



## Port gets \$450K for boardwalk

**Stephen Tait**

— NEWBURYPORT — The state Seaport Advisory Council voted to give the city \$450,000 to help develop a new section of its boardwalk along the Merrimack River, a grant that local officials had fought hard to obtain.

The money will fund a 320-foot long boardwalk underneath Route 1, which will connect Cashman Park to the so-called Waterfront West — the area between the Black Cow restaurant and Michael's Harborside. That connection will link the commuter rail station to the downtown district.

Passing under Route 1 is expected to be the most costly aspect of the work.

Once the development of Waterfront West is finished, the section will connect the downtown district to Cashman Park.

"I think this gives us a very unique position," Mayor John Moak said. "That portion of it is going to be great. It is a tremendous link. I think it is going to make that rail trail very viable. There is a real reason to use it.

"It is good for the people of Newburyport. It is going to give people easy access."

State Rep. Michael Costello, D-Newburyport, and Moak courted Lt. Gov. Tim Murray last month in pursuit of the grant, giving him a tour of the city to show the potential impact of such a trail system, and assembling local officials and prominent community members at Michael's Harborside.

The sales pitch worked, evidenced when the council voted unanimously Friday to give Newburyport the money.

"That certainly had a big influence," Moak said.

Costello said the money is important since it will help link together the rail trail, which could provide increased tourism to the city and the surrounding region.

For example, he said that in the near future people in Boston could hop on the train with their bikes, travel to Newburyport and visit the region without ever having to get into a car.

"It was a big score for Newburyport," Costello said of the money.

During Murray's visit last month, he said fostering tourism — an \$850 million industry in the state — is important. He said the key to attract tourism is to make it easier for people to travel, which includes making the connections Newburyport is striving for in the rail trail.

Moak said city officials have been working for funding for the boardwalk for about three years. Much of the credit is due to Geordie Vining, the city's senior project manager who has helped develop much of the rail trail system in the city, the mayor said.

"We got help, and we worked hard to get it," Moak said.

The link that will travel underneath Route 1 is a segment of a larger system of trails that will create a three-mile loop in Newburyport.

Next summer, construction will start on a 1.141-mile long, 10-foot wide, paved trail to be used by bicyclists, joggers, walkers and others that will lead from the north side of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority train station to the Merrimack River, near the Route 1 bridge, on the old rail corridor.

Construction for that phase could go into 2009 but no longer than that. The \$2.8 million project is funded by grants from the state and federal government.

The next phase will aim to turn the railroad corridor along the old City Branch rail into a trail. For the second phase, besides funding, the city must also secure rights of way, which Vining said either need to be purchased or acquired through other means, along the railroad corridor.

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Photos



A drawing of proposed boardwalk extension, going under the Route 1 and railroad bridges, past River's Edge Condominiums into Cashman Park. Courtesy Photo