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## **State Capitol Steps Spill Over with Support for Rock Island Trail**

*Public officials and business owners from towns along the 144-mile corridor rallied on Aug. 11 to demonstrate enthusiasm for the Rock Island Trail project*

**JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.**—Hundreds of community residents including mayors, city administrators and business owners gathered outside the state Capitol on Friday to put a face on those who will benefit when the 144-mile Rock Island rail line is converted to a cross-state walking and biking trail.

The rally was organized by Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc., the Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, but the overwhelming community support for the trail was the true motivator.

“Communities, companies and individuals want to partner with Missouri State Parks to get the trail operational as fast as possible,” said Greg Harris, executive director of the Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. “What’s at stake for central Missouri and these towns is tangible—tourism, business opportunities, community improvement and recreation. All of us who live along this corridor know the potential that the trail offers and we are ready for it to be built.”

Public officials, including mayors from Stover, Versailles, Owensville and Gerald and administrators and aldermen from Windsor, Pleasant Hill, Belle and Union, urged the trail would bring value to their towns both in terms of tourism and revenue—putting them on the map as hubs that connect to the famed Katy Trail. Business owners and residents from towns along the route, including the owners of Chilhowee Corner Store, Leeton General Store and Bluebird Outdoor Adventures in Cole Camp, spoke about the opportunities the trail would bring.

“We’ve seen firsthand the power of rail-trails in Missouri—the Katy Trail is beloved and generates millions in annual revenue for the state,” said Liz Thorstensen, vice president of trail development at Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. “The Rock Island Trail has the potential to amplify those benefits, connecting 23 communities and creating new tourism and economic development opportunities for thousands of Missourians. This is a once-in-history chance to build something truly iconic.”

The Department of Natural Resources is considering whether or not to accept Ameren’s donation of the 144-mile stretch of the former Rock Island rail line, which has been inoperable since the

1980s. The state is currently collecting public comments about the project and will make a decision by February of 2018.

*Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 160,000 members and supporters, 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. Connect with RTC at [railstotrails.org](http://railstotrails.org) and @railstotrails on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).*

*Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. is a 501c3 nonprofit coalition of citizens and communities with a mission to preserve the Rock Island corridor and build a hiking and biking trail. Learn more at [rockislandtrail.org](http://rockislandtrail.org).*

*The Missouri Bicycle and Pedestrian Federation is a statewide coalition of bicyclists, walkers, runners, trail organizations and related businesses which represents over 50,000 Missourians and advocates on behalf of the state's two million ardent bicyclists and six million walkers. Learn more at [MoBikeFed.org](http://MoBikeFed.org).*