

EYE ON:

Massachusetts' Clipper City Rail Trail

Newburyport, Mass., located 40 miles north of Boston, was once home to a thriving shipbuilding industry, a fact memorialized in the city's moniker, Clipper City. Two rail lines blossomed in tandem with Newburyport's bustling maritime trade: the Old Eastern Line, carrying passengers to and from Boston, and the City Branch Line, which took freight (mainly coal) from the seaport to points inland.

By the 1970s, the two lines had fallen out of service, and the corridors became overgrown and prone to dumping. Today, the Clipper City Rail Trail—the first phase of which opened in 2010—is reviving these dormant tracks.

"The trail addressed some of the leftover blighted and abandoned land," says Geordie Vining, who has been the trail's project manager for more than a decade. "We've taken that and transformed it into a community asset."

But while nearby rail-trails—including the Old Eastern Marsh Trail on the other side of the Merrimack River—wend through picturesque scenes of lush green woodlands and marshes alive with birdsong, the Clipper City Rail Trail features a more urban and industrial backdrop. Planners, in turn, thought the trail needed a little help in the aesthetic department.

"A number of years ago, I went to Paris on a family trip and saw sculptures along the Seine," says Vining. "It impacted how I put together the design of the trail. It needed visual focal points."

These focal points came in the form of more than a dozen original public art pieces purchased and commissioned largely from regional artists. Now, with



GEORDIE VINING

Trail Under Construction: Clipper City Rail Trail

Location: Newburyport to Newbury, Mass.

Used Railroad Corridor: Phase one was built on the Old Eastern Line; phase two will be built on the City Branch Line

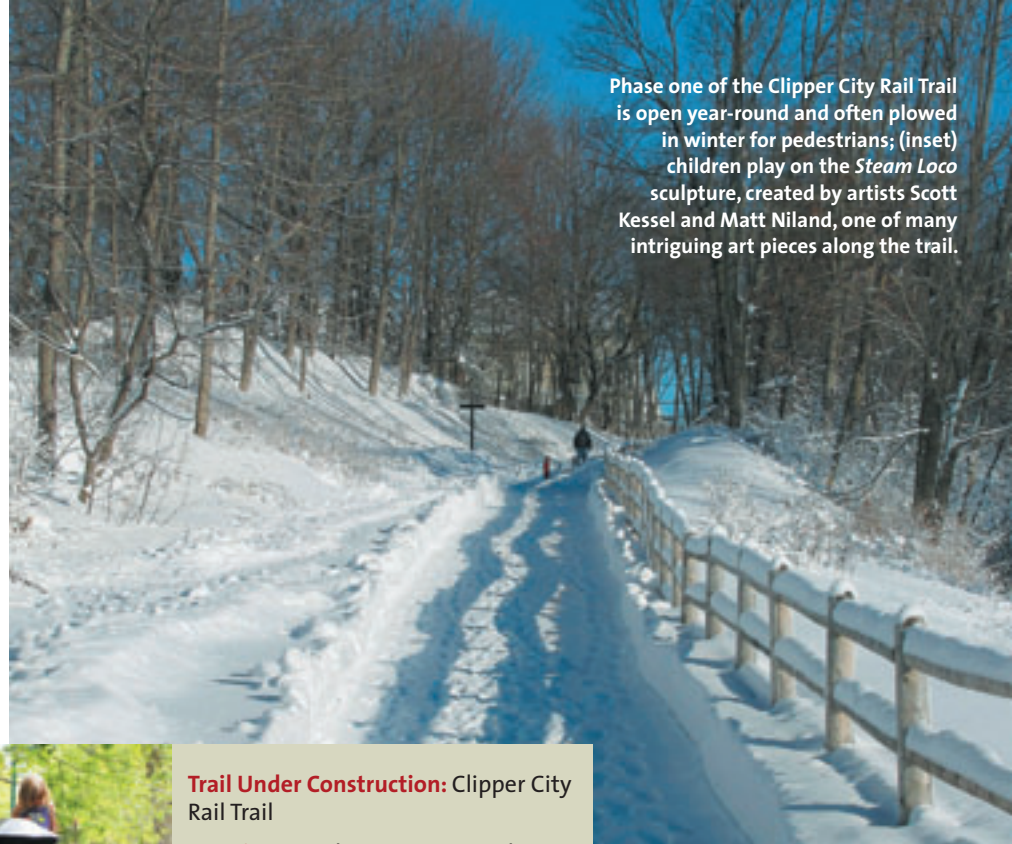
Length: 1.1 miles are currently complete and open to the public; a 1.5-mile extension is under way

Proposed Surface: Asphalt

compelling artwork lining the mile-long trail, its location in the busy North End neighborhood and connection to a major commuter rail station, "the trail has been well received since day one," says Lisë Reid, Newburyport's parks coordinator. "It's well used and appreciated."

Hundreds attended the trail's second anniversary last summer—a celebration complete with live music and birthday cake—and daily use on the trail during the warmer months is currently estimated at more than a thousand visitors. The next 1.5-mile extension, phase two, which is in the preliminary design stage, will connect to the existing trail's north end, travel along the waterfront and the city's South End neighborhood, then head down through a section of conifers, pitch pines and hardwoods to end in Newbury. The city anticipates construction on this phase beginning in 2014

Phase one of the Clipper City Rail Trail is open year-round and often plowed in winter for pedestrians; (inset) children play on the *Steam Loco* sculpture, created by artists Scott Kessel and Matt Niland, one of many intriguing art pieces along the trail.



and ending the following year. To complete the circle, a short connector will be added later to join the two segments at their southern ends.

Although the artwork will continue on the second phase, Vining says users can expect something

a little different this time. "We want to complement the art on the first phase of trail, not replicate it," he says. "There's a lot of metal art on phase one, so we're looking to use more stone or other materials for the art on phase two."

When asked what the most popular sculpture on the trail is, without hesitation Vining mentions the little locomotive that was commissioned as an interactive sculpture. "It's a gathering place. Every time I go by, there are children playing on it."

The same could be said of the trail itself: It's a gathering place. Not only does the trail provide health benefits, alternative transportation and a recreational amenity, but, according to Vining, "it's also a social space to see neighbors and other people you know."

For more information, visit www.cityofnewburyport.com/Planning/RailTrail.html.