

## Trail News - 7/22/09

### Wisconsin Rail Trail Begins Process of Rail Reactivation

A section of the Cheese Country Trail in southwestern Wisconsin is undergoing the process to reactivate the corridor for rail use. The 47-mile trail, which runs from Monroe to Mineral Point, is currently railbanked under federal law through an agreement between the Tri-County Trail Commission and the Pecatonica Rail Transit Commission. The approximately 3.5 mile section of trail proposed for rail reactivation is at the eastern end of the trail, near Monroe west towards Gratiot. The reactivation is needed to provide room for rail car movements due to increased rail activity in the Monroe area.

Under the terms of a 1983 amendment to the National Trails System Act, the Rails to Trails Act allows the federal government to regulate the disposition of rail lines being considered for abandonment by rail companies. This process, commonly known as the Rails-to-Trails Law, allows the railroad right-of-way to be used for trail purposes on an interim basis until the need for future rail use occurs.

The Cheese Country Trail is part of the [Tri-County Trail System](#), which includes the 10-mile Pecatonica State Trail (not to be confused with the Pecatonica Rail Transit Commission although both are named for the Pecatonica River, a tributary of the Rock River). The [Pecatonica State Trail](#) is also a former railroad corridor but was abandoned prior to the creation of the Rails-to-Trails Law and thus, is not preserved for future rail use. The Pecatonica corridor is owned by the Department of Natural Resources and operated by the Tri-County Trail Commission.

Pursuant to the terms of the agreement between the Tri-County Trail Commission and the local rail transit commission, reactivation of the line requires a formal six-month notice. Formal notice must also be provided to the federal [Surface Transportation Board](#). At this time, an awareness of the project is being made in anticipation of the project which is being considered to begin no earlier than mid-2010. The proposal for rail reactivation will depend on the ability to raise the needed funding. Total cost is estimated at seven million dollars. Eighty percent of that cost will be funded by the state. The remaining 20% must be raised by the Rail Transit Commission and operating railroad.

At this time, it is anticipated that the railroad and the trail will be able to share the corridor and that the uses currently allowed on the trail will remain the same. Current trail uses on the Cheese Country Trail include motorized uses such as ATVs, motorcycles, and snowmobiles, as well as pedestrians and bicycles.

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