

Proposal to
Rhode Island Department of Transportation

A Fresh Beginning

The Blackstone River & Canal Navigation & Transportation System

July 2009

Presented by
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
Blackstone Valley Visitor Center
175 Main Street – Pawtucket, RI - 02860

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Tourism Council Efforts to navigate the Blackstone River

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council created the Blackstone River and Canal Navigation and Transportation System (BRCNTS) in 1990. This was after two years of leasing riverboats from Blount Marine to understand and gauge the public interest in the Blackstone River.

Since the closing of the Blackstone Canal in 1848, no public vessels operated on the Blackstone River or Canal. Eighteen dams and heavy industrialization interfered with the river's navigability. In 1993, after four years of feasibility studies on the Blackstone and Pawtucket Rivers, Blount Marine constructed and launched the *Educational Vessel Blackstone Valley Explorer* for the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.

From the beginning the Council's vision has been to create safe, inclusive access for all passengers of the *E/V Blackstone Valley Explorer* and to secure a method to launch the *Explorer* into every navigable section of the Blackstone River to determine the viability of public tours. The *Explorer* and its sister vessels have and continue to provide reconnaissance for miles of the Blackstone River in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Since 1989 the Tourism Council has safely carried over 325,000 passengers on Rhode Island and Massachusetts Rivers and invested over \$2,000,000 to make Blackstone River access by boat practical, feasible and self-supporting.

Project Background

In 1992, with the introduction of the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council began the effort to open up the Blackstone River by writing and securing a series of FHWA and RIDOT funds to construct Blackstone River landings. As the Blackstone River Bikeway progressed the Blackstone Riverboat Landings were thought to be an enhancement to the experiences of the public traveling through the Blackstone River Valley. The Council spent the next several years raising funds and working with the communities to open up the Blackstone River to the public. With the support of RIDOT, the congressional delegation and the Blackstone Valley communities, \$1,355,000 was appropriated through the ISTEA program for the Blackstone River and Canal Navigation and Transportation System.

In approximately 1997 the Tourism Council invited the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor to join the Council's efforts to create increased public use of the Blackstone River and dovetail their efforts for improved canoe and kayak access. Since then, the Corridor has been actively involved in advancing several projects, including both riverboat landing and smaller-scale canoe/kayak access sites. This work was accomplished through the investment of a significant amount of Corridor development funds and staff resources.

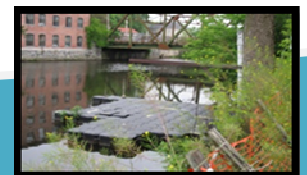
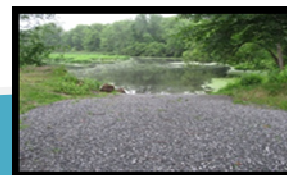
The Current Situation

Progress has been slow on the construction of the landings due to several environmental factors. Changes in local leadership and local planning personal staffs, as well as the difficulty of obtaining approvals for construction projects on the Blackstone River have all contributed to the difficulty of development of the landing sites.

On June 18, 2009 a meeting was convened by RIDOT with officials and community planners who are involved with the construction of the System in their communities. The goals of the meeting were to identify and rectify problems, improve management of projects and improve river access. RIDOT official Tom Queenan proposed to move from a decentralized system to one organized by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. Queenan suggested modifying the role of the municipalities on the river landing projects that have not moved into design. He also suggested redistributing funds in the Transportation Improvement Plan set aside for these projects only, and place them under the management of the Tourism Council. The Council would assume leadership of the projects and coordinate with the Corridor Commission, the municipalities and others on moving toward the completion of the river landings. All other enhancement RIDOT projects underway with the communities in the Blackstone Valley are not to be affected by this suggestion. Mr. Queenan requested a 3 page report from the Tourism Council be prepared and delivered by July 3 to RIDOT stating their plans to reorganize (BRCNTS) river access projects.

Project Summary

The Tourism Council will coordinate with the Corridor Commission and the municipalities on moving toward the completion of the river landing sites. The Council will continue its visioning process to create safe and inclusive access for *E/V Explorer* passengers and to facilitate access to the Blackstone River and will lead the river landing projects to help them come to completion. The Tourism Council will develop public outreach and information sessions on proposed landings and continue to maintain communications with RIDOT, RIDEM, the Heritage Corridor and municipalities on all issues related to BRCNTS sites and will work to develop a long-term maintenance strategy.



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PROJECT DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT STEPS

1. Concept Design and Technical Feasibility - *Plans at 10%*
2. Community Approval
3. RIDOT Approval
4. Design Stage - Geo-technical - *Plans at 30%*
5. Topographical Survey
6. Community Approval
7. RIDOT Approval
8. RIDEM Permits
9. Plans, Specifications and Cost Estimates - *Plans at 90%*
10. Community Approval
11. RIDOT Approval
12. Final - *Plans at 100%*

PROJECT DETAILS

Elements needed for the Blackstone River and Canal Navigation and Transportation System (BRCNTS) to be safe, effective and successful.

1) The BRCNTS has to serve three constituencies

- A. The *E/V Blackstone Valley Explorer's* passengers
- B. Search, Rescue and Recovery Vessels
- C. Canoeists, kayakers and small vessel operators

2) Each river section (between the dams) that can physically accommodate the *E/V Explorer*, or similar vessels, requires:

- A. An accessible landing system for the *E/V Blackstone*
- B. A 12' wide boat ramp that is deep enough into the river to accommodate the trailer that hauls the *Explorer*
- C. Access for canoeist, kayakers and small vessel operators
- D. A professional buoy and safety line system for each downstream dam

3) The three phases required for creating river access development for the BRCNTS:

- A. Program and Concept Feasibility securing answers for the following topics:
 - Car and bus access and parking?
 - Is there enough water in the river to operate?
 - Is there public interest and benefit to navigate this section of the river?
 - Are there feasible places to construct an Explorer launch and landing?
 - Are the other river groups interested in accessing this section of the river?
 - Is there an agreement for maintenance for the system?
 - Is there insurance for the system?
 - Is the concept technically feasible from an engineering and design standpoint?
 - Is the project financially feasible from a cost-benefit perspective?
- B. Design (Landing, Ramp and Dam Safety System) and Project Permitting
- C. Construction and Use by Explorer, canoeist, kayakers and small vessel operators.

Design and Engineering Cost Estimates

3% of Concept Feasibility and Design Stage plus 14% of total project cost.

Repair, Replacement & Maintenance of Constructed Facilities

Discussions will be held with local, state and federal officials to locate institutional funding for river landing maintenance.

River Landing and Access Area Maintenance

The October 2005 Blackstone River Flood created 10 million in damages to Rhode Island public and private property. To plan for a similar flood event, the Tourism Council founded Blackstone alert that seeks to understand "smart river building" along the River. A 2006 Blackstone Alert Conference was held to include the communities affected by the 2005 flood and to make them partners in a web-based broadcast system to alert them of potential high water along the Blackstone. A report is due soon as to the next steps to be taken to help the Blackstone River Valley become more resilient to flooding.

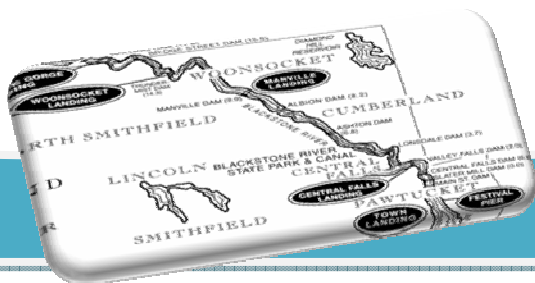
The maintenance of the access and parking areas at each proposed river landing site will be a priority subject for discussion by BVTC, the Heritage Corridor and the involved municipalities. It is hoped the Friends of the Blackstone will continue to do their significant cleanup of river debris.

Safety & Insurance

A cable and buoy system will be installed at the closest downstream dam from each river landing. The system will provide a "last line of defense" for any vessel that may find itself near the dams. The Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor staff has suggested we seek funding for cable and buoy systems from other sources such as US Army Corps and state agencies and has offered to help pursue such funding. The Tourism Council recommends a river signage system that indicates canoe portages and dams ahead. Gilman Brothers of CT and CR Environmental of MA have been contacted and are working with the Tourism Council on preliminary estimates on design, construction and installation of Dam Safety Buoy systems for the downstream dams at each landing location. Chatterton Insurance of Pawtucket is investigating liability issues for landings, ramps and Dam Safety Buoy systems.

Communication with Stakeholders

Since RIDOT's June 18 meeting, BVTC has undertaken an aggressive outreach program with all the involved cities and towns. Two particularly useful meetings were held by BVTC with the National Corridor. One was with the Chair, Michael Cassidy and the other with the Executive Director, Jan Reitsma and Planner Keith. Most of the issues covered at RIDOT's June 18 meeting were discussed including the proposed distribution of funds that follow in this report



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CURRENT AND FUTURE STATUS OF BRCNTS FUNDS

Each community with funds not expended on landing projects has been contacted to discuss the aggregation of the allocated funds (at right). Each community is in agreement with the distribution of funds.

Municipality	Existing Allocation	Funds Shifted to Aggregate	For Project Start-up
Pawtucket	\$ 130,000	\$ 110,000	\$20,000
Lincoln	\$ 180,000	\$ 160,000	\$20,000
Woonsocket	\$ 390,000	\$ to complete TBD	n/a
Cumberland	\$ 565,000	\$ to complete TBD	n/a
N. Smithfield	\$ 90,000	\$ 70,000	\$20,000
TOTAL	\$1,355,000		

Suggested Uses for Newly Aggregated Funds

Central Falls Landing: Realignment of the landing floating platforms, pedestrian and accessible improvement of the boat ramp, installation of destroyed ramps to the floating platforms, electrical service, engineering report on the existing structure, determine the following agreements: maintenance, winter removal, insurance and repair and replacement.

Cumberland: Ramp improvement if necessary, design, engineer and build Dam Buoy Safety System, determine the following agreements: maintenance, winter removal, insurance and repair and replacement.

Woonsocket: Landing nearing design completion; design, engineer and install Dam Buoy System. Determine the following agreements: maintenance, winter removal, insurance and repair and replacement.

Lincoln: Feasibility study for two sites, building on already performed work.

North Smithfield: Siting and feasibility study, building on already performed work to the extent applicable.

Pawtucket: Siting and feasibility study, building on already performed work to the extent applicable.

Other sites: Sites that can accommodate the *E/V Blackstone Valley Explorer*, rescue craft and canoe and kayak interests should also be considered. M Residential in Central Falls, above the Central Falls Dam, could possibly be a future location for a landing to work in concert with the proposed fish ladders. Private funds may be available.

Time Frame

Top priority is to complete the Central Falls, Cumberland and Woonsocket projects. Construction of the Cumberland Landing will continue according to schedule, and be completed this calendar year. Construction of the Woonsocket Landing and design/engineering of the improvements to the ramp at Cold Spring Park will commence immediately after confirmation of program approval from RIDOT with the goal to complete construction in 2010. Evaluation, redesign and reconfiguration of the Central Falls Landing and engineering for ramp improvements will commence immediately after confirmation of program approval by RIDOT with the goal to complete construction in 2010.

The next priority is obtaining cost estimates for the dam safety lines for Cumberland and Woonsocket in 2009 and completing installation in 2010. Lincoln and Pawtucket project feasibility will begin immediately after confirmation of program approval from RIDOT and will build on already performed work and documentation to the extent possible. The studies should be completed in 2010 or 2011. A feasibility study for North Smithfield will proceed in the same timeframe, provided there is stakeholder consensus that there is a need for a second landing on this section of river and it is a higher priority than other river access projects.

Evaluation of need for additional river access accommodations for canoes, kayaks and rescue craft will commence immediately after confirmation of program approval by RIDOT, with the goal to develop recommendations and associated cost estimates in 2009 or early 2010. This task may be led by JHCBRVNHCC if staff resources are available.

Additional Funding

Additional funds will be sought from Federal, State, Municipal and possibly private sources to assist in the further development and construction of the BRCNTS.

NOTE: Central Falls has \$400,000 in separately applied for funds for the Central Falls landing landscape improvements including attention to the parking area run-off situation. Lincoln has separately applied for funds for the Moffitt Mill project. Both of these funds are not part of the BRCNTS project.

Blackstone River and Canal Transportation and Navigation System Project Management Team

The Project Management Team will consist of members from RIDOT, the JHCBRVNHCC, RIDEM, the Blackstone Valley Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone, the cities of Pawtucket, Central Falls and Woonsocket, the towns of Lincoln, Cumberland and North Smithfield and Blackstone River rescue organizations as needed. The Project Manager for the Team will host quarterly meetings and other meetings as needed to complete the project in a timely fashion.

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Project Management:

Estimated time allocation to be 1/2 of the Concept Feasibility and Design costs.

Project Development: Robert Billington, Executive Director (Pro bono)

Interim Project Manager: Robert A. Cox - résumé available upon request. This will be a staff position at \$30.00ph.

