

Tift Area Greenways (TAG) Master Plan

Prepared for:

The Tift Area Greenways Association,
the City of Tifton and the
Tifton Downtown Development Authority

By:



MACTEC Engineering and Consulting, Inc.
Atlanta, Georgia

June, 2011

This page has been intentionally left blank.

OVERVIEW

MACTEC Engineering and Consulting Inc. (MACTEC) is pleased to provide this summary report to the Tift Area Greenways Association (TAGA), the City of Tifton, and the Tifton Downtown Development Authority (TDDA) as documentation of our planning services associated with the Tift Area Greenways (TAG) development concept.

Introduction

The community-based initiative to develop a multi-purpose trail system for the Tift Area (Tifton and Tift County) has been formalized in 2010 as the Tift Area Greenway (TAG) program. A group of citizen advocates, organized as the Tift Area Greenway Association (TAGA) has worked in conjunction with the City of Tifton, Tift County, Tifton Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Tift Recreation Department and other local partners to develop this initial master plan. MACTEC Engineering and Consulting, Inc. (MACTEC) has served as the greenway planning consultant and has completed preparation of the TAG master plan document, with GIS mapping provided by the Tift County GIS Department.

Several prior plans and studies have preceded this master plan. Specifically, the Tifton-Tift County Comprehensive Plan, the South Georgia Regional Bicycle Plan and the Downtown Tifton Master Plan have been reviewed for this planning study. Each of these precedent plans are, in principle, supportive of the Tift Area Greenway concept.

Overall, it is understood that the planning and implementation of a community-wide multi-use trail program like TAG is a long-term and incremental endeavor. The role of this master plan is to provide the starting point and a guide for TAGA and partners. The sections that follow describe the details of planning analysis and resulting master plan recommendations.

Summary of Existing Conditions

Across the Tift Area, there are a wide range of environmental conditions that are relevant to greenway and trail planning. In the core downtown Tifton area, conditions are urban in character, with city blocks, streets, sidewalks and buildings with no set-backs, many of which are historic. There are also existing urban parks/greenspaces, infrastructure such as railroad corridors, and larger roads that are designated US and State Highways.

Beyond the Tifton urban core is a broad area of suburban development, residential and commercial, extending out to the rural countryside. Within suburban Tifton/Tift County, streets are spaced farther apart, yards are larger, and there are more undeveloped land parcels. There are also large institutional campuses such as the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC)

and University of Georgia (UGA) campus area, and Moultrie Technical College. Interstate 75 is also a major feature that traverses the urban, suburban and rural landscapes of the Tift Area.

Beyond the suburban landscape, the majority of Tift County is rural areas with large and highly productive farms, pine forests and undeveloped greenspace. In rural Tift County, roads are very widely spaced and, with the exception of major arterials, carry low traffic volumes.

The most important existing conditions for greenway planning purposes are those that provide opportunities for greenway routes, or those that can be impediments to greenway routes and connectivity. In the Tift Area, key features include roadways with wide public rights-of-way, railroad corridors (active and inactive), river/stream and floodplain corridors, and existing parks/greenspaces.

Roadways in the Tift Area have a wide variety of right-of-way widths, street widths, travel lane widths, traffic volume levels and levels of access control. In the Tifton city limits, there are right-of-way width ranges from less than 40 feet to 80 feet or more, with street widths from less than 20 feet to 60 feet or more. In the downtown area, many streets have existing sidewalks, while outside of downtown most do not. Most streets in the Tift Area are either city streets or county roads under local jurisdiction. For the State and US Highways, the rights-of-way are typically under the jurisdiction of GDOT.

Tifton is an historic railroad junction with many rail corridors converging in the historic downtown. There is currently a significant volume of rail traffic through Tifton on active freight rail corridors. There are also rail corridors that are inactive or abandoned. Along these inactive/abandoned corridors, some right-of-way is still owned by railroad companies, however much of the abandoned rail right-of-way has reverted to the private owners adjacent to either side of the abandoned corridor. No abandoned/inactive rail corridors in Tifton/Tift County have been converted to rail-trails to date.

There are numerous river/stream and floodplain corridors across the Tift Area. Generally, rivers and streams flow northwest to southeast. Some of these stream corridors and their adjacent floodplain areas offer opportunities for establishment of greenway corridors.

Existing public parks and greenspaces in the Tift Area are generally either large structured parks or small informal greenspaces. The major public parks and greenspaces of importance to greenway master planning are Fulwood Park, Tifton Gardens Park, the Veteran's Park, the Tift County Recreation Center, and the E.B. Hamilton Recreation Complex west of Tifton. The City of Tifton detention ponds area north of Fulwood Park is not a formal park, but has soft surface trails along the tops of levees that are regularly used by residents. As public-owned greenspace in the midst of city neighborhoods, the detention ponds area offers great potential for expanded recreational trails.

Summary of Opportunities and Constraints

Based on existing conditions analysis and consideration of the factors of successful greenways, the following were identified as primary opportunities for and/or constraints to development of the Tift Area Greenway system:

Opportunities

- Connect public parks/greenspaces to neighborhoods, activity centers (such as downtown and the hospital area), and other parks/greenspaces.
- Link together existing recreational trails, public or private, as well as existing sidewalks.
- Use existing wide streets and public rights-of-way to add multi-use trails.
- Add multi-use trails to road corridors in conjunction with future road widening, new road construction, road resurfacing, etc.
- Use utility easements through floodplain areas to extend greenway trails.
- Use abandoned rail corridor segments for rail-to-trail projects.
- Relatively few areas of steep topography make biking and walking comfortable.

Constraints

- High traffic volumes on road corridors that would be desirable bike/ped routes.
- Difficulty to assemble adequate right-of-way along potential greenway corridors such as river/stream corridors and abandoned rail corridors.
- Neighborhood/resident concerns about trails being developed 'in back yards' or adjacent to residential properties.
- Relatively few existing sidewalks throughout the city to connect to.
- I-75 is a major dividing line between east and west Tift Area and is difficult to cross with a bike/ped path.

Summary of Comparable Organizations

The Tift Area Greenways Association (TAGA), City of Tifton and Tifton DDA have the opportunity to learn from the examples and successes of similar but more established organizations in Georgia who have implemented major multi-use trail systems. Two examples of successful trail development organizations and trail systems in Georgia include the PATH Foundation and Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails, Inc., which is partnering with the PATH Foundation for implementation.

PATH Foundation



Celebrating its 20-year anniversary, the PATH Foundation has developed more than 160 miles of multi-use trails in the greater metro Atlanta region, including the Silver Comet Trail which extends to Alabama. The PATH Foundation model is nationally-recognized, and the organization manages to accomplish a great amount of trail

implementation with a small staff (four full-time staff members) with assistance from a high-powered Board of Directors and a wide range of partnerships with local governments and authorities. PATH has established and consistently used a standard trail construction detail and has developed and implemented master plans for connected trail systems that include off-street trails and trails that are within street rights-of-way. The PATH Foundation has recruited a wide range of private funding partners, and has actively pursued grant funding from public sources such as Transportation Enhancement grants in partnership with local governments.

The trail systems developed by the PATH Foundation and its local government partners include the following:

Silver Comet Trail – includes 60 miles of rail-to-trail from Cobb County to the Alabama state line. Developed through a partnership involving the PATH Foundation, Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia State Parks, Cobb County, Paulding County and Polk County. The trail has had a substantial benefit in terms of tourism and economic development as documented on www.railstotrails.org.

Arabia Mountain Trails – includes over 20 miles of off-road multi-use trails through a 7,000 acre greenspace preserve.

Atlanta-DeKalb Trail System – includes the Chastain Park Trail, Nancy Creek Trail, Stone Mountain Trail, Whetstone Creek Trail and South Peachtree Creek Trail which connect multiple parks and other points of interest using off-street and on-street trails.



Silver Comet Trail – PATH Foundation



DeKalb County Trails – PATH Foundation

Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails, Inc.



Formed in 2008, Coastal Georgia Rails to Trails, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization of community leaders from Camden, Glynn, McIntosh and Liberty counties that has developed the initial stage of a rail-trail along a former CSX rail bed that passes through the four counties. The organization raises private funds and seeks public grants in cooperation with the local governments in the area. They partnered with GDOT in 2007 to prepare a feasibility study for the trail development, and are currently partnered with the PATH Foundation for trail implementation. The plan of the organization is to complete 10-foot wide multi-use trail along the entire 68-mile corridor between Riceboro and Kingsland. To date, over 6 miles of trail have been completed and opened to the public. More information is available for review on the organization's website at <http://georgiacoastrailtrail.com/>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tift Area Greenway master plan recommendations are presented in this section in order from most general to most specific recommendations. At the broadest level are overall master plan goals, leading to recommendations for trail routes, for trail types and design, and for phasing of trails implementation.

TAG and TAGA Goals

The overall goal of the Tift Area Greenway master plan and Tift Area Greenway Association is to provide a connected system of multi-use trails across the Tift Area that provides recreation and transportation options for Tift Area residents.

A related goal is to encourage walking and biking to and within activity centers and destinations such as downtown Tifton for purposes of promoting development of local commerce and tourism development.

An overriding goal for planning and implementation of TAG is sustainability. TAGA and partners will strive to develop a connected multi-use trails system in a manner that is sustainable financially, environmentally and socially.

Recommended TAG Trail Routes

The included figure *Tift Area Greenways (TAG) Multi-use Trail Routes – Tifton/Tift County* illustrates the recommended locations for trail routes as well as a general recommended approach to implementation phasing of nearly 20 miles of new multi-purpose trails, including on-street bicycle lanes. In this plan, the relationship of trail routes to existing roadways, railroad corridors and destinations such as schools, parks and TRMC. The following description provides elaboration of the routes shown.

Existing Marked Bike Routes

Shown in pink, existing marked bike routes include segments of the following streets:

- E.B. Hamilton Drive/King Road
- South Central Avenue
- Oak Ridge Church Road
- Baldwin Drive
- Davis Road
- Carpenter Road

State and Regional Trail Routes

Drawing from previously prepared and adopted plans at the state and regional levels, the planned regional and state bicycle routes are shown in red. Routes include:

- US Highway 82 across the county and through downtown Tifton
- US Highway 41 from downtown Tifton north across the county
- US Highway 319 from US Highway 82 (east of downtown) northwest across the county
- US Highway 319 south
- 8th Street west from Fulwood Park across I-75
- Tift Avenue north from Fulwood Park

As these routes are included in regional and statewide plans, it is recommended that TAGA coordinate with the City, County, South Georgia Regional Commission and State Department of Transportation to implement and maintain on-street bicycle lanes.

TAG Priority One Trails

Trail routes indicated as Priority 1 for implementation are located in three areas: Northeast Tifton, Downtown/Main Street, and Southwest Tifton.

In the northeast section of Tifton, connecting trails are recommended to extend approximately 0.9 miles from Fulwood Park north along Prince Avenue, to new and repaired trails in the city detention ponds area, then along Davis Avenue to the TRMC area, with sidewalk improvements along 20th Street. A link can be made to a trail segment extending from the Middle School eastward past Mary's Lake and to the Tifton High School area, a total length of approximately 2.4 miles. These multi-use trails are expected to develop with a combination of currently available right-of-way (such as that through the detention ponds area), on-street paths where wide right-of-way exists, connections to existing sidewalks, and some off-street connections requiring private owner cooperation.

In the downtown area, previous and ongoing streetscape improvement projects are enhancing the sidewalks of Main Street. In effect, this portion of the Priority 1 Trails has either been completed or is underway by the Tifton DDA. The portion of this trail included in Priority 1 is the approximately 1.2 mile length extending along Main Street from Martin Luther King Drive north to downtown.

In the southwest area of the city is the recommended bike lane extension from King Road southwards along Carpenter Road to Golden Road for approximately 2.9 miles. Then from Golden Road at US Highway 319 to the intersection of Jordan Road and Union Road for approximately 1.4 miles.

TAG Priority Two Trails

Trail routes identified as Priority 2 for implementation are located in all parts of Tifton: central, northeast, north, west and south.

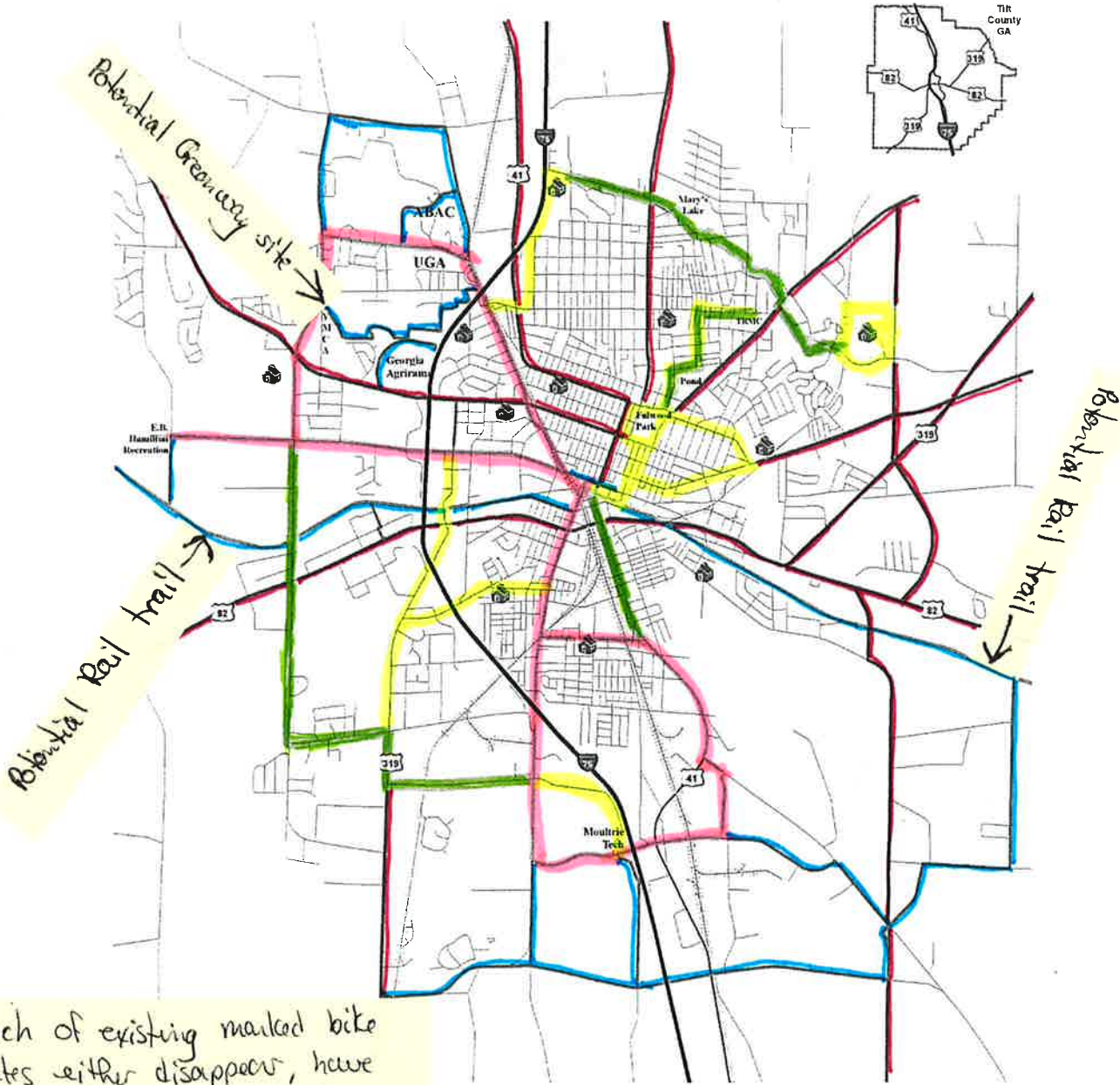
In central Tifton, from the perimeter of Fulwood Park to the Atlantic Coastline Railroad Depot area, a trail connection is recommended between two Priority 1 areas, effectively completing a link from lower Main Street north to TRMC and the High School. Tier 2 trails also include the perimeter of the High School in northeast Tifton.

On the north side, Priority 2 trails include an extension from the Tier 1 trail end at the Middle School following Fulwood Road, Emmett Drive and West 20th Street south to Baldwin, totaling 1.5 miles.

On the west side, Priority 2 trails extend northwards along US 319/South Virginia Avenue from Golden Road to West 2nd Street for approximately 2.1 miles to connect Tier 1 trail to the commercial district in the US 82 and I-75 vicinity.

Tift Area Greenway – Overall Trail Priorities and Estimated Costs

PRIORITY I TRAILS			
<i>description</i>	<i>length</i>	<i>trail type</i>	<i>estimated cost</i>
Pinebrook trail improvements (City detention ponds area)	2,700' (0.5 mi.)	varies 10' multi-use trail	\$ 140,000
Main Street (from MLK Dr. to downtown)	6,400' (1.2 mi.)	varies 12' multi-use trail	\$ 305,000
Fulwood Rd./Richards Dr. (from Middle Sch. to High Sch.)	12,900' (2.4 mi.)	varies 12' multi-use trail	\$ 250,000
extend existing Carpenter Rd. bike lane from King Rd. to Golden Rd. West	15,300' (2.9 mi.)	bike lane	\$ 74,000
from Golden Rd. West @ Hwy. 319 to Jordan Rd. @ Union Rd.	7,500' (1.4 mi.)	bike lane	\$ 37,000
sidewalk improvements along 20th Street	2,500' (0.5 mi.)	sidewalk	\$ 25,000
PRIORITY II TRAILS			
<i>description</i>	<i>length</i>	<i>trail type</i>	<i>estimated cost</i>
Jordan Rd. from Union Rd. to Southwell Rd.	5,400' (1.0 mi.)	bike lane	\$ 26,000
Fulwood Rd./Emmett Dr./West 20th St. (from Middle School to Baldwin)	8,100' (1.5 mi.)	bike lane	\$ 39,000
Hwy. 319/S. Virginia Ave. from Golden Rd. West to West 2nd St.	11100' (2.1 mi.)	bike lane	\$ 54,000
Chestnut Ave. from downtown to Fulwood Park	3,400' (0.6 mi.)	varies 12' multi-use trail	\$ 54,000
Fulwood Park peripheral trail	5,000' (0.9 mi.)	12' multi-use trail	\$ 240,000
Old Omega Rd./ W. 17th Street from Hwy. 319 to Union Rd.	6,000' (1.1 mi.)	bike lane	\$ 29,000
East 4th Street/ Ferry Lake Rd./ East 12th Street	8,700' (1.6 mi.)	bikelane	\$ 42,000
High School peripheral trail	7,500' (1.4 mi.)	12' multi-use trail	\$ 360,000



Much of existing marked bike routes either disappear, have been paved over or are in very poor repair.

**Multi-use trail routes
Tifton/Tift County**

- Conceptual -



- | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| | TAG priority 1 | | Roads |
| | TAG priority 2 | | Railroads |
| | TAG priority 3 | | Railroads inactive |
| | State & regional trail plans | | I-75 |
| | Existing marked bike routes | | School |

This map is for reference only; no legal accuracy is implied. Produced 11/2010 by the Tift County Tax Assessors GIS dept.