

62 miles of rail-with-trail on high-speed corridor plan

Plans for high speed rail passenger service on the CSX railroad S-line from Virginia to Raleigh include roughly 62 parallel miles of rail-with-trail across the rural northern Piedmont, says a state transportation official.

Trail design and environmental fieldwork will be completed by 2010. Then local governments can explore local, state and federal funding sources as Virginia local governments do the same thing.

Their aim: Environmental clearance for a 116-mile, two-state trail from Raleigh to Petersburg, Va. as part of the East Coast Greenway. The Virginia part of the project parallels the Norlina to Petersburg line that CSX ripped up in the early 1980s.

"Quite encouraging," is how David Foster, the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor's project manager for the state Department of Transportation, termed the co-

operation between the two states and their transportation agencies. At Virginia's suggestion, the two state transportation agencies piggybacked the trail design and environmental work with the same work being done for the improved rail system.

The federal DOT's Southeast High Speed Rail plan, or SEHSR, links Washington, Raleigh and Charlotte. Plans call for eventual links into South Carolina, Georgia and beyond. The trains will hit highs of 110 mph and will average about 85 mph.

Foster gave these specifics on the rail-with-trail. A 30-foot wide trail footprint will sit in a 60-foot wide trail right of way as the trail flips to the east and west of the CSX track. The trail will average 100 feet from the track and will typically run no closer than 60 feet. About one-third of the trail will be 1,000 feet or more from the track.

Nationally the number of rail-with-trails has jumped from 37 totaling 152 miles in 1996 to 60 totalling 240 miles in 2000 with 4.5 million annual users, according to a Federal Highway Administration study. North Carolina has one mile of rail-with-trail, the Libba Cotton Bikeway in Carrboro.

SEHSR will tie into the speedy Northeast Washington-to-Boston corridor. A recent report to Congress identified \$357.2 billion in rail needs by 2050. The plan focuses on high speed passenger rail service in five rapidly

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Briefs

Bike Virginia's 21st annual bike tour, "The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Tour," offers over 2,000 bicyclists of all ages a look at Virginia's mountain heritage and scenery along with lots of fine music from June 20-25.

The tour winds through the mountains around Abingdon, Va., and Bristol and Kingsport, Tenn. Logistics and fees for the tour are available at:

www.bikevirginia.org

Anyone who has seen **Be Active North Carolina's** 2008 calendar is almost compelled to exercise this spring. The calendar promotes National Youth Fitness Week in February, National Physical Education Week in March and Bike Safety Week in April.

For more information on upcoming events in your community go to www.beactivenc.org

A mile to go for the **Brevard Bike Path**. That's how much is left to complete the 5-mile path after a stretch was recently finished that pushes the trail closer to downtown Brevard.

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Art on ATT: It's heavy



Photo by Nancy Pierce

Al Frega with rack at Olive Chapel Road trailhead.

Al Frega, a Durham welder and artist who flips abandoned industrial remnants into functional art, is confident about one aspect of the 1,000-pound objects fashioned by his oxyacetylene torch's 3,600 degrees: They won't be stolen.

The 61,000 people who used the southern end of the American Tobacco Trail in Wake County last year probably didn't realize the bike racks and benches at the Olive Chapel Road and White Oak Church Road trailheads are Frega's work, along with the sculpture at the White Oak Church Road trailhead. They're all fashioned from railroad rails.

Frega, who earned a MFA from UNC-Chapel Hill, doesn't worry about the aesthetic aspects of the craft he has honed for more than 20 years. Functionality informs his work, which can be seen from the Triangle to Cullowhee and has been used in movies and on television.

"To me it's almost fossils, bones," Frega, 51, says of the jungle of iron scattered about the yard of his workshop, which was once

Frega (Continued on page 2)

Rail-with-trail

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growing corridors across the nation and is subject to Congressional approval.

The return to rails is reflected in the private sector. Freight railroads plan on \$12 billion in upgrades over the next few years to make freight trains run faster and bigger. The investment occurs in the context of \$3 a gallon gasoline and the high price tag for building and rebuilding roads.

That rail-with-trail is part of the high-speed rail corridor discussion is of some consolation to two Triangle trail boosters. Board member Dave Connelly reports that four years ago he and Bill Bussey of Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy suggested that rail-with-trail be folded into discussions but got little traction.

Frega

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Durham's livery stable. The augurs, compressors, conveyor belts and water pipes were the industrial guts of Durham's two defunct tobacco factories. Train and trolley rails and anything industrial add to the clutter.

To build his 6-foot long benches, the upper New York state native cuts three sections of rail and welds them together with the base of the rail skyward to form the bench seat. The middle section of rail is longer. It is bent at a 30-degree angle and planted about 36 inches deep in the ground. Rust is sanded off the iron before it receives a sealant. The result is a 1,000-pound whopper of a bench.

Frega juggles multiple projects simultaneously due to the vagaries in public funding. A 2-year project for the Galax Bike Trail in Virginia recently fell through for that reason. Sometimes government agencies term his work "trail amenities" to evade classification as art and thus frivolous (and unfundable).

Frega does offer a word of caution about his benches. "These benches aren't too comfortable," he says. "We don't want people sleeping on them."

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Mountain rail-trail on hold

Hopes for an 18-mile rail-trail between Brevard and Hendersonville went into a holding pattern in early January when the former Ecusta paper mill on the edge of Brevard was purchased by a firm with plans to convert the site to residential, office, retail, commercial, open space and light industrial uses.

The possibility of rail service on the inactive Norfolk Southern line is one of the attractions of the 527-acre site, John Hanselman,



Photo by AL Capehart

Dunn-Erwin Trail Boss Thomas Jernigan examines upgrade for planned asphalt surface.

managing principal of Renova Partners, said in announcing the \$15.9 million purchase. The Norfolk Southern line runs by the Ecusta site.

"It's too early to know what impact the sale will have on rail-to-trail plans," said Josh Freeman, Brevard's town planning administrator.

Officials of Davidson River Village, a subsidiary of Renova Partners, said the community will be solicited for ideas on possible uses of the property. Final plans may evolve over a year or two, although the issue of whether rail service is needed may be decided much earlier.

The developer could decide early on that a rail-trail would be a great draw as such trails have been in many places in North Carolina and the rest of the country.

Much of the site is covered by warehouse and factory buildings which housed flax

pulping and paper manufacturing operations from 1939 until about 2002. Half to three-quarters of the buildings are expected to be removed as developers work with officials on soil and potential ground water contamination.

Davidson River purchased the site from P. H. Glatfelter Co. and will assume responsibility for soil contamination. Glatfelter will handle contamination in the river area, according to the agreement reached with state and federal environmental agencies. Renova Partners specializes in turning around old industrial sites.

Chances for reactivating the line are minimal, unless Davidson River forwards a strong argument for use. Norfolk Southern has not filed for abandonment of the line that winds through the mountains. Railbanking is a possibility.

Rail-trail advocates and local and state officials are encouraging the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to acquire the rail corridor as a linear park or trail. Such a purchase would be a first for North Carolina, although many state park programs in other states have created linear parks along abandoned rail corridors.

If a Brevard-to-Hendersonville trail develops, it would tie into a projected 28-mile trail extending from Hendersonville northeast to Asheville.

Mike Domonos, NCRT board member, has urged Henderson County trail supporters to organize and develop broad support for the trail and create an entity to act, if Norfolk Southern files for abandonment and the state is not immediately prepared to seek the property.



Resource Contacts

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Last summer North Carolina Rail-Trails awarded a \$1,100 grant to Brevard for the trail which will eventually run from the downtown northwest to Davidson River Campground in Pisgah National Forest. The recent addition has not been officially opened and lacks signs. The project is slated for completion in 2010.

One of the state's first **Safe Routes To School** workshops was held in Brevard in September.

North Carolina is receiving \$15 million in federal funds to encourage children to walk or bicycle safely to school with the goals of improving air quality and reducing childhood obesity and traffic congestion. Grants may be used for infrastructure such as multi-use paths and sidewalks as well as for education and training for safe traveling to schools.

Mike Domonkos, a NCRT board member and an attorney, encouraged the Brevard city administration to initiate a SRTS program and wrote a brief for the Transylvania School Board which answered their concerns about legal liability for SRTS. He also provided the school board with evidence of the success and acceptance of SRTS around the nation.

As a result of Brevard's early application and its successful workshop, the state department of transportation requested that Brevard file for a demonstration grant. A grant has been submitted and funding appears almost assured.

The **American Tobacco Trail** bridge over I-40 in Durham received \$1.5 million from Durham in December. The \$6.4 million project includes four miles from N.C. 54 to Chatham County and has a June 2010 completion date.

Peddalling the Katy Trail solo



Scenes along Missouri's 255-mile Katy Trail.

By Eve Capehart

The Katy Trail runs 255 miles east to west through the middle of Missouri, much of it on the north bank of the Missouri River. The compacted, crushed limestone trail with 26 trailheads skirts farm bottomlands and limestone bluffs. Decaying former railroad towns dot the trail every 15 or so miles and provide variations on the amenities: toilets, water, food, lodging, camping, bike rental and repair. Riding west to east (downstream) in the fall is the general recommendation.

I was asked in the St. Louis REI store if I planned to camp or use plastic. Most through cyclists travel with credit cards for B&B's or motels. I chose to load my bike high with my old tent and sleeping bag. I rode alone though sometimes joined by other cyclists, because I am a slow rider and because after my husband's death in February this was my personal challenge to re-establish my confidence and independence.

I rode 270 miles in eight days, camping six nights, staying in a B&B the night it rained and in the bicyclist's shelter (just like a hostel) in Tebbetts for \$5. Four nights of camping I was the only camper. One of those nights I slept by the swing set in the city park of Pilot Grove (pop. 750).

I ate wherever and whenever food was available – frequently that was the town bar. Veg-

etables were rare, unless you call French fries vegetables. I carried snacks and an emergency can of beans. Everywhere people were uncommonly friendly.

Everyone with a bicycle was automatically a friend. Riders come from everywhere. One man riding a recumbent with bright yellow gear was headed to San Diego from Bar Harbor, Maine. The trail was his only non-road respite. An 80-year-old who had just ridden nine miles for breakfast in the neighboring town passed me on his way home (but I caught up with him for conversation).

I saw a couple and later a solo woman — all with panniers — who appeared considerably older than my 68 years. The only cyclists I passed going my direction were an assortment of grade school kids, parents and teachers on a field trip. The hardest part of the trip was reaching the end of the trail and putting my bike in the car, thereby giving up my identification as a co-adventurer with all the others on the Katy Trail.

For more information:

www.katytrailstatepark.com and *The Complete Katy Trail Handbook, 8th edition*, Brett Dufier, Pebble Publishing, 2005.

Eve Capehart is a founding member of Carolina Tarwheels Bicycle Club of Durham and Chapel Hill and lives in Richmond, Va.

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Coastal Carolina stalls

Plans to build the 32-mile Coastal Carolina Trail linking Beaufort, Pitt and Martin counties in eastern North Carolina have been postponed indefinitely.

"We're disappointed, but this is just a bump in the road," said AL Capehart, president of North Carolina Rail-Trails, which has been involved in the project since 1994.

"Despite the hundreds of hours invested, the initial phase couldn't be pushed forward right now. Now the focus is on the trail in Washington. Someday the Coastal Carolina Trail will happen. The economic, recreational, transportation and community benefits are just too great."

The CCT plan calls for a rail-trail from Washington-to-Oak City on the Washington Branch of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad (ACL - CSX). The projected first phase was from Stokes to Pictolus in Pitt County.

With that phase on hold, the CCT Committee is now focusing on 12 miles of abandoned rail bed and trail along the Highway 264 corridor between Washington and Pictolus. The section would be part of the proposed 22-mile Washington-Greenville Greenway. In Pictolus the rail-trail could connect with a drainage lateral (and possible trail) that leads to East Carolina University's North Campus Crossing. Greenville has yet to plan the connection.

The CCT's master plan, executive summary, feasibility study and concept brochure won state awards for community involvement. Working with Washington and DOT, the committee succeeded in having the trail loop under the new Highway 17 bypass bridge west of Washington. Recently the three counties and the city requested that the Mid-East Commission's Rural Planning Organization add the CCT to the 2009 State Transportation Improvement Plan for a feasibility study.

For a decade Pitt County's commissioners, planning department, visitor's bureau and Department of Community Schools and Recreation led the trail effort. However, when Community Schools and Recreation determined it could not monitor or maintain the 2.2 miles between Stokes and Carl Morris Road, planning for the section stopped. NCRT continues to hold a \$5,000 grant from the McClure Charitable Foundation for the trail's development.

NCRT Spring Board Meeting

Saturday, April 12, 10:30 a.m.
Vineland Station Museum
701 S. Madison St.
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