

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AUGUST 6, 2014

CONTACT:

Jake Lynch

Media Relations

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

202.974.5107

jake@railstotrails.org



BID FOR REUSE OF MISSOURI RAIL CORRIDOR GATHERS STEAM

Ameren considering proposal from trail org; would create unparalleled recreation asset

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and Missouri trails advocates launched a combined action this week to try to save a 145-mile segment of inactive rail corridor for conversion to a rail-trail and the possible future reactivation of rail service.

Converting the unused section of Rock Island Line corridor from Windsor to Beaufort into a rail-trail would bring into active public use a significant stretch of linear property that has not seen regular rail service since the 1980s.

“The opportunity to preserve an intact corridor of this length is incredibly rare,” says Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s President Keith Laughlin. “Because of its length and its location, this trail would create one of America’s primary destinations for bicycle tourism, providing a significant boost to Missouri’s economy.”

What has especially piqued the interest of recreation and tourism groups in Missouri and beyond is the corridor’s connection in Windsor to the iconic 237-mile Katy Trail.

Together, the two rail-trails would form the basis of a multi-use trail system stretching more than 500 miles across Missouri, ultimately connecting St. Louis and Kansas City.

“We have seen the kind of economic powerhouses that trails of this length become,” Laughlin says. “For Maryland and Pennsylvania, the 150-mile Great Allegheny Passage brings in an estimated \$40 million a year in direct spending by trail tourists. It is not hard to imagine the visitors and benefits a trail system spanning the state of Missouri would bring. Missouri would be added to the ‘bucket list’ of cyclists everywhere.”

As the nation’s largest trails organization, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy stepped in last to week to facilitate the purchase of the corridor on behalf of Missouri Rock Island Trail,

Inc. and the Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation, in a bid involving the current owners of the corridor, Ameren, a utility company, and Missouri State Parks.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's bid for the property stipulates that the corridor must be "railbanked," a legal term that means the corridor is held by a public agency or qualifying community organization and made available for public use as a trail. Railbanking a corridor also facilitates the reactivation of rail service if it is economically feasible in the future by ensuring the corridor isn't sold and broken up into pieces.

Following the completion of railbanking and the completion of the purchase from Ameren, the property would be donated to Missouri State Parks, securing the corridor in public ownership for development as a multi-use trail.

Ameren is currently considering a number of bids for the corridor. The company is expected to make a decision by the end of next week.

"The important first step is preserving the corridor," Laughlin says. "If the future includes a ribbon cutting on a fantastic new trail, the bulk of the credit will go to those local activists, including the Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. and the Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation, who envisioned all the many benefits that such a trail would bring to their communities."

Missouri State Parks Director William J. Bryan this week confirmed the department's intention to accept ownership of the trail with a view to future trail development.

"Public assets like rail-trails are only possible with the vision and support of agencies like Missouri State Parks," Laughlin says. "By committing to turn the corridor into a rail-trail they are doing a tremendous service to the people of Missouri, and should be congratulated on their support of conservation and recreation tourism in this state."

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

For more information visit www.railstotrails.org.