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DATE: July 31, 2007  
TO: Chairman and Members of the Board  
FROM: *[Signature]*  
R. E. Abolt, County Manager  
SUBJECT: Status of County Trail Projects

Ladies and gentlemen, recently Ms. Jo Hickson asked Commissioner Stone for a status report on subject projects. The enclosed from Pat Monahan and Robert Drewry gives you a summary of where we are on these important improvements. To say the least, constructing trails is as challenging as building roads. If you would like, we can set a special briefing for you on each and answer questions that might remain.

REA:fqr  
Attachment

- cc: Congressman Jack Kingston, One Diamond Causeway, Suite 7, Savannah, 31406
- Congressman John Barrow, 450 Mall Boulevard, Suite A, Savannah, 31406
- Ms. Jo Hickson, 3601 Abercorn Street, 31405
- A. G. Bungard, P.E., County Engineer
- Linda B. Cramer, Finance Director
- Thomas L. Thomson, Executive Director, MPC
- Robert W. Drewry, Public Works and Park Services
- Patrick C. Monahan, Assistant County Manager



I N T E R O F F I C E

RECEIVED

JUL 31 2007

CHATHAM COUNTY  
MANAGER'S OFFICE

Date: July 31, 2007

To: R.E. Abolt, County Manager

From: Pat Monahan, Asst. County Manager  
Robert W. Drewry, Director, Public Works & Parks Services

*PCMA 7/31/07*  
*for Robert Drewry*

Subject: Status of County Trail Projects

In follow up to the inquiry from Jo Hickson about the status of various county trail projects, which she also requested be sent to U.S. Representatives Jack Kingston and John Barrow, we provide the following (not knowing the Congressmen's knowledge of the projects, each update begins with a brief description of the project):

A. Truman Linear Park-Phase 2: The project provides a 6.3-mile trail which will link Daffin Park (77-acre park) to Lake Mayer/Bacon Park (750 acres). The project includes 4.8 miles of new trail and about 1.5 miles of widening the existing Julie Backus Smith Trail at Lake Mayer. Total project cost is estimated at \$2 million (updated from project estimate plus cost of pedestrian bridge over DeRenee Avenue). Through the assistance of Congressman Barrow, the federal government designated \$1,00,008 in funding as a high priority TEA-LU project.

As an update, Chatham County approved and executed a "Framework Agreement" with Georgia DOT for the project in August 2006. Recent work has focused on four main areas: 1) route alignment and property acquisition, 2) research on alternative trail surfaces and pedestrian bridge, 3) environmental approval and 4) engineering plans (construction document) for bidding and research on alternative trail surfaces.

A1. Route alignment: While the master plan provides a route, which generally follows publicly-owned property, the path requires approval/concurrence of four other units of government (Transit Authority, Hospital Authority, City of Savannah, Georgia Regional/DHR). According to research on SAGIS, the trail also adjoins 62 individual property owners. The trail must be surveyed and easement areas must be platted and recorded to avoid the problem which arose with Truman Linear Park, Phase 1 (i.e. private property encroachment).

In addition, the Board authorized staff to pursue acquisition of a significantly-sized parcel adjoining the trail. The area could be used for trail amenities; however, initial discussions with the property owner's broker indicate a wide difference between asking and selling price, which affects any final agreement.

- A2. Research on alternative trail surfaces and pedestrian bridge: While the master plan assumes use of asphalt as an 8-foot wide trail surface to accommodate pedestrians, bikers and roller bladders, an alternative surface may be available. Use of cold-based surface provides a similar hard-top surface as asphalt, and it has the added value of a coal-mix, which provides the advantage of a permeable surface which also filters. Long used in timber harvesting for logging trucks, the cold-based surface may be ideal for trails. Several staff will be attending an on-site inspection of a project in Screven County in August to determine the applicability of the surface material as well as learn more about how cold-base material compares to asphalt in cost, durability, maintenance and application time.

While the master plan proposed an at-grade crossing as the trail crosses DeRenne Avenue, the revised budget would fund a pedestrian bridge, a suggestion which arose during the public hearing process. This would allow a continuous crossing and avoid the heavy flow of traffic on DeRenne Avenue between Truman Parkway and Waters Avenue. The County Engineer's Office has helped to identify model pedestrian bridges and estimate cost.

- A3. A question remains whether the studies used for the Categorical Exclusion should be updated. The question remains pending GDOT's determination.
- A4. In reviewing the project, the County Engineer's Office concurs in the recommendation of a recordable plat for the easements and formal construction documents for bidding. While a "typical" section can be used for most of the trail surface, certain areas of the trail will require detailed sections. In addition, the specifications will need to detail location of fencing and additional landscape barriers as agreed upon during public hearings.

In summary, within the next 90 days, the County will be obtaining the services of a consulting engineer to complete the survey, plat the trail alignment, draft the necessary easements, and complete documents for bidding. By that time, GDOT will complete its determination whether any updates or additional "effects" evaluation will be necessary. The County also needs to determine funding options. While the County planned to commit \$500,000 from its "Open Space, Greenspace and Bikeways" Fund (2003-2008 SPLOST), at least an additional \$500,000 will be necessary to complete the project as planned (also pending award of construction contract).

B. S&O Canal Corridor/Triplett Park Connector and Trail Head: The project follows the historic 16-mile Savannah & Ogeechee Canal with a dual goal of a trail and historic preservation/restoration. The Master Plan divides the project into four sections, each with various phases, with a total cost of about \$9 million (updated). Recent work has focused on two major areas, which relate to available funding: 1) \$833,000, SPLOST 1998-2003; 2) TE Grant 000-00-072, \$200,000 for the Triplett Park connector and trailhead (another \$200,000 funded the Master Plan).

B1. By agreement dated October 1, 2005, the County entered into a contract with the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal Society to manage the SPLOST funds in accordance with the Master Plan. Similar to the approach with several other SPLOST projects, the County entered into the agreement to allow a non-profit organization to determine priorities in accordance within a development plan and utilize the time and knowledge of volunteers who would champion the project. Funds to the Canal Society are distributed on a project-by-project request, which staff reviews for consistency with the master plan and competitive pricing. Work has started progressing within the past several months as leadership within the Canal Society has stabilized. The Canal Society has contracted for about \$80,000 in work, including an archeological survey, and is obtaining engineering services for pedestrian bridge crossings.

Recent discussions with the Canal Society's Canal Master (i.e. president) have suggested ways to fast-track work, especially trail construction, because of the past delay. In addition, the City of Savannah Water & Sewer Bureau has indicated its willingness to assist in dual-purpose projects for extending sewer lines in areas parallel to the S&O Canal near Bush Road. As the City builds maintenance roads to access planned lift stations, the asphalt pathways can double as portions of the trail since they will be limited access.

B2. The Triplett Park connector and trail head projects are complete, which closed out TE Grant 000-00-072. The projects, totaling \$143,229, funded a connector trail from the lake at Tom Triplett to the S&O Canal Corridor and a portion of the trail head project.

C. S&O Canal: Besides the S&O Canal projects previously noted, the County received TE Grant 002-00-267 for \$200,000 (with \$120,000 county match) for design and construction of Phase 1, 2 of the S&O Canal Master Plan. The project includes survey, structural design and signage plan for Section I and II (Lock 5, 6), Phase 2-F (near Triplett Park).

C1. Work on lock stabilization cannot begin until GDOT reviews Chatham County's adherence to the Planned Development Process (environmental permits, property certification, utility impact). The approval from GDOT is pending.

D. Coastal Georgia Greenway: The Coastal Georgia Greenway provides a network of 450 miles of trails through Georgia's coastal counties (each county/municipality also sponsors projects within its boundaries for greenway connectors) as part of the national East Coast Greenway program to promote heritage and eco-tourism. The throughway of about 150 miles connects the six coastal counties. The Coastal Georgia Greenway Master Plan for Chatham County with 102 miles of trails would cost an estimated \$16 million (1997 base year). Chatham County serves as the sponsor county (management, grants) for the coastal region under a \$400,000 TE Grant and received a \$100,000 RAP grant from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for the routing study.

Recent work has focused on the following:

- D1. When the Board in mid-2004 took no action on an funding proposal for the Coastal Georgia Master Plan, a regional approach to funding became splintered according to the priorities of each county. Chatham County's priorities focused on the sections of 102 miles within its boundaries, especially the S&O Canal Corridor and Truman Linear Park, Phase 2.
- D2. The section of the trail from the Bamboo Farm on US 17 to the Bryan County line became selected first as the throughway section to protect the corridor from imminent development. Work to date includes two property acquisitions which will allow the trail to extend off US 17 along Basin Road from the Bamboo Farm, which would become a trail head. At old Basin Road, the trail will be limited access, including several timber bridges, to the Ogeechee River (Bryan County line). A third property acquisition is pending (Board authorized pursuing an offer), which would create County ownership of 1,500 acres of greenspace. Besides the benefits to the Coastal Georgia Greenway, the project also provides protection of environmentally-significant property and strengthens the County's commitment to preserve the corridor in partnership with Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield.

At the completion of property acquisitions, a master plan and development plan will be completed.

E. McQueen's Island Trail-Phase 2: The one-mile trail extends eastward from the entry to Fort Pulaski (its current terminus) to Lazaretto Creek. This would provide a connector between McQueen's Island Trail and the Tybee Trail under construction, or 11 miles from end to end. A second issue on Phase 2 relates to whether GDOT will fund a separate pedestrian/bike bridge or will just provide a designated bikeway lane on US 80. Project cost for Phase 2 (exclusive of bridge) would be \$840,000.

- E1. While Chatham County includes the project in its 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan, staff is working with the National Parks Service, the property owner, to include it as part of the U.S 80 widening project to Tybee Island.

F. McQueen's Island Trail-Phase 1 (Stabilization): The McQueen's Island Trail, Georgia's first rails-to-trails project, provides a six-mile trail from the entry to Fort Pulaski westward for six miles with a trail head near the mid-way point just east of the Bull River Bridge. Work to date has focused on a stabilization project of the existing trail. Project cost for Phase 1 would be \$300,000.

- F1. Chatham County closed the last mile of the trail on the western end because of severe erosion caused by high spring tides (and perhaps container ships in the Savannah River Channel). Also included in the 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan, the project calls for stabilizing the old railroad bed. Adding to the expense, work would be managed from the river because of the narrowness of the trail for large

vehicle/crane access. Fort Pulaski/National Park Service has applied for a federal grant, with concurrence by Chatham County, to repair the damaged area and construct additional wildlife interpretive signage.

G. Hutchinson Island Trail: Another project identified in the 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan, the trail would extend eastward from Grand Prize of America Avenue to the far tip of Hutchinson Island. The two-mile trail would be constructed of a pervious material which would adjoin property held in a conservation easement (Chatham County Salt Marsh Mitigation Area). The Hutchinson Island trail would cost about \$80,000.

G1. The project remains in planning pending completion of the Salt Marsh Mitigation Area, which will determine routing.

H. Whitemarsh Island Trail: Another project designated in the 2003-2008 SPLOST, the Whitemarsh Island trail would connect sidewalks on the School Board's Whitemarsh Island campus (two elementary schools, middle school) to the county-owned Demere tract, a 150-acre parcel held in a conservation easement. The Demere tract includes an interior system of trails, which have become overgrown since the YMCA Camp Venture vacated the property after the County's purchase. Once completed, the trail system would connect the school campus, the Islands Police Precinct, YMCA one-mile trail, Demere property to the bikepath on US 80 (with future link to McQueen's Island Trail and US 80 bikepath as part of the US 80 widening project). Based on the SPLOST funding, the project budget totals \$450,000.

H1. The initial phase from the schools to the Police Precinct remain in construction. The connector to the YCMA and Demere property are in planning pending final design, including needed timber bridges near marsh buffers.

In summary, the eight trail projects remain in various stages of work and with various funding needs for completion. Management of the individual projects falls within the responsibility of the Department of Public Works and Parks Services, County Engineer's Office and County Manager's Office. In each instance, the managing department tries to keep these trail projects moving forward, as funds allow, but in balance with other capital projects, too. Should any of the readers request more information, they can contact Asst. County Manager Pat Monahan.