

RAIL-TRAILS AND COMMUNITY SENTIMENT

A Study of Opposition
to Rail-trails & Strategies
for Success



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This report was conducted by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to document the extent of opposition to rail-trail projects.

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The purpose of
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
is to enrich America's
communities and countryside
by creating a nationwide network
of public trails from former rail lines and
connecting corridors.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Rail-trails provide an excellent setting for people of every age and physical ability to safely walk, bike, cross-country ski, in-line skate, horse-back ride, and simply enjoy the outdoors.

Communities benefit from rail-trails in many ways. Along with recreational use, rail-trails may provide communities with an economic stimulus that may have been lost when rail service was discontinued. Local businesses of all kinds, from antique shops and bed & breakfast establishments to hardware and even clothing stores, frequently see an increase in sales when a trail opens on a previously disused railroad corridor. New businesses such as snack bars and bicycle shops often open to accommodate trail users. Small towns such as Marthasville, Missouri and Lanesboro, Minnesota credit their rail-trails for providing the economic stimulus that led to renewed development and community spirit. Newspaper accounts with headlines reading “Katy Trail Gives Small Town New Lease on Life” and “Trail Paved the Way to Revival” report the incredible impact these trails can have on the economic prosperity of the towns they pass through.

Additionally, rail-trails serve as safe non-motorized transportation routes that can improve air quality while improving one’s health. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that motor vehicles release more than 50% of hazardous air pollutants and up to 90% of the carbon monoxide found in urban air.¹ To help reduce private vehicle emissions, the EPA recommends the general public avoid unnecessary driving by consolidating trips, telecommuting, carpooling, using public transit, and *choosing clean transportation alternatives such as biking or walking*. Air pollution is not, however, solely an urban problem. Ozone

exposure and increased exposure to UV-B radiation resulting from ozone depletion — both are a result of air pollution — can have a damaging effect on some agricultural crops. Bicycling and walking on trails creates no pollution at all and is in keeping with the Surgeon General’s report on physical activity and health.² This

recent report concluded that “people of all ages can improve the quality of their lives through a life-long practice of moderate physical activity.” Rail-trails, with their easy grades and proximity to communities, are ideal for starting and maintaining a daily routine of physical activity, with the added benefit of reducing vehicle trips if combined with regular commutes or errands.

The study finds that 85% of trails opened with either no opposition or with landowner and citizen concerns addressed through outreach to the community.



And that’s not all. Important and increasingly rare wildlife habitats are protected along rail-trails. Dense vegetation gives cover to a variety of species. Rail-trails that parallel rivers and streams provide vital buffer zones for birds, turtles, fish, and plant life. Trails provide transportation routes for humans, while they also create transportation corridors for wildlife, often providing critical connections to other, larger, wildlife habitats. In addition, railroad corridors have significant value as part of American culture and history. Rail-trails preserve historic railroad depots, bridges, markers, sites, and routes. The Minuteman Bikeway in Massachusetts follows

closely the route of Paul Revere's famous midnight ride. Historic interpretation is widely used on rail-trails to keep history alive for generations to come.

Impressive as these benefits are, some trail projects do encounter opposition when they are proposed. Verbal confrontations between opponents and proponents, legal battles, burned trestles, and blocked trails may make for startling newspaper headlines but incidents such as these are not representative of rail-trail projects nationwide. As with countless other public works projects, citizens and landowners may well be dubious when a new rail-trails project is proposed. Landowners adjacent to proposed trails typically have concerns related to noise, privacy, littering, property damage, trespass-

ing, liability, and property rights. Unfortunately, a few unusually troubled trail projects have captured the media's attention and created an unjustified image of all rail-trail projects as difficult or fraught with controversy. This report examines 125 trails that opened between January 1, 1994 and August 31, 1996 in an effort to accurately depict the level of opposition that trail projects routinely encounter. The study finds that 85% of trails opened with either no opposition or with landowner and citizen concerns addressed through outreach to the community. In addition, this study takes a closer look at rail-trail opponents, why some rail-trail projects fail, and some of the many rail-trail success stories.



Trail user stops to chat while maintenance is performed on the trail.

METHODOLOGY

This report investigates 125 open rail-trails located throughout the United States.

The selected trails were taken from the approximately 250 rail-trails that were added to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's open trails database between January 1, 1994 and August 31, 1996. Any trail excluded from the survey either opened before January 1, 1994 but was "discovered" by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy after that date, or RTC had insufficient data for comparison. The trails included in this report vary in length, location, and uses from a 0.5-mile urban trail in Ohio to a 55-mile snowmobile trail in Wisconsin to an 8.5-mile railbanked trail in Louisiana. The data used to compile this report came from telephone surveys of trail managers and information on file, including local newspaper reports of the trails and written surveys routinely conducted by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Phone surveys of trail managers were conducted in October and November of 1996. No trails were added or omitted based on the manner in which they were received by the public.

Trail managers were asked to rate the level of opposition they encountered in one of the following three categories: (1) no opposition / landowner and citizen concerns voiced and addressed, (2) legal action, and (3) illegal action. In creating these categories, it was expected that all trail projects would encounter some level of concern. However, in the process of interviewing trail managers, "no opposition" was included in the first category as

numerous trail managers reported that there was absolutely no opposition to the trail project.

"Landowner and citizen concerns voiced and addressed" refers to issues raised by the community that are considered routine in trail development. These issues are privacy, littering, property rights, cost, liability and crime. Trails were included in this category when trail managers reported that they responded to community concerns with public outreach and were able to address those concerns through design and management specifications.

Category (2) "legal action" refers to instances when lawsuits were brought against trail builders questioning their legal ownership of the trail corridor. Most railroad corridors consist of a mixture of adjacent landowner easements, fee simple ownership (the corridor was purchased or condemned outright), and federal or state grants or easements. The current adjacent landowner may not know what type of transaction took place when the railroad was built and may assume incorrectly that the corridor reverts to him when rail service ends. In the case of a railbanked corridor, the adjacent landowner may not be aware that any reversionary interests are delayed while the corridor remains "banked" for future transportation use.

Category (3) "illegal action" includes any trail where a manager reported illegal activity occurring on the trail corridor that he felt was directed at stopping progress on the project. If a trail manager reported that a trail project experienced legal and illegal action, that trail was included in Category (3).

RESULTS & SUMMARY

- ▼ **85% of all trail projects studied met with either no opposition or with routine landowner and citizen concerns that were addressed.** Of the 125 trails opened, 107 did so without significant controversy. Where concerns were raised, trail proponents worked with citizens and adjacent landowners to reach common ground. For example, concerned citizen meetings were held in regard to the Cady Way to Fashion Square Trail — the first rail-trail in Orlando, Florida. On the North Augusta Greenway located in North Augusta, South Carolina, and named for Mayor Greene, concerns were addressed at city council hearings. Officially opened in October 1995, the Greenway is the major connector for a planned city-wide system of trails.
- ▼ **10 out of 12 proposed trails involved in legal challenges won in court and proceeded to become rail-trails.** The remaining two trails gave up the sections of right-of-way under dispute and opened the trail by by-passing the challenged sections. The trail proponents who encountered lawsuits did not let the lawsuits create insurmountable delays. Progress in the areas of planning, design, funding, and in some cases construction, continued. Trailnet, Inc. began construction on Grant's Trail (formerly the Carondelet Greenway) in Missouri while defending against a lawsuit that it eventually won. Volunteer work parties and AmeriCorps volunteers developed a trailhead, installed posts, and decked bridges during that period. Now open, the trail is enjoyed by over 20,000 users per year.
- ▼ **5% of the trail projects encountered illegal attempts by opponents to block progress on the trail.** Six trails encountered action that included, but was not limited to, physically blocking the trail and the burning of railroad trestles. Two of those six trails also faced legal challenges to ownership of the corridor before opening.
- ▼ **The majority of trail managers reported that outreach to the community prevented or eased opposition to the trail.** Most agencies conducted public hearings or held meetings with concerned citizens to inform the public and to ask for citizen input. The Eastern Nebraska Trails Network, for example, hosted a pre-opening/pre-construction trail walk on the Field Club Trail located in Omaha to allow citizens to see the corridor for themselves. Approximately 60 people attended the walk and participated in a drawing for door prizes donated by local bicycle shops. A “friends of the trail” group, if not serving as the managing agency itself, can serve as a good mediator between the managing agency and the local community.
- ▼ **Many trail opponents find that their fears about the trail do not materialize.** Concerns that rail-trails increase crime, lower property values, and introduce liability claims are not supported by actual experience and numerous studies on the subject. Former opponents often become the most ardent trail users and proponents. Penny Towery, a local landowner and former opponent of the Prairie-Duneland Trail in Indiana says, “I think it [the trail] is a wonderful thing, my opposition is totally gone, and I am pleased and grateful that it is in my neighborhood.”



DISCUSSION

Land is a precious commodity in the United States and control over the use of land is a highly-prized right that is stated in the Constitution and defended by courts throughout the nation.

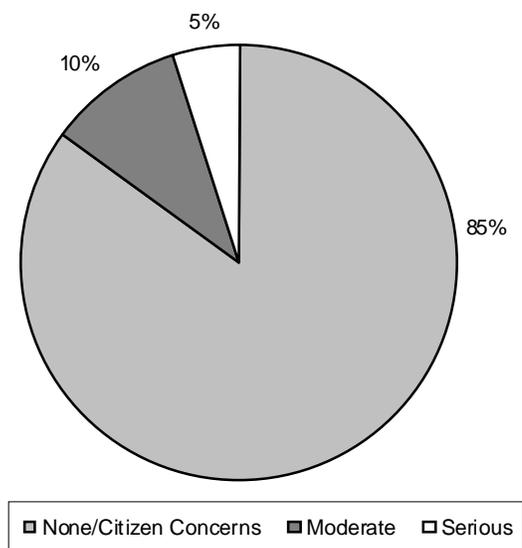
Few issues arouse more public interest and concern than decisions about the use of public land and open space, or zoning and other land use questions. At the same time, the general public is demanding more recreational opportunities close to home and seeking alternatives to the automobile for everyday activities such as commuting and shopping. Communities want safe places to walk and bicycle and need open space and greenery to make them pleasant places to live.

Not surprisingly, then, the conversion of abandoned or former railroad corridors to public trails stirs considerable public interest. Questions that arise concerning the ownership of rail corridors must be resolved before a trail conversion can move forward. The location of a potential trail needs to be discussed before work begins. The design and management of a trail ought to be the subject of public scrutiny before any asphalt is laid or landscaping is planted. Equally, trails serve a public interest and should not be blocked by individual opposition or special interest politics.

Trails, like new stadiums, housing developments, highways and parks, are public works projects that have to go through a public approval process. The length of this process and the quality of the debate over a trail development depends on a great many factors, including the level of community support, the involvement of a public agency and the presence of an activist or enthusiast group. Support for a trail cannot be taken for granted and legitimate concerns about the impact of trails need

to be addressed openly, early, and often, to prevent those concerns from becoming intense opposition.

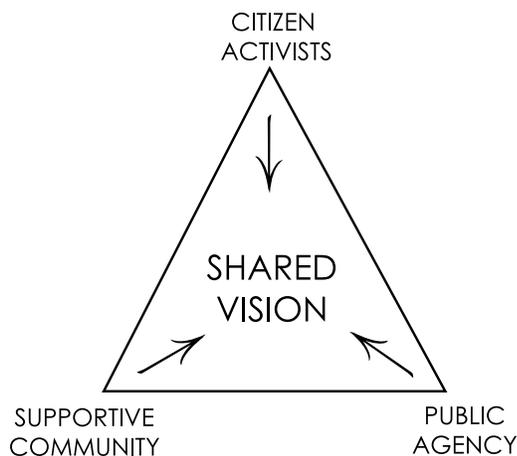
Intense and illegal opposition has taken different forms. In Missouri and Georgia, railroad trestles along the corridors were burnt by opponents of the trail projects. In Wisconsin and Oklahoma, opponents physically blocked the trail with debris or fences. In each situation, the source of the opposition was either from just one or from only a few disgruntled individuals. These instances, although rare, can halt a trail project and discourage others from beginning one if not countered with community outreach and public support.



Degree of opposition as reported by trail managers.

PARTNERSHIPS, OUTREACH, & SUCCESSFUL TRAILS

Most rail-trails are the result of a cooperative effort between an active citizen group, a responsive public agency, and a supportive community all of whom share a vision for the trail.



Projects that falter in their progress are usually lacking involvement from one of these three important groups.

To ensure that these groups are in agreement about the rail-trail project there must be early and extensive outreach. The community should be involved in every stage of development from the acquisition and design to construction and maintenance. As a result of public hearings held to address citizen concerns, a “Friends” groups called Citizens for Rails-to-Trails was formed to support the creation of the Prairie-Duneland Trail in Indiana. If this type of citizen involvement is part of the trail development process from the beginning, the end result will be a safe, well designed and enjoyable community asset. This interactive process also serves to enhance the pride the community has in the trail, in turn decreasing the burden of maintenance on the managing public agency.

Once the community, citizen activists, and public agency (or agencies) have shared vision for the trail, it is important to develop a written action plan. The action plan should define each groups’ role in the trail development process and outline the necessary steps toward opening and maintaining a successful rail-trail.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Establishing good communication and an effective working relationship between an agency, a citizen group, adjacent landowners, and other community members is not always easy. Regardless of whether trail proponents have encountered minimal opposition or are embroiled in a highly controversial project, the following strategies can help get a project moving in a positive direction. It is never too late to reach out to opponents, work towards compromises and build support throughout the community.

- ▼ ***Be the first to contact adjacent landowners.*** Remember that no one likes surprises, especially when it affects their home or land. Individuals who hear about the project from an already disgruntled neighbor or a negative letter to the editor in a local newspaper are more likely to become opponents themselves. Notify landowners as early as possible in the process and ask for comments. Make personal contact with those landowners that have already responded negatively to the trail proposal.
- ▼ ***Provide a designated contact person to respond quickly and accurately to suggestions, concerns and other comments.*** List his/her name, address, and phone in all trail-related information. Respond quickly to any inaccurate information before it becomes widely disseminated. Noteworthy events such as corridor acquisition or groundbreaking ceremonies provide an excellent opportunity to make contact with the community, present accurate information and generate positive media attention.
- ▼ ***Create opportunities for one-on-one communication.*** A low-key setting such as a trail walk or casual open house will allow undecided members of the community to ask individual questions they may be uncomfortable asking in a large group meeting. Door-to-door meetings are an extremely effective way to reach out to the community. Be prepared to sit down with people and listen to their opinions. An individual may just need a few specific questions answered before becoming a trail booster.
- ▼ ***Give landowners a role in the project.*** Problems may occur if landowners adjacent to the proposed trail feel that they have no voice in the process. Invite them to serve on a trail advisory committee where they can have direct input on the project. Suggest an Adopt-a-Trail program so that landowners can “adopt” the portion of the trail adjacent to their property (See Clarion/Little Toby Creek Trail Success Story, page 13).
- ▼ ***Know your facts and prepare a management plan.*** Expect the community to have serious questions about the project in areas ranging from crime and property values to design, cost, and management. Be prepared to answer these questions but if you can't, let them know what is being done to find an answer and when that information will become available.
- ▼ ***Arrange a tour of an established rail-trail in your area and/or invite other communities to speak about their trails.*** Hearing about other communities' real trail experience can allay the concerns of future trail neighbors. If a visit is not possible, set up a computer for a “virtual” tour of a rail-trail that has an internet web site (See Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's web site at <www.railtrails.org> for links to trail sites).
- ▼ ***Look for built-in constituencies among adjacent landowners.*** Many of these individuals will be members of equestrian, running, bicycling or other trail user groups that would gladly

work towards a trail conversion. This will broaden your base of support and ensure your trail plan accommodates all possible users.

- ▼ ***After support for your project begins to grow, hold a public meeting to answer any lingering questions and to present the plans for the trail.*** Provide index cards and pens for those attending to note questions. Near the end of the meeting collect the cards so that the questions can be read aloud by one person and answered by meeting organizers.
- ▼ ***Construct a “demonstration” section of trail.*** There is no requirement that a trail be completed in one piece. Instead, you can plan to build the trail in two or more phases. Many fears arise from not knowing what to expect from a rail-trail and a “demonstration” trail allows concerned citizens to see for themselves how a trail would look and how it is managed.
- ▼ ***Bring in a third party to help build consensus.*** A third party can help identify the concerns of trail opponents and supporters. Involve someone who is respected and trusted by both sides. You might contact the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program for help (202) 565-1200.
- ▼ ***If faced with a lawsuit, continue work in the areas of planning, design, funding, and possibly construction of your trail.*** Continue to reach out to the community and build support for the project. If you decide it is not practical to fight the lawsuit, is there another solution? A bypass or a land swap might be an effective compromise. Don’t let a dispute over one section de-rail the entire project.
- ▼ ***If encountering illegal activity, don’t become confrontational yourself.*** Leave matters to the appropriate law enforcement officials. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper to make the community aware of what has happened. Make it clear that any illegal behavior is inexcusable and is not in keeping with the spirit of the project.
- ▼ ***Above all else, be positive and creative.*** For example, the Friends of the Weiser River Trail in western Idaho arranged a “Fly the Trail Day.” Five small planes took over 170 people including trail advocates and opponents on free twenty minute rides along the 83-mile proposed trail corridor.



Citizens participate in a trail design workshop.

WHERE DOES OPPOSITION COME FROM?

Opposition to rail-trail projects is usually fueled by a lack of information and unanswered criticism of trail proposals.

This leads to misconceptions about trails including confusion related to property rights issues, concern that property values will drop and liability will increase, and fear of increased crime such as littering, trespassing, burglary and vandalism. Understandably, farmers and ranchers will have particularly strong concerns. After all, the proposed trail often passes both their home and their source of livelihood.

However, there is also powerful institutional opposition to trails from the 4.9 million member American Farm Bureau Federation which has come out against rail-trails in rural areas. Although most American Farm Bureau Federation “members” belong because they take advantage of homeowner insurance policies offered by the group, the association’s policies are established by a subsection of that group. Sadly, the Farm Bureau in most states — but not all — actively opposes rail-trails and ignores the many benefits trails can have in preserving habitat, developing the local economy and providing low-impact access to the countryside.

Other rail-trail opponents have recently taken shelter under the broader banner of the property rights and wise use groups. The National Association of Reversionary Property Owners, attack rail-trail projects throughout the country, focusing on fears and claiming that adjacent landowner rights have been violated by the National Trails System Act. This act allows for the preservation of railroad corridors through railbanking. Railbanking has been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court and is in

line with our national policy to preserve former railroad corridors. Even so, railbanking is just one method of trail development. Only forty-six of the over 850 open trails are railbanked though this method is increasingly popular as it preserves the integrity of the corridor. Fifty-eight of 1,100 current trail projects are developed on railbanked corridors and on an additional seventy-eight trail projects railbanking is currently under negotiation.

Generally, fears about a proposed trail are similar on every project and include concerns about property values decreasing, increased liability, crime, and privacy. There is no indication that trails cause property values to decrease. The 1992 National Park Service Study, the Burke-Gilman Study³ and the Colorado State Parks Survey⁴ all found that property values either increased or remained constant. Real estate agents list proximity to the trail in advertisements and homeowners report that the presence of the trail would make their home easier to sell. Newer housing developments advertize trailside and green-way lots at a premium.

To protect landowners from liability, 49 states (excluding Alaska and the District of Columbia) have “recreational use” statutes on the books.

The 1992 National Park Service Study, the Burke-Gilman Study³ and the Colorado State Parks Survey⁴ all found that property values either increased or remained constant.



Under these statutes, no landowner is liable for recreation injuries resulting from mere carelessness. To recover damages, an injured person would need to prove that a landowner engaged in willful and wanton misconduct. Insurance is available to cover the legal costs associated with such claims.

Landowners and others in communities where trails are being discussed are frequently concerned about the potential for undesirable activity such as vandalism, graffiti and dumping. Reports of rape, assaults and murder on trails exist but are rare. Indeed, an unused, overgrown and isolated railroad corridor is far more likely to attract this kind of criminal activity than a well-used and maintained trail with clear rules and regulations governing the use of the corridor.

The Chief of Police in South Burlington, Vermont, wrote to a local planning agency considering a trail, that “crime and the fear of crime do not flourish in an environment of high energy and healthy interaction among law abiding community members,” based on his experience with a local rail-

trail. He went on to say that “the trail may be one of the safest places in the city” based on his review of reported incidents.

Crime and personal security concerns can be addressed in the design and operation of a trail. For example, trail design can ensure vegetation and landscaping do not create hiding places, volunteer or police patrols can be established to monitor the trail; access for emergency vehicles should be maintained, and emergency phones can be installed where levels of use or particular locations make it desirable. Urban and suburban trails have very different safety issues from rural trails. As such, trail management plans should address safety issues according to the needs of each individual trail.

Successful trail projects result from the ability of trail proponents to sell their vision for the trail to the community. This involves presenting accurate information and countering false information, developing a trail plan that addresses community concerns, and involving the community and adjacent landowners in the process.

WHY PROJECTS FAIL AND WHY THEY SHOULDN'T

At its peak, the United States railroad network consisted of 270,000 miles of track connecting small towns to urban areas and moving goods to market.

Today, 150,000 of those miles have been abandoned; many of them impossible to reassemble. Each year approximately 2,000 more miles are proposed for abandonment. A relatively small number — around 10,000 miles — have been preserved as multi-use trails.

Currently, an additional 18,000 miles are proposed rail-trail projects where at least some interest in opening a trail exists. Many will eventually become open trails and some will never make it past the concept/planning stage of development. Why do some projects fail? A cursory study of trail projects classified by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy as “inactive,” found numerous reasons including a lack of community or agency support, ranging from mere apathy to vocal opposition, resumption of rail service, lack of funding, and damage to the corridor.

Trail projects that do not have a “Friends of the trail” group or other champion can stagnate and eventually fail. When working with an agency, these volunteer groups can serve as a liaison between concerned citizens and agency officials and help move the project along. They may also participate in fundraising, construction, and management of the trail. In some instances, the “Friends” group takes on the managing agency role as well.

Political and adjacent landowner opposition may stop a trail project. On one trail project in Kansas, long-standing friction between politicians at the city and county level halted progress. Some trail projects

require the cooperation of several jurisdictions and agencies that can be difficult to organize, especially where one jurisdiction in the middle of the trail disagrees with those on either side (See the Wolf Creek Bikeway Success Story, page 13).

Although trail proponents may be disappointed, the resumption of rail service is the best possible reason for a project to fail. No one wants to see a viable rail line go out of service. Resumption of service will usually occur very early in the development process while the railroad is seeking abandonment through the Surface Transportation Board. Many times an offer of financial assistance from a rail customer or government agency will cause rail service to be resumed. In this case, a trail group may want to pursue a rail-with-trail or stay alert for notices of a later abandonment of the same line.

Lack of funding can create a major stumbling block to trail development. Many jurisdictions may not have the resources to acquire and build a trail and a surprising number of agencies and organizations may not know about funding sources that are available through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). Information about ISTEA is available from the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse at (888) 388-6832. Funding sources such as shared-use with utilities or cable companies, salvage of the rail, corporate sponsorship, and other creative fundraising strategies are also a possibility.

In St. Joseph, Missouri severe damage to a railroad bridge prevented trail proponents from moving ahead with their plans. Bridges eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places are occasionally offered for relocation with funding through the Historic Bridge Program within the Federal Highway Administration. This solves two problems at

once. A damaged bridge is replaced and an historic bridge is saved by relocating it to the trail site.

Railroads are not required to negotiate for trail use; however, they do gain some advantages in selling to a trail group or agency. First, a trail group or agency wants to acquire the entire corridor intact, which means only one transaction is needed instead of numerous transactions with each interested party. Second, agencies and organizations have access to large funding sources that allow for a commitment to pay cash upon signing a deal. This transaction can also generate good public relations for the railroad especially if a donation of all or part of the corridor is involved.

The railroad abandonment process under the jurisdiction of the Surface Transportation Board occurs under a very strict timeline. To file for railbanking, an agency or citizen group must file “Statement of Willingness To Assume Financial Responsibility” within thirty days of the railroad abandonment

filing. This requires close attention to notices of upcoming abandonments and extremely quick work by agencies and citizen organizations. Missing deadlines can result in a lost opportunity for trail development.

Delays, even long delays in trail development, should not be considered failures. Rail-trail projects may succeed even though progress may occur over a long period of time. Efforts to establish the Prairie-Duneland Trail in Indiana began in 1984, with an attempt to railbank the corridor. Although this effort was unsuccessful, trail activists and supporters convinced the City of Portage to acquire the still-abandoned corridor in 1992. After securing funding, the Portage Parks Department began construction on the first six mile section of trail. The Prairie-Duneland Trail was officially dedicated on July 13, 1996. A twelve-year project, the Prairie-Duneland Trail is a clear example of cooperation between government agencies and citizens resulting in a trail that benefits the entire community.



The community turns out for the opening of the Katy Trail in Missouri.

SUCCESS STORIES

Many trails are envisioned, designed, constructed, and maintained with the full support of the community, the adjacent landowners, and the managing agency. The examples that follow are just a few of the many rail-trail success stories occurring all over the country.

- ▼ The **Wolf Creek Bikeway**, a 13 mile trail going through Brookville and Trotwood, **Ohio**, resulted from a cooperative effort not only between the citizens and agency officials but between the officials of several different local agencies. Working together the Dayton-Montgomery County Park District, Village of Brookville, and City of Trotwood completed the trail in 2½ years. Even more astounding, the cost to construct the trail was well below what was expected. The Wolf Creek Bikeway is also an example of a trail that is part of a larger trail plan for the region. Efforts are in the works to connect to other area trails including the Little Miami Scenic Trail. When completed, the network will consist of almost 70 miles of trails in the Miami Valley region.
- ▼ The **Larkspur Path**, a two mile trail connecting Corte Madera and Larkspur, **California**, was enthusiastically supported by the adjacent landowners and citizens in the Baltimore Park area of Larkspur. A change in the General Plan for the area would have allowed development on the corridor. Feeling that the right-of-way was the last natural green space in Larkspur and additional residential or business development would create unwanted density, a group of citizens established the Railroad Open Space Preservation Group. Residents thought that a trail would prevent development on the corridor while providing recreational opportunities and some much needed open space for the neighborhood.
- ▼ The developers of the **Clarion/Little Toby Creek Trail** in Clearfield, Elk, and Jefferson Counties, **Pennsylvania** were asked by at least one adjacent landowner to set up an Adopt-a-Trail program so that he could “adopt” the section of trail that abuts on his property. The Brockway resident said, “it would be a good educational project for [my] family.”
- ▼ The **Cat Tail Trail** in **Wisconsin** is a 17.8 mile railbanked trail that runs from Amery to Almen. The corridor was acquired from Wisconsin Central Ltd. by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and then leased to Polk and Barron Counties. Through the abandonment process Turtle Creek, an important walleye stream within the right-of-way, was protected from disturbance by salvage or construction during spawning season. Now open, the Cat Tail Trail, named as a result of a “Name the Trail” contest, provides access for fishing as well as walking, bicycling, horseback riding, and snowmobiling.



THE PRAIRIE SPIRIT RAIL-TRAIL: A CASE STUDY

Most rail-trail projects will not encounter the hurdles that the proponents of the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail have so far overcome and continue to battle. Even so, there are many lessons that can be taken from these determined trail builders. The idea for a rail-trail surfaced in the late 1980's after the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company sold the 50-mile corridor to KCT, a Utah-based salvage company. After holding the corridor for 2 years, KCT filed for abandonment in 1990. Kansas Wildlife and Parks expressed interest in the right-of-way and negotiations between the two entities began. On April 23, 1992, an agreement for trail use was signed. KCT agreed to donate the corridor to Kansas Wildlife and Parks for use as a trail.



In-line skaters are one of the many user groups that enjoy the Prairie Spirit Trail.

trail, became vocal opponents. The controversy was played out in letters to the editor in local newspapers and the negative sentiment began to spread.

In the meantime, Kansas Wildlife and Parks sought funding for development of the trail. This would lead to one of the trail proponents' greatest achievements and greatest frustrations. Federal funding from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) would provide 80% of the funding required to build the trail with the requirement of a state or local match of 20% of the costs. The Friends of the Prairie Spirit were successful in raising \$67,000 of the local match for the trail. The frustration came in the development of the Franklin County section of trail. Although the two opponents were unsuccessful in stopping progress in their home county, they continued to oppose extending the trail in neighboring Franklin

The proposed trail would run 50 miles from Ottawa to Iola, Kansas, passing through several small towns including Garnett. In Garnett, concurrent plans were developed to renovate the A,T & SF depot for a trail rest stop and information center. A Richmond resident submitted the winning entry in a "Name the Trail" contest and the corridor became the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail. By September of 1993, the "Friends of the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail" was formed with over 85 members. However, by this time, opposition was also building. Two local residents, both with property adjacent to the proposed

County. When state funding was finally approved it was under the condition that the Franklin County Commission support the trail. This left the decision in the hands of three county commissioners who voted 2-1 against the trail, even though the City of Ottawa — the largest city in the county — voted to support the trail.

The first 18-mile section of trail in Anderson County opened March 30, 1996 with great fanfare. By August, over 4,700 people had enjoyed the trail. Even though trail advocates are still facing hurdles on the Franklin County section, they were able to open a significant portion of the trail. Though not the recommended course, the adverse publicity may even have helped attract non-local visitors to the trail. Along with the depot restoration, development in Garnett is on the rise. A restaurant has opened and a hotel renovation is underway. Currently, Kansas Wildlife and Parks is working to get the trail designated as a state park. The Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail would then appear on state highway maps and would be eligible for funding from state-wide park entry fees.

It took only six years from the time KCT proposed abandonment until the first section of the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail opened. Many trails, especially those that are unable to reap the benefits of railbanking, take much longer to complete. Some trail builders have experienced an acquisition phase alone of 5-10 years. Opposition from a few vocal individuals has been dealt with by strengthening existing support through the creation of “Friends” groups and expanding support throughout the community. There are two “Friends of the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail” groups: one in Garnett and the other in Ottawa. In addition, the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail has an internet web site giving access to information about the trail to people around the world as well as in the trail’s own backyard.

Visit the Prairie Spirit Rail-Trail website and others linked to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s website at <http://www.railtrails.org>.



RESOURCES

Rail-Trail Opposition: 12 Most Frequently Asked Questions. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Factsheet.

Top 10 Ways to Work with the Opposition. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Factsheet.

Rail-Trails and Liability. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Factsheet.

The Economic Benefits of Rail-Trails. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Factsheet.

Secrets of Successful Rail-Trails. Eds. Karen-Lee Ryan and Julie A. Winterich. Available from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. 178pp.

The Impact of Rail-Trails: A Study of Users and Nearby Property Owners from Three Trails. Roger Moore et al., National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 1992 100pp. Executive Summary available from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Analysis of Economic Impacts of the Northern Central Rail-Trail. PKF Consulting for Maryland Greenways Commission and Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Annapolis, MD, 1994. 70pp. Executive Summary available from Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

Rail Trails and Safe Communities forthcoming from Rails-to Trails Conservancy.

Rail-with-Trails: Sharing Corridors for Transportation and Recreation. Patrick Kraich, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Revised 1997.

Railbanking: What, Where, Why, When and How? Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Factsheet.

FOOTNOTES

¹ United States Environmental Protection Agency. Hp. December 29, 1997. Online. EPA. Available: <http://www.epa.gov>. February 18, 1997.

² *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General.* U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. July 1996.

³ *Evaluation of the Burke-Gilman Trail's Effect on Property Values and Crime.* Seattle Engineering Department, Seattle, Washington. December 1987. 42pp.

⁴ *The Effects of Greenways on Property Values and Public Safety.* The Conservation Fund and Colorado State Parks, 1994. 76pp.

PHOTO CREDITS

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