

Putting the TE Program Into Action

“In my career as a city council member, mayor, Member of Congress, businessperson, Secretary of Commerce, and now Secretary of Transportation, I have time and again seen the power of transportation improve the economic condition of neighborhoods and communities of all backgrounds.”

— Norman Y. Mineta, U.S. Secretary of Transportation.

Transportation Enhancements projects have enabled numerous communities to realize the economic and social benefits that result from their efforts and investment.

Transportation Enhancements allow governments to support communities that want to preserve their best qualities and grow in keeping with their values. The following case studies illustrate many of the best TE projects around the nation and highlight their economic and community benefits. The case studies were selected from over 50 nominations, all innovative and worthy contenders.

The projects selected were those that distinguished themselves through demonstrated benefits to the community. These projects create a representative picture of the TE activities. They demonstrate projects from all 12 TE activities from urban, suburban, and rural settings across the nation.

These case studies are highly representative – individually and as a whole – of Transportation Enhancements. These stories are meant to inspire you to build projects that enhance communities and the experience of traveling in the United States.

PRESERVATION OF ABANDONED RAILWAY CORRIDORS

Silver Comet Trail

COBB, PAULDING AND POLK COUNTIES, GEORGIA



The Silver Comet Trail, one of the most popular spots in northwest Georgia for outdoor recreation and bicycle commuting, sprouted from an abandoned rail corridor between Atlanta and the Alabama state line. In the early 1990s, a group of private citizens and nonprofit organizations, including the PATH Foundation and the Georgia Rails to Trails Society, spearheaded the development of the trail, working with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the three counties adjacent to the trail: Cobb, Paulding and Polk.

RELATIONSHIP TO SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

The railroad corridor, now occupied by the rail-trail, was built by the Seaboard Railroad between 1897 and 1903. The rail line was used for freight transport until 1947 when the shiny Silver Comet passenger train was introduced. For over 20 years the Silver Comet raced up and down the corridor carrying passengers and mail from Boston to Birmingham. The Seaboard Railroad discontinued its Silver Comet service in 1969, marking the end of luxury rail service to many southern cities.



In 1992, GDOT purchased the 57-mile corridor from CSX for \$5.8 million. There are currently 38 continuous miles of open trail from Smyrna to Rockmart and an additional 20 miles in the planning and construction phases. When complete, the Silver Comet will travel through three counties in Georgia to the Alabama state line and connect with the Chief Ladiga Trail in Cleburne County, Alabama. Transportation Enhancements (TE) funds have played a key role in the development and construction of the rail-trail.

The presence of the trail has encouraged an increasing number of commuters to bike to and from work, reducing the number of automobiles on congested roadways and improving Atlanta's air quality. Michael Clapp, one of the commuters on the Silver Comet Trail, said, "I have been using the Silver Comet to commute to work for over two years now. It's an excellent way to commute without having to mix with traffic."

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

The Silver Comet Trail has brought new life to the economies of Cobb, Paulding and Polk Counties. New businesses are opening and connector trails have been constructed in subdivisions and local downtown areas providing direct access to the trail. Bike shops, such as the Silver Comet Depot, have opened in Cobb and Polk Counties offering bike or inline skate rentals for trail explor-

ation. Bike shops have also opened in Paulding for trail users interested in purchasing bikes and accessories. Visitors from all over Georgia, other states and countries are signing the guest registers at these trailside businesses.

The trail and its associated businesses are attracting a growing number of visitors to the town of Rockmart. Just one year after the Silver Comet began bringing trail users directly to its downtown, Mayor Curtis Lewis was quoted in the May 6, 2002, edition of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* as saying, "In the last 12 months, we've had more tourists than in the last 30 years. Before there wasn't anything to bring them here."

In addition, residential developers are recognizing the value of the Silver Comet Trail as an attraction for prospective homeowners. For example, a community of 322 homes is being constructed adjacent to the trail in Dallas, Georgia. The developer also plans to construct a community trail that will connect to the Silver Comet Trail.

Located in an area previously lacking recreation, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, the Silver Comet Trail has energized and united communities along its length. On weekdays the trail is used for bicycle commuting, and each weekend the trail comes alive with recreational users. The renewed sense of community that has developed from the trail's construction is revitalizing neighborhoods, renewing pride in the community and helping residents get acquainted with their neighbors. By preserving this abandoned rail corridor, the Silver Comet Trail is

protecting the natural environment while providing residents and visitors with a safe and accessible facility for recreation and non-motorized transportation.

FUNDING

Total Project Cost: \$13,500,000
Federal TE: \$9,359,000
Non-federal Match: \$4,141,000

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