



January 10, 2025
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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\$17.3 Million RAISE grant will prepare a 9.3-mile shared-use path connecting northern Berkshire communities for construction

Pivotal award result of collaboration between BRPC's Berkshire Funding Focus, municipalities of Adams, North Adams, and Williamstown, MASS MoCA, and TOURISTS

Berkshire County, MA – Congressman Richard Neal announced a major federal grant award on Friday from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program. The award will fund complete planning, design, and permitting for the "Adventure to Ashuwillticook Trail," or "A2A Trail Project", a 9.3-mile stretch of shared-use pathway connecting the existing Ashuwillticook Rail Trail to the Williamstown Mohican Path by way of downtown North Adams and the rotary of the MASS MoCA campus. This comprehensive preparation phase will move a unique regional opportunity for connectivity to 100% design and "shovel-ready" status.

"As we begin the new year, we are starting right where we left off in 2024 – announcing millions of dollars to improve our infrastructure throughout western Massachusetts. This is the direct result of our efforts at the federal level to pass a once-in-a-generation investment in our nation's roads, bridges, airports, clean water, and public transportation. Funding for the U.S. Department of Transportation's RAISE program came from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – legislation that was drafted in the Ways and Means Committee under my chairmanship," said Congressman Richard Neal. "This \$17.3 million grant is part of more than \$27 million awarded to the First District in this latest allotment, supporting projects from Berkshire County to Worcester County. The Adventure to Ashuwillticook Trail Project will highlight the natural resources in North County – a true asset that attracts thousands of visitors every year. This project will play a key role in stimulating significant economic activity throughout the region, while promoting the health and well-being of local residents."

The landmark grant award is the result of a collaborative effort involving Berkshire Funding Focus, a government funding initiative of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), along with three municipalities: Adams, North Adams, and Williamstown, as well as MASS MoCA and TOURISTS hotel. BRPC will coordinate the ongoing partnership and manage the grant award over the course of the four-year process.

"BRPC is very proud to partner with local governments, private businesses, and non-profit entities who are eager to move this project forward and believe so strongly in the promise of Berkshire collaboration," states Executive Director Tom Matuszko. "The major benefit afforded by the RAISE grant is that it will provide for the design of the entire segment, which will then open doors for future construction funding in a fully shovel-ready state."

The A2A Trail Project will yield significant economic benefits, connecting premier northern Berkshire cultural tourism destinations, including the Clark Art Institute, Williams College Museum of Art, MASS MoCA, Adams Theater, galleries, historic properties, restaurants, retail shops, and hospitality properties. Similar trails in Massachusetts and across the nation boast multi-million-dollar economic impacts, including long-term job creation, visitor spending, and local tax generation.

The development of the A2A Trail Project is a transformational infrastructure link for the region and has the amplifying impact of more broadly realizing the vision for a 75-mile trail system from the Vermont border north of Williamstown to the Connecticut border south of Sheffield. To date, each component of Berkshire County's shared use paths has evolved independently, a long and cumbersome process. Now, communities are working together to realize this vision.

"Not having an abandoned railway to convert has been a significant challenge in the extension of the bike trail through North Adams, from both design and fiscal perspectives," shared North Adams' Mayor, Jennifer Macksey. "This award is pivotal in terms of accelerating our pace for planning. I have to thank BRPC and our public and private partners for advocating for this essential investment in linking the northern Berkshires to the existing bike path system, and particularly our congressional delegation for their continued support of our infrastructure projects. Connection to the Berkshires' natural resources – as well as the wealth of educational and cultural resources our region has to offer - benefits everyone, physically and mentally, and will enhance our region's overall economy."

The Adventure to Ashuwillticook Trail

Local and regional public entities have spent the past two decades trying earnestly but unsuccessfully to find a route through the narrow Hoosic River valley, but changing personnel, a lack of financial resources, and the challenges of navigating the still active rail lines in North Adams led to each proposal losing steam. Particularly problematic was the patchwork of neighborhoods between the towns, which in past proposals meant several potentially dangerous trail crossings of Route 2.

"This project will be key to strengthening the connections between our neighboring communities," states Williamstown Town Manager, Robert Menicocci. "It will allow the final connection between Williamstown and the broader regional bike path network to finally move towards construction, a vision that has been in our region for decades."

A 1.75-mile section of the east-west trail will traverse land assembled as part of the TOURISTS hotel campus. TOURISTS partners Ben Svenson and Eric Kerns have passionately advocated for this project and contributed significant time and resources positioning it for this kind of major support. "When we kicked off our hotel project in 2015, bike paths were progressing in neighboring communities while the North Adams sections were stalled, despite having indisputably transformative economic, community, and environmental value," said Kerns. "Since then, we've done everything we can to eliminate barriers, raised funds to support progress, and told this ambitious story to anyone and everyone who would listen. This regional coalition, and the watershed funding it has enabled, is the glorious manifestation of the creative, community, and now financial capital we've all been working so hard to assemble."

The A2A Trail route creatively interacts with its existing built and natural environment as it weaves along the Hoosic River through former industrial relics, waterways, and underpasses, intersecting with the Appalachian Trail, and offering new connections to public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities. Svenson added, "For almost exactly a decade, we've been thinking about how to get this done while we're brushing our teeth in the morning. It's a testament to stubborn determination and a powerful network of advocates and supporters that we can now celebrate this enormous victory for everyone in North Adams

and the surrounding communities.”

MASS MoCA has been a key partner in the continued development of trail concepts and stands at the location of the proverbial “golden spike” of the A2A Trail. “There is phenomenal collaborative work that went into this from many in the Northern Berkshires region, and I am so proud that MASS MoCA could play a catalytic role,” said Kristy Edmunds, Director. “This will be a game-changer for the region and underscores that persistence of vision, seamless coordination, propulsive early philanthropic support, and great timing can attain a long-sought-after goal and future legacy. It’s important to acknowledge that this idea is the result of successive generations of passionate advocacy coming to fruition. It addresses one of our many long-standing transportation needs, spurs new growth in the region’s creative economy, and reconnects people to each other, the environment, and their neighborhoods in powerful ways.”

MASS MoCA’s campus will serve as the rotary where the east-west Adventure Trail and north-south Ashuwillticook Rail Trail connect. Morgan Everett, MASS MoCA’s Director of Public Initiatives and Real Estate, added, “By working together to realize this essential bike and pedestrian trail that will surround MASS MoCA’s campus, we have the exciting chance to link our local communities, businesses, and cultural institutions, while also improving the daily lives of residents and enriching the experience of visitors. This long-desired dream is now an incredible opportunity for us all to usher in a new era of connectedness, vibrancy, and sustainability for the region.”

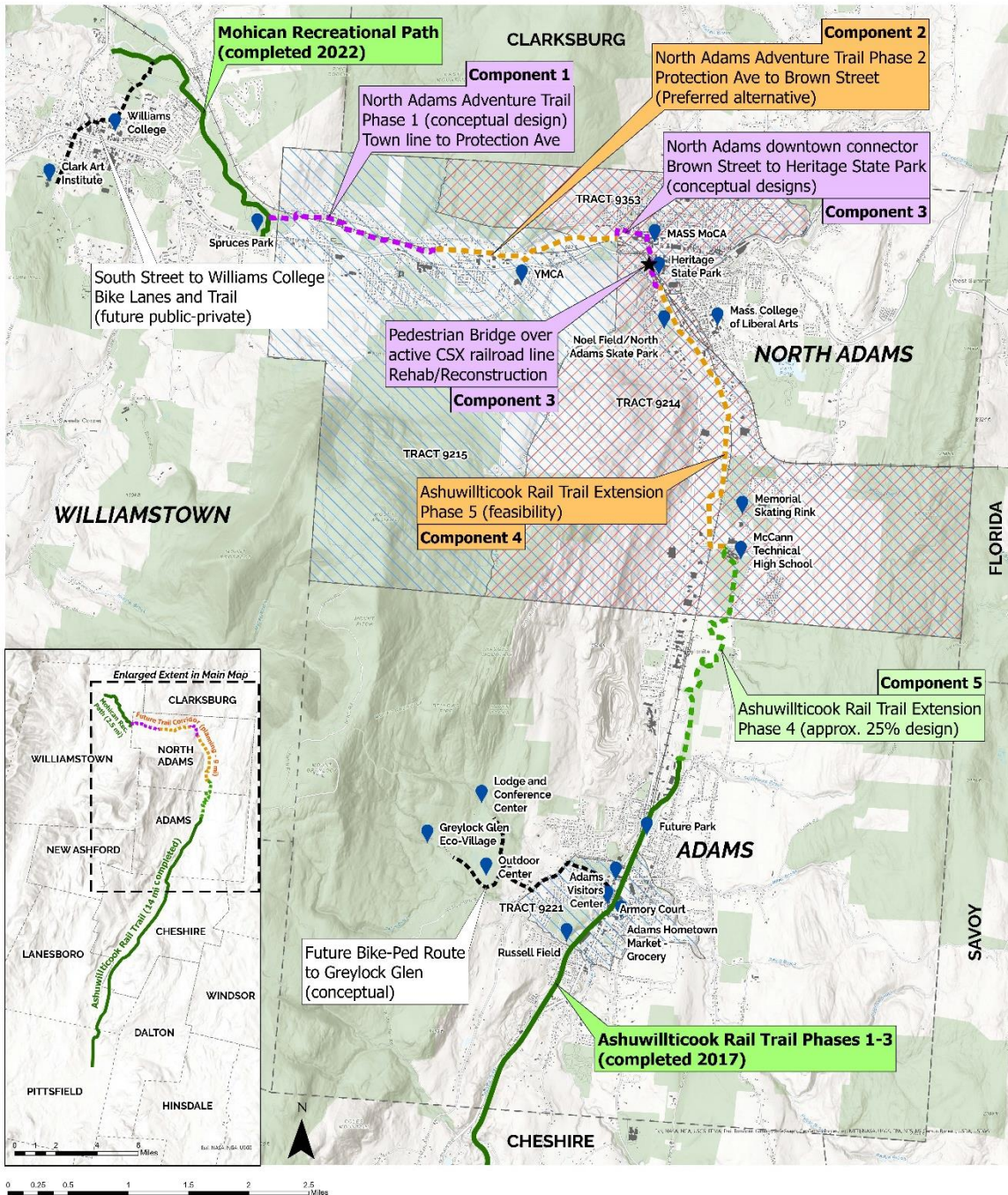
Beyond MASS MoCA, the trail will continue through North Adams south along the Hoosic River for three miles to Hodges Cross Road adjacent to the McCann Technical School campus, following the river until reaching Lime Street in Adams, the current terminus of the 14-mile Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. “The vision for a regional bike path through the Berkshires has been decades in the making, and after today, takes a major step towards realization,” said Adams Selectboard Chair, John Duval. “Development of the RAISE application was a true regional and collaborative effort that has resulted in a ‘once in a lifetime’ funding award and will position the project for future construction. The Town cannot thank BRPC enough for its leadership and assistance in this effort.”

BRPC’s Transportation team has been involved in each stage of the region’s shared-use path planning for several decades. “BRPC has participated in everything from conceptual planning and funding acquisition to design and construction,” says Clete Kus, Transportation Program Manager. Providing regional coordination and supporting collaboration between communities and stakeholders resulted in the initial 14 miles of the rail trail, and we are eager to see the next phase come to fruition.” Senior Transportation Planner Nick Russo added, “In 2024, over 122,000 bicycle and pedestrian trips were recorded entering the Ashuwillticook at Route 8 in Lanesborough and Park Street in Adams. We can only expect more to be counted as the trail expands. The design funding provided for this next segment will allow for the project to move forward efficiently as one investment, rather than in a more piecemeal fashion that the region is accustomed to seeing.”

About BRPC: [Berkshire Regional Planning Commission](#) is the regional planning agency for Berkshire County, Massachusetts, providing comprehensive planning services to municipalities, which include land use, transportation, community and economic development, housing, public health, and environmental planning. BRPC promotes regional collaboration among communities and works to increase coordination between all levels of government.

About Berkshire Funding Focus: [Berkshire Funding Focus](#) supports Berkshire County entities seeking federal and state funds and builds organizational and sector capacity for the long term. BFF helps grant-seekers become aware of and be more competitive for government funding. Investment in our region is strengthened by BFF’s role as:

- A clearinghouse for relevant government grant opportunities
- A convenor of potential partners to explore collaborative proposals
- A counselor to answer questions and help navigate grant requirements



NORTHERN BERKSHIRE BIKE PATH STATUS

Legend

- Ashuwillticook Rail Trail (constructed)
- Mohican Recreational Trail (constructed)
- - - Ashuwillticook Extension Phase 2 (design)
- - - Downtown North Adams Connector (conceptual)
- - - Adventure Trail Phase 1 (conceptual)
- - - Adventure Trail Phase 2 (preferred alternative)
- - - Ashuwillticook North Adams Extension Phase 3 (conceptual)
- - - South Street to Williams College (future public-private)
- - - Greylock Glen Connection (future town project)
- + Railroads
- Towns
- Area of Persistent Poverty
- Historically Disadvantaged Community
- Open Space

