

Mineral Belt Trail

LEADVILLE, COLORADO

At an elevation of 10,400 feet above sea level, the Mineral Belt Trail (MBT) is one of the highest paved rail-trails in the country. The MBT was a challenge to developers because it is located within a Superfund site, a national historic district, a mining district with overlapping claims and an area of high topographic relief—all of this in a small community with limited financial resources.

In July 2000, seven years after the trail's groundbreaking, Leadville officially opened the Mineral Belt Trail, a 12.5-mile rail-trail through the town. The successful completion of the trail was the result of strong partnerships between Union Pacific Railroad Company, Colorado State Parks, Colorado Department of Transportation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Asarco Mine, the town of Leadville, Lake County and private landowners.

Interesting features of the trail include the safe and legal access it provides to historic mining areas, panoramic views of Colorado's three highest peaks (including Mount Elbert, the state's highest mountain) and the trail's

use, sanctioned by the EPA, as an impervious cap over the old railroad corridor.

RELATIONSHIP TO SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

The MBT follows old railroad grades, some dating to 1884, once used to transport gold, silver and other minerals from area mines. The rail-trail also follows abandoned sections of the Denver & Rio Grand and Colorado Midland railroad corridors, which were largely responsible for opening the central Rocky Mountains to settlement.

Today, the Mineral Belt Trail passes through the historic town of Leadville linking three public schools, recreation areas, the public library, Colorado Mountain College, the National Mining Museum, the hospital and medical center and several churches. Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds were used for trail construction and the installation of a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over a busy roadway.

With connections to so many places in the

community, the rail-trail's transportation benefits are considerable, particularly to children who can now safely walk or bike to school on the trail rather than on area roads.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Until recent years mining was the economic backbone for Leadville. The 1999 closure of the Asarco Mine was a devastating blow to Leadville's economy and community spirit. Realizing the need to redefine their community, Leadville residents rallied around the idea of the trail, focusing on the town's natural beauty, recreational opportunities and historic mining areas. The MBT draws tourists to the area year-round, boosting the economic viability of this former mining area. In the months following the trail's opening, Leadville reported a 19 percent increase in sales tax revenues. Owners of restaurants and lodging facilities report that they are serving customers who have come into town specifically to ride the trail. The MBT has helped Leadville prevent an economic recession by contributing to the town's revitalization efforts and successful development as a recreation and tourism destination.

FUNDING

Total Project Cost: \$2,570,000

Federal TE: \$194,000

Non-federal Match: \$2,376,000

CONTACT

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