

Rails to Trails

Interurban Greenway begins Phase I of its bicycle path

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Old L&N Train Depot

LA GRANGE, Ky. (May 2003) – New life is being pumped into what was once a major mode of transportation in Oldham County. Six decades after being abandoned, the process has begun to revamp the old Interurban railways trail, which ran from La Grange to Louisville.

This huge undertaking is the premiere project of the nonprofit group, Greenways for Oldham County. Greenways was organized in 1997 by individuals who wanted to preserve open spaces and create a network of recreational areas in the county.

In place of the rails that once churned their path through the countryside, Greenways members now hope bicyclists and walkers will pound down the same pathway. When completed, the 13-mile, multi-use Interurban Greenways Trail would provide access to soccer fields, the Oldham County YMCA, schools, subdivisions, parks and recreational facilities.

Phase I of the three-part project is currently under contract, said Greenways member Paul Clinton. Carrollton-based Ohio Valley Asphalt Co. will lay a 10-foot wide asphalt pathway from the old L&N train depot on East Main Street to Sixth Street.

Greenways received a Transportation Equity Act-21 grant for the funding of Phase I, which covered the purchase and renovation of the depot, and a paved parking lot at the depot. This stretch of trail covers 0.6 miles and is expected to be completed this summer. Part of the depot has been set aside for trail users, said Clinton. It will contain restrooms

and trail information. The Oldham County Chamber of Commerce plans to move its offices into the depot, along with the Oldham County Economic Development Authority. Greenways applied for a Recreational Trails grant for Phase II funding but was turned down. Applying for grant funding can be an involved process, with a variety of reasons for grant rejection. After a certain length of time has elapsed, Greenways can re-apply for Phase II funding.

Plans were recently unveiled for the second and third segments of the trail. Phase II will be approximately two miles in length, with a proposed cost of \$268,400. The trail will begin at Wendell Moore Park, continue on to Buckner and connect the YMCA near I-71 with the soccer fields along Hwy. 146, plus 54 acres near the Oldham County Country Club.

Phase III would add a 1.6 section of trail through Crestwood at a projected cost of \$209,300. Beginning at the Hwy. 329 Bypass, it would extend to Glen Arm Road. The Crestwood section would join with a seven-foot-wide sidewalk to be built by the South Oldham Lions Club, beginning at the Dairy Queen in Crestwood and continuing on to the Hwy. 329 Bypass. The Lions Club built a mile-long sidewalk 20 years ago along Hwy. 146 from Ash Avenue in Pewee Valley to Floydsburg Road in Crestwood. Federal transportation enhancement money provides the main funding for this trail. This is money generated by a gas tax and sent to the state. Greenways is seeking \$382,260 of this money, with grants to be announced in fall 2003.

Because the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet cannot give money to private, nonprofit organizations, this money is funded to cities and towns for projects with community wide benefits. Greenways needed the sponsorship of Oldham County Fiscal Court to apply for funding for the estimated overall cost of \$477,700. With the state contributing 80 percent, a 20 percent match would have to be split between Greenways and Fiscal Court, with each contributing \$47,770.

Magistrate Duane Murner said that Fiscal Court is unanimous in supporting Greenways, having given money to the group several times in the past. Although this project may not be the court's first priority, Murner said Fiscal Court is committed to putting the project into this year's budget.

"Our budget is tight, as is all governmental budgets," he said. If the project were to become a major burden on Fiscal Court, "we would have to slow down on it," he said. Murner considers the project an asset to the county. It provides more opportunities for enjoying the county, and will possibly be connected to a 225-acre conservation park to be created on Hwy. 524 E. in the northeastern part of Oldham County, he said.

Sarah Moser is the newest community planner hired by the Oldham County Planning and Zoning Commission to act as a representative for the county in overseeing construction of Phase I. Moser holds a five-year degree in landscape architecture with the University of Kentucky. In her previous role as a design consultant, she has had experience in private practice, implementing such landscaping upgrades as urban plazas and streetscapes.

Greenways is still collecting information for its master plan, said Moser. The plan lays out a guide for the county, said Joann Green. Green is president of CBA Inc., a landscaping architectural firm in Indianapolis. She has been hired by the county as a consultant for Phase I and the master plan.

The plan provides "a sense of where the trail needs to go," said Green, who has also been

filling out grant applications, in addition to providing the master plan. The plan drafts opportunities for connector trails, she said, since right-of-way issues are still being ironed out.

On June 12 at 7 p.m. at the John Black Community Center in Buckner, a public information session will be held, said Moser. Attendees will be able to view the completed draft and express their interest in this project.

Once a master plan is in effect, Greenways will hire someone to conduct deed research, said Clinton. This information will be used to identify parcels of land along the proposed route, easements and right-of-ways. Three parcels of land have been donated to the project, said Clinton, and the trail will run in front of Yew Dell Gardens in Crestwood.

A preliminary deed research has revealed that TARC holds ownership of the some of the old electric rail, said Clinton.

Moser said this project is “a new way for the community to connect. It will bring people outdoors.” She said it might eventually become a regional link to other counties, such as Jefferson and Henry counties.

Jefferson County, Ky., has completed a project similar to the Greenways Interurban Trail in the construction of its Louisville Riverwalk, which borders the Ohio River in downtown Louisville. As another example, Clinton cited a 3.7-mile trail recently built in Clermont, Ky., at the Bernheim Forest and Arboretum. This hike and bike trail was built along an old roadbed with \$200,000 in federal grant money.

When completed, the Greenways Interurban Trail will become part of the Oldham County Parks System. The county retains ownership of the trail and its amenities.

Greenways president Judy Hall said, “We never planned on being property owners.” Her vision of the project is for the trail to be shared by the public and to promote a healthier lifestyle among adults and children.

Green said that what makes this project unique is “the diverse environment that it extends through, connecting three communities.” It provides the “opportunity to celebrate the heritage of the original interurban route.”

Moser said that in using the depot as one of many trailheads, the project is enhancing one aspect of a piece of La Grange’s history.

“This project has taken a long time and they still have a long way to go,” said Murner. “I admire their tenacity.”

Kentucky Rail Trail Statistics

- Number of open trails: 5
- Miles of open trails: 11
- Number of trail projects: 17
- Miles of trail projects: 160
- Average visit is 2 hours in length..
- Men and women comprise an equal percentage of users
- 88 percent of nearby landowners use the trail an average of 85 days
- The longest trail in Kentucky is the seven-mile River Walk in Louisville, with two miles of rail trail.

Source: Kentucky Rails to Trails Council website at www.kyrailtrail.org