

## **The Midtown North Greenline: A Rail-trail for Hollywood-Springdale**

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### **Introduction**

When looking at Memphis, Tennessee, compared to higher ranked major cities, one difference is clear to me. We have a severe lack of greenspaces, or parks. New York has Central Park, Boston has its “Emerald Necklace,” San Diego has almost 40, 000 acres of parks and our rival city of Nashville has a series of downtown greenways (The City of San Diego). According to a 2002 study by the Trust for Public Lands, Nashville spends \$55 per resident on parks and some cities, like San Jose, California, over \$300, while Memphis spends only \$42 (Thompson, 2007). There is a mostly citizen-lead movement gaining momentum that is the solution to Memphis’ greenspace problem: greenlines.

A greenway is a protected linear greenspace (Little, 1990). A greenline is a type of greenway in which an old railroad corridor has been converted into a trail. These trails may be used for recreation or transportation. Greenlines are a positive asset to a neighborhood because they decrease crime and pollution, increase property values, and connect communities. (RTCc)

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is a nonprofit organization that provides a large amount of information and resources on and advocacy for greenlines, or rail-trails as they call them, for communities hoping to start their own. Their website reports that there are 160,000 miles of abandoned rails in the US and only 13,150 miles of rail-trails. Out of those, Tennessee can only claim 58 miles of completed rail-trails. (RTCc)

The Midtown North community in Memphis (also known as Hollywood-Springdale) has an abandoned half-mile railroad corridor going through it that could be made into a greenline. Greenlines have many benefits and this community could profit from converting this old rail into a trail. This paper gives the history of greenlines, explains their benefits while presenting a few greenline success stories from around the country, explains the pros and cons of a greenline in Midtown North and outlines the steps that the community could take to make this dream a reality.

## **History**

At its peak, railroads covered 272,000 miles of the U.S., around half of which still remains in use (RTCc). This leaves a lot of abandoned rails that could be converted into trails. The beginnings of rail-trails can be traced back to the 1960s, when the rate at which railroads were being abandoned quickly increased due to the increase in passenger travel by air and by the new system of interstate highways (Little, 1990). Trucks carrying freight also travel these highways decreasing the amount of freight trains. The concept of greenlines in the U.S. began when the rail corridors were opened up by the removal of the tracks and people just began to walk or ski along them. This idea of rail-trails, as they became known, slowly gained significance and gradually the movement began. These greenlines could be used for recreation, especially for the wheelchair-bound, socialization, and conservation of nature and historical sites. America needed a system of trails and the increasing amount of abandoned rail corridors was the way to make it happen. (RTCc)

The rail corridor going through Midtown North used to be the Louisville & Nashville (L&N) railroad. It began as the Memphis & Ohio in 1860 and then became its own system through Memphis, the L&N in 1872 (Jauchler & Johnston, 2004). “In its later years, the L&N route solely served the huge Sears Distribution Center at Cleveland Street, also called Crosstown” and was abandoned in 1980 by the CSX railroad company (V&E, 2003). Most of the tracks have been pulled up and the corridor left alone to become completely overgrown and littered.

### **Benefits**

Greenlines attract environmentalists because of their “recycling, land conservation, wildlife habitat preservation and non-automobile transportation” benefits (RTCc). Rail-trails are recycling rail corridors for a new function. Greenlines in cities can often be described as urban forests because they are usually lined with trees and plants. “Urban forests play important roles in urban ecosystem function” by providing many ecologically beneficial functions (Galvin, 2000). Greenspaces, like urban greenlines, reduce the urban heat island effect. This effect occurs because natural environments absorb energy from the sun, whereas urban development reflects the sunlight away, causing increased temperatures in cities. “The proportion of incident sunlight reflected by the Earth’s surface is known as albedo” and the less green there is, the higher this albedo level gets (Serrill, 2007). Vegetation absorbs some of the energy from the sun through photosynthesis, thus helping to cool the land and keep temperatures balanced. (Serrill, 2007)

Plant life also reduce air pollution by storing carbon dioxide, absorbing chemicals that make up acid rain and ozone pollution, catching particulates like dust and smoke and releasing oxygen through photosynthesis (Davis). Oxygen and reduced particulates are important for clean air and thus our respiration especially for those with respiratory problems like asthma. They also reduce the rate of global warming because they take in so much greenhouse gas which is important considering the current global warming crisis. Trees also provide insulation or shade to nearby houses which can help to reduce energy and cost of heating and cooling (Galvin, 2000). Erosion reduction is another benefit as tree roots hold soil in place and leaves reduce the force of rain drops (Davis). Trees also cause “stormwater runoff reduction through interception and canopy storage of precipitation” meaning that leaves can catch rain water which can reduce flooding (Galvin, 2000). Trees help the soil to absorb more water which reduces non-point source pollution and runoff. Another type of unhealthy pollution that trees reduce is urban noise pollution. They buffer noise “especially high-frequency sounds that are the most distressing to people”(Davis) By doing a tree survey we could access the potential of the Midtown North Greenline becoming an arboretum like the V&E Greenline. The title of an arboretum helps to protect the trees and is a good educational tool for people and especially for kids.

The question is would the trees and plants that grew on the railroad corridor after it was abandoned not provide the same benefits as the trees that could be planted along a converted greenline? No, because the plant life that grows after a disturbance is often invasive weedy species. This is not a balanced healthy ecosystem. Also, linear greenspaces act as habitats for wildlife and plants (Galvin, 2000) but also as corridors

where they can travel. Roads cut lines across the landscape causing fragmentation of habitat. This isolates wildlife and can cause extinction. Having a series of greenways where wildlife can roam acts as a migratory corridor which increases biodiversity.

(Serrill, 2007)

Rail-trails offer a place to get away from city congestion and enjoy nature, even if it is just an isolated corridor or green. Greenlines also encourage eco-friendly transportation. People use them to commute to work or school by walking, skating, or riding a bike. The rail-trail could also be used to access bus stops or other mass transit that encourages carpooling. The fewer cars on the road, the less carbon we are emitting and the healthier our air is.

As Charles Little so eloquently put it “we are reminded that ‘The Environment’ with which we are much preoccupied these days in terms of ozone layer, and rainforest and carbon monoxide, begins at the edges of our shoes as we explore along a streamside path, at the tips of our fingers as the racing waters curl around them, and in the bordering woodlands in which we, hugging our knees, sit still as a stone, watching, a deer glide softly by” (Little, 1990). We seem so caught up today in the big themes of conservation, like slowing global warming, that we forget that preserving our local greenspace for our community and people who will live there in the future is just as important. Love of the outdoors has to start with an experience in nature. The desire to conserve nature has to start near home. Greenlines help teach people, and especially children, a love of nature and an investment in protecting it. It is a way for people confined to an urban area to still understand the benefits and beauty of the outdoors. Wanting the local greenline to be litter free and full of wildlife to enjoy is practice and a step toward conserving

ecosystems and the larger environment. “Greenways, therefore, should be seen as a beginning in a journey toward an environmental consciousness- a way for people to practice as well as to promote the protection of the ecosphere, starting at the edges of their shoes”(Little, 1990).

A greenline encourages recreation and commuting by bike especially with the lack of bike lanes and sidewalks in parts of Memphis. Non-automobile commuting decreases the amount of air pollutants in a city. According to the Commercial Appeal, Memphis is also next to last in commuters who use bikes (0.1% of Memphians) of the 50 largest US cities (Carlier, 2007). In the South, where fried food is king, a system of trails for recreation and exercise right out the front door could also make a difference in the health of Memphians. An easily accessible way to work out while enjoying the outdoors is not common in Memphis.

Greenlines are mostly used for recreation and exercise. “The National Recreation and Park Association recommends that 25 miles of trails exist for every 50,000 people in an urbanized area”(Ryan & Winterich). Memphis has a population of almost 700,000 and definitely not nearly enough recreational trails.

Some of the Appalachian Trail, a well-known hiking trail stretching from Georgia to Maine, is rail-trail because railroad grades are gradually sloping cuts through the Appalachian Mountains that make great trails. Their gradual slope and flat surface makes them useful for all sorts of sports. It also makes them great for wheelchairs. Greenlines provide opportunity for recreation like walking, jogging, biking, hiking, rollerblading and even cross country skiing (in cooler areas). Rail-trails are a convenient, scenic and easy way to get exercise and enjoy being outdoors. Americans could use this opportunity for

exercise especially because of how unhealthy we are as a country. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 64% of us are overweight or obese. This extra weight, especially in kids can lead to other health problems like heart disease or diabetes. (RTC, 2006)

Rail-trails are also used for commuting to work. They are an easy walk through neighborhoods and are often long, so they are great for getting between home and work. They can provide access from home to bus routes or light rails. Atlanta is in the process of creating a system of trails connected with bus routes, light rail, tourist attractions and so on to decrease the hefty amount of automobile traffic in the city. It is also often a safe, convenient route for kids to take to school. With one in three school age children at risk of developing weight- related health issues, greenlines are a great way for youth to get the exercise that they need (RTC, 2006). With global warming and the fuel crisis becoming real threats, using greenlines can become a great way to get out of our cars.

Greenlines connect communities. They bring people in the same community together and give them a chance to socialize. Charles Little said “to make a greenway is to make a community” (RTCa). They also physically link different communities together with the trail often going through more than one neighborhood. Public urban greenspaces facilitate strong social bonds, encourage neighborly visits, and reduce aggression toward family members (Davis). They improve our interactions and relationships with each other. Greenspaces such as rail-trails bring people together. As David Burwell, president of RTC put it “rail-trails are America’s new front porch... a place where you can talk to your neighbors and meet new people”(Ryan, 1997).

There are many economic benefits to greenlines. One fear people often have of rail-trail conversions in their neighborhood is that it will decrease the property value of their house. The opposite is often true, especially for houses adjacent to the greenline (Nicholls, 2005). Not only that, but trails also can boost the economy of the area around it. They can act as corridors to businesses. People can use the trail to get to shops from their homes, or from shop to shop.

Previous studies show that, “in most cases, less than 10% of respondents felt greenway proximity decreased sales value” (Nicholls, 2005). Most other “results suggest that... proximity to greenways and open space elevate the market value of nearby housing”(Campbell, 2007). The Greater Memphis Greenline is estimated to increase property values in Memphis by \$150,000,000 (Thompson, 2007). “In 1995, ‘walking and bike paths’ placed third in a list of thirty-nine features that home buyers defined as crucial in persuading them to buy a home in a new community” according to the American Lives real-estate market research firm (Ryan, 1997). Another study found that public parks “within 1,500 feet of a residence increased its sales price” on average from between \$845 and \$2,262 (Nicholls, 2005). In a study done on three neighborhoods with greenways in Texas, property value premiums were produced in most of the areas, and the closer to a greenway entrance a house was, the higher the price. Also, because of the linear nature of a greenline, more houses can be positively affected the increased property values. It will probably take a few years after establishment of a greenway, however, before an increase in property value can be detected. (Nicholls, 2005)

### **Greenline Examples**

Seattle's urban 12 mile Burke-Gilman Trail is an example of economic profit from rail-trails. It has more than 750,000 visitors per year. It is used for running, cycling, commuting, and shopping. The rail-trail is known for its controversial start. Burlington Northern gave no public announcement about a sell-off in 1988 to a developer. Rail-trail supporters argued the sale and got back the section of trail. Not only that but the trail was also extended 4 more miles. This story helped to publicize the issue and pressure railroad companies to tell the public when they are going to abandon rails or sell land. Now, the rail-trail provides many economic benefits to Seattle. In a study done to determine the impact of the trail, real estate agents considered it "at best, a sales plus that helped them to attract buyers" (Little, 1990). They said that property near the trail is "significantly easier to sell and ... sells for an average of 6 percent more as a result of its proximity to the trail" (Little, 1990). Police saw no more crime near the trail than compared to the rest of the neighborhood, probably due to the lack of vehicle access. None of the residents expressed negative thoughts about the trail and most agreed that it made living there more enjoyable. The study of the Burke-Gilman trail supported the fact that rail-trails do not increase crime and help to "sell homes, increase property values, and improve the quality of life" (Little, 1990). These residents overcame a land-loss scare and extended the rail-trail that is now an asset to their community (Little, 1990).

The Virginia Creeper Trail gave tourism a boost in Damascus, Virginia, already a pivotal stop on the Appalachian Trail, it calls itself "Trail Town, USA" (Parsons, 2005). Converted from a section of the former Virginia-Carolina Railroad, the rail-trail is 34 miles long and is used by about 200,000 cyclists every year. The big draw for the trail is that it is downhill, so bicyclists can get rides to the top of the trail and ride it downhill

back (Daniel, 2007). The Tennessee Valley Authority power company funded a lot of the conversion. Land-owners feared that the trail would increase crime. They brought their issues to court but the judge sided against them and with the railroad company. Contrary to the trail opponents' opinions, there is very little crime and people take so much pride in the trail that it is very well maintained.

Because of the trail, property values have shot up. Also, the greenline added over 32 businesses and 200 jobs to Damascus (Parsons, 2005). The governor of Virginia has created the "Virginia Works!" initiative which funds projects that aim to increase tourism in rural areas of Virginia to boost their economies. Many of these areas once had "rail-road dependent economies" so the initiative plans to make an "extensive rail trail system through Southside Virginia"(Parsons, 2005).

The Minuteman Bikeway, "America's 500<sup>th</sup> Rail-Trail", is a railbanked 11-mile paved trail in Arlington, Massachusetts with over a million users per year. The trail traces the steps of Paul Revere's famous ride. Director of planning and community development for Arlington, Alan McClennen, said that he has heard people remark that they moved there just to be close to the bikeway and that real estate brokers want to push property near it. The trail is also only 7 miles from downtown Boston and begins close to a rapid transit station. For many people, their commute to work consists of biking the trail to the station and boarding the transit to get into the city of Boston. Many businesses and bike shops are situated near the trail to attract trail users. One fourth grade class used the Minuteman Bikeway in every part of their curriculum because the students voted it as "the biggest—and most positive change in their lifetimes"(Ryan, 1997). The trail seems

to have had positive economic, recreational, and ecological impacts on this Massachusetts community. (Ryan, 1997)

The nearly \$3 million Greenway Trail from Maryville to Alcoa, Tennessee is an 8-mile rail-trail in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. It has become not only a recreational trail but a great way to travel to work, shops, school and downtown as well. Community pride and support for the rail-trail have increased since its completion. The Greenway Trail has also increased property values, with the most increase in property value being the houses nearest the trail. Several events lead to an economic boost from the trail. A major corporation moved its support center next to the trail because of the trail's beauty, the community pride and the benefits the trail provides for employees. An outdoor theater was built from funds donated by the mayor, where artists perform and an annual festival is held. The schools in Maryville use the trail as part of their physical education classes, to teach the importance of healthy exercise, as well as science classes, to teach ecology and conservation. Because of the large amount of Transportation Enhancements (TE) funding, the trail received for construction, more has been applied for, including a connection to low-income housing community in Alcoa. (RTCb)

## **Concerns**

The main concern communities raise when a greenline is proposed near them is that the trail will increase crime. Greenline opposition sees leaving the corridor as open space as an easy way for criminals to access backyards. (Campbell, 2007) Three towns in Massachusetts, Weston, Belchertown, and Southampton rejected the idea of rail-trail conversions in their area in 1998. Weston has the highest average household income in

Massachusetts. It voted 690 to 410 against a 3-mile long rail-trail because they thought it would lead to crime and damage of the existing hiking and horseback riding trails.

(Andrews, 1998)

However, studies show that there is no correlation between greenways and increased crime and in many cases they decrease crime. (Campbell, 2007) This is because it is no longer an abandoned, littered corridor open for criminal activity but an open and green trail that is used by many people each day. It makes sense that the more used a trail is, the less criminals will attempt anything because of this large amount of daily traffic. A study conducted in 1987 on Seattle's Burke-Gilman Trail, mentioned previously, found from interviews that the rate of burglary and vandalism of houses next to the trail was less than the average rate of the rest of neighborhood. (Tracy & Morris, 1998)

Tracy and Morris of the RTC conducted a study in 1998 that supported the safety of rail-trails. They collected statistics and surveys from managers of rail-trails and local law enforcement agencies. They separated out urban, rural and suburban, greenline statistics which is very helpful because this paper is looking specifically at urban greenlines. In regard to major crimes, the "RTC found the crime rates on urban trails to be very low compared to the national crime rate for urban areas" (Tracy & Morris, 1998). After looking at minor crime which includes things like graffiti, littering, and trespassing, they found that "very few incidents directly affecting urban property owners occurred" and "none of the urban trails reported burglary to adjacent homes" (Tracy & Morris, 1998). Although the article gives evidence for the safety of rail-trails, it also points out ways to deter criminal activity. Boosting trail use, cutting vegetation and installing

lighting all to decrease the amount of hiding space on the trail were listed. So was keeping the trail free of litter and cars. Finally, the article gave examples of different types of effective trail patrol, most by bike, used across the country. The surveys showed that crime was not increased by the greenlines but rather, deterred it because of the heavy use of a previously abandoned area. (Tracy & Morris, 1998)

The Heritage Trail in Iowa is a 26 mile crushed limestone rail-trail through the beautiful grassy plains of Iowa. It is a good example of what can happen when people object to a greenline in their neighborhood. The trail goes from Dubuque to Dyersville passing sites like wetlands, Indian burial mounds, multiple railroad artifacts and great fishing spots, just to name a few. The railroad was abandoned by the Chicago and North Western (CNW) in 1979 and the tracks taken up and used elsewhere. CNW was willing to sell it, so Heritage Trail, Inc. was formed to start the rail-trail project. There was a stand off between the Dubuque County Conservation Board (DCCB) and the county supervisors above them who were concerned about the “political fallout from the opponents of the trail idea who quickly showed themselves to be vociferous, if not obstreperous, in their reaction” (Little, 1990). A hearing finally took place, and the trail group was optimistic until they saw meeting packed with objecting neighbors worried about crime coming into their rural areas. They felt they had not control over the situation and that making a trail would increase the trespassing and vandalism that the railroad corridor caused. The residents threatened to burn the bridges so that the trail could not be built, because they knew that new bridges would be too expensive. The county supervisors denied the funding. After debate with the railroad company, Heritage Trail, Inc. negotiated a price of \$235,000 for the 26 miles. The DCCB put up some of its

budget and with a loan and donations from some of the trail's board of directors' own pockets, the corridor was purchased. The residents stood by their threat and there were nine burnings and three bridges were totally burnt down. Private and government funds were combined over the next few years to finish the conversion. After 5 years of struggle, the trail was completed in 1986. As Doug Cheever, from the board of directors put it, the trail "was an idea whose time had come" that's why it succeeded, despite the odds (Little, 1990). Thousands of people enjoy all the trail has to offer every year bringing in annually more than \$156,687 per mile. (Siderelis, 1995)

### **The Greater Memphis Greenline**

Greenlines have been making local news lately with the proposal of the Greater Memphis Greenline and its role as an issue in the upcoming elections. Darrell Eldred, a spokesman for the group trying to acquire land for the Greater Memphis Greenline (GMG) project, stated in the recent Memphis Business Quarterly that "Memphis is one of the last major cities to have a greenbelt system to use for recreation" (Thompson, 2007). The Greater Memphis Greenline, a 13-mile corridor that would stretch from Midtown to Cordova, is currently at a standstill because of insufficient funding to purchase the land from the CSX railroad company that owns the old tracks.

Common Sense Inc. a non-profit group in Memphis formed a committee in 2004 that decided that making a rail-trail conversion with this section of the CSX railroad was a good idea. A Board of Directors was formed from other local non-profits (Thompson, 2007). The Greater Memphis Greenline would mean "millions of dollars in economic development and property value appreciation in the heart of the city" (Thompson, 2007).

It would give local small businesses a boost. The greenline would also attract home buyers and help the real estate market because “people are attracted to areas where they can go bike riding or jogging not far from their homes” (Thompson, 2007). Memphis residents believe that there is a lack of parks near their homes and are forced to use the sidewalks for recreation. (Thompson, 2007)

Negotiating prices is the main hold- up for the GMG. The railbed is poorly maintained but CSX still wants \$17 million for the rail corridor which they do not even own in entirety. This value is based on the “across the fence” method which means that the land should be worth as much as the property around it is. Another appraisal method based on tax value pinned it at \$2.4 million. There is also the possibility of the railbed being contaminated which would cost CSX a lot of money to clean up. The GMG is an example of exactly how difficult it can be to negotiate requiring a rail corridor, especially in Memphis, with CSX, the same company that owns the rail through Midtown North. Not only would the greenline be very beneficial if built but the potential greenline would also link Midtown to the Wolf River Greenway which would have many ecological, economic and recreational benefits for Memphis. (Thompson, 2007)

### **The V&E Greenline**

The 1.7 mile V&E Greenline through the Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood is a great example of a grassroots rail-trail conversion. The abandoned L&N railroad was an eyesore to residents and was victim to weeds, dumping, and deviant activity. It was unsafe and not maintained by the railroad. A spontaneous meeting of neighbors got the ball rolling and there was no stopping them. The V&E Community Development

Corporation (VECA CDC) and funds from Pew Charitable Trusts helped to buy the rail corridor from CSX in 1996. The residents raised the money from the community and also from applying for grants to build the greenline. They formed a committee, where committee leaders meet every month to discuss issues. The Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood also partnered with many organizations and non-profits like VECA CDC, MLGW, and the City of Memphis. Keeler Iron Works donated one of the bridges to the neighborhood including a plaque that says its reason for helping out was that V&E is such an up and coming neighborhood in Memphis. Funding for maintenance, however, comes solely from tax-deductible donations from residents. The rail-trail took around 7 years for completion with the installation of the second bridge. Residents use the trail for jogging, walking and biking. They also have a monthly clean up where volunteers assemble at the new stationhouse ready to rake leaves, cut weeds, pick-up litter or plant trees. Removing kudzu, a weedy, invasive species is also a major issue. Trashcans have been placed along the trail to decrease litter. Beautiful wooden signs can be found at some street crossings marking the greenline and helping to publicize it. (V&E, 2003)

Thanks to the neighborhood's efforts, the old railbed is now a beautiful greenline. Because of good maintenance, it is free of dumping and litter and has a tree canopy shading a lot of the trail. Neighbors also planted a lovely garden along one section of the trail in 2003. The greenline has also improved the housing market in the neighborhood (V&E, 2003). Walking along the V&E Greenline is a very positive experience; neighbors standing along the trail, chatting about daily events; people walking their dogs; runners getting their daily exercise; women power walking and talking; birdwatchers

taking in the scenery; bike riders whizzing past; citizens voluntarily picking up litter; smiling faces; and residents just relaxing in nature after a hard day at work.

### **Midtown North**

The Midtown North community has a section of abandoned railroad going through it that looks much like the V&E Greenline did before the neighborhood got involved and made it into what it is today. Midtown North is an urban community in north Memphis enclosed by Jackson Avenue (south), Springdale/Tunica Streets (west), Chelsea Avenue (north) and Hollywood (east). It is known for having the highest infant mortality (30.9 deaths per 1,000) in the U.S. This mostly African American neighborhood (98%) contains many youth and elderly and suffers from a migration of the people in-between away from the neighborhood. Due to loss of industry in the area, many residents are unemployed. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, in area code 38108, 33.8% of residents have an income below the poverty level, whereas in Tennessee only 13.5% do. Midtown North also suffers from poor health, lack of good education, crime, and physical and environmental degradation. Dumping is common and there are many houses that are vacant or in need of repairs. Velsicol Chemical Company for 40 years dumped chemicals into Cypress Creek which runs through Midtown North and under the old L&N railroad. These chemicals contaminated the soil, some of which was moved to many residents' backyards. (Rhodes, 2004)

All of these problems and its physical proximity to Rhodes prompted the College to apply for and get the Community Outreach Partnership Center grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. A community center was established

called Shasta Central which is lead by Dorothy Cox and has Rhodes students on staff. The neighborhood has improved since the grant and many faculty-sponsored or student-lead programs have been initiated. (Davies, 2007)

A recent meeting of the Hollywood Hyde Park Springdale Neighborhood Association put a greenline as one of their top priorities for future projects. They recognized the benefits it could have for the community. Installing the greenline could address some of residents' major concerns of recreation for children and the need for a neighborhood organization or watch club (Rhodes, 2004). Greenlines are a great place for kids to ride bikes or run. They also provide an opportunity for neighbors to socialize and discuss community concerns. Police can use them to patrol and increase safety levels. Rail-trails can also be used for neighborhood watch. A greenline could also mean a much needed raise in property value for residents near the trail. Finally, a greenline could mean a way for residents of Midtown North to learn about and enjoy nature. A greenspace could increase the ecological health and air quality in this area.

The rail corridor through Midtown North with the possibility of becoming a greenline stretches west to east from Springdale Street to Hollywood Street and is about a half-mile long. Part of it, maybe half because it is hard to tell, still has tracks on it. This could possibly be because it is owned by more than one person or company. An old, unsafe bridge crosses over Cypress Creek, close to Hollywood. The corridor does not cross over any streets between Springdale and Hollywood, but a few dead end streets meet up with it which could potentially act as access points to the greenline. The rail corridor has been the L&N railroad since around 1872 (see the previous section on the railroad) (Jauchler & Johnston, 2004). The railroad corridor, as far as I can tell, is owned

by CSX. I could not find any newspaper articles on this corridor to indicate environmental problems or accidents. It could make a great extension to the V&E Greenline.

### **Obstacles**

There are a few obstacles that the community may face but they can easily be overcome. One obstacle is gaining support for the greenline from the community. The example of a 62-mile rail corridor in West Virginia helps to explain the effort it takes to get the message out, and how it can be done with enough determination. Many of the towns along the corridor were economically-dependent on the railroad, so when it was abandoned, concerned citizens banded together to create a rail-trail. They thought that the trail could bring tourists to the area for activities like horseback riding hiking, and biking. These activities could start new business and give the economy a boost. The North Bend Rails-to-Trails Foundation was formed and along with a new board of directors, they set out to gain support. They “briefed congressional representatives, state officials from the Railroad Maintenance Authority... and the Division of Tourism and Parks”( Ryan and Winterich). They had letters of support from local businesses, politicians and residents to give to them. They were successful in “strengthening the coalition” with these supporters and also with all of the people they won over by giving numerous presentations all over the area (Ryan and Winterich). These were done at places like “Rotary and Lions clubs, town councils, county commissions, economic development councils” and other civic groups and also at monthly open meetings and

various dinners (Ryan and Winterich). The rail-trail took two years to complete and has added more than 20 much-needed businesses to the area.

(Ryan and Winterich)

Other greenline examples show one obstacle that has been effective in keeping greenlines out of certain communities and this is opposition from residents. Burwell says that the main opponents to rail-trails, people that are scared of the unknown, bring up issues like “increased crime, decreased property values, and loss of privacy”(Ryan, 1997). For example, Iowa’s Heritage Trail where objecting residents burned the bridges along the rail-trail to try to keep it from being completed because of their fear of an increase in crime. (Little, 1990)

Even though there is evidence that greenlines do not do any of these things, a small number of people continue to object to rail-trails. However, almost always this opposition disappears once the rail-trails are open. Would a greenline through Midtown North increase the crime and blatant prostitution going on near the railroad bed? It is hard to say, but case studies from other urban rail-trail conversions indicate no. I tried to gauge the potential reaction of Midtown North to the greenway proposal by talking to some residents.

On one end of the proposed Midtown North Greenline, I encountered a woman who did not want me near her property, much less a trail that would be used by many people. However, on Hollywood at the other end of the greenline, I met some very nice gentlemen who work at an automobile place next to the railroad tracks. They asked if something was going to be done about taking up the tracks. I told them what I was doing and they seemed very interested. One man told me he had walked the V&E Greenline

and it was “real nice, with gardens and everything”. These men gave me hope that Midtown North would respond well to the idea of a greenline through their neighborhood. Also, the fact that the neighborhood association put it on their priorities list gives me hope of a positive reaction from Midtown North.

The overgrown state of the trail could be one setback. However, the V&E Greenline at one point looked like this. The rail-bed can be made back into an open space without too much cost and is not too overgrown to be dealt with. Also, with all of the vegetation that is not directly on the tracks where the trail would be built, the corridor is green and shaded.

There is also a large amount of litter and dumping where the rail-bed is near roads. It should not take a lot of effort to be cleaned up, however. The rail corridor seems that it could make a nice trail and envisioning the rail-bed in the trail state that the V&E is in now is not difficult.

Most of the donations that keep the V&E greenline maintained, not even accounting for all of the money it took to make it, come for residents in the Vollintine-Evergreen neighborhood. With 33.8% of the Midtown North community below the poverty line, I am concerned that funding this greenline project will be difficult. Fundraising will be crucial. This greenline will also need great support from within the community and people that have the passion and will to fight for it and see it through. The Midtown North Greenway will also need volunteers willing to sacrifice time to help build and maintain the rail-trail.

## **Future Steps**

The next section will provide assistance for anyone who likes this Midtown North Greenline idea and wants to pursue making it happen. It is just a summary of the steps required to make a greenline. Detailed guides can be found on the Rails-to-Trails website for this brief step-by-step list.

Talking to the community is important so that they can put a face to the greenline idea. Especially because many people do not even know what a greenline is, hold an informational meeting so that they know you and your intentions. Stay positive and listen to people. Do research or use the research I have provided to help dismantle some of their concerns about increased crime, decreased privacy and so on. Stress all of the great benefits of greenlines and how the community could be better because of it. Gaining support from within Midtown North is critical. Search out groups like CDCs, the Rhodes partnership, churches, businesses, and government agencies (Ryan & Winterich). Form a committee, appoint leaders and let interested residents be part of the process. When people can be involved, they are more likely to be supportive and invested in the outcome. Have groups with specific tasks like research, fundraising, feasibility study, publicity and so on. The RTC guide also suggests inviting a former rail-trail skeptic or an expert to assure people that this is a good idea. Trails need public support (like a trail group) and they must be organized. A financial plan is also important because the trail group has to prove that it is financially capable of purchasing the rail corridor (eventually) or the railroad company will not be interested. (Allen & Iurino)

Getting volunteers is another important step. Publicizing the idea and getting the media interested can lead to positive results. The Midtown North Greenline must have a

voice that the media, government, non-profits and all the people that could help get the greenline together, can hear. (Ryan & Winterich) Involving “stakeholders” or people that would benefit from a greenline is an easy way to go about getting support. These people could range from bike riders to politicians to environmentalists. Applying for help from the RTC is an option although it is very competitive. (Allen & Iurino)

Contacting the railroad is the next step. One person should be designated to do this and should contact CSX’s real estate department. Things that you want to accomplish with this contact are letting them know you are interested and committed and what your plan is, learn about the railroad, and find out which person you should be negotiating with. Understanding the railroad and their options for disposing of the corridor is important. They may own all of the railroad segment, or ownership of all or parts of it could revert to property owners adjacent to the railroad. (Allen & Iurino)

A crucial step in making a rail-trail is conducting a feasibility study. I have merely proposed this greenline idea. A lengthy, in-depth analysis of the rail corridor must be done. See the RTC website for specific directions.

Finding deeds and local land records for restrictions on use of the property could be useful. Railroad companies seem to know everything about the railroad segment like length and acreage, value, taxes, and history. Do research so you know what a practical offer would be for the segment. Public records which may help value the rail segment should be available somewhere since the railroad probably pays Memphis real estate taxes and abides by city ordinances. (Ryan & Winterich)

Making a deal with the railroad will hopefully be next. At this point, you will probably have heard the term “railbanking”. This, as far as I understand, is for rail

corridors that have not yet been abandoned. However, an attorney or Tennessee rail branch could have this information because the Surface Transportation Board (STB) has to authorize abandonment and “physical abandonment” has to take place which can mean many different things, depending. The STB was created in 1887 to keep railroads from taking advantage of Americans by regulating profits. They can keep railroad corridors from being destroyed immediately so that it can be used as a trail but they do not take trail conversions into consideration when making decisions. This corridor in Midtown North has not been used for a good while so railbanking may not apply here, however, I will explain railbanking as I understand it in case it can be. In the 1980s, Congress realized that rail corridors were quickly being abandoned all over the country, so they came up with a way for them to be preserved in case they are needed later on. They amended that National Trails Systems Act which created railbanking, a law where soon-to-be abandoned rails can be given, leased or sold to a trail agency who can assume financial and managerial responsibility for it. Rail service on the corridor can by law be restored, so this public or private agency must agree not to build permanent structures on the trail. “Fewer than 10 percent of the country’s rail-trails have been railbanked” however, it has been very successful when used (RTC, 2006). To apply for railbanking, an agency must file a “Statement of Willingness to Assume Financial Responsibility” which is not binding. A lawyer really would be needed to understand all the technicalities of railbanking. (Allen & Iurino)

Of course, financing and making an agreement with the railroad is the next step. The half-mile rail section in question will probably cost thousands of dollars. Looking into who funded the V&E Greenline could be a good place to start looking since this

greenline would just be an extension of it. “One of the largest sources of funding for rail-trails is federal transportation money” so finding transportation benefits in the feasibility study could be helpful (Allen & Iurino). Having a good negotiator is very important in getting a good deal in the purchase. Fundraising to maintain the trail after it is complete might be difficult for Midtown North. However, it seems that when people see the greenline they will want to donate money and I am sure that part of the Rhodes College community would volunteer manpower to help maintain it. The Greater Memphis Greenline Inc.’s mission is “to collaborate in a public-private partnership with local government in the development of the GMG and other unused railway right-of ways and easements in Memphis and Shelby County, to create a world-class recreational park/hiking-biking trail system”(GMG) so maybe they would be willing to help with the Midtown North Greenway. Finally there are a lot of legal matters to be dealt with before the rail-trail can be open for business. (Allen & Iurino)

## **Conclusion**

The Greater Memphis Greenline has become a campaign issue in the current Memphis city council race. Memphis may finally be recognizing the significance and benefits of linear greenspaces in the city. This is important because “a system of greenways- down rivers and streams, across ridgelines, over abandoned railroads, along scenic and historical- which, in terms of any quality of life measure worth considering, may be one of the most significant people-oriented efforts in civic improvement to be mounted in the post-war era”(Serrill, 2007). The Midtown North Greenline could improve many aspects of life for people in this neighborhood. Greenlines are becoming

more common across the country and with the help of the RTC and the momentum of the greenline movement, it is becoming increasingly easier and quicker to build a rail-trail.

“A livable suburb or city is one that lets us get home after work fast... that restores and sustains our historic neighborhoods... that preserves among new development some family farms and greenspaces... a livable neighborhood lets you and your spouse walk through a natural ecosystem as you simply take an evening stroll down your street” Vice President Al Gore (Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse). The Midtown North neighborhood deserves all of this and this Greenline is perfect for them. It is feasible and with funding and neighborhood support, The Midtown North Greenline could become a great asset to this community.



## Midtown North Greenline

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