

## Charlotte Trolley goes uptown with trail

Charlotte has spawned a new rail-with-trail (RwT) subcategory: trolley-with-trail (TwT). The two-mile Charlotte Trolley is flanked by a concrete ribbon, running from the restored historic Southend northward to and through the uptown business district. The trolley-with-trail begins at Tremont Avenue, crosses over a new bridge at I-277 and terminates at Ninth Street on the uptown's north edge.

The TwT owes its existence to a two-decade private drive to put a historic trolley back on track and Charlotte Area Transit System's (CATS) more recent project to build light passenger rail to Rock Hill on a former Norfolk Southern rail corridor. The project includes a glass-walled rail tunnel through the city's new convention center.

The last trolley, No. 85, rolled out of Charlotte in 1938, then eventually ended up in a Huntersville backyard as a rental residence. It was tracked down by UNCC history professor Dr. Dan Morrill, who purchased the dilapidated trolley car and thus gave birth to Charlotte Trolley Inc.

Today, old No. 85 and three other replica trolleys make hourly runs. CATS has assumed trolley operation while the nonprofit Charlotte Trolley now concentrates on restoring three more historic trolley cars and a trolley museum.

North Carolina's other RwT is the Libba Cotten Bikeway, which connects downtown Carrboro with UNC Chapel Hill via an active rail spur to the campus.



Charlotte's historic No. 85 trolley car heads for the Southend barn. The trolley will share the corridor with light rail passenger trains to Rock Hill. *Jon Bell photo*

## Jacksonville completes trail corridor handovers

With the acquisition of an additional 10 acres at the Camp LaJuene Marine Base main entrance, Jacksonville has all the pieces to develop a 5.2-mile rail-trail greenway which will connect the base's trail network to downtown. The new acquisition supplements 45 acres of the abandoned Camp LaJuene Railroad deeded to the city in 2003.

The project runs parallel to NC 24 from the base, then crosses the highway into the downtown area to terminate near US 17.

Congress passed special legislation

allowing the railroad properties to be deeded to the city.

The project has been in design for over two years and construction plans are awaiting approval from NC DOT, according to Rhonda Parker, city planning administrator. NC DOT previously earmarked \$1.5 million in Transportation Enhancement funding for the project. A major structure will be a bike/ped bridge to cross over the six-lane highway. If approval comes quickly, said Parker, construction could begin this fall.

Stop by the Info Depot:  
<http://www.NCRail-Trails.org>

Along the Carolina & Northwestern corridor:

## Catawba Lands Conservancy opens trail

The Catawba Lands Conservancy and trail development volunteers will officially open the 1.3-mile South Fork Catawba River Rail-Trail at 10:30 am Saturday, May 14. The trail is on the Paul and Agnes Rhine Nature Preserve, located a mile south of Lincolnton.

The scenic preserve is part of the CLC's South Fork riparian protection project. It includes an abandoned section of the Carolina & Northwestern line along the river. Volunteers from the Lincolnton area have improved the rail bed and constructed a public parking area off Laboratory Road.



Lincolnton has a half-mile downtown rail-trail on the same abandoned section of the Carolina & Northwestern line.

## Lincolnton completes extension acquisitions

Lincolnton's plans to extend the Marcia Cloninger Rail-Trail are moving forward after nearly seven years of planning, engineering and acquiring property.

The city built a half-mile stretch of the trail from East Pine Street to Congress Street that opened in 1998. Since then, the city has been working to extend the trail four-tenths of a mile from Government Street to Motz Avenue to connect Betty G. Ross Park.

In May 2003, Lincolnton officials began the process to acquire access to 22 properties that the extended trail would cross. Most of the property owners accepted the city's offer for payment, but seven resisted and the city began condemnation proceedings on those properties.

The city spent \$93,000 for right-of-way acquisition, appraisals, surveys and legal fees to acquire the 22 properties. The

seven property owners who initially didn't want to sell eventually settled before their land was condemned.

The NC DOT is reviewing the city's construction plans. After planners approve them, the city can solicit bids on the \$185,000 construction.

## Negotiations stretch out Gaston abandonment

The fate of five miles of Norfolk Southern's Carolina & Northwestern line in northern Gaston County continues to be negotiated. The railroad's latest abandonment extension runs to Dec. 9, 2005, while the North Carolina Railroad Co. seeks to preserve the line segment from Bulb Ave. just north of Interstate 85 and US 321 in Gastonia to north Dallas.

NS originally filed for abandonment in March, 2003. Gaston County and the two cities then jointly filed for federal railbanking and interim trail use. The decision on that petition was put on hold when the NCRR filed with the federal Surface Transportation Board to negotiate financial assistance for keeping the line in service. A series of abandonment extensions has kept the matter on hold for two years. NS has stated in filings that it has no interest in keeping the line active, but will consider railbanking and interim trail use.

Acquiring the Gaston line segment under federal railbanking would give NCRR control of the rail corridor. While acquisition negotiations continue, NCRR is talking with Gaston Co. and the two cities regarding a lease for interim trail use under Section 1247(d) of the National Trails Act. Gastonia's parks and recreation and Connect Gaston plans call for connecting downtown Gastonia with Rankin Lake Park and Gaston College, said city Planning Director Jack Kiser.

NCRR is a state-owned real estate trust which owns the 317-mile mainline from Morehead City to Charlotte and leases that property to NS. The Gaston segment does not directly connect to that mainline and is the NCRR's first venture into preserving other rail corridors.

## Dave Connelly elected to NCRT board

Dave Connelly of Durham is the newest NCRT board member. He has

served as a board member and officer of Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy since 1997.

Connelly has also been on the NC committee of the East Coast Greenway Alliance since 2000 and has worked on routing for the Maine to Florida greenway initiative.



Connelly

## Turner compiles state transportation history

NCRT member Walter R. Turner has compiled a history of North Carolina's 20th Century struggle to get out of the mud and on the road to a state highway network. The title is "Paving Tobacco Road: A Century of Progress by the North Carolina Department of Transportation."

Turner, a fifth generation North Carolinian, is historian at the North Carolina Transportation Museum at Spencer. His book records how the state developed a reputation in the 1920s as the "Good Roads State" and continued to build the nation's second longest state-maintained highway system. One chapter is devoted to other forms of transportation, including the state's aviation, rail, ferry and bicycle programs.

Turner's book is a good basic historical reference. It mixes the roles of public and private transportation leaders with statistics. It includes over 90 historical photos, plus maps that depict progressive decades. The volume includes appendixes that list highway fund revenues through 2002.

The 180-page paperback is published by the state Office of Archives and History and the Transportation Museum Foundation. It can be ordered for \$25 and \$4 shipping by calling 919-733-7442.

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## Safe Routes to School new funding source

The US House of Representatives recently passed a special Safe Routes to School (SR2S) program with a billion dollars in funding over five years. The Senate is expected to concur in most of the House bill provisions and the total transportation funding package including SR2S will likely be signed by the president.

A number of states have had a SR2S program for years. The SR2S programs are also designed to help mitigate the child obesity problem well documented in this country. Current federal law and regulations permit the states to use federal safety and hazard set aside funds for their SR2S programs. Many state DOTs have not set up a SR2S program. Some states have passed legislation to require their departments of transportation to fund SR2S programs. The leading SR2S state, California, in fact requires that one-third of the federal safety and hazard funds be used for SR2S.

Unfortunately North Carolina has no developed SR2S program. If your local trail project would help children get to schools safely, NC DOT should be requested to provide SR2S funds for your rail-trail or greenway project. If the request is denied, NC DOT should be challenged to justify the basis for the denial.

Safe Routes to School involves studies, mapping, education, traffic calming, installation of traffic signals and new sidewalks.

Additionally federal guidelines make it clear that purchase and development of multipurpose trails such as rail-trails are permitted

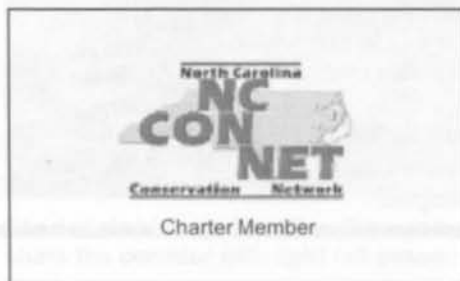
and encouraged uses for the hazard and safety funds.

The new federal program and SR2S funding are in addition to monies for safety and hazard funding. It is also in addition to the TEA-21 enhancement funds commonly used for off road bike or multi-use trails.

The new federal program will require states to set up SR2S programs including a full-time state SR2S coordinator.

The program provides for a generous amount of funding for a few demonstration projects. Those states and localities with existing programs doubtless will have a head start in obtaining demonstration project grants.

In some states the program is closely identified with its governor. Michigan's program is referred to as "Gov. Jennifer Granholm's Safe Routes to School Program." In Pennsylvania, press releases with great frequency announce that Gov. Rendell is handing out a check to various localities as part of "Ed Rendell's Home Town Streets and Safe Routes to School Program". Perhaps some of our elected and appointed officials will see the public benefits and public relations of a SR2S program.



## Whistle Stops

### Promising Rail-Trails

The Virginia General Assembly has passed legislation to enable the Department of Conservation and Recreation to acquire a current 34-mile Norfolk Southern abandonment that runs from Burkeville to Farmville and Pamplin City. But wait, there's more!

Our neighbor to the north has set its sights on 400 miles of surplus rail corridors in Southside, the region comprised of 22 counties below the James River. Last fall VDCR held a regional conference. The keynote speaker was Gov. Mark Warner. He and others pointed to the community, recreation and economic benefits that could be realized from a Southside rail-trail network. Frequently mentioned were the successes of the Virginia Creeper and New River State Trail, both at the North Carolina line in the southwest corner of the state

As one VDCR official summed it up: "We have mountains, we have sea, and we have railroad lines to connect them."

By comparison, H 1230, a bill to encourage railbanking through expanded interim trail use, died last year in a North Carolina General Assembly committee for lack of attention. NC DENR has not sought to preserve inactive rail corridors, and it has been 10 years since NC DOT has preserved a rail corridor.

Hello, Gov. Mike Easley? Do you recall the broad statements you made in support of facilitating rail-trails when you first ran for attorney general 13 years ago?

We do.



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

(Spring 05)

**THANK YOU FOR JOINING NCRT**

**"To Preserve Rail Corridors and Promote Rail - Trails"**





### Laurel River a trail to lumbering past

For a scenic outing in western North Carolina, put the Laurel River Trail in Madison County on your list. The 3.6-mile rail-trail is beside the Laurel River on a long-deserted section of the Madison Co. Railroad, a lumbering line in the Pisgah National Forest. Fat tire bikes are best for the ballast and dirt surface.

From Hot Springs, take US 25/70 east to the intersection of NC 208 and the Laurel River. A dirt road turns into parking and the trail, which follows the river downstream to the ghost town of Reunion, where the Laurel empties into the French Broad River.

### Washington backs CCT bridge access

The Washington City Council has passed a resolution urging the NC DOT to provide bike/ped passage on a new US 17 bypass bridge at the west edge of the downtown area to assure continuity for the proposed Coastal Carolina Trail.

The new bridge over the Tar-Pamlico River could facilitate extending the rail-trail south to Chocowinity on river front recreation land and rail corridor owned by Washington.

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