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## **New track on MBTA line to make travel easier**

*By Paul Tennant*

**[ptennant@eagletribune.com](mailto:ptennant@eagletribune.com)**

A second track between Lawrence and Andover is expected to allow more trains to run between the Merrimack Valley and Boston, and end some delays.

The added track will allow trains to travel in both directions at the same time. Currently, a train headed to Boston must stop before getting on the single track if another train is heading at that time toward Haverhill, the northernmost stop on the commuter line.

Work to add the second line is expected to begin this winter, with track being installed whenever heavy snowfall isn't interfering with construction, said John Ray, director of railroad operations for the MBTA. The project will be paid for by \$17.4 million from the federal stimulus plan and is expected to be completed a year from now, Ray said.

Mayor James Fiorentini has touted Haverhill's access to commuter rail as part of plans to develop the city's downtown. The closeness of the train station has served as a major selling point for former shoe factories that have been converted into apartments.

"It would be a major boom for us," Fiorentini said of the new track allowing greater ease of travel for trains.

The mayor said he has met many people who would like to take the train from the Merrimack Valley into Boston, but do not do so because the service is not convenient for them. It's especially bad in the early afternoon, when people must wait sometimes as long as two hours for a train into Boston, or back to Haverhill, he said.

"We've been pushing for this for a long time," Fiorentini said. "I've told him (Richard Davey, general manager of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) this is a priority for the city."

The second track will enable trains to run in opposite directions at the same time for the first time in 25 years, Ray said. The second track that used to run along the single line in Andover was ripped up and the rails and ties were used elsewhere in the MBTA system, he said.

"Access to the commuter rail is one of Haverhill's strongest assets," said state Sen. Steven Baddour, D-Methuen. "This enhancement will certainly improve service between Haverhill and Boston and will better serve the many families and commuters who rely on public transportation."

The Haverhill/Reading line runs north from downtown Boston through Malden, Melrose, Wakefield, Reading, Wilmington, Andover, Lawrence and North Andover, ending in downtown Haverhill.

"The service at Lawrence today is constrained because of that single track. There's no place to bring a commuter train up and hold it while an outbound or inbound train comes in the opposite direction," Ray said.

The second track will run parallel to the line now being used, according to the MBTA.