

Lincolnton opens downtown rail-trail section

It's official. It's a rail-trail. On Sept. 9 the sun shined, the band played, city and state officials spoke, a ribbon was cut and bikes rolled on a half-mile of paved greenway trail which curves around downtown Lincolnton.

It took a decade of persistent nudging by local advocates, a reversal of political winds, nearly three years of acquisition negotiations, and 18 months of design and construction.

The Lincolnton Rail-Trail is the first in the state to result from the combination of a grass-roots initiative, local-state agreements and federal ISTEA Transportation Enhancements funding. Before trail development came the significant preliminaries of the Main Street bridge replacement and storm sewer construction to handled downtown drainage into the rail corridor.

The next goal is to connect the city/county recreation center at the south edge of town with a partially-developed, north-end city park. The north-south extensions will depend on easements from neighboring property owners. The downtown section was built on property purchased from Norfolk-Southern.

Completion of the first section will allow the city to move ahead with a downtown redevelopment plan, which will incorporate three railroad out-parcels acquired with the corridor. A trail beautification committee is working with local artists to create murals on buildings bordering the rail-trail. Corridor landscape will be completed when the weather turns favorable.



NC BOT District Representative Ann Galther, left, and Lincolnton Mayor Pro Tem Marcia Cloninger, right, escort NC DOT Deputy Secretary David King to the Lincolnton Rail-Trail dedication ceremony.
(Photo courtesy of Craig Wyant, A Fine Line Design)

NRTF offers \$925,000 for state trails

Did you miss last summer's 1998 National Recreational Trails Fund grant cycle? Not to worry.

With the federal budget taking shape, the NC Trails Program launched the 1999 NRTF grants. And TEA-21, the federal transportation reauthorization act, increases NRTF authorizations from \$30 million to \$40 million for 1999 and \$50 million for 2000.

The state's share of funding increases from \$700,000 to \$935,000 and the maximum grant has been increased to \$50,000, up from \$30,000 for 1998. The federal/local match remains 80/20. Documented in-kind donations can be applied toward the match. Funds are dispursed as reimbursement for project spending.

The rapid grant cycle turnaround is to

put the state in synch with the federal fiscal year. The grant application deadline is Jan 29, 1999. Funds will become available in June.

NRTF funds can be used for acquisition, development, improvement and maintenance of public trails.

Grant applications can be submitted by federal, state and local agencies, and by certified non-profit organizations.

More information is available at <http://www.ncsparks.net>. Application forms can be downloaded from the web site in the Adobe .PDF format.

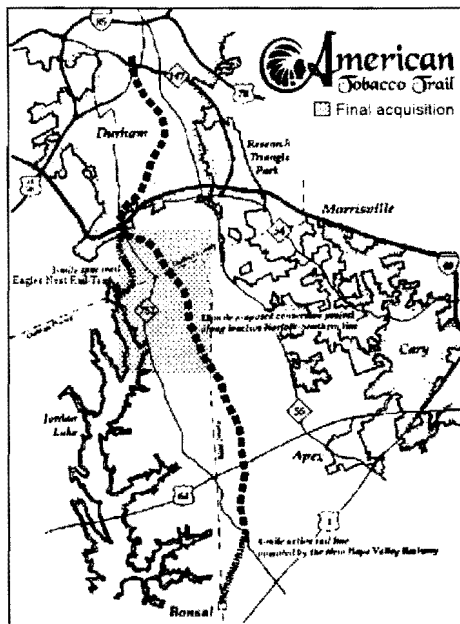
Instructions and forms also can be obtain from regional trail specialists or by calling 919-846-9991. Write NC State Trails Program, 12700 Bayleaf Church Road, Raleigh, NC 27614.

ATT corridor acquisition completed

The deal is sealed and the entire length of the 23-mile American Tobacco Trail project now is in the state railbank. Purchase of the Chatham County and south Durham County section closes a 6.5 mile gap between the north Durham and Wake County segments that were acquired three years ago.

The title transfer ceremony took place Aug. 13 at Central Carolina Community College, Pittsboro. The Chatham County government had urged the NC DOT Rail Division to finish up the corridor acquisition.

Trail development in Durham now is scheduled for next spring. Wake County held a well-attended interim lease and management public hearing July 28 and had the first development planning session Oct. 14. The ATT master plan calls for the Durham city section to be paved and the rural sections to be a natural surface.



Durham and other Triangle cities plan to connect over 70 miles of greenway trails to the ATT project.

Heartlands rail-trail gets help from corrections

The Carolina Heartlands Rail-Trail Committee has tackled a tough task and is getting plenty of muscle from an welcomed source: the state correctional system.

CHRTC has set out to obtain recreation easements along a former Seaboard corridor between Wadesboro and McFarlan in Anson County. . . property parcel by property parcel.

The volunteers started in the middle of the 12.5-mile project and obtained right-of-way agreements for the first mile between Morven and the new Morven Elementary School.

The corridor went out of service in 1980 and has accumulated trees, brush, trash and beaver dams. CHRTC started doggedly clearing the right-of-way, getting help from the Richmond County Saddle Club and a few other volunteers.

Then it asked for help from the NC Department of Correction Impact Training Unit in Hoffman.

"We asked if we could get help clearing the railbed in a cut through town," said Myla Warfel, CHRTC president. "They brought out a crew that started clearing the entire width of the right-of-way. Toward the end of the week I asked how far they would get?"

Sgt. David Schram's reply: "We'll have another crew here next week. We'll go all the way or as long as there's useful work to be done."

The young crews are mostly first-time offenders and are in a bootcamp-type program. Very military. Very disciplined.

And they have taken on the trail project as a mission, according to Warfel.

During the week 20 to 25 inmates are at work. On Saturdays the number can reach 90.

Which gives CHRTC a new challenge: obtain right-of-way easements fast enough to stay ahead of all that help.

IT'S A DEAL - Steve McCurdy, Norfolk Southern real estate manager (at far left) accepts check from Pat Simmons, NC DOT Rail Division director.



LET'S CELEBRATE - Chatham County officials and citizens join NCRT's Al Capehart (below far left) in marking completion of American Tobacco Trail corridor acquisition.



For news updates stop by the Info Depot: <http://www.NCRail-Trails.org>

New TEA-21 brings on funding review

NCRT is one of several dozen federal Transportation Enhancements stakeholders invited to participate in a focus group staged by the NC DOT Enhancements Work Program.

The stated purpose is to review TE administration, to identify improvements, and to develop policies and criteria for project selection and funding under TEA-21. The focus group has been asked to fill out questionnaires and invited to make suggestions.

TE decisions are made by the NC DOT Enhancements Internal Work Group, made up of staff from throughout the department. NCRT recommended that an external public stakeholders advisory committee be established and be involved in the process.

A broader public review of the revised TE work plan will be placed on the NC DOT web site sometime in December for 30 days, according to the TE Coordinator Laurie Smith. The web site will provide direct public response. The url to check: <http://www.dot.state.nc.us/planning/development/Enhancement/Program/>.

NC ISTEA Enhancement Projects

Eligible Categories	1998 Data
Pedestrian & Bicycle	26.58%
Scenic/Historic Site Acq.	3.37%
Scenic or Historic Hwy	4.66%
Beautification	38.66%
Historic Preservation	2.08%
Historic Facility Rehab	19.65%
RR Corridor Preservation	5.54%
Outdoor Adv. Control	0.00%
Archaeological Planning	0.46%
Water Pollution Mitigation	0.00%

TEA-21 Transportation Enhancements North Carolina Funding Estimates

ISTEA 6-Year Total	\$ 77,874,860
TEA-21 6 Year Total	\$108,503,082
TEA-21 Percent Change	39.3%
TEA-21 Annual Average	\$ 18,083,847
Transferable TEA-21 6 Year Total	\$ 1,832,715

TEA-21 1998-2003 North Carolina Average Annual Funding Per Conference Agreement

Program	(Dollars)
IM/NHS	263,436,000
STP	184,568,000
Bridge	105,315,000
CMAQ	15,545,000
ADHS	23,958,000
Rec Trails	1,007,000
Metro Planning	2,841,000
Priority Projects	40,008,000
Minimum Guarantee	103,988,000
GRAND TOTAL	740,665,000

NC BOT takes fresh look at railbanking, rail-trails

The NC Board of Transportation's Emerging Issues Committee passed a resolution Oct. 1 to review NC DOT railroad corridor preservation and interim use policies, and to determine what legislation is needed to implement a more effective railbanking and trail program.

The motion followed presentations by the NC DOT Rail Division, the Pedestrian/Bicycle Division and NCRT.

Pat Simmons, Rail Division director, reviewed the challenges of managing unused corridors and the lack of opportunity to lease those corridors to local governments for management and interim

use. The stumbling block is the state corridor leasing statute that limits interim trail use to rail lines that are acquired by fee simple absolute deeds. Although the exact figure isn't known, Simmons thought that much less than 10 percent of the state's rail corridors are owned fee simple. The vast majority of railroads operate on corridor easements.

The primary problem is that effective railbanking is not really the state's public policy, said NCRT representative Dan Arrasmith. The 1989 General Assembly passed the state railbanking statute, but failed to allocate funding for an effective program. Then the next legislature passed a leasing law that all but precludes interim trail use.

NCRT listed four things needed to correct the situation:

1. Embrace corridor preservation as an aggressive state policy.
2. Find the resources to support effective railbanking.
3. Correct the interim use statutory roadblock.
4. Open interim use to other departments, local governments and qualified land trusts.

States with successful corridor preservation and interim trail programs have much in common, said NCRT. That model is the state DOT being the corridor acquisition agent; state DNR parks and recreation facilitating interim trails; and local governments assuming on-going corridor management.

It is a successful partnership that has created over 1,000 rail-trail miles in such states as Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin. Pennsylvania and West Virginia also use the model and are creating impressive trail networks, NCRT told the board.

JOIN THE NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS INITIATIVE, NOW!

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Telephone: Home _____ Work _____ E-mail _____

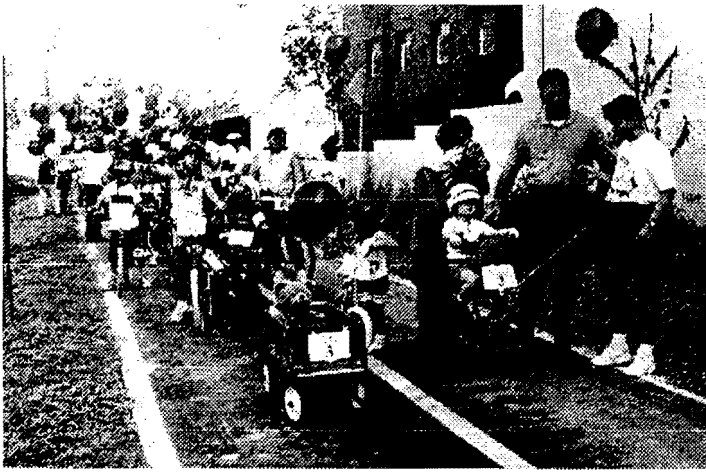
Reason for interest in rail-trails _____

NCRT annual memberships: Individual - \$20, Corporate - \$100

Mail to North Carolina Rail Trails, PO Box 61348, Durham NC 27715-1348

(Fall 98)

THANK YOU FOR JOINING NCRT



LET'S RUMBLE - Lincolnton Rail-Trail opening day brought out bikes and balloons for the Beautiful Bike Parade. Murals have been proposed for the adjacent building walls.

State environmental net formed

The North Carolina Environmental Resources Network was formed Oct. 19 at Camp New Hope in Orange County. NCRT and some 65 conservation and environmental organizations participated in the year and half discussion leading to a plan for the future of conservation in North Carolina.

With the departure of Bill Holman as the NC environmental and conservation lobbyist for two decades, it became necessary to rethink environmental and conservation strategies.

The discussion resulting in consensus recommendation (1) to created a new organization to serve and strengthen the environmental community as a whole, and (2) to enhance the ability of existing organizations to provide needed services to the community.

NCRT board meetings

Annual meeting: 10:30 a.m., Oct. 10, 3912 Fayetteville Street, Durham.

Winter meeting: 10:30 a.m., Jan. 10, Whiteville, Columbus County. Waccamaw Cypress Trail project.

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Transylvania County	Mike Domonkos	828-884-7648
Wake County	Leslie Kennedy	919-362-4011
Warren/Halifax County	Howdy Tomlinson	252-586-6270

RESOURCE CONTACTS

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NC DOT Rail Planner	Mark Sullivan	919-733-4713
NC DOT Bike-Ped. Prog.	Curtis Yates	919-733-2804
NPS SE Region RTCP	Chris Abbett	404-730-2311
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy	Steve Emmett-Mattox	202-797-5400

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