

charles river/north station

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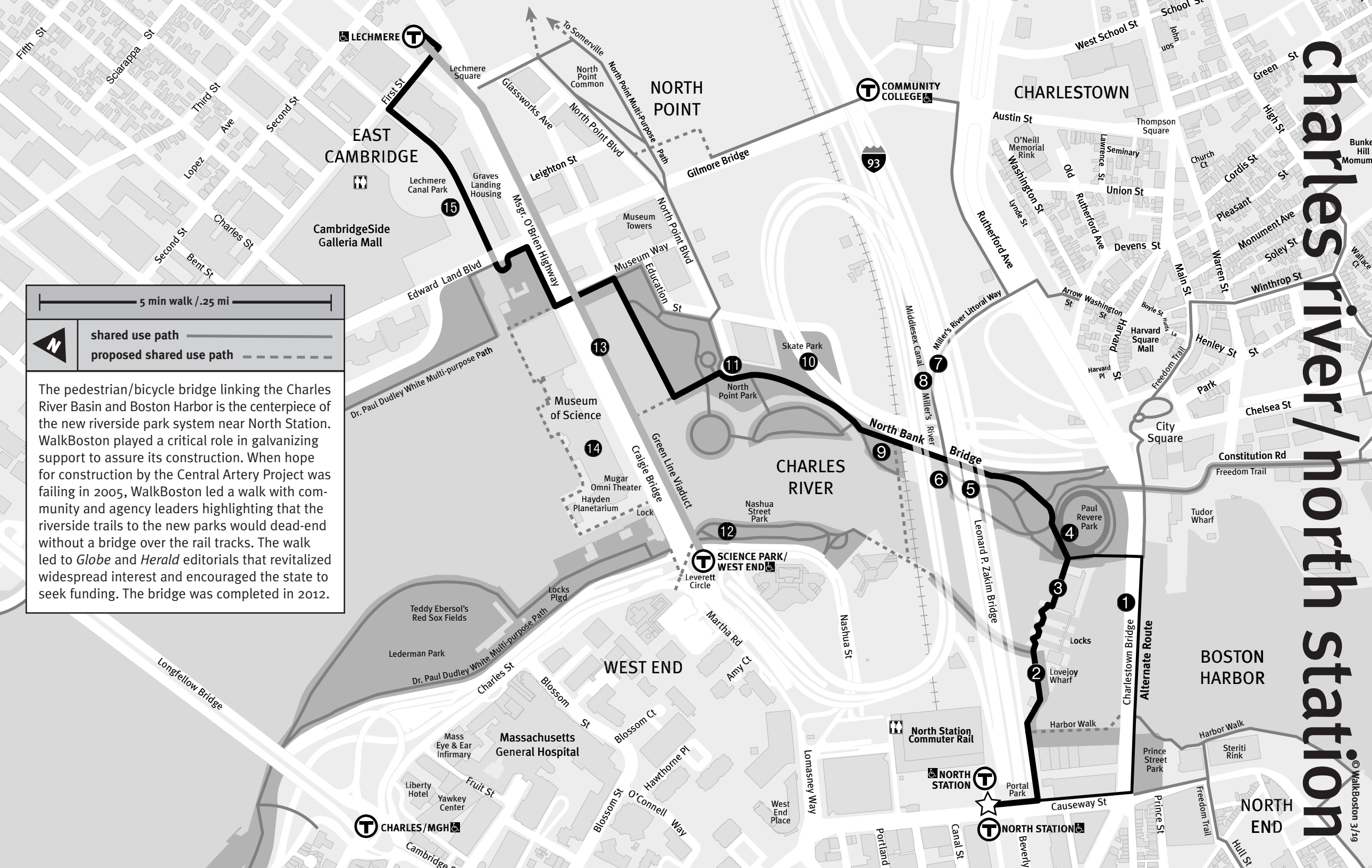
5 min walk / .25 mi

N

shared use path

proposed shared use path

The pedestrian/bicycle bridge linking the Charles River Basin and Boston Harbor is the centerpiece of the new riverside park system near North Station. WalkBoston played a critical role in galvanizing support to assure its construction. When hope for construction by the Central Artery Project was failing in 2005, WalkBoston led a walk with community and agency leaders highlighting that the riverside trails to the new parks would dead-end without a bridge over the rail tracks. The walk led to *Globe* and *Herald* editorials that revitalized widespread interest and encouraged the state to seek funding. The bridge was completed in 2012.



A reclaimed/re-found half mile

The banks of the Charles River between the Museum of Science and Boston Harbor were once heavily industrialized with a landscape of railyards, polluted drainage ditches, wharf warehouses, and no walking access to the river. Dubbed the “Lost Half Mile” by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, the construction of the Central Artery’s Zakim Bridge and its ramps high above the river brought an opportunity for a new riverfront, with 40 acres of new parks, a skate park, two housing towers, and the U.S. headquarters for the Education First company.

The reclaimed Half Mile is the site of a beautiful new walking facility: the North Bank Bridge, a 690-foot pathway that curves under the Zakim Bridge and over the MBTA commuter rails that used to be an impassable barrier. The bridge is one of three that are planned. The second will be a walkway attached to the MBTA rail bridge over the river into North Station. The third, a South Bank Bridge, will connect Charles River walkways along the Boston side of the river to the HarborWalk in a richly historic and highly visited area.

Area history

English explorer John Smith came to this river in 1614, mapped it and presented it to King James I, who named the river after his son Charles. The vast river and mud flats surrounded half of the peninsula where Boston was settled. Tidal waters pushed up to Watertown and drained back into the harbor at a narrow throat between Charlestown and the North End. The first ferry across the Charles River began operating in 1630 and was awarded to financially strapped Harvard College in 1640. Harvard used tolls as income for 145 years, starting at two pence per person and six pence per pig.



MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

Sites to visit

- ① **Charles River Bridge** - Ferry traffic between Boston and Charlestown grew in spite of winter ice. In 1786, a bridge replaced the ferry, connecting the North End and Charlestown. Bridge builders were permitted to charge tolls, with £200 paid annually to Harvard for 40 years to offset the lost income from the ferry. The bridge was replaced in 1900 by the bridge you see today, which also carried the Charlestown elevated railway until 1975.
- ② **Warren Bridge** - An extension of Beverly Street, this bridge was chartered in 1828 with tolls allowed for six years. It was a direct competitor to the adjacent Charles River Bridge and quickly threatened to become toll-free. Owners of the older bridge hired Daniel Webster to sue for their exclusive rights to the crossing. The lawsuit reached the U.S. Supreme Court, where the Warren Bridge owners prevailed. The bridge was removed in 1962.
- ③ **Charles River Dam & Locks** - Completed in 1978 where the Warren Bridge once crossed, the Charles River Dam has three locks that can be crossed by pedestrians. The dam fixes the level of the water on the river, and pumps river water into the harbor when rain or snowmelt could flood the Basin. The locks are in frequent use by boats traveling between the harbor and the river.
- ④ **Paul Revere Park** - This 5-acre park stands where Revere was thought to have watched for lanterns – “one if by land, and two if by sea.” The park includes mosaic art commemorating his actions, a large grassy oval, an amphitheatre for performances, a fenced-in playground for children, and a pier with fish-cleaning stations overlooking Boston Harbor.
- ⑤ **Five Beacons Sculpture** - Five perforated stainless steel columns by artist Ross Miller were installed in 2012 under the Zakim Bridge. The columns are lit from inside and outside, and occupy the outdoor room formed by the multi-lane highway deck above. Reclaimed granite seawall blocks frame the space.
- ⑥ **Miller’s River** - A tiny estuary between the Zakim Bridge and the rail lines is the remnant of an oyster-filled expanse of water that extended to Sullivan Square and into East Cambridge. The river was gradually filled as nearby industries, including slaughterhouses, used it as a dumping ground. The stench and health impacts led to Massachusetts’ first anti-pollution environmental laws based on public health.

- ⑦ **Littoral Way** - A riverside walkway leads to residential Charlestown. A linear public art project by Ross Miller, the Littoral Way includes graphics, paving designs and lighting that wind through the I-93 structural piers.
- ⑧ **Middlesex Canal** - In 1804, Middlesex Canal between Lowell and Boston passed through the Miller’s River. Horses pulled boats to a tidewater lock, and a long cable under the river acted as a guide that was pulled up by boatmen so they could drag canal boats by hand across the river into Boston’s Canal Street. The canal was closed in 1851.
- ⑨ **North Bank Bridge** - This 690-foot-long bridge with complicated geometry crosses the rail lines and Miller’s River between Paul Revere and North Point Parks. It links, for the first time, the walkways along the Charles in Cambridge to Charlestown, the Mystic River and Boston Harbor. The bridge was designed by Greenman-Pederson, Carol R. Johnson Associates, Ammann & Whitney, and Stantec.
- ⑩ **Charles River Skate Park** - The Charles River Conservancy championed the large-scale skate park under construction beneath the ramps of the Zakim Bridge. The park incorporates elements from unique skate-spots throughout greater Boston for skaters of all levels, along with seating for spectators.
- ⑪ **North Point** - Cambridge’s 60-acre North Point neighborhood, extending north of the Miller’s River, includes a shared-use path through the park that links with the riverfront trails. North Point Park opened in 2007 and occupies an 8.5-acre site featuring small islands, bridges and kayaking canals.
- ⑫ **Nashua Street Park** - Across the river from North Point Park is the Nashua Street Park, with water views of the Zakim Bridge, a six-foot misting sculpture, granite stairway to the water’s edge, and fiber-optic lighting. It was previously a helicopter landing pad and parking lot.
- ⑬ **Green Line Viaduct** - This 1910 concrete and masonry arch bridge carries the MBTA Green Line over the river. The only remaining elevated section of the Green Line, the viaduct was constructed to take streetcar lines off the Craigie Bridge by connecting to multiple streetcar lines in Cambridge and Somerville.
- ⑭ **Science Park** - The Craigie Bridge, in front of the Science Museum and parallel to the Lechmere Viaduct, covers the original basin dam. Built in 1910, the dam stabilized the water level of the Charles River from

Boston to Watertown and converted the Charles River Basin into a body of fresh water. The 8-acre park built on the dam was replaced by the Museum of Science beginning in 1951.

⑮ **Lechmere Canal** - The Lechmere Point settlement and canal was developed in the 19th century. Cambridge’s urban renewal program transformed this obsolete industrial waterway with walkways and a fountain-centered park surrounded by new buildings, including the CambridgeSide Galleria. The park contains a 1986 bronze sculpture called the Tower of East Cambridge Faces, designed to capture the diverse culture of East Cambridge.

About WalkBoston

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities. Our education and advocacy programs give voice to people to make their communities more walkable. We develop and implement innovative programs that address social and physical barriers to walking.

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