

Virginia Civil War Trails

STATEWIDE

Virginia's statewide Civil War site preservation initiative began in 1993 as a local effort to mark the route of General Robert E. Lee's retreat from Petersburg to Appomattox, Virginia. The nonprofit Virginia Civil War Trails, Inc., works with local governments, historians and tourism agencies to develop and maintain Civil War driving tours across the state. Today, there are six driving trails collectively known as Virginia Civil War Trails. A series of Transportation Enhancements (TE) awards have been used to help link and interpret 299 Civil War landmarks and historic buildings in 84 cities and counties throughout Virginia. TE-funded components include historical markers, roadside pull-offs, the acquisition of historic Civil War sites, detailed brochures,

maps and radio transmissions describing local Civil War events.

RELATIONSHIP TO SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

Mitch Bowman, Virginia Civil War Trails, Inc., describes a trail as "an interpreted, chronological progression along a historic road trace." Appropriately, the Virginia Civil War Trails make use of existing roadways, following the original routes used in Civil War campaigns in the northern, central, tidewater, southern and valley/mountain regions of Virginia. Portions of the driving tours are also designated as Virginia Scenic Byways.

Several historic sites in the driving tours also relate to rail and river transportation, as all available methods of surface transportation were used to transport supplies to Civil War troops. Virginia Civil War Trails also include bicycle and pedestrian facilities through historic town centers and state and national battlefield parks.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS

The Virginia Civil War Trails have become one of the nation's premier heritage tourism destinations, generating new economic activity in all regions of the state, particularly in rural areas. Eighty percent of the trails are located in rural settings, attracting tourists to previously unvisited areas. Traffic counters and visitor center questionnaires suggest that over 80,000 people explore the Virginia Civil War Trails each year. On average, a visitor spends \$66 per person per day, amounting to more than \$5.2 million each year.

The popularity of the Virginia Civil War Trails has helped build community pride and support for local historic preservation efforts. More than 190 sites featured on the trail had never been interpreted before becoming a part of the Virginia Civil War Trails. Bowman adds, "TE funding played a key role in the development of this program, providing the funds needed to get the ball rolling and put the infrastructure in place. The program is successful today because of TE funding and the partnerships it encourages." The Virginia Civil War Trails project is an excellent example of how a state can use transportation funds to help communities preserve and interpret their past through heritage tourism.

FUNDING

Total Project Cost: \$2,762,790

Federal TE: \$2,210,232

Non-federal Match: \$552,558

CONTACT

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