New Hampshire Department of Transportation
Bureau of Rail & Transit

Trail with Rail Design Standards

Overview: The Trail Planners and Designers should meet with the Bureau of Rail & Transit prior to beginning any design work and walk the corridor together to discuss the overall scope of the project and to look at trail constraining conditions. Plans should be submitted to the Bureau of Rail and Transit several times during the design process so the Bureau can provide guidance and information on any required changes as the design proceeds.

Clearances: The trail shall be designed at the property line of the NH DOT railroad corridor as far away from the tracks as possible. The edge of the trail shall be located a minimum of 20’ from the centerline of the tracks. No retaining walls, slopes, ditches, fencing or other structures shall be constructed within 15’ from the centerline of the tracks. Where there is not sufficient clearance to construct the trail beside the tracks, the trail shall be located off of the railroad corridor.

Fencing: 4’ high chain link fence set 6” above the ground to allow for small animal movements shall be constructed along the edge of the trail closest to the tracks (a minimum of 15’ from the tracks). Gates shall be installed at pedestrian crossings as directed by the Bureau. Fencing will not be required where there is a natural physical barrier between the trail and the tracks that is acceptable to the Bureau.

Drainage: Water flow from the trail shall be directed away from the tracks. Where water must flow off the trail toward the tracks (in cut sections), a ditch (a minimum of 15’ from the tracks) shall be constructed to route runoff flow to appropriate cross culverts. Additional cross culverts may be needed under the trail or railroad tracks or existing cross culverts may need to be replaced with larger culverts.

Slope Finishes: No loam or seed shall be placed on cut slopes near the tracks or within 10 ft of the tracks. All cut slopes for the trail shall be capped with 6” erosion stone. All disturbed areas within 10 ft of the tracks (such as at crossings) shall be capped with 1 ½” crushed rock ballast 6” deep.

Crossings: At-grade trail crossings should be constructed adjacent to public roads where possible to avoid additional crossings over the tracks. New crossings will only be approved as a last resort and may require a hearing before the NH DOT Hearings Examiner for approval. Crossings shall be at 90 degrees to the tracks and constructed in tangent sections with sufficient sight distance for a safe crossing. Trail crossings of the railroad corridor shall be kept to an absolute minimum. All other options including locating the trail off the railroad corridor shall be pursued before a crossing is requested. Approved railroad crossings shall be paved through the crossing and a minimum of 25’ on either side of the tracks.
Bridges: The trail shall not be located on an active railroad bridge or be attached to an active railroad bridge. A separate bridge will be required specifically to serve the trail and shall be located a minimum of 15’ off the railroad bridge.

Signage: Signage shall be attached to the fencing every 500’ stating “Active Rail Line – Do Not Enter Track Area” and at every fence opening for a vehicle or pedestrian crossing. All other appropriate crossing signage shall be erected at all trail crossings of the tracks as specified by the Bureau or specified in all Crossing Orders as issued by the NH DOT Hearings Examiner.

Plantings: There shall be no tree planting between the edge of the trail and the railroad tracks. All tree planting must be located on the far side of the trail away from the railroad tracks.

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