

Planning for Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment

TRANSIT PLANNING ALONG HISTORIC CIVIL RIGHTS TRAIL

SELMA TO MONTGOMERY TRAIL, ALABAMA, EPA REGION 4



The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail commemorates an important turning point in American civil rights history. Almost 25,000 civil rights advocates overcame violent protests to march along the 54-mile route, resulting, in part, in the signing of the Voting Rights Act which prohibits discrimination in voting practices or procedures based on race or color. Today, the Selma to Montgomery Trail runs through a series of rural communities whose residents suffer from low wages and high unemployment. These rural communities contributed much to the historic story of the Trail, but have not benefitted from Trail tourism or economic development. The high cost of private transportation makes basic travel from remote rural areas to shopping and medical appointments cost prohibitive for many in this impoverished area. The Trail, however, is a national attraction and still offers a unique economic development opportunity to these communities. Restoration of the properties along the trail could help improve the quality of life for residents living near the trail.

Since 2009, EPA Region 4 has supported eleven public visioning sessions along the Trail, which revealed community support for public transit and improved access to basic health and retail services. EPA is working in partnership with the National Park Service—which is interested in managing a transit system along the Trail to accommodate visitors and provide an improved visitation experience—and Tuskegee University—which is evaluating rural brownfields and petroleum brownfields for reuse as transit stops (or Historic Waysides).

In 2015 and 2016, the EPA Land Revitalization Team provided technical support to Tuskegee University, the National Park Service, and other local stakeholders to plan for the cleanup and reuse of brownfields properties along the trail for transit stops or service sites (refueling, vehicle services, etc.). The Land Revitalization Team developed a Site Prioritization Tool for communities along the Trail, to help them evaluate and prioritize sites for reuse.

"This tool provides an important aspect of capacity building for planning for brownfields reuse and land revitalization: it organizes a process for gathering information necessary for brownfields cleanup and reuse options in a manner that is simple and efficient for a community to see how reuse planning relates to cleanup needs."

—EPA Region 4 Land Revitalization Coordinator

The Site Prioritization Tool is an Excel-based set of worksheets that helps community leaders understand the past, current, and future uses of properties along the trail. The tool encourages collaboration among stakeholders to evaluate the positives and negatives of each site, improves stakeholder understanding of the brownfield cleanup and reuse planning process, and provides a single place to collect site information about the sites. Information for multiple sites can be entered side by side, making site comparison easier. The tool is supported by a handbook that helps the user understand where to find information on individual sites and why each piece of information is important to the revitalization effort. The tool does not prioritize sites for a community, but allows local leaders to gather and evaluate the information needed to make their own site prioritization decisions.

In June 2016, Tuskegee University took responsibility to implement the use of the tool in communities along the trail. The University will work directly with communities to collect and store information on brownfields that could serve as potential transit sites along the trail. Tuskegee University will help community leaders understand the data and make reuse decisions across multiple sites. It will also collect and organize information across these communities, to help create a trail-wide transit plan. Tuskegee University is a trusted local partner to communities along the trail. Backed by support from the EPA Land Revitalization Team and the National Park Service, Tuskegee University will help communities identify the best sites for a transit system that: revitalizes brownfields; improves access to healthy life choices, retail, and employment opportunities; and provides an anchor for economic development for communities located along the Trail.

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Figure 1. Lowndes County Jail is one site considered for a future transit stop along the Trail.

LESSONS LEARNED

- A local organization that can be the long-term portal for technical assistance helps build trust, credibility, and capacity.
- With the right tools, community leaders can make informed decisions that will support citizens' social and economic needs.
- Innovative partnerships can simultaneously preserve cultural touchpoints, support economic development, and improve environmental conditions and quality of life.

PLANNED POST-TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

- EPA will support Tuskegee University and community leaders to use the tool in several communities along the Trail.
- Tuskegee University will work with communities to analyze property data and work with local leaders to select best sites for transit development.
- EPA will continue to engage project partners and community leaders to promote economic development along the Trail.