

NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS

Little Toot

Vol 4 No 1

Spring 1992

Transportation Act Encourages Local Enhancements Planning

The latest federal "Highway Bill" contains several provisions and funding sources that could benefit public transit, bikeways, greenways, railbanking and rail-trails...if people want them enough to press the public wishes to local and state governments.

Officially titled the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA, or "ice tea" in Beltway lingo), the 1992-1997 funding act tags 10 percent of the \$155 billion Surface Transportation Program (cleverly, STP) as a minimum to be allocated to the states for Surface Transportation Enhancements (STE, which hopefully will not become yet another engine additive).

Of the many titles in ISTEA, the enhancements provision is the most

State To Receive \$97 Million In Options

promising for rail-trails and for integrating transportation with other community goals. Other ISTEA sections will be covered in future newsletters.

North Carolina's enhancements allocation is projected to be \$97 million over the six-year period. The state's 1992 allocation is expected to be \$11.3 million. At this point it appears that NCDOT will be the primary and perhaps the only state agency to channel the federal funds.

It is up to each state to decide which agency or agencies will administer the funds and how funds will be allocated to state agencies, local governments and organizations. NCRT is engaging other

interested groups in discussions aimed at forming a North Carolina transportation public policy coalition. The purpose is to

Enhancements Authorize Rail-Trail Funding

help citizens become involved in enhancement funding decisions at the state and local levels.

At the heart of the transportation enhancements concept is the difference between good and great. Widening a road

shoulder to meet minimum safety standards for bicycle use is good. Developing a landscaped corridor for exclusive use by bicyclists and pedestrians is great.

The act provides a shopping list for transportation enhancement projects. One of the 10 items on the list is the preservation of abandoned railway corridors, including conversion to pedestrian and bicycle trails. The list also includes pedestrian and bicycling facilities; scenic easements and historic sites; landscaping

Continued on next page



Picture this in North Carolina, nearby to your community. This scene is actually just across the border on the Virginia Creeper Trail near White Top Mountain. The original railroad continued to Lansing, West Jefferson and Todd, NC. The Tarheel State has over 2,000 miles of abandoned rail corridors that hold recreation, conservation and transit opportunities.

"To Preserve Rail Corridors and Promote Rail - Trails"

NCRT Awarded Two 1992 State Adopt-A-Trail Grants

Gov. Jim Martin's office has informed NCRT that it is receiving two 1992 Adopt-A-Trail Grants. The grants were selected from 57 applications to DEHNR. The program has \$35,000 to distribute this year.

One \$2,500 grant to NCRT is for producing and distributing rail-trail information materials throughout the state. The second grant, for \$900, will be applied toward researching titles on the Virginia Creeper corridor from White Top Mountain on the state line to West Jefferson.

The U.S. Forest Service and the towns of Abingdon and Damascus are operating a 32-mile trail on the Creeper corridor in Virginia. NCRT has placed high priority on investigating the extension of the trail into North Carolina. Priscilla Brown of West Jefferson is heading the renewed Ashe County initiative and has recruited a local team to investigate and evaluate the trail extension.

NCRT received a \$2,500 Adopt-A-Trail grant in 1991, which was used by the Triangle chapter as seed money for matching grants from Durham and Wake counties. The combined funds are being used to finance a master development plan for the Durham-Bonsal American Tobacco Trail project.

Transportation. . . continued from front

and scenic beautification; historic preservation; and rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures or facilities, including railroad facilities and canals.

The new law calls for integrating enhancements into long-range transportation planning, starting with local metropolitan planning organizations (MPO). North Carolina currently has 19 MPOs on paper with various degrees of staff and activity. MPOs then submit their plans to the state, which draws up a state Transportation Improvement Program (you guessed it, TIP) for federal review.

In addition, states must develop separate long-range plans for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, to be incorporated into each state's overall long-range plan.

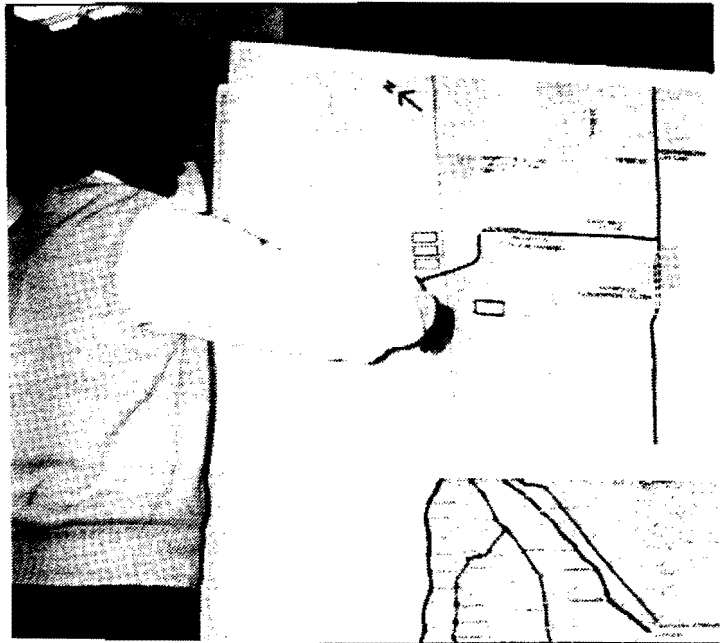
Until new long-range plans are approved, transportation enhancements are supposed to be advanced as part of the regular programming. Which means that 1992 and probably 1993 funding will be used to plug funding holes in existing programs or to speed them up.

During this interim period the most effective course is for interested parties to submit enhancement proposals directly to the NCDOT.

In the next issue we will examine the new, yet-to-be-funded \$30 million per year National Recreation Trails Fund, which is at this point is unsweetened "ice tea" for rail-trail proponents.

WRONG MEDIUM, RIGHT MESSAGE

*Bumper sticker spotted on westbound car along I-40:
"North Carolina. First in Pavement. Last in Education."*



Lynn Purcell, Charlotte Senior Transportation Planner briefed NCRT on plans for the railbanked Cedar Yard at the winter meeting. The eight-acre tract is wedged between I-77 and the proposed NFL stadium. The former switching yard was railbanked 40-60 by the city and NCDOT at a cost of \$1.7 million. The tract also includes a small portion of railbed for a line from Gastonia to Mount Holly and Charlotte. NCDOT also railbanked the 16-mile Gaston County portion of that line last year. NCRT urged interim use of several abandoned rail corridors until the time light rail transit becomes economically viable for Metrolina. The city is evaluating a trolley service from downtown along South Boulevard to the Dilworth area.

Lincolnton Railroad Corridor Greenway Stumbles On Bridge Removal, Inaction

Lincolnton railroad corridor greenway proponents are facing new roadblocks in their efforts to develop a two-mile trail and greenway inside the community.

Just as it appeared that Norfolk Southern was finally moving to divest itself of the remainder of the Newton-Lincolnton abandonment, the NCDOT began letting contracts to demolish three highway bridges in Lincolnton and to fill the grades, thus blocking the rail corridor. The Catawba County portion of the line is being acquired by NCDOT and railbanked for potential industrial development rail access from Newton.

Repeated efforts by greenway proponents to prod the Lincolnton City Council and City Manager David Lowe to inter-vene with NCDOT have been unsuccessful. The trail advocates propose keeping the corridor viable by placing large concrete culverts in the bridge fills.

Considerable private effort has been poured into the greenway project over the last three years, including a comprehensive development proposal by the UNC-Charlotte Architecture Department. The corridor connects downtown Lincolnton with outlying schools and parks.



Whistle Stops:

Transportation Transformation

Do you despair over new or widened arterial roads that result in more chaotic clutter and traffic? That breed endless strip malls? All punctuated by more traffic lights? Or disorderly development that provides no safe travel option other than the automobile? Tired of being locked into a runaway scheme that makes less and less sense?

A minute of reflection makes one aware of how much our lives and communities are dominated by a single mode of transportation: Automobiles. It is apparent that transportation is the cornerstone for how your communities -- even our culture - develop in the future.

The new Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act provides the opportunity to explore and implement other options. By loosening the paving purse strings and encouraging local level participation the act provides a six-year experiment -- now down to five -- on crafting transportation for attractive and liveable communities.

ISTEA mandates local level inputs to state transportation planning. The vehicle is Metropolitan Planning Organizations. If you want something better, then get involved with your MPO.

The clock is now ticking off the future. -- DA

Senate Bill 131 Good, But. . .

A state bill to facilitate railbanking received a boost when the Legislative Research Commission's Committee on Railroads and Other Public Transportation recommended passage of Senate Bill 131 to the House.

The bill would allow the state Secretary of Transportation or an officer of the railroad to file an affidavit stating an intention to preserve an easement for future transportation use after rail service is discontinued on the line. The filing would negate the current presumption of easement abandonment seven years after the tracks are removed, per G.S. 1-44.1.

The bill passed the Senate last year and was given a favorable report by the House Committee on Transportation. It is expected to

come on the floor during the legislative short session. NCRT urges railbanking advocates to express support to their state Representatives.

Senate Bill 131 is an important step, but still depends upon the NCDOT to take a more aggressive stance on railbanking. Even better would be a blanket act which would automatically railbank all rail corridor abandonments for several decades. Such a law would allow long-range evaluation of corridors for future transportation, recreation, conservation and infrastructure enhancements. It also would allow systematic approaches to use of these public assets, rather than the piecemeal, helter-skelter, irreversible abandonment process which now eliminates many future corridor options. -- DA

NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS, INC. STATEMENT OF REVENUES, EXPENSES, & ENDING FUNDS BALANCE For Year Ending Dec. 31, 1991

REVENUES

Memberships	\$1,470
Annual Meeting Fees	750
Donations	180
Adopt-A-Trail Grant	2,500

Total Revenues \$4,900

EXPENSES

Annual Meeting	\$ 975
Newsletter	1,600
American Tobacco Trail Plan	2,000
Office Expenses	725

Total Expenses \$5,300

Deficit (400)
Beginning Balance 1,200

Ending Balance \$ 800

The Corporation is a North Carolina nonprofit corporation exempt from income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

John P. Stratton, Treasurer

ENLIST TODAY IN THE NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS MOVEMENT!

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Telephone: Home _____ Work _____ Best Time _____

Reason for interest in rail-trails _____

Member of other conservation/recreation/historical organization _____

NCRT annual memberships: Individual - \$15, Family - \$20, Corporate - \$100

Mail to North Carolina Rail Trails, Suite 124, 703 9th St., Durham, NC 27705

THANK YOU FOR JOINING NCRT

"To Preserve Rail Corridors and Promote Rail - Trails"

NEXT MEETING JUNE 13

The next NCRT quarterly meeting will be held 10 a.m. Saturday, June 13, at the Ashe County Public Library, just off Main Street in West Jefferson.

An inspection of the Virginia Creeper corridor in Ashe County will follow the meeting.

Raleigh will be the site of the September annual meeting, in conjunction with the National Greenways Conference.

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Onslow Rec Group Endorses Rail-Trails

The potential 87-mile Wilmington-Jacksonville-New Bern rail-trail gained more early support when then Onslow County Recreation Advisory Committee endorsed the rail-trail concept and asked the county commission to adopt a policy of rail corridor protection and trail development.

The committee's action came on the heels of a presentation by Al Capehart of NCRT and Tom Potter, the state's Division of Parks and Recreation rail-trail specialist.

At the south end of the line, a New Hanover County-Wilmington task force is evaluating the area's several rail-trail opportunities.

Danville Forms Dan River Trail Affiliate

In a hands across the border move, the Dan River Trail Association has spawned a Virginia affiliate, the Danville Trail Association. The two organizations will have interlocking officers and directors. The groups are promoting a trail on the abandoned Norfolk, Franklin & Danville corridor, which meanders across the state line eastward from Danville.

The groups also are staging numerous summer promotional events:

June 12-14, Dan River Paddle; June 18, Business Meeting; June 25, Solstice Trail Walk; June 27, White Oak Mountain Hike.

July 11, Dan River S. Boston-Staunton Event; July 16, to be announced; July 25, Cascade Day Hike.

For times and gathering places, contact Forrest Altman at 919-234-8556, David Brice at 919-694-9896 or Norma Howard at 804-822-5725.

Cleveland County Waiting At The Station

Following the recommendations of a study committee, the Cleveland County Commission has asked Norfolk Southern to donate its abandoned line from Shelby west to the county line for a rail-trail. The railroad wrote to the commission in April and stated that its response will be delayed for at least one month.



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