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## After opening of renewed rail trail on Mammoth Road, groups eye connections to downtown Manchester paths

By Josie Albertson-Grove New Hampshire Union Leader  
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Riders go under the Interstate 93 tunnel on a new section of the Roc  
DAVID LANE/UNION LEADER

A newly-widened section of the Rockingham Rail Trail was formally opened Thursday – and now, trail advocates want to connect the East Side trail to other trails in the city.

The two-mile stretch of trail built over disused railroad tracks reaching from Mammoth Road to Lake Shore Drive, is wider and more level than it was. A portion of trail that passes through wetlands had difficult footing before the renovation, particularly after storms, but is now elevated and drier.

“We know it took an awful lot of work, but we’re seeing the results, with all of our community members using it constantly,” Mayor Joyce Craig said Thursday, during a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open the trail. As if to prove her point, three people cycled through the brief event.

The trail links Manchester’s east side to the 30-mile Rockingham Rail Trail, which reaches to Newfields. From there, an ambitious bicyclist could ride bicycle-friendly roads into downtown Portsmouth, said Mark Gomez, Parks and Recreation director for the city of Manchester.

Craig and Gomez thanked former alderman Real Pinard, a longtime advocate for the trail.

“It takes more than one to do something like this,” Pinard said, thanking the team of planners, engineers and city workers who built the trail and made it more accessible.

The next planned phase of the rail-trail network will likely be the most difficult, said Jason Soukup, of trail advocacy group Manchester Moves. Connecting the Rockingham Rail Trail to the riverfront Heritage Trail and trails on the south end of the city will take just 1.6 miles of trail – but it will mean crossing 13 streets and navigating dense downtown neighborhoods.

Soukup said one day, he also hopes for a trail running north, next to railroad tracks on the east side of the Merrimack River. A freight train still runs there twice a week, he said, and commuter rail advocates are eyeing the tracks for a connection to Boston. But Soukup said there are plenty of examples of trails that run alongside working trains.

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