

Resurfacing of the St. Marks Trail, Status Update
Office of Greenways & Trails, Todd McGee, 850-245-2052
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Funding – The 2006 Florida Legislature funded \$5 million, effective July 1, 2006, to the Office of Greenways & Trails for statewide maintenance, repair and construction of trails and related facilities. It is estimated by the design consultant that approximately \$3.5 million will be used for resurfacing, repairing and upgrading the 16 mile Tallahassee-St. Marks Historic Railroad State Trail (St Marks Trail), which is located between Capital Circle Southeast and the St. Marks River. In addition, this funding will provide for a boardwalk along the river in St. Marks and an observation tower. It will also fund a new restroom facility and several pavilions at the Wakulla Station Trailhead where the Boundless Playground is located and a significant amount of public use occurs.

Purpose of Resurfacing and Width – The St. Marks Trail currently has an 8-foot wide paved surface and was the first rail-trail in the State trail system to be paved. After 20 years of service, it's time to address wear and tear, as well as safety issues such as bumps, dips, crumbling edges and drop offs at the edge of the pavement. These improvements are necessary for safety and to make the trail more usable for recreational users, especially those on thin tire bicycles and in-line skates. While resurfacing the trail surface is the primary objective of this project, it will be also widened to 12 ft. during the process. This is the only State Trail paved at less than 12 feet wide.* Portions of the trail, however, may remain 8 ft or possibly be widened to only 10 ft., instead of 12 ft., in order to protect the tree canopy or other natural features. A minimum of a 3 ft. grassy shoulder will remain on each side of the trail for runners/walkers, and the equestrian trails will remain in existence.

**Florida's Manual of Uniform Standards for Design, Construction and Maintenance for Streets and Highways (Florida Greenbook) - "Chapter 9- Bicycle Facilities" and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials - "Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities" recommends minimum widths of 10 feet, and desirable widths of 12 feet under certain conditions, such as substantial use by bicycles, joggers, skaters and pedestrians.*

Canopy Protection – Protection of the tree canopy is a priority of OGT. Special conditions (protecting trees, canopy, and natural areas, etc.) were included in both the Wakulla and Leon County designs. The Wakulla County segment (Phase I) design revealed no impacts to vegetation and the canopy. However, as the construction progresses, OGT will make any adjustments as necessary to minimize any impacts if encountered. The Leon County segment (Phase II) design is 90% complete and although no impacts have been identified, OGT will ensure that the canopy is protected. In some instances, the trail may remain less than 12 ft. where deemed appropriate by the OGT project manager.

Estimated Timeframe – Pending receipt of all permits, OGT anticipates that the trail construction will begin no later than April 2010. Construction will occur in two phases to ensure that the trail users have constant access to a portion of the trail. Phase 1 will begin at Riverside Drive in the City of St. Marks and terminate at the Wakulla County line. This phase consists of 10.79 miles. During Phase 1 construction, the trail will be closed for use beginning in April and reopening in December 2010. The Wakulla Station Trailhead will remain open during Phase 1 construction, with the exception of four days in August, when the entrance drive and walking loops inside the trailhead will be resurfaced. The contractor will ensure that these trailhead improvements will occur during weekdays so that construction will not interfere with weekend activities at the trailhead. Phase 2 construction will begin at the Leon County line and terminate

at the main trailhead at Capital Circle. OGT anticipates that Phase 2 construction will begin in December upon completion of Phase 1 and is anticipated to reopen in July 2011.

St. Marks Redevelopment – The Tallahassee-St. Marks Trail plays a key role in the revitalization of the City of St. Marks. St. Marks is located at the southern terminus of the trail. As part of this resurfacing project, the new St. Marks River Trailhead, on which OGT will begin construction within the next year, is expected to significantly increase use of the southern segment of the trail. The City is working to revitalize the economy through a Waterfronts Florida project to draw attention to the natural beauty and rich history of the area. City officials are pleased that the southern seven miles of the trail will be reconstructed first.

“I don’t want to see St. Marks die,” says Billy Bishop, chairman of the 15-member St. Marks Waterfronts Florida committee, a partner with the Department of Community Affairs’ waterfronts revitalization program. (January 1, 2009, Florida Trend)

“I think it is great that St. Marks Trailhead is first to be done. This will bring in more activity in St. Marks to help out our business in the City.” Chuck Shields, City of St. Marks, City Commissioner, Public Meeting comment sheet, December 2, 2008