

# CONNECTIONS

THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS CLEARINGHOUSE NEWSLETTER  
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## Celebrating Idaho's First Road: The Oregon Trail

By Joe Relk, Idaho Transportation Department

The Oregon Trail was the route west for hundreds of thousands of Americans during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Idaho is one of the states through which these travelers would pass on their journey along this trail. Given the importance of this route in Idaho's, and the nation's, history, it is only fitting that Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds are helping to promote this important social, historical, and transportation resource in Idaho.

### Two Trail Centers Funded

In July 2000, Idaho's Three Island Crossing State Park opened its new Oregon Trail History and Education Center thanks to over \$1 million in TE funds. This striking rock, glass, and metal building celebrates one of the most dangerous river crossings along the Oregon Trail, the crossing of the Snake River at Three Island Ford. The new center was designed to physically evoke a feeling for the days of covered wagons. The front entrance is covered by a canvas roof and a wall made of native basalt begins outside near the front door. Tracks from local animals and moccasins are imbedded in the sidewalks of the center and intermingled with prints from the shoes, oxen and wagon ruts of the pioneers.

The center presents visitors with a chronological account of the Oregon Trail, from Native American shelters to an authentic reproduction of a pioneer wagon to an account of the conflicts and challenges caused by demographic changes from settlement. The center also features slide shows, recordings, and an eight-minute video on the history of the area. Travelers can still camp at Three Island crossing, but today there are modern campground facilities at this state park. Each summer, locals re-enact the dangerous river crossing using wagons and horses, totally unassisted by modern technology.

A partnership between Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation and the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) made the interpretive center a reality.



A re-enactment of the Snake River Crossing at Three Island State Park. (Photo: ITD)

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**"THE OREGON TRAIL IS IDAHO'S FIRST ROAD, AFTER ALL, AND ITD HAS HELPED PRESERVE THAT IMPORTANT PIECE OF HISTORY THROUGH VARIOUS PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS THAT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE ENHANCEMENTS FUNDING."** —PATTI RAINO, ITD TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS PROGRAM COORDINATOR.

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## NEW NTEC BOOKLET ON THE BENEFITS OF TE

**COMMUNITIES BENEFIT! THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS, IS A NEW, 24-PAGE BOOKLET DESIGNED TO SHOWCASE THE POSITIVE BENEFITS OF TE PROJECTS. THIS COLOR PUBLICATION FEATURES TEN CASE STUDIES OF PROJECTS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY. EACH CASE STUDY TELLS THE STORY OF THE PROJECT AND HIGHLIGHTS THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCE.**



**FOR A FREE COPY OF COMMUNITIES BENEFIT! CALL NTEC AT 888-388-NTEC, OR EMAIL NTEC@TRANSACT.ORG. THE BOOKLET CAN ALSO BE VIEWED AND PRINTED FROM NTEC'S WEB SITE AT WWW.ENHANCEMENTS.ORG.**



Costumed actors guide visitors through the Oregon Trail experience at the National Oregon/California Trail Center. (Photo: ITD)

The Oregon Trail History and Education Center's dedication follows closely on the heels of the opening of the National Oregon/California Trail Center in Montpelier, Idaho, in July 1999. The National Oregon/California Trail Center received more than \$1 million in TE funds as well. The living museum takes guests through the pioneer experience as if they were navigating the trail themselves. The interpretive center uses actors playing the parts of wagonmaster, outfitter, and fellow travelers to help visitors understand what the journey along the trail was like. Visitors buy and outfit their wagons, take a simulated wagon ride, and gather information about the trail from other travelers along the way.

The building also houses the Rails and Trails Museum, and there are plans to finish the second floor, which will be used for multimedia presentations and exhibits. The center's Allinger Community Theatre was built in the style of an 1860s theatre, and is used for films and presentations about the Trail. In addition, the center sponsors historical conferences, meetings and workshops, and teacher certification in Idaho history. This National Trail Center has already benefited the traveling public and the Montpelier community. New hotels have been built nearby, and the center's group facilities provide space for social gatherings that did not exist before. The National Oregon/California Trail Center is featured in a new NTEC publication, *Communities Benefit! The Social and Economic Benefits of Transportation Enhancements*. (See sidebar).

## Historical Marker Guide and Trail Kiosks

Patti Raino, ITD's Enhancements program coordinator, explained that the new interpretive centers are not the first TE-funded projects relating to the Oregon Trail in Idaho. "The Oregon Trail is Idaho's first road, after all, and ITD has helped preserve that important piece of history through various programs and projects that would not have been possible without the Enhancements funding," Raino said.

For example, ten Oregon Trail markers are highlighted in the new *Idaho Highway Historical Marker Guide*, which was published this year by the Idaho Transportation Department using \$80,000 in TE funds. ITD began its historic marker program on Idaho's highways in 1956. Historic markers help Idaho's tourists find sites on the Oregon Trail along with other historic landmarks.

Organized by highway, the compact guide provides a location and description for more than 240 historical markers. The guide is also packed with 90 old-time photos, drawings and maps, most of which illustrate the



historical places described in the book. By providing the location and text for each historical marker, the guide acts as a historical compass to enhance the traveling pleasure for both Idahoans and their visitors. To learn more about the guide, access the guide's Web site at: [www2.state.id.us/itd/hmg/hmgindex.htm](http://www2.state.id.us/itd/hmg/hmgindex.htm).

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# Questionnaire: What's Slowing the Money (and Projects) Down?

In the May 2000 issue of *Connections*, NTEC reported on the low – 65% – national obligation rate as of the end of FY 1999. As of the end of FY2000 (Sept. 30, 2000), the national obligation rate is 68%. While this is an improved rate, it still indicates that selected TE projects are not moving to the point where they can be implemented. FHWA and NTEC want to know what the problems are, as well as what is working well and moving projects towards obligation at a reasonable rate. With this information, NTEC will create a “Best Practices” report to pinpoint methods for improved project implementation.

We need input on your experience with the TE program to identify these best practices. **We encourage you to fill out this questionnaire on-line at [www.enhancements.org](http://www.enhancements.org).** If you prefer to fax your answers, please answer using additional paper since there is not enough space on this page for comments, and fax all pages to NTEC at 202-466-3742. Thanks for your help!

## 1. Your association with TE:

**Government:** \_\_\_ Federal \_\_\_ State \_\_\_ MPO/RPTA

\_\_\_ City \_\_\_ District \_\_\_ Project Sponsor

**Private:** \_\_\_ Project Sponsor \_\_\_ Business \_\_\_ Consultant

\_\_\_ Interested Citizen \_\_\_ Non-Profit Organization

**Other** (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**State** (necessary): \_\_\_\_\_

**Name** (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. DOT/MPO's communication with approved TE project sponsors about required work and status of project:

Are staff helpful? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

Are staff available? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

Are staff timely? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

Are guidelines available to explain the necessary steps?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

What would improve this communication?

## 3. DOT/MPO's procedures to promote timely project execution:

Are procedures in place to expedite projects?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

What elements of these procedures work well, or do not?

What would improve these procedures?

## 4. DOT/MPO's technical assistance offered to approved project sponsors:

What is helpful?

What could be done to improve technical assistance?

## 5. DOT/MPO's use of Federally approved streamlining procedures

(Categorical Exclusions for NEPA compliance, advance payment, etc.):

Which does your state use?

What works well or does not?

What would improve the use of these streamlining procedures?

## 6. State and Federal design and review requirements for TE projects:

Are any of these requirements overly burdensome?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know (If yes, please list)

Are any of these requirements not thorough enough?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know (If yes, please list)

What could be done to improve the review requirements and process?

## 7. Appropriateness of DOT/MPO's local agency contracting requirements for TE projects:

Are they appropriate? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

Are they competitively bid? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

Do these requirements result in higher prices?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

What would improve the requirements, if at all?

## 8. DOT/MPO's willingness to allow credit (e.g. donations of land, materials, professional services, or cash) to local match:

Is this allowed in your state? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

What is your experience using the credit option?

What did or did not work well?

What could be done to improve the use of these credits?

## 9. DOT/MPO's process for reimbursement for project expenses:

Is it timely? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

What worked well or did not work well about this process?

What would improve the reimbursement process?

## 10. Project sponsors' ability to raise local match funds:

Are the requirements for local match prohibitive?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

Is it possible to raise this amount in a timely manner?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

What could be done to improve project sponsors' ability to raise local match?

## 11. Project sponsors' ability to comply with Federal-aid requirements:

Are sponsors knowledgeable of these requirements?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

Which requirements do they address effectively, and which less effectively?

What would help sponsors improve their understanding, navigation, and fulfillment of these requirements?

## 12. Project sponsors' ability to let contracts and oversee project implementation:

Are sponsors timely? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Don't Know

What do sponsors handle well, and not so well?

What would help sponsors with this oversight?

## 13. What should be done to improve the rate of project obligation in your state?

## 14. What are the specific reasons for project implementation delays, if not addressed in above questions?

# New Resources for Rail-Trail Projects

By Hugh Morris, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Just over half of all Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds nationwide are spent on developing bicycle and pedestrian projects. Many of these projects are rail-trails, trails developed in corridors used by railroads. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has been helping local trail advocates move their projects from vision to reality for fifteen years. Part of the work involves fielding phone calls from trail advocates around the country asking for information or guidance on a variety of trail-related topics. Recently we have received many inquiries on two topics: Liability and Trails; and Rails-with-Trails (trails built alongside active rail corridors). These inquiries led us to develop reports which address these topics.

## **Rail-Trails and Liability: A Primer on Trail-Related Liability Issues and Risk Management Techniques**

Liability concerns are among the most frequently voiced concerns by people who live adjacent to proposed trails. Likewise, trail managers need to be cognizant of trail-related liability issues. This report details the various legal mechanisms that protect both trail managers and adjacent landowners. In general, trespassing laws serve to protect adjacent landowners who fear that trail users will wander off the trail onto their land and become injured. Trespassing laws relieve the landowner of liability in this situation, provided the landowner has not done anything that could be construed as an intent to injure a trespasser.

For the trail manager, protection is often provided through a state recreational use statute which relieves a landowner from liability if they open their land to the public free of charge for recreational purposes. Every state has a recreational use statute. There is often a state tort claims act which specifies the conditions under which a public entity (the trail manager) can be held liable for injuries.

The best way for trail managers to avoid liability issues is to design the trail according to best practices and maintain

the trail in good condition. This includes the use of signs at the trailhead and along the trail that specify trail rules, warn of dangers, and indicate where private property begins. Signs should also be used to warn trail users of temporary dangers such as fallen trees that the trail manager has not yet had the opportunity to clear. A regular, documented, maintenance schedule is also useful for showing that the facility is adequately cared for.

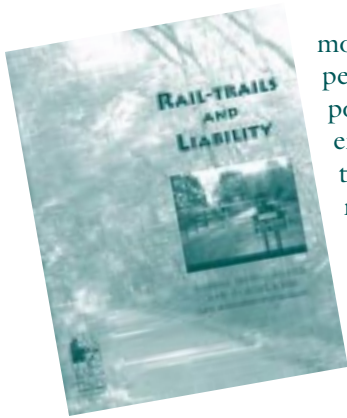
For both trail managers and adjacent landowners, insurance is the best stopgap measure to ensure that they will not suffer in the event of even a frivolous lawsuit. The above mentioned protections often mean that a suit will not advance in court but do not ensure that a suit will not be filed. Having insurance is the best way to protect against these situations.

## **Rails-with-Trails: Sharing Corridors for Transportation and Recreation**

As our urban areas become more and more dense, finding locations for trails becomes harder. In many places around the country, trails are being built alongside active rail corridors. These corridors are often wide enough to accommodate not only the tracks but a multi-use trail as well. There are now 61 such trails around the country and at least 20 more being developed. Making the most of these corridors in areas where land is scarce seems like a great idea, but, unlike regular rail-trails which are built on abandoned rail corridors, rails-with-trails have their own set of issues. These issues primarily concern the close proximity of a trail to the active rail lines. Rail operators are understandably leery of this arrangement because of concerns that trail users will trespass on the railroad tracks.

This report documents the design and operating characteristics of the 61 trails built along active rail corridors. Key design characteristics include some form of barrier between the trail and the tracks such as a fence or vegetation. Also key are the methods used when the trail crosses the tracks. On low speed, infrequently used tracks,

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The Schuylkill River Trail turns perpendicular to the tracks at the crossing. (Photo: Richard Smithers)

# Updated Historic Preservation and TE Booklet Now Available

By Dan Costello, National Trust for Historic Preservation

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Federal Highway Administration.

Thanks to the generous support of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Human Environment, the National Trust for Historic Preservation will soon be distributing a revised edition of the 1995 booklet, *Building on the Past, Traveling to the Future*.

The joint Federal Highway Administration — National Trust for Historic Preservation publication emphasizes the importance of historic preservation-related Transportation Enhancements (TE) activities to the transportation agency's mission to enhance communities as it improves mobility and safety. Half of the twelve TE activities directly or indirectly relate to historic resources, and the landscaping and other scenic beautification activity is frequently employed for streetscape and gateway amenities' improvements in and along the Main Streets of historic communities and neighborhoods.

The new guide aims to encourage potential project sponsors to pursue Transportation Enhancements awards from their state transportation agencies for projects that include one or more of the twelve TE activities and can establish a relationship to surface transportation. The eligibility rules for historic preservation proposals have been changed to reflect a congressional directive in the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This directive revised and clarified the test for demonstrating how TE proposals establish the required relationship to surface transportation. New guidance for TE repeals the FHWA 1995 supplemental guidance on historic preservation Enhancements projects that had imposed a narrow eligibility inter-

pretation requiring a substantial transportation linkage for non-transportation historic properties.

The booklet is designed to help project sponsors navigate the new guidance and TE program so they can apply for Enhancements funds for historic preservation projects. The revised *Building on the Past, Traveling to the Future* contains sections on:

- the 12 TE activities;
- the critical role played by state transportation agencies in implementing the Enhancements provision;
- discussion of the characteristics of some of the strong and effective state programs;
- background information on technical questions about the TE programs;
- step by step suggestions for devising project proposals and participating in the TE program;
- a discussion of the critical relationship between surface transportation and historic preservation;
- a list of various ways that historic preservation TE proposals can make the important relationship to transportation case, and
- contact information for Federal and state transportation and historic preservation offices conversant with each state's TE program.

The new guide also contains 25 project profiles selected from among the thousands of approved projects to show how creative and imaginative Enhancements projects can be devised using historic resources. Many of the case studies were chosen to emphasize that historic preservation TE projects contribute to community revitalization and heritage tourism. These are projects that truly enhance the community benefits of transportation investments.

The revised *Building on the Past, Traveling to the Future* will be published in November 2000. To receive a copy, call the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse (NTEC) at 888-388-NTEC, or email [ntec@transact.org](mailto:ntec@transact.org). You can also call the National Trust for Historic Preservation at 1-800-944-6847, or 202-588-6000. Dan Costello can be reached at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. His phone is (202) 588-6167, and his email address is [dan\\_costello@nthp.org](mailto:dan_costello@nthp.org).



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## Celebrating Idaho's First Road...

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Idaho Transportation Department also developed Oregon Trail kiosks at four rest areas in 1998 and 1999 using \$262,000 in TE funds. The selected rest areas are located where Idaho highways intersect with the Oregon Trail. These signs consist of one common panel and four unique panels with specific information about the Oregon Trail at the different rest area locations. Topics covered include forts, famous battles, fur hunters, Native Americans, and facts of daily life on the trail. The kiosks are located at Coldwater Hill on Interstate 86 eastbound; Massacre Rocks at I-86 westbound; Timmerman at the U.S. 20 and Idaho 75 junction and Snake River View at I-84 eastbound.

### The Trail as Idaho's Past and Future

By funding TE projects that are related to the Oregon Trail, ITD is helping to preserve and promote an important part of America's transportation history. Modern-day travelers can now learn more about the footsteps and wagon wheels that established the first great trail and road in Idaho. The two trail centers, the historical markers guide, and the trail kiosks all provide opportunities for education and celebration of this treasured route to the western U.S.

**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.

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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.

## New Resources for RT Projects

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the trail often uses an at-grade crossing where the trail is brought perpendicular to the tracks at the cross point to ensure that bike tires will not get caught in the flange and to ensure that the cyclist has a good view in both directions. For tracks that carry more trains at higher speeds, some trails have built bridges or tunnels to minimize trail-train conflicts.

Most of these trails are built alongside tracks that are infrequently used, such as spur lines that may have two to four trains per week moving at slow speed. A few trails, however, are next to tracks that have 20 trains per day moving at up to 150 miles per hour.

Because this concept is growing in popularity and because of the specific design issues associated with such trails, the Federal Railroad Administration and the Federal Highway Administration have undertaken a study to produce a "Best Practices" report. This report is due to be completed in the fall of 2001. Until then, this report provides the greatest detail on how these corridors are operating.

One such rail-with-trail is the York County Heritage Trail in Pennsylvania. This trail is featured in RTC's report and in the new NTEC publication *Communities Benefit!* (See sidebar on page 2.)

Copies of these rail-trail reports may be obtained free by downloading from [www.trailsandgreenways.org](http://www.trailsandgreenways.org), or for \$8.00 from:

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