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Rail trails get \$1.27 million grant

By Jillian Jorgensen

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Three towns will split more than \$1 million to continue work connecting rail trails in Derry, Windham and Salem, the Southern New Hampshire Rail Trail Alliance announced yesterday.

"The whole idea of this entire corridor is not recreation, it's transportation," said Dave Topham, a member of the alliance. "And that's how we managed to get a \$1.27 million grant."

The group has rated high enough on a list of projects to qualify for a transportation enhancements grant through the New Hampshire Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration. The money has not officially been awarded, Salem's Community Development Director William Scott said.

The money will be divided among the three communities to set up key connections between them. Those connections will create a 10-mile stretch of uninterrupted, paved trail, linking Salem through Windham into downtown Derry.

The alliance includes representatives from the Derry Rail Trail Alliance, the Salem Bike-Ped Corridor Committee, and the Windham Rail Trail Alliance. It was created to help implement the Salem to Concord Bikeway. But Topham acknowledged connecting to Concord is a long time away.

"I don't think any of us will live long enough,

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but we might get to Manchester," he said.

At the southern end of the trail, another group is actively planning to continue the trail from the state border into downtown Methuen.

The grant will pay for three phases of the project over the next few years, Topham said. First will be connecting a paved portion of the trail in Derry to a paved portion in Windham, including the construction of a culvert that will allow bikers and pedestrians to safely pass beneath a road.

The second phase will pave a portion in Windham from Roulston Road to the town line, near Cycles Etc., Topham said. The third phase will pave just over a mile in North Salem, where no work has been done on the trail yet. He said that's by design.

"We want to get the most rail built to serve the most people soonest," he said. "By connecting the trail that's done in Windham to the trail that's done in Derry, we get the most bang for our buck the soonest."

Scott said the alliance came about from the idea that if each town did its own project, that's all they would wind up with.

"If each town came together, then you get 10 miles, and you're really connecting communities," he said.

He said a lot of credit should go to Windham and Derry for getting so much done already.

"Now that we're connecting to Salem, we're connecting to a lot of retail and other opportunities," he said.

Topham said the grant money will go a long way, since most of the money to work on the trails in Derry and Windham has been raised privately. More money still must be raised, Topham said, as the grant requires a 20 percent match.

The rail trail runs along the route of the old Boston & Maine Railroad Manchester-to-Lawrence branch. It will veer off that course in Salem because the old railway bed is a wetland, and will run between the rail corridor and Route 28 in a fenced area.

The trail will allow people who might drive along Interstate 93 from Derry to Salem to have a greener commute, Topham said. Without the trail, bikers would have to take Route 28.

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"The whole idea of this entire corridor is not recreation, it's transportation,"

This is a joke, right!?

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What a waste of our tax dollars. They couldn't find something else to spend the 1.27 million dollars.

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I say the same exact thing! It is a complete waste. If we HAD the money, I would feel different.

With millions unemployed, school districts struggling and police and fire being cut, this money is going to build a TRAIL in the woods! Unbelievable.

Do they realize what the cost will be to keep up the trail? Every season? It will erode from flooding. Trees will fall on it, leaves will need to be cleared, and each spring the trail will need to be monitored during the mud season to ensure it does not have massive holes/sinkholes. The upkeep for things like this, especially in New England is a very big deal.

Do they REALLY think people are going to BIKE to work, instead of driving or taking PT!? That is just comical.

And how much will this trail be used each year? It will be impassible at times, from November until March, possibly longer or shorter. This just makes no

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"Route 28 is not a good bicycling road at all from Salem to Derry," he said.

While the trail may become a popular recreation destination, Topham said it will be more than that.

"It really serves a lot of people, and with far more than just recreation," he said. "This opens up communities, businesses and even tourism."

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