Undertake a special study of Westchester in order to promote mixed uses, identify ways to enhance its “hamlet” character, and ways to make it more pedestrian friendly.
- Create, maintain, and enhance a pedestrian-friendly development pattern in village areas.
- Seek to extend sidewalks for pedestrians in the Town Center, Westchester center, and adjacent areas.
- Where appropriate, require new developments to install sidewalks.
- Create more pedestrian trails and greenways in the community.
- Establish a system of bicycle routes in Colchester.
- Consider bicycle travel whenever road work is undertaken.
- Educate people on bicycling.
- Develop a trail / greenway master plan.
- Create a local bicycle route map and install signs and pavement markings to identify routes.
- Become recognized as a “bicycle-friendly community.”

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<p>Columbia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a small, pedestrian-friendly mixed-use district along Route 66 in the town center. • Continue to steward this land [Szedga Farm] while encouraging the use of the trails and community gardens and providing land for active agriculture. • Create a natural resource planning map that shows lands that are of the highest priority for preservation and highlight areas for greenways, trails, wildlife corridors and agriculture. • Pursue opportunities to extend or improve open space greenways with walking trails. • Promote public access to open space and trails as appropriate by linking open spaces and conservation areas. • Plan for future subdivision road locations; require new subdivisions be in a pattern to facilitate road and trail linkages. • Develop a master plan for Recreation Park that includes trails and internal roadways connecting active and passive recreation areas. • Continue to steward town-owned trails; increase public awareness of passive opportunities available in Columbia. • Work toward an inter-connected trail system. • Plan safe and accessible pedestrian and bike pathways for in-town travel, and transit services to other communities.
<p>East Hampton</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out grants to expand the Air Line Trail and create better signage to encourage trail users to visit local businesses. • Consider creating trail head for access to the Air Line Trail. • Enhance and protect the existing trail system throughout town. • Work with Eversource to connect the trail in East Hampton to an expected trail on the old railroad right-of-way in Portland. • At present, the Air Line Trail's western terminus is in the village center of East Hampton and will eventually form a 50-mile trail linking Portland and Webster, MA. Plans are currently in place to extend the trail easterly into the town of Portland. • Establish trails along greenways to encourage passive recreation. • Although used primarily for recreation, the Air Line Trail cuts through the town and is used for bicycle transportation. • Create walkable villages through sidewalk, safety, and streetscape improvements. • Extend the Air Line Trail westward to connect to Portland. • Accommodate bikes whenever practical in road and site development projects. Develop a list of roads where bike lanes should be considered.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
Hampton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage development that is compact and transit-accessible, with pedestrian-oriented development patterns. • Identify and review the status of any Town roads that are not maintained. Evaluate their potential for future uses, including use for bicycles and pedestrians. • Evaluate the location of a future footpath along one or both sides of Main Street/Route 97 on Hampton Hill. • Develop a town-wide cycling and walking map. • Seek funding to support walking and cycling paths along Route 97 and Route 6 as well as along selected Town routes.
Hebron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and protect trail corridors that will highlight wildlife areas and raise understanding of natural systems. • Establish a trail network with viewpoints along trailside by working cooperatively with adjacent landowners. • Work with the Economic Development Commission and others in marketing the Town’s many recreational opportunities to enhance local economic development, and bringing recreational activities such as bike races, running races and horseback trail riding meets to the Town business center. • Continue to pursue available grant funding to maintain, map, and extend current trail systems and enhance park facilities. • Continue to expand existing educational activities (field walks, interpretive markers, cooperative activities with the schools, nature trail booklets, marked trails, earth day events, etc.) that will make the public aware of the important roles that these natural systems perform including threats to these systems such as those posed by invasive species. • Provide safe pedestrian access within sites and between sites to help reduce the impact of the automobile. • Continue to encourage the establishment of sidewalks in the public right-of-way throughout the town center. • Work with the CT Department of Transportation to continue to install crosswalks and pedestrian cross buttons to encourage pedestrian activity in the Town Center. • Connect Hebron Center with sidewalks / bikeway to Hebron Elementary School and eventually the Air Line Trail. • Connect Hebron Center trails with a new trail through the RHAM complex, Salmon River State Forest and Burnt Hill Park. • Plan and seek funding for a sidewalk / bikeway connection between the Town Center and the Air Line Trail. • Seek grants and other funding sources to implement the Jeremy River Trail, a connection between the Town’s business center and Burnt Hill Park.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<p>Hebron (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development should be land/soil/topography based, with consideration given to preserving natural features. Streams and wetlands should serve as buffer areas, and provide opportunity for passive recreation such as walking paths and trails. • Integrated sidewalks and trails should be constructed to facilitate walking from Hebron Elementary School and Stonecroft senior housing to the Library or to the central business district. • A bikeway / pedestrian connection should be planned and implemented between the Village Green District / Hebron Center area to the Church Street Park and Air Line Trail to the south. • Enhancement of transitional areas should occur including the installation of park benches, flower and community gardens and other public amenities together with the establishment of pedestrian sidewalks, bicycle paths and walking trails to enhance the visibility, attractiveness and enjoyment of the Town Center by helping to minimize traffic volume, improve traffic circulation and enhance the accessibility to municipal, educational, recreational, residential, commercial, cultural and historical sites. • A long-range plan of a pedestrian connection along Church Street from Hebron Center, to the Neighborhood Convenience District, and eventually to the Air Line Trail should be actively pursued. This would greatly add to the vitality of this neighborhood commercial district, and increase pedestrian safety in the immediate area. • Consider the permanent preservation of the Skungamaug Fish and Game Club and other properties along the Jeremy River consistent with the recreational use of the Air Line Trail and environmental value of the river system. • Connect the Jeremy River Trail System, originating at Burnt Hill Park, to the RHAM High School complex. • Encourage opportunities by the schools and affiliated organizations, to maintain, rehabilitate, research and study Town open space, historical sites, State or Town parks and trails, etc. so as to reaffirm and strengthen a sense of civic spirit within the student body.
<p>Lebanon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider additional opportunities to create multi-purpose trail networks open to the public through existing open space and road systems, when preserving new properties, and during the development review process. • Continue to work with the State of Connecticut to provide adequate signage, access and parking at Lebanon state parks, including the promotion of passive recreation activities such as bicycling, cross-country skiing, and equestrian access. • Connect or loop the walking path around Town Green in the vicinity of the Library, provide additional parking at the Library site for those utilizing Lebanon Green, and provide greater utilization of Lebanon Green for community events.

Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development

Pomfret

- Consider coordinated development of sidewalk system connecting municipal properties and private institutions in Route 169/Route 44 area as well as the Pomfret Hill Section.
- Consider future development in association with the Air Line State Park Trail. Work with DOT and DEEP to control access and explore interconnection to Pomfret’s Recreation Park and Connecticut Audubon Society. Replace historic trestle crossing on Route 169 and Needles Eye Road.
- Seek funding for sidewalks and other area improvements through Small Town Economic Assistance grants, Federal TEA grants, Quinebaug-Shetucket Rivers Valley Corridor programs, Borderlands and other sources (i.e., USDA – United States Department of Agriculture).
- Develop regulatory standards for Village area, including parking, access, and other standards to encourage mixed-use, pedestrian friendly development and discourage strip development.

Portland

- Work with CT-DOT to improve the intersection of Routes 17, 17A and 66 to serve pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles.
- Encourage the creation and maintenance of a pedestrian friendly streetscape.
- Promote redevelopment of the riverfront to create a pedestrian friendly environment with recreational amenities.
- Continue to link parking areas, public access points, and visitor attractions via an overall network designed to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles.
- Enhance the pedestrian environment through street furniture, fencing, street plantings, pedestrian scale lighting, crosswalks, signage, and sidewalk improvements.
- Extend the Air Line Trail to the Town Center.
- Establish connections from the Air Line Trail to East Hampton, Middletown and Glastonbury.
- Establish an interconnected system of open space in order to create greenway trails and wildlife corridors.
- Aspire to be a pedestrian-friendly community.
- Ensure that adequate and safe pedestrian crosswalks are provided in appropriate places.
- Close gaps in discontinuous sidewalks.

	Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development
<p>Portland (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforce the existing sidewalk maintenance ordinance. • Aspire to be a bicycle-friendly community. • Create an overall system of bicycle routes in Portland. • Accommodate bicycles whenever practical in road and site development projects. • Narrow travel lanes and create bicycle lanes where possible. • Establish formal bike lanes with medians where space is available. • Work with CTDOT to include bike lanes on all state roads in Portland.
<p>Putnam</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create walkable neighborhoods • Make provisions for obtaining and siting street furniture (benches, bicycle racks, trash receptacles, etc.) where practical • Improve and expand existing and construct new walking/ bicycle/cross-country skiing trails, greenways, parks, and similar open or natural land uses. • Extend and connect Putnam’s greenways, constructing new walking/bicycle/cross-country skiing trails, to link with, and bring about the preservation of, areas of natural, scenic, historic or cultural value; partner with adjoining communities to create a regional greenways network. • Expand the existing greenway network to include the existing Little River Trail and other greenway trails, notably a trail along the Five Mile River. • Use existing monetary set-asides, trail construction associated with Pomfret’s sewer main construction activities, and grants, to fund construction of the Air Line Trail and the extension of the River Trail, and perform said construction. • Add separate or shared (with sidewalks/walking paths) bicycle lanes onto roadways where feasible. • Construct new sidewalks in areas of heavy pedestrian traffic that currently do not have sidewalks. • Improve existing roadways, sidewalks, and pathways (greenways) for the convenience of not only automobile drivers but also for bicyclists and walkers. • Explore the creation of a bike sharing program. • Provide sidewalks linking housing and essential services for walking residents

Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development

Thompson

- Install stone dust on critical sections of the Air Line State Park Trail.
- Develop outdoor recreation assets in alignment with the “Trail Town” report from the National Park Service assistance program.
- Enhance Thompson’s appeal for adventure racers and recreational cyclists.
- Encourage local businesses to invest in covered bike racks. Encourage local restaurants to plan menus aimed at cyclists.
- Add signage that indicates to share the road with bicyclists.
- Add active pedestrian protection at the Air Line Trail Crossing at Route 193.
- Install Signage at the intersection of Routes 12 & 193 to indicate Trail Parking, West Thompson Dam, Downtown.
- Install a new painted crosswalk by the Air Line Trail parking lot on Route 12.
- Add safety signage at the New Road intersection with the Air Line Trail.
- Regrade/repair sections of the trails that are not bike friendly.
- Develop a Sidewalk Master Plan.
- Work with new developments to provide or improve sidewalks.
- Add additional directional/safety signage at trailheads and along the trails.
- Secure agreements with abutting property owners for additional access points to the Air Line Trail.
- Add trail signage and amenities such as benches.
- Improve parking at trail access points.
- Support Cyclocross and “Gravel Grinder” competitions.
- Support the development of trails and events for mountain biking and recreational bike use.
- Partner with the CT Trails Census to observe trends in trail use.
- Build partnerships with trail racing event organizations.
- Seek grant funding for Trails equipment and programming enhancements.
- Pursue additional connections between existing trails.

Excerpts from Plan of Conservation & Development

Windham

- Consider painting “sharrows” to remind drivers to share the road with bicyclists.
- Improve pedestrian and bike connections from ECSU campus to Downtown.
- Increase, where possible, walkability in historic villages with bikeways and walking paths that are physically separated from roadways.
- Complete Air Line Trail / East Coast Greenway connection between Bridge and Jackson Streets along Riverside Drive up Railroad Avenue to the North side of Main Street. Include signage along trail to direct users to restaurants and businesses.
- Coordinate with CT DEEP and others to provide maintenance on the Air Line Trail and East Coast Greenway including litter removal.
- Seek funding for a trail connection in North Windham from Air Line Trail to Mansfield Hollow Recreational Areas.
- Include sidewalk maintenance in the public works operating budget; replace the entire block of sidewalk only when the replacement cost is less than maintenance, or the sidewalk needs to be widened.



NATIONAL INSPIRATION OF TRAIL TOWN PROGRAMS



TRAIL TOWN PROGRAM

The Trail Town Program powers community development with outdoor tourism across Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Maryland— but the program also helps trails around the nation.

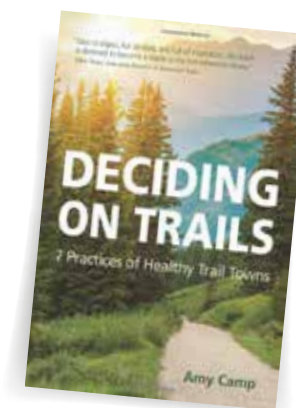
The program starts by thinking regionally: a world-class trail needs amenities along its entire stretch, and towns working together can create a much broader impact with 5 keys to a successful Trail Town:

- Partnerships
- Assessment and research
- Connecting town to trail
- Business and real estate development
- Marketing

Not every project looks the same. Every region has its own strengths and challenges. This program can support the ALSPT Region with insights and lessons they've learned along the way. Initial support is available in this free [Trail Town guide](#).

Nationally, there are numerous programs and support to towns to build economic connections to trails. The Trail Towns Program is one such program and through research for this plan, “Deciding on Trails” is also an excellent segue into education on how the twelve towns of the ALSPT Region can become trail towns. There are also many available webinars such as “[The Catalytic Impact of Trails](#)” produced by American Trails.

Assessing the towns for their current and potential development as “Trail Towns”, each town has the existing and potential unique economic connections to the trail. Business and physical connections require enhancement, signage and wayfinding to expand economic assets of the region.



Nationally, there are numerous programs and support to towns to build economic connections to trails.



TRAIL TO TOWN GROWTH CONNECTICUT EXAMPLES

To emulate and expand concepts and methods for economic growth, the ALSPT Region can look to railstotrails.org for examples of towns & cities in Connecticut that have worked together to improve and maintain trails to keep them vital parts of their communities and economies:

FARMINGTON CANAL HERITAGE TRAIL -

Farmington Canal Heritage Trail - The evolution from canal to railroad to trail tells the history of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. The 48-mile trail begins on the urban campus of Yale University in New Haven but takes on a more rural aspect as it heads north to the Massachusetts state line. The corridor follows a short-lived canal completed in 1835 that was replaced in 1847 by a railroad that ran until the 1980s (a small segment is still active in Plainville). The longest paved trail in the state, its asphalt surface and proximity to population centers makes it one of the most popular. The trail joins the Farmington River Trail in two places. The East Coast Greenway shares the trail from Simsbury to New Haven, minus the gap between Plainville and Southington. The New England Rail-Trail Spine Network incorporates the entire trail length.

FARMINGTON RIVER TRAIL - The Farmington River Trail runs a C-shaped circuit through the forests and communities west of Hartford. It connects at both ends with the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail to create a frequently used 26-mile loop. The trail itself is listed at 16 miles, although some of that is on low-traffic roads between Canton and Simsbury, where you'll also find less than a mile on dirt/crushed stone. The rest of the trail is paved. The scenic Farmington River flows along the southern half of the trail and is home to several historical factories and the Canton Historical Museum in Collinsville, a good half-way stop for refreshments or shopping.

PEQUONNOCK RIVER TRAIL - The historical seaport of Bridgeport on Long Island Sound anchors 14 miles of trail that runs north to the Colonial-era town of Newtown. The Pequonnock River Trail stitches together these locally developed trails that follow the former Housatonic Railroad. Riverside parkland is a big draw for trail users. They use the trail, some of which is paved, to visit such destinations as the Beardsley Park and Zoo in Bridgeport, the 5-mile-long Pequonnock River Wildlife Area in Trumbull, and the Centennial Watershed State Forest in Newtown. The downtown Bridgeport segment is separate from the northern sections of the trail.



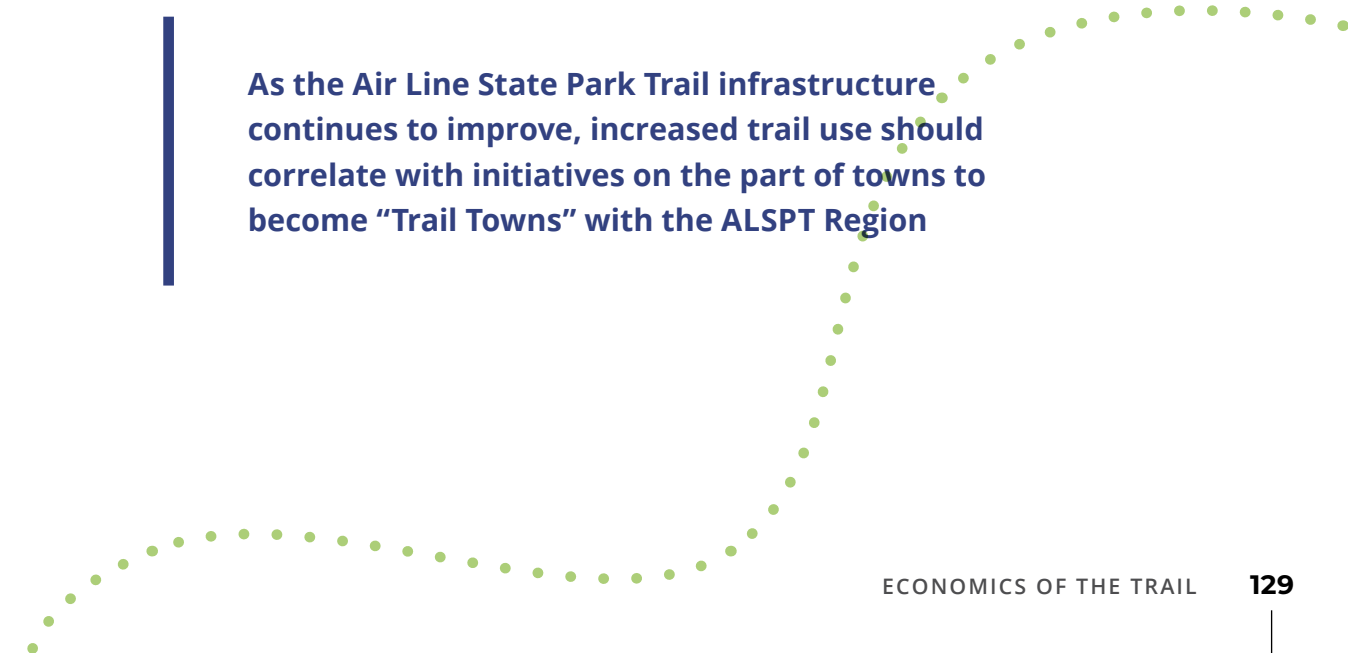
*Scene along the
Pequonnock River Trail.
Photo by Matthew Lupoli,
www.traillink.com.*

LARKIN STATE PARK TRAIL - The woodsy environs of the Larkin State Park Trail make this an ideal destination to escape the sun under a leafy canopy in the summer or enjoy up-close leaf peeping in the fall. At one time a link on the New York & New England Railroad, the 11-mile trail rolls between Southbury and Naugatuck just southwest of Waterbury. Founded as the Larkin State Bridle Trail geared toward equestrians, the pathway is widely enjoyed by people on horseback. Fat-tired bicycles are recommended for those on wheels, as the trail surface of crushed stone, gravel, cinder and dirt can get rough and soggy, especially after wet weather.

WINDSOR LOCKS CANAL STATE PARK TRAIL

Fishermen can be a common sight on the 5.4-mile Windsor Locks Canal State Park Trail in the northwest corner of the state. It's not surprising, as the trail occupies a narrow sliver of land between the Connecticut River and the historical Enfield Falls Canal. The asphalt trail itself replaces the towpath used by mules to tow barges along the canal in the mid-1800s, avoiding the river's rapids. The wooded isle draws wildlife, including bald eagles. The state closes the trail from November through the spring so the bald eagles can nest in peace.

With the potential trail user numbers increasing, as noted in the previous paragraphs, the Air Line State Park Trail Region and the member towns have an opportunity to improve the economic vitality of their village centers and the region with the trail as a focused destination. Currently there are few services and amenities that cater to the trail system and trail users. This is understandable as the full length of the trail is not finished with reliable conditions over its entire length. As the trail infrastructure continues to improve, increased trail use should correlate with initiatives on the part of towns to become "Trail Towns" with the ALSPT Region supporting the regional "Trail Towns" concept through marketing of businesses and services that support the trail (see examples on page 91).



As the Air Line State Park Trail infrastructure continues to improve, increased trail use should correlate with initiatives on the part of towns to become "Trail Towns" with the ALSPT Region

Examples of Existing ALSPT Oriented Business and Events Promotion



Bike Shops Abound on the Air Line State Park Trail

From the Putnam Cyclery on the north end of the trail and Pedal Power in Willimantic to Air Line Cycles in East Hampton, bicycle retail, repair shops are critical to the success of the ALSPT Region. Air Line Cycles for instance has been a strong advocate for the Air Line State Park Trail and the Town of East Hampton business community. There's a sense of community building that emanates from the owner, the staff and

business, building events that bring people of all riding styles together.

"Air Line Cycles is the classic small town America bike shop, where cutting edge technology meets old school community. Whether you are looking for the latest in Di2 electronic shifting or clutch derailleurs for better chain retention, AirLine Cycles has the expertise you are looking for!"

Horse Adventures Await Trail Users

We start out at Hidden Springs Farm, our 20-acre piece that is home to our nine rescue horses. Once tacked up, we lead you to the Air Line Trail State Park which is across the street from the farm. This trail takes us to a scenic reservoir, perfect for taking photos!

"We absolutely loved this experience at Hidden Springs farm! The location is beautiful, and you could tell how much love is put into caring for those horses. We felt so connected to our horses Tinto and Meri and didn't want to leave them! And it was such an amazing value if you consider that this is a private tour! I highly recommend this for any animal lovers that would like to connect with and ride some beautifully natured horses. We hope to be back soon!"



Racing for Quinebaug Valley Community College

The “Tackle the Trail” marathon was established in 2014 to raise for students and programs at QVCC. The last funding count raised was \$500,000. Over nine years, the event has grown from a 20 mile race to a full cohort of trail race options for individuals and relay teams including a marathon, a ½ marathon, a 10K relay and a Tackle Jr. which is free to young children. Tackle the Trail has been successful partnering with Wyndham

Land Trust, CT DEEP, Hale YMCA, NOW and other organizations and sponsors. Each year there are over 150 volunteers, 50 teams, and hundreds of individual runners. Participants from local to global travel to Northeast Connecticut to experience the Air Line State Park Region and run the trail. This presents an opening for collaboration among the ALSPT Region, cross marketing the trail and the towns while promoting the importance of this fundraising event.



**Current Site -
 Building has been removed**



**Concept design of site
 with future trailside use**

TRAILSIDE BUSINESS EXAMPLE

Grassroots Business Opportunity with Town Property

Hebron, Connecticut: Route 85 Air Line State Park Trail Parking Area – Town purchased 1.2 acre property in 2017 through foreclosure. Negotiations with town for purchase or lease could prompt building of a trailside business as demonstrated in the example shown here.

TOWN VIEW FROM THE TRAIL Based on informal trail interviews, towns of the ALSPT Region can either be invisible or visible based on the visitors' experience. With a goal of increasing visibility from the trail, towns can heighten awareness of town centers or businesses based on "trail towns" economic goals. They can encourage awareness as thru towns with signage and business names or allow the use of popup business trucks or sheds at trail parking lots.

PORTLAND



"Lots of traffic! Is it safe for bikes? How do I find the trail. Looks like they have new things popping up?" - Gateway Downtown Thru Businesses: Calendar - Event Focus

COLUMBIA



"Is this the Hop River Trail? I missed the winery? Loved the river!" - Tri-Axis Wayfinding with Hop River and ALSPT for Public Information to Businesses

HAMPTON



"Am I still in Chaplin? Is this state forest? Is there food and things to see farther up the trail?" - Trailside Businesses - Popups

HEBRON



"Can't wait till there's a trail connection into the business district. Is there a place to stay?" - Find Your Way Businesses Off the Trail with Calendar - Event Focus

LEBANON



"I hear there's a great Farm Market and History Museum, what else?" - Find Your Way Businesses Off the Trail with Calendar - Event Focus

EAST HAMPTON



"There's quite a bit downtown here. Why isn't there more? Is there a place I can stay overnight?" - Downtown Thru Businesses: Calendar - Event Focus

POMFRET



“Beautiful scenery? Where can I get a bite to eat?” - Pomfret Station Information
Sharing to Businesses Off the Trail

PUTNAM



“Wow, what a great downtown, who knew. Is there a safe place to park a bike?” - Downtown Thru Businesses:
Calendar- Event Focus

COLCHESTER



“If I take the spur trail, is it worth it? Anything to visit, places to eat?” - Find Your Way
Businesses Off the Trail

THOMPSON



“Fascinating history, especially the Train Wreck. Where can I eat?” - Find Your Way
Off the Trail Businesses

WINDHAM



“Eclectic and it great to see the diversity of people in one place in Eastern Connecticut.” - Downtown – Thru Trail
Business: Calendar – Event Focus

CHAPLIN



“Not sure what there is north of Willimantic. What am I going to see? Are there stopping points?” - Trailside
Businesses - Popups

INFLUENCE CORRIDORS ALONG THE TRAIL

The ALSPT Region can also tap into some economic influence and opportunities beyond the boundaries of the ALSPT Region to increase the number of users on the trail and to improve the economies of the towns along the ALSPT. Marketing and economic growth for Connecticut transcends geographic boundaries. There are many influence regions within the state that align and yet also compete for economic and tourism relevance.

First and foremost, the ALSPT Region could work to define its marketing influence as the region continues to build out the trail. It is also vital to the economic growth of the ALSPT Region to explore the concept of partnering with adjacent areas to promote geographic synergy and a positive tourism & trail travel experience for Connecticut residents and outside visitors alike. By accentuating this alignment of concurrent efforts to build multi-use trails by varied organizations near the ALSPT Region, the ALSPT Region can take on a leadership role to promote economic and trail oriented business growth to developing trail systems by aligning with organizations in the following influence regions.

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT CONNECTOR INFLUENCE CORRIDOR

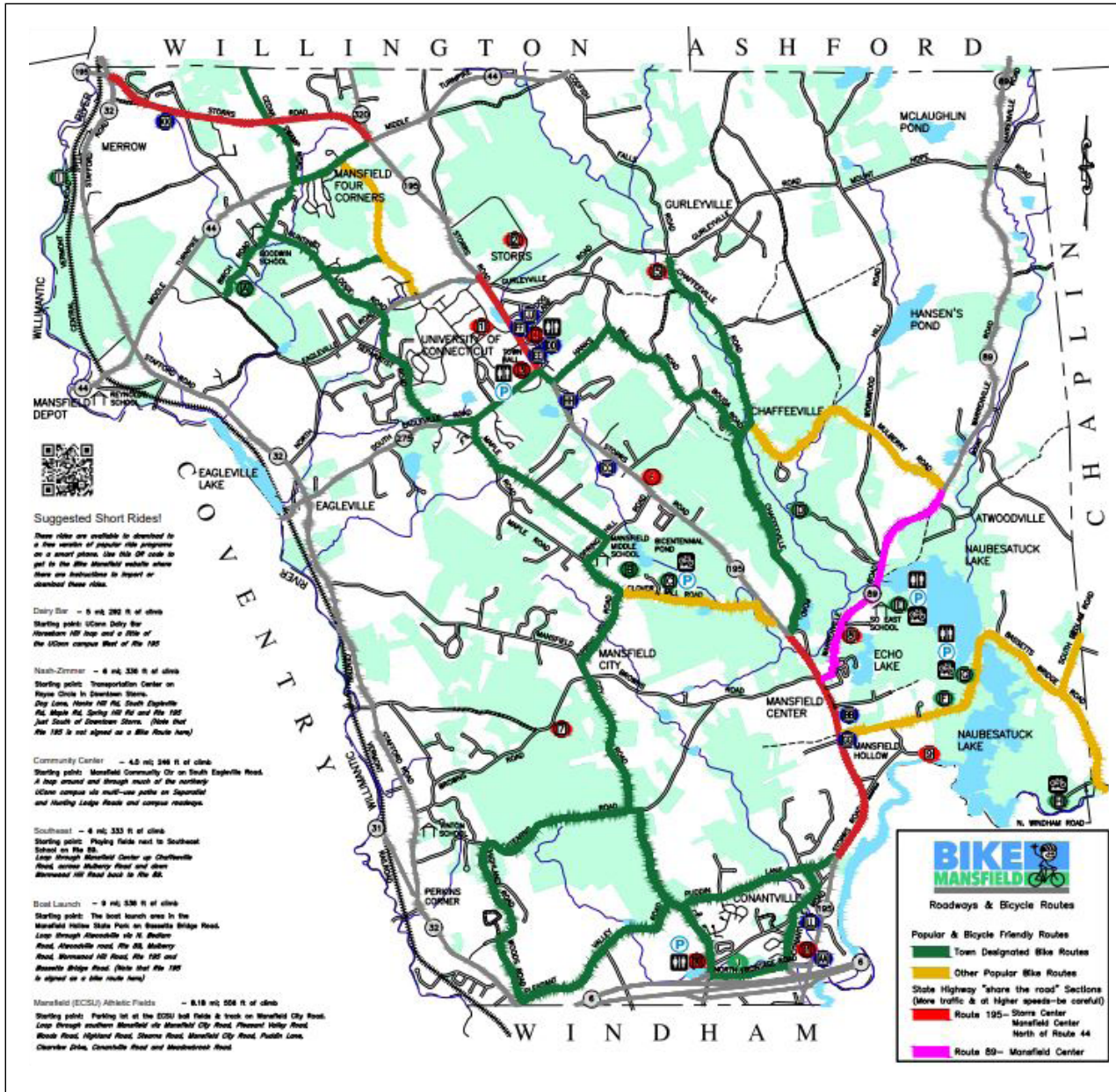
Through the Jonah Center for Earth and Art visioning process, in partnership with RiverCOG, a new multi-use trail initiative is conceptualized for future funding and construction. This initiative would create a new dynamic economic influence region for both the Air Line State Park Trail Region and the Hop River Trail Region via this connector multi-use trail that also ties into the Farmington Canal Heritage Multi-Use Trail in Cheshire, CT. This connection would provide numerous economic and recreational benefits to all towns within this economic region and to the state as a whole:

- The connector would enhance existing shorter walking and cycling trails by greatly increasing the accessible mileage of each trail. Recreational multi-use trail travel and options for bicycle commuters would be significantly improved.
- The connector would provide a bike route to the commuter rail hub in downtown Meriden, which cyclists could use to travel to New Haven, Hartford, Springfield and beyond.
- It would connect the Air Line State Park Trail with the East Coast Greenway (see map at top of post) at two locations (Cheshire and Willimantic), creating a 111-mile bike trail loop



around the greater Hartford area. Such a facility would be sure to attract recreational bicyclists from a large surrounding area.

- There is a unique opportunity within this larger influence region to build a synergistic destination-oriented trail system for tourism and extended stay visits for out of state visitors.
- Marketing coordination between towns, COGs, transit districts, tourism regions and the ALSPT Region is critical to effectively marketing the tourism opportunities to visitors from out of state.



THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT – MANSFIELD CORRIDOR

This influence corridor is dynamic in the power and potential of youthful exuberance inherent at nearby University of Connecticut (UConn) and the forward planning initiatives for outdoor recreation by the Town of Mansfield and its regional partners. Mansfield along with the CT Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) and the American Public Health Association actively supported an APA grant initiative led by the Eastern Highlands Health District for a Healthy Communities Toolkit for Connecticut.

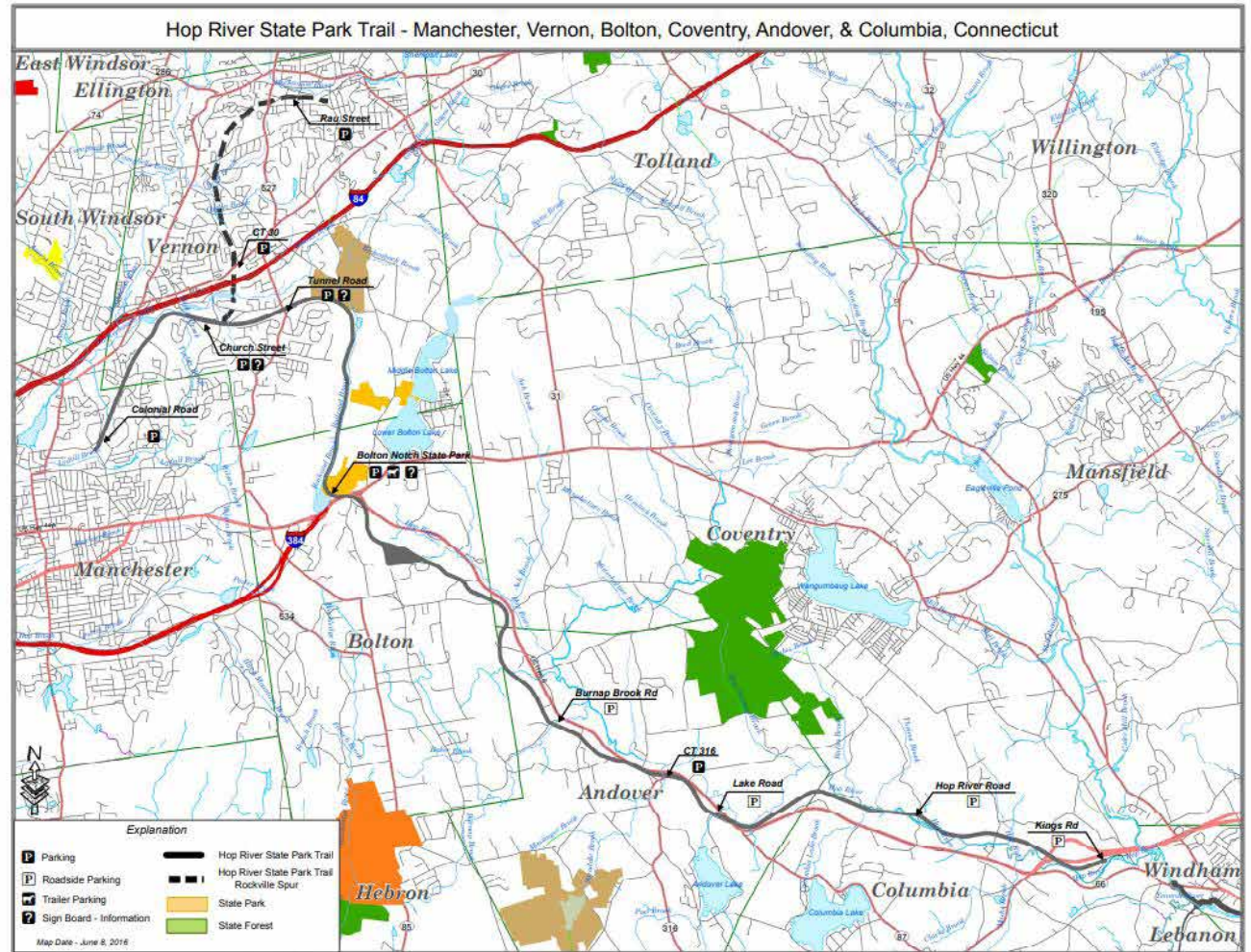
Mansfield’s open space connections map notably portrays the potential for a hiking connection through open space between UConn and the ALSPT. While the town doesn’t have a continuous off-road bike trail system at this time, it has a defined specific bike route in a public-oriented online map. Opportunities for connecting into the ALSPT corridor are evident. With Windham Transit District routing, bike racks on buses and continued planning from Mansfield, Windham and UConn, a dynamic system furthers the goals of the Healthy Communities Toolkit, and the connection with the ALSPT will further enhance economic growth in the region, with the ALSPT as the focal point.

At left, Mansfield Bike Routes with Points of Interest

HOP RIVER STATE PARK TRAIL INFLUENCE CORRIDOR

The Hop River State Park Trail, which is a CT DEEP-owned multi-use trail linking Windham to Manchester, intersects with the ALSPT near the Willimantic River. The seven towns that influence and support this trail system have formed a burgeoning alliance with a focus on improving reliability, communications between member towns and coordinating improved wayfinding with support from CT DEEP. The trail is a former railroad line that winds 20.2 miles through the towns of Manchester, Vernon, Bolton, Coventry, Andover, and Columbia. Like a pathway through time, this serpentine path passes among modern subdivisions and crosses roads, but mostly takes the trail user along a remote, quiet, and long unused path through the eastern Connecticut countryside. The Hop River Trail Alliance includes four groups that advocate for section of the Hop River State Park Trail: Bike Walk Andover, Bike Walk Bolton, Bike Walk Columbia, and Vernon Greenways.

Given the symmetry of character and local dedication to the trail system, a collaboration between the ALSPT and the Hop River Trail Alliance is strongly recommended. The Hop River Trail Alliance is well represented by trail enthusiasts. For instance, Vernon Greenways is a group of 120 volunteers that advocates



for and helps maintain the five-mile section of the Hop River State Park Trail in Vernon. The group shares an active newsletter with its membership and is forming a nonprofit to better manage collective grant funding initiatives and coordination with CT DEEP.

Like a pathway through time, this serpentine path passes among modern subdivisions and crosses roads, but mostly takes the trail user along a remote, quiet, and long unused path.



THE LAST GREEN VALLEY

The Last Green Valley, as noted in a previous chapter, is an expansive federally recognized, “National Heritage Corridor.” The region is managed by The Last Green Valley, Inc. (TLGV), a nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating and conserving the region’s fragile and irreplaceable resources. Founded in 1995 as a grassroots organization and built upon a proven track record of success and partnerships, TLGV works to ensure a natural and cultural legacy in the region for generations to come. Seven of the twelve towns of the ALSPT Region reside within TLGV’s boundaries. For this reason alone, the importance

of collaboration with TLGV must be highlighted. The ALSPT Region and TLGV are synergistic in their goals and the TLGV has an expansive understanding of the economic opportunities inherent in the cultural and natural resources of the region. With its almost 30 years of experience in managing a large region with effective programs and projects that highlight tourism, natural resource protection, cultural preservation, TLGV can offer insights to the management of the ALSPT Region’s new initiative to collectively leverage economic sustainable growth.

The ALSPT Region and The Last Green Valley are synergistic in their goals and the TLGV has an expansive understanding of the economic opportunities inherent in the cultural and natural resources of the region.

EIGHTMILE WILD AND SCENIC WATERSHED

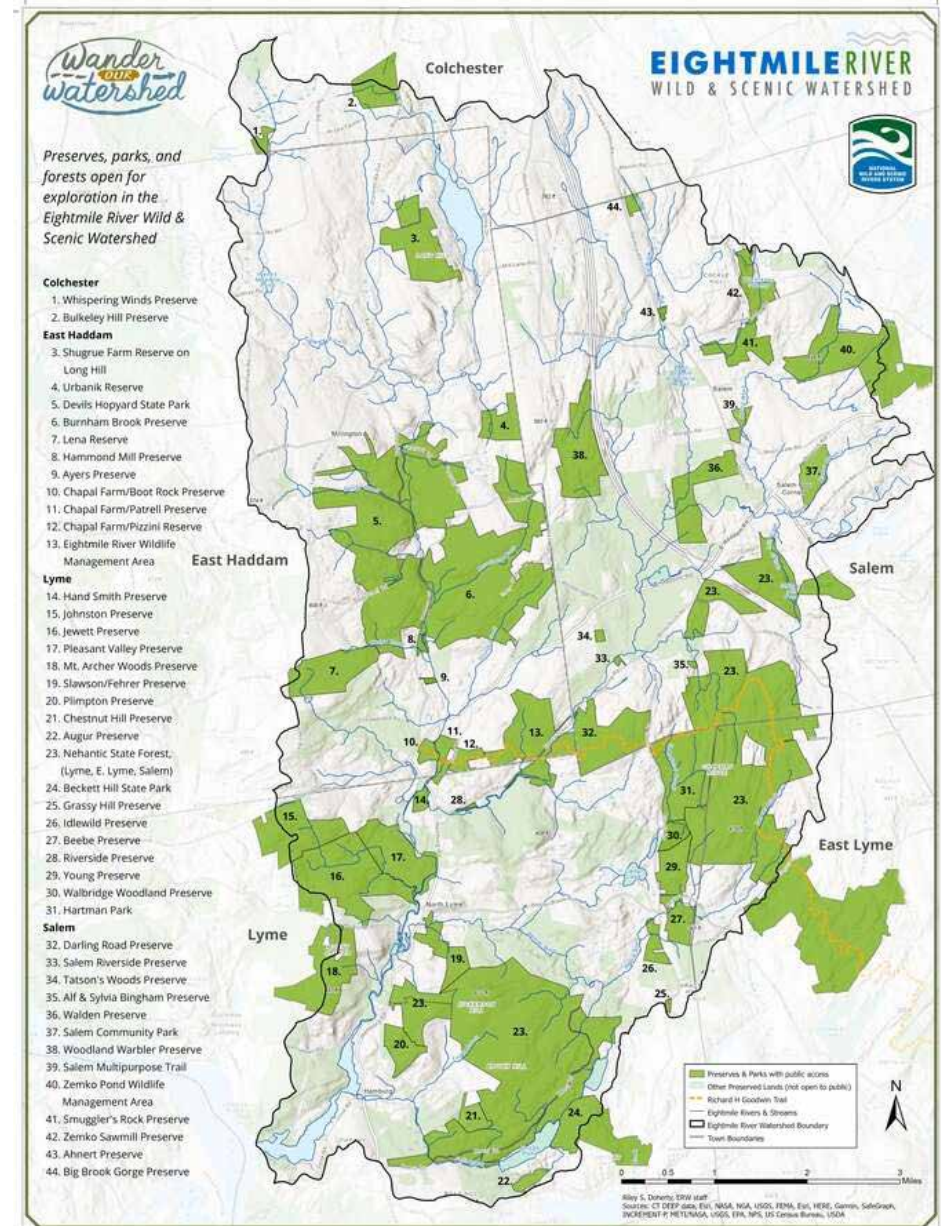
In 2006, the Eightmile River Watershed was designated as a segment of the National Wild and Scenic River System. While the watershed's boundaries encompass sixty-two square miles, primarily in East Haddam, Lyme, and Salem and despite the "eight-mile" label, the watershed contains 150 miles of rivers and streams. The watershed meets the Connecticut River eight miles north of Long Island Sound.

This Watershed is of importance to the ALSPT Region because of its connection to Colchester and the potential for expansion of its hiking trail systems through a network of municipal and land trust open space preserves and Devil's Hopyard State Park in nearby East Haddam. Recently the Eightmile River Wild and Scenic Watershed initiated a "Wander our Watershed" promotion to encourage use of the trail systems within these open space properties. The watershed is also home to most of the 14 miles that form the Richard H. Goodwin Trail, which is one of Connecticut's newest long trails. This yellow-blazed corridor is bookended

on the southeast by Darrow Pond in East Lyme and, on the northwest, the entrance to Chapal Farm Preserve on Route 82 in East Haddam.

This extensive conservation system offers future potential for collaboration between the Watershed and the ALSPT Region to build a multi-day long distance hiking trail in Eastern Connecticut. With support from CT DEEP and member towns, the two organizations could work side by side building this extensive north border to coast trail for a wilderness experience. The ALSPT Region could provide a network of support to a future trail system north of East Haddam into Colchester.

Overall, these examples give an overview of the possibilities for the ALSPT Region to build sustainable economic wealth for its towns, residents, and businesses within the region and throughout Eastern Connecticut with creative economic planning, strategic land use policy, supportive transportation infrastructure and thoughtful conservation.



RECOMMENDATIONS: Economics of the Trail

- 01** Create a geospatial oriented database to tabulate ongoing progress toward trail user counts, trail-oriented business development, and trail event data. Work closely with UConn Extension Center to coordinate information cataloguing for the benefit of the region and other areas of the state.
- 02** Ensure that trail count systems continue through UConn and CT DEEP and information is transferred to the ALSPT database.
- 03** Join and participate in national multi-use trail programs.
- 04** Contact the Trail Towns Program for support in economic assessment of towns and contact Connecticut Main Street Center for consideration of a united Main Street view of the towns in the region.
- 05** Support and expand information systems on CT Trail Finder, which automatically update the ALSPT Region website.
- 06** Ensure that town, regional and state plans of conservation and development and comprehensive development strategies (regional economic plans) include supportive text toward sustainable conservation based economic growth in the region.
- 07** Continue to find representation on ALSPT Region organization board for influence corridor representation and collaboration.
- 08** Work with influence corridors to cross market ALSPT-based events, including fundraisers.
- 09** Work closely with bike shops to ensure they remain viable and profitable, including promoting events concurrently on ALSPT Region website and local business websites.
- 10** Work with regional economic strategy organizations such as the Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (SeCTer) to make trail-oriented businesses aware of small business lending programs that help small to medium-sized businesses expand, upgrade machinery and equipment, and/or relocate in our region. SeCTer's lending region includes all of eastern Connecticut, from the Massachusetts border to Long Island Sound.
- 11** Ensure that services and amenities are built into the trail system, either on the trail or adjacent to the trail to support expectations of trail users.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Economics of the Trail

- 12** Work with event organizers to cross promote the ALSPT Region, its website and the importance of naming the Air Line State Park Trail and the region as the area hosting the event.
- 13** Consider a grant application to fund a full market study of the region including property valuation data to create an economic baseline for new infrastructure or improvements.
- 14** Promote diversity and equity on the trail and within the ALSPT Region. The audience of potential trail users and the economic opportunities, both cultural and economic, are the gift of becoming an inclusive and welcoming region.
- 15** Evaluate land use policy near the trail to promote business growth in service clusters zones or in village centers to ensure the larger conservation sections remain protected.





CHAPTER 7

Marketing and Branding Strategy

The Air Line State Park Trail (ALSPT) runs along a route that was once a fashionable railroad offering fast rail transit from New York to Boston. Its travelers bore witness to striking vistas on their journeys. Even though the railroad is no longer in use, travelers of a different kind are still enjoying the views along this magnificent route.

From Portland to East Hampton, the rail path is an almost continuous 65 miles, attracting walkers, hikers, horseback riders, and bikers from all over Connecticut. They come for solitude or to ride a horse in a natural setting. A meditative walk in the woods surrounded by the beauty of nature. A balm for the soul and a feast for the eyes.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, there has been a renewed interest from residents of all ages in quiet greenspaces – those seeking exercise, a walk in the woods, the desire to be surrounded by nature, near the sights and sounds of water falling, frogs croaking, turtles passing by. The trail passes over streams, state forests, through town parks, and along wildlife management areas, through villages and town centers and one of the last remaining covered bridges in the state. The path is wheelchair-accessible on long stretches of improved trail and dogs are permitted.

The trail, which dates from the early 1870s, has a rich history, filled with excitement, allure, and tragedy, too. It was the site of one of only four



train crashes in U.S. history. Called the Great East Thompson Train Wreck in 1891, it is known as one of the most disastrous train wrecks in American history. Hundreds were injured and two killed in a crash attributed to crew error.

The Air Line Railroad was laid down as part of a direct route between Boston and New York. The tracks ran flat and straight, like a line in the air. The Air Line employed the finest trains of the times, featuring the Pullman Palace car, which featured gleaming white and gold décor. The cars were finished in mahogany and decorated with velvet rugs, silk curtains, and upholstered chairs. Businessmen and prominent people, including President Benjamin Harrison, rode this line.

This unique history, the region and the experience, that is not well known to many, serves as the basis for the following marketing narrative.

Above, Members of the Air Line State Park Trail (Portland Extension) take part in a ribbon cutting in June 2018. The committee is one of four groups to be honored with a Rockfall Foundation environmental award. Source: Middletown Press, October 2018

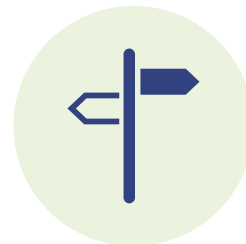
STAY AND PLAY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In addition to the history of the trail, the current uses of the trail will influence the marketing and branding strategy for the trail. The Air Line Trail State Park Region Master Plan Count and Survey Analysis Report, from the Center for Land use Education and Research at UConn Extension, was finalized in September 2022. The major findings of the trail survey noted that respondents could identify and had visited trail side businesses. They could also identify many local business in East Hampton and Colchester, where trail connections are easy.

It was noted by survey respondents that the three busiest parking areas and entrance posts are Smith Street in East Hampton, Route 163 in Colchester, and Route 85 in Hebron and there is a need for increased trail user amenities, such as restrooms, mileage markers and signs, and improved maintenance. While future surveys should be conducted to gather information about trail use and amenities sought by trail users, this initial survey, together with the history of the Air Line Railroad, is a great jumping off point for the trail's marketing, branding, and wayfinding strategies.



Survey respondents pointed to specific needs along the Air Line State Park Trail



More trail signs and mileage markers



Additional restrooms



Improved maintenance

BRANDING AND MARKETING THE TRAIL



Through this planning process, the ALSPT Region has started to define itself through several pilot projects. The twelve towns and trail committees have contributed to content to build an ALSPT Region website to define the tourism geography of the region, the relationship to the trail and the activities, events and sightseeing inherent in the region's lexicon. Coordination of signage and branding continues as numerous partner organizations and towns seek grant funding to build information signs. The critical goal defined by this plan is to unite the towns and organizations of the region into one identifiable branding scheme to convey a regional brand that complements the ALSPT logo designed by CT DEEP and messaging from CT VISIT.

Additional support was provided by a matching grant from the Eastern Regional Tourism District to design and print wallet size trail maps which highlight each town in the region. Of the twelve towns, eight ultimately participated in this project and also signed up for a reprint of these popular maps. The brainchild of the Thompson Planner and ERTD board member, Tyra Penn-Geseck initiated emails to each of the municipalities, who committed \$3,000 toward the match fund to a grant of \$25,000 from ERTD. (Tyra recused herself from the grant decision by ERTD) for a total project budget of \$46,000 to design these foldable wallet size brochures and maps (see Figure 7A). This was the first regional marketing project coordinated in the ALSPT Region.



FIGURE 7A

Pocket size map produced in 2021 for eight of the 12 towns

TARGET AUDIENCE AND TIMING

As the enthusiasm for the trail builds, a need to balance expectations of the target audience with the conditions of the trail is critical to a successful marketing plan going forward. The trail in its current condition does not offer a reliable or easy situation for creating a regional marketing push. The audience of existing users and their reviews on TrailLinks, AllTrails, Trip Advisor, social media outlets provides insight into the potential for the trail and the disappointment of trail users in the lack of consistent conditions for the 64 miles from Portland to Thompson and the Colchester Spur.

Beyond the breaks in trail continuity, the lack of wayfinding signage, section of the trail also vary. Using cycling as an example, some sections of the trail are ideal for most bicycles with a slightly aggressive tire tread. Other sections would require an aggressive tire tread. Some sections are suitable only for mountain bikes and others are unpassable except for hikers. Even in passable areas for cycles, there are sections of unstable gravel piles from run off from steep inclines at gated intersections with local roads.

In marketing the trail, the ALSPT Region will need to stage marketing to match trail conditions as the region and CT DEEP simultaneously work to improve continuity in the trail system for all allowed trail uses. Therefore, the target audience would be staged as shown at right.

MARKETING THE AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL IN STAGES, TO DIFFERENT AUDIENCES



Local Residents

Initially focus on regional residents who live near the trail and can use it daily or weekly. What are their needs and expectations year round? Work with partner organizations, elected officials, and government agencies to build synergy with constituents and business community through a targeted marketing campaign. Based on interviews, keep the trail system dynamic for all types of visitors.



Connecticut Residents

As conditions on the trail become more reliable for extended sections of the trail for all uses, extend the existing marketing campaign statewide to residents and visitors to the state. Create trail journey examples for the ALSPT Region website to showcase options for trail use and local visits.



Out of State Visitors

Coordinate with the Connecticut Office of Tourism, Influence Areas of the ALSPT Region, the East Coast Greenway and neighboring states to promote the connections and the whole journey experience whether it is a larger state loop or an interstate journey. Conditions of the trail and wayfinding would require optimal improvements prior to this type of marketing campaign.

Targeted messaging for expected conditions to potential trail users during these stages is critical to progress to the next phase of marketing. In an age of quick information and social media sharing, a poor or bad review can deter new trail visitors. The ALSPT Region website should continue to be revised and updated to fully communicate conditions and exciting new infrastructure on the trail. Another important marketing tool includes building the ALSPT Region Trail community by engaging with the public as stakeholders toward improved conditions on the trail. Ask for their advice, their trail stories, constructive feedback, and implement recommendations that are cost effective and develop the trail experience. Most important, thank the public for their contributions and give credit for their input.

Further, the target audience to which the ALSPT Region can market is sizable based on the demographics and potential trail user statistics in Chapter 6. It is made up of outdoor enthusiasts, hikers, runners, bicyclists, horseback riders, nature lovers, parents and teachers seeking activities for children, as well as Connecticut tourists and out-of-state tourists. Based on trailside interviews and observations of the planning team, the diversity of people traveling the trail is wide ranging.

From the very old to the very young, teens, young adults, working adults, retirees, Asian Pacific



Islander Desi American or Hispanic/Latino descent, Black, White, Indigenous, visitors from Europe, Latin America, Canada, and other countries, neurodivergent, neurotypical, accessibility challenged (canes, wheelchairs, walkers, etc.), unhoused, middle income, limited income, wealthy, their interests in trail meld into a common thread of the delight in the ALSPT trail experience.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, studies have shown that more people than ever found appreciation in outdoor greenspaces, an appreciation that has continued due to the spiritual, mental, and physical benefits of being in nature.

These groups are looking for the respite, soft socialization and peace that comes amid nature, surrounded by singing birds, flowing water, and beautiful trees. Other people may be seeking camaraderie and fun.

The ALSPT Region should aim to increase brand awareness to these diverse groups of trail users. Making new target audiences aware of this exceptional recreational space and the opportunities for services, attractions, and businesses in the ALSPT Region will be an important next step. By developing recognition through collaborative marketing, increased ALSPT Region visitation will be ensured, and will grow exponentially year to year.

Marketing strategies to reach multi-use trail enthusiasts include digital marketing, partnerships and collaborations, events and promotions, public relations, trail signage and wayfinding, as well as ongoing development of trail-region visitor data evaluation and measurement and shared experience.

To continually evaluate the marketing campaign, website analytics, social media metrics, email open rates, and other key performance indicators could be regularly monitored. Visitor surveys could also be conducted and collected feedback could be reviewed to gather insights and suggestions for improvement.



Marketing Campaign Would Emphasize Four Key Areas

- 1 Scenic Natural Beauty**
Focus on the benefits residents and non-residents of Connecticut will receive when they explore the scenic beauty of the Air Line State Park Trail Region.
- 2 A Unique History**
Highlight natural resource and historic aspects of the trail.
- 3 Activities and Outdoor Adventures**
Promote ancillary activities for all ages to the public, ones that are available on and along the trail and the ALSPT Region.
- 4 Shared experience**
The common purpose of enjoying, enhancing and experiencing the Air Line State Park Trail and the region.

MARKETING STRATEGIES WOULD FEATURE THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES

- Creating an ongoing updated calendar and dataset of events and promotions on the ALSPT Region website.
- Organizing events and promotions that include guided hikes and nature walks to attract visitors to the trail and generate word-of-mouth referrals. Seasonal festivals could be part of the plan to attract families, students, and other groups.
- Advertising activities on kiosks at trailheads, or by posting and distributing multilingual flyers at recreation centers, senior centers, faith centers, libraries, and other communal spaces to engage people who may prefer paper to phones or who may not have consistent access to the internet.
- Developing relationships with media outlets, bloggers, and influencers to generate positive coverage and reviews of the Air Line State Park Trail. Representatives from the ALSPT Region should participate in relevant events, fairs, or trade shows to showcase the trail, distribute trail maps, and network with potential visitors.
- Working with local economic development commissions, center business district leaders, regional and state tourism districts, create monthly content for the ALSPT Region website, Facebook, Instagram and other social media sites.
- Developing sponsorships and partnerships with local businesses, tourism organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to offset costs and support the marketing of the trail.

LOGO DESIGN AND BRANDING

Differentiation and commonality of the Air Line State Park, the CT DEEP State Park and the more expansive Air Line State Park Region requires careful marketing, logo design and branding to both unite the trail and the region while also promoting clarity to the trail user and target audience.

CT DEEP is focused on the tasks of maintenance, park safety, improvements, management, rule enforcement and year to year staffing and financial planning. The ALSPT Region focuses on economic growth, coordination, communication, and tourism marketing. There are numerous logos that connect visitors to the Air Line State Park Trail and there will be logos that promote the ALPST Region (see Figure 7B).

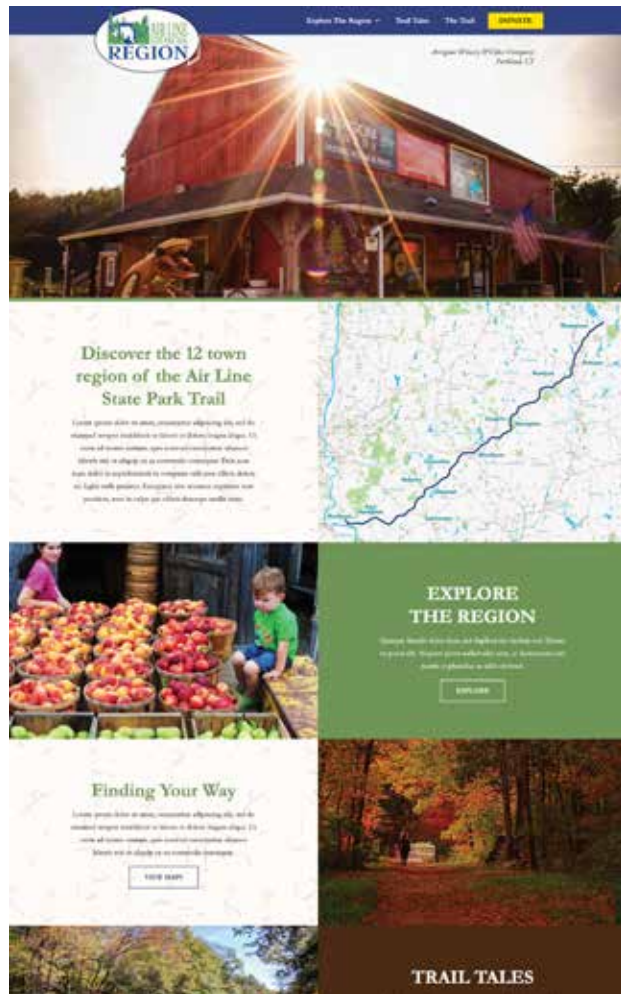
The goal will be to create a branding and wayfinding manual for the region similar to the manual created for the Naugatuck River Greenway.

FIGURE 7B

Sample of Logos Used for the Air Line State Park Trail, Past and Current



WEBSITE VIDEO AND SOCIAL MEDIA



The new website for the Air Line Trail State Park Region launched in June 2023.

To provide a solid base of knowledge about the ALSPT Region, we would continue to expand the current user-friendly website to create a features information section about the trail's charming history and include photographs, videos and text detailing the many activities available, for young and old, athletic, or non-athletic, biker, walker, or horseback rider. Ultimately the website should offer a bi-lingual option, initially in Spanish given the large percentage of Windham's Hispanic/Latino populations and trail users near Willimantic center.

In addition, the website should include detailed, but easy-to-read and accessible maps as well as information about nearby available amenities. As noted above, the website would also offer an event calendar, be optimized for search engines and be mobile responsive.

Social media sites could be leveraged to showcase all that this greenspace gem has to offer. Striking photos and videos, content generated by users of the trail, as well as trail information could be shared on popular social platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube. Targeted ads could be run to reach potential visitors and posts will be boosted if the budget allows. Events on the trail could be promoted using event websites such as MeetUp.com and Eventbrite.com.

CT DEEP sponsored a tourism video that provides an eighteen minute education of the trail experience. There are also numerous videos produced by YouTube Trail Visitors about the experience of the trail. As the attention span of cell and social media viewers contracts, it is worth exploring an edited version of the current CT DEEP video toward a three - five minute version that can be quickly and easily accessed for a consumable video view of the trail. The ALSPT Region could produce a video, collaborating with CT DEEP, CT VISIT, the East Coast Greenway and The Last Green Valley.

Finally, to expand website marketing of the trail, the towns and the ALSPT Region can refine the new ALSPT Region website to increase daily cross correlations with social media and monthly email marketing to share highlights from tourism based organizations and businesses near the trail, stories of trail users, samples trail journeys, activities, and special updates. The new ALSPT Region can also build an email list of enthusiasts and potential enthusiasts for notifications, newsletters and events. Content marketing could also be used through the creation of compelling blogs, articles and videos that feature the trail's unique features, history, and activities. Content can also be shared with local influencers and bloggers to promote the trail to their audiences.

MAPPING AND CELLPHONE APPLICATIONS

Beyond coordination with CT DEEP's ALSPT website, CT Trail Finder, the East Coast Greenway, the Eastern CT Tourism District and CT VISIT, the ALSPT Region should advocate for and imprint mapping into the trail system marketing through QR code for cell phones and websites. Information about the trail could be shared with users and potential users through online mapping services like CT Trail Finder as well as the East Coast Greenway, TrailLink and Alltrails. Special attention to trail users can enhance physical and mental health privately and confidentially.

CT Trail Finder is a new system coordinated by the CT DEEP, the University of Connecticut Extension and other partners. This geospatial mapping system is designed to convey information to trail users for time on the trail planning. Once on the trail, the mapping system within CT Trail Finder is not cell phone friendly at the time of this printing. Additionally, cell service on the trail at the time of this printing is sporadic and unreliable.

This is where TrailLink, a free service based app web system produced by the Rails to Trails Conservancy can provide support with downloaded maps of the trail to a visitor's cellphone. The website and app provide a search-

able database of more than 40,000 miles of trail around the country, including the ALSPT. Registration on TrailLink.com and downloading the app is free and allows people to view interactive maps online, save favorite trails to an account, share trail photographs & reviews and submit new trails to the website or edit existing trail descriptions.

AllTrails is a fitness and travel mobile app used in outdoor recreational activities and the service allows users to access a database of trail maps, which includes crowdsourced reviews and images, and the app is based on satellite tracking, so a cellphone's GPS will work to follow a person on the trail once you've downloaded the map.

Hiking Project by REI is an app driven by the hiking community and the downloaded maps are free. There are many others, but the general recommendation is for the ALSPT to align its efforts with organizations who can also promote the region (see Figure 7C).

Other unique cellphone applications tied to the ALSPT can promote unique connections from the trail. For instance, on trail systems in Derbyshire U.K., a trail traveler will find a unique sign and instructions to connect to a website via a QR code (see Figure 7D).

FIGURE 7C

Connecticut Trail Finder Website

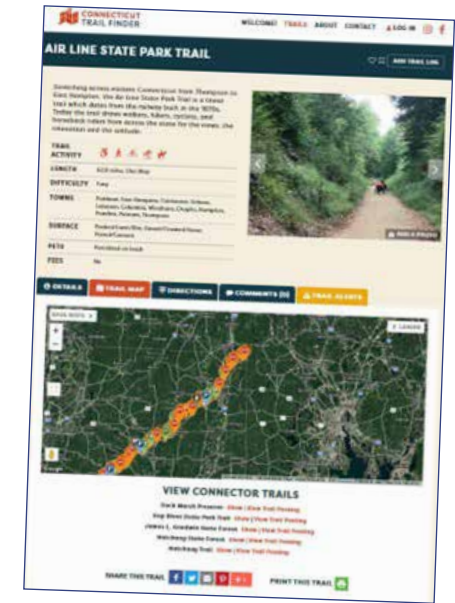
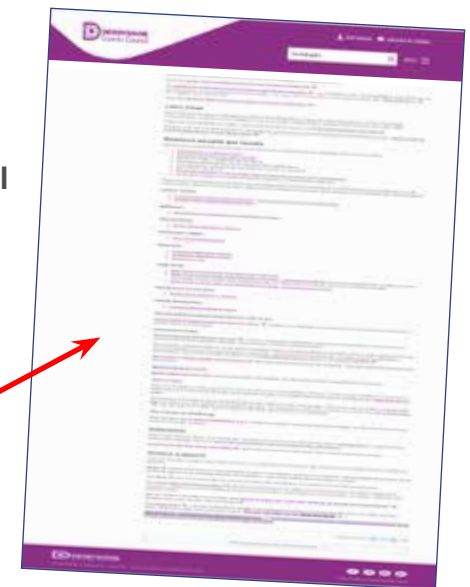


FIGURE 7D

QR code on UK Trailside Bench Promotes Mental Health Outreach



CT VISIT TOURISM COORDINATION

Tourism websites and new web based geography and regional tourism boundaries/communications defined by the State Office of Tourism are generally firmly established. CT VISIT managed by the State Office of Tourism is the managing entity for Connecticut tourism and promotion.

Funding is periodically available for tourism planning, brochures, events, and promotion through grant funding, most often through regional tourism districts. Marketing Challenge Grants, once offered by CT, were described as providing nonprofit tourism entities in their efforts to promote attractions and host events. The grant guidelines offer a blueprint for the ALSPT Region toward working with CT VISIT.

A key future action of the newly created ALSPT Region is to create a partnership between Connecticut Office of Tourism with ongoing coordination toward marketing the region. The ALSPT Region should work and advocate with CT VISIT and Eastern Regional Tourism District to clarify visitors' understanding of the geography and the places, journeys, and amenities available in the ALSPT Region.

There are several events and activities highlighted on the state tourism website within the towns of the ALSPT region. Ongoing coordination and advocacy on the part of the ALSPT Region to keep CT VISIT current of activities and events in the region is vital to the economic growth of the region's tourism industry.

COLLABORATING WITH CONNECTICUT STATE OFFICE OF TOURISM

The ALTSP marketing efforts will work in synergy with the State's Strategic Marketing Plan for Tourism toward the following

- Media Advertising
- Direct Marketing
- Promotional Pieces
- Production Projects
- Direct Sales
- Public Relations
- Social Media
- Strategic Marketing Planning
- Web Design



↑ [Click to view the plan.](#)

Website Coordination to Promote the ALSPT Region

Another important step is to coordinate website flow from CT VISIT to Eastern Regional Tourism District (ERTD) to the ALSPT Region. Currently, the site for Eastern Regional Tourism District “Visit Our Website” takes the viewer to Mystic Country attractions. The ALSPT Region and its towns transect both the “Scenic Northeast Region” and the “River Valley Region”. Future conversations with CT VISIT and ERTD would work to describe the ALSPT Region on the CT VISIT website and improve routing to the ALSPT Region’s website through inserted hyperlinks. CT VISIT website highlights and connects the bigger geographic view of Connecticut.

Ideally, the CT VISIT website, similar to “The Last Green Valley” will describe and link to the ALSPT Region by January 2025. There are clear economic advantages for all tourism leaders, state, regional, the ALSPT Region and their towns to build Eastern Connecticut’s tourism experience through coordination and partnerships.

A: Scenic Northeast Banner found via regions (see D)

B: Eastern Regional Tourism District website banner

C: River Valley website banner

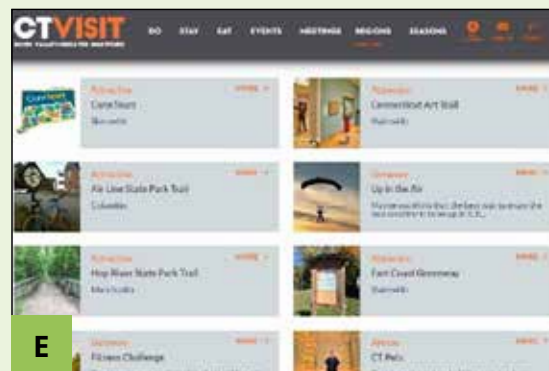
D: CT VISIT Region search map for AB&C

E: Required search for ALSPT

F: ALSPT Overview based in Columbia, CT with link to website

FIGURE 7E

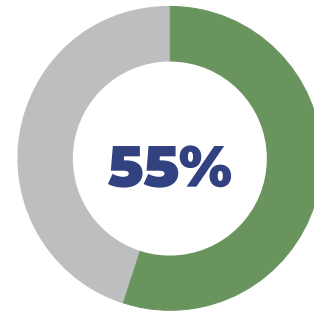
Connecting Tourism Website Flow to ALSPT Region



COGNITIVE GEOGRAPHY



More mapping connections in branding, websites and signage will help build trust in the trail system and new trail visitors.



In interviews with ALSPT trail users, **55% of the respondents didn't know where they were** on the trail, town, or region.

There is also a necessary action going forward in partnership with CT DEEP, UConn and the CT Office of Tourism to mapping and geo-locating while branding and marketing. Interviews with trail users found that 80% of the respondents didn't know where they were on the trail, town, or region. This can be both a safety concern and impact the experience for current and future trail visitors.

The geographic focus of the ALSPT Region website through CT TrailFinder and the EZ Pocket Maps are the first steps to bring cognitive awareness of where a visitor is on the trail. More mapping connections in branding, websites and signage will help build

trust in the trail system and new trail visitors.

As noted above, mapping through cell phone apps can also promote the ALSPT towns and the partner influencing regions near the trail in conjunction with a detailed ongoing calendar, trail conditions, event information updates for planning and informing people of their relative location once they're on the trail. Where are the places to visit, where can they find overnight accommodations, campsites, campgrounds, types of restaurants and locations, bathroom breaks, drinking water sources, and more.

EVENTS

Whether events are coordinated and hosted by other organizations, towns or the new ALSPT Region, the goal is to unite calendar events together with the Air Line State Park Trail as the centerpiece attraction. Tackle the Trail, Willimantic Street Fest, Thread City Brew Fest, the Chatham Historical District's Ghost Run, Air Line Cycles Thursday Evening Group Rides, the Willimantic Whitewater Partnership Riverfest, The Last Green Valley's

Walktober and more, the ALSPT Region can advocate and promote the region to residents and visitors to the region by cross-marketing. Beyond cross-marketing, the ALSPT Region and member towns can begin to promote the trail and even fundraise through events of their own showcasing the region's character. For those trail visitors who don't participate in marathons or races, event examples might include the examples shown below.



MARKET-TO-MARKET RIDE

Celebrate the Agriculture Heritage of the region with a day of trail side farmers markets collaborating with local agriculture producers and existing farm market organizers on the trail at major parking areas or publicly owned land or lots near the trail.



VIEWS FROM THE TRAIL

Coordinate with local galleries, art schools and artists to hold day long painting public workshops or demonstrations on sections of the trail. Coordinate with ALSPT Region galleries to host gallery exhibition of trail art for one month each year. This would be particularly beneficial to village or town centers where the ALSPT travels through the center business district.



TRUCKING THE TRAIL

Celebrate the culinary diversity of the region with a food truck day on the trail in partnership with CLICK in Windham and merchant groups to help local food businesses grow within the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS: Marketing and Branding Strategy

- 01** Hire an experienced outdoor/trail oriented consultant to create a marketing plan to implement a multi-year staged approach to attract new trail users balanced with continuing improvements on the ALSPT.
- 02** Continue to conduct surveys to gather information about the people traveling the trail, trail use and amenities that trail users seek.
- 03** Initiate a meeting with staff at the State Office of Tourism to connect as a future partner for advancing marketing of the ALSPT Region.
- 04** Share data and information about ALSPT amongst all twelve towns in the ALSPT Region, the Eastern Regional Tourism District, The Last Green Valley, and the State Office of Tourism.
- 05** Coordinate funding between the twelve towns and possibly a neighboring influence region such as the Hop River Trail Alliance towns to hire a either a part-time or full-time regional marketing/economics coordinator to staff the ALSPT Region and possibly the Hop River Trail Alliance. The specific job duties would include generating website and social media stories and managing updates to the ALSPT Region website with website host. This person would coordinate the calendar of events with ongoing and daily outreach to ALSPT Region organizations and would feed information to CT VISIT.
- 06** Plan for organizing special events, workshops, and volunteer activities along the trail.
- 07** Continue to expand the website promoting the ALSPT Region as a day or short-long stay visit and what to expect on the trail.
- 08** Advertise ALSPT activities online on websites, social media, and apps, via email marketing and offline by posting flyers at trailheads or at public locations in towns.
- 09** Develop relationships with media outlets, bloggers, and influencers to generate positive coverage and reviews of the Air Line State Park Trail.
- 10** Participate in events, fairs, or trade shows to showcase the trail, distribute trail maps, and network with potential visitors.
- 11** Ask local businesses, tourism organizations and relevant stakeholders to sponsor activities along the trail.
- 12** Re-evaluate the marketing campaign yearly.



CHAPTER 8

**Wayfinding
and Signage**

OVERVIEW

Last, but certainly not least, the trail signage and wayfinding along the ALSPT require tactical planning cooperatively with the Hop River Trail Alliance.

Signage is the mechanism by which wayfinding is communicated effectively and wayfinding is a high priority for the ALSPT Region so visitors can navigate the trail, easily determine their locations relative to their starting and ending points, and access services and emergency support if required. Signage and wayfinding should work effectively together as they will play a crucial role in marketing and providing a supportive trail user experience on the Air Line State Park Trail (see Figure 8A).

The primary recommendation in this chapter involves the ALSPT Region collaborating with the Hop River Trail Alliance to create a plan for mileage markers and wayfinding signage. The University of Connecticut Landscape Architecture Program evaluated the ALSPT and proposed a recommended layout for signage. Trail signage and wayfinding markers should be visible, informative, and follow local regulations (see Figures 8C, 8D and 8E). This evaluation is an excellent first step toward an ALSPT Region wayfinding-signage plan. Again, the goal is to enhance the user experience and help visitors navigate the trail easily.



Wayfinding is a high priority for the ALSPT Region so visitors can navigate the trail, easily determine their locations relative to their starting and ending points, and access services and emergency support if required.



GUIDANCE FOR WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

To ensure that the signs are easy to understand, they should offer clear directions to the trailhead, landmarks, scenic overlooks, as well as access points, parking areas and other locations. The wayfinding signage should provide critical guidance for emergency personnel when needed since EMTs, medics, police and fire officials will use mile markers to pinpoint where on the trail their assistance is needed. The signs will also promote safety and sustainability, encouraging visitors to follow designated paths and dispose of trash properly.

The first wayfinding step to incorporate into future signage involves color coding. Color coding allows the trail user and visitor to the ALSPT Region to quickly correlate their location without reading the details on the signs (see Figure 8A). This is helpful when

driving the region, parking at trail heads, and cycling on the trail. Towns can incorporate each color code into signage to begin a process of identifying their relative location to the trail and visitors. This promotes marketing of the towns as well as safety for the trail user.

Additional signage would provide locational and explanatory information about unique features on the trail, such as footbridges that have panoramic views and historical landmarks like the parking lot in East Thompson, the site of the train crash. Signage will highlight these features, providing information about their significance. Local history and culture could be incorporated into the design of the signs by featuring artwork and graphics that are unique to the region.

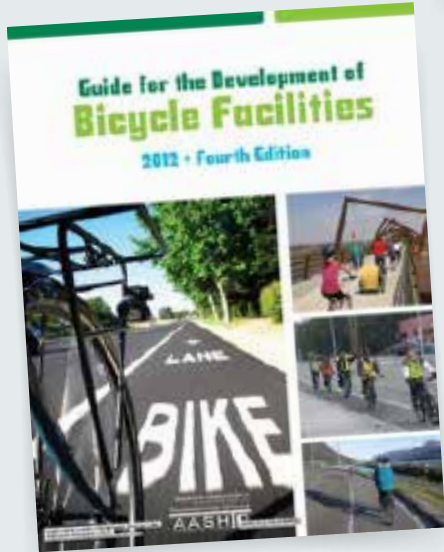
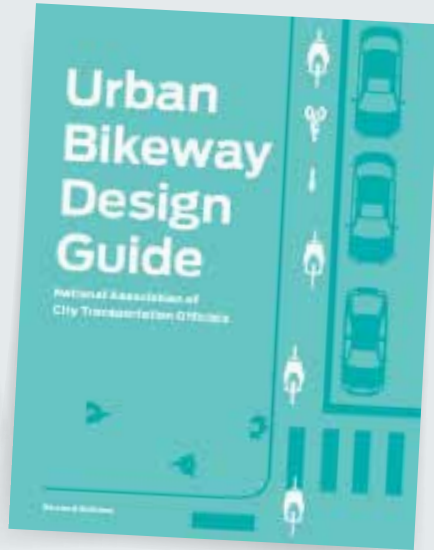
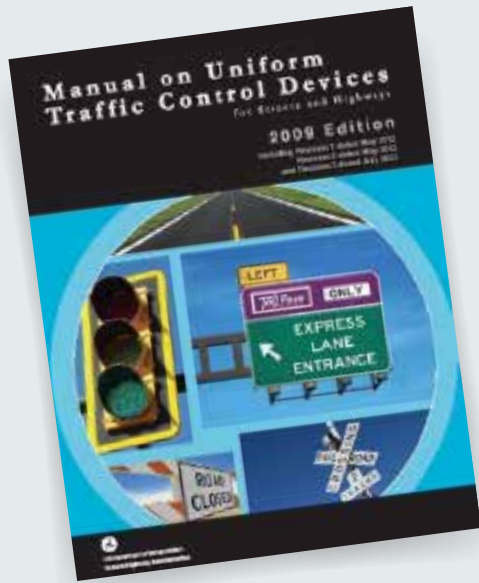
FIGURE 8A

Examples of Color Codes for ALSPT Region Towns



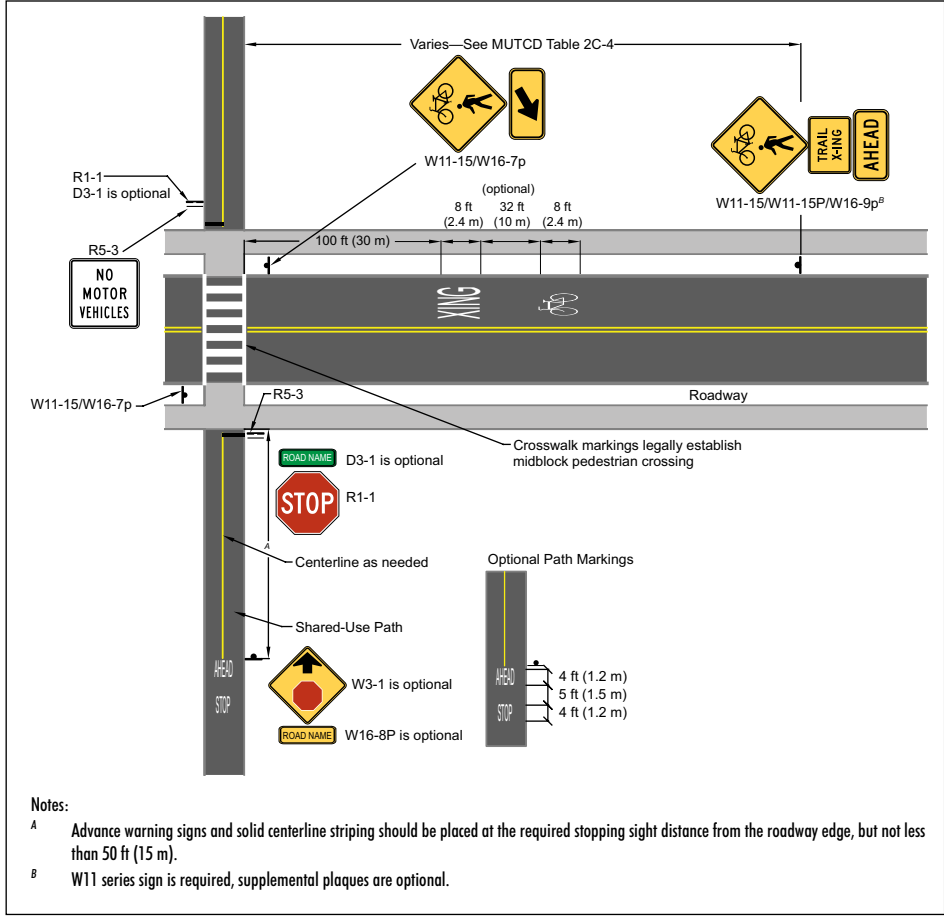
Example of how color coding might be used for trail signage. Note that the train icon can be changed to ALSPT Logo.

Resources for Signage Design



There are abundant industry standard resources that provide information and guidance on the design and placement of signage on trails and public roads, these resources should be followed when signage is placed within a road's right of way and when appropriate in all other locations.

FIGURE 8B Sample Schematic of Signage at Intersection



Example of mid-block path-roadway intersection. Path is stop-controlled for bicyclists.

FIGURE 8C

**Layout of Signage at Trail-Road Crossings:
UConn Landscape Architecture Program**

At the intersection of State Route 203 in Windham and the Air Line State Park Trail, there are no cross walks, no lighting and minimal signage identifying the intersection. Trail signage indicating an approaching crossing should be located 60' from the intersection. Roadway signage on the roads should be placed at distance from the crossing as indicated in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

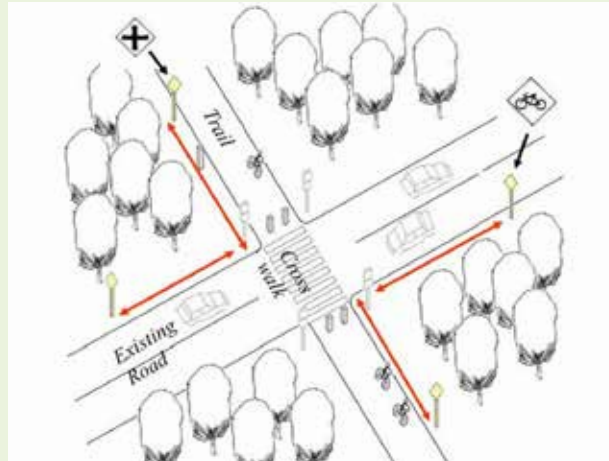


FIGURE 8D

**Layout of Site Features at Trail Heads:
UConn Landscape Architecture Program**

All site features (signage, bollards, fences, etc.) need to be organized for maximum clarity and safety. This can be done by using two "regulating lines" as a guide for placement of site features. Line "A" is parallel to the road and is set back a uniform distance from the road edge. The setback distance will vary according to the type and width of the road. Line "B" is parallel with the center line of the trail and 3' from the trail edge.

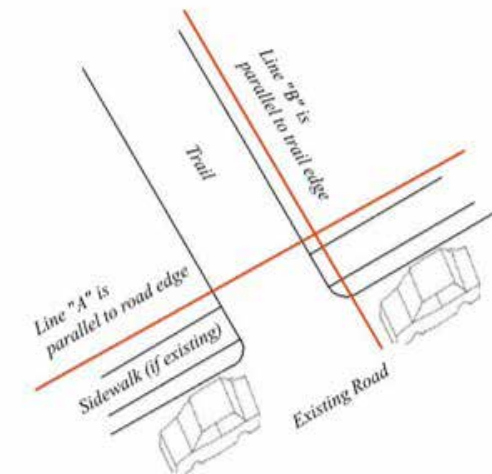


FIGURE 8E

Sign Type and Placement

TRAFFIC CONTROL SIGN

Locate bollards and gates to stop vehicular traffic from entering the trail. The type of bollard and/or gate will be determined by the character of the area, urban or rural.

IDENTIFICATION SIGN

All crossings require signage and site features to ensure safe crossing conditions for trail users. These signs serve as trail identifications for both the trail user and vehicular traffic and should be situated at the intersection of line "A" and line "B". Since each road crossing varies in intensity, three types of signage can be used and the type of sign should be determined by the urban or rural context.

REGULATORY SIGN

These signs outline the types of activities and behaviors regulated on the trail and should be placed at road crossings and in parking areas.

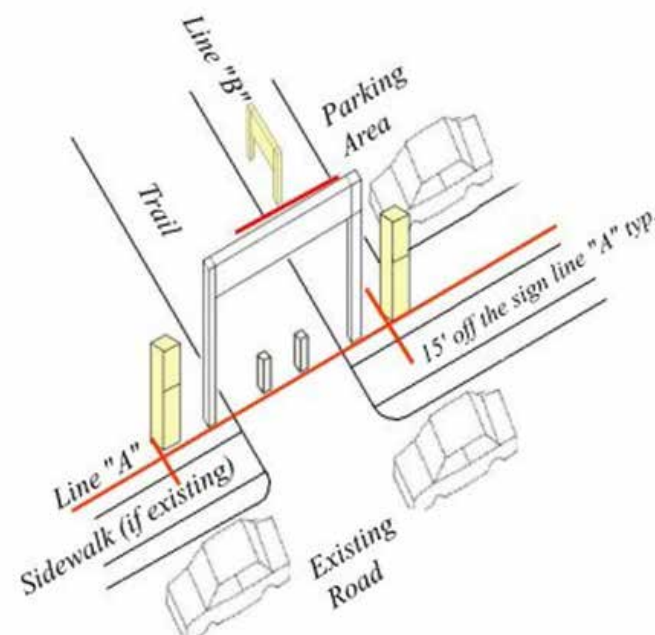
INFORMATION SIGN

These signs display the types of activities found along a section of the trail. Many of these activities or educational notes are displayed in a graphic manner.

REFERENCE SIGN

These signs are located along the trail over the entire length of the trail system and are uniform in design. Such signs would include mile markers, small logos, QR codes for the ALSPT Region, and regulatory information as needed. Another type of reference sign would be located at educational features or points of interest.

SOURCE: UCONN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM



Trail Identification: Trailheads need to be identified to help users access the trails. The scale of the trail identification sign should depend on the importance of the trailhead, the surrounding context, and cost implications. Below are a few examples of regulations appropriate for multi-use trails. These symbols can be stacked vertically on 8' x 8' posts.



TOWN-TO-TRAIL WAYFINDING

Signs will connect the Air Line State Park Trail to local communities and businesses, and color coding can accentuate the connection with the ALSPT (see Figure 8E). Color-coding by town on signage can incorporate information about nearby attractions, restaurants, stores, and lodging options. Effective coordination of uniform wayfinding and signage is crucial for economic

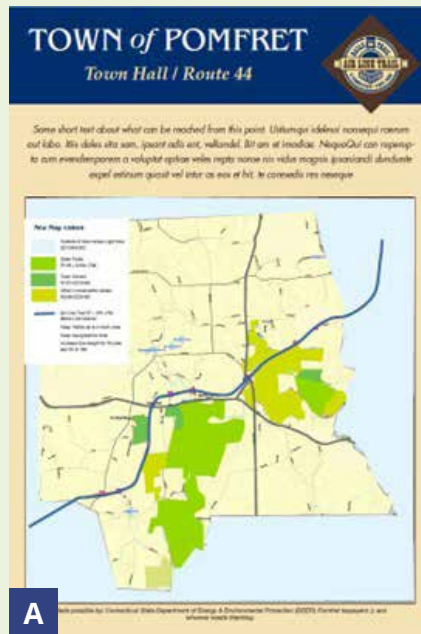
growth in all 12 towns along the Air Line State Park Trail. Encouraging visitors to explore the diverse offerings through this type of wayfinding is fun, engaging and welcomes ALSPT Region visitors with attention to their comfort and safety. The signs along the trail will generate significant economic impact for the partner towns.

As part of the Trail Town's initiative recommended previously in this plan, businesses can adopt the same color coding in their messaging to ALSPT Region visitors. By incorporating these elements into the design of its wayfinding and signage, the Air Line State Park Trail can effectively market itself as a regional destination and attract more visitors.

FIGURE 8E

Signage As an Important Tool to Connect the Trail and Towns

New signage in Pomfret uses color coding of blue to identify town (A) and work as designed by UConn's engineering students for the East Thompson Trail Parking Lot could be the next step toward color coding for Thompson and signage at the trail head (B). The existing sign in Portland could be redesigned using the color coding for Portland and East Hampton (C).



QR CODES SUPPORT WAYFINDING AND EDUCATION

The balance of trail signage is important and requires careful planning and consideration. QR codes are helpful to reduce the need for educational signage related to trail features such as geocaching, natural resources of the trail, history and other amenities. The most important aspect of QR codes is the ability to help visitors with wayfinding and information on and about the trail. This requires strong cell signal service on the trail. That said, a plan for design and placement of QR codes can enhance the trail wayfinding experience if incorporated correctly.

The ALSPT Region organization should work with CT DEEP, CT Trail Finder and CT Visit to coordinate and consolidate a unified strategy with a lens toward the visitor's virtual awareness of the ALSPT Region and the ALSPT.

Here are examples of several virtual options to get information about the Air Line State Park Trail, none of which are complete or conclusive about the trail system and the ALSPT Region.

- <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Air-Line-State-Park-Trail>
NOTE: need to incorporate CT Trail Finder and link to ALSPT Region onto webpage
- <https://www.cttrailfinder.com>
NOTE: make sure you type in bicycling to find the ALSPT in the list view)
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/154317004770544/>
NOTE: volunteer managed Facebook site
- <https://www.trailink.com/trail/air-line-state-park-trail>
- <https://explorect.org/air-line-trail>
- <https://www.ctvisit.com/listings/air-line-state-park-trail>
NOTE: need to connect to new ALSPT Region website
- <https://www.alltrails.com/parks/us/connecticut/airline-state-park-trail>

**Use this QR Code to visit
the new Air Line State
Park Trail Region website!**



ACCESSIBILITY



Accessibility is an important aspect of infrastructure since it provides knowledge and wayfinding for those who need accommodations. The CT DEEP Air Line State Park Trail webpage notes that, “This park is generally not handicapped accessible; however, some sections in East Hampton, Colchester and Hebron are wheelchair accessible”. While a major goal for building out the ALSPT is the provision of accessibility and defining the limits of accessibility on the trail, wayfinding information on the CT Trail Finder and the ALSPT Region website should map and direct people to sections of the trail that are accessible since it is anticipated that this trail will mostly remain unpaved (see Figure 8F).

The Last Green Valley conducted an accessibility study on a portion of the trail that provides an example for a more complete evaluation of the full ALSPT system. This type of information as presented by TLGV is invaluable to people with limited mobility seeking access to the trail (see Figure 8G).

In this plan, accessibility is not limited to physical improvements. The trail’s accessibility will also improve when signage is translated into languages other than English and options are provided for people with hearing or sight impairments.

From installing Spanish language trail information in the central areas of Windham where there is a large Latino population to cell phone adaptation of trail information to promote knowledge and wayfinding for all, a cohesive plan adopted by all stakeholders who build infrastructure and design information for the trail is a must for the ALSPT.

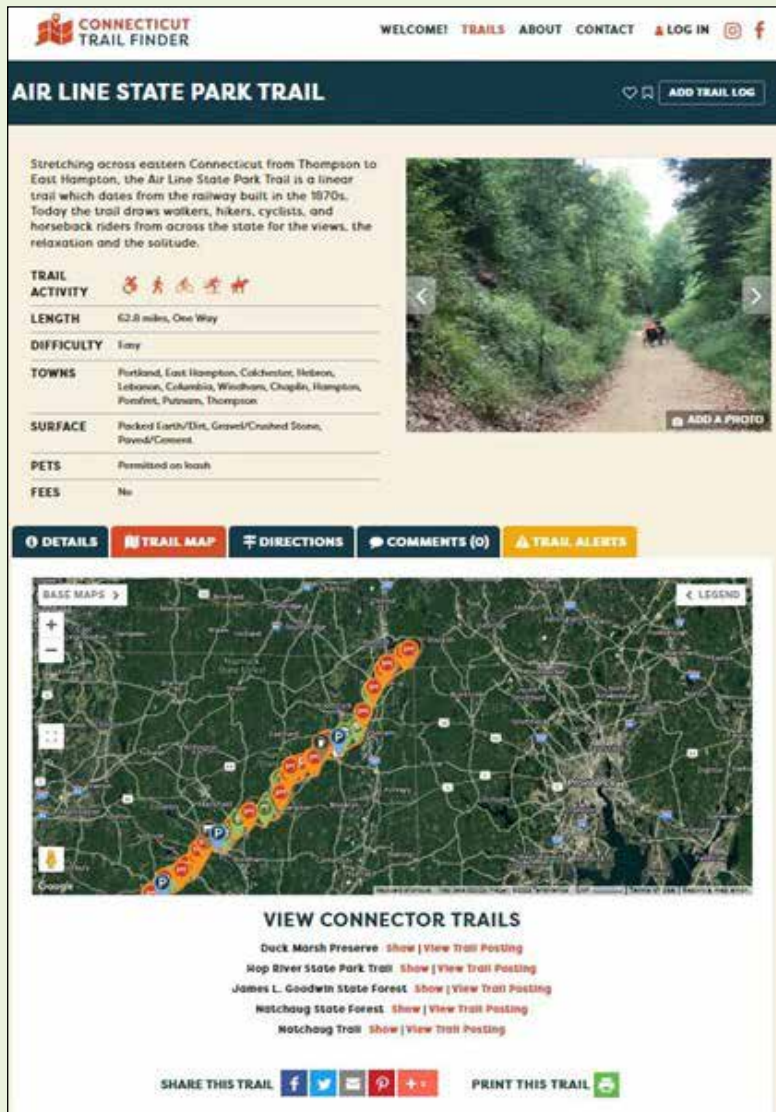


FIGURE 8F Wayfinding to "CT Trail Finder"



FIGURE 8G The Last Green Valley Accessibility Study

RECOMMENDATIONS: Wayfinding and Signage

- 01** Conduct a workshop with the support of the Eastern Regional Tourism District, CT DEEP, the University of Connecticut (CT Trail Finder) and The Last Green Valley and the East Coast Greenway for business leaders and municipal officials to outline the importance of signage and wayfinding in economic growth of the ALSPT Region. The NVCOG CT Plan provides a template for building a wayfinding-signage plan for the region.
- 02** Hold a moderator-led roundtable/workshop for organization who incorporate the ALSPT into their websites and social media to coordinate on-line wayfinding for trail users and ALSPT Region visitors.
- 03** Have each ALSPT town adopt an ALSPT Region code color for uniformity and mapping of the trail and improved experience for the trail user. That color would be incorporated into future signage near the trail and within the town's business districts.
- 04** Coordinate with the Hop River Trail Alliance and East Coast Greenway in the planning for wayfinding and signage over the next two years to coordinate signage and wayfinding for both these trails and the two regions.
- 05** Create an accessibility plan that connects accessibility infrastructure (especially at trailheads), surface design, signage and virtual wayfinding to the appropriate ALSPT-related websites via website information, links and cellphone applications.
- 06** Develop signage plan along the trail that offers clear directions to the trailheads, landmarks, scenic overlooks, as well as access points and parking areas.
- 07** Develop signage and wayfinding that promotes local restaurants, trail-related businesses, lodging and amenities that produce mapping and related information that is both website- and cellphone-friendly. Careful planning for QR Codes can assist with this process.





CHAPTER 9

**Leadership
and Implementation**

AIR LINE STATE PARK TRAIL LEADERSHIP

Effective leadership for the ALSPT Region and the ALSPT corridor is a critical component of establishing and sustaining implementation of the recommendations outlined in this ALSPT Region Master Plan. In the case of the Air Line State Park Trail, the single most practical and cost-effective strategy is to begin a bi-annual roundtable with CT DEEP and a new ALSPT Region organization that would represent the twelve towns and other stakeholders in the ALSPT Region.

The first step in this strategy is to create an ALSPT organization. This organization could be established by formalizing the current 130+ member ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee

into a new Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for the ALSPT Region. To support this effort, the ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee secured a \$75,000 grant in May 2023 with a 20% match supplied by town and trail committee volunteers. The purpose of this grant is to enact recommendations from this chapter. Parameters for structure, membership and goals for this new nonprofit organization were discussed by the ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee throughout the project planning phase of this master plan with detailed recommendations coalescing in a February 2023 roundtable. The Committee's recommendations are detailed on the next page.



East Hampton: Site Tour of Upcoming Infrastructure Project Funded by Congressionally Directed Spending with Project Sponsor, U.S. Congressman Joe Courtney

THE VALUE OF A TRAIL ASSOCIATION

“Your dues and contributions help us provide grants to the towns on the trail, funding construction and maintenance. It also allows us to provide trail amenities such as bike repair stations. Our Adopt-a-Mile Program volunteers, Trail Ambassadors and the participants in the Spring Clean-Up days help keep the trail free of debris. Board members

SOURCE: FARMINGTON CANAL RAIL-TO-TRAIL ASSOCIATION

and volunteers attend the Collinsville Farmers Market each Sunday from July to October, along with having booths at area events and trailside tables to keep you informed about the trail. Our website keeps you current on trail news, enables reporting trail issues to town officials and facilitates communicating to the Board your compliments or complaints.”

ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee Leadership Recommendations



STRUCTURE

- Create the new ALSPT Region organization as a Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to leverage the potential for fundraising and grant funding/oversight.
- Establish a communications network between the town departments/officials, trail committees, key stakeholders, and CT DEEP that could be funneled through the new ALSPT Region organization as moderator.
- Host yearly bi-annual meetings to coordinate ongoing strategies for maintenance, park rules, funding, and implementation of this plan's recommendations for signage, infrastructure & emergency management.



MEMBERSHIP

- The new ALSPT Region organization's membership could be designed to include stakeholders through the organization's bylaws.
- The twelve towns should appoint representatives to a Board of Directors for this new nonprofit organization with the goal of representing and coordinating town support of the trail and addressing issues and concerns in the management and maintenance of the trail.
- CT DEEP and other state agencies would participate in bi-annual meetings as ex-officio representatives.




GOALS

- Implement the recommendations of the ALSPT Region Master Plan and subsequent studies through coordinated discussion, planning and strategy.
- Work both as a region and one entity to secure funding for larger visionary projects and support grant applications for localized infrastructure projects by towns and partner organizations. Coordinate the economic growth possibilities of the ALSPT Region through land use and grant funding support for the concept of Trail Towns, trail-oriented businesses, the new ALSPT Region website and related marketing strategy.
- Coordinate with CT DEEP to ensure that signage and wayfinding, both virtual and stick-built, improve the trail user experience in the entire twelve-town region.

Air Line State Park Trail Region Roles and Responsibilities

CT DEEP	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	COUNCILS OF GOVERNMENT
Encourage regional collective planning and communications for 12 ALSPT Towns and partner organizations	Support and sponsor the ALSPT Region organization including representation from town (official or resident) with goal to improve intra town collaboration and with CT DEEP	Include Air Line State Park Trail planning in Unified Planning Work Program update with specific focus on multi-town infrastructure
Plan for and provide an internal planning scope and strategy for CT DEEP management of the trail	Formally appoint 1-2 representatives to the new ALSPT Region organization	Work with new ALSPT Region organization and towns as needed to include infrastructure projects and maintenance in Metropolitan Planning Organization's Statewide Transportation Improvement Plans
Provide clarity on a yearly basis toward Passport to Parks funding toward maintenance allocation and district implementation schedule to regional organization	Review and update zoning regulations and POCDs to identify uses that are incompatible to the ALSPT and ensure that these are located at appropriate distances from the trail with buffers as needed. Consider creating an overlay zoning district along the trail	Assist with CTDOT grant funding programs or special programs for congressionally-directed spending or similar programs to support activities along the ALSPT
Advocate for additional staffing for district offices	Survey local road connections	Participate on 12 Town Regional Trail Committee
Provide single point of contact for town communications related to emergencies and adverse trail conditions	Encourage local transit to extend service or on-demand service to select trailhead parking locations for transit dependent populations	Work with state and federal in support of towns
Streamline permitting and review for infrastructure improvements for connections between town centers and the ALSPT	Consider yearly financial stipend \$1000-\$2000 (or a population-based rate) to ALSPT Region organization to help cover town/regional marketing and website, and overhead costs for meetings	Adopt, where appropriate, the ALSPT Region Master Plan and its recommendations into local Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies
Advocate on behalf of towns with CT DOT for trail to town center connections	Support local economic development commissions and business groups planning and providing information for stay and play options for visitors	Support the ALSPT Region Master Plan and its recommendations through open space planning and regional POCD recommendations to support the efforts to improve the ALSPT
Advocate with other state agencies on permitting for infrastructure projects and marketing campaigns	Evaluate options for ALSPT to be used as a commuter route and plan for land use along the trail that can build upon direct connections to business centers near the trail	Work with local rural transit districts establish connections to ALSPT trailheads for transit-dependent populations

Air Line State Park Trail Region Roles and Responsibilities

TRAIL COMMITTEES	NEW ALSPT REGION ORGANIZATION	STATE & FEDERAL LEGISLATORS
Continue to advocate and plan for improved trails conditions and experiences for trail users at the local level	Coordinate communications with CT DEEP and represent local interests in planning, maintenance and infrastructure improvements on the ALSPT Trail	Support funding for major improvements to the ALSPT and timely completion of the full trail for continuity of experience for trail users
Become active and support the new ALSPT Region organization by attending meetings as ex-officio members or by sending recommendations with representatives	Coordinate with Hop River Trail Alliance on wayfinding, marketing the ALSPT region, and advocacy with the Connecticut Office of Tourism and related agencies	Promote the ALSPT Region website as the primary source of information about the ALSPT and where one can plan for a stay and play visit in one or more of the 12 towns and the surrounding region
Advocate for coordination of events and local conservation of trail resources and scenic protection	Implement the recommendations of the ALSPT Region Master Plan including seeking continuity of experience improvements and wayfinding	Secure bond funding for a complete final buildout of the 64 miles of ALSPT corridor to ensure continuity of surface structure, draining and design
Become active with ALSPT Region website and contribute/promote stories via content and social media sharing.	Support the 12 Towns of the ALSPT Region and economic growth opportunities with updates to the ALSPT website promoting attractions and services with partner stakeholders and state tourism agencies	Learn about investments made in the ALSPT to date and how future investment can help the economy of the ALSPT Region expand
Promote ALSPT to new members to heighten awareness of ALSPT trail use and options	Provide a single point of contact with CT DEEP for arranging the date of the annual or bi-annual roundtable for town staff/officials, trail committees and partner stakeholders	Attend events like ALSPT workshops and ribbon cuttings to be continually informed and aware of new developments within the ALSPT and the ALSPT Region
Participate in training by CT DEEP for appropriate maintenance of the ALSPT and encourage additional volunteers to participate in such training	Support towns in expanding economic growth opportunities located in close proximity to the ALSPT, with a special focus on the Willimantic center hub	
Be the eyes and ear of ongoing conditions and information on the ALSPT and report back to the new ALSPT Region organization, Town Representatives and your local CT DEEP liaison	Promote strategies to increase diversity and inclusion of trail visitors with partner organizations	
	Coordinate with events organizers on the trail, starting with Tackle the Trail, the Ghost Run and other organizations	<p>▶ Work with the ALSPT website designer to expand the stay and play experience planning portion of the website by providing suggested journeys and local events on the ALSPT</p>

LET'S GET STARTED ON IMPLEMENTATION

- Stakeholders and town residents should share and read the ALSPT Region Master Plan and/or its Executive Summary.
- Elect a temporary Chair/ President of the ALSPT Region Stakeholder Committee until bylaws are established for a new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization.
- Establish bylaws for the new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization.
- Hire or secure volunteer services of legal assistance/attorney to file incorporation paperwork to form a Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
- Ensure diversity and inclusion are part of the structure of the new nonprofit ALSPT Region organization.
- Establish "Friends of ALSPT Region" to help fundraise for events, workshops, marketing, staffing and matching funds for infrastructure.
- Maintain a geospatially oriented database of information about the trail and the region.
- Review recommendations of the ALSPT Region Master Plan (Appendix D).
- Arrange annual or bi-annual communications and maintenance-project review with CT DEEP.
- Consider mutual aid needs for safety and emergency management between the towns in the ALSPT Region.
- Review ongoing grant applications or funding received for new infrastructure to ensure compatibility with this Master Plan.
- Establish consistency in wayfinding signage for 50 miles of the ALSPT and coordinate signage with that along the Hop River State Park Trail.
- Meet with local Connecticut legislators to discuss developing a bond funding initiative to fully buildout consistent trail conditions along the 64 miles of the ALSPT.
- Work together with state and federal legislators to build out additional trail infrastructure to improve the trail user experience.
- Conduct an informational meeting with 130-member Air Line State Park Trail Region Stakeholder Committee to highlight next steps.
- Apply as a regional collaborative with towns for new grant funding opportunities that benefit the ALSPT Region trail system. Track progress in database.
- Work as one voice for ongoing maintenance agreements or memorandums of understanding with CT DEEP.
- Work across boundaries with local Influence Areas, nearby towns, and the schools of higher learning in the ALSPT Region to share information about trail progress and market the ALSPT.
- Coordinate meetings on an annual basis with the four Councils of Government along the ALSPT to ensure that the ALSPT Region and corridor are part of their unified planning work program and/or general work program.
- Preserve the conservation experience for the trail user to increase eco-tourism activities in the ALSPT Region.



- Advocate for a Trail-Town Aid Program with the support of state legislators to assist towns with funds needed to care for the ALSPT. Coordinate these efforts with CT DEEP.
- Act as one regional voice for marketing the towns and the ALSPT Region via the new website and social media outlets as noted in Chapters 6 and 7.
- Hire a part-time staff person to support the ALSPT Region initially with arranging the bi-annual roundtables and the ALSPT Region-sponsored events, coordinating updates to the website consultant and maintaining ALSPT-related databases.
- Create a diversity and inclusion strategy to maximize potential for ALSPT Region membership, business involvement and a welcoming experience to trail users of all backgrounds.
- Once the trail is complete for the full 64 miles, apply for National Recreational Trail designation and other trail designations that could possibly provide funding to the ALSPT Region in the future.
- Connect with The Last Green Valley for inspiration and potential future staffing for trail marketing and regional coordination.

Funding for the ALSPT Region

The new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization will continue to: set a vision for trail development, investment, and promotion; outline a fundraising strategy; propose policies; provide quality control for the organization; and support the efforts of the towns, trail partners and CT DEEP.

Toward that end, there are numerous avenues to raise funding to support trail infrastructure, regional marketing, events, and education workshops. One avenue is being designated as a nationally recognized area, which would make the ALSPT Region eligible for federal funding.

More research is required for this avenue. As the ALSPT Region becomes recognized, opportunities to conduct fundraising events

or sales of merchandise may provide a different source of revenue. While difficult to organize, race events or marathons have raised between \$70,000 to \$300,000 per event for some nearby Connecticut organizations. Another source of funding is derived from the rural status of many of the ALSPT communities, as designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (see Figures 9A and 9B).

Fundraising is a skill and one that can be learned and improved upon with training can be provided by Community Trust Foundations. These organizations also provide capacity building grants for new organizations like the new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization.

While difficult to organize, race events or marathons have raised between \$70,000 to \$300,000 per event for some nearby Connecticut organizations.



FIGURE 9A

USDA Rural Development Eligibility: Business

Connecticut (MA/CT/RI Jurisdiction) Rural Development Eligible Areas for General Business Programs

This map of communities in Connecticut that are eligible for USDA Rural Development Business Programs shows that many of the ALSPT towns are eligible or partially eligible for these programs.

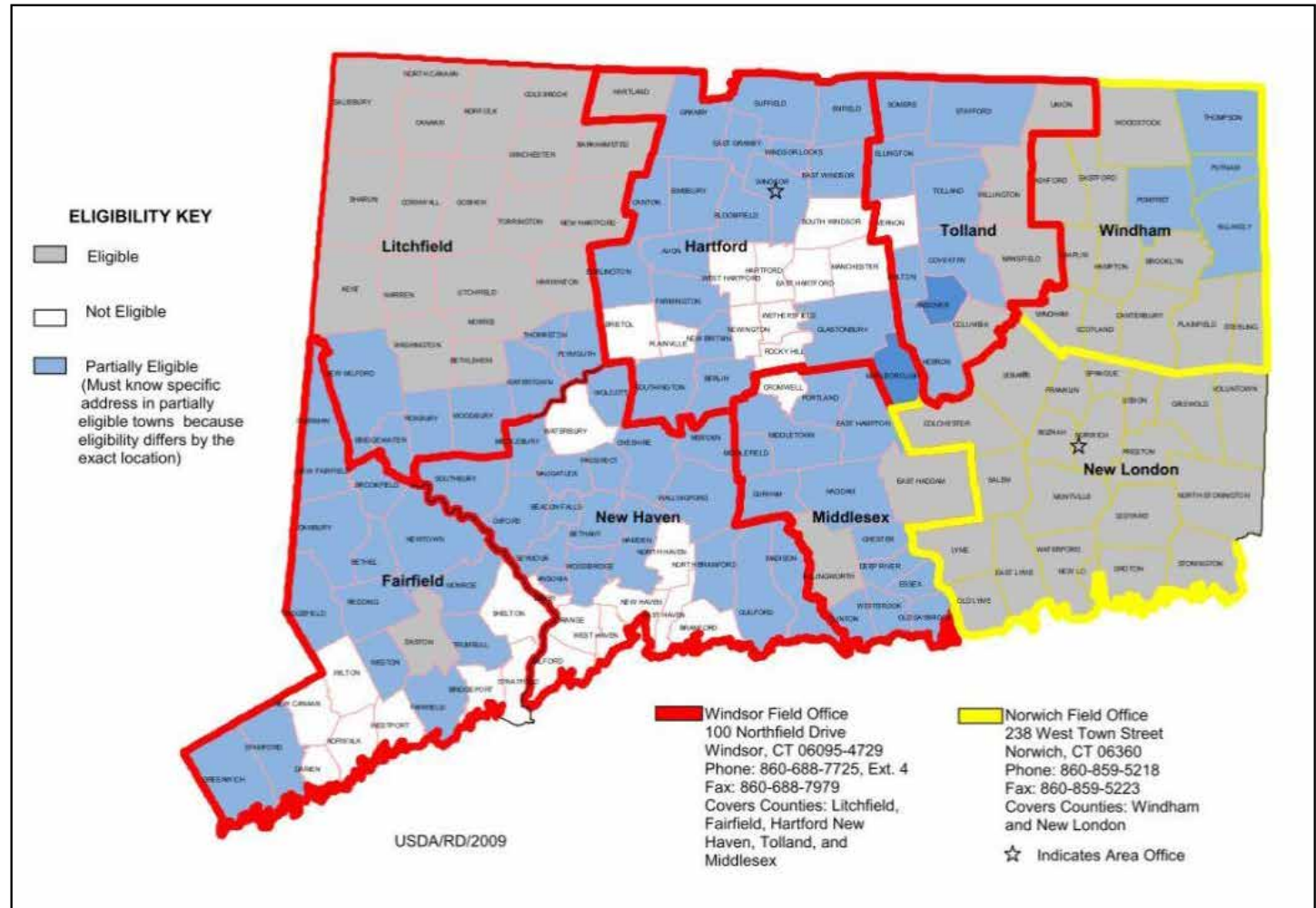


FIGURE 9B

USDA Rural Development Eligibility: Housing

Connecticut (MA/CT/RI Jurisdiction) Rural Development Eligible Areas for Housing Programs

This map of communities in Connecticut that are eligible for USDA Rural Development Housing Programs shows that all the ALSPT towns are eligible for these programs.

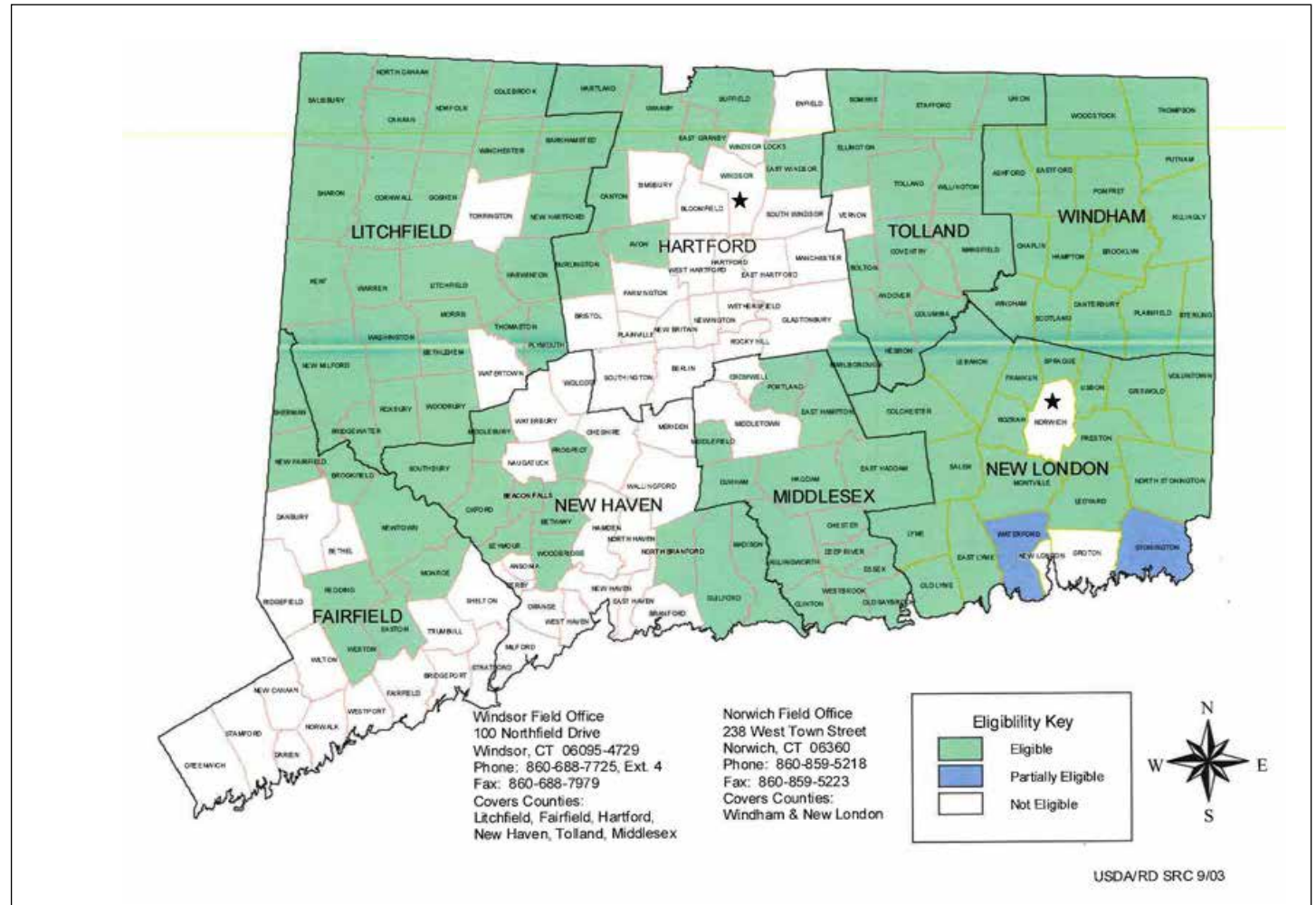


FIGURE 9C: Public Expenditure Through Grant Funding for the ALSPT*

Colchester	Colchester Design of Link Trail to Air Line State Park Trail (SPT) Connection to the Goodwin trail in Babcock WMA then to the system of trails in Day Pond which in turn connects to the Air Line SPT	\$43,200
East Hampton	East Hampton/DEEP State Parks ALSPT Phase 2 ALSPT connection to Portland to extend from Phase 1 funded by last grant round	\$583,800
Portland	Portland Air Line State Park Trail Extension 2.27 mile extension of this State Park Trail with 10 car parking lot.	\$685,932
Hebron	Hebron Church St Park - Air Line SPT connection design universal access trail to link to existing trails in Burnt Hill Park; first phase (not an actual connection) in connection to ASPT; includes a bridge	\$62,000
The Last Green Valley	The Last Green Valley Improving Trail Access for All Abilities using upgraded High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process equipment, plus training new volunteers and hosting new events, to improve accessibility on many miles of trails including the ALSPT	\$15,330
Thompson	Thompson Trail Maintenance Equipment Town's volunteer Trails Committee will purchase equipment for use in ensuring proper maintenance of the Town's large trails system, much of which includes portions of state and federal trails systems.	\$9,704
Colchester	Construction of a link between the Goodwin Trail and the Air Line SPT	\$47,776.00
CT Audubon & Pomfret	Preparation of construction documents for an ADA shelter, restroom, and interpretive exhibit observation deck.	\$53,491
CT RC&D	Master Plan to include resource inventory wayfinding, economic opportunities, bike to work assessment, increase safe routes to schools, maintenance plan	\$188,522
Hebron	Connector trail will include boardwalk, a bridge and a 12 car parking lot	\$228,320
Putnam-NECCOG	Develop a shovel ready plan to complete the ALSPT connection to the Putnam River Trail and the YMCA/Technology Park system.	\$64,200
Thomaston	Planning and design of an additional section of the NRG in Thomaston.	\$140,400
Thompson	Planning/Design	\$16,000
Windham	Maintenance, Amenities	\$86,525
ALSPT CTDEEP Rec Trails Grants Since 2015		\$2,177,424
New 2023 ALSPT Rec Trail Funding Awards		\$707,500
Funding from CT DEEP prior 2015		\$4,419,560
Side Grant from Community Connectivity		
Colchester	Colchester Town Green Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project	\$397,030
Hebron	Hebron Center/Air Line Trail Connector	\$399,033
Total CC Grants		\$796,063
Congressionally Directed Spending		
2023 - Courtney - East Hampton		\$1,400,000
Total CDS		\$1,400,000
TOTAL ALSPT INVESTMENT		\$9,500,547

*20% match not included

FIGURE 9D: Formation of 12 Town ALSPT Region Association Two Years

BUDGET BY CATEGORY OF EXPENSE	FUNDING REQUEST
Bylaws (Legal Review and Application for Non Profit Status)	\$5,000.00
Newsletter - Social Media Promotion	\$2,000.00
Special Event (Promotion of Trail with CT Latino Outdoors Concept) Diversity & Inclusion	\$5,000.00
Website Management, promotion and updates	\$15,000.00
Collaborative 12 Town Project (Wayfinding or to identified by 12 Town Organization)	\$8,000.00
Coordination with CTDEEP Trail Finder and Cell based website information (DX Labs -UConn)	\$5,000.00
Part time Staffing to 12 Town ALSPT Region Organization for project	\$20,000.00
Regional Promotion Video: Edits of existing footage to 2-3 minute video	\$6,000.00
Overhead - Support Host Fiduciary CTCRC&D	\$9,000.00
Total Grant Funding Request	\$75,000.00
Total Project Costs with In Kind Match of 20% (match could be higher)	\$93,480.00

FIGURE 9E: Examples of Funding Sources

ORGANIZATION	TYPE OF GRANT
USDA	Rural Development Grant - RBDG
USDA	Community Facilities Loans/Grant
USDA	Community Connect Grants - Broadband
CTDOT	Connectivity Grants
CTDOT	STIP Funding for Road Improvements
CT Rec Trails Grants	Infrastructure and Planning Grants
Councils of Government	Planning Assistance for connectivity (roads, trails, transit) and GIS Mapping
Economic Enterprise Regions	Loans for trail oriented business startups
Corporate Funding	Various corporations invite applicants to submit for funding (highly competitive)
Fundraising	
Community Foundations	Organization capacity building or educational
Eastern Regional Tourism District	Marketing and tourism promotion
Congressionally Directed Spending	Programmatic funding for special projects including infrastructure through federal legislators



Fundraising Example: Draft logo design for merchandise fundraising. Trailside interviews indicated interest in t-shirts and hats with this logo.

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR THE ALSPT CORRIDOR & REGION



- Multiple jurisdictions and governing agencies along the length of the trail
- Lack of a staffing at both the local and state levels to denote a single trail manager or maintainer for the entirety of the trail
- Informal awareness by state governing entities of the efforts by towns and trail committees to improve trail conditions and the challenges in formalizing the relationship between the towns, trail committees and the state governing agencies
- Lack of resource- and information-sharing among various managers and maintainers of the trail
- Limited long-term funding to support trail operations, trail maintenance, and the establishment of related policies and plans at the local level
- How to engage many supportive jurisdictions, residents, trail users, and partners along the length of the trail
- How to access information about the local volunteer base, local advocacy groups, trail users, participants in Air Line State Park Trail events and programs, and how best to share email-marketing databases
- Reducing conflicts between trail uses through good design and proactive management, and resolving user conflict by having trail users involved in the decision-making processes, especially for special events and trail days
- Establishing a trail corridor that represents a welcoming, diverse and inclusive environment
- Securing dynamic, action-oriented leadership for new ALSPT Region nonprofit organization



