



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

VISITING CAPE COD

Where to Park for the Cape Cod Rail Trail: Every Trailhead Lot, Capacity & Tips for Busy Days

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-rail-trail-parking-guide

The South Dennis lot at Route 134 — the western terminus of the [Cape Cod Rail Trail](#) — fills completely by 9:30am on July and August weekends. That single fact shapes everything about how you plan a Rail Trail day. Know the lots, know the alternates, and you will be on the trail while others are still circling.

This guide covers every official trailhead parking area from Dennis to Wellfleet, with honest notes on capacity, fees, and what locals do when Plan A fails.

The Quick Answer: Parking at a Glance

The Cape Cod Rail Trail runs roughly 25 miles on a converted railroad bed from South Dennis to South Wellfleet. Five towns — Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet — each have at least one trailhead with parking. Capacity ranges from fewer than 20 spaces (Wellfleet) to 100-plus (South Dennis). Fees vary by location: state park lots charge a vehicle fee, National Seashore lots require a park pass or day fee during peak season, and several town-adjacent lots are free.

Peak pressure points: South Dennis, Nickerson State Park (Brewster), and Salt Pond Visitor Center (Eastham) are the three lots that routinely fill on summer weekends.

Dennis: The Western Terminus

Route 134 Trailhead, South Dennis

This is the official western starting point of the trail and the most heavily used trailhead on the entire 25-mile corridor. The lot sits off Route 134 in South Dennis, close to the South Dennis Post Office and just south of Route 6.

Capacity: Large lot, roughly 100 spaces including a dedicated bike rack area near the trailhead kiosk.

Fees: No fee as of the most recent season — confirm locally before you go, as the town has considered managed parking during peak periods.

What to know: On a Saturday in July, this lot fills by 9:30am and stays full until early afternoon. Overflow parking happens informally along the access road, which creates its own congestion. If you are driving from the mid-Cape or Upper Cape to start here, arrive before 9am or be prepared with a backup plan.

The local move: Dennis residents often park a few blocks away at the nearby shopping plaza on Route 134 and walk to the trailhead (under five minutes). It is not official overflow but it is widely practiced on busy days. Ask before assuming.

Access: The trailhead connects immediately to the paved Rail Trail heading east. Restrooms are available at the trailhead lot.

Brewster: The Nickerson Hub

Brewster has the most significant mid-trail parking infrastructure, thanks almost entirely to Nickerson State Park.

Nickerson State Park Trailhead

Nickerson State Park straddles the Rail Trail and offers the largest parking capacity of any mid-trail access point.

The park entrance is off Route 6A in Brewster. Multiple lots within the park connect to the Rail Trail via short spur paths, and the park internal bike trail network links directly to the main corridor.

Capacity: Substantial — Nickerson has hundreds of parking spaces spread across several lots. The trailhead-specific area is well-marked and has dedicated bike rack stations.

Fees: Massachusetts state park parking fee applies (\$8 for MA-plated vehicles, higher for out-of-state plates — check the current DCR fee schedule before your visit). If you have a DCR season pass, it is valid here.

What to know: Because it is a state park, Nickerson lot stays better-managed than most. It rarely completely fills the way the Dennis lot does, though it gets heavy on summer weekends. The park also has a bike rental operation (check current vendors and hours ahead of time), which makes Nickerson a smart starting point if you are renting.

Restrooms: Available at the park.

Tip: Campers at Nickerson State Park have on-site access to the Rail Trail without worrying about day-use parking at all — another reason [Brewster camping](#) near the Rail Trail is worth considering for a multi-day trip.

Underpass Road Trailhead

There is a smaller access point off Underpass Road in Brewster, positioned roughly mid-trail through the town. This lot has limited capacity — expect 20 to 30 spaces — and it fills fast on busy days. However, because it is less obvious than the Nickerson entrance, it often has spaces when the main lots are full by midday.

Fees: Free.

Tip: If you are planning a Brewster-to-Orleans or Brewster-to-Eastham out-and-back ride, Underpass Road saves you the state park fee and puts you right in the middle of one of the trail best-shaded stretches.

Orleans: The Crossroads Access

Orleans is where the Rail Trail converges with Route 6 and the town main commercial corridor. The trail passes through Orleans as it transitions from the wooded Brewster section toward the more open National Seashore landscape to the east.

Orleans Trailhead / Eldredge Parkway Area

The Orleans access point sits near the Route 6 / Eldredge Parkway intersection. The lot here is mid-sized — roughly 30 to 50 spaces — and serves both Rail Trail users and visitors to nearby shops and services.

Fees: Free.

What to know: Orleans is a natural stopping point for riders doing a longer route (Dennis to Eastham, for example), and the proximity to Orleans center means food and services are within easy reach. Sundae School, a beloved Orleans ice cream institution, is a short detour from the trail corridor — a fact that shapes many riders route planning.

Tip: If the Eastham lots are full when you arrive, driving back to Orleans and starting there is the most common fallback. You will add mileage to your ride, but the Orleans lot is almost always accessible.

Note on town connections: The Rail Trail does not traverse the heart of Orleans town center — it runs along the Route 6 corridor. If you want to ride from the trail into Orleans proper for lunch or shopping, budget for a short road section on bike-friendly but trafficked roads.

Eastham: The National Seashore Gateway

Eastham is where the Rail Trail passes directly through Cape Cod National Seashore territory, and it is where the parking situation gets most complicated — and most beautiful.

Salt Pond Visitor Center, Cape Cod National Seashore

The Salt Pond Visitor Center is the single most important hub on the eastern half of the Rail Trail. The visitor center sits directly on Doane Road off Route 6, and the parking lot connects to both the Rail Trail and the National Seashore own trail network, including the Nauset Marsh Trail and the Buttonbush Trail.

Capacity: The main lot holds a few hundred cars, but it serves visitors for multiple activities — the visitor center itself, guided programs, kayak launch access nearby, and Rail Trail riders. On a peak summer weekend, expect the lot to be full or near-full by 10am.

Fees: Cape Cod National Seashore entrance fee applies during peak season. As of recent seasons, the weekly vehicle pass is around \$25 and the annual America the Beautiful pass covers all National Seashore lots. If you are visiting multiple times, the annual pass pays for itself fast.

What to know: The visitor center has excellent restrooms, water, exhibits, and staff who can answer questions about trail conditions. Rangers here are a reliable source for real-time lot status across the Seashore — worth asking on a busy day.

The overflow situation: When Salt Pond fills, rangers sometimes direct visitors to the overflow area in the field across Doane Road. This adds a short walk but keeps access moving. Plan for this on holiday weekends.

Brackett Road / Town of Eastham Access

The Town of Eastham maintains a separate, free access point to the Rail Trail off Brackett Road, away from the National Seashore fee zone. This lot is smaller — under 30 spaces — but it is free and it is known to locals as the alternative when Salt Pond is overwhelmed.

Fees: Free (town lot, not National Seashore).

Tip: If you have a National Seashore pass, Salt Pond is the better experience — the visitor center adds real value. If you do not, Brackett Road saves you the fee and still puts you on the trail quickly.

Wellfleet: The Eastern Terminus

South Wellfleet Trailhead

The Rail Trail eastern terminus sits in South Wellfleet, near the intersection of LeCount Hollow Road and the old railroad corridor. This is the quietest trailhead on the entire trail by a significant margin.

Capacity: Small — under 20 spaces. There is no large infrastructure here, which is partly why Wellfleet does not see the same parking crunch as Dennis or Eastham.

Fees: Free.

What to know: Ending (or starting) in Wellfleet means you are deep in the lower Cape, surrounded by the National Seashore on both sides. The terminus connects riders to Wellfleet town center by road — a short ride west on Route 6 gets you to the Wellfleet town pier, oyster shacks, and the commercial strip. It is worth the detour.

The strategic advantage of starting in Wellfleet: Almost nobody does. If you are riding east-to-west (Wellfleet to Dennis) on a summer weekend, you will find parking easily at the South Wellfleet end while everyone else fights for Dennis. This directional flip is one of the best Rail Trail tips locals know.

Tips for Busy Days

Arrive before 9am or after 2pm. Lots fill between 9:30 and 11am on peak summer days. By 2pm, turnover begins as half-day riders wrap up.

Ride to the trailhead. If you are staying within 2-3 miles of any access point, riding your bike to the trailhead and locking it at the first rack is always an option. Many Brewster and Eastham accommodations are close enough to make this work.

Start mid-trail. Brewster Underpass Road and Orleans Eldredge Parkway lots are perennially underused compared to the two termini. Starting from the middle of the trail and riding both directions gives you flexibility and a better chance at parking.

Weekday mornings are a different world. Tuesday through Thursday in July, even Salt Pond Visitor Center has open spaces at 9am. If your schedule has any flexibility, a weekday Rail Trail day is dramatically more pleasant than a Saturday.

Check the weather window. After a rainy morning that clears by 11am, the lots fill later than usual. Flexible travelers who chase the clearing can often find spaces at peak lots on these days.

Best Time to Go

Optimal season: Mid-September through mid-October. Foliage is starting, the trail is crowd-free, and the lots are never an issue. Temperatures are ideal for riding.

Second best: Early May through mid-June. The trail is in good shape after winter, crowds are minimal, and Nickerson campground is bookable without the intense competition of July.

Peak season reality check: July 4th through Labor Day weekend, parking is the constraint. Everything above applies. Go early, go weekdays, or go to Wellfleet.

Year-round note: The Rail Trail is maintained year-round and is technically rideable on mild winter days, though some sections accumulate debris and the lots are unstaffed. Salt Pond Visitor Center has reduced winter hours — check the National Seashore website before a cold-weather visit.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is parking free at all Cape Cod Rail Trail trailheads? No. Nickerson State Park charges the standard DCR vehicle fee (\$8 for Massachusetts-plated vehicles, more for out-of-state plates — verify current rates). The Salt Pond Visitor Center in Eastham charges the National Seashore entrance fee during peak season (roughly late June through Labor Day). The Dennis Route 134 lot, Orleans, Wellfleet, and the Eastham Brackett Road access are currently free, but check local signage as parking policies can change seasonally.

Where is the best place to park for the Cape Cod Rail Trail? It depends on your starting point and what you want to see. For access to rentals and services, Nickerson State Park in Brewster is the most convenient mid-trail hub. For the National Seashore experience, Salt Pond in Eastham. For a free, uncrowded start, South Wellfleet. For the western terminus and longest possible east-bound ride, South Dennis at Route 134.

Can I park at Nickerson State Park without paying the park fee if I am just using the Rail Trail? No. If you park inside Nickerson State Park, the state park vehicle fee applies regardless of your activity. The DCR fee

structure does not have a Rail Trail-only exemption. The Underpass Road trailhead in Brewster is a free alternative that keeps you out of the park fee zone.

What happens when Salt Pond Visitor Center fills up? Rangers manage overflow using an adjacent field lot. Wait times are typically short even when the main lot is full. If overflow is also full, rangers may suggest the Brackett Road town access point in Eastham as a free alternative without the congestion.

Is there parking for people with disabilities at Rail Trail trailheads? Yes. All official trailhead lots — South Dennis, Nickerson State Park, Salt Pond, and Wellfleet — have ADA-designated spaces near the trailhead access. The Rail Trail surface itself is paved and accessible. Salt Pond Visitor Center has the most complete accessible facilities, including accessible restrooms and exhibits.

Explore More on the Rail Trail

Once you are on the trail, the towns it passes through — Dennis, Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet — offer far more than the pavement itself. The [Cape Cod Certified directory](#) lists field-verified local restaurants, bike shops, kayak outfitters, and accommodations within reach of every trailhead, so you can build a full day (or a full trip) around your ride. Browse experiences and businesses near each town to make the most of wherever you park and pedal.

◆ THINGS TO DO

Make a day of it

Bookable experiences that pair perfectly with this guide. Scan any code to reserve.

BOOK · VARIES

Kayak, SUP & Pedal Boat Rentals

Cape Cod Waterways · Dennis

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · ~\$60

Kayak & SUP Rentals + Bass River Tour

Inland Sea Kayak & SUP · Dennis

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book

BOOK · FROM \$37/PERSON

Kayak & Paddleboard Rentals — Mashpee

RideAway Adventures · Mashpee

A hand-picked Cape Cod experience to pair with this guide — book direct.



Scan to book



Headed to the Cape with friends? Share this guide.

Every share helps a real local business get found — and keeps Cape Cod guides free. Scan to send it along.

Explore Cape Cod →



Cape Cod Certified · capecodcertified.com/guides/cape-cod-rail-trail-parking-guide · Real guides, real local knowledge. Verify seasonal details before you go.



FOR CAPE COD BUSINESSES

This is what being Cape Cod Certified looks like.

You just read a guide that travelers and locals download, keep, and share. The businesses inside it were chosen on merit — real vetting, real local knowledge, never pay-to-play.

Own a Cape Cod business? Get Certified and earn your place in guides like this one — in front of the exact people planning their trip and their spend.



Get Certified → capecodcertified.com/join