

Little Toot

Yes! A Trail Corridor!

Eight years of advocacy, three years of dealing

Rail-trail will provide commuting options for Triangle region

After eight years of advocacy, four years of regional planning and three years of negotiating North Carolina now has its first opportunity for a full-fledged rail-trail: The American Tobacco Trail.

That premier project passed a major milestone Aug. 31 when the NC DOT Rails Division acquired the urban Durham and Wake County portions of the American Tobacco Trail corridor for \$2.8 million. Negotiation are now underway for the remaining eight-mile middle section in rural Durham County and Chatham County.

That will railbank 23 miles from downtown Durham to New Hill in Wake County.

The American Tobacco Trail project is central to Triangle region greenway planning. Connector trails are planned by Durham, Cary and Research Triangle Park. The existing 3-mile Eagles Spur trail provides access to Jordon Lake at Stagecoach Road.

At New Hill the line connects with the four-mile New Hope Valley Railway, which is owned and operated by the Eastern North Carolina Chapter of the National Railroad Historic Preservation Society.

The NC DOT Rails Division proposes to lease the Durham section to the city for



Paul Worley (left) and Pat Simmons (center) get an eager assist from NCRT's Al Capheart at the door to the Durham County Register of Deeds office. Simmons is NC DOT Rails Division director. Worley, senior rail planner, headed up negotiations for the American Tobacco Trail corridor acquisition.

interim trail use until needed for light rail commuter service.

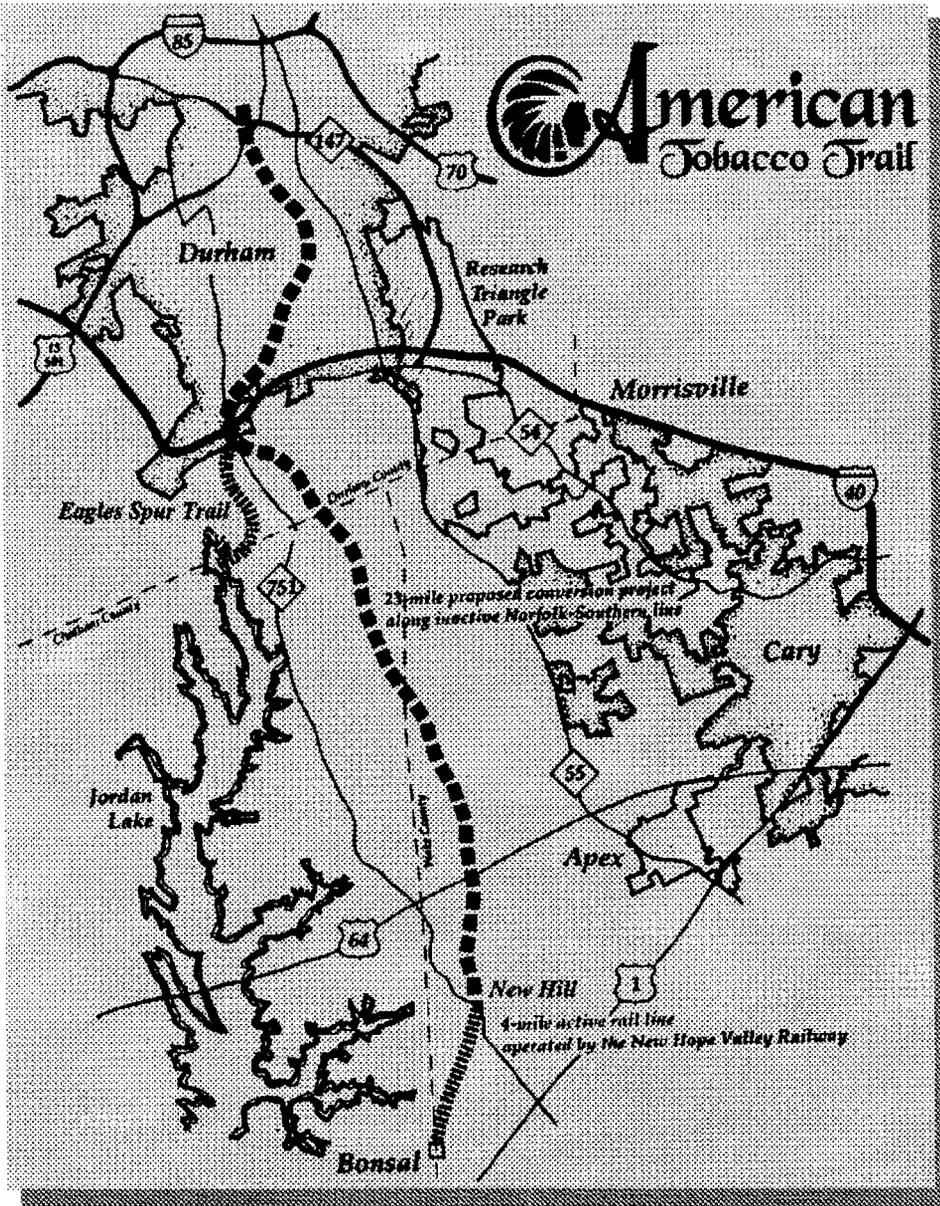
The NC DOT Pedestrian and Bicycle Program has \$300,000 allocated for each of the next four years to develop the American Tobacco Trail.

Built as the Durham & South Carolina Railroad in 1905, the line hauled the golden leaf to the American Tobacco Co. warehouse in downtown Durham. It was commonly known as the Durham Branch. The original alignment through Chatham County was moved east out of the New Hope River basin when Jordon Lake was created in the 1970s. After realignment it was never used because of the merger of Norfolk Southern and Southern railroads. The new Norfolk Southern retained title

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ATT Needs Nov. 20

The legislatively-required public hear on developing the Durham Branch railway as the American Tobacco Trail has been scheduled by the Durham City Council for 7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 20, at Durham City Hall. NCRT and TRTC urge trail advocates to make every effort to attend this hearing and to voice support.



Triangle plans link with regional trail

Cont. from Page 1

in fee, thus making it eligible for interim trail use under the state's stringent corridor leasing law.

The push to protect the corridor was started in the 1980s by the then-new North Carolina Rail-Trails and local Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Keeping the potential alive became a mission for NCRT co-founder Al Capehart. While Capehart championed the concept, TRTC leaders John Gobel and Robert Payne organized a regional feasibility study that drew out public inputs and involved city, county, state and federal agencies.

A State Trails Committee grant was used to leverage additional funds from the City of Durham and Wake County, which resulted in a Greenways Inc. trail master plan proposal in 1992.

That helped generate support for including the corridor in the state railbanking plan. At that point Paul Worley, NC DOT senior rail planner, took up the task of negotiating the purchase while threading a maze of conflicting state and federal regulations.

It all came together when Steve McCurdy, Norfolk Southern property agent, delivered the deed to Pat Simmons, Rails Division head, in a ceremony at the NC DOT District 5 office.

Durham Mayor Sylvia Kirkoff, an early proponent of corridor preservation, made celebratory remarks.

That launched rail-trail advocates toward the next milestone: Getting the American Tobacco Trail from the planning board to on the ground.

And that process will start Thursday, Nov. 16, at an American Tobacco Trail Open House, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. on the second floor of Durham City Hall. Videos of other rail-trails will be shown and preliminary plans will be discussed.

The public can talk to city, county and state designers, engineers and landscape architects about trail development.

Stop, look and listen: Shopping mall crossings ahead

Even while the Durham Branch was in the final phase of being acquired it was being subjected to developer encroachment. Despite strong protests by the Durham Open Space and Trails Commission, the Durham City/County Planning Board gave a mall developer permission to build two major entrances across the corridor. That action was then approved by the Durham City Council.

In doing so, the council went against its own 1989 resolution to prevent driveways from crossing preserved rail corridors. The resolution also called for city staff to draw up an ordinance. The task fell through

the cracks when the city and county planning offices were merged.

As a result, two busy mall entrances will cross the trail only 200 feet from where the new Martin Luther King Parkway crosses the corridor. Trail supporters contended that the new mall had adequate access off the new parkway and asked for design changes that would avoid crossing the trail from Fayetteville Road. That request fell on deaf ears.

The Open Space and Trails Commission is pressing the joint planning board to belatedly draft the ordinance and present it to the city and the county.

Whistle Stops:

The trail in my back yard

Editor's Note -- Greenway and rail trails often excite the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) instinct among property owners. This letter, lifted from the Pikes Peak Area Trail Coalition newsletter, is reprinted in part because it is typical of what happens when adjacent property owners gain experience as trail neighbors. While reprinting it here is preaching to the choir, you might use it to calm NIMBY fears.

Less than 20 years has changed the view from my deck dramatically. In this short period of time, some 10,000 homes have been built in the rocky cow pastures to the west. . . I am shocked by the volume of traffic on my street but I am excited by the new trail in my back yard - and I mean in my back yard! The trail is nine feet from my property line and only 40 feet from my raised deck.

I admit, I was a little concerned about my loss of privacy with strangers passing so close. However, the trail has been a very

positive amenity. There are no negatives - none - zip! People jog, walk and bike by as I read my paper each morning without affecting my peaceful enjoyment. When I choose, I wave "hi!" to some and am developing new trail friends.

What had become a neglected, overgrown creek corridor is now an amazingly beautiful and natural byway. As I walk the trail, I don't see trash and I don't have to jump out of the way of "hell-bent-for-leather" bicycles. The users I see are happy, mellow and courteous. They are there to enjoy this oasis in our sea of asphalt, not abuse it.

Each time a new trail is proposed, there are alarmist outcries that it will destroy property and property values, invade privacy, lead to vandalism and theft, and spread litter through pristine areas. When the trails are finally in place, the reality is far different. My experience is the norm. The trail has added a lot to my enjoyment of my community . . . *Dr. Wayne J. Selting, Colorado Springs, CO.*

Hey, now we're talking

If talking - both ways - across the table is any measure, then the fourth meeting of the Transportation Environmental Round Table at NCSU signals progress.

When it all began in March, 1994, environmentalists were talked down to as the NC DOT presented overwhelming reams of data on how it efficiently builds highways. Questions not directed to that subject were largely ignored . . . or not understood.

But like water falling on a rock, there has been a gradual change. The Oct. 25 session generated a proposal for task teams to address mutual concerns.

David King, deputy secretary for non-highway transportation, offered that established public transportation corridors should be included in land use planning.

Yes, let's talk about that some more.

Stokes trail advocates mount counter campaign

David Simpson, Stokes County project contact, is heading an education and petition campaign in support of preserving the 8.5-mile Norfolk Southern corridor between Brook Cove and Rural Hall.

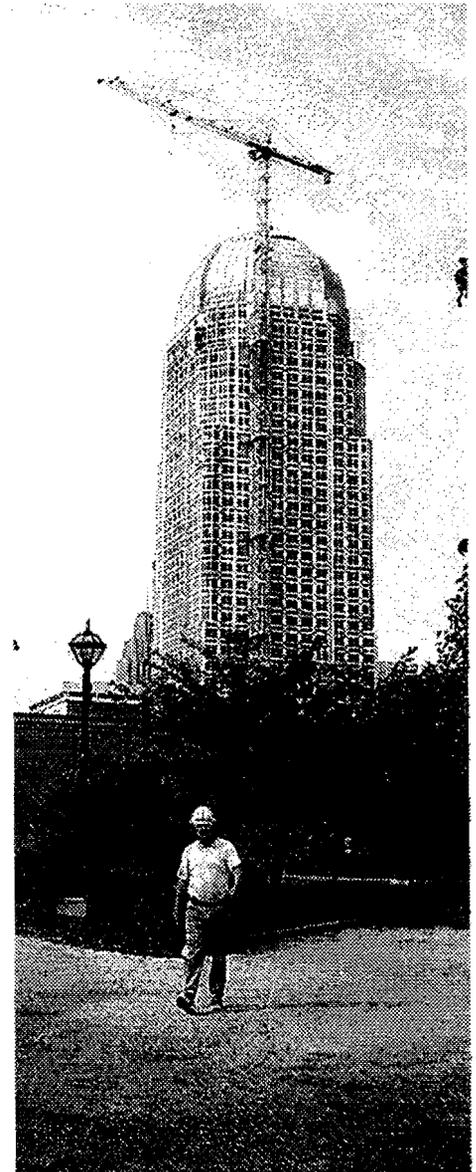
The drive is an effort to offset opposition from adjacent property owners who have been organized by Sara Solomon. Her group convinced the Stokes County Commission to oppose a rail-trail even before the commissioners heard from trail

supporters. Trail advocates will have an opportunity to rebut opposition claims at the commission's Nov. 6 meeting.

The railroad is expected to file an exemption for abandonment at the end of November. The corridor could be railbanked under the National Trails System Act Section 8(d).

The Forsyth County Commission is reportedly taking a wait and see position.

NCRT is compiling a list of adjacent property owners in both counties.



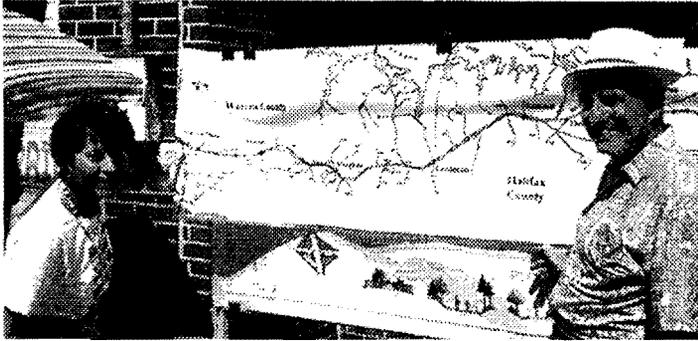
Hard top commute

The Winston-Salem Strollway gained another unique "design feature" when the new Wachovia Bank headquarters was recently topped out. This construction worker took the best commute home: The Strollway.

Cyber trailhead on-line

American Hiking Society is constructing the on-line National Trails Information Center. Trail user information and advocate resources are presently available via *America On-Line*. Future plans include web links to other trail organizations and agencies.

You can take a look at this ambitious project by logging onto AOL, go *Conservation to Backpacker, National Trails Day and NTIC On-Line*.



Roanoke Valley Trail Association board members Roseleen Walsh and Howdy Tomlison promoted the project at the Littleton Downtown Turnaround Festival. The festival features a hot rod parade that tours Littleton, turns around and tours Littleton, again. Littleton also is home of the Sabina Gould Walkway, the world's shortest rail-trail, but with ambitions of growing to 32 miles as the RVT.

RTVA presses on with rail-trail plans

The Roanoke Valley Trails Association was incorporated Oct. 5 as a land trust to retrieve and protect unused rail corridors and to promote multi-use trails in Warren and Halifax counties.

The primary goal is to create a rail-trail on the CSX line from Norlina to ^{Roanoke} _{Rapids} a distance of 32 miles. The project was the subject of a feasibility study conducted this year by the association and NCRT under a state Travel & Tourism Rural Development Grant.

RVTA has requested that CSX lease the line for interim trail use until it may be needed for light rail service in the next century.

The advocate group also is campaigning to have the project included in the state's long-term transportation plan.

Next meeting Dec. 9 at Greensboro

NCRT's next quarterly meeting will be 10:30 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 9, at Bur-mill Center in Bur-mill Park a mile north of Greensboro. Take Highway 220 north to Owls Roost Road, then Bur-mill Road. City planners will review the local greenway trails program.

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