

HALF MOON TRAIL

35-MILE HIKE & BIKE CORRIDOR PLANNED

by Michael Short

The trains are now few and far between.

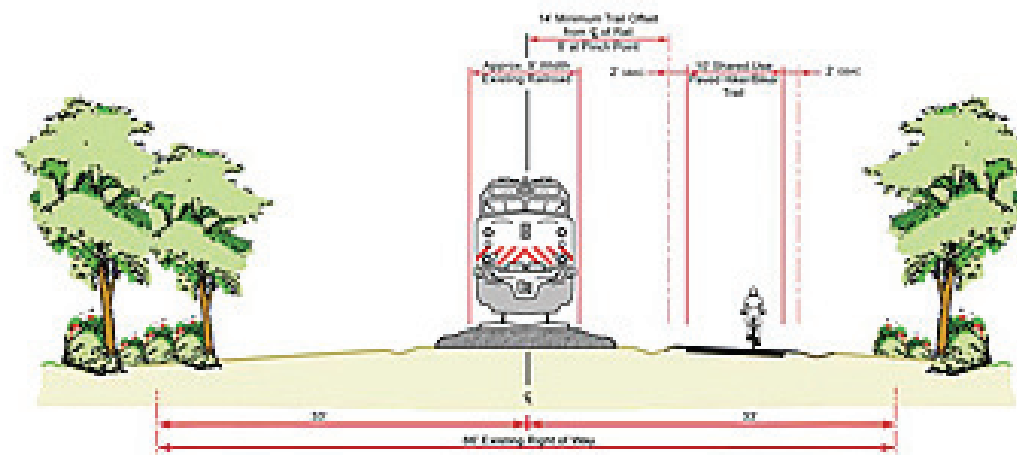
But the rail line linking Cape Henlopen State Park and Georgetown could one day bustle with activity.

Plans are in the works to link the nearly abandoned rail line with the Breakwater & Junction Trail linking Lewes and Rehoboth Beach. The Half Moon Trail could complete a 35-mile stretch of hiking and bicycling trail through some of the most breathtaking scenery in Delaware.

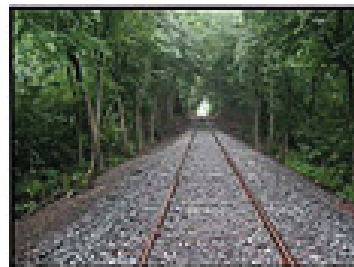
The Breakwater & Junction Trail took years to develop along an abandoned rail line which offers breathtaking views of the marshes and wetlands surrounding Cape Henlopen State Park. It's proven popular with hikers, walkers, bicyclists and others. Delaware Greenways is championing the idea, which has been discussed for years. "People are really looking for these experiences," said Mark Chura, executive director of Delaware Greenways. "It's just another great experience. It really adds to the area."

Georgetown-Lewes RTT/RWT Planning Study

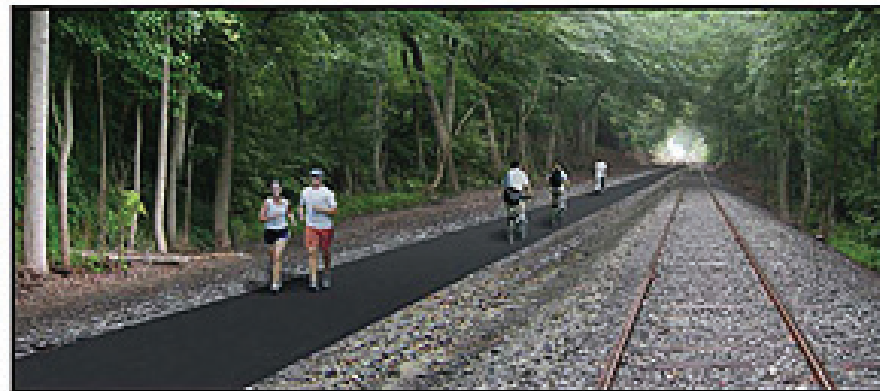
RWT - Rails with Trails Option



Typical Section -RWT Option



Existing Conditions



Artists Rendering of Proposed RTT Option

October 2008



He explained that the trail could offer a unique experience for visitors, provide year-round recreation for residents and be an attraction that could draw in visitors and help boost local business.

“It (could) really add to the quality of life people enjoy here,” Chura said.

The nearly 17-mile long Half Moon Trail would be named for the ship used by Henry Hudson in his search for a Northwest Passage. Those early explorers were the first Europeans to discover the Delaware Bay.

Plans call for the 16.8 mile long trail to combine the rail line with a separate trail to be used for walking or bicycling. The key is to have adequate separation so that safety can be maintained. Combining the two elements is not unheard of, according to Chura.

The line is already owned by Delaware’s Department of Transportation (DelDOT) and its’ 66 foot wide width would allow the mixed use, he said. DelDOT has recommended that the two uses be combined.

The rail line from Lewes to Georgetown was once used by the Queen Anne’s Railroad scenic tours, but the company developed financial problems and folded a decade ago. Now, it’s used only for a few trips to SPI Pharma (formerly Barcroft) at the entrance to Cape Henlopen State Park.

Currently, DelDOT has said there is some funding available for design work for the trail. Tight budgets, however, could mean it is some time before the trail work can be completed and Delaware Greenways may be looking at grants and other options to help fund the cost.

Chura has spoken to Lewes City Council about the plans and expects to speak to many more homeowner's groups, residents and others in the area. Lewes is expected to be a hub of the trail system which combines the Half Moon Trail, the Breakwater & Junction Trail and various loop trails around the area.

There is also a 46-mile long shoreline trail that begins at the Cape May Ferry Termi-



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nal. That companion trail could become part of an almost unbroken link of 71 miles of trails to be explored and discovered. “That’s not a bad way to spend a weekend,” Chura said. “This will really have the ability to connect portions of the community.” There will be an outreach effort to listen to community concerns and gather ideas about the plans.

For example, no decision has been made about whether to use a blacktop or cinder surface for the trail and some local residents could raise concerns about parking, safety etc. “We want to reach out to communities along the rail line,” he said.

Each section of the trail is expected to be self-contained, so that it can stand on its own. Chura said that means that Delaware Greenways hopes to develop each section so that parking and bathroom facilities are available.

Plans call for any trail to be developed with adequate separation from nearby homes. Chura said designing the trail correctly is a key to making sure safety is maintained. He also said the trail will be carefully monitored by people on bicycle and on foot to look for potential problems or concerns. Such a monitoring system would be similar to the trail steward system already in place for the Northern Delaware Greenways Trail. “They will be the eyes and ears,” he said.

There is a Friends of the Half Moon Committee and anyone interested in joining the group can do so at the Delaware Greenways website delawaregreenways.org.

Supporters say the new trail just makes good sense for Sussex County. “It creates economic opportunities for business. It’s close to home recreation for people who live here year round,” said Chura. “It’s an opportunity to experience the area in a way you can’t now. There’s a real pent-up demand. . . There are a lot of people who like to walk, who like to bike, who like to run and there are not a lot of places to do that now without a lot of effort.”

For more information about the Half Moon Trail or Delaware Greenways, go to the website, delawaregreenways.org. The site includes information on the history of the Half Moon Trail as well as plans for the future.



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