



Tobacco Heritage Trail / Roanoke River Rails-to-Trails, Inc.

Project Description

The Tobacco Heritage Trail (THT), which is being constructed primarily along abandoned railroad corridors through Southside Virginia, will offer an opportunity for walking, bicycling, and all forms of non-motorized transport off the public highways. While the initial development of the THT is located in Southside Planning District, when fully developed, the Tobacco Heritage Trail is anticipated to extend into other Southside counties and connect with other communities' greenways and trails. County roads may be utilized for connectivity and identified with signs. The Virginia Beach Pipeline, much of which is located on the abandoned Virginian Railroad, could link Southside to the Hampton Roads area. Through other localities' trails or property easements, there is the promise of a "Beaches to Bluegrass" Trail.



Due to the length of the Tobacco Heritage Trail and the number of phases that will be required, a naming strategy was devised. For the most part the trail segments will use the former railroad names. The original names of the historic rail lines were: Richmond & Danville (Halifax and Charlotte Counties), Virginian Railway (Lunenburg and Brunswick Counties), and Atlantic & Danville (Brunswick, Mecklenburg and Halifax Counties). This multi-segment, multi-phased project encompasses 160+ miles of abandoned railroad corridor through five counties.

Roanoke River Rails to Trails, Inc.

The Tobacco Heritage Trail project is being spearheaded by Roanoke River Rails to Trails, Inc. (RRRT), a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt Virginia corporation. RRRT was formed for the acquisition of abandoned railroad right of way and to coordinate the development of a regional off-road trail system. The bylaws call for representation from each county and each town desiring to join. Currently, 16 localities are represented on the Rails to Trails Board of Directors. The RRRT Mission is:

- To enrich Southside Virginia's communities and countryside by creating a regional network of public trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors.
- To develop plans for the establishment and development of recreation, transportation, historic preservation, economic revitalization, open-space conservation and wildlife preservation trails for the enjoyment and use of the general public.

Project Status



The first 40+/- miles of abandoned railroad corridor was purchased in June 2006 from Norfolk Southern (NS) utilizing Virginia Works funds in the amount of \$466,505.43. An additional 50 miles is expected to be purchased in December 2009 using Virginia Works and Virginia Land Conservation Funds. This purchase will be subject to a conservation easement held by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Norfolk Southern applied to the Surface Transportation Board in 2007 to abandon additional rail corridor located in Lawrenceville. RRRT is negotiating to purchase this property for THT use. RRRT has an agreement with Norfolk Southern to acquire their interest in the abandoned rail in Halifax, Mecklenburg, Brunswick, Lunenburg and Charlotte Counties and negotiations to obtain title to this additional ROW are underway.

Due to the length of the THT, this is a multi-segment, multi-phase project. Phase I of the Tobacco Heritage Trail consists of two segments: 1) in Mecklenburg County stretching between the towns of La Crosse and Brodnax (4+/- miles); and 2) in Brunswick on the western edge of the town of Lawrenceville (2+/- miles). Enhancement funding in the amount of \$230,000 was awarded in 2004 to begin the development of the THT for Phase 1A. Enhancement funding in the amount of \$391,000 was awarded in 2005 for Phase 1B. An Enhancement application submitted in November 2006, requesting funds in the amount of \$555,636, was partially funded in the amount of \$139,000 for Phase 1C. To further develop the THT, and assist with the construction of Phase 1, a Recreational Trails grant in the amount of \$49,855 was awarded in October 2005, and Rural Development provided \$25,000 in funding for signage in July 2005. The Tobacco Indemnification & Community Revitalization Fund awarded funds in the amount of \$863,891 in 2007 to aid with THT construction. Phase 1 is under construction and will be complete in December 2009.

A consultant has been selected to begin the design for Phases 2, 3, and 4. Most of the FY2008 Enhancement funding award of \$468,000 will fund Phase 2 of the Tobacco Heritage Trail, which is the construction of 2.4 miles of the R&D Greenway in Halifax County.

VDOT awarded American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds in the amount of \$6,000,000 in 2009. These funds will be applied to Phase 3, which will connect Phase 1 in Mecklenburg County to Phase 1 in Brunswick County resulting in 17 miles of fully developed THT.

The Tobacco Indemnification & Community Revitalization Fund awarded funds in the amount of \$159,471 in 2009 will aid in the development of Phase 4.



The Overall Master Plan for the Tobacco Heritage Trail, funded by the Tobacco Commission, was completed in June 2008. The Master Plan recommends design criteria for the trail, trailheads and locations, signage and site furnishings. The master planning process garnered public input and included extensive historic research for the site, events, and structures along the trail route. Public meetings were held in

Halifax, Mecklenburg and Brunswick counties to receive comments from a wide range of groups and individuals throughout the region.

The Tobacco Heritage Trail Management Plan, with assistance from the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program, was completed in January 2009. The plan outlines the procedures for trail maintenance and construction and will assist in the implementation of the Master Plan.



Tobacco Heritage Trail (formerly A&D Railroad) located in Boynton.