

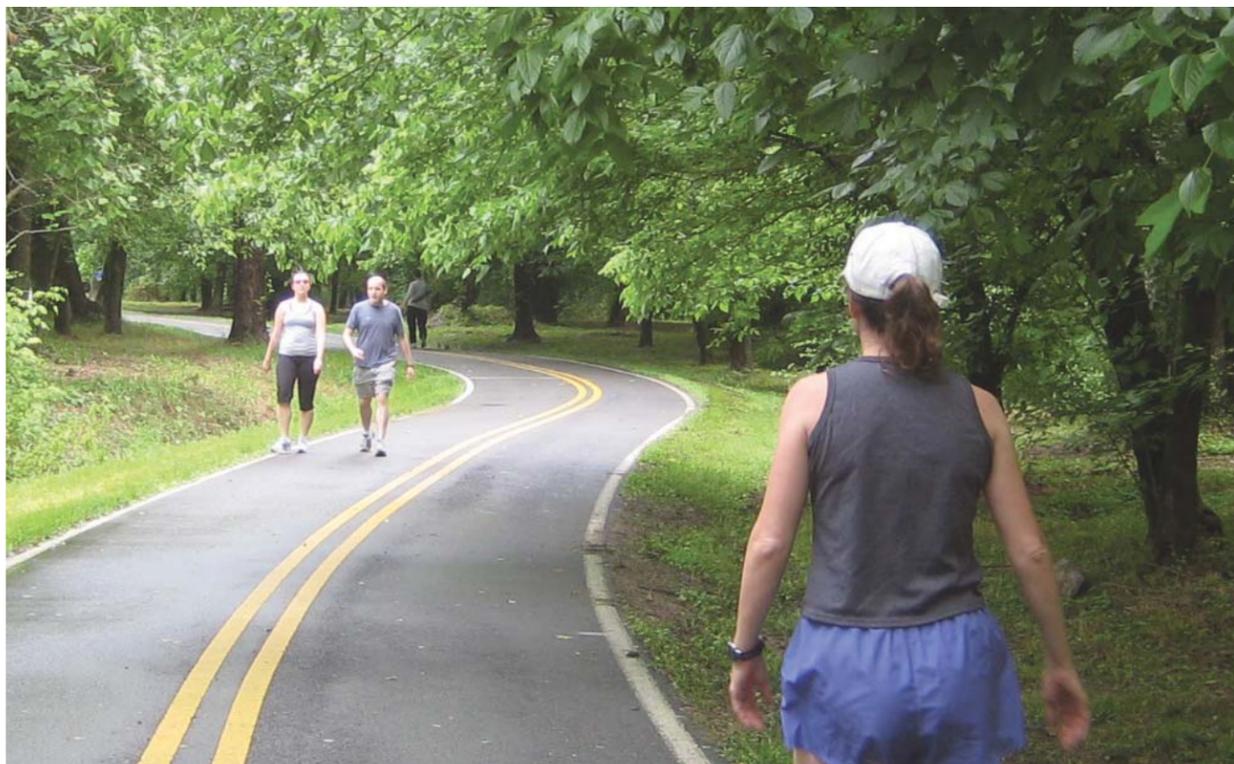
SUMMARY

PROJECT FOCUS

The **Freshwater Land Trust** partnered with the **Jefferson County Health Action Partnership** in 2010 to develop a **Greenway and Path Master Plan** for the people of Jefferson County, Alabama to promote healthy lifestyles for the area, alternate modes of transportation and protect the region's waterways.

The purpose of the plan is to provide a tool to enable the development of a regional greenway system that connects communities throughout Jefferson County with an active transportation network. Over 200 hundred miles of greenways and paths along six main corridors have been identified through this effort. More than 600 miles of connector greenways and paths have been identified beyond the main corridors. With implementation of the network, people will be able to walk and ride bicycles in their everyday activities for health and enjoyment. The greenway and path network will serve transportation and recreation needs as well as improve quality of life and sustain economic growth.

This plan is designed for communities and municipalities to use the information provided in the application process for funding, final design, and construction. It will be a supplement to the **Active Transportation Plan** of the **2035 Regional Transportation Plan** of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB). Any specific greenway or path has a greater chance for funding if viewed in the context of an overall network with meaningful connectivity.



The planning process, named **'Our One Mile'**, speaks to the importance of communities working together in using this information to build their miles of the greenway and path network. Many people, agencies, organizations, and special interest groups have been a part of this work defining a comprehensive network that will best service residents and visitors of Jefferson County and the region beyond. A list of those involved, the design team and interested parties is included at the end of this document.

During the Our One Mile (OOM) master planning process a competition was held to name the Greenway and Path system. The name chosen is **The RED ROCK Ridge and Valley Trail System** and will be referred to as **The RED ROCK** for the remainder of the document. Our One Mile was the process of developing a greenway and path network master plan. **The RED ROCK** is the name of the network and speaks to the culture and character of our geographic area. There are many greenways and paths that make up the network.

PLANNING PROCESS

The basic principles or core values of the greenway master plan are based on collaboration, community self-awareness, connectivity, and respect for the land and landowners. To obtain community input the team held over forty stakeholder meetings at locations all over the county to discuss connectivity, important destinations, and what prospective greenways and paths should look like. At the stakeholder meetings, participants had the opportunity to illustrate greenway path locations and recommendations on paper maps. Also, an online interactive map was hosted on the **Freshwater Land Trust** web site for those who were unable to attend a stakeholder meeting. (All Geographic Information Systems (GIS) maps used in the master plan were provided by the **Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, City of Birmingham and Jefferson County**.)



The following comments were common to all meetings by stakeholders:

- Create a system that incorporates walking and bicycle riding in everyday activities
- Improve safety of walking and riding, because streets are dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists
- Provide pedestrian connectivity between important destinations such as schools, shops, work places and central business districts
- Provide accessibility for all communities
- Provide access to natural areas, creeks and rivers for all
- Create a sense of place and sense of local culture

With these comments, it became evident that the people of Jefferson County want a greenway network that is safe and accessible. The network should incorporate walking and bicycle riding into their everyday activities with meaningful connections and with a sense of place.

With valuable input from stakeholders, the design team held workshops for analysis and field visits to ground truth all potential greenways and paths. Leaders and advocates for connectivity were invited to the workshops for another layer of stakeholder input beyond the original meetings. The result is a master plan that will function as a “roadmap” for developing a meaningful greenway and path network that addresses health, transportation, recreation, and natural space needs of Jefferson County.

Additional rounds of stakeholder meetings were held to obtain feedback on the plan and to gain consensus on strategies for implementation. **The Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham** has been included in the process for future adoption of the master plan in the **Long Range Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** making all Paths eligible for **Surface Transportation Program (STPBH)** and **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds**.



VISIONS AND GOALS

The vision for a Greenway Master Plan for Jefferson County, Alabama was derived from the citizens, community leaders, and agencies, such as the Jefferson County Department of Health, the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham and the Freshwater Land Trust. The goal was for the greenway network to improve the overall quality of life through improving health, the economy, transportation and the environment. Input from the thirty-six stakeholder meetings, the interactive web site map and design workshops have contributed to forming the defining attributes of what this network should be with the following guidelines as goals:

- **Develop a meaningful network of greenways and paths that links people with important destinations both locally and regionally**
- **Provide a safe environment for people to walk and cycle**
- **Stimulate economic growth via new jobs in construction, increased tourism, new industries related to active use, decreased healthcare costs and improved property values and the recruitment of new businesses to our community**
- **Protect and enhance our natural resources including water systems, air quality and green space**
- **Provide alternate options for active transportation**
- **Develop a better sense of community that enhances safety in our neighborhoods**
- **Enhance the sense of history and character for each area**

BENEFITS OF A GREENWAY AND PATH NETWORK

There are few developments or infrastructure improvement projects that affect a community in as positive a manner or improve the quality of life in so many different ways as does a well developed greenway network. The environment, health of the residents, education, sense of community, transportation choices and economy all improve dramatically with the implementation of a comprehensive greenway network.

We only have to look at the City of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the renaissance it has experienced in the last twenty years due to a commitment to greenways, parks and development which have improved the quality of life for its citizens. Those changes were due to private and public partnerships working together to redefine the community and change the downtown area from a depressed area to one of the most attractive destinations in the southeast. Mayor Ron Littlefield commented that *“Nothing has helped our community more financially and improving the quality of life than our commitment to greenways and parks”*.

The Medical Mile in Little Rock, Arkansas is only one dazzling piece of the Arkansas River Path. A fourteen mile loop, with an additional ten mile extension to Pinnacle Mountain State Park, will eventually connect with the 225-mile Ouachita Wilderness Trail.

Little Rock’s Mayor Jim Dailey commented, *“Over 24 key tourism destinations, including 5,000+ acres of federal, state, and local parkland will be connected by the Trails. Developers use the trail’s proximity to sell high-rise condominiums, housing*

and commercial developments. From the perspective of the City of Little Rock, the Path is an economic, health, and environmental conservation stimulator.”

The following sections explore how Jefferson County, Alabama can benefit from the implementation of a comprehensive greenway network in each of the listed categories.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

With full community support and with appropriate implementation, greenways and paths will provide tangible economic benefits for communities throughout the county. Quality of life and the county’s attractiveness to businesses will improve as well within the context of ever increasing competition among cities for business and recruitment. The Greenway Master Plan takes into consideration the specific economic benefits for the county.

In the greater Birmingham area, the cost of owning and operating a car is 28 percent of the median household income. (1) Households are currently faced with a difficult choice: devote an extraordinary amount of their household budget to transportation or an extraordinary amount of time to their commutes. Both choices result in a disinvestment in the local community and make less money available for higher quality food, housing and healthcare. **The RED ROCK** will improve this condition.

Many communities nationwide are using bicycle and walking facilities to revitalize businesses and bring new economic life to downtown areas.

Studies by the Trust for Public Land show that investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, parks and green space improve nearby property values, increase retail and service sector purchases, promote tourism and enhance the quality of life. All these factors are important considerations for companies looking to establish new businesses or expand in the area. The Birmingham Business Alliance recognizes the value of outdoor recreation as a way to promote economic investment in its Birmingham Blueprint Plan, addressing growth for the region. (2)

It is expected, based on comparable networks in the southeast that for each dollar invested in greenway expansion there is another ten dollars in positive economic impact. (3) The on-going annual economic benefits will exceed the amount of the initial investment in the form of service sector business, retail, real estate, healthcare benefits, environmental, aesthetic, and quality of life advantages that will add substantial value to the plan, in the following ways:



Tourism

Paths and greenways bring new visitors and tourists to an area and inject new dollars into the local economy. Connectivity between tourist destinations will increase the numbers of visitors, translating into longer and more beneficial stays. Tourist dollars can help sustain a greenway network and provide needed dollars for the creation of new infrastructure and long term maintenance of the greenway network.

Jefferson County is rich in its historical significance related to the industrial revolution, and the Civil Rights Movement as well as biodiversity and natural resources. These very interests are responsible for a 56 percent increase in Alabama visitors between 2002 and 2006. (4)

We are in an age where park space and greenways need to generate income to be sustainable. Tourism provides a revenue source that not only benefits local business, but funds green space expansion and maintenance through increased tax revenue as well.

The **Great Allegheny Passage**, or the **GAP**, is a 125 mile greenway traveling through Maryland and Pennsylvania. The region experienced 45 million additional dollars in 2008 injected into the local economy when the last link in the project was completed. This financial return represents growth during a recession and impacted the creation of \$7.8 million in jobs. The daily path users spent an average \$13.00 a day and extended Path users that spent the night, spent an average \$98.00 per day. These expenditures can be seen in lodging, meals, equipment, transportation and clothing. (5)

Enhanced Business through Expansion and New Economic Development Activity

Greenways and paths offer amenities that attract business to communities and make the metropolitan area competitive with other metro areas as outdoor amenities become an increasingly attractive draw. They also offer year-round recreational opportunities that promote potential and existing business communities and enterprises. Greenways and paths create a draw and add to the growth of young professionals choosing to reside in or relocate to the area. Many people choose a place to live based on the elements that contribute to the quality of life.

A user study was conducted along the Little Miami Scenic Path in Ohio where 150,000 users were recorded with typically \$13.50 spent per trip. The direct economic impact is \$2.1 million. Add the \$277.00 per person annually for equipment, clothes and accessories, the number rises to \$41 million each year. (6) Documented growth has occurred, for example, in small businesses along Paths and green space. The people along the Chief Ladiga Path in East Alabama are looking at a similar economic impact for their communities. The City of Piedmont has seen an increase in their revenue dollars by encouraging businesses and services that complement the Chief Ladiga Path and made it an economic driver for their community. (7)



The seven towns of Tarrant, Gardendale, Fultondale, Brookside, Graysville, Adamsville, Cardif; along with the Freshwater Land Trust, Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham and CAWACO Resource and Development Council, have joined forces in the Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership in an effort to promote the economic benefits of parks and green space for these communities. The Partnership envisions a seamless network of interconnected greenways, Paths and blueways along all 28 miles of Five Mile Creek Corridor. (8)

Enhanced Property Values and Local Property Tax Revenues

There is significant research that supports increased property values that result from the addition or expansion of nearby greenways and paths. These results include an increase in residential property values by making adjacent neighborhoods more attractive, thus increasing the prices people are willing to pay. This can be seen in local developments like Ross Bridge, Mt. Laurel, Blount Springs and The Preserve.

The Carolina Thread Path in the North and South Carolina has been projected to see a 4% increase in value in surrounding property. The same can be said for the GAP in Pennsylvania and other paths around the country. Chattanooga, Tennessee has seen increased value in the past two decades due in part from the Riverfront Park and the city-wide greenway system. Increased value of property translates into increased revenue to local government from property taxes. This revenue stream can assist in compensating for bonds issued or other resources utilized to finance the proposed greenways and paths.

Increased Construction

The actual construction of the proposed greenways and paths, as well as all other construction related opportunities, will result in increased economic activity, employment and wages. The schematic *The RED ROCK* Master Plan proposes over two-hundred and fifty miles of greenways with an average construction cost of \$500,000.00 per mile. During a 15 year period this could generate over \$50 million of direct and indirect economic activity. (9) Based on estimates from other similar projects, construction of this size in the Birmingham region could generate over five-hundred and sixty new jobs.

Health Care Costs

Greenways and paths reduce air pollution and contribute to reducing health care costs in the community by offering an active community environment and providing an opportunity to exercise, which lowers obesity rates associated with heart, diabetes and lung disease among users. With the improved healthy lifestyles, a reduction in health costs will incur by the way of insurance dollars spent with a preventative approach to well being. Jefferson County can greatly benefit from improved lifestyles considering Alabama is rated the second most obese state in the Nation and Jefferson County is among some of the highest obesity rates in the state.

Alternative Transportation and Mobility Benefits

Greenways and paths provide alternative modes of transportation, including bicycling and walking, as well as connectivity to public transportation that is affordable. These modes will contribute to minimizing transportation cost and increasing access to facilities and services.

A comprehensive network of greenways and paths offers an alternative for transportation in daily activity. In Portland, Oregon, 6% of the population uses bicycles as a primary mode for transportation to work and 14% as a secondary mode. The cost of all bicycle improvements throughout the city in the past two decades, approximately \$50 million, was the same as one mile of the highway system. Dramatic savings examples like Oregon are the norm when looking at the economic benefits of Greenway systems throughout the United States. The lower rates of driving in the Portland area resulted in 1.1 billion in annual household out-of-pocket savings, much of which is returned to the local economy. (10)

Considering these numbers and that the average median household in the county is spending 28% of their income on transportation, the savings made feasible by a greenway network that complements an affordable and dependable bus transit system will be substantial. The quality of life of many of our citizens will improve with increased flexibility of spending dollars and a workforce with greater mobility.

HEALTH

A large amount of documentation exists that determines physical activity reduces cardiovascular disease, lowers the risk of cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Studies also show that people are more active in communities that integrate facilities that are conducive to walking and cycling. It logically follows that communities with greater access to greenways and paths will have healthier populations. This is a trend happening across the country with marked improvements in health seen in Atlanta, Chattanooga, Little Rock and Greenville S.C.

Even small increases in light to moderate activity, such as daily bike rides or 30-minute walks, can produce measurable benefits among those who are least active. (11)

Improvement in health for the public is one reason why the health community in Little Rock raised 2.1 million dollars for their greenway system and why Jefferson County Health Department has pursued a similar course of action with the Health Action Partnership.

ENVIRONMENT

Greenways can take the form of linear parks or open spaces. Greenways are often located near waterways and within floodplains. This undeveloped open space provides a buffer along waterways that protects water quality and reduces the heat island effect of developed areas. Open spaces along waterways also provide areas that can absorb flood waters, as originally planned (for the Birmingham metropolitan area) by the Olmsted Brothers, in the early 1900s.

Those recommendations went largely unheeded and the flood plain was developed, resulting in flood problems years later with damage to public health and safety as well as negative economic impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods. Millions of dollars have been spent by the Corps of Engineers and Federal Emergency Management Administration to purchase flood prone developed property along a number of streams to create the very open space that was previously recommended by the Olmsted Plan. These open spaces also provide wildlife habitat, educational venues for all ages to experience nature and green oases for enjoyment not always available in our cities.

The Federal Highway Administration published a case study in 1993 titled *The Environmental Benefits of Bicycling and Walking in the United States*. The study expressed that "...bicycle-riding and walking do not contribute to the environmental damage inherent in extracting, transporting, processing and burning petroleum or other fossil fuels. "The FHWA also reports that Americans are willing to walk to destinations up to two miles away and bicycle up to five miles. Given that nearly half our trips are for a distance of five miles or less, encouraging bicycling and walking as transportation option can reduce (3):

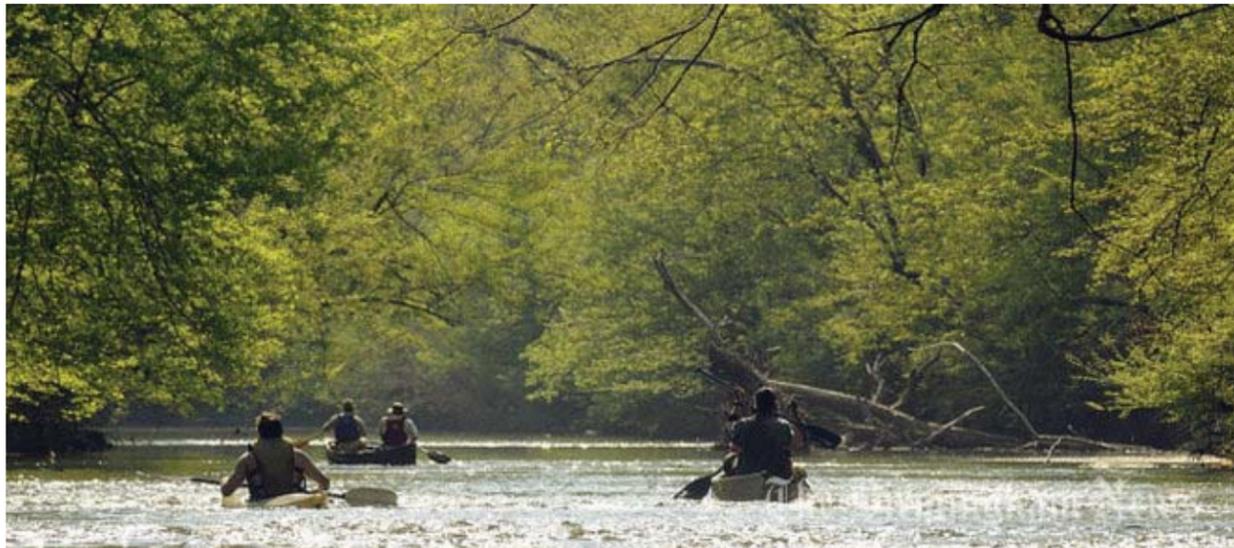
- Fossil Fuel Use
- CO2 (carbon dioxide), CO (carbon monoxide) Nox (nitrogen oxides) and VOCs (volatile organic compounds) emissions
- The amount of storm water pollution and runoff
- Vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- Heat island effect
- The loss of wildlife areas

Reducing the number of our vehicular trips can dramatically affect the amount of emissions in our county. Considering that Jefferson County is in non-attainment for National Ambient Air Quality status by the Environmental Protection Agency, it should be a goal for the public to improve our air quality which affects public health, the economy and our quality of life. Access to open spaces and waterways also improves awareness of our environment and encourages good stewardship of our surroundings and natural resources.

COMMUNITY

Fredrick Law Olmsted, father of landscape architecture and designer of most of the major urban public parks in the United States by the early 1900s was drawn to the notion that the creation of public green space could serve social engineering purposes such as providing respite from teeming cities and opportunities for people of varied backgrounds to mix and mingle creating a greater sense of community. He described park and greenway work as a “democratic development of the highest significance”. (12) This is evident in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the downtown was redefined from a dangerous blighted area, in the last few decades, to a safe and attractive place for people to live and work and in that effort became a world class tourist destination.

The more people have opportunities to recreate and travel along greenways and paths, the greater the opportunity for social interaction and the development of a stronger sense of community. The more people on the ground, the safer the neighborhood with more eyes to deter crime and encourage positive outdoor activity. With a stronger sense of community comes improvement with quality of life and all the benefits associated with positive change.



Chapter Footnotes:

1. <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
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5. Path User Survey and Economic Impact, Rails to Paths Conservancy Northeast Regional Office March 2009.
6. Little Miami Scenic Path Users Study, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments
7. Anniston Star: Business as Usual: Georgia’s Silver Comet illustrates possibilities of the Chief Ladiga Path, August 2009
8. “Leading Change for Healthy Communities and Successful Land Re-use”, by Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry of the US Department of Health and Human Services, November 2010.
9. Carolina Thread Path, by Alta Planning and Design
10. Portland’s Green Dividend, Joe Copyright, 2007, <http://www.ceosforcities.org/files/pdg%20final.pdf>
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12. Olmsted’s Jewels in Our Midst, Justin Martin, New York Times, Jan.21, 2012.

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