

Little Toot

State emphasizes rail in new travel plan

The Jan. 11 NC Passenger Rail and Transit Summit sends signals up and down the line of a changing NC DOT policy geared to moving the state toward ISTEA-inspired multi-modalism. The center piece is a rail passenger plan that is big, bold and unfunded.

It begins by embracing the US DOT's recently designated Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor and extends one leg through Charlotte toward Atlanta.

The blueprint includes new passenger service west from Salisbury to Asheville and east from Charlotte to Wilmington. Raleigh would get service to Morehead City.

The new state plan also extends passenger rail and/or regional commuter lines to nearly all metro areas.

The last mile is expansion of local bus and other transit options.

It is a new transportation flag run up the pole, where it will be saluted for vision and shot at by highway interests. And all will be looking at the \$10 billion plus estimate.

Above all, it does signal realization the state can't keep growing by paving it's way out of mounting congestion. But,

will motorists buy into the future while stuck in paved gridlock? That's the selling job ahead.

In presenting the plan, Sec. Norris Tolson made the following points:

First, we have to realize that we do have choices. One mode of transportation does not fit everybody or every region. We have to provide people with alternatives to highways and planes.

Second, we must coordinate with each other. The things that happen in Durham affect Raleigh. What happens in Charlotte affects the Triad. What happens in Asheville affects Murphy. We must coordinate with each other and erase those formal - or informal - boundary lines that we like to draw.

Third, we must plan. Transportation is more than just moving people and goods. Transportation decisions also impact economic development, land-use patterns, our natural resources and environment.

Fourth, we must partner. This transportation system doesn't belong to the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Finally, It's no secret that needs are great and funding is limited. We need to be creative in ways to pay for this.

Rutherford implements countywide corridor preservation policy

What started two years ago as a project to reactivate a small stretch of railroad tracks for a potential industrial spur has turned into a Rutherford County plan to preserve nearly 30 miles of inactive rail corridors.

The prospective industrial project wilted, but Jim Black, executive director of the Rutherford EDC, saw both the need to protect rail options and the immediate tourism potential of a countywide rail-trail network. The county commission has passed a resolution of intent to protect inactive corridors.

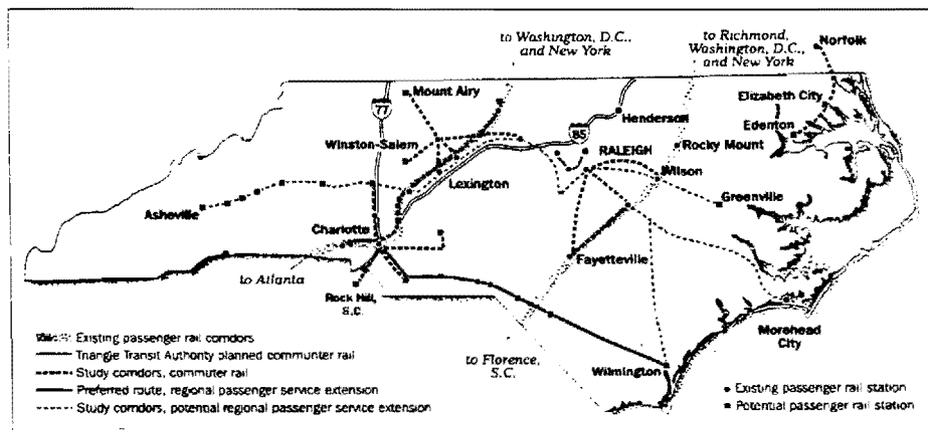
Since then, Black has organized citizen support groups for six different rail segments and staged a county-wide coordination meeting, which was attended by representatives from almost every city, town and village in the county.

Each of the six corridor segments requires a different approach, including federal railbanking, leasing and new easements. NCRT has been working with Black and other citizens to orchestrate the plan, and to obtain federal NRTF and state Adopt-A-Trail grants for development. The projects include:

Cliffside South - Four miles and two spurs owned by Cone Mills. A 99-year lease is being finalized.

Cliffside North - Additional 3.7 miles connecting to Ellenboro. Corridor intersects N-S East project. New easements required.

N-S East - Eleven miles of Norfolk-Southern abandonment from the Cleveland County line west to Alexander Mills. Norfolk-Southern has quit claimed the



Rutherford continued on page 3 -

Gold Hill digs up the past for its future



Ed Norvell of the LandTrust for Central NC looks at mining railbed from the crumbling foundation of what was a large ore processing plant at Gold Hill in the 1800s.

Gold Hill in southwestern Rowan County is staking out a future based on its past. But instead of again digging for gold, the village is reclaiming history and selling it to visitors. Part of that plan includes a two-mile rail-trail through the village, past mining sites and winding through the woods to ruins of what was probably the largest refining plant in the East.

The area is pocketed with mining shafts that date back to 1842. One of the largest was financed by cotton gin inventor Eli Whitney. A 70-acre area in the village has been turned into the Gold Hill Mines Historic Park, fronted by an original rock wall and containing a rock jail. Modern improvements include a playground and the Russell Ruffy Center, which is available for meetings and events.

All of this is a grass-roots effort by the Historic Gold Hill and Mines Foundation. Individuals also are playing a major role in bringing new life to history. High Point businessman Darius Hedrick has restored and reopened two of the original stores. Others are acquiring sagging buildings and restoring them for new uses, such as bed and breakfast accommodations.

Boardwalks help recreate the feel and sound of the past.

The now quiet village was not always so. In the 1850s there was a rowdy population of 6,000 miners patronizing 27 taverns and other entertainments. There also was the Burt Shoe Co., which shod all those miners.

The village foundation was established in 1989 to recover the past, piece by piece. While researching titles, attorney Ed Norvell came across a fee simple rail corridor title, originally held by a mining company. Norvell followed the title to an individual in New York, who donated the linear property to the LandTrust for Central NC, where Ed is now director of rural communities preservation.

The Salisbury-based land trust is helping the local foundation obtain NRTF grants for developing the trail. One of the major needs is funding to replace a 100-foot bridge over a steep ravine.

The Gold Hill foundation has a lot of history on its hands, including many old photographs. For a peek, point your Web browser to <www.salisbury.net/goldhill/mines>

Whistle Stops:

Rail preservation cheaper than paving

The following was written in response to a high-speed rail article in the Charlotte Observer. The writer is James RePass, president of National Corridors Initiative.

The development of 110-mph (and up) rail service in the Carolinas does not need to take decades, as stated in your Dec. 2 article the high-speed rail corridor designation by U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater.

Former Federal Railroad Administration chief Gil Carmichael, who interestingly enough comes out of the automotive industry, has called for the creation of the "Interstate II" program to invest in rail infrastructure improvements in an organized national program not unlike the original interstate highway program of the 1950s. Unlike the original interstate, the right-of-way already exists, and many cases needs only grade-crossing elimination and upgraded track.

While not a minor task, it is a lot smaller task (and much cheaper) than acquiring huge swaths of rights-of-way for building the original interstate highway system, yet can carry more people and freight.

The article states that the Northeast Corridor electrification project, which my organization has actively supported, took 20 years. That's not quite right: It was first proposed in 1912, or 86 years ago, and is about 10 months from completion. But the reality is just the opposite of the obvious: Once the political will was found to go forward with the project, it took just eight years (1991-1999)...

My reaction to the idea that this (high-speed Carolina rail) will take decades: Only if you let it.

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



Developers set ATT pace

Developers of the Kroger Center and Southpoint residential subdivision have set the pace in putting the Triangle's American Tobacco Trail in place by incorporating a needed detour to the I-40 crossing site near the intersection of Fayetteville Rd. and NC 54 in south Durham. Note the open access by trail, in contrast to the auto entrance gate which will be operating when Southpoint is completed (below).



Rutherford saves lines

Continued from page 1

property to the county.

Alexander Mills - An 0.8-mile trail through town provides off-road access to the Forrest W. Hunt Elementary School.

The property has been deeded to the town.

Thermal Belt South - An abandoned CSX spur parallels the active Thermal Belt Railroad short line through much of Forrest City. Ownership being re-researched. Also possible rail-with-trail connection to Alexander Mills trail.

Thermal Belt North - An 8.5-mile section through Spindale, Rutherfordton, Ruth and on to Gilkey. This inactive section of Thermal Belt Railroad will be put in the federal railbank and interim trail.

Rutherford County's traditional tourism attractions have been South Mountain State Park on the far east and Lake Lure on the far west. Recent land trust preservation of the huge Rollins Tract adds more recreational space. Black sees rail-trails as the start of a trail network to connect these attractions.

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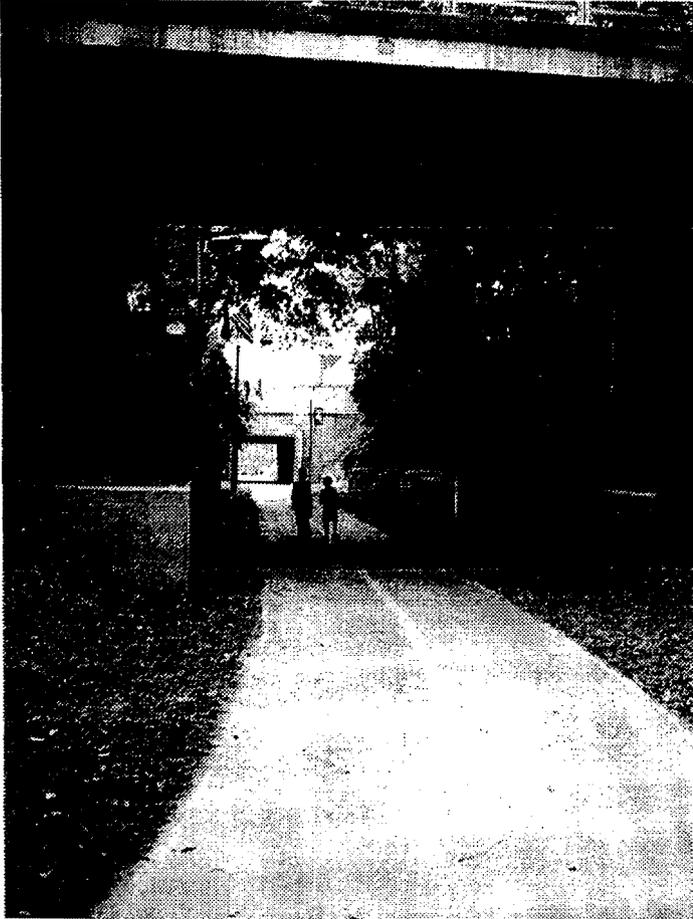
Reason for interest in rail-trails _____

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

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

(Winter 99)

THANK YOU FOR JOINING NCRT



No great hurry

Two youngsters enjoy quiet space of the Lincoln Trail for a walk downtown on an early fall morning.

NCRT board meetings

Spring: 10:30 a.m., April 10, Rutherfordton.
 Summer: 10:30 a.m., July 10, Lincolnton.
 Fall: 10:30 a.m. Oct. 9, Durham

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