



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Gap Closure Trail Study, led by the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), identifies a preferred alignment for the gap in the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (FCHT) through the Town of Plainville, CT. Although the process also identified a preferred alignment for a multi-use trail connection to the downtown New Britain CT **fastrak**¹ station, the focus of this Executive Summary is the closure of the FCHT gap through Plainville.

The study focused on the last significant gap in the FCHT, an 84-mile bi-state, multi-use trail that extends from New

Haven, CT to Northampton, MA. Nearly the entire FCHT in Connecticut is either complete or in design/construction. In addition to being a major portion of the East Coast Greenway (ECG), when complete, the FCHT will directly link 15 municipalities in two states. The Gap in the FCHT extends from Northwest Drive, where the existing FCHT terminates, south to Town Line Road in Southington. The study area for the project encompasses all of Plainville, from Northwest Drive to Town Line Road, and from Route 6 to I-84.

1 **CTfastrak** is a regional bus rapid transit system currently operating between the downtown Hartford, CT station and the station in downtown New Britain, CT.

The Steering Committee created the following vision for the study:



To connect the communities with a world-class, multi-use trail that closes the gap in the FCHT through the towns of Southington and Plainville with a connection to the CTfastrak station in downtown New Britain. These links will prioritize safety, comfort, and mobility for all users, regardless of age or ability, through cohesive and attractive trails that promote economic and community vitality.



Public Outreach

The Gap Closure Trail Study was led by a Project Steering Committee consisting of the following regional and local agencies:

- ▶ CRCOG
- ▶ Town of Plainville
- ▶ City of New Britain
- ▶ Town of Southington
- ▶ CTDOT
- ▶ East Coast Greenway Alliance
- ▶ Farmington Valley Trails Council
- ▶ Plainville Greenway Alliance
- ▶ Plainville-Southington Health District
- ▶ Connecticut Department of Energy

and Environmental Protection

- ▶ Bike New Britain

Public involvement was a key element of the Gap Closure Trail Study. The effort held 7 public meetings, published 3 project newsletters, hosted a booth at community events, and met with scores of community members/property owners and other project stakeholders in small group settings. The project website www.gapclosurestudy.com was launched in July 2016 and was updated on a regular basis to include project reports and meeting materials, so that members of the community could stay up to date on all project progress.

Existing Conditions

The effort built upon findings from previous efforts including the 2008 Plainville Greenway Alliance Report, the 2009 Greenway Study, and the 2009 Master Plan Report. It also has been informed by a review of existing conditions, including an assessment of compatible land uses within Plainville, Southington, and New Britain, and a

review of the transportation system including barriers (e.g., railroads, waterways, and the airport) and a Level of Traffic Stress analysis which identifies streets on which there is the greatest level of comfort with walking and cycling within the study area. This analysis helped to inform the initial development of potential trail alignments.

Alternatives Evaluation



The planning study analyzed a long list of potential alternatives based upon a well-established alternatives screening and evaluation methodology and broad public input and consensus-building. It provides a recommended trail alignment which could be advanced into the design phase. The community played a central

role in developing a long list of 14 potential alternatives for the FCHT Gap Closure connection and 5 potential alternatives to connect with the CTfastrak station. Each of these were then screened against 6 criteria, see Screening Criteria and Threshold below (**Step 1: Alternatives Screening**).

SCREENING CRITERIA	THRESHOLD
Connection with Farmington Canal Heritage Trail (Plainville)	Connects to Northwest Drive to Town Line Road
Connection with CTfastrak (New Britain)	CTfastrak station (New Britain)
Connection with downtown Plainville	Connects with Main Street somewhere between Woodford Avenue and Rte 177
Major off-road element	More than 75% off-road
Avoids significant ROW impacts	Fewer than 30
Avoids undue reliance on Rail Right of Way	Avoids permanent impacts to Pan Am rail line connecting to Waterbury and Plainville Rail Yard
	Fewer than three at-grade rail crossings
Avoids being overly circuitous	Not more than double straight-line distance

EVALUATION CRITERIA	FACTORS CONSIDERED
Connectivity	Connections to people and recreational resources
Safety	Traffic speeds, crash history, number of driveways, and traffic volumes
Security	Options for access/egress
Potential Property Impacts	Easements needed, ease of construction
Potential Environmental Impacts	Floodplains, wildlife habitat, hazardous materials, historic/cultural, and recreational
Estimated Costs	Order of magnitude lifecycle costs

The Steering Committee at a meeting in April 2017 forwarded a shortlist of 4 practical and feasible alternatives in Plainville, and 2 practical and feasible alternatives in New Britain, onto the next step (**Step 2: Alternatives Evaluation**). Four criteria – major off-road element; avoiding major right-of-way impacts; avoiding undue reliance on the rail right-of-way; and not overly circuitous – proved to be critical in narrowing the list of potential alternatives. A public meeting in May 2017 provided critical feedback that informed both the screening and evaluation steps.

The shortlisted alignments were developed to the extent that they could

be evaluated on a qualitative scale against the following 6 evaluation criteria, see Evaluation Criteria and Factors Considered above.

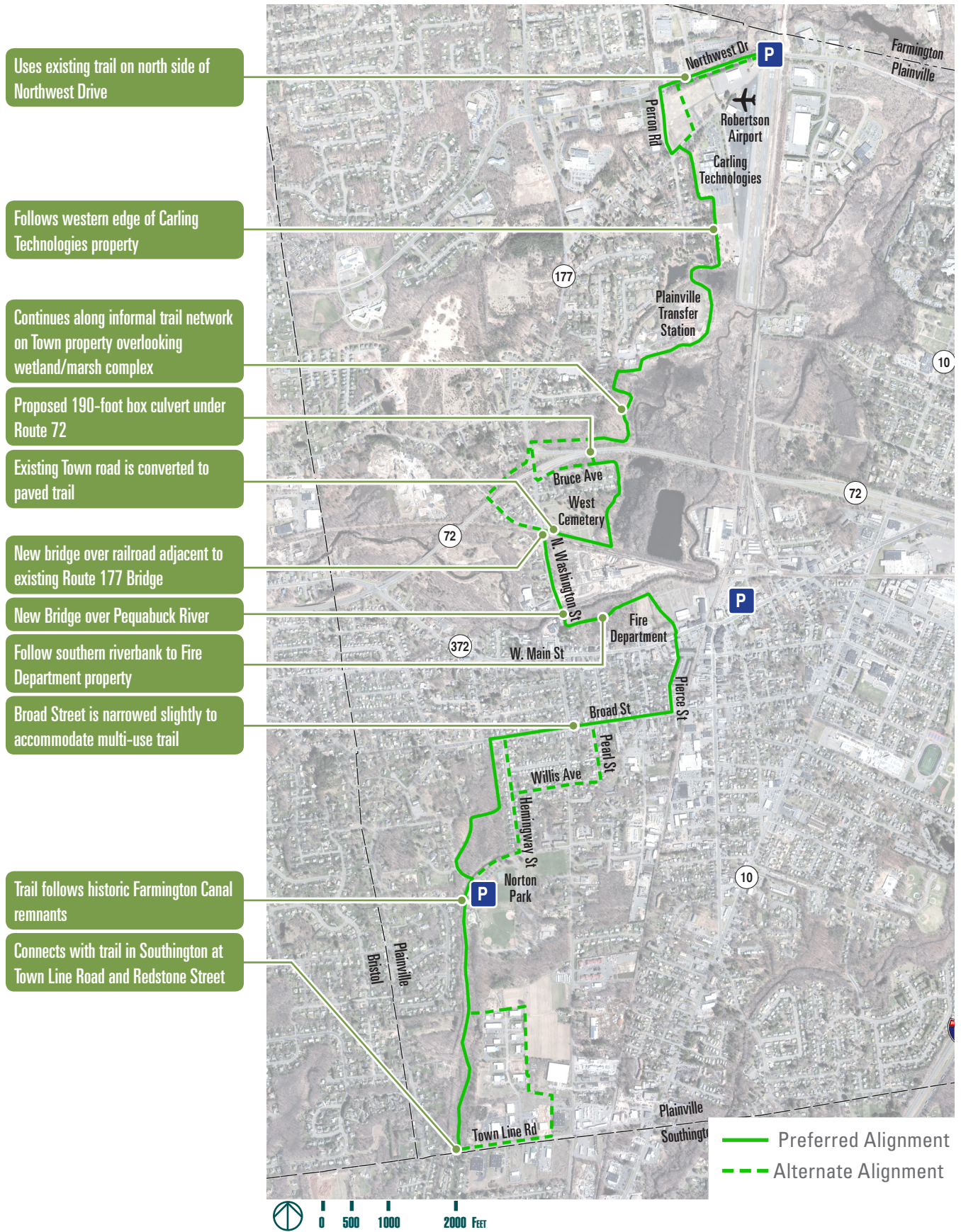
Alignment C in Plainville performed best from this evaluation, as did Alignment E in New Britain. These two alignments performed best in relation to their capability to remain off-road, their connections with both homes and destinations, and their minimization of right-of-way impact and intersections with driveways and roadways. A public meeting in October 2017 provided critical feedback that informed the refinement of Alignment C.

Preferred Alignment (Alignment C)

As currently envisioned, Alignment C is a 5.3-mile multi-use trail extending from Northwest Drive to Town Line Road in Plainville. Nearly the entire length of the preferred alignment consists of off-road multi-use trail. The map on the next page provides more detail on the alignment and assumptions for Alignment C. The trail is assumed to be between 10' and 12' in width in most

places, and designed to standards set forth by CTDOT and by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the Federal Highway Administration's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), and the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG).

Figure ES-1 Overview Map of Preferred Alignment C in Plainville, CT



Schedule and Cost

The project is proposed to be developed in three phases:

- ▶ Project Development – would solidify funding, determine state or federal environmental review, and prepare a scope for the next phase.
- ▶ Design and Permitting – would design the trail to prepare it for construction. Environmental assessments and permits are included in this phase.
- ▶ Construction – two phases of construction are assumed:

- Phase 1 – Northwest Drive to West Main Street (Route 372) (3 miles).
- Phase 2 – West Main Street (Route 372) to Town Line Road (2.3 miles).

Based upon the 2017 CTDOT Cost Estimating Guidelines, the conceptual construction cost estimate for Alignment C is approximately \$14.4 million, or \$2.7 million/mile. This per mile cost is in line with the per mile costs for the most-recently constructed sections of the FCHT in Cheshire and Farmington (which were constructed at \$2.8 million/mile).

Implementation Timeline

