

CENTRAL GEORGIA RAIL-TO-TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

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Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The Central Georgia Rail-to-Trail Association, Inc. (CGRTA) was officially incorporated in April of 2006. Since that time, officers of the board have been elected, bylaws adopted and an application for 501 (c) 3 designation was prepared and submitted. One of the organization's primary purposes is to pursue construction of a shared-use trail, with appropriate amenities, on an approximate 33-mile abandoned CSX Railway line corridor that runs from the City of Macon in Bibb County to the City of Milledgeville in Baldwin County. The rail line in question was originally abandoned by CSX in the early 1980s.

The impetus for the rail-to-trail initiative came out of the Regional Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan prepared by the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) in 2005. The need for a feasibility study pertaining to the proposed trail was then incorporated into the Georgia Department of Transportation's (GDOT) FY07 Planning Services Contract with the RDC. Prior to initiating action to acquire right-of-way and designing and building the facility, the CGRTA Board of Directors requested that the RDC conduct a feasibility study that would:

- Examine the natural, historic and physical features along the route;
- Review property ownership of the railway right-of-way and adjacent land parcels;
- Assess the potential environmental, economic and community impacts of developing such a trail, including feedback from major stakeholders and the general public;
- Identify potential obstacles or impediments to developing the trail, along with recommended alternatives or solutions, where applicable;
- Estimate right-of-way and construction costs and outline possible funding sources; and
- Establish a strategy for implementation, including steps to begin acquiring the right-of-way and funding the trail.

With a feasibility study in hand, the CGRTA, Inc. will have the information necessary to make sound decisions as they further pursue this initiative.

Description of Corridor Route

The corridor begins in the City of Macon (Bibb County) just south of Central City Park. It then crosses the Ocmulgee River and Interstate 75 through land owned by the

Archeological Conservancy to Emery Highway. It then proceeds eastward past Lakeside Park and through a large developed area of east Macon.

As it crosses the Jones County line, it makes a turn north where it passes several residential subdivisions and a public recreational facility and is in close proximity to two public schools. After proceeding under Hwy 49, it turns northeast passing two residential subdivisions and vacant land until it reaches the southern end of the Marietta Aggregates Rock Quarry. The corridor continues past the quarry and crosses Cumslo Road and Hwy 18, south of the unincorporated community of James, where it then enters a large stretch of undeveloped land. From a gas pipeline easement, the corridor takes a sharp turn northward and just before reaching Hwy 22 it turns back towards the east just west of the unincorporated Haddock community. The corridor passes south of Haddock paralleling Hwy 22 and proceeds due east into Baldwin County.

In Baldwin County, the corridor continues eastward and passes through undeveloped land and across a Georgia Power easement until it reaches the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Industrial Park, where it touches the southern part of the Park. It then crosses Blandy Road, and to the north is the Central Georgia Technical College (CGTC)-Milledgeville Campus and to the south are a number of facilities operated by the Baldwin County Board of Education. There is an at-grade crossing of the Hwy 441 Bypass, and then it proceeds under Hwy 22. From Hwy 22, the corridor makes a slight jog to the southeast where it then proceeds a short distance to its termination point at an existing active rail line just south of Garrett Way. A series of maps detailing the complete route of the proposed trail can be found in Appendix G.

Background Information

Description of Communities Served by the Corridor

The proposed Central Georgia Rail-to-Trail Corridor directly serves three counties and two cities; Bibb County and the City of Macon, Jones County, and Baldwin County and the City of Milledgeville.

Bibb County and the City of Macon

Bibb County is the largest in total population of the three counties that the corridor traverses, though it is projected to grow the slowest of the three. In 2000, Bibb County's population was 153,887. Of that total, 97,255 persons, or 63.2% resided in the City of Macon. By 2030, it is projected that Bibb County's total population will increase by only 4.9% to 161,300. All of the growth will take place in the unincorporated area of the County; mostly in the northern and southern end, with little or no growth in the eastern end where the corridor is located. The City of Macon's total population is expected to continue its decline over the next 30 years, with migration out to unincorporated Bibb County and to neighboring counties.

The 2000 US Census revealed that 42.2% of Bibb County's population was between the ages of 25-54; considered the prime working age group. Like the national trend, the population of Bibb County will become progressively older during the next 30 years, with the over 55 age groups seeing significant gains. In addition to the growth of the older age groups, there will also be a decline in the number of persons per household before leveling off. This is due to the fact that there will be fewer persons in the child-rearing age groups and a trend towards smaller families.

Jones County

The county with the largest section of the corridor within its boundaries is also the fastest growing county in terms of total population. In 2000, as indicated by the US Census, there were 23,639 persons living in Jones County. By 2030, the total population is projected to climb to 34,710 persons, a 46.5% rate of growth. Many existing Jones County residents are concentrated within several miles of the corridor in the southwest portion of the County. The City of Gray, located north of the corridor on Hwy 18 and Cumslo Road, is planned to grow to the south as well as westward, thus bringing additional residents closer to the corridor.

The existing age distribution in Jones County mirrors closely that of Bibb County with a large percentage in the working age groups. As in Bibb County, the older age groups (55 and over) will expand significantly, but an interesting contrast to the trend in Bibb County is the continued modest growth in the working-age and school-age groups. This is largely due to the expected in-migration of working-age families. Because of this trend, the persons per household figure will likely not drop as rapidly as the national rate and as in some areas of Georgia, such as Bibb County.

Baldwin County and the City of Milledgeville

The 2000 total population for Baldwin County, according to the US Census, was 44,802, of which 18,757 persons or 41.9% lived in the City of Milledgeville. Over the course of the next 30 years (2030), total population in Baldwin County is expected to reach 52,210 persons, an increase of 16.5 percent. Most of this increase is expected to occur around Lake Sinclair as seasonal housing is gradually being replaced by permanent housing dwellings, and the portion of the unincorporated area between the City of Milledgeville and Lake Sinclair.

The City of Milledgeville is home to a large institutional population due to the presence of a state university, a military college, a state prison and state mental health facilities. Future growth will likely occur as a result of annexations and some infill development.

Existing age distribution in Baldwin County appears much the same as that found in both Bibb and Jones County; concentration in the working-age groups. Over the next 30 years, the age distribution in Baldwin County, as a percentage of total population, is projected to show a radical shift. Those groups under 44 years of age will either decline or remain level, while those over 45, particularly age 60 and above, will experience dramatic gains.

As would be expected with this trend, the persons per household will decline for most of the next 30 years then will enter a period of little or no fluctuation.

The relevancy of the above socio-economic data as it relates to the development and use of a rail-to-trail facility is as follows:

- There is a large potential user base for a recreational trail facility; almost 250,000 persons will live in the counties served by the proposed facility. This does not count the growing populations in neighboring Houston, Monroe and Putnam Counties that could be attracted to utilize the facility, particularly if feeder facilities are eventually developed.
- The growing older population could benefit from the trail since these persons will have the time to utilize the facility, as well as to volunteer for various activities to help promote and maintain the trail. In addition, there is a growing awareness among the older population of the need to stay fit and healthy during the later years of life, thus another reason for projected trail usage.
- The growing working age population and their families in Jones County, though lacking in time that the older generations will have, bring to the table their higher level of incomes and enthusiasm that is much needed during the establishment of the trail. In addition, these age groups have their own needs for recreation and exercise that the trail can provide. Additionally, the likelihood that most of the future development in Jones County will occur in close proximity of the trail corridor will increase the potential usage of the facility.

Description of Natural Features Along the Corridor Route

Water Resources

From its beginning point south of Central City Park, the corridor immediately crosses the Ocmulgee River (there is no bridge presently, but posts from the old bridge are visible from the ground) and goes under Interstate 75 at Walnut Creek and into what is now land owned by the Archeological Conservancy, which contains a substantial amount of wetlands until it reaches Emery Highway. There is a small amount of wetlands just east of Emery Highway. There are no other wetlands or water resources in the Bibb County portion.

There are only a few wetlands and creeks that potentially impact the corridor in Jones County; they include: 1) Dry Bone Creek and adjacent wetlands just north of where the corridor crosses Hwy 49; 2) Slash Creek and associated wetlands slightly further to the east; 3) Little Creek and its wetland areas west of the Hwy 18 crossing; 4) wetland area past the Eatonton Natural Gas Pipeline; and 5) Pumphouse Branch, near Haddock.

Once the corridor moves into Baldwin County, it crosses Fishing Creek twice. In close proximity to the second crossing of Fishing Creek there is a “swampy” area located nearby. There are no other water resources identified in the Baldwin County segment. The streams and wetlands areas described above are illustrated in a series of maps

displaying water demographics along the proposed trail route. These maps are located in Appendix G of this study.

Topography

As would be expected along a former rail line, the corridor's topography is relatively flat as illustrated in a series of topographic maps located in Appendix G. There are, however, several sections in both Jones and Baldwin County where picturesque viewsheds are created by changes in the topography on either side as it blends in with the rural landscape.

Description of Physical Features Along the Corridor Route

Adjacent Land Uses and Street Crossings

The corridor's beginning point crosses between one of Bibb County's significant park and recreational complexes and its oldest industrial area; Central City Park and the Seventh Street Industrial Area. Beyond the Ocmulgee River and Interstate 16 the corridor enters an area rich in historical and archeological significance; an area currently held in trust by the Archeological Conservancy. After proceeding across Emery Highway, the corridor enters a primarily undeveloped area with Lakeside Park to the north and several commercial and institutional uses to the south. This rural character continues until just past the Jones County line.

Just beyond the Jones County line the corridor passes suburban-type development that includes residential subdivisions, a major public recreational facility and several public schools. The proposed trail would be ideal for those residing in the various subdivisions to walk or bike to the recreation area or the schools. After passing this development, the corridor again enters a rural area until it reaches the Rinker Materials Rock Quarry where it cuts through the main portion of the quarry area. An alternative route would have to be found to circumvent the quarry (a possible alternative route is discussed elsewhere in this study).

Leaving the quarry, the corridor continues to track eastward with largely undeveloped land on either side until it reaches the village of James near Hwy 18. James is a very small rural railroad village that developed along the Central of Georgia line c1871. The village is centered around a rural crossroads that is bisected by the abandoned rail bed. About a dozen buildings are situated along parallel access roads located on each side of the railroad bed. The rail bed provides a grassy median that serves as a central town commons.

Making its way past James, the corridor begins to take a northerly turn through densely forested land, until just south of Hwy 22 where it again makes its way eastward. Once it makes its easterly turn, it enters the village of Haddock. Founded in 1871, Haddock developed along the lines of the Central of Georgia Railroad. Haddock is characterized as

a small rural community containing approximately three dozen residential structures, as well as several commercial and institutional buildings. The town is centered around a small, turn-of-the-century commercial district featuring several load-bearing brick storefronts concentrated at the crossroad of Hwy 22 and Etheridge Road. Most of the residential and institutional buildings were built during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Continuing to move east beyond Haddock, the corridor passes a light industrial area, and then once again enters undeveloped land as it crosses into Baldwin County. For a number of miles, the corridor passes through one of the most picturesque areas along the entire route. This area contains a mixture of forestland and pastureland, this along with subtle topographic changes, enhances the scenic quality of the area.

In almost an instant, the scenic beauty intersects with urban development. The corridor enters the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Industrial Park, where several industries and businesses back up to the corridor. The corridor's relationship with the industrial park continues for some distance and then it reaches the area behind the Central Georgia Technical College-Milledgeville Campus. The corridor continues past the technical school and intersects with the US 441 Bypass just south of Hwy 22. On the north side of Hwy 22 is another section of the industrial park along with the Baldwin County recreational complex that includes a golf course, recreation center with a walking track around a lake, ball fields and a swimming pool.

Where the corridor crosses the Hwy 441 Bypass, it is four-lane and is at the bottom of a major curve. This configuration could pose significant safety issues for the users of the trail. In addition, plans are underway to reroute a portion of the Bypass that could significantly impact this junction of the trail. Once across the busy and potentially hazardous Hwy 441 Bypass, the corridor proceeds under the Hwy 22 bridge and then makes a slight jog to the southeast. It then continues for some distance past several commercial businesses and terminates at an active north-south rail line just south of Garrett Way. A series of maps located in Appendix G provides an illustrative look at the existing land uses along the corridor.

Property Ownership

This section of the report will provide a description of the property ownership of the railway right-of-way, and where possible, adjacent land parcels.

Railway Right-of-Way

The Middle Georgia RDC received from the CSX Real Property Office an index of the CSX Valuation (VAL) maps of the abandoned rail line between Bibb County and Baldwin County. A copy of this index map can be found in Appendix A. The map specifically identifies the areas no longer owned by CSX. In early January 2007, the RDC followed up the receipt of this index map with a letter to Mr. Ralph Pressley, Regional Manager of CSX Real Property. In that letter, it discussed the CGRTA's desire to work

with CSX on this project and to request a meeting to discuss, among other things, the company's plans for the corridor's right-of-way. After some weeks had passed, the RDC staff made contact with Mr. Pressley, and in that conversation, Mr. Pressley did express the desire and willingness of his company to work with CGRTA, Inc. on the rail-to-trail project. In addition, he revealed that though CSX still owns a vast majority of the abandoned line, easements have been granted to many of the neighboring property owners to use the corridor. It was not clear from the conversation on the type and method used to convey the easement. This will require extensive title research by CGRTA, Inc. in order to determine this information prior to moving forward with formal discussions with CSX related to acquiring their portion of the corridor. This research, although not a part of the feasibility study, is identified as an action item elsewhere in the study. Depending upon what is revealed by this research, the results could significantly add to the complexity and cost of the right-of-way acquisition process.

The VAL index map shows four sizeable segments; one entirely in Jones County, one in Jones and Baldwin Counties and two entirely in Baldwin County that are no longer owned by CSX. Below is ownership and current use information (as of March, 2007) on these four segments obtained from the Jones County and Baldwin County Tax Assessor's Offices. Prior to taking any action on the tracts noted below, Tax Assessor Office records should be consulted again to obtain the latest ownership and current use information.

Jones County Segment

Ownership: Rinker Materials
Current Use: Rock Quarry

Jones County-Baldwin County Segment

Ownership #1: John David Pettigrew-Milledgeville, Ga.
Current Use: Part of 374.15 acre tract that includes 100 acres of agricultural land and 274+ of timberland that is all under the State conservation use assessment provision. There is also 1,400 square foot house constructed in 1940.

Ownership #2: Emory Van Williams-Macon, Ga.
Current Use: Part of 70.59 acre tract that includes 55.59 acres of woodlands and a number of utility and other accessory buildings.

Ownership #3: Clance Edward and Emory Van Williams-Macon, Ga.
Current Use: Part of 114.22 acre tract that is currently in woodlands.

Ownership #4: Willis Craig Blasingame-Oceanside, California
Current Use: Part of 43.00 acre track that is presently in woodlands use.

Ownership #5: Craig Blasingame-Oceanside, California
Current Use: Part of 336.00 acre tract that includes 314.81 acres of woodlands and 21.19 acres of open land that is all under the State conservation use assessment provision.

Ownership #6: George Allen Wilkinson-Milledgeville, Ga.
Current Use: Part of 261.75 acre tract that includes 89.26 acres of woodlands, 170.26 acres of open lands and 2.03 acres in ponds that is all under the State conservation use assessment provision.

Baldwin County Segment #1

Ownership #1: John Thomas Brown-Stone Mountain, Ga.
Current Use: Part of 230.43 acre tract that is entirely covered by woodlands, and all of which is under the State conservation use assessment provision.

Ownership #2: Horace W. Franklin-Milledgeville, Ga.
Current Use: Part of a 247.99 acre tract includes the following land uses; 126.47 acres in woodlands, 115.96 acres in open land and 5.56 acres in ponds. All of this property is under the State conservation use assessment provision.

Baldwin County Segment #2

Ownership #1: Linda B. Tanner-Milledgeville, Ga.
Current Use: Part of a 73.41 acre tract that includes woodlands and a 1,904 sq. ft. manufactured home.

Ownership #2: Jerry N. Veal-Milledgeville, Ga.
Current Use: Part of a 20.57 acre tract that contains open land, a 1,908 single-family dwelling and other accessory buildings. The undeveloped portion of the tract is under the State conservation use assessment provision.

Ownership #3: Ronald J. and Shirley A. Boyd-Milledgeville, Ga.
Current Use: Part of a 274.74 acre tract and is occupied by; 107.98 of woodlands, 163.79 acres of open land, 2.97 acres in ponds, a 2,593 sq. ft. single-family dwelling and several accessory structures. The undeveloped portion of the property is under the State conservation use assessment provision.

Ownership #4: J.M. Wall, Jr.-Milledgeville, Ga.
Current Use: Part of 1.57 acre tract that is currently in open land.

After reviewing the above data, several potential issues are noted. The first is out-of-town ownership. Several of the tracts are owned by individuals whose addresses are outside the three-county corridor area; two in particular are owned by an individual whose home address is listed as California. Acquiring property from local owners is often difficult, but when dealing with individuals who reside in other portions of the state, or elsewhere in the country, the difficulty is compounded.

A second, and possibly more troublesome issue than out-of-town ownership, is that most of the property listed above is covered under Georgia conservation use tax law, Chapter 48-5, O.C.G.A. This law allows “a single-owner of not more than 2,000 acres of tangible

real property, using it for the primary purpose of any good faith production, including, but not limited to subsistence farming or commercial production, from or on the land of agricultural products or timber subject to certain qualifications” to apply for a conservation use assessment and maintain such use for at least a period of ten years.

The issue related to this law begins with Code Section 48-5-517 which states: “a penalty shall be imposed under this subsection if during the period of the covenant entered into by the taxpayer the covenant is breached. The penalty shall be applicable to the entire tract which is the subject of the covenant and shall be **twice the difference between the total amount of tax paid pursuant to current use assessment under this Code section and the total amount of taxes which would otherwise have been due under this chapter for each completed or partially completed year of the covenant period.**” Any penalty will also bear interest from the date the covenant is breached. The penalty shall not apply in any case where a covenant is breached solely as a result of “the transfer of a part of the property subject to a covenant for a bona fide conservation use.” The development of a shared-use trail is not listed as a “bona fide conservation use” beginning in Code Section 48-5-50, but the words, “but not limited to” is mentioned, thus a legal opinion will be needed to clarify if a shared-use trail can fit under this classification.

Another important section of this law is 48-5-232 that states: “no property shall qualify as bona fide conservation use property if it is leased to a person or entity which would not be entitled to conservation use assessment.” A bona fide non-profit conservation organization designated under Section 501 (c) 3 of the Internal Revenue Code is listed earlier in the law as an entity that could be entitled to such assessment. Again, a legal opinion should be rendered to determine if the CGRTA, Inc. is such an entity. Leasing the property could prove to be an option to fee-simple acquisition in order to avoid possible penalties to the landowner if CGRTA, Inc. is considered a legal entity under the law, and a shared-use trail is found to be a “bona fide conservation use.”

Adjacent Land Owners

Research was conducted in mid-2006 at the offices of the Jones County and Baldwin County Tax Assessor’s Offices, and online at the Bibb County Tax Assessor’s Office’s website to obtain a complete list of property owners adjacent to the proposed rail-to-trail corridor. Some follow-up research was conducted at these sites in early 2007. Because of the sheer size of the database, and the fact that ownership records can become outdated in a short period of time, a brief summary (see below) of the adjacent land owners in the three counties is provided. When CGRTA, Inc. begins its right-of-way acquisition process, these property-ownership records will be provided to the organization with the caveat that verification by CGRTA, Inc. legal counsel be conducted prior to initiating any discussions with the landowners.

Bibb County

The owner of the property adjacent to the corridor east of the Ocmulgee River to Emery Highway is identified by Bibb County Tax Assessor Office records as Lamar Mounds, Inc. (held in trust by the Archeological Conservancy). Crossing beyond Emery Highway, the land is predominately owned by commercial businesses and institutional uses with a scattered number of tracts owned by individuals and apartment complexes. As the corridor moves closer to the Jones County border, the percentage of ownership by individual or multi-individual investors increases, but several large tracts are shown to be owned by a major culvert company.

Jones County

As it enters Jones County from Bibb County until the time it reaches the Rinker Materials quarry site, because of the residential character of the area, many of the parcels are relatively small in size and owned by one or two persons. Beyond the quarry, the size of the parcels increases dramatically until the village of James where smaller residential parcels can be found. The parcel size again becomes large as the corridor makes it turn northward then eastward to Haddock. The parcels are owned by individuals, family partnerships and in some cases development companies. Parcel size is mixed as the corridor approaches Haddock. Past Bowen Hill Road to portions of western Baldwin County, as described above, the corridor has been sold off to individuals or family partnerships. The parcels north of the corridor fronting on Hwy 22 range in size from several acres to 22+ acres and are under a variety of ownership.

Baldwin County

Continuing through Baldwin County, the parcel size and type of ownership remains relatively constant until the corridor reaches the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Industrial Park. At that point, the parcel size becomes considerably smaller and the ownership changes from individuals and family partnerships to commercial and industrial companies. Before reaching the US 441 Bypass, the adjoining property owners become public educational institutions on large tracts of land. Finally, as the corridor crosses US 441 Bypass and goes underneath Hwy 22 and makes it final eastward turn, adjoining properties become very small, and ownership of the property is made up of individuals, commercial enterprises or development companies.

Community Outreach Efforts

The objective of the Middle Georgia RDC's community outreach effort was to ascertain community concerns, needs and preferences, and any potential obstacles or impediments that must be overcome in order to successfully implement the proposed rail-to-trail project. It was not the intent of this study to garner support for the project; that being the responsibility of CGRTA, Inc. as part of their marketing and promotion efforts.

There were a number of methods used by the Middle Georgia RDC to solicit the input from elected officials, citizens and key stakeholders during the development of this study. Below is a summary of those efforts.

- In the initial stages of the study, a letter was sent out to all chief elected officials in the three county corridor area that briefly explained the project, the purpose of the feasibility study and solicited the inputs of their constituents as well as themselves. Additionally, they were advised that the RDC would keep them involved and informed as the study progressed.
- A meeting was conducted on April 18, 2007 with representatives from the Ocmulgee National Monument, the City of Macon, New Town Macon and the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce on issues related to the National Monument, the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail and the proposed relocation of the Norfolk and Southern rail line. A summary of the results of the meeting is contained in Appendix C of this report.
- A list of key, community stakeholders was developed (see List of Stakeholders in Appendix B) with each being sent an invitation to attend a special stakeholders meeting held on April 19, 2007 at the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center. At the meeting, the proposed project was explained in detail and the attendees were asked for their input on any known potential obstacles, problems, or concerns. Additionally, they were queried as to the expected level of community support, degree of opposition and overall feasibility of the project.

Issues and Opportunities

Assessment of Environmental, Economic and Community Impacts

Environmental Impacts

Most, if not all, of the impacts of the proposed trail to the surrounding environment should be positive. The reason for this assessment is based on the following:

- There are very few wetland areas that the corridor crosses. Those that are present have already been disturbed by the former railroad bed. During the preliminary engineering phase of the trail development, a more thorough wetland study should be conducted to determine the presence of jurisdictional wetlands that could not be discovered during this initial investigation. Where it is found that jurisdictional wetlands may be disturbed beyond that created by the old rail bed, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should be consulted on the need for Section 404 permits. The protection of these wetland areas will help with improving water quality in the surrounding streams by providing natural buffer zones, and with preserving the natural habitat for the many plants, birds and animals that make their home along the corridor.

- Along the undeveloped areas of the corridor and in the wetland areas mentioned above, there are likely numerous plant, animal and bird species that make their habitats in these areas. Some of these species may be on State and/or Federal threatened or endangered lists. As with wetlands, during the preliminary engineering phase, a study should be conducted on the plant, animal and bird species along the segment proposed for construction, with particular attention placed on locating any species that are threatened or endangered. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources-Wildlife Resources Division should be consulted during this study, if any threatened or endangered species are found. Since potential users of the trail are bird and animal watchers, it would be beneficial to locate signs and other markers along the trail that depict important areas of observation, and note those in the various marketing tools to attract these type visitors.
- The proposed trail could become an excellent tool for conservation. By bringing attention to the significant environmental features found along the trail, it is hoped that there will be an increased desire by trail users and communities alike to preserve important landscapes, provide needed links between fragmented habitats and protect plant, animal and bird species.
- The proposed trail also could become an outstanding educational tool for all ages, but in particular, school-age children. The trail would provide local teachers with an outdoor classroom, rich with an array of environmental features that would instill a wealth of scientific knowledge in their students, and enable the students to gain an appreciation of their natural surroundings and become more sensitive to the need of environmental protection.
- There are several opportunities to develop recreation areas in close proximity to the trail corridor. The first one is in the east Macon area where feeder trails and other amenities can be constructed near an existing lake and large open area. The second recreation opportunity would be south of the trail corridor in the Haddock area. In this location, there are several good size bodies of water that could be transformed, along with the surrounding property, into a county or regional park. The final recreational opportunity would be along Browns Crossing Road in western Baldwin County. Once home to a major, annual arts and crafts festival, this area may also have some historical significance, lending itself to being a possible site for an informational/educational roadside marker. Additionally, along this roadway, there is a beautiful pastoral setting that would make it an attractive turn-off for bicyclists, walkers and joggers.
- It is generally understood that the trail will be looked upon primarily as a recreational resource. However, with ever increasing attention to the air quality issue in the Macon urbanized area, greater emphasis should be placed on the use of this trail as a pleasant transportation alternative for commuting to work and school. Once the trail is completed between Macon and Milledgeville, some bicyclists may want to use this trail as an alternative to the automobile between

these two communities, provided support facilities are available at the employment centers in both communities. The biggest possibility for use as an alternative means of transportation will come from shorter trips. As like most other successful trail projects in the country, it is hoped that the trail will attract residential, commercial and institutional developments that will seek connection to the trail. This will create opportunities for short-distance trips between these uses. In addition, existing residents along completed trail segments can begin to take advantage of this alternative transportation opportunity as long as proper marketing tools are in place to educate them to this fact.

Economic Impacts

Many communities across the country have begun to realize the economic potential of having a rail-to-trail facility in their community. In the case of Bibb County, Jones County and Baldwin County, the proposed rail-to-trail facility will provide a link to two other trails; the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail and the Oconee River Greenway. Instead of one facility, there is the potential of having three outstanding recreational facilities that will have enormous economic value both to the local communities and to the middle Georgia region.

Trails bring job growth in construction and maintenance, as well as tourism-related opportunities like bike rentals, restaurants and lodging. In addition, many major companies have made decisions to relocate regional and corporate headquarters in large part because of the availability of trails. A case in point, Ruby Tuesday, Inc. relocated its Restaurant Support Center to a site adjacent to Greenway Trail in Maryville, Tennessee. This was done in part, because the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company was extremely impressed with the beauty of the greenway and felt it helped develop a sense of community.

Evidence is continuing to grow, based on the many studies that have been conducted on the subject, that trails improve local economies and bolster property values and make adjacent properties easier to sell. In some communities, trail systems have become the central focus of tourism activities. In a 2002 survey of recent home buyers, sponsored by the National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders, trails ranked as the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18 choices. One does not have to go far to see proof of this concept. The Silver Comet Trail in north Atlanta has brought in an enormous number of tourists to the area, and residential and commercial developments have sprung up in rapid fashion along the border of the trail in order to take advantage of the many amenities that the trail provides.

There are no statistics at this time to evaluate the economic impact of the proposed trail. However, based on experiences from other communities, it appears that once the rail-to-trail facility is constructed and local marketing efforts are underway to promote it, the three counties and affected municipalities stand to gain significant economic benefits from such a facility.

Community Impacts

The proposed rail-to-trail facility will have other impacts on the three communities in which it will cross. These include:

- Health Benefits
- Transportation/Livability
- Historic Preservation/Community Identity

Health Benefits

Recent studies by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and pronouncements by the U.S. Surgeon General highlight some very alarming trends: obesity is on the rise. Obesity may soon cause as much preventable disease and deaths as cigarette smoking, with the indirect costs attributed to these conditions amounting to over a \$100 billion annually.

It is a proven fact that regular physical activity can help prevent heart disease, control cholesterol levels and diabetes and slow bone loss associated with advancing age. Exercise also lowers the risk of certain cancers and helps reduce anxiety and depression.

Trails help make for a healthier community by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe and accessible places to bike, walk, hike, jog and skate. They make it easier for people to want to become physically active:

- Trails connect people with places, enabling them to walk or cycle when running errands or when commuting to and from work.
- Trails provide for a natural, scenic area that influences people to want to be outside and be active.
- Trails connect neighborhoods and schools so children can cycle or walk to school, especially in communities that do not have sidewalks.
- Trails offer a cost-effective place to exercise and serve as a place where people can see and interact with other people while exercising.

An important way to begin building healthy communities is to establish an effective trail system. Studies have shown that more people are exercising because of the presence of a trail system within close proximity of where they reside, resulting in healthier communities and citizens, with a subsequent reduction in health care costs. The proposed rail-to-trail system identified in this study is an important step in that direction for the middle Georgia community.

Transportation/Livability

People living in expanding urban areas are growing increasingly more alarmed about the diminishing quality of life brought on by sprawling development and its byproducts of air pollution and reduction of greenspace. Many people are seeking to escape these problems and are coming to small towns and rural areas in search of a quieter, more peaceful lifestyle, and to enjoy the beautiful landscapes. One way in which Bibb County, Jones

County and Baldwin County can enhance their livability, and attract residents from the urban areas is to establish an attractive and functional trail system in the Middle Georgia region. An interconnected trail system is already beginning to take shape with construction of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail in Bibb County and the Oconee River Greenway in Baldwin County. The development of the proposed rail-to-trail would be the link that could connect these two significant trails together.

In addition to linking existing trails together, establishing a trail system would provide an alternate method of transportation between downtown Macon and southwestern Jones County. Currently, the only viable means of transportation between these two areas is via automobile. The amount of automobile traffic on the roadways between these two areas is steadily increasing and is expected to continue. One contributing factor to the traffic increase is the planned high density residential uses and commercial development in southwestern Jones County, including the Hwy 49 area where the rail-to-trail corridor is located (2007 Jones County Comprehensive Plan). While this development will help to boost the community's economy it will also amplify present traffic congestion. The other major component contributing to increased roadway congestion is the efforts that are underway to continue the revitalization of downtown Macon into a shopping and entertainment destination for middle Georgia.

While the development and redevelopment occurring in Jones County and Macon are positive for economic growth purposes, the side effects of increased the highway network congestion, along with existing air quality concerns in Bibb County, necessitates exploring alternative means of transportation between the two areas. One transportation alternative is to establish this trail system between downtown Macon and southwestern Jones County. The trail would offer people a more pleasant commuting option and perhaps incentive to leave the automobile behind and chose to bike a few miles into work on weekday or as a means of transportation to weekend entertainment destinations such as museums, restaurants, shops and theatres. Not only would a trail system support efforts to decrease air pollution and congestion and it would also function as an important economic stimulus to the downtown Macon area and southwestern Jones County.

Historic Preservation and Community Identity

Most residents of middle Georgia are clearly aware that within a few blocks of the proposed rail-to-trail termini in Macon and Milledgeville are numerous historical and archeological treasures. Along, or in close proximity to the corridor itself, history abounds within the villages of James and Haddock and other historic sites and structures. The desire to walk in the footsteps of our predecessors or stand in the exact place where a significant event occurred is a characteristically American need, indicative of a culture that values authenticity. The presence of a man-made trail like the one proposed will provide a uniquely effective way to highlight the area's history. The historical and cultural resources found along the proposed trail corridor are listed in Appendix D of this report.

In addition, for more than 100 years the railroad was the backbone of American travel and commerce, and was integral to the development of countless communities like James and Haddock. In the 1920's, the national rail system consisted of nearly 300,000 miles; less than half of that remains today. Saving unused rail corridors and converting them to trails preserves a piece of our past.

The recognition of the cultural, historical and natural assets along a trail system enhances a sense of community identity. This can be accomplished by incorporating recreation, education and interaction into a single-user experience. Many trails are planned, designed and constructed with the concept of community identity in mind. The proposed rail-to-trail facility will not only expand individual community identity, but also a regional identity that binds the three communities together.

Since 2000, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has worked with historic destinations across America to promote their unique heritage as great travel destinations through its **Dozen Distinctive Destinations** program. Each year, the National Trust honors 12 communities that offer authentic experiences. These destinations offer striking alternatives to “Anyplace,” U.S.A. They have preserved their sense of place and character, have dynamic downtowns, a strong commitment to historic preservation and revitalization, interesting architecture, cultural diversity, and an economic base of locally owned small businesses and walking access for residents and visitors. The inclusion on this list is a considerable honor and a boost to the local economy as a result of the publicity and an increase in tourism activity. A previous winner of this award was Thomasville, Georgia. This also could be Macon or Milledgeville and the development of the rail-to-trail facility would enhance their chances to receive this coveted award.

Potential Obstacles or Impediments to Developing the Trail

There are many obstacles that the CGRTA, Inc. must overcome if it is to successfully fulfill its stated mission to construct the proposed rail-to-trail facility. This section of the study will examine these obstacles as well as offer possible alternatives or solutions to address these impediments.

Crossing the Ocmulgee River and Interstate 16

Probably the greatest challenge in the early portion of the trail is crossing the Ocmulgee River and Interstate 16. An analysis of recent aerial photography of the proposed route (see Appendix F) indicates that the bridge over the river from the old rail bed has been removed; therefore, a new bridge would have to be constructed. In addition to the new bridge being extremely costly to build, the logistical problem of finding a way to either go over or go under I-16 would have to be solved.

A possible solution to this obstacle is a plan prepared by the developers of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail. They are examining the possibility of constructing the extension of the Heritage Trail along the east side of the Ocmulgee River from Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. to the pathway under I-16 at Walnut Creek, with a connection to the Ocmulgee

National Monument boardwalk and trail system. This would eliminate the obstacle of crossing the Ocmulgee River and I-16 and would allow the rail-to-trail system to connect with the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail, a stated goal of the proposed project.

Extension of Trail to Emery Highway

As determined at the April 18th meeting held at the Ocmulgee National Monument (ONM) with National Park Service (NPS) representatives, the extension of the trail to Emery Highway on the abandoned rail bed would be on property currently owned Lamar Mounds, Inc. and held in trust by the Archeological Conservancy. Congressional funding is being requested to conduct a study to determine if significant cultural resources are present to justify expansion of the ONM. The proposed rail-to-trail facility would be located in the expansion area. Based on past history, the National Park Service has supported the development of trails inside or in connection to the facilities they manage.

Another issue related to the extension of the trail is from the ONM boardwalk area to Emery Highway and pertains to the relocation of the existing Norfolk and Southern Railway that currently passes through the Ocmulgee National Monument. It is not clear at this time if the abandoned CSX line being considered for the proposed rail-to-trail facility will be used as part of this line relocation. It is known, however, that if and when the current line is abandoned, as a result of the line relocation, the right-of-way will become part of the ONM property. This may create a better opportunity for acquiring property for this section of trail than using the existing abandoned corridor.

It is strongly recommended that the CGRTA, Inc. hold refrain from acquiring property in this area until the ONM expansion study is completed and more is known about where the Norfolk and Southern Railway relocation will occur.

Finally, no matter which right-of-way is used for the rail-to-trail facility, there will be security concerns related to the ONM. Mr. Jim David, Superintendent of ONM, has indicated that some method will have to be set in place to control access to the trail after visiting hours.

Eisenhower Parkway Extension

The Eisenhower Parkway Extension project, like the proposed rail-to-trail project, has been discussed for many years. Plans for construction of the Extension have been prepared but have been delayed due to environmental and cultural issues along the initial route. Georgia DOT has contracted with Kimley-Horn and Associates to prepare an environmental impact document on the number of alternative routes now being considered. In reviewing these alternatives, it was discovered that all of them terminate near the intersection of Emery Highway/Emery Road/Hwy 80. This is the approximate location where the proposed rail-to-trail corridor leaves the ONM area and crosses Emery Highway. This issue has been brought to the attention of Kimley-Horn's project director. It will be extremely important that the CGRTA, Inc. Board of Directors keep a close

watch on the Eisenhower Parkway Extension project, and coordinate with Georgia DOT and other officials as it moves forward.

Widening of Jeffersonville Road Project

The most recent Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the Macon Area Transportation Study (MATS) includes a project (P.I. #351080) to widen Jeffersonville Road from 2 to 4 lanes, with a continuous left turn lane running from Recreation Road to the Eisenhower Parkway Extension. This proposed project will impact the development of the proposed rail-to-trail corridor. Right-of-way acquisition is currently slated for FY11. The MATS staff has requested that CGRTA, Inc. coordinate very closely with Georgia DOT on the development of the trail as it relates to this road widening project.

Conflicts with Active Line in Jones County

Soon after the corridor crosses into Jones County, it parallels an active rail line on the west. This poses several problems:

- For residents living northwest of the corridor and wanting to access the Jones County South Recreation Complex, Mattie Wells Elementary and Mattie Wells Primary Schools.
- For residents living on the southeast side of the active line and wanting to access the trail.

Because of safety concerns, the railroad companies do not want pedestrians to cross active rail lines. Both circumstances above would require crossing an active rail line. Possible alternatives include:

- Residents could utilize the proposed trail up to the south end of the Hwy 49 bridge overpass. A ramp could be built to take the users to street level where they would cross over the bridge. From the bridge, a shared-use trail could be constructed along the Hwy 49 right-of-way to access the recreation center and the schools. It is suggested that this trail be extended past Hattie Wells Elementary to where it would connect with the new residential subdivision.
- A trail could be constructed on the east side of the subdivisions located south of Griswoldville Road, then proceed west along Griswoldville Road until just before the active line right-of-way. The trail would then turn northward paralleling the active line until the Hwy 49 right-of-way, where it would connect with the shared-use trail described previously.

There are large, undeveloped tracts of land situated north of Hwy 49 and east of the schools. If, in the future, this land develops into residential subdivisions, a pedestrian bridge will have to be constructed over the active rail line in order for residents to gain access to the rail-to-trail corridor. This action would require negotiating with the railroad to ensure that it would not cause problems for rail traffic currently using the line.

Rinker Materials Rock Quarry

The next challenge facing trail planners is the Rinker Materials Rock Quarry in Jones County. The abandoned rail line bisects the quarry just east of Pitts Chapel Road. Crossing the quarry would be unacceptable both to the users of the trail and the quarry owner. Additionally, Rinker Materials of Florida has plans for a 102.08 acre expansion of the quarry that includes a new plant area directly east of the present facility.

The quarry expansion project means that the proposed rail-to-trail will have to be rerouted a significant distance that will substantially add to the cost of the project. Also, CGRTA, Inc. must closely coordinate with Rinker Materials of Florida regarding any other quarry expansion plans to ensure that a shared-use trail facility in the area will not impact future quarry operations.

Sections No Longer in CSX Ownership

Portions of the abandoned line corridor in eastern Jones County, as well as portions in Baldwin County, have been sold by CSX to other interests. These parties have incorporated this former right-of-way into the rest of their properties and are using it for other purposes. To reclaim this property from these owners may be very difficult. In addition, many of the owners have placed these tracts of land under the State conservation use assessment provision. As stated earlier, there are substantial penalties to sell land under this provision. A legal review would have to be conducted in order to determine if property sold or leased to CGRTA, Inc. while under conservation use provisions would be subject to the penalties specified by law. If acquisition of these properties proves too difficult, or are prohibitively expensive, then alternative routes around these properties will have to be found.

Passage Near Milledgeville-Baldwin County Industrial Park

The proposed trail corridor passes south of the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Industrial Park. This would be an excellent benefit to the employees of the industrial park, as well as a potential selling point for the Development Authority in recruiting new businesses and industries to the park. However, there may be some security issues that will need to be addressed with some, or all, of the existing companies using the park. It is important that discussions with the Development Authority are held early in the process to resolve any concerns by the Authority and the businesses/industries. The Development Authority and the occupants of the industrial park should be viewed as valuable partners in the planning, development and marketing of this project.

Crossing the US 441 Bypass in Milledgeville

The proposed trail would cross the US 441 Bypass in Milledgeville at-grade. This means that users of the trail would have to negotiate four lanes of heavy traffic. Vehicles coming from the north past the Hwy 22 intersection would come around a turn at a relatively high rate of speed before reaching the crossing. This would make it very difficult for trail users

to react to the oncoming traffic and for motorists to be able see and react to trail users crossing the roadway. This creates a very hazardous situation that could cause many collisions resulting in serious injuries and/or deaths.

Compounding this safety issue is a highway improvement project involving the Bypass that impacts the area around the Hwy 22 intersection. During the early coordination process of the Bypass project, the development of the rail-to-trail facility was brought to the attention of Georgia DOT. A request was made to coordinate any improvements to the Bypass in this area with the proposed trail.

In light of the possible conflicts mentioned above, the following alternative is suggested:

- Terminate the rail-to-trail facility prior to the US 441 Bypass south of the CGTC-Milledgeville Campus.
- Construct a shared-use trail along Fishing Creek beginning at the rail-to-trail facility south of the industrial park, past the Baldwin County Board of Education (BOE) complex/Georgia College & State University (GC&SU) West Campus, under the Hwy 441 Bypass and Hwy 49 bridges and eventually connecting with the Oconee River Greenway.

The advantages of this alternative include:

- Avoids conflicts with the Hwy 441 Bypass.
- Provides connectivity between the rail-to-trail facility and the Oconee River Greenway, with subsidiary connections that could be provided to the GC&SU main campus and the downtown area.
- Potential usage could be substantial considering the employees and students that currently live or work along or in close proximity of these trails, and the possible tourists that would also use them.

Other Highway Crossings

In addition to Emery Highway and the US 441 Bypass mentioned above, the trail corridor will cross Griswoldville Road, Cumslo Road, Hwy 18, and Bowen Hill Road in Jones County and Roberts Road, Browns Crossing Road, Pettigrew Road, Horace Veal Road and Blandy Road in Baldwin County. At each of these crossings, there will need to be appropriate signage, crosswalks, signals and other measures installed necessary to warn the trail users of approaching road intersections and provide safe crossing of these roadways. In addition, there will need to be measures in place (road geometric design, signage and/or bollards) to discourage vehicles other than bicycles from entering the trail.

Most of the population in Haddock resides north of Hwy 22. Potential users of the trail in the Haddock area would have to cross Hwy 22, which has a considerable amount of traffic, and exercise extreme caution due to vehicles speeding through the community despite a reduced speed limit. CGRTA, Inc. and Jones County are encouraged to work with the Georgia DOT District 3 office to install appropriate pedestrian safety infrastructure prior to the opening of the trail in order to ensure the safe crossing of Hwy 22.

Crossing of Utility Easements

Macon Water Authority (MWA): Below are the utility easements, currently owned by the Macon Water Authority, crossed by the proposed rail-to-trail corridor.

- Emery Highway - 2'' and 20'' water lines.
- Jeffersonville Road - 6'' and 12'' water lines to be upgraded to 16'', with possible expansion to 36'' if large industrial user locates at the Ocmulgee Industrial Park.
- Masseyville Road - 12'' water main.
- The corridor crosses a 12'' sewer main just past Masseyville Road and twice crosses a 15'' sewer main further to the north.

In order to cross these easements, the Macon Water Authority requires an encroachment agreement approved by the MWA Board to repair the mains if necessary. The reconstruction of the trail, if repair is needed, is the responsibility of the trail owner.

Jones County: The Jones County Water Department operates a water system in southern Jones County. The proposed rail-to-trail corridor would impact on this system in the following locations:

- Parallel to and south of Griswoldville Road - 8'' main.
- Just past crossing of SR 49 and on Lite-N-Tie Road - 6'' main.

Prior to developing a trail on these easements, an encroachment agreement would have to be approved by the Jones County Board of Commissioners, providing access if repair to the lines becomes necessary.

Baldwin County: Baldwin County operates a water system in the rural portion of the county. Water line easements that parallel Browns Crossing Road, Roberts Road, Horace Veal Road and Blandy Road would be impacted by the proposed rail-to-trail corridor. An encroachment agreement will need to be approved by the Baldwin County Board of Commissioners.

City of Milledgeville: There are several locations in the City of Milledgeville where the proposed rail-to-trail corridor intersects with water line easements. The City's Water and Sewer Utilities Director has indicated that CGRTA, Inc. will be required to obtain permission from the City of Milledgeville prior to crossing these easements. It is likely that any agreement with the City of Milledgeville will include the right by the city to take out part of the trail in order to make necessary repairs/replacements to water lines at affected locations.

There is no information currently available from the City of Milledgeville regarding the location of sewer lines along the proposed trail corridor. CGRTA, Inc. will be required to coordinate with the city, during the preliminary engineering phase, in order to locate all sewer easements potentially impacted by the trail, and to obtain necessary approvals from city officials.

Georgia Power: There are several transmission line easements either owned or managed by Georgia Power that would be crossed by the proposed trail corridor. The location of these transmission line easements are as follows:

- South of the Ocmulgee National Monument on property currently owned by the Archeological Conservancy.
- South and east of the Rinker Materials Rock Quarry in Jones County.
- The Georgia Transmission Corporation in western Baldwin County-managed by Georgia Power.
- South of the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Industrial Park near Fishing Creek.
- Along Blandy Road.

Georgia Power has developed a short document entitled: *Guidelines for Approval of Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails on Georgia Power Transmission Rights of Way*. A copy of this guide is located in Appendix E. The document contains all information CGRTA, Inc. will need to know related to trail development on Georgia Power transmission rights-of-way.

Atlanta Gas and Light: The Atlanta Gas and Light Company (AGL) operates and maintains a 12” high pressure line easement that crosses the proposed rail corridor north of SR 49, a short distance from the Jones County South Recreation Complex. Before the rail-to-trail facility is constructed over this easement, CGRTA, Inc. will need to obtain an encroachment agreement from AGL.

Southern Natural Gas: The proposed trail corridor crosses several gas pipeline easements owned and operated by Southern Natural Gas (SNG). The first easement is the SNG Brunswick Line located just south of the quarry in Jones County, while the second one is the SNG Main Line located northeast of James and south of Commissioner Creek in Jones County. According to the SNG Principal Property Rights Specialist out of their Birmingham Office, CGRTA, Inc. will need to obtain an encroachment agreement from the SNG Encroachment Coordinator. The agreement will outline the conditions for crossing the easements, to include the right by SNG to take out portions of the trail in order to make necessary repairs to the pipeline, with the cost of reconstructing the trail being the responsibility of the trail owner.

City of Eatonton: The City of Eatonton owns and operates a natural gas pipeline that runs through the unincorporated community of Haddock. According to the Eatonton City Administrator, CGRTA, Inc. will be required to enter into an agreement with the city stating that, in the event pipeline repair is necessary, the city could disturb the trail in order to make the required repairs. The city is agreeable to compacting the earth where the repair was made, but replacement of the trail will be the responsibility of the trail owner.

Underground Storage Facilities or Other Hazardous Waste Materials

Utilizing those who have the background and expertise in locating and mitigating hazardous waste materials, the CGRTA, Inc. should conduct a thorough study to determine if there are any underground storage facilities or other hazardous waste materials currently existing along the trail corridor, and if any such materials do exist,

prepare a hazardous waste mitigation plan prior to any acquisition of corridor right-of-way.

Proximity to Existing Fire Stations

An examination of existing facilities maps (see Appendix G), indicates that the proposed trail corridor passes in close proximity to Jones County Fire Department Stations #2 and #4. As a result of the field survey conducted by the Middle Georgia Regional Development Center, it was determined that these two structures are a sufficient distance from the rail line and should not impact the proposed trail development. As a precaution, CGRTA, Inc. should coordinate with the Jones County Fire Chief/EMA Director to minimize any potential impact from the use of the trail on Fire Department operations at these stations.

Role of the CGRTA, Inc. Board of Directors

One of the most important components of any organization, to successfully achieve its goals and objectives, is having a strong and active leadership. The Board of Directors of the CGRTA, Inc. should act as a community “champion” or advocate for the proposed project. Part of the role of community champion includes: 1) communicating enthusiasm and support of the organization’s mission; 2) establishing political and community support for the project; and 3) obtaining financial contributions in support of the organization’s mission. A noteworthy example of this “champion” concept is the PATH Foundation in Atlanta. A significant portion of their success is owed to the members of their Board, who over the years, have been strong advocates of building recreational trails. In just fifteen years, PATH has developed more than 100 miles of trails throughout northern Georgia and has become a nationally recognized model for trail-building success. Some of their more notable trail accomplishments include the Silver Comet, Stone Mountain, Lionel Hampton, Westside, Arabia Mountain, Chastain Park, South Decatur Trolley, Northwest Atlanta, and Freedom Park Trails.

CGRTA, Inc. is a fledging organization. Last year it was officially incorporated, and has completed the necessary paperwork to become a 501 (c) 3 organization. Several meetings of the organization have been held. Attendance at the first meeting was good, but has slipped considerably over the past two meetings. Some of the Board members have not attended any of the three meetings. A new member was recently elected to fill a vacant Board position, and another person is being considered to fill the eleventh and final position on the Board. Active involvement on the part of all Board members is paramount if the organization hopes to accomplish the considerable amount of work needed to bring the proposed rail-to-trail project to fruition.

Over the next several months, successful fund raising is critical in order for the organization to conduct a promotional campaign and conduct required legal research. Afterwards, fundraising will have to continue full throttle in order to accumulate the millions needed for right-of-way acquisition, design and construction, and possibly full-time staff to oversee and market the project.

The CGRTA, Inc. Board must be willing to make the necessary commitment needed to accomplish each successive goal. Additionally, they should actively seek to recruit new members to pass on the mantle when their term expires. These new members must not only believe in the organization's mission, but also be willing to make the commitment of time and energy needed to fulfill the dream of one day having a trail in middle Georgia that thousands of people can enjoy.

Cost Estimates and Potential Funding Sources

Cost Estimates

Based on local trail construction calculations and other factors, it is estimated that a 10-foot wide trail would cost approximately \$100.00 per linear foot. In certain sections of the trail, where bridges or overpasses or other structural work is needed, the cost per linear foot would certainly be higher. Estimating the length of the trail to be around 33 miles (174,240 feet), and using the \$100/foot figure, construction of the trail would equate to approximately \$17.5 million in 2007 dollars. Design and engineering fees are estimated at roughly 7-10% of construction costs, depending upon the work that would be required. Events could take place that are beyond the control of the CGRTA, Inc. and could cause the cost of construction materials to skyrocket and greatly alter this estimate. The Board should take contingency issues into account during their fundraising activities in order to have sufficient funds available for such events.

Estimating costs for right-of-way acquisition is much more difficult to ascertain. Efforts should be placed first and foremost on obtaining a donation (fee simple or conservation easement), and placing this property in a land trust that the Board could create, or use one that has been set in place. Since most of the corridor appears to be in the hands of CSX Real Property, Inc., obtaining a donation may be difficult but not impossible. It will be important to bring someone on board who is experienced in negotiating with the railroad on land acquisition matters. Others on the negotiating team should be an experienced and qualified appraiser to provide a fair and accurate appraisal of the value of the various sections of the corridor. Also, a tax consultant familiar with all of the state and federal tax credit programs and how they may apply to the railroad's interest.

Mr. Pressley of CSX Real Property, Inc. indicated in his discussions with the Middle Georgia RDC that while CSX owned most of the corridor, neighboring property owners have been given access to this corridor through easements. He was uncertain as to how these easements were granted, if they were sold or not. By conducting a thorough legal title search on the property, then and only then, can this situation be accurately determined. In any event, no matter how the easements were granted, the neighboring property owners have enjoyed the use of this property for a number of years, and may not be willing to relinquish it for a shared-use trail. This in itself could involve a long and drawn out negotiation process, depending upon what is discovered from the title research. Finally, acquiring the portion of the corridor that CSX has sold to adjacent landowners may be difficult to achieve. Initially, an inquiry should be made to the landowners about the possibility of a donation. The negotiation process should involve someone who has

knowledge and understanding of the tax benefits that can be derived from such a donation and how it would directly benefit the donor. If acquiring the property via donation is not successful, the bartering of services that the property owner may need/want is an alternative strategy.

The least attractive alternative for CGRTA, Inc. is having to acquire the property through a fee-simple purchase. If faced with this situation, CGRTA, Inc. should come to the table with the most recent market value information available. This data can be obtained from a certified appraisal consultant.

Potential Funding Sources

Potential funding sources that can assist with rail-to-trail components such as planning, design and construction are many and varied. The sources listed below are not all inclusive, but represent the more commonly known and utilized programs. They include:

Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program

The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) created the Transportation Enhancement Program. The Act required that ten percent of the funds within the Surface Transportation Program (STP) be reserved for the TE Program. Subsequent federal legislation (TEA-21-Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century and most recently SAFETEA-LU-Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) has made minor changes to the TE Program, but it still remains a vital and permanent part of the Federal-aid Highway Program. Projects eligible under this program include the provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles.

The TE Program is not a grant. Federal funds are made available to projects on a cost reimbursable basis, i.e., the sponsor must incur the expense before Federal TE funds are paid to the Sponsor. For funding purposes, all transportation projects are divided into three phases:

- Preliminary Engineering (PE)- pre-construction work items such as planning studies, environmental documentation, design plans, right-of-way plans and construction bid documents.
- Right-of-Way- property acquisition.
- Construction- project implementation.

Federal funds available under the TE Program will pay up to 80 percent of the total project cost. The Sponsor's local match must be at least 20 percent of the total project cost. The local match may be cash, in-kind services, or donated services, materials or real property. The federal TE funding may be used in any or all three project phases mentioned above. Most sponsors use their own funds to complete the preliminary engineering and right-of-way phases and use the TE funds for construction. This approach is encouraged by Georgia DOT since it simplifies the project management process the Sponsor must follow. CGRTA, Inc. can play a significant part in this grant

process by providing all or most of the matching funds through a combination of cash, in-kind services and real property.

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

The Recreational Trails Program was first authorized under ISTEA, then later under TEA-21 and more recently under SAFETEA-LU. This program is funded through the transfer of federal gas taxes paid on non-highway recreational fuel uses in off-highway vehicles and in back country camping. In 1992, The Georgia Department of Natural Resources was designated as the agency to administer the Recreational Trails Program.

The purpose of the RTP is to provide and maintain recreational trails and trails-related facilities identified in, or that further a specific goal of, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. The RTP mandates that the grant funds be allocated by the following categories and percentages: motorized, not less than 30 percent; non-motorized, not less than 30 percent; and diversified, not less than 40 percent.

This is a reimbursement program; therefore the grant recipient must pay 100 percent of the cost of an item before submitting a request for reimbursement for 80 percent of eligible costs. The program encourages the donation of private funds, materials, new right-of-way and services at fair market value. These donations can be counted toward the match. Like the TE Program described above, CGRTA, Inc. can make a significant contribution to the required local match either by providing private funds or right-of-way donations.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program

Section 1404 of SAFETEA-LU provides funding for Safe Routes to School Programs to benefit children in primary and middle schools (K-8). The purpose of the program is to enable children, including those with disabilities to walk and bicycle to school. The intent of the program is to make walking and cycling to school safe and appealing.

The SRTS Program is funded at \$612 million and provides Federal-aid highway funds to State Departments of Transportation over five federal fiscal years (FY 05-09) in accordance with a formula specified in the legislation. The Georgia Department of Transportation will be receiving approximately \$16.8 million through fiscal year 2009. These funds are available through a competitive application process. Eligible activities include sidewalk improvements, traffic calming and speed reduction improvements, pedestrian crossing improvements, off-street pedestrian facilities, and traffic diversion within approximately 2 miles of schools. Non-infrastructure related activities are also eligible for funding including public awareness campaigns, traffic education and enforcement near schools and student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety. Prior to applying for these funds, a Safe Routes to School Plan must be prepared for the school seeking participation in the program. Schools along the proposed trail that could potentially benefit from this program include Mattie Wells Elementary and Mattie Wells Primary.

Highway Bridge Program

The Highway Bridge Program under the SAFETEA-LU legislation provides funding that is primarily intended for use in replacing and rehabilitating highway bridges along with systematic preventative maintenance. Sidewalks can be built as part of bridge rehabilitation, as well as pathway undercrossings or bridges. A requirement of this program for pedestrian facilities, on bridge structures when bridges are rehabilitated or replaced, is that there is pedestrian use at each end of the bridge and safe facilities can be provided at a reasonable cost. A potential candidate for this program is the SR 49 bridge. This bridge would have to be rehabilitated to provide safe pedestrian access for those users coming from the trail to the recreational and school facilities on the other side.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist low-to-moderate income neighborhoods. Residents of the neighborhood work closely with local staff to develop a plan for their awarded funds. CDBG funds can be spent on improving pedestrian accessibility if that is a desire of the neighborhood. Possible locations where CDBG funds could be used for trail development are the Haddock community and east Macon and Bibb County.

Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP)

The Georgia Land Conservation Program as specified in Chapter 305-01 O.C.G.A provides grants, low-interest loans, tax incentives and consultation/referrals/technical support to carry out its goals to improve water quality and conserve fragile, threatened and natural habitats and forest and agricultural lands. An eligible land conservation project must demonstrate that it meets one or more of the ten specific objectives, including the provision of recreation in the form of boating, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, running, jogging, biking, walking and similar outdoor activities.

All qualified cities and counties, regardless of size, are eligible to apply for funding under the GLCP. To be a qualified city or county, a community must be in compliance with requirements established by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts. GLCP funds can be used for all direct costs of activities which are required by applicable state laws and local ordinances or policies in order to obtain fee simple or lesser interests in real property. These costs shall include the purchase price, if any; the cost of due diligence investigation, such as appraisals, surveys, phase 1 environmental reports and title searches; title insurance; fees for services related to the direct acquisition of property, such as holding costs, overhead costs, finder's fees and real estate commissions; attorney fees; pro rata ad valorem taxes and other costs related to closing the transaction; provided however, that the costs shall not include any costs for services provided in violation of Chapter 40 of Title 43.

Georgia Conservation Tax Credit Program

The Georgia General Assembly in 2006 passed an amendment to existing tax law to “provide for income tax credits with respect to qualified donations of real property for conservation purposes.” Qualified donations include fee simple donations or conservation easements of property to a qualified organization.

A qualified organization means the state, a county, a municipality, or a consolidated government of this state; or a bona fide charitable nonprofit organization qualified under the Internal Revenue Code. To be a qualified organization, a charitable nonprofit must:

- Be authorized to do business in Georgia and have a tax-exempt status as a charity under Section 501(c) 3 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986; and
- Meet the requirements of section 1.170A-14(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, and therefore have the power to acquire, hold or maintain land or interests in land; and
- Have adopted the Land Trust Alliance’s Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices (2004) as guidelines for the organization’s operations and commit to making continual progress toward implementation of these Standards and Practices; and
- Have received a Determination Letter from the IRS.

Conservation purposes were defined by the Act to include those types of conservation lands identified in Chapter 22 of Title 36 of the Georgia Code, as follows:

- “Conservation Land” means permanently protected land and water or interests therein, that is in its undeveloped, natural state or that has been developed only to the extent consistent with, or is restored to be consistent with, one or more goals, including the provision of recreation in the form of boating, hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, running, jogging, biking, walking, and similar outdoor activities.

The purpose of the Georgia Conservation Tax Credit Program is to provide a financial incentive to landowners in order to encourage dedication of their property for conservation uses. The incentive is provided in the form of state income tax credit that can be applied in the tax year of the donation; an unused tax credit can then be carried forward and applied to the landowner’s tax liability for up to five additional years.

The total income tax credit provided under the Act cannot exceed the lesser of \$500,000 or 25 percent of the fair market value of the donated property in the year in which it was donated. For individual landowners, the total amount of the tax credit cannot exceed \$250,000. For corporate landowners, the total tax credit cannot exceed \$500,000.

It should be noted that under the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR)-Georgia Conservation Tax Credit Program website, the following response is found: “The State of Georgia will only accept a donation of land (fee-simple or conservation easement) if the property is of statewide significance and can be managed to protect and maintain its values in perpetuity. In

addition, emphasis is placed on sites that can provide opportunities for **public recreation** (author's emphasis), education or scientific research.

Georgia Division of Public Health (GDPH)

The Georgia Division of Public Health provides support and assistance to jurisdictions and local community groups related to planning, preparing grant applications, and conducting fundraising activities for walking trail projects.

Corporate and Business Community

The Kodak American Greenways Program, a partnership project of the Eastman Kodak Company, the Conservation Fund, and the National Geographic Society provides small grants to stimulate the planning and design of greenways in communities throughout America. Although public agencies can apply, local, regional or statewide nonprofit organizations receive preference. The maximum grant is \$2,500, with most grants ranging between \$500 and \$1,500.

Wal-Mart Stores and the Wal-Mart and Sam's Club Foundations provide funding to local organizations in several different areas, including education and the environment. Government agencies and 501 (c) 3 organizations are eligible to receive the funding.

Georgia Power provides philanthropic support through the Georgia Power Foundation, Inc., corporate giving and employee involvement. Since 1986, the Georgia Power Foundation has given more than \$85 million to non-profit organizations throughout the state. The foundation has identified four areas of focus that includes: promoting health and cancer prevention and protecting the environment. About 46% of the foundation's annual contributions support the area of health and human services, while 13% of the foundation's contributions go toward environmental grants. Grant requests up to \$10,000 are evaluated on an ongoing basis. Georgia Power works with leadership teams in its regions across the state to evaluate grant proposals within their local areas. Tax-exempt organizations may request contributions once per twelve-month period and reapply on an annual basis. The foundation board must review and approve grant requests greater than \$10,000 during their quarterly meetings.

Georgia Power makes charitable donations to hundreds of organizations and initiatives throughout their service territory. Most of the corporate giving is driven by employees who work with community agencies to identify the best programs to address local needs.

Georgia Power's employees and retirees donate more than 70,000 hours of volunteer hours annually in their communities to support education, the environment, community and economic development and other initiatives. These efforts are coordinated through their Volunteer Services Department.

"Operation Roundup" is a community development program funded by the voluntary contributions of the customers of Tri-County Electric Membership Corporation (EMC) to

the Tri-County EMC Foundation. Charitable donations are then made by the foundation to worthy projects and needs within the eight-county Tri-County EMC service area (includes Bibb, Jones and Baldwin Counties). Organizations can apply to the foundation's Board of Directors who award funds quarterly based on the worthiness of each application and the availability of funds.

Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) annually dedicates a portion of its operating profits to help protect and restore the environment, increase access to outdoor activities, and encourage involvement in responsible outdoor recreation. REI employees nominate organizations, projects and programs in which they are personally involved to receive funding or gear donations. During 2006, REI granted \$4 million to more than 430 of their community partners.

Consideration should be given to naming a portion of the trail after a corporate or individual sponsor who donates a certain size gift to the construction of the trail. This has been done in other trail projects in the country to raise the large sums needed to build the trail.

Private Foundations

Private foundations that support the cause of health, fitness and environmental protection, through trail development, are an additional source of funding. The Foundation Center, a non-profit organization formed in 1956, connects nonprofits with various grant sources. The Center maintains a comprehensive database related to available grants, awarding agencies, eligible applicants, and minimum/maximum awards. They also operate research, education and training programs designed to advance philanthropy at every level. It should be noted that there is a subscription fee to access their database.

Bikes Belong Coalition

Bikes Belong is a national coalition of bicycle suppliers and individuals working together to put more people on bicycles. Bikes Belong accepts requests for funding of up to \$10,000 for facility projects.

The Facility project objective is to connect existing facilities, or create new opportunities; leverage federal, state and private funds; influence policy; and generate economic activity. Eligible facility projects include bike paths, trails, routes, and lanes and innovative and unique high-profile projects. Bikes Belong will consider funding advocacy work and construction cost matching funds.

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax is an alternative many communities have used since its inception to improve or expand its infrastructure base. A possible use of the SPLOST is the development of trails and greenways. It is likely that monies for this use would have be part of a comprehensive list of capital improvements, or part of a specific

SPLOST to fund recreational or transportation plan improvements. For example, the City of Milledgeville recently passed a SPLOST that included funding for the development of the Oconee River Greenway.

The initial challenge to passing a SPLOST for trail construction is to first convince local elected officials that the facility is worthy of inclusion on the SPLOST list. If the trail is part of an overall recreation or transportation plan that has been studied and approved by the respective policy bodies, then it stands a better chance of making it to the SPLOST list and gaining a level of political and community support.

Once it is placed on the ballot, the primary task becomes gaining approval of the voters. Achieving a successful vote requires a coalition of elected officials, business/industry representatives and key citizen groups agreeing that the need exists and the proposed project(s) are necessary to meet that need, and are willing to devote time and energy to convince others of the same. This is an important reason why the Board of Directors of the CGRTA, Inc. needs to be an active and vocal champion for the project.

Community Partnerships

Partnering with other community organizations in Bibb, Jones and Baldwin Counties can result in many important contributions being made towards the cause of building the proposed rail-to-trail project, as well as helping to create enormous community support for the project. Some examples that other communities have successfully implemented include:

- A local trail organization in Ohio raised money selling an “honorary acre” of land based on the price of the land.
- A greenway foundation in Oregon sold symbolic “yards” of the trail and placed the donor’s names on permanent markers that are located at each trailhead. They were able to raise enough in private donations to match their TE program award.
- In Colorado, a local homeowners group adjacent to the trail partially funded a rail-to-trail project. A Boy Scout troop in the same community, cleared ten miles of railroad ties.

Summary

The Middle Georgia Regional Development Center employed a variety of research techniques during the preparation of this feasibility study. Elements included examining and analyzing numerous sources of information, such as aerial photography, maps, tax records, various planning documents and related websites. Additionally, an extensive field survey was conducted to determine possible encroachments, illegal dumping or illegal uses along the corridor, existing infrastructure within the rail right-of-way and a determination of adjacent land use. The final research component consisted of holding several meetings and interviews with various city and county officials, community stakeholders, representatives from affected state agencies and private industries.

From this research, the Middle Georgia RDC was able to identify a series of issues and opportunities related to the development of the proposed rail-to-trail corridor. The most important of these is the identification of specific obstacles or impediments to the successful development of the trail. The feasibility of the trail development is directly linked to how these obstacles are addressed and ultimately overcome.

In an effort to provide CGRTA, Inc. with a blueprint for achieving their stated goal of converting the abandoned CSX rail line into a shared-use trail facility, the RDC has developed an implementation plan consisting of specific action items designed to address each known obstacle. This implementation plan is presented with the understanding that only through the continued involvement of key community stakeholders, and a strong commitment on the part of the CGRTA, Inc. Board of Directors, can success be achieved.

Rail-to-trail projects usually take several years to develop, and with numerous obstacles to overcome, this proposed rail-trail is no exception. Fortunately, with more than 1,000 rail-trails already on the ground, these issues have been successfully dealt with in the overwhelming majority of cases.

Implementation Strategy

This section of the study takes the findings and results of the research that was conducted and attempts to formulate a workable and achievable implementation strategy. The implementation strategy is designed to be action-oriented and practical in nature. With that in mind, the Middle Georgia RDC developed a guide that CGRTA, Inc. can use to steer their actions as they pursue their stated goal of converting the abandoned rail line into a shared-use, recreational trail. It should be noted that the following recommended implementation tasks are not all inclusive. Additionally, the activities are not necessarily in order of importance or priority. Some tasks, such as fund raising and building community support, are ongoing in nature and will continue throughout the lifetime of the rail-to-trail initiative. Also, many of these recommended implementation tasks can be initiated simultaneously.

Implementation Actions

- Initiate fund raising activities. Sufficient funding is needed to cover the costs associated with a preliminary engineering study, an environmental assessment, a property title search on the rail right-of-way and land/structure appraisals.
- Solicit both political and community support. Formally address the Board of Commissioners and City Councils for the affected communities. Let them know what you hope to accomplish and ask for their assistance and support.
- Seek to partner with community organizations/institutions (New Town Macon, Georgia College and State University, Oconee River Greenway Authority, Convention and Visitors Bureaus, etc.) that share and support your goal.

- Await results of Ocmulgee National Monument Expansion Study before proceeding with trail development in this section of the corridor. Coordinate closely with Ocmulgee National Monument to ensure security concerns are adequately addressed.
- Continue fund raising activities and aggressively pursue any and all funding assistance opportunities (grants, donations, SPLOST, etc.). A significant amount of money will be needed for both acquisition, construction and marketing.
- Negotiate with the railroad and affected property owners and secure the right-of-way. The Rails to Trails Conservancy strongly recommends seeking professional assistance in negotiating with railroads and property owners.
- Obtain legal opinion regarding status of property potentially impacted by Georgia conservation use tax law (Chapter 48-5, O.C.G.A.) and status of CGRTA, Inc. as a bona fide non-profit conservation organization.
- Consider employing a Project Manager (perhaps part-time initially, and then full-time as the project develops) in the early stages of the process with the position possibly funded through initial fund raising efforts. This allows the Board of Directors to focus on fund raising and building support for the project.
- Coordinate with the Macon Area Transportation Study (MATS) Policy Committee in order to get the proposed project placed in the long-term planning document.
- Coordinate with representatives of the Rinker Materials Rock Quarry to ensure the proposed trail is compatible with future expansion plans of the quarry.
- Address possible conflict with active rail line in Jones County and possible pedestrian accessibility issues.
- Address possible issues and concerns of the occupants of the Milledgeville-Baldwin industrial park. Additionally, examine all possible alternatives to conflicts with the US 441 Bypass in Milledgeville.
- Coordinate with all applicable state and local officials and agencies to ensure appropriate pedestrian safety infrastructure (signage, crosswalks, signals, etc.) is installed at affected road crossings along the trail route.
- Negotiate agreements for crossing all affected utility easements.
- Benchmark other communities with successful rail-to-trail projects and utilize guidance found in available publications. The Rails to Trails Conservancy has published a variety of resources on obtaining corridor ownership, such as *“Acquiring Rail Corridors”* and *“Secrets of Successful Rail-Trails.”*