



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

This FAQ provides key information about the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan. We encourage you to stay involved and share your thoughts as we move forward with this exciting initiative. Together, we can help create a trail that benefits our community for years to come.

### Trail Planning Basics

#### What is the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan?

The Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan is an initiative to explore the potential of converting 18-miles of inactive rail corridor within Durham County into a multi-use trail. The trail extends over 8 miles into Person County to the City of Roxboro, creating a 26-mile trail network overall. The plan will explore the development of the trail by examining factors such as design, costs, environmental impacts, and community needs. It aims to determine how the trail could provide a safe, sustainable space for active transportation, enhance regional connectivity, and offer access to green space.

#### What is a rail trail? Are there other examples of these types of trails?

A rail trail is a type of path developed on a former railroad corridor, repurposing unused rail corridors into paths for activities like walking, bicycling, running, and sometimes horseback riding. They are typically flat, making them ideal for outdoor activities. Many rail trails exist in the US, including:

- [American Tobacco Trail](#): A 22-mile rail trail which crosses through Durham, Wake, and Chatham counties. The trail was developed and opened in segments from 2000 to 2014 and now serves as a multi-use path for cyclists, walkers, and equestrians.
- [The Great Allegheny Passage](#): A rail trail spanning approximately 150 miles from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Cumberland, Maryland and routing through the Appalachian Mountains.
- [Virginia Creeper Trail](#): A 34-mile rail trail that crosses through the Appalachian Highlands. It is known for its beauty and scenic route.
- [Capital Crescent Trail](#): An 11-mile rail trail which connects Bethesda Maryland, to Washington, D.C. which passes through numerous parks and urban areas.

#### What is the history of the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Corridor?

The rail line between Durham and Person counties has a deep historical connection to regional transportation, commerce, and industry, particularly for agricultural goods like tobacco and textiles. Initially established in 1890 for these purposes, the Lynchburg & Durham Railroad operated train services until 1983.

#### Who owns the trail corridor?

The rail corridor is currently owned by Norfolk Southern Railway and is private property.

## **What are the potential benefits of the trail?**

The Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail plan offers many potential benefits to the community. It aims to improve physical and mental health by providing a safe path away from busy streets, access to nature, and sustainable transportation options. The plan seeks to support local businesses by increasing foot traffic and patronage nearby the trail. Additionally, it aims to share the area's history and local stories, fostering community connection. Through ongoing community input, the plan is designed to ensure the trail meets residents' needs and enhances life in the area.

## **What prompted the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan and why is it being prioritized?**

The rail line from Downtown Durham to Roxboro, once a vital freight route for agricultural goods like tobacco and textiles, ceased operations in the early 1980s. Since then, turning the unused rail line into a trail has been a long-standing goal of the community. The Little River Corridor Open Space Plan, adopted in 1991, identified the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail as an ideal opportunity for a multi-use trail for hikers, bikers, and equestrians. Despite previous attempts by the City of Durham in the 1990s to purchase the corridor, Norfolk Southern, the current owner, was not interested in selling until recently.

However, the desire for this rail trail has remained strong in the community, with advocates continuing to push for this planning study and a future trail. Since the 1991 Little River Corridor Open Space Plan, several Durham County and City adopted plans have included the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail, highlighting its ongoing importance. These plans include the 2001 and 2011 Trails and Greenways Master Plan, the 2006 Durham County Capital Improvement Plan, and the 2023 Comprehensive Plan. The trail has been consistently prioritized within the community, with a focus on incorporating it into a regional greenway vision and emphasizing the need for alternative transportation options in both the City and County.

So, with the railway's recent interest in selling the corridor and the history of trail advocacy in Durham, the City of Durham and Durham County requested federal funding through the Triangle West Transportation Planning Organization and included matching funds in the FY24 budgets to fund this trail plan.

## **How is the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan being funded and what does it cost?**

The Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan is funded through the Triangle West Transportation Planning Organization's FY2025 work plan (also referred to as the [Unified Planning Work Program](#)). The total cost of the planning study is \$500,000. The Triangle West TPO Policy Board approved \$400,000 for this plan using Surface Transportation Block Grant - Direct Allocation (STBG-DA) federal funds that are available to Triangle West for planning studies. A local match of \$100,000 was required for use of these federal funds, which was split evenly between Durham County, City of Durham, and the East Coast Greenway Alliance.

As one of its functions, the Triangle West Transportation Planning Organization - which serves as the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) responsible for coordination of regional transportation planning for the western Triangle - administers planning studies of regional significance within its planning area. ([Click here](#) for information about Triangle West's planning area). Member jurisdictions of Triangle West may request federal funds that flow through the MPO to conduct planning studies, which require a local match. The Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan for Durham County was requested by Durham County and the City of Durham. Funding consideration for this study underwent a public comment period as part of Triangle West's requested FY2025 work program, which was approved by the Triangle West Policy Board.

Additional planning studies being conducted in Durham that are leveraging federal funds available through Triangle West include the [Reimagine Durham Freeway Study](#), the [Durham Bike + Walk Plan Update](#) and the [US 70 East Corridor Study](#).



## Who is leading the plan?

The plan is a collaborative effort led by five key organizations: Durham County, the City of Durham, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), the East Coast Greenway Alliance, and the Triangle West Transportation Planning Organization (formerly known as the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization).

In addition to these lead agencies, representatives from 12 community organizations and government agencies are providing guidance and oversight on the historical, cultural, and environmental aspects of the rail trail plan. Throughout the process, community-wide engagement will play an essential role in shaping the plan - ensuring it accurately reflects and addresses the needs and concerns of all residents.

## What will the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan review?

The planning study will:

- Conduct an inventory and assessment of the 18-mile inactive rail corridor, adjacent parcels, and potential trail linkages located within Durham County.
- Identify opportunities to link parks, schools, neighborhoods, and historic resources to the trail corridor and foster connections between communities via the rail trail.
- Collaborate with government agencies, community leaders, and the public to identify and respect the distinctive features of the trail corridor, including community destinations and the historical, cultural, and environmental highlights.
- Seek extensive community input to create a trail experience that honors the area's history, ensures accessibility for people of all ages and abilities, and enhances the quality of life of residents and visitors alike.
- Develop a trail concept plan that captures community interest and inspires a shared vision by incorporating compelling renderings, site master plans, 3D illustrations, and other visual elements to clearly convey recommendations and ideas.
- Provide clear strategies and a prioritization schedule for implementing the plan recommendations, a detailed phasing schedule, planning-level cost estimates, and guidance on trail operations, maintenance, and security.

## What is the timeline for the trail's development and how much would it cost?

The planning study is the first step in developing the trail, which will likely be built in phases, similar to the American Tobacco Trail. The study will outline strategies for phased development, provide cost estimates, and explore funding options, helping to shape the timeline for construction.

The funding for the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail will likely come from a mix of public and private sources, including local government budgets, state and federal grants and partnerships with nonprofits such as the East Coast Greenway Alliance. Costs will depend on factors like land acquisition, construction needs, amenities, and environmental considerations. As planning progresses, we'll refine the cost estimates, explore funding sources, and share this information back with the community.



## Regional Connectivity and Identity

### Was the rail corridor considered for other modes, such as light rail?

Currently, the corridor is not being considered for other transportation modes. The Durham County Transit Plan is the long-range vision plan for how the county's transit funding resources are spent to improve public transit. This corridor is not included in that plan as the priority is on other corridors with higher density population and employment centers and more existing transit ridership. In addition, the cost of light rail is very expensive and a project like this may not be financially feasible.

There are many transit services and improvements that are being funded in northern Durham County including the expansion of service on GoDurham Routes 4 and 9, bus stop improvements, a north Durham microtransit zone, and demand response/paratransit improvements for all residents of the County. Passenger rail service improvements on the existing Amtrak routes serving Durham are also under consideration.

### How will the trail name and branding be decided?

The naming and branding of the trail is a collaborative process, guided by input from both the community and a dedicated Trail Identity Committee. The committee will play an important role in reviewing ideas, ensuring the name and branding reflect the identity of the communities the trail will serve within both Durham and Person Counties.

We will also be seeking community input throughout the engagement process, including public workshops and surveys. This will help ensure the name and branding resonate with local residents. Ultimately, our goal is to create an identity that reflects the trail's unique history, culture, and natural characteristics, while also providing a sense of pride and ownership for those who will use it.

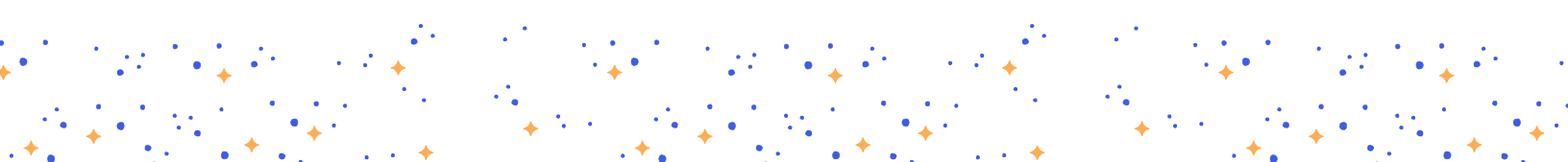
Please stay tuned for upcoming opportunities to get involved and share your thoughts.

## Common Concerns

### How will the trail planning address safety?

While safety concerns are common with new trails and public spaces, studies show that trails can reduce crime in communities by increasing visibility, attracting more pedestrians and cyclists to an area, and boosting natural surveillance. As more people utilize the trail, it helps create a safer, more welcoming environment. The transformation of unused rail corridors into trails has been linked with crime reduction due to increased foot-traffic and trail usage, reduced vehicle-related injuries among cyclists and pedestrians as they provide paths separated from car traffic, and other health and well-being benefits due to improved physical activity. Our team is also committed to learning more about specific safety concerns along the trail to best mitigate these through planning and design. This could look like additional fencing, privacy screening, lighting, regular security and monitoring along the trail, etc.

The "[Social Justice as it Pertains to Safety on the American Tobacco Trail](#)" study by NC Rails-to-Trails explored how trail design and community involvement impact crime and safety perceptions. After a 2011 crime spike, the study used community data and public input to assess safety. It found low crime on the trail overall, but perceptions of safety were impacted by areas like the Fayetteville Street intersection, which had higher crime and design which could contribute to this increase. The study emphasizes community input and suggests improvements like better lighting and natural surveillance to enhance safety.



## **What impact will the trail have on the environment?**

The Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail Plan aims to respect, protect, and enhance the natural environment. The trail will improve access to green spaces and provide opportunities for environmental education and conservation. By repurposing an abandoned rail corridor, the trail will help reduce environmental degradation and promote sustainability. The trail development will also adhere to watershed overlay district requirements and environmental standards within the Unified Development Ordinance to ensure it meets local environmental protections.

## **Will eminent domain be used during trail development?**

At this stage, eminent domain is not a necessity or expected strategy for the Durham-to-Roxboro Rail Trail since land access beyond or outside the old rail line is not anticipated at this time. The goal is to develop the trail along already-existing corridors, such as the old rail line, which has been unused for the last few decades and is owned by the railroad. However, as we continue to gather input and finalize the plans, we'll evaluate the best available ways to make the trail work for everyone while respecting property rights.

If any land acquisition is required, the focus will be on voluntary agreements with property owners. We want to work collaboratively with the community to ensure the trail is developed in a way that benefits everyone without necessitating court proceedings or causing unnecessary disruption.

## **How will the plan address nearby resident's concerns about hunting season? Can it be closed during certain times?**

We recognize hunting season is a concern and are exploring ways to address it without closing the trail. Options include creating buffer zones with vegetation or additional space between the trail and hunting areas, and using fencing in key spots to define boundaries. Clear signage could also be used to inform users about hunting seasons and nearby hunting zones. We are committed to working with the community to find a solution that ensures safety for everyone.

## **Additional Resources**

### **What are some examples of other similar rail trails that we can learn from?**

In [this video produced for the Ecusta Trail](#), which is being developed from Hendersonville to Brevard, NC, residents and stakeholders from communities that have developed similar rail trails share their experiences of how the trail has impacted their communities.

The [Rails to Trails Conservancy \(RTC\)](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to converting unused rail corridors into public trails. Their website offers resources to learn more about rail trails, including the Great American Rail-Trail, and features TrailLink, a platform to explore nearby trails. RTC advocates for trail development and provides tools on building, funding, and enjoying these trails, which connect communities and promote active transportation. Visit their site to learn more.

*FAQ Updated on 6/3/25*