

SOUTHWEST TRAIL

Garland, Saline and Pulaski Counties, Arkansas

Connecting People, Communities and Economies for a Stronger Region

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Stretching from Little Rock to Hot Springs in Arkansas, the developing 65-mile Southwest Trail is serving as both an idyllic outdoor destination for the region of Garland, Saline and Pulaski counties—and a way to meet the diverse needs of the people, communities and economies across the project footprint.

When complete, the Southwest Trail will travel from Little Rock to Hot Springs, connecting multiple historic sites and tourist destinations along the way, including historic Little Rock Central High School and Hot Springs National Park. Part of the plans include a link to the 15-miles-plus Arkansas River Trail that will help create a seamless 153-mile system through five counties.

Project managers, which include the three counties, the City of Little Rock, the City of Hot Springs and Metroplan—the regional planning organization facilitating planning and construction of the trail—anticipate that it will help generate tens of thousands of visitors and millions of dollars in economic development annually. Tourism alone is expected to generate upwards of \$1.2 million a year and help sustain 27 jobs annually. Other expected benefits include better floodplain management and improved water quality, increased opportunities for physical activity and a new transportation resource for regional mobility.

Counties have raised \$6 million in local funds and secured several grants for key connections, and early estimates peg total construction costs to range from \$17 million to \$33 million. Without a major infusion of cash from the federal government or private foundations, the trail is expected to be built in segments, with the first segment in Pulaski county shovel ready within two years, and a final completion timeframe of about 10 years.¹ Additional funding would help accelerate completion to sooner realize the benefits.

“People are already anxious for this to get built,” said Daniel Lysk, president of the Friends of the Southwest Trail. “This is going to be a trail that everyone will be truly proud of and love.”



Junction Bridge along the Arkansas River Trail, part of the Southwest Trail | Photo by Scott Stark

CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

LEAD AUTHORITY:	Metroplan
TOTAL PROJECT COST:	\$33 million
FUNDING PLEDGED TO DATE:	\$6 million
FEDERAL:	\$0
STATE:	\$0
LOCAL:	\$6 million
SHOVEL-READY:	2 years or less
TYPE:	Rural, Suburban, Urban

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

JOB CREATION

An estimated \$26.6 million in construction expenditures supporting 320 direct jobs² from construction and 130 indirect jobs (e.g., from materials manufacturing); \$2 million in total tourism expenditures resulting in 27 induced jobs per year

HEALTH IMPACT

\$5 million per year in health-care cost reductions from 1,600 new exercisers

ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$22 million in property value increases from proximity to the trail; \$160,000 per year increase in property tax revenues; \$1.2 million in tourism spending from 20,000 new visitors; \$2.2 million in aggregate value to users each year from 1.2 million new uses³

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

The Southwest Trail will provide safe, affordable means of active transportation to existing and planned schools, commercial and employment centers, and neighborhoods in three counties.

SOURCES

¹ Natural Connections: Arkansas' Southwest Trail, *Rails to Trails*, Spring/Summer 2018, <https://www.railstotrails.org/trailblog/2018/november/29/arkansas-southwest-trail/>

² Estimated at 17 jobs per \$1 million spent, according to a study commissioned by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) on American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) job creation; jobs in terms of full-time equivalents

³ The Southwest Trail Corridor & Economic Impact Study (2015), https://www.littlerock.gov/media/1373/150724_southwest-trail_final-report.pdf