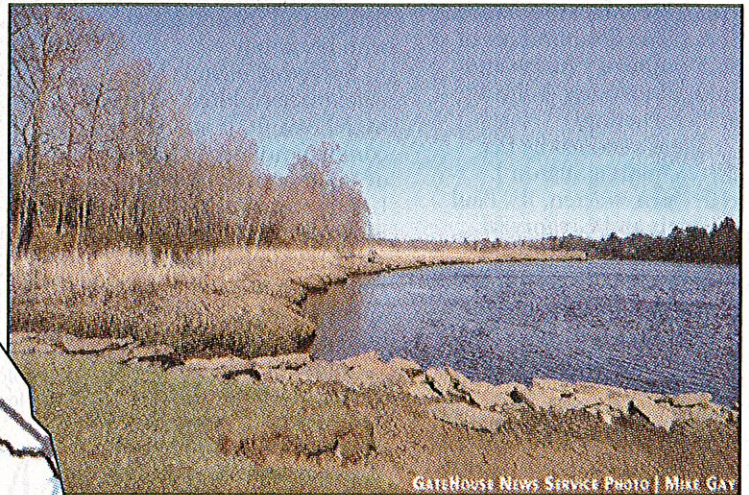
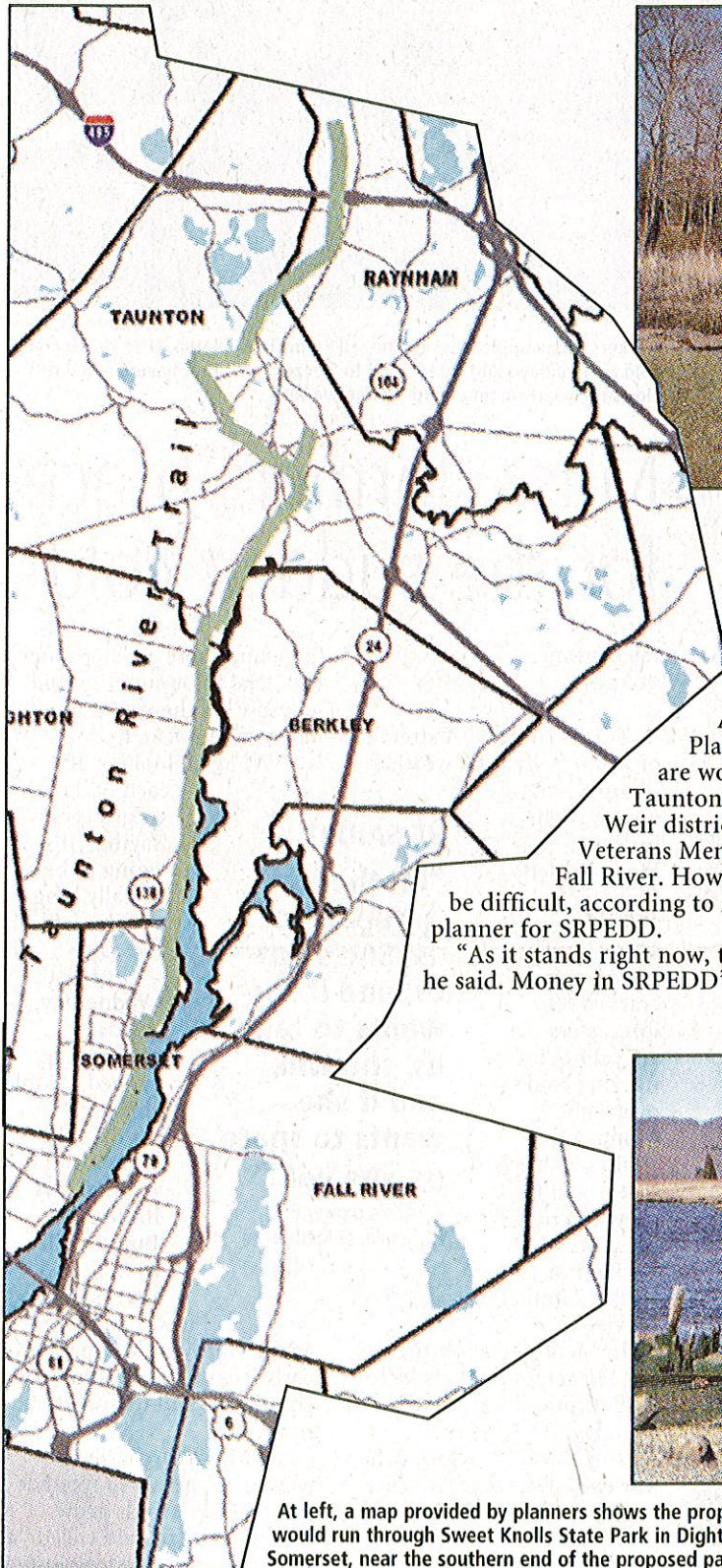


BIKE PATH

SOUTHCOAST TRAIL

Proposed 22-mile bike path would link FR, Taunton



GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE PHOTO | MIKE GAY

Christopher Nichols
GateHouse News Service

TAUNTON — A 22-mile bike path may one day connect Taunton and Fall River, if planners can find the money to create it.

The Taunton River Watershed Alliance and the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District are working to build a bike path along the Taunton River. The path would begin in Taunton's Weir district, run through Dighton and end at the Veterans Memorial Bridge, which connects Somerset and Fall River. However, securing funds for the project could be difficult, according to Adam Recchia, principal transportation planner for SRPEDD.

"As it stands right now, there isn't any funding for this project," he said. Money in SRPEDD's Transportation Improvement Program

TURN TO **TRAIL**, PAGE A4

ONLINE

Would you support a Fall River-Taunton bike path? Vote in our poll at

HeraldNews.com



HERALD NEWS PHOTO | DAVE SOUZA

At left, a map provided by planners shows the proposed Taunton River Trail in green. Above, a portion of the path would run through Sweet Knolls State Park in Dighton. Below, A New Haven Railroad bridge used to stand at this site in Somerset, near the southern end of the proposed path.

Trail: Project likely to take more than 10 years

From Page A1

is tied up for the next four years.

"So unless another project falls off, there's not too much funding right now," Recchia said.

Projects commonly fall through or get pushed back, so funds could become available in the coming months, Recchia said. But each mile of off-road bike path costs about \$700,000, meaning the path would have to be built piecemeal at an optimistic rate of about a mile per year.

"A lot of times, we can squeeze in a mile of bike path when another project falls off," Recchia said, adding that the project likely wouldn't be completed before 2024.

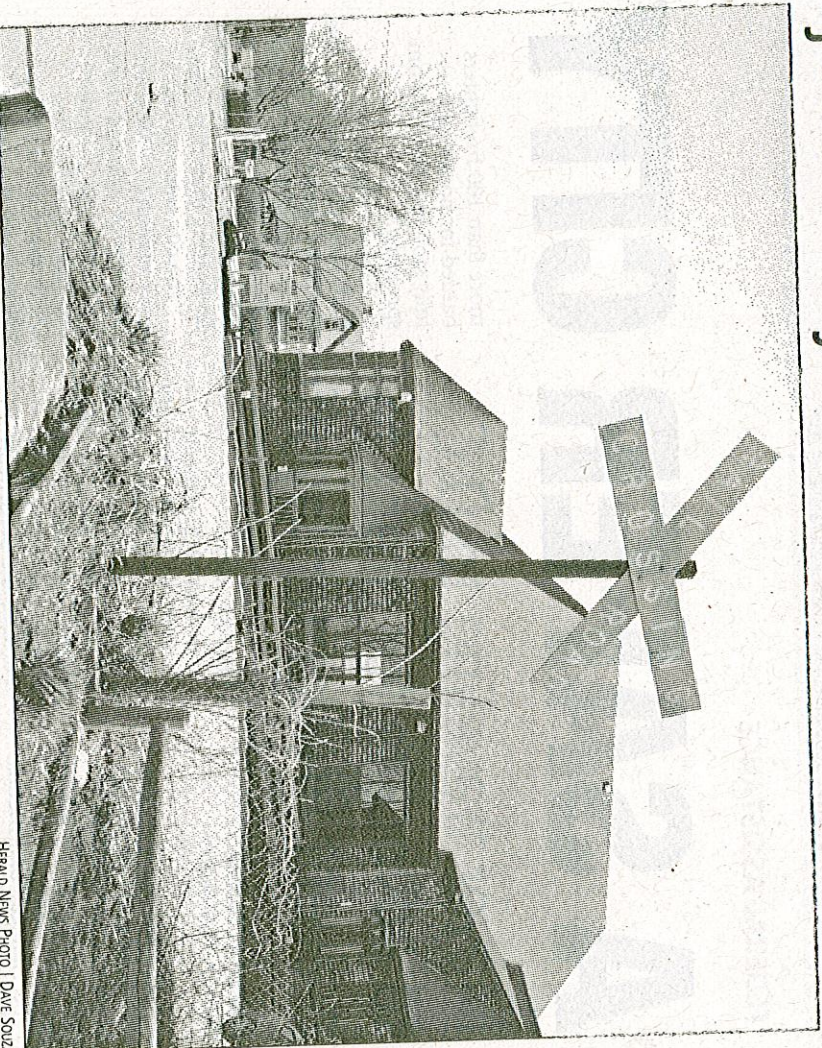
"Unfortunately, that's the reality when it comes to transportation projects," he said.

Recchia said that SRPEDD is also currently looking for money through the federally funded Transportation Enhancement Program and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program.

RIGHTS-OF-WAY

In the meantime, SRPEDD and TRWA are working to obtain right-of-way ownership of the land for a potential bike path. Representatives from the two organizations have been meeting with officials from the two towns and Taunton for rights-of-way, according to Alfired Lima, a director for TRWA who has taken the lead on the project.

According to Lima, the off-road portions of the bike path will travel largely along old rail lines — two large sections of which are owned



This old railroad crossing sign on Main Street is Dighton is the only reminder that trains once passed through the neighborhood. A new bike path may go through the area if funding can be secured.

HEADLINE PHOTO | DAVE SOUZA

by the Taunton Municipal Lighting Plant and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. Lima said they have received a commitment from TMLP and have spoken to DCR.

The portion owned by DCR travels through Sweet Knolls State Park in Dighton and is slated to be the highlight of the bike path.

"It has nice views of the Taunton River. It's pretty wooded, and the right-of-way is also in good shape," Recchia said.

If a right-of-way is obtained, Recchia said DCR may also be a source of funding, and Sweet Knolls would likely be the place

where construction begins.

Lima also said that some sections of the railroad are privately owned, so rights-of-way could be difficult to obtain.

"There will be some missing links that we'll have to address," he said.

PAST AND FUTURE

The proposed bike path, Lima said, has been in the works for the past 20 years, but came to a halt in 1999 due to a lack of support from Taunton and Dighton. The project regained momentum in 2010 after DCR purchased a stretch of railroad along the route.

"At that point, the Taunton River Watershed

Alliance ... their board of directors, felt that this was the time to perhaps revive the vision," Lima said.

The project includes three concepts: the recreational bike path, greenways along the Taunton River to preserve open space, and interpreting and telling the history of the Taunton River.

Lima said he hopes one day to extend the bike path all the way to Brockton, but the focus now is building the path from Taunton to the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

At the bridge, Lima and Recchia said they hope to link up to the South Coast Bikeway, another bike path currently being built to link Rhode Island, Fall River and

Cape Cod. "The bike path is part of a big plan, but a great plan," said Lima. "It would be a great asset to the city of Taunton."

OFFICIALS' REACTIONS

Local officials expressed their support for the idea of a bike path connecting two major cities in southeastern Massachusetts.

"It would be tremendous if we could have one continuous bike path from Taunton all the way down here to Fall River," said Perry Long, Fall River's neighborhood outreach coordinator. "This is a recreational activity, but it's also something that increases commerce here and in every single one of our towns."

Long said a bike path would tie in to Mayor Will Flanagan's plans for Fall River.

"We are working hard here in Fall River, just as Taunton is, and it's a wonderful initiative," Long said.

Taunton Mayor Thomas Hoye Jr. said he supports the idea, but is concerned about funding.

"It's certainly worth looking at. It would create a unique recreation opportunity for the community," said Hoye. "I think it would be a great addition to the community, (but) the question always comes back to funding."

Bud Whalon, chairman of the Dighton Board of Selectmen, shared Hoye's concern.

"I think it's a good thing. I think it's a great thing for the town, but it's coming at a time when money seems to be a little dried up," he said.