

# A Concise Plan for Repurposing 4 Former Highway and RR Bridges across the CT River



**Proposed Tri-State Trail Network**  
 Craig Della Penna 413-575-2277 CraigDP413@gmail.com  
 More info about Schell Bridge is here. <https://schellbridge.org/about/>

The older Rt 9 Bridge built in 1937 and seen on the far right has been replaced by a newer bridge, [seen here under construction]. It is now open to only bikes, pedestrians and other recreational uses.

In the southwest corner of New Hampshire, the southeast corner of Vermont and across the northern tier of Massachusetts lies over 100 miles of interconnected, unused former railroads and low-volume country roads.

In a 13 miles stretch of the Connecticut River there will be four former highway and railroad bridges across the river that could be upgraded to be used by bicyclists, pedestrians and other recreationalists.

This represents a golden opportunity to create a network of off-road and low-volume roads that would be a resource for all the residents of the re-gion. The effort to create this network is called the Tri-State Trail Initiative.

Built in 1920, the Rt 119 Bridge is slated to be taken out of service and become open to only bikes and peds by 2026 when a new bridge is constructed and the rail-w-trail project is finally permitted and built.

Built in 1913 by the B&M Railroad, the Fort Hill Branch Bridge was taken out of service in 1983 and will be made into a bike-ped bridge around 2026 after the new Rt. 119 bridge is constructed and the rail-w-trail project is finally permitted and built.

Two views of the Schell Bridge

The Schell Bridge at Northfield, built in 1904, is the 4th bridge in this group. Having four bridges, open only to bicycles, pedestrians in a 13 mile stretch of one of the most scenic scenic rivers in North America will be remarkable. This is something that would early be marketable for bike tourists looking for an unforgettable experience.

# Into a 3-State Walking- Biking Trail.

<https://Tinyurl.Com/4-bridges>



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# WHO AM I? HERE'S A LINK TO A SHORT 2-PAGE BIO

- The Annoying Rain Man of Rail Trails
- And Like Forrest Gump, I am a Witness to Iconic Events.
- My Iconic Events Were in the Realm of Rail Trails. And all I do is get places to “YES.”
- [www.tinyurl.com/CDP2pagebio](http://www.tinyurl.com/CDP2pagebio)



**Short bio of Craig Della Penna**

Early on, I worked in the railroad industry for Pinsky Railroad Company. This was one of the country's earliest shortline railroads dating from the 1930s. In the 1990s, I was marketing rail freight and planning the start-up and managing the operations of what eventually became seven, large-scale, contemporary, railroad transloading facilities. Our facilities took thousands of trucks off the roads coming into New England each year.



One of these facilities—in So. Windham, CT (seen to the right) was the largest in the Northeast—over a mile long. And I'm proud to say that no one was ever killed or even injured at any of my facilities.



In February of 1994, I was put under contract by a regional publisher to write a series of books on the history of old railroad lines converted to walking and biking trails.

The books were pretty detailed in terms of railroad history, why it was there, why it went away and by way of an odometer-based mileage guide; I showed all the bits of RR infrastructure or archaeology that was out there and what it did.

The books were well-received and two years after the first of three books on this subject came out, I got involved in the politics of how these paths did, or did not get built and I began to actively organize "friends of the trail" groups in numerous communities all across New England where the idea of a rail trail was not being automatically seen with favor. In fact, there were many places where opponents carried the day. I know this is so foreign to 21st century people, that people were actually dead-set opposed to the idea of converting dead corridor into a linear park, but that was the case.

In 1997 I was hired by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, [RTC] as an organizer and lobbyist in the New England region to not only prevent bad policy at the state and local level, but to also "parachute" into some of the most notable rail trail "wars" in the northeast. In fact, within 150 miles of here lies the densest network of former steam railroad corridor in North America and the vast majority is becoming trails. Remaking these forgotten places into linear parks is a game-changer in Gateway Cities and towns. A reinvestment in places that have NOT been reinvested-in, for 2-3 generations.



In late 2001, while working for RTC, my wife Kathleen and I bought a badly run-down, circa 1865, farmhouse that sits next to (eight feet from) the rail trail in Northampton's historic Civil War era, village of Florence. We began a far-reaching renovation and had contractors there for 14 months.

Then in the spring of 2003, we opened as a bed & breakfast called [Sugar Maple Trailside Inn](#). We won a Historic Preservation award from the city and the renovation was even featured on [HGTV's Restore America](#) television program. Even in Yankee Magazine's 70th anniversary issue, our reno and our bed & breakfast was featured.



In 2004, I left RTC, became a Realtor and focused on developing a unique niche—selling houses near trails and greenways. This was in direct response to all the antis I met over the years who said their houses would never be saleable if the dead railroad behind their house became a trail. Of course, I have proven them all wrong. [I am the 1<sup>st</sup> Realtor in the U.S. with this niche](#), and I have been featured twice in National Realtor Association trade magazines, twice in the Certified Residential Specialist Magazine, and twice in the Massachusetts Association of Realtors magazine. I was even recently featured in a national [Wellness oriented Real Estate magazine](#).



I've also been written about in an editorial for the *Boston Globe*, an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, and even a story for the *United Airlines in-flight magazine*, *Hemispheres*, called [Roads Less Traveled](#).



The National Association of REALTORS awarded me the National EverGreen Award at the NAR conference in Chicago, for not only being the 1st REALTOR in the U.S. to have this special niche real estate practice, but also for my accomplishments in getting trails built all over the Northeast. I also hold the Certified Residential Specialist (CRS) designation. Only 2% of Realtors in the U.S. have this designation.



In 2005, I also set up two entities. One was **Northeast Greenways Solutions (NEGS)** to teach local groups and communities how to get their projects to "YES." Projects that don't get to YES, don't get built. That is all I really do. Get places to YES.

The other org was called [Central Highlands Conservancy LLC \(CHC\)](#), a hybrid land-acquisition vehicle set up specifically to purchase former railroad corridor in Massachusetts in order to prevent it from being sold to adjacent landowners.

Using CHC, we purchased 3.2 miles of former railroad right of way. This included three, large, former railroad bridges of the developing 104+ mile trail called [Mass Central Rail Trail](#).

**Craig Della Penna, CRS, GRI, Green, REALTOR®** Associate Broker, Trailside Team, The Murphys Realtors, Inc.,  
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# ALL NEW FANGLED IDEAS WILL PASS THROUGH THREE STAGES OF TRUTH

ALL TRUTH PASSES THROUGH THREE STAGES:

**FIRST** *It is ridiculed.*

**SECOND** *It is violently opposed.*

**THIRD** *It is accepted as being self-evident.*

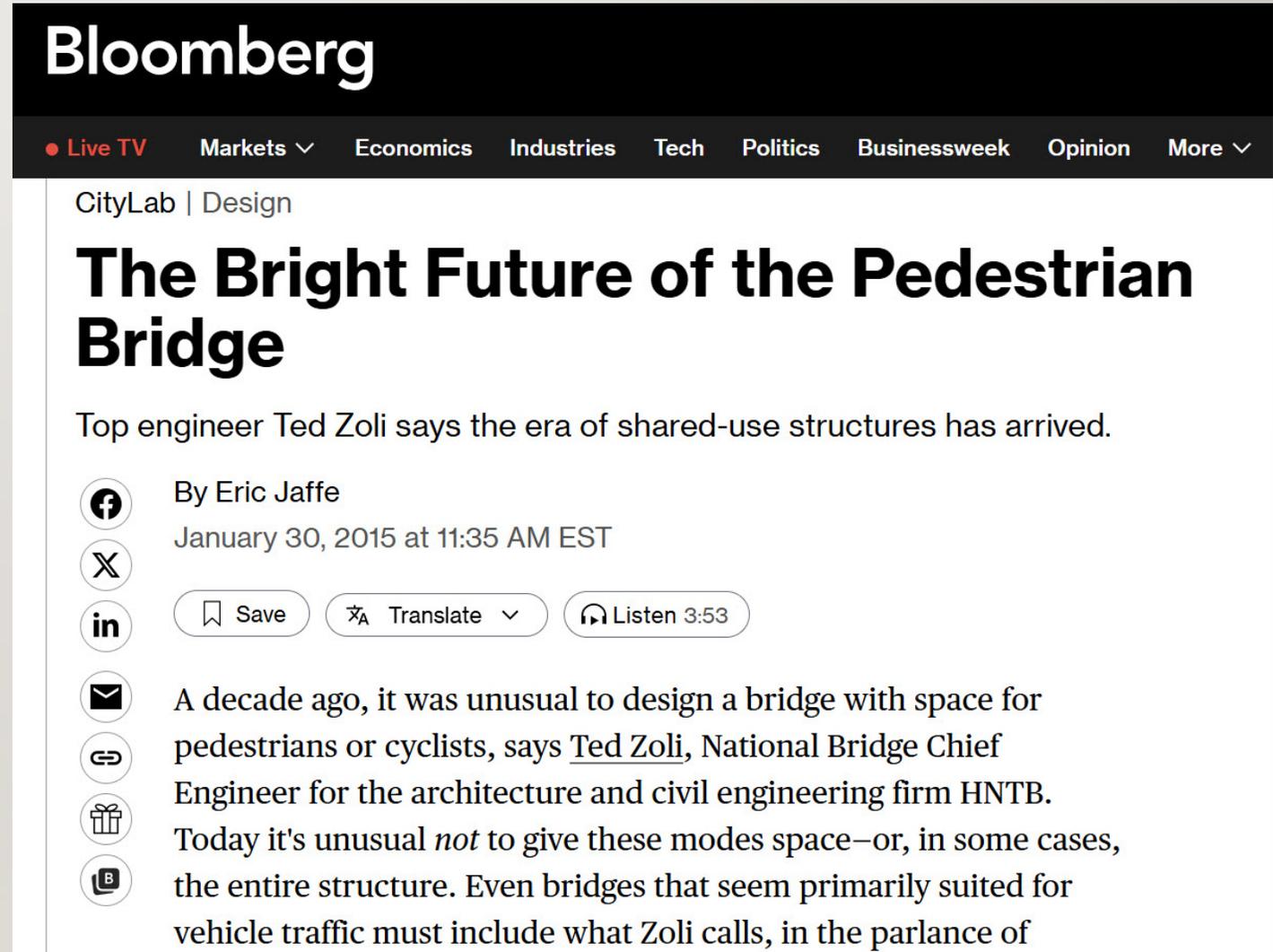
*Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860).*



# YOU ARE NOT INVENTING THE WHEEL HERE.

- Here's a story from 15 years ago.
- What we are talking about today is happening everywhere.

<https://tinyurl.com/Ped-Bridges>



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CityLab | Design

## The Bright Future of the Pedestrian Bridge

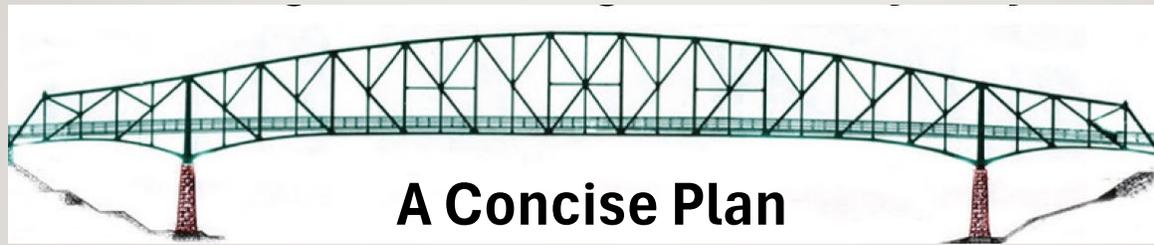
Top engineer Ted Zoli says the era of shared-use structures has arrived.

By Eric Jaffe  
January 30, 2015 at 11:35 AM EST

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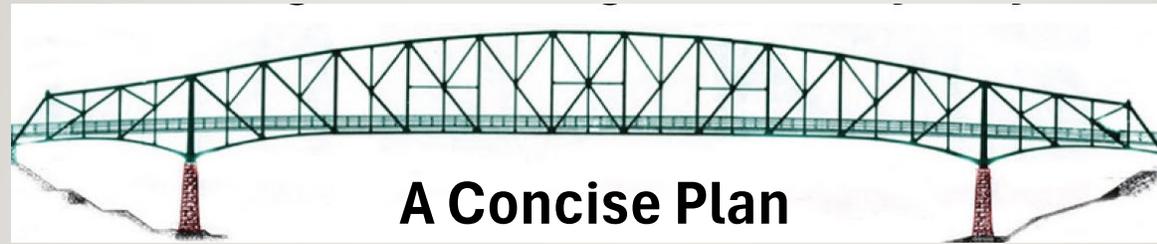
✉ A decade ago, it was unusual to design a bridge with space for pedestrians or cyclists, says Ted Zoli, National Bridge Chief Engineer for the architecture and civil engineering firm HNTB. Today it's unusual *not* to give these modes space—or, in some cases, the entire structure. Even bridges that seem primarily suited for vehicle traffic must include what Zoli calls, in the parlance of





## A Concise Plan

WHO	WHAT	WHEN
VT Legislature	Develop contemporary recreational-use statues like Maine, NH, Mass	ASAP
VT Legislature or the local Regional Planning orgs.	Develop a way for the bridges to be owned by VT to take the burden off of NH	ASAP
The pertinent Regional Planning Agencies in VT, NH and Mass	Develop an organization that would take-in representatives from all parties. Each town, RPA, pertinent state agencies, and local NGOs not only the environmental themed entities, but take-in orgs like Chambers of Commerce and tourism agencies in these locales. Give a welcome too to the Rotary Clubs and other civic orgs. All should be welcomed.	Over the course of the winter and then plan on meeting quarterly with updates from the lead NGO affiliated with the Tri-State initiative. Have a guest speaker for every meeting who is familiar with building a trail in areas where cross-state initiatives don't happen naturally or easy. Yes, there are people who specialize in those things.
"Pick a name" for a not-for-profit org to be stood-up representing the Tri State initiative	Develop/stand-up, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit org to be the umbrella for the needed fundraising (and friend-raising) for the initiative.	ASAP
Hire a consultant to do a report about what it will be worth if a Tri-State Trail Initiative were to get finished	There are only a small handful of consultants that do these type of reports that are highly respected. This is the most important task actually. And privately fund this project.	Hire this consultant as soon as the large, multi-town, multi-state, organization is created.



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VT needs to build more Rail-w-Trail projects and to do this, they'll need to develop contemporary Recreational Use Statutes, like nearby states of Maine, Mass and New Hampshire have already done.

<https://www.norevisionisthistory.org/rails-w-trails>

# Here's some items that'll help you get your Rail with Trail built

- EXAMPLES OF SETBACKS ON CURRENTLY OPEN RAIL-W- TRAIL PROJECTS IN MASS.
- CONTEMPORARY RECREATIONAL-USE STATUTES IN MAINE AND MASS.
- LATEST INFO ON RAIL-W-TRAIL OR DUAL USE CORRIDORS FROM RTC.
- HERE'S WHERE CSX BUILT A BIKE-PED, AT-GRADE CROSSING OF ONE OF THEIR ACTIVE LINES.
- PINSLY RR's CLAREMONT & CONCORD RAILROAD AND THEIR EXPERIENCE

## Example Setbacks: Rails-with-Trails in Massachusetts

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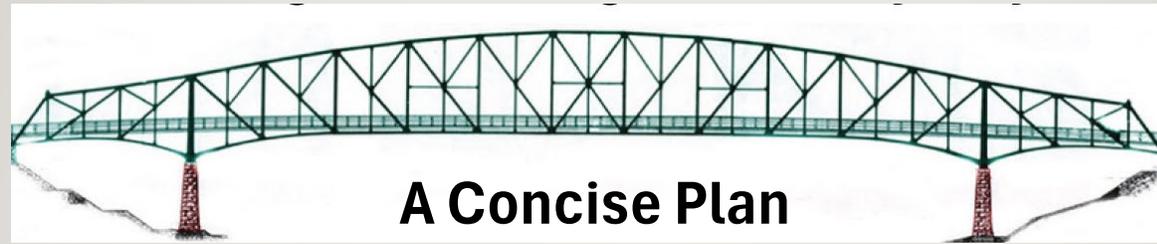
Ben Bayes  
bayesb@gmail.com

[CLICK HERE TO OPEN](#)

Here's a recent look at setbacks seen on rail-w-trail projects around Massachusetts. This has been put together by Ben Bayes, Board member at Norwottuck Network.

<https://www.norevisionisthistory.org/rails-w-trails>

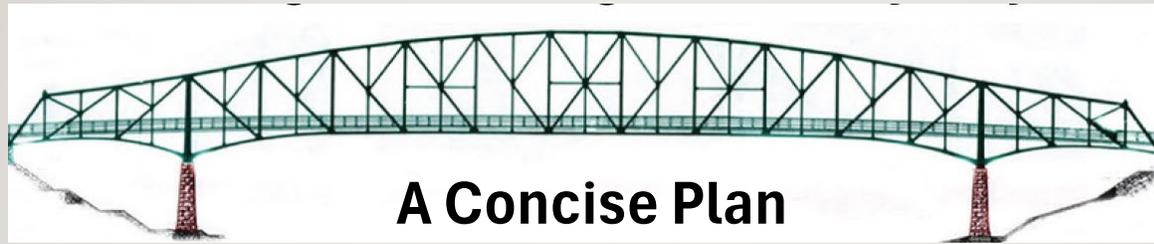




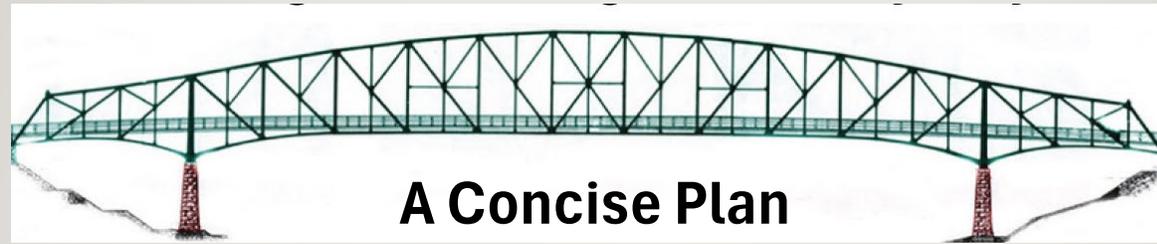
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Develop a way for the bridges in NH and VT to be owned by the state of Vermont to take the burden off the state of New Hampshire.

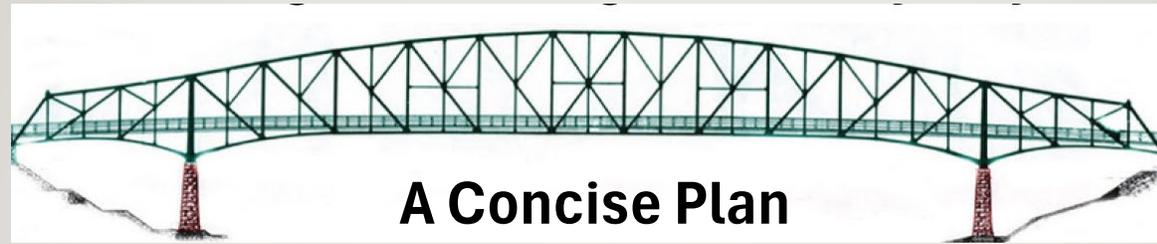
?? Let the lawyers work on this



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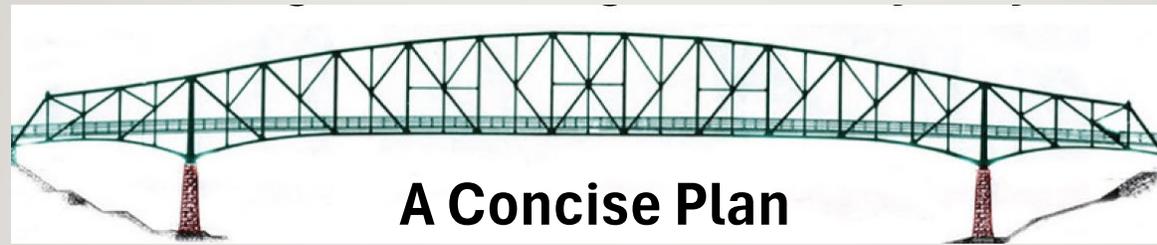


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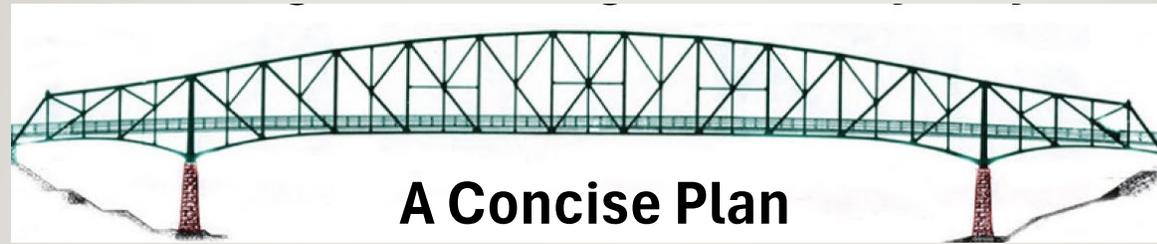
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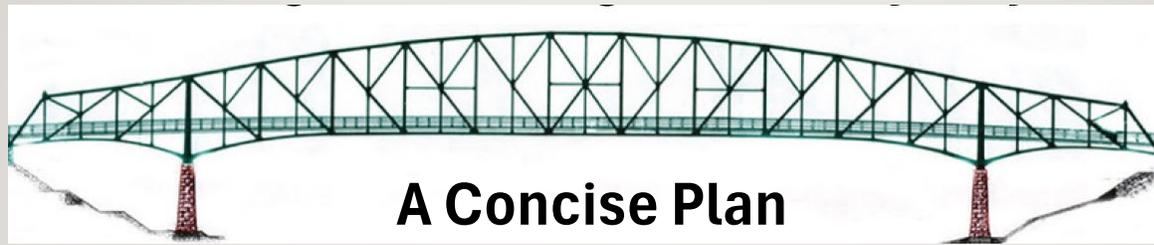
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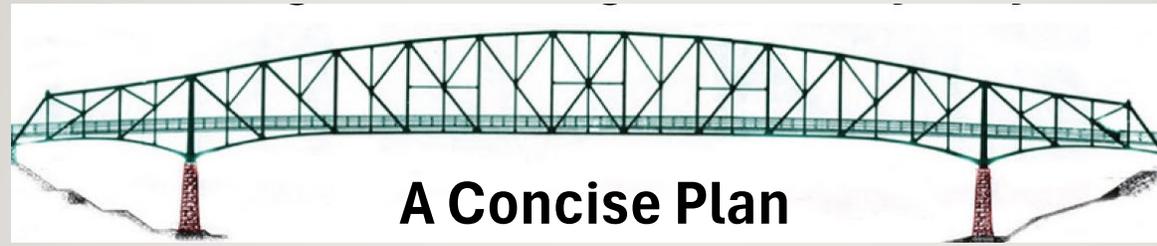
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# THE THREE MOST RESPECTED REPORTS ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF A LONG-DISTANCE LINEAR PARK-TYPE PROJECT

Economic Impact of the Erie Canal  
<https://tinyurl.com/PTNYReport>

Economic Impact Analysis of the New Haven & Northampton Canal Greenway.  
November 2025 (coming soon)

Envisioning a Statewide Connection:  
Mass Central Rail Trail Benefits Study.  
<https://tinyurl.com/MCRT-Report>

**The Economic Impact of the Erie Canalway Trail**  
AN ASSESSMENT AND USER PROFILE OF NEW YORK'S LONGEST MULTI-USE TRAIL

**Executive Summary**

**Parks&Trails**  
NEW YORK

Prepared for:

**CAMBRIDGE**  
ECONOMETRICS

Economic Impact Analysis of the  
New Haven Northampton Canal  
Greenway (NHNCG)

October 7, 2025

Northeast Greenway Solutions  
NORWOTTUCK NETWORK  
NHNCG

camecon.com

*Envisioning a Statewide Connection*  
Mass Central Rail Trail Benefits Study

**DOWNLOAD the REPORT**

Mass Central Rail Trail  
NORWOTTUCK NETWORK  
CAMBRIDGE ECONOMETRICS





Slide 1 & 2

<https://Tinyurl.Com/4-bridges>

Slide 3

[www.tinyurl.com/CDP2pagebio](http://www.tinyurl.com/CDP2pagebio)

Slide 5

<https://tinyurl.com/Ped-Bridges>

Slide 7 & 8

<https://www.norevisionisthistory.org/rails-w-trails>

Slide 17

<https://tinyurl.com/PTNYReport> and

<https://tinyurl.com/MCRT-Report>