



FALL LINE TRAIL

State Project No. 9999-964-724, P101, R201,
C501

UPC: 120289

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC HEARING COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

INTRODUCTION

The Fall Line Trail was established to create active transportation connections in Central Virginia, taking advantage of existing and planned active transportation facilities, abandoned railroad corridors, power transmission easements, and other locations where a new on- and off-road trail could be implemented. The preferred location for the Fall Line Trail was initially identified through the Ashland to Petersburg Trail Study, which was conducted by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in coordination with a Stakeholder Working Group, Environmental Agency Working Group, and input through public meetings and outreach. As part of the Ashland to Petersburg Trail study, VDOT held public information meetings in March 2019 and October 2019.

Since the completion of the study and the identification of the preferred corridor, a number of alignment refinements have been incorporated into the corridor, to be consistent with current local and regional priorities for active transportation, recreation, and economic development. VDOT has also been working hard with locality jurisdictions, as well as the Central Virginia Transportation Authority (CVTA), to plan for and build out the trail.

Two Location Public Hearings were held to provide an opportunity for the public to review the proposed location and provide any comments or input to help inform the project development process. The meetings were held on May 3, 2022 at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens (1800 Lakeside Avenue, Richmond) and May 5, 2022 at the Hilton Garden Inn – Southpark (800 Southpark Boulevard, Colonial Heights). The Location Public Hearings utilized an open forum format, as described in Section 3.07 of VDOT's *Public Involvement Manual*, to provide an opportunity for the public to interact with a team of technical experts and inform the Commonwealth Transportation Board's (CTB) location decision for the Fall Line Trail. As part of the open forum format, no formal presentations were included at the public hearing; however, there were 13 display boards and a summary brochure available for review. Additionally, VDOT staff were available to discuss any of the materials or answer questions. Materials for the public hearing were also made available on the project website.

In conjunction with the public hearings, between May 3 and May 18, 2022, VDOT held a comment period during which comments could be submitted regarding the Fall Line Trail. The public was provided the opportunity to give written or verbal comments at the Public Hearings or by completing a survey online, in addition to mailing or emailing comments.

A total of 517 comments were received as part of the May 2022 Location Public Hearings and the associated comment period. There were 47 comment sheets submitted at the public hearings, 388 received via the online survey, and 82 comment sheets and written comments were sent via email and standard mail. Following is a summary of the narrative comments made, organized by general topics, and responses to each topic.

RESPONSES TO COMMENT TOPICS

Support Project and Support Alignment

There were 148 commenters that indicated support of the Fall Line Trail project and another 291 comments were made in support of the proposed alignment presented at the Location Public Hearing. These comments do not require an individual response but have been included here and in the project record.

Oppose Alignment

Of the comments submitted, 62 comments noted opposition to the Fall Line Trail's proposed alignment. Many oppose the alignment due to its location in the vicinity of their property, potential right-of-way acquisitions, and the potential safety and security issues, all of which are addressed below. Additionally, several comments mentioned that the existing on-road bike lanes should be used instead of building a new bike path.

Response: The goal of the Fall Line Trail is to have a continuous shared use path that would provide for both bicycles and pedestrians and would be physically separated from roadway traffic, providing the most stress-free environment for the users, which the existing bike lanes do not provide. However, VDOT is working with localities to develop design guidelines to allow for specific considerations in constrained conditions. Additionally, an important part of this planning process is that the City will seek additional public input, as well as have some design modifications, that may include revising the alignment as the project moves forward.

Location Concerns & Recommendations

There were 74 commenters that identified concerns or suggested modifications relating to the proposed alignment location. Additionally, 53 comments included suggestions to incorporate the Fall Line Trail into the Bridge Park conceptualized over the Manchester Bridge in downtown Richmond. Following are areas of concern:

- Petersburg – suggest extending the termini 200 feet to the south to the historic train abutment at the corner of University Blvd and the Norfolk-Southern Railroad Track to coordinate with the VDOT Revenue Sharing project.
- Petersburg terminus to the VSU campus – support for a bridge to maintain more level ground to ensure a comfortable experience for all ages and abilities and create a beautiful placemaking across the Appomattox River.
- VSU campus– support for the option that travels closer to the perimeter of the campus which will likely create better synergy between public use of the trail and a campus community which has historically enjoyed a closed campus.
- Colonial Heights
 - Old Town Creek crossing – suggest using the old Seaboard Air Line (SAL) SAL bridge, just north of the present-day CSX railroad.
 - CSX crossing – three options were suggested – a) tunnel under the CSX tracks; b) use the bridge where Old Town Creek flows under the CSX tracks; c) divert the trail north of Old Town Creek to the corner of Taswell Avenue and Cedar Lane, then use the pedestrian walkway under the CSX bridge.
 - Branders Bridge Road/Swift Creek Lane/Kelmarbi Road – concern with the trail being on or near their residences
- BridgePark/Manchester Bridge – Many commenters are in favor of incorporating the BridgePark project, a linear park that would cross the James River connecting the city center

to both sides of the river, into the Fall Line Trail alignment to connect the two amenities. Several other commenters were against using the center median of the Manchester Bridge, where there would be no views of the river. Others noted concern about using the Manchester Bridge due to concerns about future available traffic capacity of the bridge.

- Downtown Richmond
 - Suggest connecting to existing destinations, such as Kanawha Plaza (adjacent but not through), the Capitol, Valentine and John Marshall House, Leigh Street, Black History Museum, Maggie Walker House.
 - Suggest using 9th Street instead of 7th Street, and to not hug the highway.
 - Virginia Capital Trail – several commenters suggested that there should be a connection with the Fall Line Trail
- Northside
 - Bryan Park – several commenters noted concern about the alignment affecting the park amenities and gardens and traffic
 - Brook Road and Brookland Parkway were already reduced to one lane each direction – suggest using the existing bike lanes, instead of affecting the historic neighborhood
 - Hermitage Road/Laburnum Road – one commenter is concerned about safety to riders, while another suggest fitting the bike lanes within the existing roadway, while not impacting curbing, street trees, or medians.
 - Diamond District – reroute out of the Sherwood Park neighborhood down Hermitage Road and through the newly planned Diamond District
- Ashland – reroute to avoid paving the Ashland Trolley Line

Response: As various segments of the Fall Line Trail advance, VDOT and the various localities involved in the Fall Line Trail will consider feedback received from the public to evaluate potential modifications or refinements to the proposed trail location. Additionally, as segments of the trail advance to future phases of project development and funding mechanisms are identified, detailed typical section design, including facility type and consideration of design opportunities and constraints will be taken into account. Presently, VDOT is developing guidelines specific to the Fall Line Trail to assist engineers and designers in determining the specific design features of the trail, depending on the anticipated number of users and the location of the trail facility, among other factors.

Environmental Concerns

Of the comments provided, 16 comments included concerns about the trail's construction and implementation having an impact on noise, drainage, historic districts, and traffic. Many others questioned the status of mature trees along the proposed alignment, particularly on Hermitage Road.

Response: Prior to construction, temporary and permanent environmental impacts will be assessed and minimized to the extent practicable, including the removal of established street trees. As the design progresses, considerations for any environmental protection, such as protective barriers, will be reviewed. VDOT and the different municipalities will work together to ensure that the facility is built in a way that minimizes the project's potential environmental impact as well as adjacent private properties.

Regarding drainage and stormwater management, as the design progresses, drainage will be evaluated and managed so as not to increase the flow rate to the outfalls more than what is being

drained in the "pre-construction" condition. While the trail project is not scoped to make drainage improvements to existing conditions, it will not create any new drainage problems. During construction, the contractor would be required to adhere to strict erosion, sediment control, and stormwater measures. Post-construction impacts to water quality would be minimized and avoided through implementation of stormwater control measures which would be designed to treat or store polluted stormwater before entering nearby streams.

Safety and Security Concerns

There were 73 comments focused on the safety and security of the trail, including the safety and security of those using the trail, as well as the safety and security of residences adjacent to the trail and the potential for an increase in crime or dangerous activities along or adjacent to the trail.

Response: Considerations for safety features, such as lighting or call boxes, as well as enforcement will be evaluated as the design advances, as well as once segments of the trail are constructed. VDOT and the respective localities will work to ensure the facility is constructed in a manner that is safe and accessible for all active transportation users.

Safety in respect to the Fall Line Trail and the surrounding areas is being taken into account within the design phase of the project. Crime prevention through environmental design tactics will be used to provide proper visibility on the trail. Additionally, VDOT is working with various localities to ensure the trail would be properly maintained and regularly patrolled to ensure a safe trail environment.

Right-of-Way/Property Takings Concerns

Seven comments focused on Right-of-Way and property takings regarding the construction of the trail. In addition, a number of comments were made regarding the potential economic impact the trail could have on property values.

Response: Private property rights are protected by both federal and state legislation. Once the design has progressed, impacted property owners would be contacted regarding any potential acquisitions, and would be fairly compensated for the required acreage and improvements on the parcels. To be justly compensated for property, the compensation amount must not be less than the amount established in the approved appraisal report as the fair market value of the property. All affected property owners would be compensated for the fair market value of the acquired portion of land and any structures acquired for construction. VDOT's *Right of Way Manual of Instructions* indicates that after any improvements have been planned and all requirements have been met, property owners would be notified, the property would be appraised accordingly, and just compensation would be offered and would never be less than the fair market value. Information regarding VDOT's Right-of-Way regulations can be found here: https://www.virginiadot.org/business/resources/local_assistance/LAD_LAP_manual_final/CH16_Right-of-Way.pdf

Regarding the potential impact to property values, while each individual case is different, studies about the economic impact of public use trails identify a number of trails, that after establishment actually increased property values and led to economic advancement for the whole community. Two such studies can be found at the following links:

<https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2020/may/the-impact-of-trails-and-greenways-on-property-values/>

<https://www.americancityandcounty.com/2021/11/15/trails-greenways-and-parks-infrastructure-projects-boost-economic-activity-and-help-residents-live-healthier-lives/>

Maintenance and Quality of Final Product

There were 21 comments included a focus on the quality of the final trail and the necessary maintenance for trail upkeep.

Response: Except along the segments of the trail that will be implemented along roadways currently owned or maintained by individual localities, VDOT is anticipated to accept responsibility for trail operations and maintenance after construction. These segments will be designed to VDOT specifications and standards and continually maintained to meet those standards and specifications. Additional segments of the Fall Line Trail that will not be maintained by VDOT or adopted into the state transportation system are provided for review and informational purposes. The specific location of these segments will be coordinated with the public as part of the applicable plan development process.

Regarding the quality of the final product, VDOT is developing guidelines specific to the Fall Line Trail to assist engineers and designers in determining the specific typical section and other design features of the trail, depending on the anticipated number of users and location of the trail facility, among other factors. VDOT's Road Design manual (rev July 2019) requires a 10-foot minimum paved width of a two-directional shared use path with a two-foot graded area with a maximum 6:1 slope and a minimum three-foot clearance maintained on either side of the path to signs, trees, and other lateral obstructions. Although the recommend width of a shared us path is 10 feet, Appendix A (1) – VDOT Complete Streets: Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Guidelines, Bus Stop Design and Parking Guidelines of VDOT's Road Design Manual (rev July 2019) indicates that a path width of eight feet, with a clear width of two feet on both sides, may be used due to physical constraints, including bridge abutments. VDOT also acknowledges in their Road Design Manual that it may be necessary to increase the width of a shared use path to 11 feet, or even 14 feet, due to substantial use by people bicycling, running, walking, and using other active transportation methods. The ultimate shared use path trail width will be determined during final design of each individual project that moves forward.

Access and Amenities

There were 23 comments that included questions regarding how the trail would be accessed, proximity of these access points to other destinations of interest, associated parking facilities, and what amenities would be provided along the trail.

Response: As the design of the Fall Line Trail advances, specific trailheads, access points and amenities will be identified depending on the various segments of the trail, nearby destinations of interest, and other considerations. VDOT is developing design guidelines for recommendations to consider the location of restroom facilities and other amenities to be included as each segment advances. Considerations for the location of entrances and amenities are expected to include an evaluation of the anticipated number of users as well as nearby destinations of interest. Additionally, entrances and amenities may be incorporated after the construction of various trail segments. For reference, the Virginia Capital Trail generally includes trailheads and amenities every three to five miles. The specific amenities, access points, and parking facilities will become more apparent as we progress into a more detailed design.

Cost and Schedule

Of the comments submitted, 44 comments focused on barriers that would prevent completion of the project, whether it be through funding, the time it would take to finish, or other complications.

Response: Segments of the Fall Line Trail will be implemented through a variety of procurement and delivery methods; therefore, specific schedules for various segments of the trail are currently under development. VDOT and the localities along the Fall Line Trail are working together to plan and build out the trail. Presently, there are several segments being designed and planned for construction within each locality. VDOT anticipates several segments of the trail to be included in the first phase that would be constructed through a design-build project procurement method, anticipated to be announced towards the end of 2022. Individual localities have released information about their own schedules for project completion of other sections of the trail. Hanover County and the Town of Ashland have announced that sections within their localities are expected to be completed by 2024. In addition, Henrico County has released their proposed project schedule, which anticipates beginning construction in late 2022 with completion anticipated by the end of 2024. Presently, Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Richmond City, and Petersburg have not announced specific construction plans; however, construction for the entire trail is anticipated to take between 5 and 7 years to complete.

Regarding funding, the current total cost of the trail is anticipated to be approximately \$266.5 million. However, Fall Line Trail estimates continue to be updated as funding is identified, and project procurement and delivery methods are determined. While the entire trail is not yet funded, specific portions are funded. The Central Virginia Transportation Authority (CVTA), established in 2020, was created to provide transportation funding sources for the localities in central Virginia: Town of Ashland, City of Richmond, Charles City County, Chesterfield County, Goochland County, Hanover County, Henrico County, New Kent County, and Powhatan County. For the Fall Line Trail project, CVTA has dedicated \$104 million to the completion of the trail. In addition, the Commonwealth Transportation Board has dedicated \$43 million for the planning and completion of the trail. For the remaining funding, VDOT and the included localities are pursuing alternate funding sources, such as SMART SCALE or the Transportation Alternatives Program, among others.