

Eastern Shore Rail to Trail Feasibility Study – Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a Shared Use Path and how does it differ from a Trail?
 - VDOT's Road Design Manual defines a shared use path as a facility physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space (buffer) or barrier and either within the highway right of way or within an independent right of way. Users are non-motorized and may include bicyclists, inline skaters, roller skaters, wheelchair users, and pedestrians including walkers, runners, people with baby strollers and people walking dogs. Shared use paths are most commonly designed for two-way travel.
 - A trail, on the other hand, is an unimproved, or sometimes improved, recreational facility intended for recreational use such as hiking, mountain biking, or equestrians. While "shared use path" and "trail" are distinctly different terms with different design standards, any portion of the trail may include or be built to the standards of a shared use path.

2. Who is responsible for the current trail planning study?
 - The Virginia Department of Transportation is funding and leading the current study and is working in partnership with various stakeholders including Canonic Atlantic Company, the Virginia Department of Conservation, the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail Alliance, the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission, and other local, regional, and state agencies.

3. Who will pay for construction of the trail? And who will own and maintain it?
 - Any construction of a trail will likely be designed and constructed in phases, using a variety of funding sources. It is possible that federal and state funding from sources like the Transportation Alternative Program, SMART SCALE and Recreational Access program could be used. The study will address options for trail maintenance and ownership, such as state agencies, not-for-profit organizations, and/or local government agencies.

4. Will the study include recommendations for connections off of the main line trail, including connections to Eastern Shore destinations and extensions to Hampton Roads and Maryland?
 - The study will include suggestions for spur connections to Eastern Shore destinations and will reference the prior plans for linking to the Southern Tip Trail and Kiptopeke State Park. Extensions to Hampton Roads and Maryland are outside the scope of the study, but those suggestions will be documented as part of the public input record.

5. Will the study include trailheads and amenities such as wayfinding signage, parking, restrooms, bicycle parking, and picnic tables?
 - Yes. The study will recommend priority locations and types of improvements for trailheads and other support facilities along the trail.
6. How will safety be addressed, including safety at roadway crossings as well as personal safety and issues such as trespassing?
 - The study will include specific recommendations for roadway crossings. Potential patrolling and police enforcement on the trail will depend on eventual trail management and ownership.
7. What is the timeframe for construction of the trail?
 - There is no definite timeline for construction. This will largely be determined by local, state, and/or regional champions and potential trail managers. Available funding will also be a factor. There are currently three active applications for SMART SCALE funding for trail sections at Cape Charles, Onley, and Accomack – if awarded SMART SCALE funding full design work could start in August 2025.
8. Why are SMART SCALE projects being pursued before the study is finished?
 - Working with local stakeholders, the study team identified several sections to advance for potential funding during the current round of SMART SCALE reviews. These decisions were based in part on trail sections that are likely to experience high demand, and also where local stakeholders were able to commit to maintenance of the trail. Also, it is important to point out that actual funding through the current round of SMART SCALE would not be available until August 2025 at the earliest.
9. Will the study consider equestrian use?
 - Yes. The study is considering needs for equestrian use, including potential separation of cyclists and equestrians as well as appropriate surface materials and horse trailer parking.
10. What are the existing conditions along the rail line?
 - The right-of-way initially contained two parallel rail lines, one of which has been completely removed. The remaining rail line is intact, including ballast, ties, and rails. In general, the right-of-way remains clear, although there is some overhanging vegetation in some sections. Drainage patterns follow existing

diches and swales. These conditions will allow removal of the remaining ties and rails and establishment of a trail with limited clearing and grading.

11. Is the trail project compatible with future utilities?

- Yes. The rail right-of-way can accommodate the trail along with potential future utilities such as sewer lines. Co-locating trails and linear utility corridors has proven successful in many locations, including a portion of the Virginia Capital Trail in Richmond.

12. Can rail service be resumed on the line?

- The current tracks cannot move any rail traffic without significant investment. This corridor is currently under consideration for railbanking which is a voluntary agreement between a railroad company and a trail entity to use an out of service corridor as a trail until a railroad may need the corridor again for rail service. If this corridor is successfully rail banked the abandoning railroad has the right to re-establish rail service.
- Background on [Railbanking](https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/acquisition/railbanking/#:~:text=Railbanking%2C%20established%20in%201983%20as,corridor%20again%20for%20rail%20service). <https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/acquisition/railbanking/#:~:text=Railbanking%2C%20established%20in%201983%20as,corridor%20again%20for%20rail%20service>.

13. What is the status of this trail approval and/or funding with the Surface Transportation Board (STB)?

- Cassatt Management, LLC on behalf of Bay Coast Railroad, Eastern Shore Railroad Inc, and Canonie Atlantic Co filed for abandonment of 49.1 miles of the Eastern Shore Railroad between Hallwood and Cape Charles on July 15, 2019. Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail Association and the Virginia Bicycling Federation filed a Notice of Interim Trail Use in response to this abandonment. No other applications were accepted by the Surface Transportation Board. On June 19, 2020 the Surface Transportation Board extended the negotiating period between Canonie Atlantic Co and Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Association to July 6, 2021.

14. How will this trail fit within the context of the farming land uses adjacent to the trail? Will pesticides on the fields adjacent the trail cause concern? Will farm equipment be accommodated on the trail?

- The study team recognizes the appeal that the rail right of way might offer farm equipment by providing an alternative travel space to Route 13; however at this time, the proposed plan to establish a shared use path in the rail right of way does not include accommodations for farm equipment. Allocation of space within the rail right of way adjacent to the shared use path for farm equipment or other

design considerations to accommodate farm vehicles is dependent upon the ultimate maintenance authority of the shared used part, which has not been identified.