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## No 'quick fix' seen for Manhan trail collapse

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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Wednesday, September 10, 2008

EASTHAMPTON - The Manhan Rail Trail is closed for the foreseeable future after heavy rains Saturday created a sinkhole approximately 12 feet wide and 15 to 20 feet deep.

Officials estimate repairs to the trail will cost \$50,000.

"I don't expect it to be open until spring," City Engineer James A. Gracia said of the trail, which broke ground in 2001 and opened to the public in 2004. "This is not going to be a quick fix."

Gracia said the \$50,000 figure was a "ballpark figure."

The Easthampton Department of Public Works has secured the site with barricades, signs and fencing, according to director Joseph Pipczynski.

"That's not a safe place to be - somebody could get injured or it could be a fatality," Pipczynski said. "I know it's an attractive nuisance but it's not done sliding in."

The Manhan Rail Trail closed Sunday after city residents informed police and City Clerk Barbara LaBombard, who also chairs the Manhan Rail Trail Committee, of the hole, near Fort Hill Road and the small bridge over the discontinued River Road. LaBombard checked out the hole after she heard of it.

"I couldn't believe that the whole path could just fall in like that, but it did," LaBombard said. "It's quite unstable around the edges. Apparently it's collapsed a little farther back since Monday morning."

The approximately 100-year-old concrete culvert, built when the railroads were created, has weakened due to heavy floods over the years, according to Gracia.

"We surmise there's a break in that culvert, and the water rushing through that just sucked it out," DPW Pipczynski said Tuesday.

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik asked Pipczynski to supply an estimate for repairs before he decides if the money will go on the fall capital plan along with funding for the spring, Pipczynski said Tuesday.

Pipczynski speculates repairs will cost "tens of thousands of dollars," noting that the Department of Public Works doesn't have the funding for the repairs needed, and that the department is not responsible for the Manhan Rail Trail but will assist where possible. Conducting repairs will be challenging because of the nature of the hole, according to Pipczynski.

"It's too deep even for a large machine to get down there to uncover that," Pipczynski said. "All that

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A large sinkhole that appeared in the Manhan Rail Trail off East Street in Easthampton will close the popular path at least until spring.

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Since it lies about 25 feet under the trail, city officials don't know what's occurring with the culvert, Gracia said. The hole is 15 to 20 feet deep from the surface to the soil, and the culvert, 2 feet wide and 3 feet high in size, is about another 10 feet below the soil, Gracia said.

"It's not washed all the way to the culvert, but slowly it's expanding," Gracia said Tuesday. "If we get more heavy rain today, it could get deeper."

Gracia said he wasn't surprised when he heard of the sinkhole this week.

"There's a lot of those stone culverts. Some of them are good, some of them are not," Gracia said. "With the torrential rains we've had over the last couple months, it creates more potential for this stuff to happen. They've held up for a lot of years but these last few storms have weakened them - I guess this is the last straw."

Catherine Baum can be reached at [cbaum@gazettenet.com](mailto:cbaum@gazettenet.com).

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