

RTC staff walks along the proposed "Met Branch" in Washington, D.C.



KELLY CORNELL/RTC



- **Trail Under Construction:** Metropolitan Branch Trail
- **Location:** Washington, D.C., to Silver Spring, Md.
- **Used Railroad Corridor:** CSX and Washington Metro Area Transit Authority
- **Length:** 8.25 miles
- **Proposed Surface:** Undetermined

EYE ON: Metropolitan Branch Trail

Rail-trails are often referred to as America’s “new backyard,” so at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), it’s particularly exciting to be working in our backyard again. Twenty-one years ago, one of RTC’s first projects was the Capital Crescent Trail, an 11-mile rail-trail connecting the urban Washington, D.C., neighborhood of Georgetown to suburban Bethesda, Md.

Now RTC is working on the Metropolitan Branch Trail, an 8.25-mile trail project along the active CSX and Metro rail corridors from Union Station in D.C., north to Silver Spring, Md. In addition to having a much-needed transportation route for pedestrians and bicyclists, the Met Branch (as it is locally called) will provide a linear park for D.C. residents—including several RTC staff members—who currently live with little or no accessible open space.

But accessing a trail and getting people to use it are not just issues of proximity. RTC has partnered with Kaiser Permanente to research the physical and social barriers to the Met Branch in the trailside D.C. neighborhoods of Eckington and Edgewood.

Particularly, RTC has conducted a physical analysis of the area and is now engaged in giving presentations to neighborhood civic associations and schools on the current status of the trail as well as eliciting feedback on the barriers to trail use, which generally fall into the categories of: physical, safety, attractiveness and community activities. Fostering community involvement is crucial in the development stage of a trail like the Met Branch.

Current projections have the Met Branch complete by the year’s end. Until such a time, RTC representatives continue to attend local meetings to discuss what community members want from their trail and to present extensive research on the more technical issues of connectivity to residences, community amenities, bike facilities, sidewalks and more.