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Roanoke Region Receives Green Light, Funding for 26-Mile Scenic Rail Trail

Roanoke Region, VA—Virginia’s biennium budget was finalized this past June, and with it comes funding for trails. A new rail trail running through Botetourt and Craig counties—the Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail is one of five priority trails identified by the General Assembly to receive support from the appropriation.

The Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail will parallel Craigs Creek and run 26 miles from New Castle in Craig County to Eagle Rock in Botetourt County. It is anticipated to be a gravel trail that utilizes existing railbeds and some shared roadways. Funding will go toward bridge repairs and preparing the trail surface; a multi-use trail for walking, running, biking, and horseback riding, that provides opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the scenic beauty of Craig and Botetourt counties and Virginia’s Blue Ridge.

“People will be able to enjoy this unique and historical scenic trail with ease,” says Jessie Spence, chairman of Craig County Board of Supervisors. “The Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail will be an outstanding asset to Craig County, Botetourt County, and the region. It will be one of the most scenic, if not the most scenic, trails in the commonwealth.”

“The Virginia Creeper Trail, a similar trail to the proposed Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail, generates \$2.3 million annually for its rural local economy when adjusted for inflation,” says Delegate Terry Austin who was instrumental in securing funding for the Craig Botetourt Scenic Trail. “I very much look forward to how this trail will benefit the community and will open the door for more business opportunities like bike shops, coffee shops, restaurants, and lodging—all these ventures and more will be possible with the influx of trail users.”

“Craig and Botetourt counties are home to some of the most beautiful natural assets in all of Virginia, and the trail will give people the opportunity to experience it firsthand,” says Pete Eshelman, director of outdoor branding for the Roanoke Regional Partnership. “This is truly a transformational project that will have direct economic benefit for the communities while also adding to the region’s growing list of outdoor assets that make it a desirable place for businesses and talent to locate.”

“Local law makers, officials, and outdoor stakeholders have been working diligently for years to secure funding for this project,” says Dr. Richard Bailey, Botetourt County Board of Supervisor. “We are extremely appreciative that Delegate Austin recognizes the importance of this project, shares our vision, and was able to secure funding for the trail.”

At their September 2022 meeting the Commonwealth Transportation Board authorized up to \$1 million dollars to the trail to support pre-construction planning activities. Both Botetourt and Craig counties have formed citizen committees to assist with the planning phase. These committees will help mitigate citizen concerns and assist the localities in recognizing and addressing potential issues. The citizen committees will share additional information and plans as they are developed.

Woody Lipps, chair of the Craig County citizen committee says that “While this is an exciting and unique opportunity, this project is still very much in the planning phase and will be for the next several months. We know there will be a lot of questions, but right now we don’t have a lot of answers, so we ask people to be patient as we work with VDOT to develop a plan that respects the residents along the trail while also showcasing the beauty of both Craig and Botetourt counties.”

Roanoke Regional Partnership assisted Botetourt County and Craig County with securing funding for planning efforts through the Virginia Department of Transportation, and Delegate Austin has been instrumental in providing trail funding to support advancing this new trail asset. Thanks to their diligent efforts, the region is poised to see another trail asset created that will continue to make Virginia’s Blue Ridge a premier location to live, work, play, and visit.

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