



Rails-with-Trails

Tracks and Trails Can Share the Corridor

Many people are familiar with the concept of rail-trails – multi-use trails developed on former railroad corridors. As thousands of rail-trails continue to increase in popularity across the county, communities are looking for other innovative ways of securing land for safe, popular, and effective trail development. Rails-with-trails are trails that are adjacent to or within an active railroad corridor. The rails-*WITH*-trails concept provides even more opportunities for the creation of trail systems that enhance local transportation systems by offering safe, attractive community connections.

Currently, there are over 150 rails-with-trails in the US totaling more than 1400 miles, of which some or all of the right-of-way is shared.

The two most comprehensive resources on rails-with-trails were developed to address common concerns and highlight best practices used in this unique type of trail development. The reports include safety statistics, design guidelines, recommendations for acquisition methods and liability protection, sample legal agreements, and case studies. Use these documents to learn more about successful rails-with-trails and to determine the best strategies for negotiating with the railroad or other managing agency:

- ***Rails-with-Trails: Design, Management, and Operating Characteristics of 61 Trails Along Active Rail Lines.*** Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.
- ***Rails-with-Trails: Lessons Learned.*** Alta Planning + Design and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Rail-with-trail: Any shared-use path that is located on or directly adjacent to an active railroad or light-rail corridor.

BENEFITS OF RAIL-WITH-TRAIL

Rail-trails are an excellent reuse of abandoned or former railroad corridors, often transforming once derelict properties into vibrant community assets. Rails-*WITH*-trails offer the same health, transportation, and environmental benefits by utilizing existing resources when there may be limited appropriate space for multi-use trails. Rails-with-trails enhance local transportation networks by providing non-motorized local connections that are sometimes preferable to on-road bike lanes or sidewalks located on congested, dangerous roadways.

Rails-with-trails benefit railroads too. In most cases, the trail manager purchases a use easement or license from the railroad, providing financial compensation and in some cases reducing liability responsibility and cost to the railroad. In some instances, a fully developed trail will also provide the railroad with improved access for maintenance vehicles.



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CONCERNS

Safety is probably the biggest concern when considering a rail-with-trail project. Both railroads and potential trail managers may be apprehensive about placing a public trail close to an active railroad track, fearing of increase risk of accidents along the corridor. However, many successful rails-with-trails across the country stand as a testament to the ability of trains and trails to coexist. For a list of several rail-with-trails and associated information such as cost of acquisition or lease agreement, characteristics of train traffic, railroad companies, and safety records, see RTC's *Rails-with-Trails Report*.

The perception that large railroad companies have deep financial pockets forces the issues of trail insurance and liability to the forefront of negotiations with the railroad for trail development. Fortunately, various levels of protection are available to railroads and trail managers. State Recreational Use Statutes (RUS) provide landowners with special protection from liability. The States of Maine and Virginia amended their Recreational Use Statute to include the same degree of protection to owners of railroad and utility corridors. Some railroads may require trail managers to accept full liability when negotiating a rail-with-trail agreement, also called indemnification. For specific agreement language, see "Liability exposure reduction options" on p. 45 of *Rails-with-Trails: Lessons Learned*.

Large Class I railroads may be hesitant to enter into a rail-with-trail agreements because a trail would mean a loss of right-of-way width and a perceived potential for lawsuits. However, smaller railroad operations may be more willing to negotiate an agreement, especially transit or tourist trains that are typically owned and managed by governmental entities whose mission it is to serve the public interest.

Environmental contaminants may also be a concern and should be addressed when developing a feasibility study. (see "Steps in Feasibility Study" p.32 of *Rails-with-Trails: Lessons Learned*).



Quick Facts from RTC's *Rail-with-Trail Report*

Longest Rail-with-Trail: **57 miles** (Railroad Trail, MI)
Shortest: **0.4 miles** (Libba Cotton Bikepath, NC)
Fastest Train: **150 mph** (Southwest Corridor Park Trail, MA)
Slowest Train: **5 mph** (West Orange Trail, FL)
Closest to tracks: **2 feet** (Railroad Trail, MI)
Most trains: **9 per hour** (Illinois Prairie Path, IL)

Visit Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's website to learn more about rails-with-trails and to access the latest resources including:

- Rail-with-trail **image libraries**
- Statewide **rail-with-trail advocacy** updates
- New **rail-with-trail projects**
- Rail-with-trail **statistics**

RTC's Trail Building Toolbox

www.railstotrails.org/ourWork/trailBuilding/toolbox
>> click on "Rail-with-Trail" <<

Questions? Contact Kelly Pack at kellyp@railstotrails.org