



Rail Corridor Preservation

The federal Transportation Enhancements (TE) program funds 12 different types of transportation-related activities. Activity 8, known in law as “Preservation of abandoned rail corridors, including the conversion and use thereof for pedestrian and bicycle trails,” helps expand travel and recreational opportunities within communities. Converted rail corridors make ideal trails because of their flat grade, long length, intact right-of-way, and few street crossings. “Rail-trails,” as these types of trails are called, help to encourage physical activity and reduce air pollution. In some locations, trails are built alongside abandoned rail corridors. These are known as "rails-with-trails." Since the TE program began in 1992, approximately 8 percent of available TE funds have been programmed for rail-trail projects.

Eligible Projects

Working within Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines, each state Department of Transportation (DOT) determines the eligibility of TE projects for funding. Examples of projects that may be considered eligible include:

- ▶ Acquiring railroad rights-of-way;
- ▶ Planning, designing, and constructing multi-use trails along a railroad right-of-way;
- ▶ Major reconstructions of trails along a railroad right-of-way;
- ▶ Developing rail-with-trail projects.

Examples of Successful Projects

Trail of the Coeur D’Alenes, Idaho. The trail of the Coeur d’Alenes, one of America’s longest continuously paved rail-trails, follows the Union Pacific Railroad’s right-of-way 72 miles from the Montana border to the Washington border. Along the way, it passes through the Silver Valley, the chain lakes region, and the Coeur d’Alene Indian Reservation. A \$1 million TE award helped defray the trail’s \$48 million cost, much of which went towards cleanup of contaminated lands along the rail corridor. Contact: Nonmotorized trail coordinator, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, 208-334-4119.



The Coeur D’Alenes trail

Capital Crescent Trail, Maryland. The Capital Crescent Trail extends 11 miles along the former right-of-way of the Georgetown Branch of the B&O Railroad between Georgetown in Washington, D.C. to Silver Spring in Montgomery County, Maryland. The trail is a recreational and commuting resource connecting residential, commercial, and employment centers. Along its route, the trail passes over four historic bridges, through two historic tunnels, and provides beautiful vistas of the Potomac River. About \$1.16 million in TE funds went towards the trail’s total cost of \$8 million. Contact: Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail, 202-234-4874.



The Capital Crescent trail (Photo: Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail)

Visit <http://www.enhancements.org/library/index.asp> for additional project examples.

Federal Guidance



Projects that use TE funds must qualify as one or more of the 12 designated activities and relate to surface transportation in order to meet basic federal eligibility requirements. Rail-trails inherently relate to surface transportation because railroads were built for a transportation purpose. Keep in mind the following when proceeding with a project in this category:

- ▶ Sponsors must comply with federal regulations involving property acquisitions contained in the “The Uniform Act” (See www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/ua.htm). Streamlining measures such as voluntary transaction procedures and exemptions for conservation organizations can make this process easier for TE projects. Project sponsors should discuss the relevance of the Uniform Act with their FHWA division and state DOT.
- ▶ Private sponsors should have a public co-sponsor to ensure the continued responsibility on the part of the public agency for the project. Sponsors should plan for the future use and maintenance of the property in their proposal.
- ▶ A legal document developed in conjunction with the state DOT and the FHWA division office should capture the protection of property rights for the use of a facility for a specific time period.
- ▶ The period of public access to the property should be commensurate with the expenditure of TE funds.

Visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/TE for a full copy of the FHWA TE Guidance.

Financing TE Projects



Most states require TE project sponsors to provide at least 20 percent of project costs, also referred to as “matching funds.” In many states, the value of donated property, materials, and services; the labor of state and local government employees; and the costs of preliminary engineering may count towards the matching requirement. Federal, non-DOT funds can often be used as matching funds. Check with your state TE manager whether these “innovative financing options” are available in your state. Additional funds for this activity may come from a variety of sources such as local and state governments, foundations, nonprofit organizations, businesses, or other federal programs. Visit www.enhancements.org/fundingsources.asp for links to specific grant programs.

Related Resources



- ▶ Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: www.railtrails.org or 202-331-9696
- ▶ FHWA Bicycle and Pedestrian Program: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped or 202-366-0134
- ▶ FHWA Recreational Trails Program: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/rectrails or 202-366-5013
- ▶ “A Summary of Bicycle and Pedestrian Provisions of the Federal Aid Program” booklet, and “Finding Matching Funds for Trail Projects,” NTEC Technical Brief: www.enhancements.org/publications.asp
- ▶ Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse: www.trailsandgreenways.org or 877-476-9297
- ▶ American Trails: www.AmericanTrails.org or 530-547-2060
- ▶ The Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service: www.ncrc.nps.gov/rtca or 202-354-6900

To Get Started



Inquiries about the TE application process should be directed to the TE manager at your state DOT. Visit www.enhancements.org/contacts.asp for TE manager contact information.