



**Trip Report
TrailLink 2001, St. Louis
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy Conference
25-29 September 2001**

To: John Balicki, Maine DOT
From: John Andrews, ETA
Date: 2 October 2001

RTC presented a great conference with distinguished speakers, excellent papers, and an opportunity to tour and meet the managers of the longest rail-trail in the country, the 225-mile Katy Trail. Only conference high lights are described, which are sorted and reported as food for thoughts that might enhance Maine's trail programs.

Maine Trail Session

Andrea Lapoint, Sally Jacobs and I each described our trail projects to a responsive, interested audience. We placed a list of Maine URLs, Maine's bike map and trail summaries on each chair before the session began. I used an LCD projector for the first time. Wow, what a difference. I was reshaping my presentation hours before the session.

Although we distributed Maine bike maps and a Maine contact flyer on a provided table in the exhibit area, we could included easel-mounted posters. Another time, I would bring one or two Maine trail posters.

How do other trail managers provide public safety?

David Dionne, Park Superintendent Anne Arundel County (Maryland) Trails, has several police-trained park employees on his 50 miles of trail during daylight hours. In addition he has many screened, trained, and uniformed volunteers who provide additional help to users. These volunteers are equipped with radios that include a park channel and a police channel. The volunteers belong to the trail friends group that also sells copies of their trail maintenance and management manual. David runs his own training program for staff and volunteers.

David also reported that they keep two spare signs for every one on the trail and will remove graffiti or replace a damaged sign within 24 hours. The ECGA is lucky to have David serve as its new president.

Katy Trail in Missouri is managed pretty much the same way. I saw two park rangers (police) on patrol with side arms. The trail is also supported by a large volunteer organization that provides additional official presence. Volunteers also wear uniform shirts with patches, but no weapons. Volunteers report problems and provide first aid and may repair bikes, but do not enforce the law. Volunteers have no assigned hours; they are simply trained users who report when the have been using the trail.

Public Health and Trails

Center for Disease Control, very visible, reported a steady increase in weight across the US. CDC considers it an epidemic caused by an increasingly sedentary life style. This has led, they report, to several hundred thousand premature deaths each year.. CDC recommends designing communities to allow and encourage people to walk or bike. CDC considers lack of walking or other exercise a public health crisis.

We were told the average American walks 400 yards per day. 29% of American lack any physical activity. In Oregon, 57% of the population is either overweight or obese.

Trails must connect destinations or only the healthy will use them. We must rebuild our communities to support walking. We need to create safe routes to walk to school. A former mayor of Bogata, Columbia told us that because they cannot afford cars and traffic is a problem, they banned auto traffic in the entire 7 million resident city. Public transportation provides the means to travel.

The “walking school bus” is being proposed to provide exercise and a safe way to school. One parent escorts several kids to school on foot. In my neighborhood each morning kids are driven less than a half-mile to the end of our dead-end street to catch a bus. If applied here, one parent would walk all the kids to the bus stop, or better, to all the way to school.

Who Uses Trails?

We have heard that trail users are desirable visitors who spend money and help the local economy. The Katy Trail volunteers surveyed their users and found that virtually all adult users have at least a college degree. A third have advanced degrees. Annual Katy Trail user income was reported as \$75K. The other side of this is that the average family is not using the Katy Trail. Many speakers told us we need to build trails that connect neighborhoods. The Eastern Trail by connecting town centers and schools should receiver wide use by its neighbors. Out-of-town ET users are likely to be similar to those who today use the Katy Trail. Several speakers recommended building trails that allow residents to start at their doorstep to go shopping or to school. (We saw a great example in Philadelphia in 2000 where the downtown streets are filled with bikes during rush hour.)

Some typical people met in St. Louis

Rory Robinson, NPS RT Program (Ohio) who works with NiSource to develop trails in northwest Indiana.

Andrea Fester, staff attorney for RTC.

Laura Cohen, San Francisco, who reported that trail funds are available from: NIH, CDC, EPA, and HUD.

9 trail advocates from Eastern Europe, and the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation director who paid their travel and attendance costs.

Mike Haynes of Nova Scotia who is working for trails along the Maritime pipeline that also crosses Maine.

Political Support

The governor of Missouri and the mayor of St. Louis attended our Thursday evening reception. We learned that trails have a friend in the White House Cabinet. The governor told us now-Attorney General Ashcroft was responsible for the Katy Trail when he served as governor of Missouri. Congressman James Oberstar, D-MN, Ranking Member, House Transportation Committee told us to be ready to organize to support the next round of enhancement funds when they come up for renewal. He told us we can't take success for granted.

Katy Trail Details

This mostly rural trail along the Missouri River has a limestone surface similar to the stone dust on Portland's Back Cove Trail and proposed for the ET. I measured the width of one section, which was 10-feet in width. Cinder block outhouses are located at trailhead parking lots about every 10 miles along the 26 miles we biked. It was easy to imagine we were on the future ET. But most users need to drive to get there; it connects farms and quaint villages, but not large population centers. Although already 225 miles long, the vision is to extend it another 190 miles westerly to Kansas City within three years. – Another St. Louis trail is being built along the Mississippi to connect Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico.

Trail Opposition & PR

I distributed Maine's bike map by placing copies on a table in the exhibit area. I could not keep them in stock. Each time I added 25 copies, the pile would shrink and be gone in a short time. A lot of attendees asked about biking Maine.

RTC reported that 85% of all trails have NO opposition.

Craig Della Penna advised all trail managers to found a trail group that will be free to take political positions. Interestingly, most trails seem to start with a government agency, not as the ET did with users.

We were urged to include kids in all PR activities. No one is opposed to kids.

We were urged to talk with each reporter along our trail at least once or twice a year even if we have no news to report. Stay in contact in case opposition arises, so that we have press credibility.

Invite major donors to all events.

Have a fact sheet about the trail ready to hand to any reporter who asks about the ET. – The ETA brochure works for me.

Be ready to describe the trail with three quick facts or issues. (Similar to the concept of selling your trail should you find yourself in an elevator with a legislator or reporter.) Be prepared.

New RTC President Keith Laughlin asked in view of the attack upon America if trails are important. Do trails make any difference? His answer was yes. Trails rebuild communities. They allow people to meet face-to-face, not windshield-to-windshield. We allow people to connect, to maintain their health, reduce the stress in their lives and on-the-trail or sidewalk, we make the company president equal to the janitor. Trails build communities and, by helping neighbors meet, strengthen democracy.

Major donor's logos can add a lot to a trail's web page. They recognize and advertise a supporter and demonstrate their trail support and credibility to anyone not familiar with the trail. Where is the ETA's PR Chair?

ATV's

Trail managers from Nevada and Alaska were surprised that Maine has an ATV problem. They each have terrible trail erosion problems caused by ATV traffic. Everyone who spoke about ATVs seemed to have the same negative experiences of trail damage.

ATVs seem to be a problem everywhere in America except where police daily patrol the trail. There were no signs of ATVs on the rural Katy Trail.

Snowmobiles

They appear to be welcome partners on all trails that get snow.

Equestrians

The Katy trail initially banned horses. Currently a 20-mile test is being conducted to see what problems equestrians may cause. No problems have been reported. I expect their access will be expanded.

Misc

The company in St. Charles, MO that rented 90 bikes for our tour of the Katy Trail also delivered 70 bikes to a UK group biking Maine and NH this fall.

The conference was held in Union Station, a restored rail station, that, when built, was the largest in the county with 30 parallel loading platforms. Today, only light rail service

reaches the station, and that is not in the terminal. The terminal has been completely refurbished as a beautiful hotel with nearly hundred Old Port-style shops.

“To win without fighting, that is best.” Sun Tzu, Chinese General 25 centuries ago.

“Never, never, never, never give up.” - Winston Churchill.

“Losers quit when they are tired; winners quit when they win.” T-shirt in Union Station.