

HUCKLEBERRY TRAIL PLAN

New River Valley



PART 1 ● 2022

ADOPTED AUGUST 4, 2022



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PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Huckleberry Trail Plan was developed through a collaborative partnership, between the New River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (NRVMPO), Town of Blacksburg, Town of Christiansburg, Montgomery County, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry, and the New River Valley Regional Commission (NRVRC).

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The Huckleberry Trail has a long history of serving the Montgomery area as a primary alternative transportation route. During the first half of the 20th Century, a passenger train transported cadets to and from Virginia Tech four times each day. The last steam engine train run occurred in 1958; however, the Huckleberry namesake carries on today. The first mile of track was converted to a nature trail in 1966 and the next 3.5 miles of the Huckleberry Trail were completed nearly 30-years later in the mid-1990s. By 1995 the trail stretched 5.75-miles, from the public library in Blacksburg to the NRV Mall in Christiansburg.

Today the Huckleberry Trail is nearly 15 miles, from Jefferson National Forest, through Blacksburg, along the outskirts of Virginia Tech campus, creek-side in Montgomery County, and continues stretching further into Christiansburg. It's been nearly 60 years since the first mile of trail was complete and its reputation has grown as an invaluable community asset. The purpose of this plan is to capture ideas about the future of the trail and begin to identify areas that are mutually beneficial for collaboration.

The first goal of the plan was to document how the Huckleberry Trail is managed today. The plan includes information on existing trail conditions and assets, operations and maintenance standards, future design and construction standards, and funding resources. The plan also reflects on interviews with other long-distance trail managers and trail influencers. Several questions were explored, such as: How have trails affected local downtown economies and can they be a reliable alternative transportation route? How many restrooms do we need per linear mile of trail? Do you plow snow or leave it? If we want to share our trail and attract visitors, what might their expectations be?

This initial Huckleberry Trail Plan documents potential areas for collaboration and also aspects of the trail that are important to retain locally. The plan also provides information that is intended to be used for ongoing conversations about the Huckleberry Trail of tomorrow.



With growing interest in creating local and regional trail connections, Friends of the Huckleberry, identified the opportunity to create a Huckleberry Trail Plan as a first step towards defining future goals. In September 2021, the New River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (NRVMPO) partnered with the New River Valley Regional Commission (NRVRC) to begin work on facilitating the development of the Huckleberry Trail Plan. The scope of work included developing a strategy for collaboration among local partners and to evaluate and implement formal policies for future trail development or maintenance. The plan would be a first step towards establishing a stronger sense of place, and identify methods to increase continuity and consistency of user experiences.



TASK 1: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR COLLABORATION

Collaboration and transparency are familiar spaces for local governments in Virginia’s New River Valley. Trail partners expressed interest in collaborating on the following:

1. **MAINTAINING THE EXISTING TRAIL AT A HIGH STANDARD**
Focus on trail clearances when trimming vegetation or installing new amenities, regular mowing and clearing of debris, combating graffiti and vandalism quickly.
2. **CONTINUING TO EXPAND AND ENHANCE THE TRAIL AND CONNECTIONS TO OTHER ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION ASSETS**
Asphalt surface material, accessibility for users of all abilities, connecting to local trails and transit stops.
3. **DEVELOPING 3-4 “GATEWAY” TRAIL ACCESS LOCATIONS**
Uniquely branded just for the Huckleberry and consistent appearance and amenities at each location.
4. **STREAMLINING EVENT COORDINATION**
Create a universal form that is compatible in the towns and county, create a shared calendar, participate in bi-annual partner meetings.
5. **IDENTIFYING MORE WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE**
Volunteers can be coordinated by owners or partners for non-construction activities, developing a new trail ambassadors volunteer program, creating alternatives to benches for donations (tree groves, planting areas, etc.).

TASK 2: ASSET AND OPPORTUNITY MAPPING

The Friends of Huckleberry, along with GIS specialists at the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, and Virginia Tech, recently updated and improved the accuracy of geospatial trail information. A high-quality map is now available for purchase in either print or smart phone app formats. Both mapping resources include the full length of the Huckleberry plus over 45 additional miles of community trails. A free version of the map will also be available to the public soon.



Staff of the New River Valley Regional Commission picked up where local trail partners left off, and performed field visits to locate and photograph trail assets for the entire length of trail. The Inventory of trail assets included: benches, trash receptacles, water refill, viewsheds, surface conditions, signage, and much more. The information is now available to local trail partners for future mapping products and maintenance inventories.

TASK 3: BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES + DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Each trail partner has established general routine maintenance goals and construction standards. The Huckleberry Trail is a public facility that is managed by local Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments, along with other recreational areas in each community. This plan documents some of the common goals for maintenance and operations of the trail. In addition, common design considerations and practices that are recommended by the National Parks Service and Federal Highway Administration are documented based on the surrounding trail environment (rural, suburban, and urban).

Trail routine maintenance and operation goals include suggestions for mowing intervals, responding to vandalism, and coordinating volunteers. Design standard recommendations provides information about trail width as it relates to capacity, trail clearances, and trail amenities.

TASK 4: GAINING AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE

The trail planning team completed two interviews with existing longer-distance trail managers and also invited a trail tourism expert, placemaker, and professional coach to facilitate a full-day workshop.

January 18, 2022, the project management team met with Mr. Mark Whaley, Park Operations Specialist, and Mr. Kevin Casalenuovo, W&OD Railroad Park/Trail Manager. The Washington and Old Dominion Railroad (W&OD) Regional Park is often referred to as one of the skinniest parks in Virginia, and includes a 45-mile trail that runs through urban centers and beautiful countryside in Northern Virginia.

February 24, 2022, Amy Camp of Cycle Forward traveled to the New River Valley to lead a trail assessment, present on the topic of unlocking the potential of trails, and facilitate a group discussion about the future of the trail. Ms. Camp specializes in coaching and supporting local leaders and communities in trail town development, strengthening heritage tourism, and accessing the outdoor recreation economy.

April 1, 2022, the project management team met with Ms. Cat Anthony, Executive Director of the Virginia Capital Trail Foundation (VCTF). The Virginia Capital Trail snakes along the James River and State Route 5 for 52-miles. The trail connects the Commonwealth’s capital of Richmond to the historic capitals of Jamestown and Williamsburg.



TASK 5: PREPARE TRAIL PLAN

Regional partners continue to make investments and pursue competitive funding opportunities to expand and/or improve trail assets each year. As an example, the Town of Christiansburg and Montgomery County pursue Transportation Alternatives funding, a statewide competitive funding opportunity, for \$200k-\$300k (max award) every other year. Historically, Montgomery County has served as the applicant, and the Town of Christiansburg has matched well beyond the required 20% to complete more significant phases of new trail development.

The Town of Blacksburg will be investing in resurfacing its entire trail segment and also widening the typical section to ten feet later this year; Virginia Tech is enhancing trail amenities and maintaining a robust online interactive map; and the Friends of Huckleberry just installed new mile marker posts and is actively developing organizational priorities so that it can continue to be a strong partner and trail advocate.

The Huckleberry Trail Plan, Part 1 identifies several ideas about potential trail amenities and examines how others could contribute and share responsibilities. Additional commitments of time and other resources could be necessary to implement new trail management goals or capital investments. Fortunate for our team, others have traversed similar conversations across the nation. Some topics are easier to discuss and can be implemented much more quickly. For example, one of the visiting trail managers/influencers has been working on a consistently branded wayfinding plan for more than eight years. However, local Huckleberry Trail partners are all open to the concept of creating consistently branded premier trail access points or gateway trailheads.

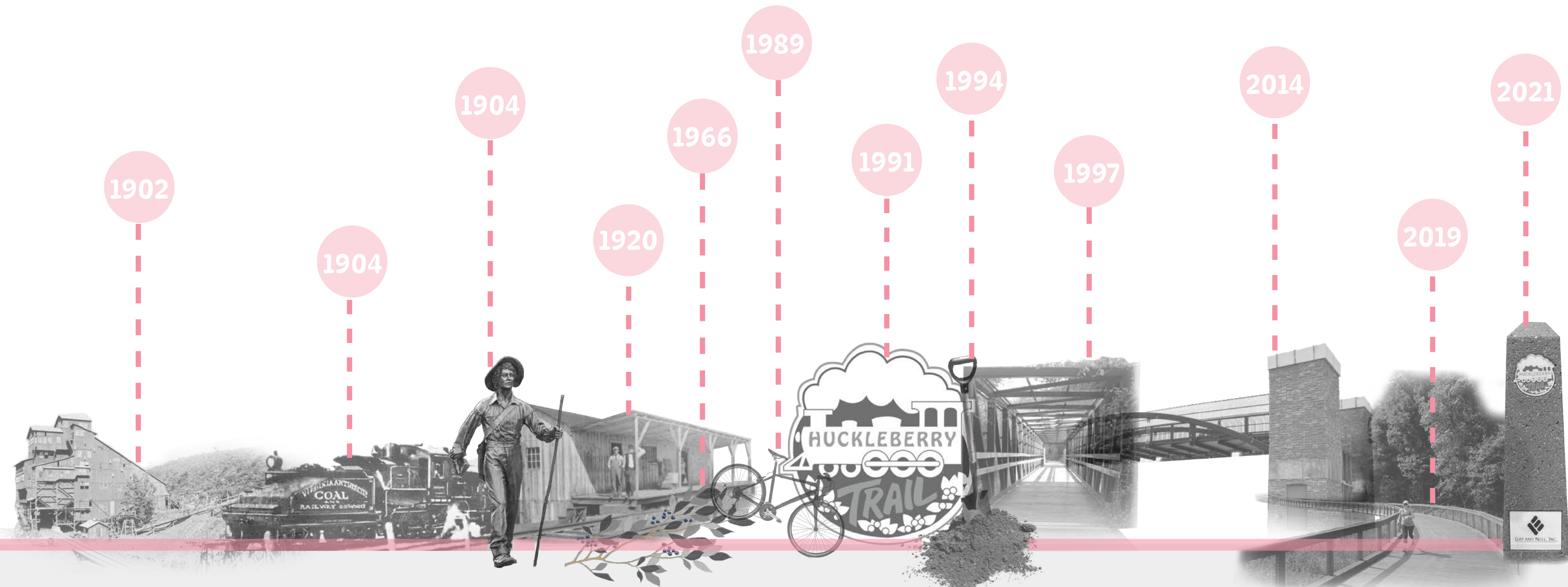
Trail partners are encouraged to review and update a shared Action Plan on an annual basis. The initial version of the Action Plan is included in this document.

#	TOP 3 List interesting takeaways + conversation points		
	CYCLE FORWARD	NOVA PARKS	VCTF
1	Local trail partners discussing early visioning work for the future of the Huckleberry Trail.	Every community (along the trail) has an individual sense of ownership.	Offers a Trail Ambassadors Program: volunteers who provide info, bike repair, etc.
2	Hearing success stories of other communities.	Currently uses National Parks Service standards to guide trail amenities.	Maintains a “how to” resource to streamline event planning.
3	Pulling back the curtain to discuss potential obstacles over morning coffee.	Does not plow snow to preserve pavement condition.	Promotes the trail through formal marketing initiatives.



BACKGROUND + CONTEXT

12



1902 Virginia Anthracite Coal Rail Company

1904 Railroad linked Merrimac Mine to Cambria Depot

1904 Rail extended to Blacksburg + VT

1920 Passenger Rail to Blacksburg- Huckleberry namesake
Mid-1900s Rail use dwindles

1966 Depot closed + rail line abandoned

J.C. Garrett (VT) helps build nature trail (present day 1st mile)

1989 Montgomery County requests a bike plan to be developed +
a group of citizens formed to review plans

1991 Friends of the Huckleberry established

1994 Construction begins on first three miles of trail

1997 First 5.75 miles complete, connecting Blacksburg to
Christiansburg

2014 Trail extended South to Christiansburg Recreation Center
Renva Knowles Bridge is built across 114

2019 Huckleberry North connection complete
Huckleberry South extended to Independence Blvd.

2021 Trail mile markers installed the entirety of the trail

EXISTING ASSETS MAP
HUCKLEBERRY NORTHERN SEGMENTS

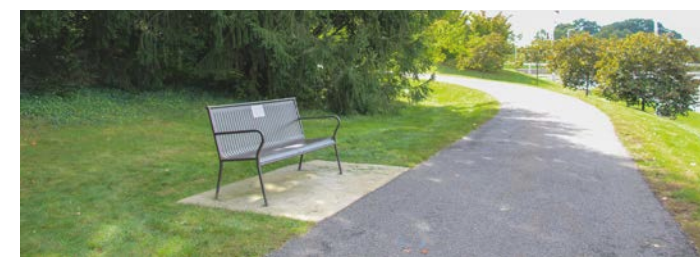
- Mile Marker
- Parking
- Restroom
- Drinking Water
- ⚙️ Bike Fix-it Station
- Park
- Picnic Area
- 🚶 Huckleberry Trail
- 🛣️ Roads
- 🏠 Buildings
- 🏡 Town Boundaries

KEY



BLACKSBURG

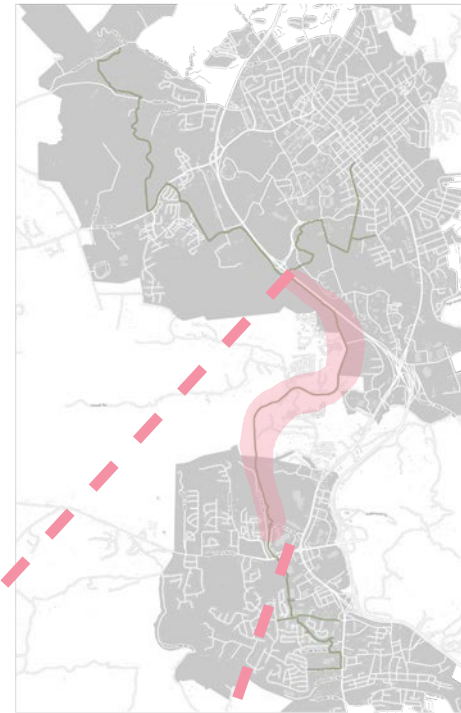
The Huckleberry Trail North- a key bike/ped connector between town and Virginia Tech - lined with mature trees that feature an established canopy - nice transitions between town, home, and green environments - higher chances of contact with others and opportunities for solitude.



EXISTING ASSETS MAP
HUCKLEBERRY SOUTHERN SEGMENTS PART 1

- Mile Marker
- Parking
- Restroom
- Drinking Water
- ⚙ Bike Fix-it Station
- Park
- Picnic Area
- 🌀 Huckleberry Trail
- 🛣 Roads
- 🏠 Buildings
- 🏘 Town Boundaries

KEY



MONTGOMERY

One of the flattest segments of trail along the Huckleberry and perhaps the most well suited for trail users of all abilities - meanders creek-side and forested bottoms - creates connections to historical coal mining areas - paved parking and bike share available - higher chances of solitude.



EXISTING ASSETS MAP HUCKLEBERRY SOUTHERN SEGMENTS PART 2

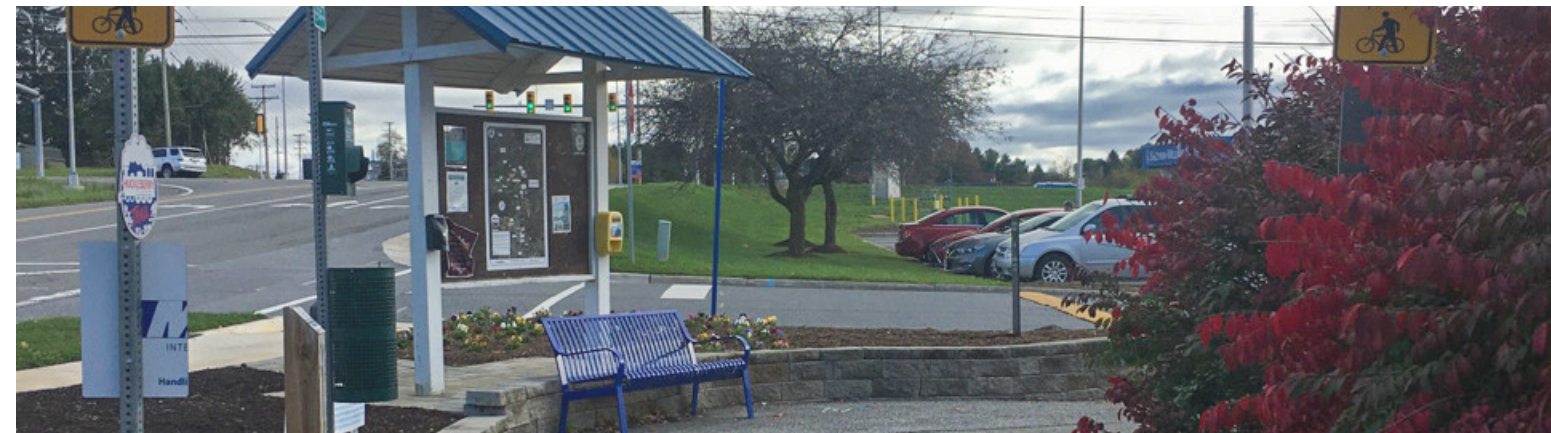
- Mile Marker
- Parking
- Restroom
- Drinking Water
- ⚙️ Bike Fix-it Station
- Park
- Picnic Area
- 🌀 Huckleberry Trail
- 🛣️ Roads
- 🏠 Buildings
- 🏘️ Town Boundaries

KEY












CHRISTIANSBURG

The Huckleberry Trail South- iconic bridge across bustling Peppers Ferry Road - a new feeling that is well maintained and features commercial/ urban vibe - new park construction and great opportunities for more connections - higher chances of contact with others and opportunities for solitude.



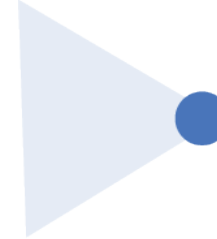
OPPORTUNITY AREA MAP HUCKLEBERRY NORTHERN SEGMENTS

-  Educational Adjacency
-  Significant Viewshed
-  Business/ Activity Area
-  Park
-  Engagement Opportunity
-  Huckleberry Trail
-  Roads
-  Buildings
-  Town Boundaries

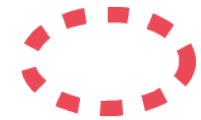
KEY



EDUCATIONAL ADJACENCIES INCLUDE:
Kipps Elementary, Blacksburg Middle School, Blacksburg High School, Virginia Tech, MFRL



SIGNIFICANT VIEWSHEDS INCLUDE:
North views toward Brush Mountain and superb vantage points of Virginia Tech



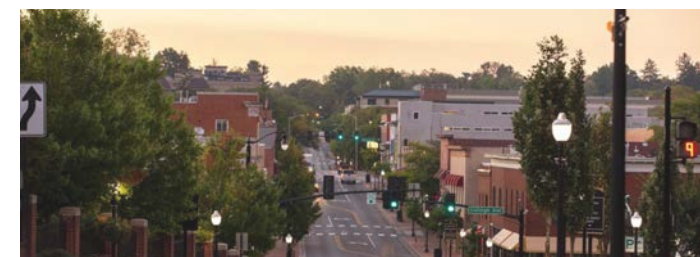
BUSINESS/ ACTIVITY AREAS ALONG THE TRAIL INCLUDE:
Hethwood Square Shopping Center and the 16 blocks of Downtown Blacksburg, Gables, First and Main Street, Moss Arts Center












PARKS/ PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AREAS INCLUDE:
Brush Mountain Wilderness, Heritage Community Park and Natural Area, Hethwood Pond + Playground, Gateway Trail, MTB Skills Park



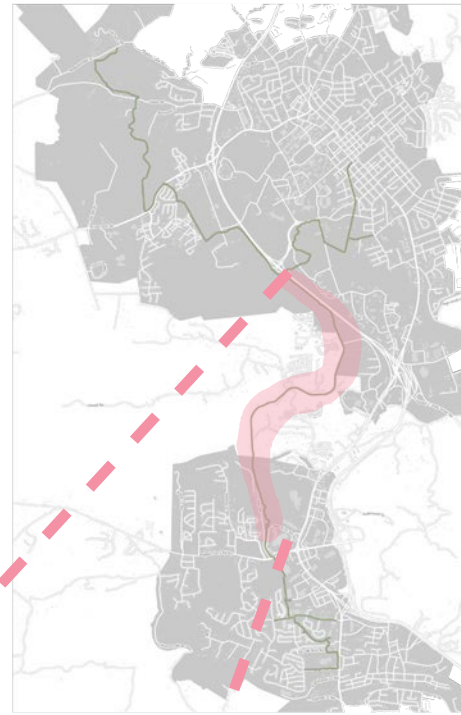
ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:
Stroubles Creek, Historic Smithfield Plantation, Virginia Tech's Duck Pond and Hahn Horticulture Garden





OPPORTUNITY AREA MAP
HUCKLEBERRY SOUTHERN SEGMENTS PART 1


-  Educational Adjacency
-  Significant Viewshed
-  Business/ Activity Area
-  Park
-  Engagement Opportunity
-  Huckleberry Trail
-  Roads
-  Buildings
-  Town Boundaries


KEY




-  EDUCATIONAL ADJACENCIES INCLUDE:
Virginia Tech's Corporate Research Center

-  SIGNIFICANT VIEWSHEDS INCLUDE:
East-West Rail corridor










-  BUSINESS/ ACTIVITY AREAS ALONG THE TRAIL INCLUDE:
LewisGale Hospital + Medical Services

-  PARKS/ PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AREAS INCLUDE:
Coal Mining Heritage Park + Loop Trail and Mid County Park

-  ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:
Unique trail geology and Corning plant interpretive area




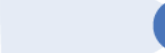
OPPORTUNITY AREA MAP
HUCKLEBERRY SOUTHERN SEGMENTS PART 2


-  Educational Adjacency
-  Significant Viewshed
-  Business/ Activity Area
-  Park
-  Engagement Opportunity
-  Huckleberry Trail
-  Roads
-  Buildings
-  Town Boundaries


KEY




-  EDUCATIONAL ADJACENCIES INCLUDE:
New River Community College Christiansburg Site and Christiansburg High School

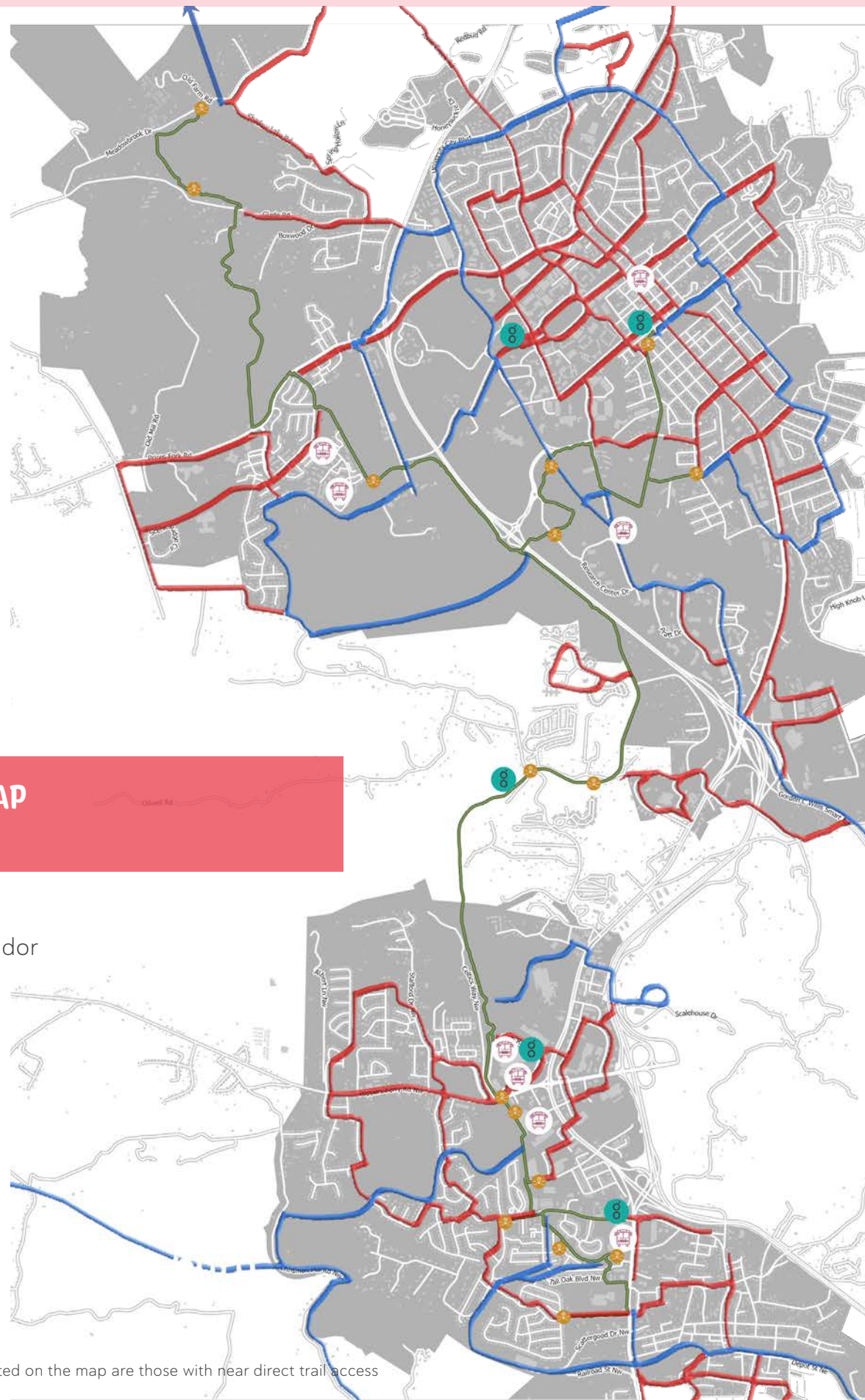
-  SIGNIFICANT VIEWSHEDS INCLUDE:
Westward mountain views and Christiansburg residential development

-  BUSINESS/ ACTIVITY AREAS ALONG THE TRAIL INCLUDE:
Uptown Christiansburg, Oak Tree Shopping Plaza, Downtown Christiansburg

-  PARKS/ PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AREAS INCLUDE:
North Christiansburg Regional Park

-  ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:
Christiansburg Institute

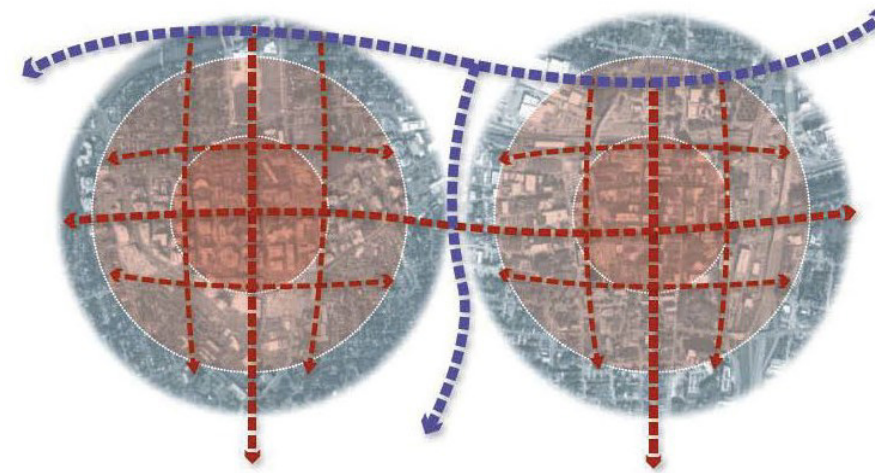




**CONNECTIVITY MAP
HUCKLEBERRY TRAIL**

- Through Corridor
- Placemaking Corridor
- Bike Share
- Bus Stop
- Access Point
- Huckleberry Trail
- Roads
- Buildings
- Town Boundaries

Note: Transit and Bike Shares depicted on the map are those with near direct trail access



Through corridor (Blue): Moderate speed, limited traffic conflicts and connects Multimodal Districts.

Placemaking Corridor (Red): Lower speed, interaction between modes, and connects areas with Multimodal Districts.

The New River Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (NRVMO) maintains a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the urbanized areas of the New River Valley. A multimodal systems plan consists of selected corridors that demonstrate an interconnected transportation system for automobiles, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. The Huckleberry Trail serves as a through corridor that is intended to connect travelers from one activity center to another. Within each population and employment (activity) center there is a spectrum of activity density that assists planners and engineers to determine what level of service is needed, and further, how to distribute trips across multiple mode choices.

Creating transportation options for underserved populations, ensuring linkages and reliability, increasing access to activity centers, and supporting active lifestyles are all goals that the NRVMO strives to achieve. The Huckleberry Trail is a terrific example of public infrastructure that aims to achieve those goals. The trail also creates connections to bus stops, bike share stations, and local bike/ped infrastructure.





**BEST MANAGEMENT
PRACTICES +
DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS**

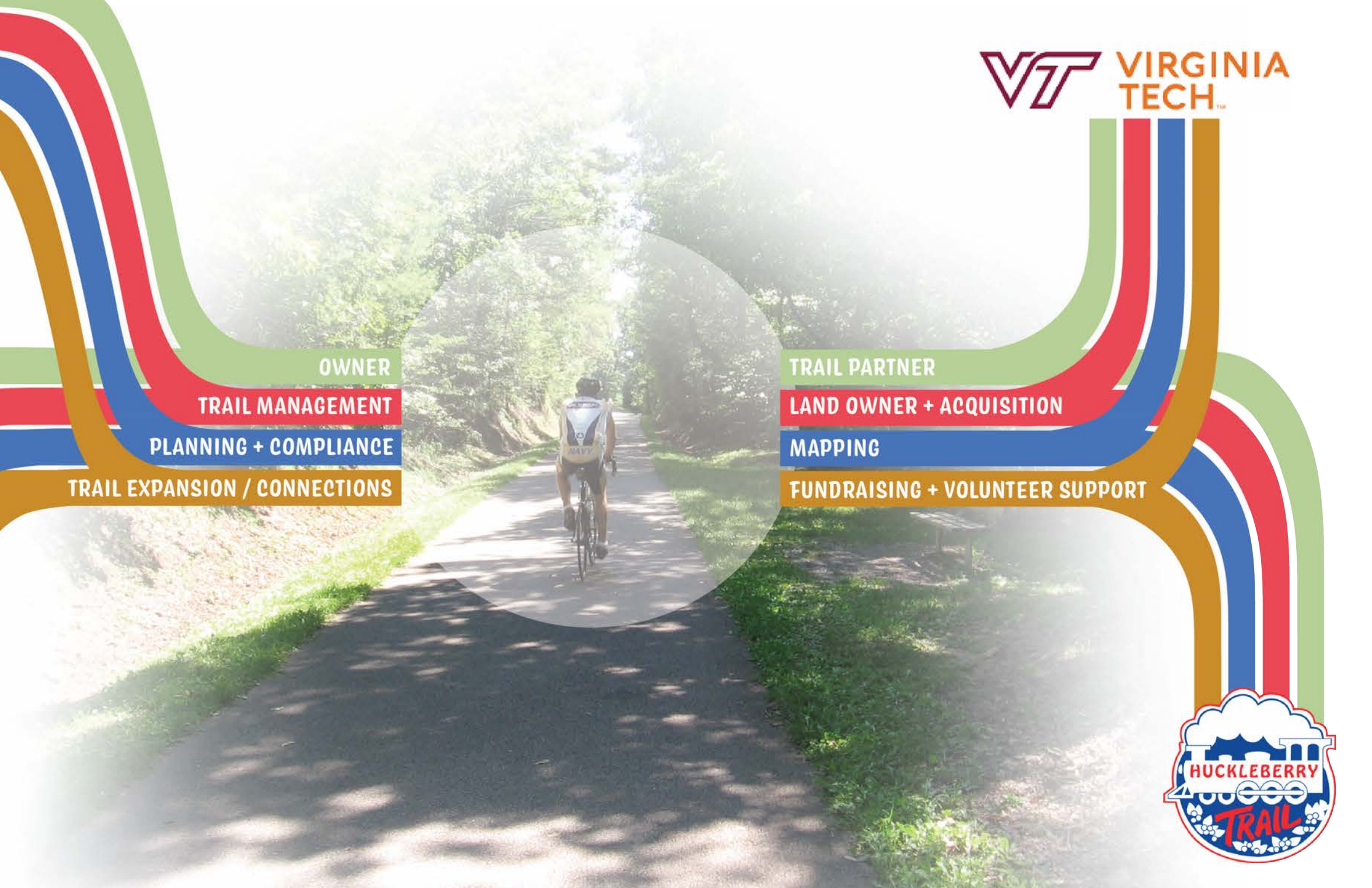
TOWN OF
Blacksburg
VIRGINIA



OWNER
TRAIL MANAGEMENT
PLANNING + COMPLIANCE
TRAIL EXPANSION / CONNECTIONS

VT VIRGINIA
TECH.

TRAIL PARTNER
LAND OWNER + ACQUISITION
MAPPING
FUNDRAISING + VOLUNTEER SUPPORT



Today, the Huckleberry Trail is a community asset and a shared responsibility that is maintained by five trail partners, including the towns of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, Montgomery County, Virginia Tech, and Friends of the Huckleberry. The trail creates opportunities for commuting, active recreation, and building community social health. Each trail partner contributes in different ways, and considering that the initial mile of trail was constructed more than 50 years ago, each partner is also in vastly different stages of trail development and enhancement.

The Parks and Recreation Departments of the of Blacksburg and Christiansburg, and Montgomery County serve as the primary point of contact for trail inquiries and reporting issues. Local Public Works, Police, and EMS departments also have important supporting roles in maintaining trail clearances and coordinating organized events. Friends of The Huckleberry works with local trail owners to promote, fund, construct, and maintain the trail. Virginia Tech collaborates with the Town of Blacksburg to keep the trail conditions on campus in good condition. The table (below) provides a snapshot of trail partner contributions towards everyday trail maintenance.



Huckleberry Trail partners are effectively utilize existing in-house resources for trail management. Some of the typical maintenance routines are very similar, between one partner’s approach and another, and common maintenance goals could be established, should sufficient resources and capacity allow. The table (below) highlights some of the most common practices and provides strategies that could assist with creating a more consistent user experience, throughout the full length of trail.

TRAIL STAKEHOLDER	Roles in Routine Maintenance							
	Ownership/ Liability	Mowing + Vegetation	Trash + Litter Removal	Snow Removal	Vandalism	Trail Access	Wayfinding Signage (On Trail)	Trail Maps
Town of Blacksburg	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Town of Christiansburg	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Montgomery County	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Virginia Tech	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Friends of the Huckleberry	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●

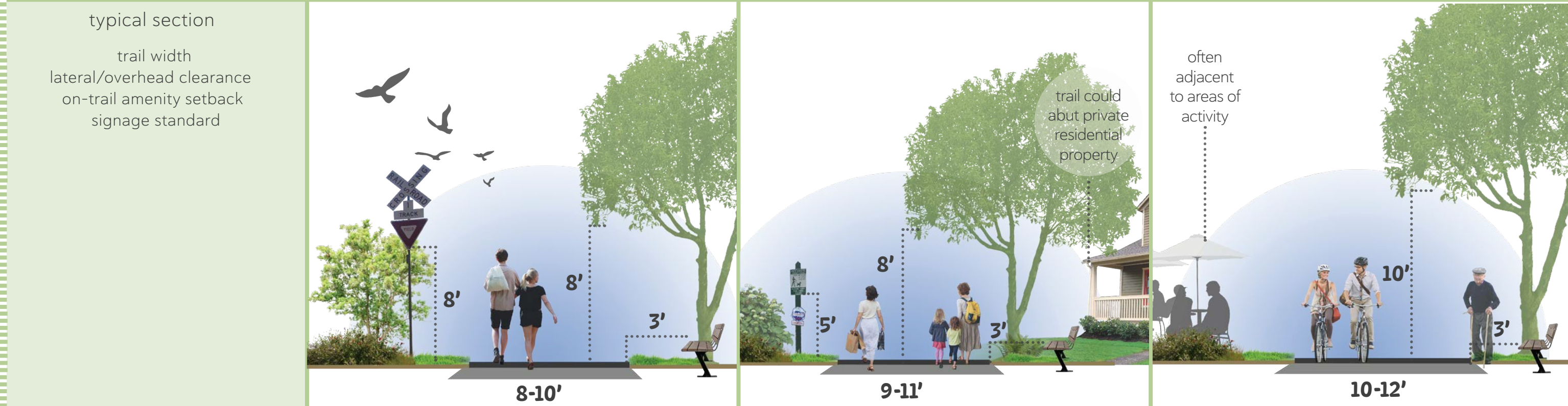
Responsible: ● Contributor: ○ N/A: ○

Frequency/ Goal	Trail Routine Maintenance + Operations Goals							
	Mowing	Trimming Vegetation	Sweeping	Trash + Litter Removal	Snow Removal	Vandalism	Coordinate Volunteers	Coordinate Events
	about every 10 days	monthly inspection, best management practices checklist, as needed	monthly inspection, best management practices checklist, as needed	weekly, encourage users to take with them	48 hours or less, unless weekend*	weekly inspection, best management practices checklist, graffiti within 48 hours or less as needed	owner and/or partner managed for trail clean-up + routine maintenance	owner managed, single form + shared calendar, bi-annual meetings + monthly updates
Responsible Party	Trail Owners	Trail Owners	Trail Owners	Trail Owners + Partners	Trail Owners	Trail Owners + Partners	Trail Owners + Partners	Trail Owners + Partners

Note: Trail Owners, for the purpose of this table, include the towns of Blacksburg, Christiansburg, and Montgomery County. Trail Partners, for the purpose of this table, include Virginia Tech and Friends of Huckleberry. However, Virginia Tech does assist with mowing and snow removal. *Cross country skiers and dog sledding community members enjoy snow being on the trail.



TRAIL SETTING (1)	RURAL	SUBURBAN	URBAN
DESIGN FEATURE	Paved surface, semi-rural and/or semi-primitive, higher chances of solitude	Paved surface, urban and/or semi-rural, limited ROW, equal chances of contact with others and solitude	Paved surface, urban, limited ROW, higher chance of contact with others
trail width(2)	8-10 feet, perceived 2-lane operation, up to 300 one-way users per hour	9-11 feet, perceived 2-3 lane operation, up to 300 one-way users per hour	10-12 feet, perceived 3-lane operation (beginning at 11 feet width), up to 500 one-way users per hour
gateway trail head(2) <small>(min one per trail owner)</small>	ADA parking, well-maintained and Huckleberry Trail branded kiosk information area, bike fix-it station	Rural + water, vehicular wayfinding to parking areas, QR codes to access trail resources (no cost and for purchase)	Suburban + restroom, emergency stations, connections to transit
local trail head spacing (3)	Local owner standards, spacing every 10-miles or less	Local owner standards, spacing every 5-miles or less	Local owner standards, spacing as needed/available
vegetation	Plantings should be consistent with the surrounding natural environment, combat invasive species, and help define the trail edge.	Plantings should respond to adjacent properties, regularly maintained, and follow CPTED standards.	Plantings should be used to further define entrances, naturally guide users to points of interest, and could be more robust considering proximity to resources.
rest stops/ rest areas (2)	Spacing typically more than 3-miles- location awareness signage, seating, bike racks	Spacing typically every 2-3 miles- rural + bike fix-its, picnic table, trash/recycling bins	Spacing typically every 2-3 miles or less-suburban + emergency stations, restroom access



Two, approximately one-mile sections of trail in Blacksburg and Montgomery County, were identified as areas for priority maintenance and to feature for their ease of access. The two “blue ribbon” sections were selected due to the adjacency to handicapped parking, trail gateway accessibility, gentle running and cross slope, and trail amenities with further accommodations.

To add to the variety of trail experiences, users have the opportunity to enjoy an ADA accessible natural surface trail adjacent to the Huckleberry Trail “blue ribbon” section that meanders through Coal Mining Heritage Park.

The Federal Highway Association has noted the importance of designing pedestrian facilities to meet the needs of all users. The FHWA has defined many of these different types of users (3):

- Stroller users
- Wheelchair users
- Individuals with limited balance
- Individuals with a vision impairment
- Individuals with cognitive impairments
- Individuals with emotional impairments
- Individuals who are obese
- Crutch or support cane users
- Individuals with low fitness levels
- Older Adults
- Children



SIGNAGE WITH DIVERSE USERS IN MIND

MAINTENANCE PRIORITY (4)

Provide information on accessibility when training maintenance personnel

LESS SIGNIFICANT SLOPE PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL USERS

Running slope < 5%
Cross slope < 2%

ACCESSIBLE AMENITIES

36”x48” clear + traversable landing pad next to bench



9-11'

This section highlights feedback received from subject experts and existing trail managers. Subject experts participated in field visits and virtual meetings to share their own maintenance goals, experience working with multiple trail partners, and lessons learned.

BUILD A GREAT ASSET FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

UPLIFTING THE TRAIL TO A NEW LEVEL

RICHER AND BROADER COLLABORATION AMONGST STAKEHOLDERS AND WITH THE COMMUNITY

CONNECTIVITY ULTIMATELY RESULTING IN OUR AREA BECOMING A "DESTINATION MOUNTAIN TOWN" ETC.

SEEKING EXPERT ADVICE POST-IT NOTE COMMENTS FROM AFTERNOON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SESSION FACILITATED BY AMY CAMP OF CYCLE FORWARD

Cycle Forward



On February 24, 2022 Amy Camp of Cycle Forward facilitated a full-day stakeholder engagement session which brought together many key Huckleberry Trail stakeholders, from tourism professionals to land conservation activists. The goals of the workshop included:

- Begin a dialogue around developing a local trail culture and trail-supporting communities
- Discuss how to achieve clear and consistent communications between stakeholders, community members, trail users, and trail maintainers
- Engage and encourage participating stakeholders, unlocking their creative energy as part of the larger Huckleberry Trail Planning process

Morning trail visits that encouraged people to Observe, Participate, and Reflect on their trail experiences. The “participate” portion was an electronic individual assessment of each trail location. Participants shared their insights on the value of the trail location and existing/missing infrastructure and connectivity to local communities. The entire group later reflected on the morning trail visits. The afternoon included:

- The “Ideal Community” small group activity and large group discussion
- A presentation on unlocking the potential of trails and trail communities
- A large group discussion about the three trail locations
- A strategic discussion concerning planning for the future of the trail

Nearly every person in attendance spoke out sharing their perspectives during the afternoon session. Themes that emerged around desired trail expansions, increased community connectivity, and equity and inclusion are consistent with trail-related objectives and best practices observed in other areas.

QUIRKY, DELIGHTFUL AND SURPRISING ELEMENTS WE CAN INCLUDE ALONG THE TRAIL.

-CONSISTENT BRANDING IN SIGNAGE
-MARKETING THAT TELLS THE STORY OF THE TRAIL(S)
-COMMUTER "CLUB"
EDUCATION ABOUT HOW TO COMMUTE BY BIKE

-BE FUNCTIONAL FOR COMMUTING TO WORK, SHOPPING, SCHOOL ETC.
-AN ENTRY POINT FOR USERS OF ALL ABILITIES
-AN AESTHETICALLY PLEASING EXPERIENCE

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (REMOVE INVASIVES- CELEBRATE NATIVES, LIKE THE HUCKLEBERRY)

NOVA PARKS
EXPERT FEEDBACK



January 18, 2022, the project management team met with Mr. Mark Whaley, Park Operations Specialist, and Mr. Kevin Casalenuovo, W&OD Railroad Park/Trail Manager. The Washington and Old Dominion Railroad (W&OD) Regional Park is often referred to as one of the skinniest parks in Virginia, and includes a 45-mile trail that runs through urban centers and beautiful countryside.

The NOVA Parks (as the organization came to be known in 2014) was established under the Virginia Park Authorities Act in 1959. The Regional Authority represents Arlington, Fairfax, and Loudon Counties, and the Cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, and Fairfax. Today NOVA Parks maintains over 12,000 acres of Virginia parks.

Best management practices and trail tips shared during the conversation included:

- Every community has a sense of trail ownership
- Currently using National Parks Service standards for trail signage and amenities
- Currently maintaining four restrooms + community businesses encourage trail users to use facilities and patron downtowns
- Doesn't formally manage trail amenity styles - focuses on trail clearance for users
- User behavior is the #1 issue (sporting vs. family users)
- Doesn't maintain trash collection - encourages users to take trash with them
- Graffiti and vandalism are encountered weekly - goal of 72-hours for correcting
- Does not currently plow and will discontinue pre-treatment of snow to preserve pavement markings and preserve water quality
- Coordinated events must begin and end at a location that is away from the trail
- Beginning to incorporate QR codes at trail heads and interpretive signed areas
- Currently provides mile-markers at every half-mile and at intersections

VIRGINIA CAPITAL TRAIL FOUNDATION
EXPERT FEEDBACK

April 1, 2022 the project management team met with Ms. Cat Anthony, Executive Director of the Virginia Capital Trail Foundation (VCTF). The Virginia Capital Trail snakes along the James River and State Route 5 for 52-miles. The trail connects the Commonwealth's capital of Richmond to the historic capitals of Jamestown and Williamsburg.

Since September 2004, the VCTF has served as a nonpartisan advocacy partner to provide expertise, raise public awareness, and to seek funding contributions to enhance the trail experience. In the beginning, the foundation was essential to the completion of the trail by raising public awareness and seeking construction funding. Today, the VCTF continues to serve as a resource, community builder, and connector to other trails in the Commonwealth.

Best management practices and trail tips shared during the conversation included:

- Collaboration and cultivation of strong relationships is a guiding principle
- VCTF maintains a "how to" resource for event planning (community police and EMS departments are often the coordinating entity)
- Trail segments and trailheads are owned by local community and DOT partners
- Formal MOUs are in place with many of the trail owners
- Localities retain flexibility to implement their own placemaking initiatives
- Vehicular navigation signage about the trail aligns with community standards
- On-trail wayfinding signage guides users to points of interest and avoids listing specific businesses
- Coordinates two full-trail volunteer clean-up days
- Volunteer construction projects are limited to licensed contractors
- Current newsletter has about 10,000 subscribers and a 40% open rate
- Coordinates 800 volunteers annually, April - October
- Trail Ambassadors program - a group of dedicated, trained volunteers who provide information assistance, basic first aid, bike repair, report trail issues, and clean up litter





PLAN FOR COLLABORATION

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Collaboration and transparency are familiar spaces for local governments in Virginia's New River Valley. Economic and workforce development, public utilities, and emergency services are just a few of the areas where NRV communities pool resources. Each year, local government partners meet to review budgets for the upcoming fiscal year and also to confirm collaborative initiatives. Regional transportation interests include attracting passenger rail to Christiansburg and creating the Valley-to-Valley Trail, which will connect the New River Trail State Park to the Radford Riverway, the Huckleberry Trail, and the Roanoke Greenway System.

The Huckleberry Trail is an important regional asset and trail partners continue to make investments and pursue competitive funding opportunities to expand and/or improve the trail assets each year. Individual priorities include: the Town of Blacksburg will be investing in resurfacing the trail and also widening the typical section to ten feet later this year; the Town of Christiansburg continues to build new trail and extend it further south into downtown; Montgomery County has additional phases planned for the Coal Miners Heritage Park area that will create new rest areas and improve ADA access; Virginia Tech is enhancing trail amenities and maintaining a robust online interactive map; and the Friends of Huckleberry just installed new mile marker posts and is actively developing organizational priorities so that it can continue to be a strong partner and advocate.

In addition to the trail work that is already underway, trail partners expressed interest in collaborating on a few topics:

1. MAINTAINING THE EXISTING TRAIL AT A HIGH STANDARD
Focus on trail clearances when trimming vegetation or installing new amenities, regular mowing and clearing of debris, combating graffiti and vandalism quickly.
2. CONTINUING TO EXPAND AND ENHANCE THE TRAIL AND CONNECTIONS TO OTHER ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION ASSETS
Asphalt surface material, accessibility for users of all abilities, connecting to local trails and transit stops.
3. DEVELOPING 3-4 "GATEWAY" TRAIL ACCESS LOCATIONS
Uniquely branded just for the Huckleberry and consistent appearance and amenities at each location.

This section provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations identified through the planning process. To create consistency with other local, regional, and statewide transportation plans, next steps/goals are divided in to two parts: 1) Action Plan, and 2) Vision Plan. Goals identified in the Action Plan reflect ideas that have the most consensus, as well as activities and/or investments that are existing today. The Vision Plan includes ideas that may require further planning and conversations about compatibility, for both the Huckleberry Trail and the partners who maintain it. Generally, both plans are intended to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis, but not less than every five years.

PRECEDENT



Trail Expansion + Connectivity

Improving Access for Users of All Abilities

Trail Mapping + Information

Event Planning

Volunteer Support

Trail Landscaping

Trail Adjacent Attractions

Gateway Trail Access

Integrity of Local Brand

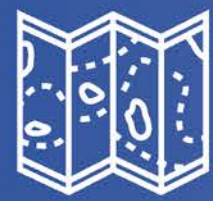
Incorporation of Local History + Art

Wayfinding + Signage (on trail)

Fundraising

Consistency of Trail Amenities

Promotion as a Destination Trail



ACTION PLAN ITEMS

CONTINUED CONVERSATIONS

VISION PLAN OPPORTUNITIES



ID	GOAL	PARTNERS	INITIATION TARGET	COST
1	Maintain existing Huckleberry Trail segments	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	ongoing	Utilize existing resources
2	Continue expanding the Huckleberry Trail South and increase connections to other alternative transportation assets (trails, transit, rail, etc.)	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	ongoing	\$\$\$ avg per year
3	Collaborate to develop consistently branded Gateway Trailheads	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Friends of the Huckleberry	Fall 2023	\$\$\$ each gateway
4	Improve and/or create new access to the most user-friendly sections of trail	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Friends of the Huckleberry	Spring 2027	\$\$ per location
5	Collaborate to update and/or create new trail mapping, free and for purchase versions	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Spring 2023	Utilize existing resources
6	Incorporate local history and art along the trail	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of Huckleberry, Blacksburg Regional Art Association, Christiansburg Institute, Christiansburg Arts Advisory Board, Montgomery Museum, Christiansburg "Public" Arts Advisory Board	Spring 2024	\$ per location
7	Develop and maintain a streamlined approach to event planning	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Spring 2024	Utilize existing resources
8	Huckleberry Trail Partners & Managers Meeting, bi-annually, Spring & Fall	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Fall 2022	Utilize existing resources

*\$- <10k
 \$\$- 10k-50k
 \$\$\$- >50K

ID	GOAL	PARTNERS	COST
1	Create additional ranges of opportunities for fundraising initiatives (tree groves, restroom areas, gateways, bike repair, etc.)	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Utilize existing resources
2	Create more opportunities and options for volunteers to contribute year-round	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Utilize existing resources
3	Construct pedestrian bridge over Prices Fork Rd at the end of Sheffield Dr	Blacksburg, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Unknown
4	Install wayfinding signage for intersecting trails, points of interest, and amenities	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Friends of the Huckleberry	Unknown
5	Collaborate to develop a best management practices plan for healthy trail vegetation	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	\$ per partner
6	Collaborate to develop a trail capital improvement plan to guide fundraising investments	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Utilize existing resources
7	Establish a formal MOU to create a Trail Ambassadors Program	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of Huckleberry	Unknown
8	Promote the Huckleberry as a destination trail in tourism campaigns	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Unknown
9	Develop and maintain consistent standards for trail amenities and technology	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	Unknown
10	Install blue-light emergency stations every half-mile mark and in low traffic and/or areas that remain dark	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	\$ per station
11	Install bollards where trail intersects with parking areas and other roadways	Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Montgomery, Virginia Tech, Friends of the Huckleberry	\$ per location



NEXT STEPS

The Huckleberry Trail is an important asset for the New River Valley’s transportation network. As such, the NRVMPPO’s Technical Advisory Committee advises acknowledging the trail as a critical roadway/commuter route. Special events, maintenance and construction, and other activities should mitigate any potential impacts that would otherwise hinder continuous through bicycle and pedestrian traffic during daylight hours. Collaboration and transparency are familiar spaces for local governments in Virginia’s New River Valley. Through a series of one-on-one meetings and review and input from the NRVMPPO’s Technical Advisory Committee, trail partners expressed potential interest in collaborating on the following next steps:

1. ESTABLISH A BI-ANNUAL MEETING
Spring meeting could focus on anticipated special events/scheduling and collaborative trail maintenance activities. Fall meeting could focus on developing/incorporating/expanding Huckleberry Trail brand, identifying fundraising initiatives, and acknowledging key trail partners/contributors.
2. MAINTAINING THE EXISTING TRAIL AT A HIGH STANDARD
Continue focus on trail clearances when trimming vegetation, regular mowing and clearing of debris, combating graffiti and vandalism quickly
3. CONTINUING TO EXPAND AND ENHANCE THE TRAIL AND CONNECTIONS TO OTHER ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION ASSETS
Continue supporting the expansion of the Huckleberry Trail and connections population and employment centers/clusters
4. DEVELOPING 3-4 “GATEWAY” TRAIL ACCESS LOCATIONS
Develop a uniquely branded premium kiosk just for the Huckleberry, and develop cost estimates to create consistency of appearance and amenities at each location
5. STREAMLINING EVENT COORDINATION
Continue exploring the creation of a universal form that is compatible in the towns and county, and creating a shared calendar
6. IDENTIFYING MORE WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE
Explore establishing a new trail ambassadors volunteer program and creating alternatives to benches for donations (tree groves, planting areas, etc.)



