

# COMMON GROUND

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING IN THE BERKSHIRE REGION

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## Regional Transportation Plan Survey

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is working at getting input for the 2016 update of the Berkshire Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP evaluates current and projected regional transportation needs for Berkshire County for the next twenty (20) years. The RTP helps us make decisions about how we spend our money on highways, freight, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and transit operations. The RTP is the Berkshire's long-term planning process required by the Federal Highway Administration.

BRPC needs your help and input as we figure out the best ways to spend our Federal funding moving into, out of, and around the Berkshires over the next 25 years. Please follow one of the following links to our survey and take ten minutes or less to answer questions about how you move around, what opinions you have about transportation in the Berkshires, and how much more money you would personally spend to help improve our system. Thank You!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BRPC-2016RTP>



More information and draft documents will be posted throughout the development of the RTP on the Commission's website:

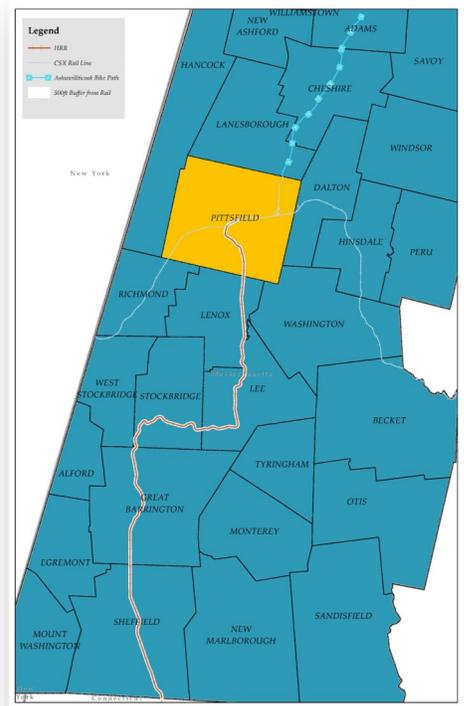
[www.berkshireplanning.org](http://www.berkshireplanning.org). We anticipate presenting the complete draft plan to the Metropolitan Planning Organization in March, 2015.

Please send questions and comments to Douglas Plachcinski, Senior Transportation Planner at (413) 442-1521, ext. 16 or [dplachcinski@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:dplachcinski@berkshireplanning.org).

## Housatonic Railroad Passenger Station Location & Design Analysis Completed

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff completed a passenger rail station location and design analysis for the Housatonic Railroad corridor in September. BRPC staff in partnership with the Housatonic Railroad Company (HRRC) spent one and a half years analyzing certain aspects of the proposed service and the rail corridor from Sheffield to Pittsfield. In terms of passenger rail station locations, the report recommends the construction or re-use of four passenger rail stations in the following locations: the existing Intermodal Center in Pittsfield; municipally owned property in downtown Lee; the re-use of the historic train station site in downtown Great Barrington; and property owned by the HRRC in Sheffield near the Massachusetts-Connecticut line. However, the recommendation for the Sheffield location is contingent on no passenger rail station being operated in North Canaan, CT.

Other findings of the report include, the need for total reconstruction of the near century-old rails and ties throughout the rail corridor and the finding that broad public support exists for the return of passenger rail service to the Berkshires. The next step in the project is for the HRRC to secure funding for the necessary improvements to the rail infrastructure in Connecticut from North Canaan to Danbury. In Massachusetts, the Commonwealth has committed \$35 million to make the necessary upgrades in the corridor. The complete passenger rail station location and design analysis report can be found at the BRPC website [www.berkshireplanning.org](http://www.berkshireplanning.org) under the heading Reports and Documents – Transportation Planning. For up to date information on the status of the HRRC passenger rail project please visit the Train Campaign's website at <http://traincampaign.org/>.



BRPC Contact: Brian Domina, ext. 14.

## Massachusetts Broadband Institute Update

The Massachusetts Broadband Institute has been meeting with communities over the last few months on developing the last mile infrastructure for broadband. Communities who are unserved had to submit a non-binding selectboard affirmation to the state by the end of December 2014 expressing their interest in building the last mile in their communities. Communities will also need to bring a Telecommunications bond to town meeting to obligate funds for their share of the construction. Building the last mile infrastructure is expected to cost between \$100 - 119 million, with the state contributing around \$40 million. The remaining \$60-79 million has to be covered by the local communities and potentially paid back by user fees. Construction is estimated to begin in 2016 and the network would go live between 2017 and 2019. For more information, contact Nat Karns, ext. 26.

## Ashuwillticook Rail Trail Abutter Survey, Autumn 2014

The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is an 11-mile paved, accessible multi-use trail located in central Berkshire County. The Trail's gentle grade offer users of all abilities the opportunity to travel a moderately long, yet universally accessible trail – unusual in the hilly terrain of the Berkshires. Since the opening of the Trail in 2001, residents across the county have increasingly voiced a desire to have similar trails within their own communities.

New bike/ped trail proposals in parts of the Berkshires have sometimes been met with opposition by property owners abutting the proposed routes, citing the potential for increased crime, noise, teen loitering and littering, coupled with a decrease in privacy and property values. Studies from around the nation indicate that crime does not increase on the trail itself or on nearby properties, but these studies do not always alleviate local fears. So BRPC felt it was time to conduct a survey to document the impacts, both the positive and negative, of the bike/ped trail that we have right here in our own backyard.

A total of 160 paper surveys were sent to all property owners who abutted, or were in close proximity to, the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail in Lanesborough, Cheshire and Adams. A total of 69 responses were collected and tabulated, for a return rate of 43%. The vast majority of respondents (86%) owned their property prior to the Trail being built, so they have a good perspective of pre- and post-trail conditions.

### Summary of Results

Question	Results listed in order of response (number of responses in parentheses)		
<b>Satisfaction with the Trail as a neighbor – majority (80%) are satisfied</b>	Very satisfied or satisfied (54)	Indifferent (8)	Unsatisfied or very unsatisfied (5)
<b>Has the Trail changed the quality of the neighborhood – 50% say improved</b>	Much improved or improved (33)	No impacts (26)	Worsened (7)
<b>Major impacts – top 3 impacts chosen out of a list of 12 options</b>	Litter on/near my property (18)	Loitering on/near my property (16)	Dog manure on/near my property (14)
<b>Remedies to reduce impact – top 3 chosen out of a list of 6 options</b>	Signs asking users to respect property (17)	Increase in police presence (15)	Fencing or shrubbery (12)
<b>Do you feel trail users pose a risk to family safety – majority (74%) feel no risk</b>	No risk (49)	Uncertain (11)	Yes risk (6)
<b>Benefits of the Trail – top 3 chosen out of a list of 9 options</b>	Safe recreation opportunity (42)	View wildlife opportunity (35)	Environmental education opportunity (34)
<b>Use of the Trail – vast majority walk (91%) and/or bike (73.5%)</b>	Walk (62)	Bicycle (50)	Jog (14)
<b>Frequency of use – almost half (47%) use the Trail once a week or more</b>	Once/twice a week or more (32)	Once or twice a month (22)	

Six of the 21 questions in the survey asked respondents to offer additional personal comments about their experiences with the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. Dog waste, discourteous behavior, and teen loitering were the most common nuisance conditions listed within these personal comments. A more complete discussion of survey results and the full copy of questions and answers will be posted on the BRPC website.

BRPC Contact: Lauren Gaherty, Senior Planner, ext. 35.

## Award Winning Effort

The Berkshire Online Building Permit program won the Cross-Boundary Collaboration Award at the 2014 Massachusetts Digital Government Summit held December 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Boston. The Massachusetts Digital Government Summit is designed to help spread best practices and spur innovation in the public sector related to digital governance. The summit has an advisory board that gathers public- and private-sector leaders to stimulate passion for digital government. Participants have used the summit to help advance the goals of their organizations. The Berkshire Online Building Permit Program, which started with the seven towns of Becket, Dalton, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, Sheffield and Richmond, working with BRPC staff, was cited for the cooperative efforts of the building officials and town administrators to help adapt the program to affordably meet the needs of the smaller rural communities. In addition to easing the administrative burden for building officials this program is a boon to builders, contractors and permit seekers who can complete much if not all of the application process without having to come to town hall. BPRC Contact: Tom Matuszko, ext. 34.



## What is WRHSAC and what does it offer Communities?

For more than ten years the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council (WRHSAC) has been assisting communities in the four Western Massachusetts counties to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. Currently WRHSAC is reaching out to introduce and explain the regional resources that are now available to local communities and groups who are engaged in emergency response.

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission staff are available to speak to larger groups throughout the region, detailing many of WRHSAC's projects and resources. Presentations can easily be tailored to fit into existing meetings, depending on the time and interests of the group. Outreach materials include a variety of short (5 minutes or less) videos about each project. Videos and questions typically take 15 to 30 minutes, though shorter or longer presentations are available. We are currently scheduling presentations through July 2015.

### For more information or to schedule a presentation contact:

Diane Persson; [dpersson@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:dpersson@berkshireplanning.org); 413.441.9060

### Available videos and topics:

- **General Information Overview:** description of WRHSAC and a sampling of WRHSAC projects.
- **Companion Animal Sheltering:** tools for managing pets and service animals in emergencies.
- **Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD):** strategies for connecting to coalitions of local groups, agencies and business that have resources that could be essential during and after an emergency.
- **Emergency Communications Strategy Report:** details on multiple projects that have enhanced regional communications which are critical for effectively responding to emergencies.
- **Emergency Rest Centers:** information on setting up and running drop-in, daytime safe havens established during emergency incidents such as major power outages or severe heat or cold.
- **Faith Community Partnering in Emergency Preparedness:** tools for connecting faith organizations and their significant resources to a community's emergency response system during disasters.
- **Individuals Requiring Additional Assistance (IRAA):** planning strategies for including the functional and access needs of individuals and families who require extra help in emergencies.
- **Mass Receiving:** resources for managing a large scale evacuation from New York City or Boston.
- **Resource Guide for Emergency Equipment and Supplies:** specific details on all the WRHSAC purchased equipment as well as information on how to access these resources.
- **Regional Emergency Sheltering:** information on multiple WRHSAC resources for operating regional shelters.
- **Regional Evacuation Planning:** resources for planning and managing mass local evacuation events.



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# COMMON GROUND

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## Farewell to Planner Gwen Miller

This past month, Gwen Miller resigned from BRPC to become the Land Use Director and Town Planner for the Town of Lenox. Gwen has been employed at BRPC since 2012, with much of her work focused on land use and comprehensive planning. Gwen’s dedication and hard work was instrumental in developing the Passenger Rail Station Location and Design Analysis and the North Adams Vision 2030, among other projects. We wish her all the best in her new position in Lenox.

## Successful Flu Vaccination Season

From September to December, the Berkshire Public Health Alliance Public Health Nursing Program, in partnership with Berkshire County Boards of Health Association, Fairview Hospital and the Berkshire Medical Reserve Corps, scheduled over twenty flu clinics throughout Berkshire County. Clinics were held in all seven municipalities contracted with the Alliance for public health nursing (Adams, Clarksburg, Egremont, Great Barrington (including Housatonic), Peru, North Adams and Washington). The Alliance staff, public health nurses, and partners worked together and vaccinated almost 1,000 individuals this season. For more information about the Berkshire Public Health Alliance Public Health Nursing Program, please visit our webpage at <http://berkshireplanning.org/focus-areas/c/public-health-program>.

## Great Barrington-Sheffield Housing Rehabilitation Program Accepting Applications

The Great Barrington-Sheffield Housing Rehabilitation Program (HRP) is managed by BRPC, and provides home improvement assistance in the form of 0% deferred payment loans for low- and moderate-income homeowners. All eligible applicants must be owner-occupants whose property is located within the Towns of Great Barrington or Sheffield, with preference given to residents living in the Program’s target areas (Housatonic Village and town-wide in Sheffield). The type of repairs which can be undertaken include: roofing, foundation repair, installation of energy efficient windows and doors, insulation, accessibility improvements, plumbing, electrical repair or replacement, septic, water supply, lead paint removal, exterior paint, etc.

For more information on the program, please visit our webpage at <http://berkshireplanning.org/projects/regional-community-development-block-grant-project/>. Applications are available on the BRPC website, or at the senior centers, libraries, and town halls in Great Barrington and Sheffield.

BRPC Contacts: Patricia Mullins, ext. 17 and Jaclyn Pacejo, ext. 32.

## CALENDAR

Be sure to check out our online calendar for recently posted events and agendas.

[berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar](http://berkshireplanning.org/events/calendar)

### JANUARY

- Jan 8<sup>th</sup> - Finance Committee
- Jan 8<sup>th</sup> - Executive Committee
- Jan 15<sup>th</sup> - Commission Development
- Jan 15<sup>th</sup> - Full Commission
- Jan 27<sup>th</sup> - MPO
- Jan 29<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday Dinner

### FEBRUARY

- Feb 5<sup>th</sup> - Executive Committee
- Feb 24<sup>th</sup> - MPO

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E-mail [jwagner@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:jwagner@berkshireplanning.org) today to subscribe!