

CONNECTIONS

The NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS CLEARINGHOUSE Newsletter
Sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 1

NOVEMBER 1999

Union Station Revitalizes Meridian Depot District

By Maureen Lofton, City of Meridian, MS

Nearly eight years ago, community leaders began to explore the idea of a multi-modal transportation center in Meridian, a town born of the rail roads. As the idea began to take shape, the economic, historic, transportation and cultural value of such a bold development became clearly defined.

A feasibility study funded by the Federal Transit Administration pinpointed the site—the existing Amtrak station on Front Street, the front door to downtown Meridian. But it was a dilapidated front door, a once-thriving commercial district formerly anchored by a beautiful, 1907 Mission-style Union Station tower flanked by east and west wings. The tower and west wing had long ago been demolished, and the dilapidated east wing was serving as the Amtrak station.

A Multi-Modal Vision and Solution

Under the leadership of Mayor John Robert Smith, who envisioned the transportation center long before most people in the community had any concept of multi-modalism, Union Station was developed as the catalyst that would spark the re-birth of the Depot District. Following a series of town meetings, architectural plans were developed and the Union Station tower was reconstructed to house

(continued on page 2)



Union Station's tower stands tall as symbol of a city, while the east wing (left) houses Meridian's economic development agency. (Photo: City of Meridan)



Union Station is now a comfortable, attractive arrival and departure point for rail and bus riders, giving travelers a positive first impression of Meridian as a thriving and progressive community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Union Station Revitalizes Meridian Depot District	1
Conference Explores Relationship Between Scenic Byways and TE	3
Conferences Calendar	3
Help Yourself to Resources	4
Improving Visual Landscapes with TE	5
FHWA Guidance Update	5

Tower Now a Symbol of Past and Future

Today, the distinctive shape of Union Station's tower once again punctuates the skyline, re-establishing Meridian's roots as a railroad community. The station is so symbolic of a community's commitment to both preservation and new development that the tower's outline was chosen by the Great American Station Foundation as the organization's logo. Union Station's importance to the continuity of community life was underscored by the comments of an elderly resident who approached Mayor Smith and said, "It looks just like it did when I was a little girl."

Project contacts

DON FARRAR
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
CITY OF MERIDIAN
P.O. BOX 1430
MERIDIAN, MS 39302
601-485-1910

B.B. ARCHER
PROJECT ARCHITECT
ARCHER AND ARCHER PA
717 FRONT STREET EXTENSION
MERIDIAN, MS 39301
601-483-4873

Amtrak, Greyhound and the Meridian Transit System, with taxi service to the Meridian Regional Airport, rubber wheeled trolley loops through downtown and office space for Norfolk Southern Railroad. Meeting rooms on the mezzanine level were designed for community activities, the existing east wing was renovated as the home of Meridian's economic development agency and an old Railway Express Agency (REA) building was converted into a railroad museum. Underscoring this commitment to Union Station was the belief that construction of a major public building would spark private sector confidence and investment in the Front Street area.

TE, "COPs" and Amtrak Provide Necessary Financing

At about the same time the plans for Union Station were taking shape, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was implemented and its provisions fit almost perfectly with Meridian's proposed development. With a total project cost of nearly \$7 million, Union Station was awarded \$5.1 million in federal and state grants from the Mississippi Department of Transportation, including the first ISTEA grant ever awarded by the state for a historic reconstruction project. All of this money was funneled directly into construction costs. Local funding of \$1.4 million was provided through Certificates of Participation (COPs), a state-authorized funding mechanism that allows the city to lease the facility from a non-profit corporation that, in turn, sells shares of the lease to financial institutions. The COPs method of financing is especially attractive because it does not impact on the city's bonded indebtedness. Finally, an unprecedented \$431,000 grant was awarded by Amtrak, which viewed the Meridian project as a model

that could be replicated in scores of other small cities served by Amtrak.

Successful Results: Community Reinvestment, Reclamation

In operation for less than two years, Union Station has had a profound impact on the community in numerous, tangible ways:

- The \$6.8 million project has already leveraged more than \$8 million in private investment in the Depot District, including office space, retail shops, a data processing/computer training center, apartments, two restaurants, and vital records storage buildings.
- Additional private sector projects under construction or designed include upper-story apartments on the west side of Front Street and an up-scale condominium development. The first tenants in the apartments in historic buildings are beginning to move in.
- The meeting rooms on the tower's mezzanine level are in great demand for business meetings and social events like retirement parties, class reunions, birthday parties, weddings and receptions. Union Station has become a hub of community life.
- Union Station is now a comfortable, attractive arrival and departure point for rail and bus riders,

(continued on page 6)



Union Station's interior renovations provide a pleasant space for travelers and in-demand meeting rooms for the community. (Photo: City of Meridan)

Conference Explores Relationship Between Scenic Byways and TE

By Danyell C. Diggs, Federal Highway Administration

One of the questions constantly asked by communities is the relationship between the Transportation Enhancements (TE) program and the Scenic Byways program. In an effort to better serve the public and the interests of communities all across the country, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) attempted to address this relationship at a national conference in the late summer of this year.

Over 250 participants attended the 1999 National Scenic Byways Conference, held August 22-25th, in Louisville, KY. This year's theme was *Sharing America's Stories, Building Successful Byways Community by Community*. The purpose of the conference was to bring together the byway coordinators from each state and each of the 53 nationally designated byways for training, information sharing, and collaboration.

About two dozen concurrent workshops were offered in five tracks, including: Byway Leadership and Organization; Marketing; Funding, Grants, and Money ("Accessing the 10 Percent Pot"—Enhancement funding); Planning and Growth; and Better Byways.

Harold Peaks, FHWA's TE Program Manager gave presentations on FHWA's recently published Interim Guidance on Transportation Enhancements Activities. He participated on a panel focused on ways to obtain TE funds for scenic byway activities. Attendees of this TE session expressed particular interest in the elements of the program that would assist in economic revitalization of their community, and would provide another source of funding for scenic byway related activities.

Conference participants were also interested in hearing about the new eligibility opportunities added by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21 added a new provision to the TE activity for Scenic or Historic Highway Programs – *"the provision of tourist and welcome centers."* Guidance concerning the eligibility of tourist and welcome centers was discussed extensively. However, many attendees were not familiar with the TE program. As a result, Mr. Peaks provided an overview of the program provisions along with specific similarities, as well as differences, between the Scenic Byways program and the Transportation Enhancements program.

Some of the similarities discussed included the following:

- Activities eligible under the Scenic Byways program are generally eligible under TE activities where all applicable criteria have otherwise been met.
- The eligibility for TE funding for the provision of tourist and welcome centers applies to both existing and new centers. This means that TE funds may be used for the construction of a new facility and/or the restoration of an existing facility. This would include those related construction actions necessary to provide the facility, such as interior fixtures and parking areas.
- TE funds can be used to purchase and install items which support or interpret the scenic or historic highway program or site including brochure racks for interpretive materials, maps or kiosks, markers, and scenic overlooks.

(continued on page 6)

Conference Calendar

JANUARY 9-13, 2000
WASHINGTON, DC

THE 79TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD

More than 8,000 transportation professionals will attend this meeting, which covers all transportation modes in more than 450 sessions. Specialty workshops and committee meetings allow participants to discuss research findings and new technologies. For more information go to www.national-academies.org/trb/meeting.

MARCH 1-5, 2000
WASHINGTON, DC

NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARKS ASSOCIATION (NRPA) LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE AND MID YEAR FORUM

This conference provides briefings on important legislation involving park and recreation interests and allows an opportunity for meeting with legislators to stress the importance of park and recreation opportunities. For more information call 202-887-0290, or email nrpapolicy@aol.com.

APRIL 9-11, 2000
EAST WINDSOR, NJ

13TH ANNUAL PURCHASE OF AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENTS CONFERENCE: PACE 2000: FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

AFT's annual conference is the nation's largest gathering of farmland protection program managers, organizers, and landowners. Now in its thirteenth year, the conference offers the most comprehensive training available on how to develop and administer state, local, and private programs to purchase easements on working farms and ranches. For more information go to www.farmland.org/events/index/htm

JUNE 18-22, 2000,
AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

VELO MONDIAL 2000: THE WORLD BICYCLE CONFERENCE

This conference will gather bicycle advocates from around the world in order to make a significant contribution towards broadening support for bicycling. It will be centered around 5 themes: transportation, land use planning, health, the economy, and the environment. For more information go to www.velomondial2000.nl

On-Line Enhancements Resources

Thanks to the Internet, it is possible to research and apply for Transportation Enhancements (TE) with a click of your mouse. Some people have already taken advantage of their state's virtual resources. This past summer, in Bellbrook City, OH, the City Manager applied over the Internet for a TE award for a \$9,000 extension of an existing bikeway. Below are the addresses and a brief look at what is available on five states' TE web pages. While you are "surfing" the web, visit NTEC at www.enhancements.org.

CALIFORNIA: www.dot.ca.gov/hq/TransEnhAct

- General program overview and guidelines, application schedule, contacts
- Eligibility requirements for applicants and projects, match requirements, scoring criteria, implementation guidance
- Downloadable TE application form (PDF)

FLORIDA: www.dot.state.fl.us/emo/enhance/enhance.htm

- General program overview and contacts, glossary of terms
- Requirements for applicants, projects, specific TE activities, application tips
- Downloadable TE application form (PDF) and photos

MICHIGAN: www.mdot.state.mi.us/programs/enhance/enhance.htm

Note: Almost all information is found within the downloadable TE application instructions

- General program overview and contacts
- Requirements for eligibility and project categories, application deadlines
- Downloadable TE application form and instructions (PDF), and booklet featuring successful TE projects

OHIO: www.dot.state.oh.us/bike/application

NOTE: This on-line information relates only to bicycle and pedestrian TE projects

- General program guidelines and contacts
- Eligibility requirements for projects and applicants, application deadlines
- Downloadable TE application form (PDF)
- Electronic TE application form: can be completed and submitted over the Internet

PENNSYLVANIA: www.dot.state.pa.us/penndot/aviation.nsf/Trans+enhance+program?readform

NOTE: All information is found within the downloadable TE Program Guide

- General program overview, application deadlines, contacts, FAQs
- Eligibility requirements for applicants, projects, and costs, selection procedures
- Downloadable TE application form and TE Program Guide (PDF), examples of projects

New Publications Related to TE Activities

Federal Highway Administration *Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access*

The U.S. DOT and FHWA recently released their new design guidebook for trails and sidewalks. The 170-page publication (part I of II books) discusses ADA compliance and varied pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle use for trails and sidewalks. This first publication reviews existing guidelines and practices, and offers charts, diagrams, and tables to convey these guidelines. To receive a copy, send a fax to: FHWA R&T Report Center, fax # 301-577-1421. Or, send a letter requesting the information to: 9701 Philadelphia Ct; Unit Q; Lanham, MD 20706. When requesting this document you must use the ID number: FHWA-HEP-99-006.

Bikes Belong Coalition *Guide to Bicycle Advocacy*

The Bikes Belong Coalition has released their new *Guide to Bicycle Advocacy*, a 40-page instructional booklet on how to utilize TEA-21 opportunities for alternative transportation. The booklet provides suggestions on how to encourage increased bike use at an early age, making the roads more bike friendly by bike lane striping, teaching driver awareness, and many other solutions. You can obtain a copy of the *Guide to Bicycle Advocacy* by calling the Bikes Belong Coalition at 617-734-2800 or viewing it online at www.bikesbelong.org.

The Trust for Public Land

The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space

The Trust for Public Land's new publication, *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*, provides a wealth of information on how land conservation is not at odds with necessary urban growth and economic development. The 48-page report includes state statistics, notable examples and detailed instructions on how you can help your community "grow smart." To order a copy or to view the booklet, go to the Trust's Web site at www.tpl.org, or call 800-714-LAND.

Two New Clearinghouses

The best information is more information, and two new clearinghouses are ready to help you find what you need. The **Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse**, a joint project of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and The Conservation Fund's American Greenways Program, provides technical assistance, information resources, and referrals to trail and greenway advocates and developers. For more information, call 877-GRNWAYS (476-9297), or visit on-line at www.trailsandgreenways.org. The recently launched **Bicycle and Pedestrian Information Center**, sponsored by the U.S. DOT, provides information on related topics, including designing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, integrating with transit and rail and encouraging safety programs. To learn more, call 877-925-5245, or visit on-line at www.walkinginfo.org or www.bicyclinginfo.org.

Improving Visual Landscapes with TE

By Margaret Martin, National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse

Three projects in opposite corners of the United States demonstrate the flexibility inherent to the Transportation Enhancements (TE) program. These three projects, located in North Carolina, Hawaii, and California, have a very strong relationship to transportation, but it is not this relationship that makes them noteworthy. By softening the visual landscape, these projects stand out in their effort to make even a short drive a pleasurable journey rather than an unremarkable commute. As Americans spend more and more time traveling the highways, interstates and expressways that link our homes with our jobs and our children with their schools, it benefits everyone to make these trips more pleasant.

One way to accomplish this is to plant wildflowers along roadways and under overpasses. North Carolina DOT began their wildflower program in 1985 in an effort to beautify their state highways, and with the advent of the TE program, more money became available for this project and others like it. A Special Event Planting program that highlights locations hosting athletic events and conventions uses Enhancements funds to decorate the surrounding grounds of these events. North Carolina DOT places a high priority on the planting of native wildflowers in all their programs, spurring the construction of a DOT wildflower farm to supply the program.

North Carolina blanketed their

state with wildflowers to improve the drive, but California opted for a more artistic approach. Rather than grow flowers, CalTrans recently sponsored a Transportation Enhancement project that they hope will prove equally appealing for commuters:



NC's Wildflower Program adds color to the drive. (photo: NCDOT)

four-by-four panels of giant poppies and brodiaeas will line the freeway in Orange County. The agency received a \$900,000 TE award to install 2,000 aluminum-framed panels on the existing soundwalls to make the drive more aesthetically pleasing.

As Americans continue to push for greater vehicle accessibility, it becomes an increased priority to protect the land that sits at the edges of development. For this reason, Hawaii DOT used TE funds to purchase a stretch of land along the

Kalaniana'ole Highway in 1997. The 312 acres of land on the east end of Oahu are perfect for just about anything—anything, that is, as long as the land remains completely untouched. Most scenic acquisitions involve buying land and then improving it, perhaps by planting trees and adding benches. That was not the goal in Oahu; the people of Oahu wanted the land to remain undeveloped—the scrub brush was beauty in itself.

Transportation is a part of life, so why not make it a great experience? These three states did this in different ways, but all improved the quality of life for their communities. The Enhancements program allows for flexibility because every situation is different, and so requires a unique

response. These projects are specific examples of a response to a realized need and are only part of a much larger picture. To learn more about these projects, refer to the contact information below.

NORTH CAROLINA: W.D. JOHNSON, STATE ROADSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEER 919-733-2920. www.doh.dot.state.nc.us/operations/dt_chief_eng/roadside/

CALIFORNIA: MARSHA MASON, TEA BRANCH CHIEF 916-654-5275

HAWAII: DOUG MELLER, TE PROGRAM MANAGER 808-587-1842

FHWA Guidance Update

Note that while the FHWA's June 1999 Interim Guidance on Transportation Enhancement Activities was titled "Interim" at publication, *it was and is intended to be utilized as a final document*. The term interim was added to allow flexibility when the Guidance was published in case any major issues were overlooked or provisions needed to be adjusted based on feedback that might be received. To date no major issues have been brought to the attention of the FHWA. Therefore, with minor edits and a few additional paragraphs, the Guidance will be published in the Federal Register as final in November.

In addition, a number of the Transportation Enhancement Coordinators across the country have asked for Questions and Answers (Q&A) to supplement the Guidance. They are being prepared. A decision will be made shortly as to whether to publish them separately to allow them to be more fluid. If you have any Q&A suggestions, please share them with the FHWA by contacting Mrs. Danyell Diggs at 202-366-9629.

National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse

c/o Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
1100 Seventeenth Street, NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

NONPROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 4434
BOWIE, MD

Toll-free Tel : (888) 388-NTEC

In DC Area: (202) 463-0641

Fax: (202) 466-3742

Email : ntec@transact.org

Web site: www.enhancements.org

Union Station...

(continued from page 2)

giving travelers a positive first impression of Meridian as a thriving and progressive community.

- Residents, as well as people with ties to Meridian, are becoming a permanent part of the Union Station complex by purchasing brick pavers inscribed with the names of loved ones, friends or themselves. The pavers are installed in the brick pathway of a small, landscaped green space linking the tower and east wing to the railroad museum.

Lessons Learned and Shared

Because this project was so complex, involving a dozen or more agencies, governments and organizations, some key lessons emerged about handling the myriad issues involved. One city staff person needs to have the authority to oversee project develop-

ment and approval. In Meridian, the director of the Community Development Department took that role and quickly learned that he needed to establish strong lines of communication with the other agencies involved, especially those that had never before worked on a joint project. Since each agency has its own operational procedures, the staff needs to develop reasonable time lines, factoring in extensive review periods for each agency. The environmental status of the project site must be assessed early in the process, and the public should be involved in the design process through town meetings, charettes and other forums to provide continuing public information and build support. Finally, the design review process should include prospective tenants and service providers such as security services, landscapers and maintenance firms. Often, their unique perspectives will not only result in better design but also in a facility that is more efficient and economical to operate and maintain.

Connections is a quarterly publication of the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration. Submission of articles as well as letters and other comments are welcome.

Editor: Megan Betts

Contributing Writers: Maureen Lofton, Danyell Diggs, Margaret Martin

Graphic Designer: Barbara Richey

Unless otherwise stated, the contents of this newsletter reflect the views of the authors who are responsible for the opinions, findings and conclusions presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FHWA and USDOT.

Scenic Byways and TE...

(continued from page 3)

Some differences discussed included:

- TE funds cannot be used for state-wide programs, marketing, or promotion not related to the scenic or historic highway program.
- TE funds cannot be used for staffing, operating costs, or maintenance.
- TE funds should not be used to purchase items such as racks for advertising or brochures for local or national businesses.

Mr. Peaks emphasized that the intent is not to use the category to simply repair and restore what are clearly rest areas, but to fund those activities linked to scenic or historic programs or scenic or historic sites. He was quick to point out that although conference attendees were focused on tourist and welcome center funding, many of the other TE categories provide opportunities to support scenic byway activities, such as landscaping and scenic beautification, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, historic preservation, and more. Participants were encouraged to look beyond trying to fund single projects, and to focus on leveraging a variety of funds to improve their respective communities with partnerships of positive actions.