



**Imagine** a path without traffic from Belmont Center to Alewife. You could walk or bike safely with your kids. You could commute to the subway without getting trapped in traffic jams at either end—or ride on to Boston, Harvard Square, or Davis Square in Somerville.

A weekend bike ride could take you onto the **Minuteman Bikeway** through Arlington, Lexington, and into Bedford; through Watertown to the **Charles River**; or along the new bike path planned beside **Alewife Brook** and Route 16 to the Mystic River. Someday, you could look forward to riding west as far as **Northampton** or beyond.

This could become reality. The Belmont Citizens Forum, an 11-year-old environmental organization, has taken several key steps to making this vision of a **community path** come true. We have **acquired 2.4 acres** of land in a 30-foot wide strip next to the commuter rail tracks between Belmont Center and Brighton Street. We have **won a \$10,000 grant** to help with design of the path, but that will pay only a portion of the cost. Many steps remain. We hope to have your help.

**Look inside** for more information and answers to frequently asked questions.

**Q. I don't bike and I'm not likely to walk to Alewife. Why would I want a path?**

**A.** Virtually every bicycle commuter takes a single-occupancy car off the road. We should all see a difference in the amount of traffic in Belmont once a community path is in full operation.

**Q. What is the Citizens Forum proposing?**

**A.** A new stretch—less than a mile long—of a community path through Belmont. It will create a short route for pedestrians and bicyclists from Belmont Center to Brighton Street. At Brighton Street, it will meet an existing gravel path, being paved and improved this year, to the Alewife T station.

**Q. What is a community path?**



**A.** It's a wide path, usually paved, shared by bicyclists and pedestrians for exercise or commuting. No motor vehicles are allowed. A shared-use path is a wonderful amenity that will be used by a large part of the town's population. It should enhance the quality of life in Belmont and bring more business to Belmont Center.

**Q. How far is it from the Center to Alewife?**

**A.** The total distance is 1.7 miles, a 10-minute bike ride or a half-hour walk. At commuting times, it takes longer to drive and now costs \$7 to park. This is the first step in an effort to

fill a three-mile gap between two segments of a community path that will one day stretch most of the distance across Massachusetts.

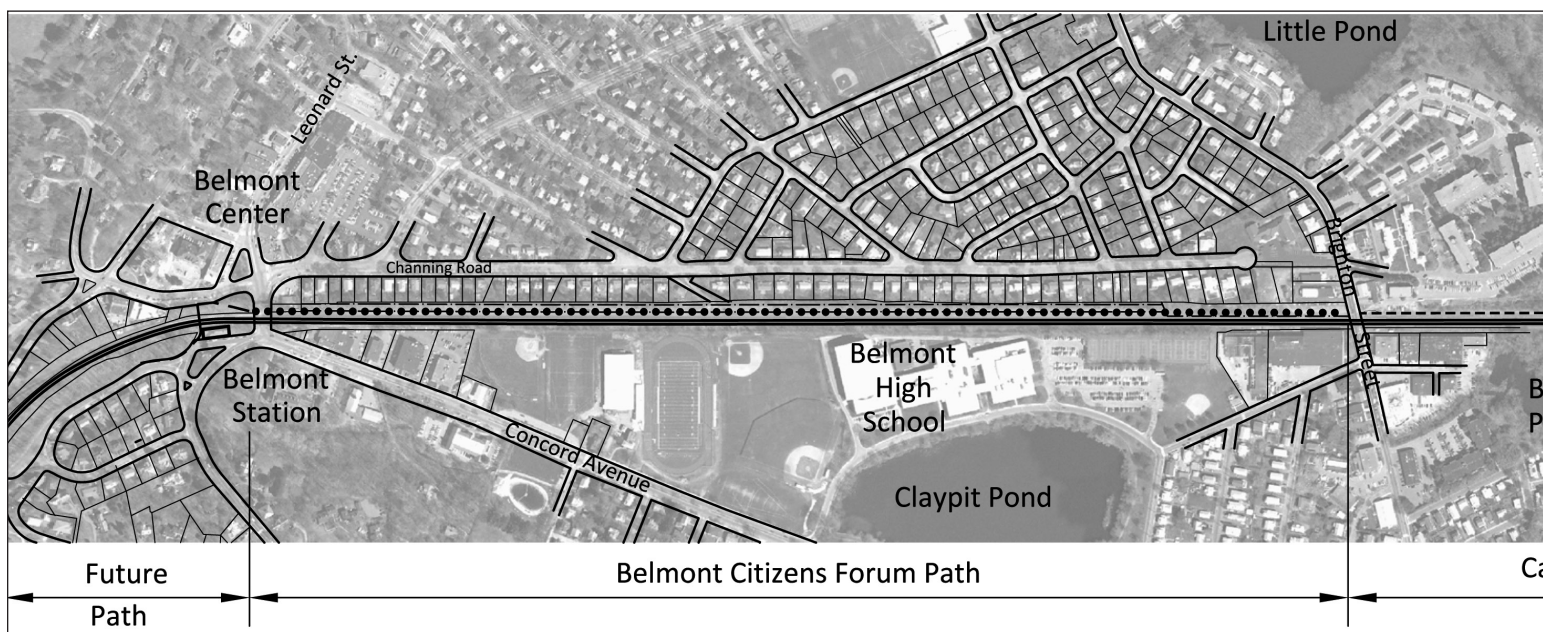
**Q. What's this three-mile gap?**

**A.** The Mass Central Rail Trail has long been planned along the route of the defunct Central Massachusetts Railroad. Parts of it are in use already, mostly in western Massachusetts. The state has taken responsibility for more than 30 miles of eastern sections—except for three miles in Belmont and Waltham. The Massachusetts Highway Department is now working on a 5-mile stretch from Davis Square to Brighton Street. The Department of Conservation and Recreation has signed a 99-year lease with the MBTA for the right of way for 26 miles from Waltham to Berlin. The missing link will lie in Belmont and Waltham.



**Q. Who will pay for the community path?**

**A.** The Citizens Forum has acquired much of the land for this first segment and expects to transfer it to the state. We're raising money for the design. Eighty percent of the construction costs will come from federal funds. Mass Highway typically pays another 10 percent, and local sponsors fund the remainder. The 10 percent local portion could come from Community Preservation Act funds and private donations.





**Q. How much money will be required to maintain this amenity in Belmont?**

**A.** Path maintenance is inexpensive. Lexington's Park and Forestry divisions spend roughly \$1000 per mile for the Minuteman Bikeway. Even when the path is complete, only about two miles of it will be in Belmont.

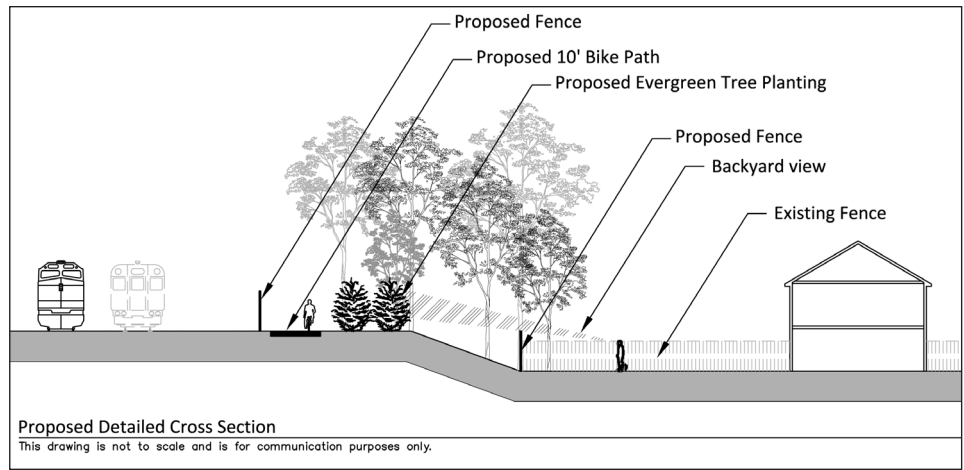
**Q. What's the route of the path in Belmont?**

**A.** From Belmont Center to Brighton Street it would parallel the commuter rail tracks on the railroad embankment between the westbound track and Channing Road. See the map below. The embankment is extremely wide because it used to carry four tracks belonging to two competing railroads—one of them the Central Mass. When those tracks were pulled up decades ago, the land on the north side of the embankment was sold off. That's what the Belmont Citizens Forum has purchased. Most of that land will serve as a buffer, with landscaping to shield abutters.



**Q. What's the likely route west of the Center?**

**A.** Bringing the community path to Belmont Center would be a major milestone. The route between Belmont Center and Linden Street in Waltham has not been determined.



**Q. What is this land now used for?**

**A.** It's a vacant parcel adjoining the commuter rail tracks.

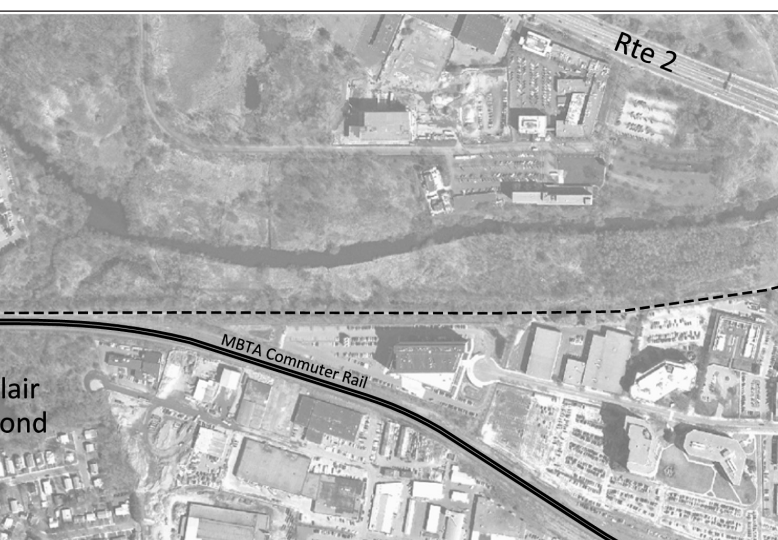
**Q. Will the path be safe?**



**A.** Two safety issues are the active commuter rail line and crime. "Rails with trail" paths have been a success. The Green Line extension to Somerville and Medford is planned adjacent to the Somerville Community Path. The MBTA, DCR, and other state agencies have designed and approved the community path from Alewife to Brighton Street with the same black steel picket fence to separate tracks and trail that is proposed to Belmont Center. As for crime, we've been told that community paths do not attract criminals. In contrast to the current conditions behind Channing Road, an open and well-traveled community path will be more accessible to Belmont police and will prevent the unsafe situation where children cross the active tracks and congregate out of reach of law enforcement.

**Q. Isn't a route on the streets—Concord Avenue to Underwood Street and Hittinger Street to Brighton Street—just as good?**

**A.** People don't feel as safe riding on the streets, especially riding through traffic at Belmont Center. Though Concord Avenue and Underwood Street are now striped, they're not heavily used. A May 2007 study of bike commuters at the Alewife garage during the morning rush hour found only 4 of 68 were from Belmont. A street route isn't the same as an off-road, shared-use path reserved for non-motorized vehicles. Safety and congestion on our streets will not improve.



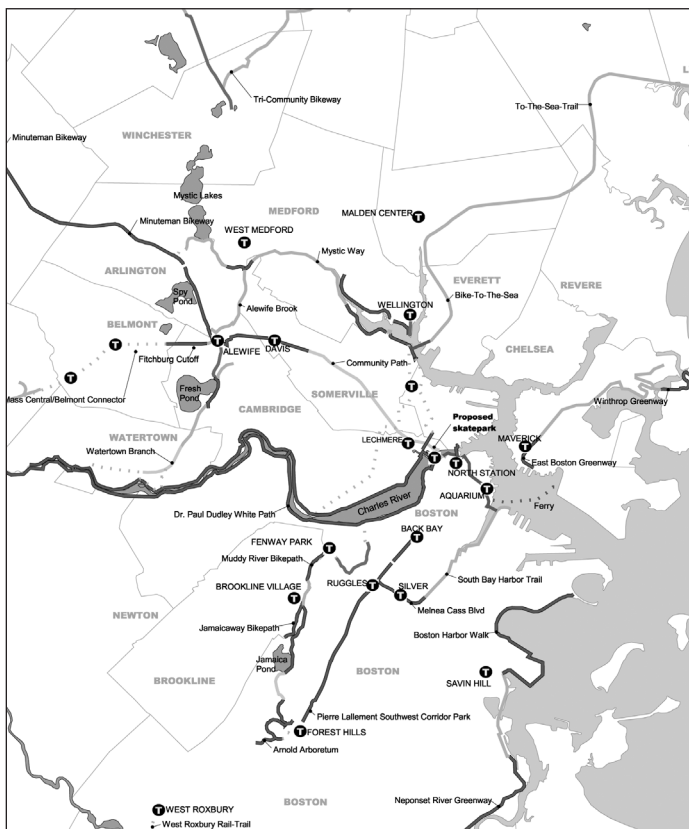
Cambridge path construction by Mass Highway, 2010

**Q. Will the path affect the value of my home?**

**A.** Probably only for the better. A 2005 study of home sales in Minuteman Bikeway communities by rail-trail advocate Craig Della Penna showed that properties close to the trail sold for a slightly higher percentage of the listed price and sold much more quickly, in less than half the average time it took to sell other properties in the same town. Realtors in towns along bikeways frequently mention the bike path in ads to attract buyers. Most homeowners with properties abutting the Minuteman Bikeway have installed gates or passages to allow their families easy access to the path.

**Q. How long will it take to complete this new stretch from Belmont Center to Brighton Street?**

**A.** That depends on many factors. Planning and funding take time, but construction can be quick. The 11-mile Minuteman Bikeway took 15 months to build.



Filling the three-mile gap in the Mass Central Rail Trail would connect most of Belmont to a wide network of community paths. Map courtesy of Bryce Nesbitt.

**Q. What is the Belmont Citizens Forum?**

**A.** The Belmont Citizens Forum was organized in 1999 with a goal of maintaining Belmont's small-town atmosphere by preserving its natural and historical resources, limiting traffic growth, and enhancing pedestrian safety. We do that in part by keeping residents informed about local and regional development proposals and by organizing public forums on such issues as traffic, flooding, transportation, and planning.



**Q. What else has the Citizens Forum worked on?**

- A.** We have undertaken a number of long-range projects:
- We called attention to Belmont's need to improve its failing sanitary sewer system, which spews hazardous waste, not just stormwater, into many basements and streets. Now the town is beginning to replace its broken sewer lines.
  - We've spotlighted the potential of the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor as a pleasant Main Street for residents and shops, not the commuter thoroughfare it is now. The roadway is scheduled to be rebuilt with many traffic-calming improvements in 2014, and the town is studying rezoning of the business districts.
  - Our first project was a study of pedestrian accidents. As a result, Belmont made international-style crosswalks the town standard. We funded the installation of the first five new crosswalks.

**Q. How can I help?**

**A.** You can sign the petition and **collect signatures**, and fill out the coupon on the back page. We'd appreciate it if you would include a donation—for projects like this mailing and for design and engineering—and a note about how you'd like to volunteer.



## How You Can Support This Project

📧 **Send an e-mail** of support to the Board of Selectmen at: [selectmen@belmont.town.ma.us](mailto:selectmen@belmont.town.ma.us)

👤 **Volunteer** for fund-raising, planning and design, advocacy, etc.

👤 **Contribute** to help fund path planning and design.

## Have You Read Our *Newsletter*?

We report in depth on topics that relate to our mission: traffic and transportation, pedestrian safety, planning, historic preservation, and protecting open space. Recent stories cover green living: How to remodel your house to reduce your carbon footprint? Why grow native plants and uproot invasives? How about green burial? And of course we cover progress on the Belmont Community Path and other bike issues. Newsletter readers have told us they appreciate our thorough examination of local issues that isn't available elsewhere.

For a sample copy check the box on the coupon. We'll send you the next issue without charge or obligation.

## Coupon

☐ Yes, I'd like to volunteer.

☐ Yes, I'd like to contribute:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$100

\_\_\_\_\_ \$200 \_\_\_\_\_ other

☐ Yes, send me a sample copy of the BCF *Newsletter*:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Please make checks out to Belmont Citizens Forum.** Your contribution is tax deductible.

**Please mail this form in the enclosed envelope to**

Belmont Citizens Forum

P.O. Box 609

Belmont, MA 02478

## Petition for the Belmont Community Path



We support the development of a plan to build a public community path for pedestrian and bicycle use on the strip of land located behind Channing Road and parallel to the commuter rail tracks between Belmont Center and Brighton Street. This plan should address the need for appropriate fencing, landscaping, and other design features reasonably required to meet concerns expressed by abutters. This segment will complete an off-road link from Belmont Center to Alewife and will benefit current and future generations of Belmont residents by offering convenient access to public transportation, healthful recreation, and a reduction in traffic and air pollution on local roadways.


Signed	Name (printed)	Address	E-mail/phone
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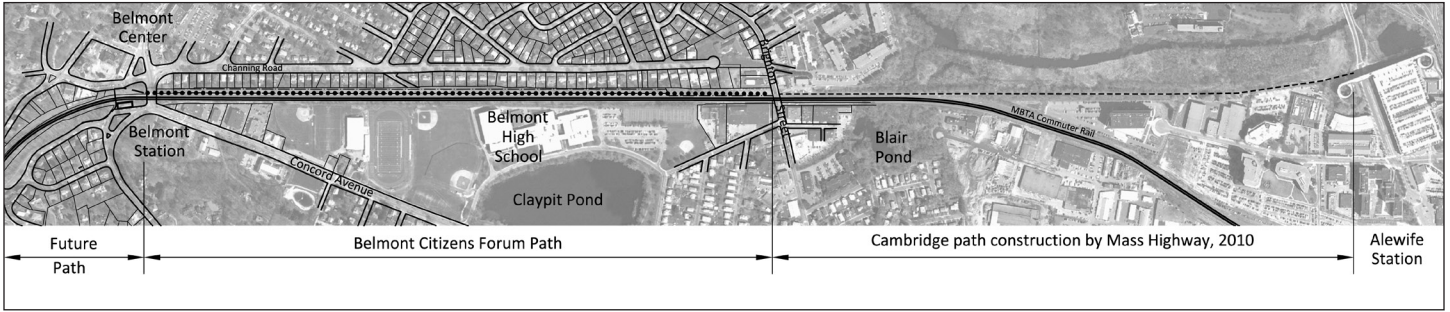




Belmont Citizens Forum

Imagine a path.... The Belmont Citizens Forum, an 11-year-old environmental organization, has taken several key steps toward making the vision of a **community path** come true. See what we've done already and what steps remain.

We hope to have your **help.** 



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