



Building our trail. Connecting our communities.

www.fireflytrail.com / fireflytrail@gmail.com

What is the Firefly Trail?

It is a planned, partially constructed multi-purpose path for pedestrian, bicycle and other non-motorized uses that will stretch 39 miles from Athens to Union Point, Georgia. It will be built on or near the historic corridor of the Athens Branch of the Georgia Railroad. One mile is open and nine more are in progress.

What is a rail-trail?

Rail-trails are paths that follow the routes of abandoned or otherwise out-of-use railroads. They provide a safe, off-road resource for walking, running, bicycling, skating and other non-motorized uses. Being wide, level (railroads need gentle grades), and connected to communities, they are perfectly suited to people of all ages and abilities, providing tangible benefits for health, safety, historic preservation, active transportation, community pride, and economic development. Rail-trails may be paved, made of crushed rock, or even left as dirt. They range from half a mile to more than 240 miles long.

Which communities will the Firefly Trail connect?

Its northern terminus will be on East Broad Street in Athens and its southern terminus will be in downtown Union Point. The trail will pass through three counties – Athens-Clarke, Greene and Oglethorpe – and connect, from north to south, Athens, Winterville, Arnoldsville, Crawford, Stephens, Maxeys, Hutchins, Woodville and Union Point. It will also connect numerous businesses, churches, parks and schools to nearby neighborhoods, creating safe routes for active transportation.

What benefits do trails provide?

Trails are safe places for exercise and active transportation, so they help people of all ages combat cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and other effects of inactive lifestyles. By separating bike and pedestrian traffic from roadways, trails can improve safety. Trails bring foot and bicycle traffic, which is good for business, and long trails often attract significant tourism. Trails can be resources for historic preservation and education, as well as corridors for nature. Trails

tend to reduce crime in the areas they serve and increase nearby property values. They help the poor by making car-free transportation safer and more comfortable. Ultimately, they make communities more attractive places to live and work, which helps recruit and retain investment in new businesses, industries and residents.

What is the status of trail development?

Athens-Clarke County has completed a 0.8-mile segment of the Firefly Trail from East Broad Street to Old Winterville Road, including bridges over the North Oconee River and Peter Street. Athens-Clarke County voters in 2017 approved a Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax that will provide \$16.7 million toward creating the trail in Winterville, crossing Trail Creek, and building as much of the trail as possible between Athens and Winterville.

Also, Maxeys and Union Point have secured \$100,000 recreational trails grants to build Model Miles, and Firefly Trail Inc., has raised more than \$200,000 to help them and other communities provide local matching funds. Riverview Foundation, W&A Engineering, and the National Park Service have come on board as major sponsors, and FTI has recruited a part-time Trail Development Coordinator to spearhead work on building the trail. The Georgia Department of Transportation commissioned an economic impact analysis in 2016 that estimated the trail, when completed, will attract about 1.1 million users per year with a total economic impact of \$14.7 million annually.

What is the history of the Athens Branch?

The Georgia Railroad, Georgia's first state-chartered railroad, opened in 1841 to connect Athens to Augusta by way of Union Point.

Originally, it terminated in Athens at Carr's Hill, but in 1888, bridges were added over Trail Creek and the North Oconee River to bring trains into downtown. The Athens Branch was abandoned in 1984 by CSX Transportation, which finished removing rails and other structures by 2000. Public outcry over the demolition of the Trail Creek trestle, made famous by the band REM, led Athens-Clarke County to buy the trestle.

Is the corridor intact?

No. While some portions may still be owned by CSX, most of the corridor has reverted to original/adjoining landowners. For some portions, ownership is unclear. We have heard from a number of property owners who are eager to help make the trail a reality. Unfortunately, some property owners are opposed to the trail.

Is opposition unusual for a trail project?

No, in fact, it occurs with just about every trail ever developed, including such iconic paths as the Appalachian Trail.

How do you plan to handle opposition?

Much of the opposition to trails grows out of fear of crime and loss of privacy. The experience of hundreds of other communities is that trails tend to reduce crime and increase safety. Generally, impacts on privacy are lower than landowners fear and often can be mitigated through vegetative barriers, fencing, and signage. Addressing opposition requires listening, open communication, and patience.

What about crossing Trail Creek?

Athens-Clarke County is now accepting Requests for Proposals for ways to get the trail across the valley at railroad grade. Options may include renovating the existing structure, building a new bridge and stabilizing the railroad viaduct, or demolishing and building new. In the meantime, trail users will continue to descend to an existing Greenway bridge over the creek.

How much will it cost to build the Firefly Trail?

Cost depends on how much of the corridor is donated, what surface material is used (concrete,

asphalt, or crushed cinders) and how much grading is required. The hope in ACC is that \$16.7 in TSPLOST funds will complete much of the trail through Winterville. In rural areas, the per-mile cost likely will be much lower. The 2016 economic impact study estimates total construction cost will be about \$24 million.

Where will the money come from to build it?

Lots of sources over time. Most long trails are built in segments as funding becomes available. Funding for the first ACC segments came from Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes and federal and state grants. Possible future sources include private donations; transportation sales taxes; special purpose local option sales taxes; gifts and grants from private businesses, industries and foundations; public fundraisers, and a variety of state and federal programs.

Are other trails proposed for this area?

Yes. The big vision is that the Firefly Trail will be the first part of a network of trails serving the entire region, including Watkinsville, Madison and Greensboro. Also, Athens-Clarke County is in the process of improving its bicycle and sidewalk infrastructure and expanding its Greenway network (a Greenway extension that is accessible from the Firefly Trail's Old Winterville Road trailhead opened in 2018).

How can I help?

We need volunteers, advocates and donors! For more information, please visit our website or send us an email. Firefly Trail Inc., is a 501(c)(3) public charity, so donations are tax-exempt. Thank you for your support!

www.fireflytrail.com
fireflytrail@gmail.com

