

To: Christian Pulver, Instructor of ENGL 379
From:
Subject: A Report on the Feasibility of Writing and Submitting a Proposal to Seek Funding for the Construction of a New Bike Trail in Western Massachusetts
Date: November 10, 2008

Purpose:

The purpose of this memo is to report on whether or not a grant proposal to construct a new bike path would be accepted, funded, and fulfilled.

Summary:

The proposed project would construct a bike trail to span from Amherst into Hadley, called the Hadley Trail. While certain organizations specialize in grants for trail construction, funding appears to be limited. My research shows that what could be obtained would cover between an eighth and a third of the estimated cost of such a project. Therefore, a project as large as the Hadley Trail may not be feasible at this time. I should instead work toward a smaller grant, focusing on the more feasible project of improving the current Norwottuck Rail Trail.

Background/discussion:

The Hadley Trail would begin in Amherst Center perpendicular to where the current Norwottuck Rail Trail crosses Pleasant Street, and would continue south along Route 116 to Hampshire College. The total trail would span approximately 3.1 miles.

The current Norwottuck Rail Trail spans 10 miles from Northampton to Belchertown. It makes bicycle travel between the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst College, and Smith College easy. In 2002 the UMass Connector Trail was opened, connecting the Norwottuck Rail Trail directly with the UMass Amherst campus. The addition I propose would add Hampshire College to this system, with the hope that the trail could eventually be extended to Mount Holyoke College as well. Such a project would connect all five colleges by bikeway.

While I have no experience building trails, I commute to work by bicycle in the summer and use my bike for recreation whenever possible year round. By building more bike paths and lanes, we can encourage more bicycle commuting and recreational use. In cities where bicycles are well accommodated, a larger portion of the population relies on bikes as its primary mode of transportation.

In Copenhagen, Denmark, where there over 250 miles of bikeways, approximately 36% of citizens commute by bike. Portland, Oregon, also has over 200 miles of bikeways, and has the highest percentage of people who bike to work of all American cities. In 1992, when Portland had only 83 miles of bikeways, 2,850 trips were made by bicycle daily. In

2002 there were 238 miles of bikeways and 8,250 trips were made by bicycle daily. Safe bikeways distinct from traffic lanes therefore promote greater bicycle use.

A study in Los Angeles observed numbers of cyclists on a particular path before and after the construction of an extension. Observers concluded that there was a 38% increase in cyclists overall a year after the extension was completed (Cohen, et al. 2008).

Greater bicycle use has a variety of benefits. Studies have shown that cycling to school is associated with better cardio-respiratory fitness in children (Cooper 2008). And a study in Sydney, Australia, reports that:

those people physically active in their journey to work were the least likely to be overweight or obese after taking into account leisure-time physical activity.

Cycling, in particular, had a strong inverse association with being obese. (Wen et al. 2008)

Cycling is therefore important for its health benefits.

Few foundations give grants out to individuals. Therefore, I would write this grant on behalf of MassBike's Pioneer Valley chapter, which "Fight[s] for bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure on our roads and in our communities: bike lanes; bike paths; RailTrails; bike parking; wide sidewalks; public open space and parks; etc." MassBike is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Most foundations will not award grants to organizations that are not classified as 501(c)(3) non-profit. MassBike's devotion to bicycle advocacy and its status make it an appropriate organization for which I would write this grant.

To better insure that my project would be funded, I decided to search for organizations that specialize in this type of venture. Bikes Belong is one such foundation. It is based in Boulder, Colorado, and is sponsored by the U.S. bicycle industry. According to its website, "Bikes Belong's mission is to put more people on bicycles often. We work to make bicycling better in America [...]," in part by "awarding grants to help create more and better places to ride."

Bikes Belong awards grants that fall under two categories: bike facility and bike advocacy. Projects fundable under the facility category include bike paths, trails, routes and lanes. The Hadley Trail, a paved bike path, is therefore exactly the type of project that Bikes Belong specializes in. Moreover, Bikes Belong prefers to fund proposals submitted by non-profit organizations that specialize in bike advocacy, like MassBike. Currently, Bikes Belong awards grants to roughly 15-20% of the proposals they receive. Based on these facts, Bikes Belong would be likely to provide funds for the Hadley Trail, provided the proposal detailed a specific project.

Since Bikes Belong prefers not to be the only funder of a project, I sought other sources of funding, coming up with little at first. I discovered the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which provides grants to communities, user groups, and non-profit organizations to plan and develop new trails throughout Massachusetts through its Recreational Trails Grants Program. Of their total grant funding, 30% is

given to non-motorized use trails, 30% to motorized use trails, and 40% to trails that facilitate diverse use.

My project would fall within the 30% given for non-motorized use trails, as it would only be open to cyclists, pedestrians, skaters and wheelchairs. However, the focus for the Recreational Trails Grants Program differs from that of Bikes Belong. The RTGP focuses on the recreation aspect of trails rather than transportation. If I hoped to secure funds through this program, my proposal would have to highlight the recreational aspects of the Hadley Trail.

For example, I would explain how Groff Park, located on Route 116, would be more accessible by bicycle from Hampshire College, UMass, and Amherst College if the Hadley Trail were built. I would also highlight the fact that the Norwottuck Rail Trail is used primarily for recreation. According to a 2002 survey, 55% of Saturday users and 29% of Thursday users listed "recreation" as their trip purpose, and 38% of Saturday users and 40% of Thursday users listed "fitness" as their trip purpose. (Norwottuck Rail Trail Survey). This focus on recreation would make the DCR likely to fund my project.

However, there are some difficulties. The "match" part of the Recreational Trails Grants could be one such difficulty. The guidelines for "in-kind" match contributions on the DCR website claim that "money from other grants and donations" is allowed, but that "contributions that occurred prior to notification of the grant award" are not allowed. According to this information, I would have to be awarded the Recreational Trails Grant before I could obtain funds from Bikes Belong. While this is possible, it would extend the length of the project. One positive of this is that already having the grant from the DCR would make Bikes Belong more likely to fund the Hadley Trail project.

The Recreational Trails Grants are provided on a reimbursement basis. MassBike or a representative of MassBike would have to take out a \$40,000 loan, or find an individual donor who would provide the funds until the DCR reimbursed us. This could pose a problem if we could not find a donor or could not obtain a loan.

Another difficulty is that the normal amount of funding granted by Bikes Belong is only \$10,000. The DCR provides grants on an 80-20 basis, and would match the \$10,000 from Bikes Belong with \$40,000, giving MassBike a total of \$50,000 to work with for the Hadley Trail. \$50,000 would in no way fund project as complex as 3.1 miles of new bikeway.

The Blackfoot Recreation Path in Blackfoot, Idaho, for example, is 10 miles long and cost \$393,000. Assuming the cost per mile remains constant, the construction of 3.1 miles cost roughly \$121,830.

The Anacostia Trail System in Maryland, which consists of 24 miles of trails, cost a total of \$2,527,121. Again, assuming the cost per mile was constant, 3.1 miles of trail cost roughly \$326,419. The Anacostia Trail System required the construction of bridges and

underpasses, which would not be the case for the Hadley Trail, but even excluding these expenses the cost would still exceed \$50,000.

Examples from New Hampshire are closest to the Hadley Trail project. The "Pedestrian Improvements" project in Lincoln "construct[ed] over 2.5 miles of sidewalk and multi-use path through the town," with a total cost of \$489,029. The Winnepesaukee River Trail in Franklin provides a 3.1-mile trail link between three towns, similar to the 3.1 miles of the Hadley Trail. The total cost of the Winnepesaukee River Trail was \$930,000.

Since the other bikeway projects cost far more than I could obtain from the two funding sources discussed, I searched for other potential funders and was met with little success. The National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse, which helped to fund all of the examples given, awards minimum grants of \$50,000. Yet their website states:

Every Enhancement project must be proposed by either a municipality, public agency, authority or commission that can assume responsibility for the administration of the project. Private, non-profit organizations are not allowed to apply for enhancement funding directly, but can act as a proponent through a public entity.

Unless MassBike and I formed a contact with a government agency that would be willing to take on the Hadley Trail project, Transportation Enhancement funds would be unattainable.

Conclusion:

Based on my research, funding from Bikes Belong and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation could be obtained for the project I propose; but the costs of similar trail construction projects make it clear that the funding from these sources would not be sufficient. MassBike also does not fit the applicant eligibility for other possible funding sources. I therefore conclude that Hadley Trail does not currently seem feasible. Rather, I plan to work on a smaller scale. I will instead focus my efforts on improving areas of the current Norwottuck Rail Trail, getting in touch with contractors and people who were involved in the trail's initial construction.

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