

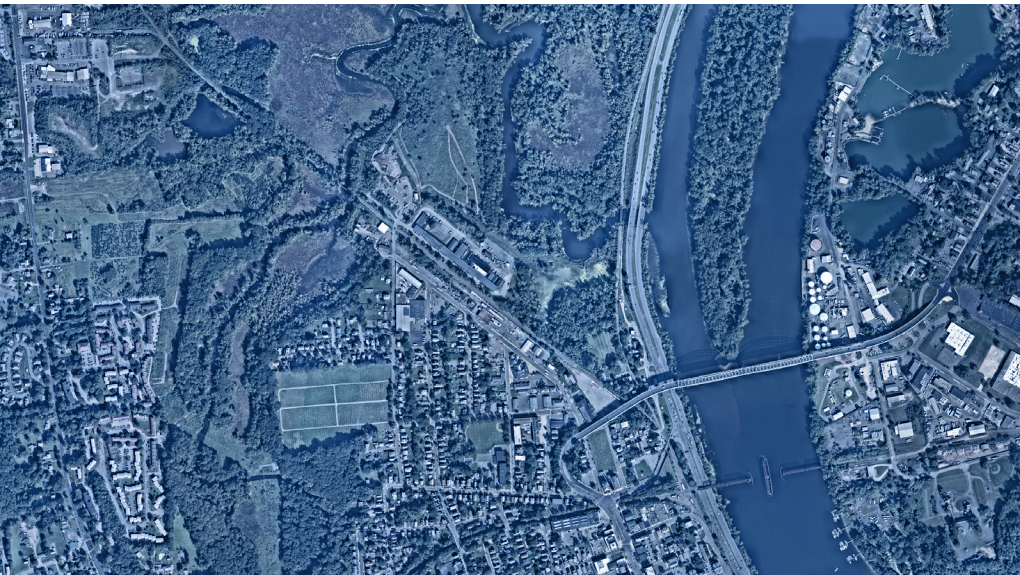


**Central CT Loop**  
ALT-FCT Study

March 2025

# **RiverCOG Central Connecticut Loop Trail Study**

## *Executive Summary*



Lower Connecticut River Valley  
Council of Governments





## Executive Summary

Lead by VHB, assisted by FHI Studio, the Study Team (team), worked with the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) and the municipalities of Middletown and Portland to conduct a trail feasibility study to link the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) with the Air Line Trail (ALT). (See Figure ES-1 on the following page.) The roughly 23-mile route is a critical gap within the Central Connecticut Loop Trail (CCLT), a vision for a 111-mile loop trail running through 22 cities and towns in the center of the state.

The Study's primary emphasis area is the 11.5-mile portion of the route between the Meriden/Middletown line and the current west terminus of the Air Line Trail in Portland. In aggregate, the work effort evaluated a list of potential route alternatives based on:

- Results from previous planning work that informed the CCLT route planning (e.g., SCRCOG's Meriden CCLT Study and NVCOG's work in Cheshire)
- A quantitative evaluation methodology to analyze alternatives,
- Thorough qualitative input from the project team, stakeholders, and the public

## Study Vision and Goals

The vision for this study is to help expedite the completion of a continuous, multi-use trail within this gap—for both recreation and transportation—that is comfortable for users of all ages and abilities and enhances connections to downtown Portland, downtown Middletown, the Wesleyan campus, and the local parks, schools, and businesses along the corridor.

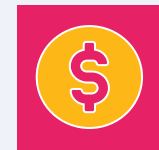
Supporting this vision are nine goals, which were established based on feedback from RiverCOG, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and other stakeholders. They include:



**A primarily off-road trail**



**Emphasis on security (signage, lighting, access points)**



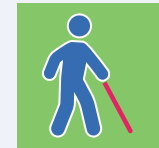
**Leverage the economic impact of the trail**



**Highlight traffic safety at road crossings**



**Consider cost for trail alternatives**



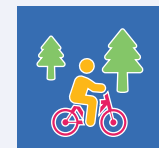
**Promote equitable access**



**Minimize environmental impact**



**Connectivity with nearby destinations**



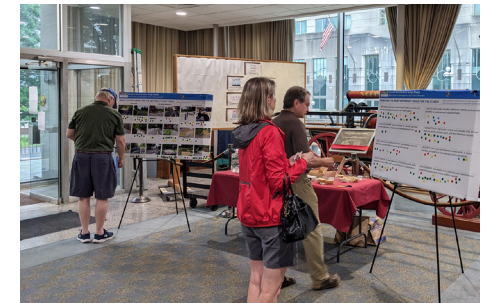
**A pleasant experience for trail users**



## Public Engagement

Community engagement played a key role in shaping the CCLT Study from its inception. Stakeholders' and community members' insights and perspectives shaped many aspects of the project, from setting study goals to developing alignment options. Comments and ideas came through multiple channels, including:

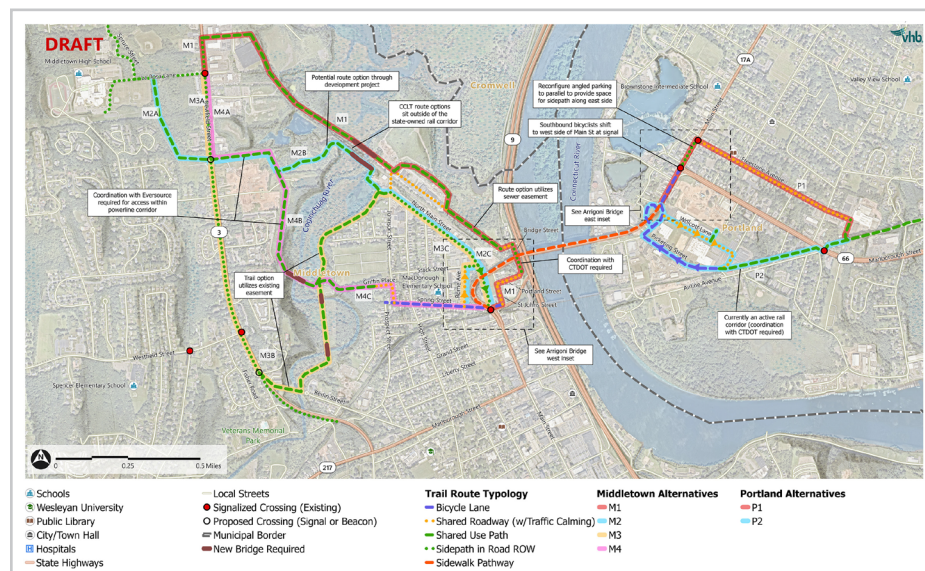
- A project webpage (hosted on RiverCOG's website: <https://www.rivercog.org/plans/cctloopstudy/>)
- Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings, held every other month from October 2023 to January 2025
- Project "pop-ups" at two established events
- Stakeholder meetings with municipal representatives, state agencies, trail advocates, and property owners
- Two public meetings/workshops held at Middletown City Hall Council Chambers in June and November 2024





## Potential Route Alternatives

To reach a Preferred Alignment for the CCLT, the planning team developed a series of nine trail route alternatives (3 in northwest Middletown, 4 in central Middletown, and 2 in Portland). These options were worked out in coordination with the TAC and later evaluated for suitability. Potential routes focused on locating the trail on public property, use of street right-of-way, and options that minimized environmental impacts when possible. Significant roadway barriers such as Interstate 91, steep topography, and various environmental constraints created challenges to finding suitable routes that would also provide a positive experience for future trail users. In some segments of the Study Area, a single route option was established because it was already in development or was clearly the most logical route. Areas where route alternatives were developed are described in detail in Section 3.



**Figure ES-1: Route Alternatives studied in central Middletown and Downtown Portland**

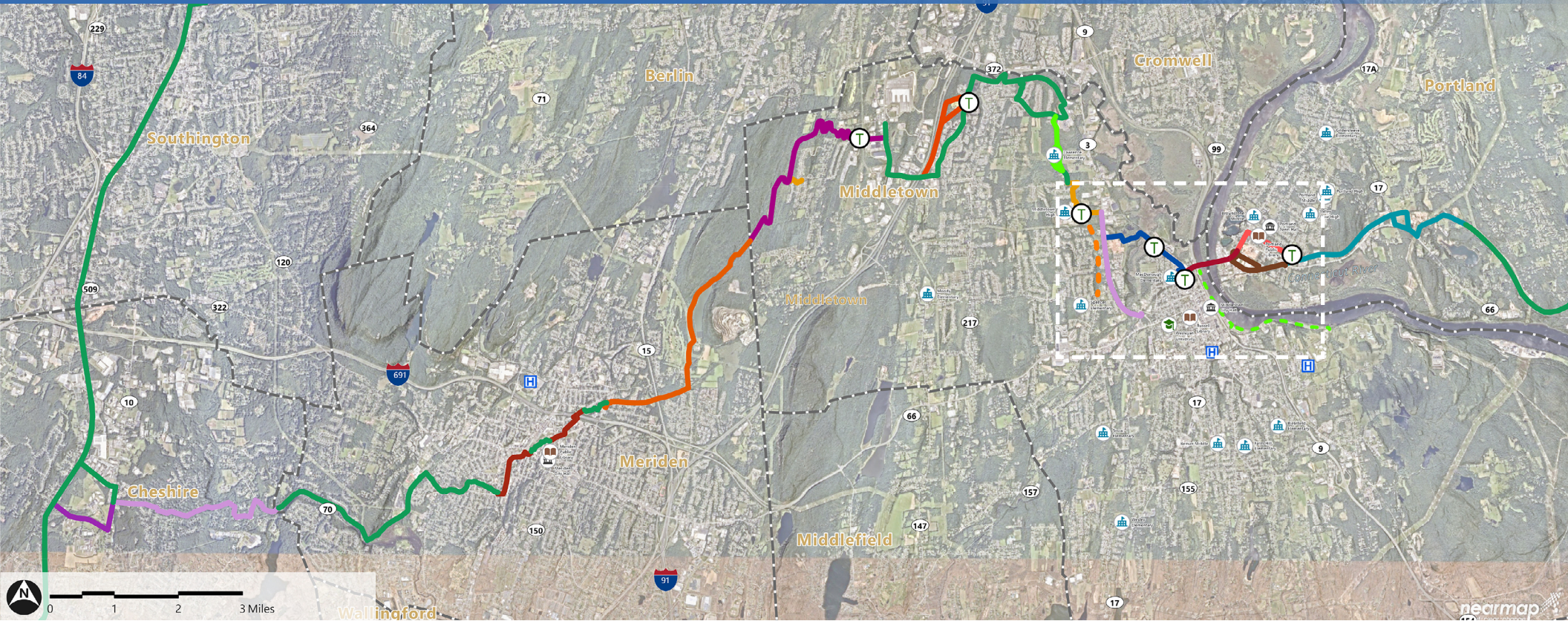
## Evaluation and Scoring

The nine route alternatives described in Section 3 were evaluated using prioritization criteria and a scoring rubric to help inform the selection of the Preferred Alignment. Route alternatives were assessed using both a **quantitative** methodology (i.e., use of GIS-based data) and a **qualitative** methodology (i.e., a more subjective interpretation). Scores were established on a scale of 0 to 5 for each criterion (0 for conditions that did not meet the goals of the criterion relative to other routes, and 5 for conditions that best met the goals of the criterion relative to the other routes). A weight was then applied to each criterion to emphasize issues important to the TAC and key stakeholders. Scores for route alternatives were based on these metrics:

- **Off-Road:** Percentage which is off-road
- **Traffic Safety:** Minimizes user conflicts with motor vehicles by avoiding crossing roadways and driveways
- **Environment:** Minimizes environmental impact
- **Security:** Frequent access points
- **Cost:** Minimizes length and/or engineering complexities that can lead to high costs
- **Connectivity:** Provides direct connections to housing and other destinations along the corridor
- **Economic Impact:** Connects with job locations
- **Equity:** Provides mobility and recreational benefits, and green infrastructure for underserved neighborhoods
- **Experience:** Avoids hills, offer access to nature, and minimize exposure to busy roads



Figure ES-2: Preferred CCLT Alignment within the 23-mile Study Area connecting the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Cheshire to the Air Line Trail in Portland






## Preferred Alignment

Based on the evaluation and scoring of the route alternatives—along with TAC, stakeholders, and public input—the Preferred Alignment was established to connect from the Middletown/Meriden line to the west terminus of the Air Line Trail. Incorporated into the recommendations are discrete trail segments intended to provide pedestrian and bicycle connectivity along the CCLT in the short term. Ultimately, the CCLT is expected to be a 10'–12' wide, paved multi-use trail with a stonedust surface and boardwalks in environmentally sensitive zones and a few short, on-street links. Figure ES-3 on the following page highlights the early-phase portions of the CCLT through Central Middletown and Downtown Portland.


## Key

-  Municipal Border
-  Schools
-  Wesleyan University
-  Public Library
-  City/Town Hall
-  Hospitals
-  Potential Trailhead and Parking Area



### Existing Paths

-  Shared Use Path (SUP)
-  Funded, In Design/Planning
-  Arrigoni Bridge





### Cheshire Paths

-  2016 Grant Application
-  On-Street Linkage




### Meriden CCLT Preferred Alignment

-  Downtown Area Gap
-  Preferred alignment

### Middletown CCLT Preferred Alignment

-  Long term I-91 Bypass
-  Newfield St/Rt. 3 Corridor
-  South of RR line/N Main corridor
-  SUP on City of Middletown property

### Portland CCLT Preferred Alignment

-  Air Line RR corridor extension
-  Freestone/Main St sidepath and shared lanes
-  Long term option to use ALT RR corridor and Pickering St

### Supplemental non-CCLT Routes



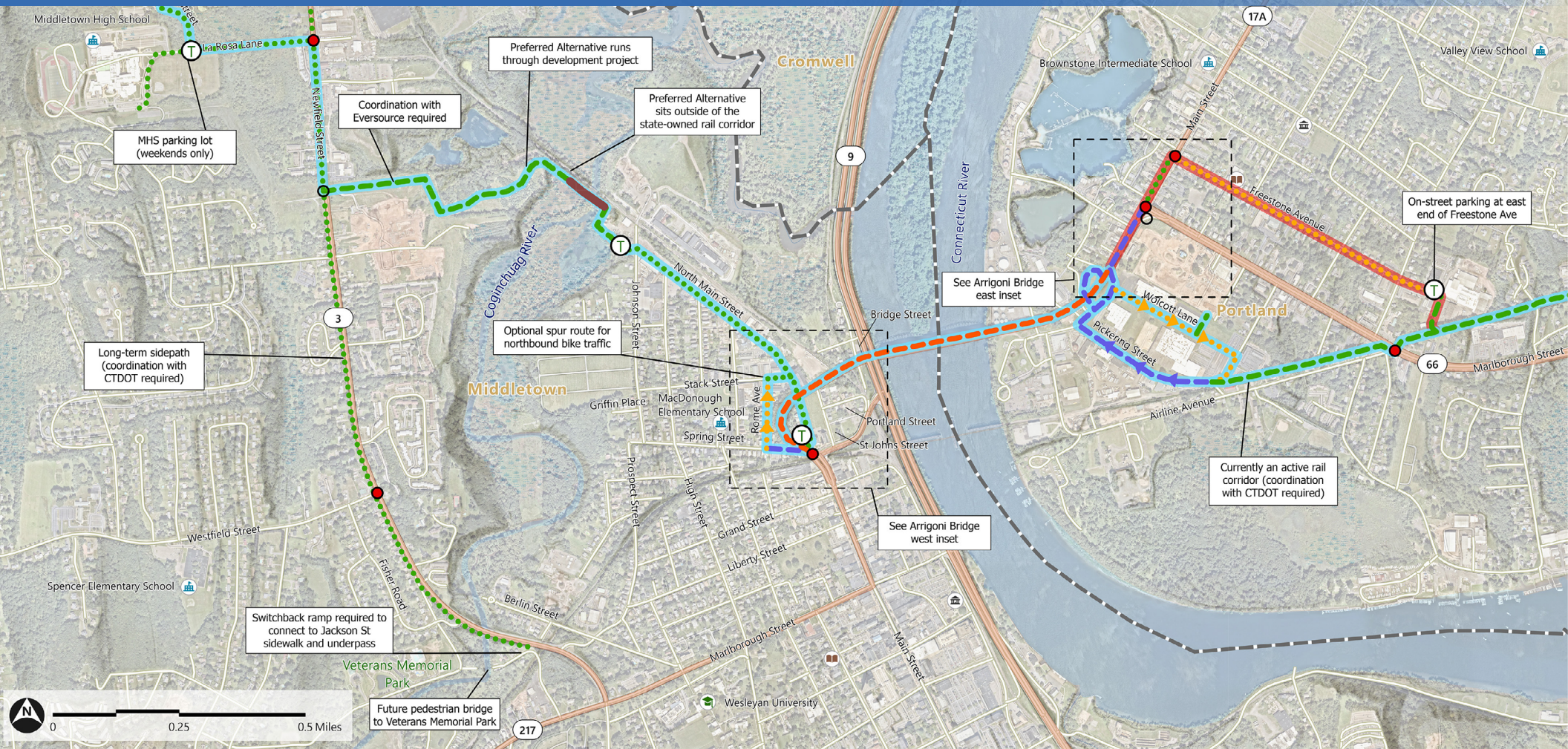
-  Nature Trail
-  Riverfront Trail



Figure ES-3: Preferred CCLT Alignment through Central Middletown and Downtown Portland



Key

- Schools
- Public Library
- City/Town Hall
- Hospitals
- State Highways
- Local Streets

- Municipal Border
- Signalized Crossing (Existing)
- Proposed Crossing (Signal or Beacon)
- New Bridge/Boardwalk Required
- Potential Trailhead and Parking Area

- Trail Route Typology
- Bicycle Lane
  - Shared Roadway (w/Traffic Calming)
  - Shared Use Path
  - Sidepath in Road ROW
  - Sidewalk Pathway

- Middletown Alignment
- Preferred Alternative
- Portland Alignment
- Short-Term
  - Long-Term



## Middletown

At the west end, the Preferred CCLT Alignment will seamlessly connect with the City of Meriden's proposed CCLT route along the east edge of Lamentation Mountain State Park. The CCLT will connect with the existing Mattabesset River Trail and run east to Tuttle Place.

From Tuttle Place, the route proceeds south to Mile Lane following an alignment developed by the City of Middletown. From Mile Lane, it follows the East Swamp Brook corridor to La Rosa Lane and turns east to Newfield Street. In coordination with CTDOT, a 10'-wide sidepath is recommended on the west side of Newfield to the powerline corridor.

From the powerline corridor, the route runs through the Springside Middletown residential development site to the state-owned rail embankment. Connections to the east bank of the Coginchaug River requires an elevated boardwalk and bridge structure (see rendering on the report cover). This Study recommends that the east end of the bridge connect with a potential new park space and trailhead near the Johnson/N. Main Street intersection.

The route to the Arrigoni Bridge along N. Main Street will replace the existing south sidewalk with a 10'-wide sidepath to the edge of the state-owned rail embankment.

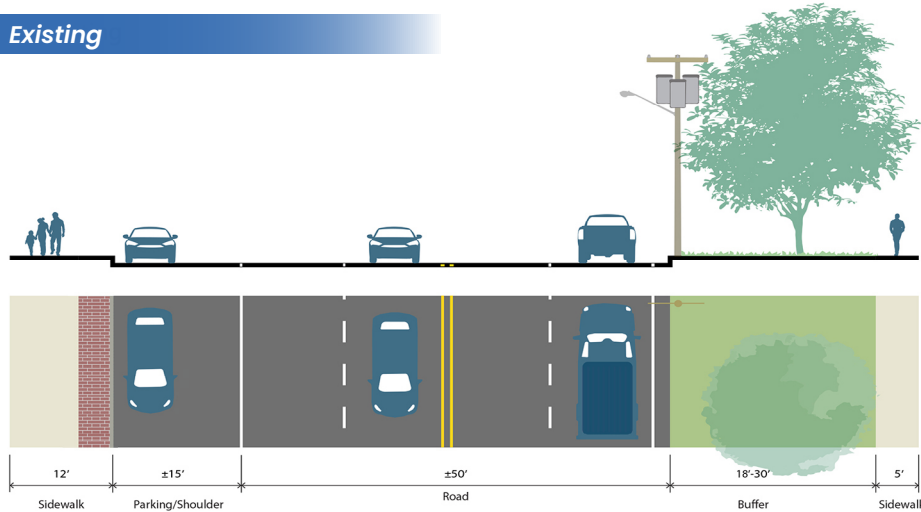


*Rendering of Preferred Alignment crossing Newfield Street at the powerline corridor*



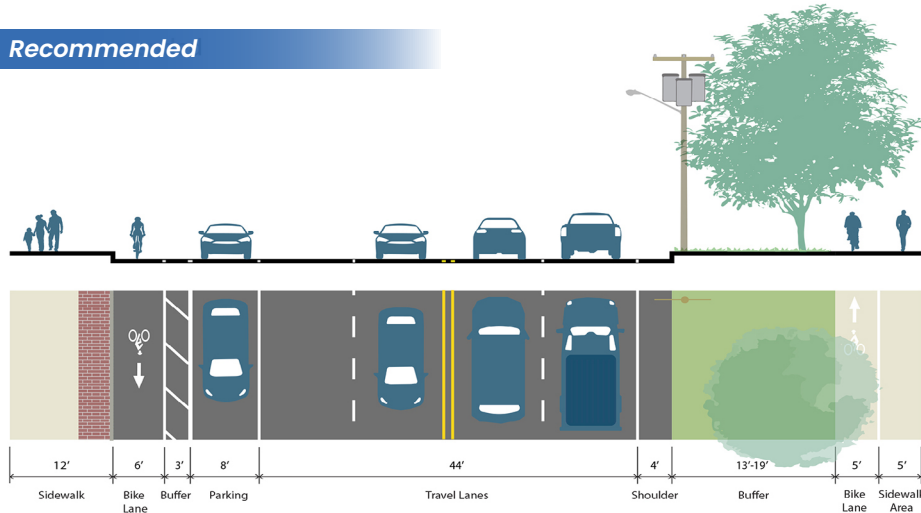
*View of recommended sidepath along the south side of N. Main Street*

## Existing



*Current conditions along Main Street between the Arrigoni Bridge and Route 66 includes four wide travel lanes and leave little space for bicyclists.*

## Recommended



*The recommended reconfiguration of Main Street narrows the travel lane and parking lane slightly to provide dedicate space for bicyclists heading toward the Arrigoni Bridge (at left), and a wider sidewalk/path for pedestrians and northbound bicycles, at right (coordination with CTDOT required).*

## Portland

As the CCLT crosses the Connecticut River into Portland, the Preferred Alignment diverges into a short-term and a long-term recommended route through the downtown area.

### Short-Term Connection Using Main Street/Freestone Avenue

In the short term, this study recommends that CCLT improvements are made along Main Street and Freestone Avenue. Due to the one-way nature of bicycle traffic over the bridge, the redesign of Main Street accommodates northbound bicycle traffic along a min. 10'-wide sidepath on the east side and, after coordination with CTDOT, southbound bicycle traffic on a striped bike lane on the west side. Because of relatively low traffic volumes and speeds, Freestone will be a shared roadway for bikes and motor vehicles with recommended traffic calming measures to create a more comfortable environment for riders.

### Long-Term Connection Using Rail Corridor and Pickering Street

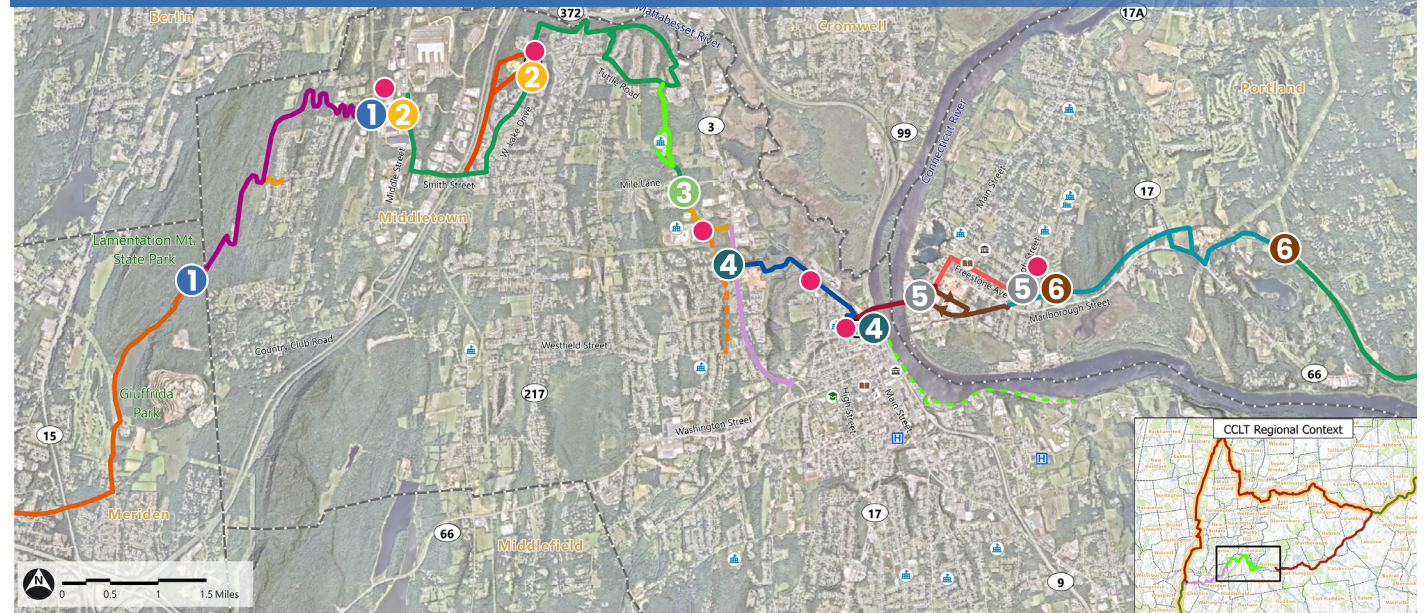
In the long-term, the Preferred CCLT Alignment incorporates the existing state-owned rail line—which is still active from the river to Route 66—as a future trail conversion from the Pickering Street intersection east to Marlborough Street/Route 66, crossing at the existing traffic signal at Airline Avenue. The connection between the long-term rail trail and the Arrigoni Bridge sidewalks would be made through the industrial area via Wolcott Street (for most pedestrians and eastbound bicyclists), and Pickering Street (for westbound bicyclists). Related to connections east, the Town of Portland and the Air Line Trail Committee are meeting with adjacent property owners about accommodating a rail trail from Route 66 to the current terminus of the Air Line Trail near Jobs Pond.












## Trail Design and Character






As a multi-use trail, the CCLT should be wide enough to accommodate people walking, bicycling, running, scooting, and/or using wheelchairs at the same time. 10' should be considered a minimum width, with 12' the ideal in most locations. A 2'-wide grass/stonedust shoulder area is recommended throughout and is required adjacent to any vertical element or structure. The trail is anticipated to be paved in asphalt in most areas, providing the most versatile surface for different trail users and is relatively easily maintained. Segments of the trail set within environmentally sensitive zones or areas with a particularly natural aesthetic could be surfaced in stonedust as an option. While nearly all portions of the CCLT will be off-road paths, some discrete segments will be on-street bike lanes and shared lanes for bicyclists (with sidewalks for pedestrian traffic). In six locations, trailheads with small parking areas, information kiosks, public art, and potential rest stations are recommended.






Figure ES-4: Cost Estimate



-  Schools
-  Wesleyan University
-  Public Library
-  City/Town Hall
-  Hospitals

-  Shared Use Path (SUP)
-  Funded, In Design/Planning
-  Arrigoni Bridge
- Meriden CCLT Preferred Alignment**
-  Preferred alignment

-  Long term I-91 Bypass
-  Newfield St/Rt. 3 Corridor
-  South of RR line/N Main corridor
-  SUP on City of Middletown property
-  East Swamp Brook Path

-  Air Line RR corridor extension
-  Freestone/Main St sidepath and shared lanes
-  Long term option to use ALT RR corridor and Pickering St
- Supplemental non-CCLT Routes**
-  Nature Trail
-  Riverfront Trail

①	Meriden Line-to-Middle St segment	\$4,328,000
②	Middle St to W. Lake Dr existing path	\$2,960,000
③	Mile Ln to La Rosa/Newfield intersection	\$1,337,000
④	La Rosa/Newfield intersection to west end of the Arrigoni bridge	\$7,660,000
⑤	East end of Arrigoni Bridge to Air Line RR corridor at RT 66 (via Main/Freestone)	\$1,050,000
⑥	Air Line RR corridor from RT 66 to the west terminus of the Air Line Trail	\$4,403,000
●	Improvements at 6 trailhead locations	\$1,000,000
	ROW, Permitting, Mitigation costs, and design fees (Not Included)	-
	<b>Estimate TOTAL (11.5 miles)</b>	<b>\$22,738,000</b>
	<b>(Cost per Mile)</b>	<b>(\$1,997,000)</b>



## Implementation Strategy

The key to successful implementation of a local or regional trail or greenway project is a thoughtful implementation strategy. This report is just the beginning of a multi-phase process that will take five or more years to complete. The Implementation Strategy for the CCLT should focus particularly on Environmental Permitting issues, Project Funding Options, and Project Phasing.

### Environmental Permitting

Permitting requirements for the CCLT will vary based on the regulated resources present within each trail segment. The notable resources within the route include the Coginchaug River and associated wetlands and critical habitat areas, potential archaeological sites along the river, the FEMA 100-year floodplain associated with the Coginchaug and East Swamp Brook, and one or two endangered bat species. Future phases of the project will need to coordinate permitting with CT DEEP, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the State Historic Preservation Office (for archaeological sites). The required permits and other information are described in more detail in detail in the CCLT Study report.

### Project Funding Options

Typically, trails and greenways are funded through a mix of local, state, and federal funding programs. The programs that should be investigated, at a minimum, for the CCLT include:

- The Connecticut Recreational Trails Program
- The Federal Transportation Alternatives Program
- The Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program
- The Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant Program
- The Community Investment Fund 2030

## Project Phasing

Five phases are recommended to complete the 11.5-mile-long segment of the CCLT through Middletown and Portland:

1

Route from Mile Lane south to La Rosa Lane, Newfield Street, along the Eversource corridor, through the Springside Middletown site, crossing the Coginchaug River and floodplain, and running along N. Main Street to the Arrigoni Bridge

2

Extension of the Air Line Trail through Portland to the Arrigoni Bridge using the short-term route, with sub-phases depending on negotiations with property owners along the former rail corridor

3

Route from the Meriden City Line through primarily City of Middletown property to the existing sidepath network along Middle, Smith, and West Lake to the Mattebesset River Trail

4

Supplement Phase 3 with the completion of the shared use path within the I-91 right of way and through City property

5

Completion of the long-term option along the currently active, state-owned rail line within the Downtown Portland area