

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FALL 2004

Introduction

Trails are one of the most popular and highly desirable recreational resources in communities of all sizes throughout the country. In addition to providing a safe and healthful alternative mode of transportation by creating pedestrian connections between community resources, trails also provide valuable recreational opportunities. The citizens of Cobb County recognize the benefits a local trail system would offer their community. They also see an opportunity to provide a critical regional pedestrian link between the North Metro Atlanta area trail systems and the Silver Comet Trail. In response to the citizen's desires to develop a connected trail system, and in keeping with their mission to investigate and develop alternative modes of transportation, Cobb County Department of Transportation (DOT) hired Jordan, Jones & Goulding to conduct the Chattahoochee River Trail Feasibility Study and Conceptual Master Plan.

The Chattahoochee River Trail Feasibility Study and Conceptual Master Plan is a comprehensive document that addresses the environmental, cultural, and regulatory opportunities and limitations of developing a trail system through Cobb County between the City of Roswell and Paces Mill Road. The Study investigates the various aspects of successfully planning, designing and constructing both transportation and recreational trails systems¹. It also addresses operations and maintenance, phasing, and funding of this trail system. The process used in this study was intended to maximize public input from local residents, business owners and related agencies in an effort to provide a comprehensive plan that would address a broad range of needs and desires while recognizing the constraints. The overall goal of the study was to determine if such a community trail was in fact a feasible objective.

Findings

Natural Opportunities and Limitations

A majority of the land directly adjacent to the River is owned and managed by the National Park Service (NPS) as the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA). The CRNRA consists of several discontinuous individual Park Units which have abundant wildlife and vegetation as well as internal systems of soft surface hiking and biking trails. The Park Units also create a natural scenic corridor through Cobb County and provide access to pristine natural landscapes in the middle of a dense suburban environment. Tributaries of the Chattahoochee, such as Sope Creek and Rottenwood Creek, provide opportunities for recreation areas and serve as natural buffers between subdivisions and neighborhoods. However, the rocky bluffs, steep slopes and low lying areas prone to flooding that are adjacent to the river present physical limitations to trail construction. However, the NPS land is the only publicly owned property along this proposed route that presents a viable route for a trail corridor outside the right-of-way of the public road network. A vast majority of the land outside the NPS property is already developed as commercial, residential or transportation.

Cultural Opportunities and Limitations

The area within the study corridor primarily consists of single family residential neighborhoods and National Park Service property. Other land uses include multifamily units, commercial corridors, and offices. There are numerous community facilities such as churches, shopping plazas, and schools. The public transportation in this area consists of several Cobb Community Transit routes (CCT) that run along roadways. The available combination of land uses provides an opportunity to link residences with nearby shopping centers, community centers, and places of work via a properly planned trail system. However, these various land uses are separated by roadways with insufficient sidewalks in some areas. The existing layout of roads and subdivisions severely limits the possibility of a continuous and safe trail system through the study area. The existing primary connections in this area are limited to areas along main roads and the River Corridor. Dangerous intersections, such as Johnson Ferry Road and Lower Roswell Road, with several lanes of roadway and heavy traffic, affect the location and crossings of the proposed trail system routes. These intense intersections present high risk safety issues for recreational trail crossings.

Additionally, there are several existing trails within and adjacent to the NPS Units. The Cochran Shoals Trail and Columns Drive shared-use path, are heavily used trails. The majority of NPS units are not interconnected by any system of designated pedestrian or bicycle routes.

Historical Opportunities and Limitations

There are numerous cultural and historical sites within the area including Native American relic sites and more recent sites containing artifacts and structures from the 1800's and early 1900's. Among these sites are mill ruins along Sope Creek and Rottenwood Creek. These areas provide educational opportunities for visitors and points of interest for trails users. However, due to the sensitive nature of these sites, any construction or development of trails near or adjacent to the historic locations will require extensive permitting and coordination with NPS to ensure that there will be no adverse affects to the ruins.

Regulatory Issues

The area surrounding the Chattahoochee River falls under the jurisdictions of several regulatory agencies. Local governments, including Cobb County, the City of Smyrna and the City of Atlanta regulate general site planning, land disturbance, and building permitting. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is a regional agency which has jurisdiction over much of the metro-Atlanta area. They oversee all development within a 2000' buffer on each side of the Chattahoochee in accordance with the Metropolitan River Protection Act (M.R.P.A.) which was developed to protect the River. The M.R.P.A regulations manage the type and amount of development within the 2000' buffer, prohibit construction of impervious surfaces within a 150' buffer, and provide a 50' non-disturbed vegetative buffer along the River's banks. Exceptions to these requirements are areas that were developed prior to the enactment 1973 M.R.P.A. act. Provisions for direct public access, which must be perpendicular to the River are accommodated by the Act. The

Department of Natural Resources regulates all river and stream crossings within the state, and oversees state mandated erosion control regulations. Any potential wetland disturbance requires coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers.

The National Park Service has strict regulations on any new construction within the park limits. They also have regulatory jurisdiction over the waters of the Chattahoochee River. As a Federal agency, NPS requires that a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) study be performed before any new construction can take place. This may be in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), an Environmental Assessment (EA), or a Categorical Exclusion (CE), depending upon the nature of the proposed project. In addition, the CRNRA currently does not allow for paved trails within the Park Units and limits bicycle use to selected soft surface trails within the Cochran Shoals and Sope Creek Units.

Costs

Hard surface, multi-use transportation trails along existing roadways are the most costly because of their impact on existing structures that may need to be demolished, relocated or rebuilt. Roadside trails also require drainage improvements and upgrades as well as right-of-way and construction easement acquisition. Trails constructed over utility easements or along natural undeveloped drainage corridors do not require as much acquisition and reconstruction costs, but can have increased costs for surface stabilization and grading. Asphalt trails are less expensive to construct than concrete trails, but have higher long-term maintenance costs. Concrete trails are more expensive to install, but are more durable and require less maintenance.

Off-road, soft surface recreational trails are the least expensive to construct, but typically have the highest on-going maintenance and operations costs and fewer user types. Additional costs will be associated with the environmental and historical impact studies that will need to be completed prior to implementation of trails within the NPS Units. However these costs are expected to be minimal in comparison to the overall construction costs.

Agency Interview Input

The agencies interviewed for this study recognize the need for a connective trail system through Cobb County between the Silver Comet and the Roswell River Walk. They feel that the trail system should minimize environmental impact, with limited grading and runoff into existing rivers and streams. The Trust for Public Land, City of Roswell, Cumberland Community Improvement District (CID), and Sandy Springs Revitalization, Inc. are all actively pursuing the development of trails along the Chattahoochee River Corridor and feel that a trail system through Cobb County would be a critical link in the whole system. The agencies agree that it is critical for the Cobb/Chattahoochee River Trail to connect to the adjacent trail systems. The agencies also see the trail system as an opportunity to preserve additional areas of land, while raising awareness of the existing natural and cultural assets along the Chattahoochee River. The sewer and water agencies are receptive to placement of trails along their existing easements. Some of the agencies interviewed had differing opinions on where the trail system should be located, but all

agree that the planning, design and construction of the trail system should strive for minimal environmental impact. NPS supports linking the various Park Units together and supports recreation uses along trails within their parks. However, they do not support the use of impervious surfaces, new areas for bicycle access, or areas of new development within their park boundaries.

Public Comments and Concerns

During the public meetings, various trail routes and design options were presented for consideration. The majority of the residents and stakeholders who attended the public meetings expressed support for the idea of developing a trail system through Cobb County. There was a general sentiment that the existing pedestrian infrastructure is inadequate. Participants expressed concerns about the impact a trail system might have on public safety and private property values. Many commented that the recreational and transportation uses should be separated. They wanted right-of-way acquisition kept to a minimum, if used at all. The participants felt that a trail along Lower Roswell Road between Johnson Ferry Road and Terrell Mill Road was unnecessary, because of the existing sidewalk facilities, and the East Cobb Roswell Road Trail.

There was a general support for the NPS policy of prohibiting hard-surface trails and limiting bicycle use within the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area. There were many concerns about the potential impact of a trail system on the environment and natural character of the Park Units in this area. Most people felt that a soft surface trail system would have less impact on the environment and would be more compatible with the character and mission of the CRNRA.

Many participants were very concerned about the Columns Drive area because of the existing conflicts and periodic accidents between pedestrian and bicycle user groups, automobile traffic, and residents along the road. However, despite the existing discontent with the present state of the existing shared use path, there was concerted resistance to any redesign of this area for fear of exacerbating the existing problems. There were a variety of people who wanted to bypass Columns Drive altogether with a new trail system, or have the existing path completely eliminated.

Additional comments included:

- Prepare additional studies that illustrate the anticipated use of these trails.
- Develop a comprehensive trail network
- Where possible, separate bicycles and pedestrians
- Provide for adequate maintenance of trails
- Where possible, provide rest stop facilities
- Incorporate an educational component for school groups

Final Recommendations

The findings outlined above indicate that a continuous hard surface multi-use trail system adjacent to the Chattahoochee River, as originally envisioned by Cobb DOT, is not feasible. The regulatory restrictions, citizen opposition, and current land ownership situation do not permit a continuous trail of this type along the river in Cobb County. However, because of the increasing demand for trails as well as the need for a critical link between regional trail systems, it is recommended that the County pursue an alternate plan for a trail system in this area. This study identifies two different trail systems that address different user demands and more effectively respond to the environmental, cultural, regulatory, and financial constraints. The two trail systems are:

1. Multi-use route that follows the public right-of-way along the major roadways that traverse between the developments within Cobb County.
2. Recreational route that utilizes the NPS land and creates a corridor with connecting units between the various NPS units.

Multi-Use Trail Route (Refer to Map A)

The first system route is a multi-use trail system that will primarily serve as an alternative mode of transportation. The trail system will follow existing roadways and utilize and connect existing and proposed trails within the area. The trail system will be comprised of 10' wide concrete trails, and in some areas a combination of bike lanes and sidewalks. It will be ADA accessible. The trail system will connect from the City of Roswell (and points beyond), through to the City of Atlanta, Marietta, and points west. The route also accesses various residential, commercial and office areas, providing for local connections within the study area. Amenities will include trailheads and restrooms along the route. Extensive coordination with local homeowners and businesses will be necessary as right-of-way acquisition will need to occur along the route.

Multi Use Trail Route Description

- The trail system starts at a bridge crossing over Willeo Creek and runs along the south side of Lower Roswell Road past Gold Branch, towards Johnson Ferry Road. The proposed trail is 10' wide and made of concrete and is accompanied by a 5' wide landscape strip. A separate trail bridge will span between the Cobb and Fulton Counties.
- The multi-use trail route continues as a 10' wide concrete trail with a 5' wide landscape strip along Lower Roswell Road to Johnson Ferry Road, where it ties into the proposed East Cobb Trail on the west side of Johnson Ferry. At this intersection, trail users could follow the East Cobb Trail route north, or travel south along Johnson Ferry Road and connect to the recreational trail system. An alternate to crossing Johnson Ferry at the Lower Roswell Road intersection, a large and potentially hazardous intersection, would be to travel south along an 8' wide section of trail along the east side of Johnson Ferry and cross at the Powers Road intersection to the East Cobb Trail on the west side of Johnson Ferry Road and continue.

- The main multi-use trail route continues west along the East Cobb Trail. The proposed East Cobb Trail turns south and follows Old Canton Road to Lower Roswell Road and Terrell Mill Road.
- The proposed East Cobb Trail continues south along Terrell Mill Road towards Paper Mill Road. At Paper Mill Road, a new section of bike lanes and sidewalks continue south on both sides of Terrell Mill Road to the intersection of Delk Road.
- At this point, the route turns west along Delk Road and continues as bike lanes and sidewalks on to the intersection of Powers Ferry Road.
- The route passes Powers Ferry Road and Delk Road and continues along Delk Road to Bentley Road as bike lanes and sidewalk.
- At Bentley Road, the route turns south and continues as a 10' wide multi-use trail on the west side of the road.
- At the intersection of Bentley and Terrell Mill Roads, the trail system crosses to the south side of Terrell Mill and continues as a 10' wide multi-use trail west to the proposed trailhead of the Rottenwood Creek Trail.
- At this point the multi-use trail system ties into Rottenwood Creek Trail and follows the route to Windy Ridge Parkway as a 10' wide trail.
- At Windy Ridge, the trail system ramps up to road level and turns west onto Windy Ridge and follows as a 10' wide multi-use trail along the north side of the roadway to Cobb Parkway.
- The final section of multi-use route follows southwest along Windy Ridge as a 10' wide trail and crosses Cobb Parkway to connect to Cumberland Blvd. It follows Cumberland Blvd south and turns west onto the proposed Spring Road Trail at Spring Road to Sports Ave.
- It follows along the Spring Road Trail to the Cumberland Connector Trail on Cumberland Boulevard.
- The Cumberland Connector follows Cumberland Boulevard south to Cobb Parkway, and continues south along Cobb Parkway to the Paces Mill Unit as a 10' wide multi-use trail.

Multi-Use Trail Route Phasing & Costs

Included in the costs are estimates for land acquisition, design & engineering services, construction of trail and trail amenities, drainage, and utility relocation. High Priority Sections are those to be implemented within 1-5 years; Medium Priority Phases are those to be implemented in 5-10 years, and Low Priority Phases are those to be implemented in over 10 years. Costs were not provided for a sidewalk/bike lane option along Lower Roswell Road between Johnson Ferry Road and Old Canton Road; this option is not recommended by JIG. Another option that was considered was the elimination of the segment of trail along Lower Roswell Road between Willeo Creek and Johnson Ferry Road. In this case, the trail segment would be replaced by proposed East Cobb Trail along Roswell Road from the Roswell border to Johnson Ferry Road. While this would be a less expensive option, it is not recommended because it would fail to connect the Roswell trail system along the Chattahoochee River, the Gold Branch Unit, or the communities along Lower Roswell Road, into this regional trail system.

Figure A: Phasing Plan and Estimated Cost of Transportation Multi-Use Trail System

Priority	Phase No.	Name	Facility Type	Estimate of Costs
High	1	Bentley Road and Terrell Mill Road from Delk Road to Programmed Rottenwood Creek Trail	10' Wide Multi-Use Trail	\$ 1,869,100
High	2a	Lower Roswell Road : From Willeo Creek to near Johnson Ferry Road	10' Wide Multi-Use Trail	\$ 2,887,060
High	2b	Timber Ridge Road from Lower Roswell To Jacksons Bluff	5' Wide Sidewalk	\$ 427,100
High	3	Windy Ridge and Cumberland Blvd from programmed Rottenwood Creek Trail to Spring Road	10' Wide Multi-Use Trail	\$ 3,251,200
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Medium	1	Delk Road: From Powers Ferry Road to Bentley Road	Bike Lanes & Sidewalks	\$ 2,095,700
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Low	1	Terrell Mill Road and Delk Road : From Paper Mill Road to Powers Ferry Road	Bike Lanes & Sidewalks	\$ 4,413,700
Low	2a	Johnson Ferry Road: From Lower Roswell Road to Powers Road	8' Wide Multi-Use Trail	\$1,178,700
Low	2b	Johnson Ferry Road Trail Bridge Overpass	Trail Bridge	\$ 3,174,800
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Total				\$ 19,297,360

Recreational Trail Route (Refer to Map B)

The second system route is the recreational trail route. It will consist of additions to the existing recreational trail networks found within the National Park Service. The new trails will consist of 4'-6' wide soft surface and boardwalk hiking trails for pedestrians only. No bikes or rollerbladers will be permitted on these trails. Most of these trails will not be ADA accessible because of the trail surface and natural terrain of the land. The trails will provide River access, cultural and educational opportunities, and recreational opportunities within and along the NPS Units. They will also be largely isolated from traffic conflicts and will provide users with a more serene recreational experience. Because this route would be primarily recreational in intended use, Cobb DOT would not be responsible for implementation of this trail system. Development and implementation of the trail system would fall under the jurisdiction of the Cobb County Parks and Recreation. This department will need to recognize that ongoing coordination with the National Park Service will be necessary to ensure that the construction, maintenance and operation of these trails comply with NPS standards.

Recreational Trail Route Description

The proposed recreational trail connects a series of existing soft-surface trails along the River to create a continuous trail network that stretches from the Paces Mill Unit in the south, to the Hyde Farm in the north.

- The Paces Mill Unit contains a dirt trail that begins at the parking lot just off Cobb Parkway and winds its way north to Rottenwood Creek.
- An existing wood floored metal bridge crosses the creek and connects the Paces Mill Unit to the West Palisades Unit. The dirt trail continues north along Rottenwood Creek through the West Palisades Unit, under I-285 to Interstate North Parkway.
- At this point a connection trail is proposed within the I-285 right-of-way that would travel up the creek bank as a boardwalk ramp to an existing sidewalk on the north side of Interstate North Parkway.
- The trail route continues as a sidewalk east along Interstate North Parkway to Powers Ferry Road. A new sidewalk is proposed from Powers Ferry Road to the entrance of the Cochran Shoals Unit.
- At Cochran Shoals, the recreational trail heads north along the existing gravel trail to Columns Drive.
- The proposed route utilizes the existing shared-use asphalt paths along Columns Drive to Johnson Ferry Road.
- At Johnson Ferry Road, the route takes advantage of a future pedestrian underpass proposed by Georgia DOT as part of the Johnson Ferry Road widening project. This underpass will connect the Columns Drive path to the existing walking trails at the Johnson Ferry Unit North by means of a boardwalk bridge.
- The trails at Johnson Ferry Unit North continue as a 4'-6' wide soft surface trail and boardwalk along the River to the Hyde Farm².
- If the Hyde Farm is turned over to the National Park Service, JJG recommends that a small trailhead with a small shared parking lot be incorporated at this location.
- From the Hyde Farm, it is recommended that the recreational trail continue north as a 4'-6' wide soft surface trail and boardwalk to the potential pedestrian bridge at the Morgan Falls Dam, to connect to the Great Park at Morgan Falls in Sandy Springs.
- In addition, it is recommended that a 5'-6' wide sidewalk along Hyde Road be implemented to provide a pedestrian connection between the proposed multi-use and the recreational trails.

Recreational Trail Route Phasing and Costs

As with the estimate for the multi-route trail, included in the costs are estimates for land acquisition, design & engineering services, construction of trail and trail amenities, drainage, and utility relocation. High Priority Sections are those to be implemented within 1-5 years; Medium Priority Phases are those to be implemented in 5-10 years, and Low Priority Phases are those to be implemented in over 10 years.

Figure B: Phasing Plan and Estimated Cost of Recreational Trail System

Priority	Phase No.	Name	Facility Type	Estimate of Costs
High	1a	Interstate North Parkway from Cochran Shoals to Powers Ferry Road	Sidewalk	\$381,600
High	1b	Interstate North Parkway Connection to Programmed Rottenwood Creek Trail	Sidewalk & Boardwalk Ramp	\$172,900
Medium	1	Renovations: Johnson Ferry North	Soft Surface Trail & Boardwalk Ramp	\$677,700
Medium	2	Spur Trail to Potential Bridge at Morgan Falls and Great Park Connection	Soft Surface Trail & Boardwalk Ramp	\$321,600
Low	1a	Hyde Farm Trailhead and Trails	Soft Surface Trail & Boardwalk Ramp	\$252,100
Low	1b	Hyde Road from Lower Roswell to Hyde Farm	Sidewalk	\$679,100
Low	2	Boardwalk Spur Trail: Johnson Ferry Unit South	Boardwalk & Soft Surface Trail	\$206,500
Total				\$2,691,500

The phasing of these trail systems will become important as the plan is implemented. This study outlines a program to phase the implementation of the trails to efficiently connect existing and proposed trails. Because the funding and management will occur through different sources and agencies, the two trail routes can and should be developed simultaneously. This Master Plan is the first step in a long process of developing and constructing these trail routes which will provide new opportunities and options for transportation and recreation. A continuous network of trails will ultimately improve the quality of life for Cobb County residents and users that wish to take advantage of the new trail system.

¹*This study defines transportation trails as hard surface multi-use trails or a combination of bike lanes and sidewalks that are used primarily used for alternative transportation purposes. Recreational trails are soft surface trails which are primarily used by pedestrians for purposes of nature observation, exercise, education or leisure. Bicycles may use the recreational trails in designated areas where their use is currently permitted.*

²The remaining Hyde Farm property is approximately 90 acres of a family farm that has been in place since the early 20th century. There are farm fields, a farmhouse, and farm roads on the property which was in operation until 2004. Part of the original farm was donated to the National Park Service through the Trust for Public Land. The fate of the remaining land is still undecided. Cobb County and the National Park Service are actively pursuing acquiring the land for permanent preservation. The property is of natural, cultural, and educational significance as well as a scenic rural treasure within suburban Cobb County.