

Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail Feasibility Study

Webinar

July 21, 2021



Agenda

Introductions

Jennifer Wampler
DCR Trails Coordinator

Kelly McClary
DCR Director of Planning & Recreation Resources

Brad Reed
Director, Planning Mgr., VDOT Staunton District

Brad Shelton
Director of Planning, Michael Baker International

- Background
- Study Contents
- Your Feedback
- Next steps



Housekeeping

- All comments & questions accepted in Question Box
(These will be recorded and responses will be made following this meeting)
- This presentation will be available online following the meeting at
www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/shen-rail-trail

Additional comments are also accepted via email or in writing to:

Jennifer Wampler, Trails Coordinator
Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation
600 East Main Street, 24th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219
Jennifer.Wampler@dcr.virginia.gov
804-786-9240 or by fax @ 804-371-7899





Meeting Purpose

To provide information on the feasibility study and gather citizen input regarding the proposed rail trail in the Shenandoah Valley from Broadway to Front Royal.

Background

Kelly McClary, Director, DCR Division of Planning and Recreation Resources



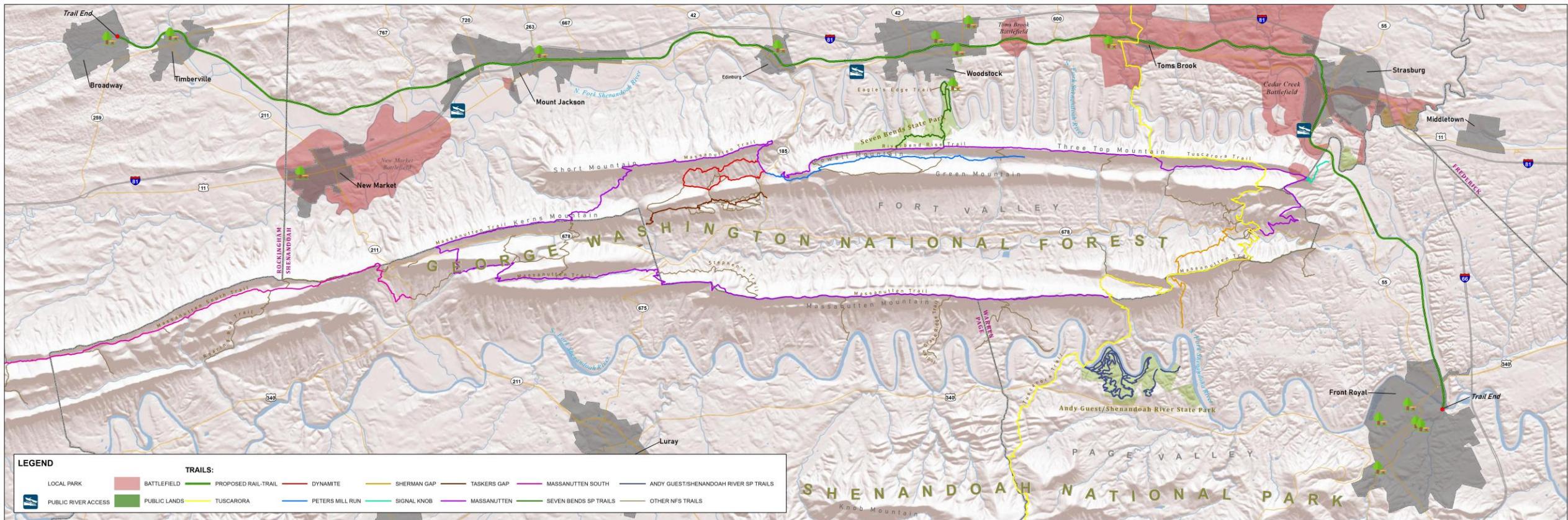
Budget Bill- HB1800

Natural Resources Item 374 P

The Department of Conservation and Recreation shall, no later than **November 1, 2021**, provide to the Chairs of the House Committee on Appropriations and the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations **an assessment of the feasibility for development of a linear park** along the Shenandoah Valley rail corridor from Front Royal to Broadway, Virginia.

The assessment shall **include the potential timeline for abandonment of existing Norfolk Southern rail sections B51.0 to B84.0 and CW84.0 to CW99.5, anticipated annual user revenues, and all start-up and ongoing costs of operation as a satellite facility of Seven Bends and Shenandoah State Parks.** The Departments of Transportation and Rail and Public Transportation shall provide any technical assistance as may be required in developing the cost assessment.

Proposed Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail and Connecting Trails



VDOT Project Page

<https://www.virginiadot.org/ShenValleyRailTrail/>

Study Partners

State Agencies

- DCR
- VDOT/Michael Baker Int'l.
- Dept. of Rail and Public Transportation

Other Organizations

- Shenandoah Rail Trail Exploratory Partnership (representing towns, counties, and regions)
- Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley (five non-profits)
- Norfolk Southern

Study Contents

- Community feedback
- Demographic and market research
- Potential uses
- Partner capacity and support
- Environmental scoping
- Corridor description
- Management alternatives



Community feedback

Jennifer Wampler, Trails Coordinator, DCR

Brad Reed, Assistant District Planner, VDOT Staunton District



Listening Session Take-aways

Trail Design

- Well-maintained, hardened surface so bicycles can use it
- 10-feet wide, with grass shoulders and shade trees
- Spur connections to destinations
- Consistent surface and signage
- Interpretive signs, mile markers

Trailhead design

- Adequate parking
- Restrooms
- Potable water
- Bike racks
- Air pumps/bike tools
- Public art
- Rest areas (benches)
- Orientation kiosks

Interviews with Elected Officials/Staff

Trail Design

- Preferred trailhead locations
- Smooth transitions
- Consistency
- Firm, stable, slip-resistant surface

Management

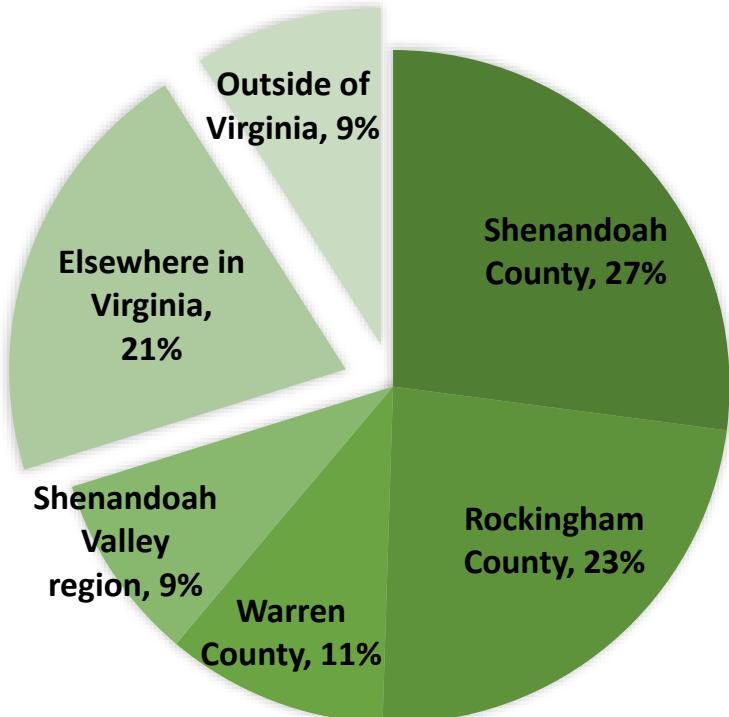
- Majority preferred a management entity that could provide a consistent, well-maintained trail experience
- Towns support varies but could include providing space for maintenance equipment, providing trailheads in town, financial support or performing some maintenance functions

Public Survey Results

- Live May 17 – June 25, 2021 in English & Spanish
- 9,283 Responses
- 5,456 Typed Comments

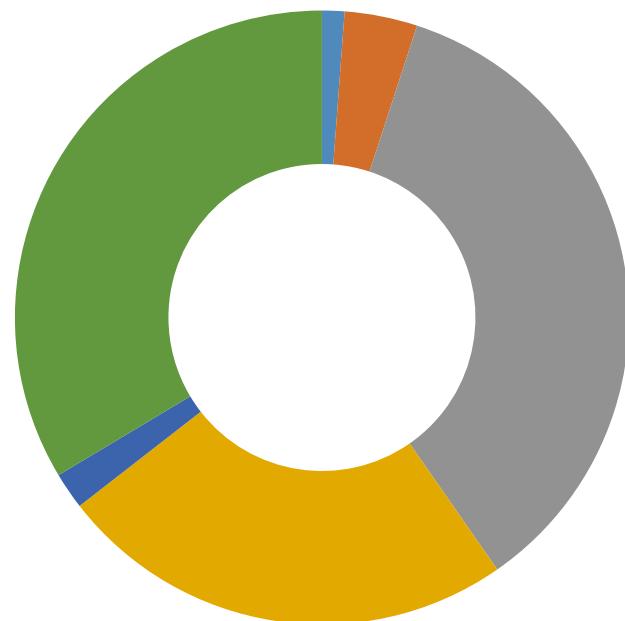
Top 5 Zip Codes of Respondents	Locality
10%	Harrisonburg
9%	Front Royal
8%	Woodstock
6%	Strasburg
5%	Broadway

WHERE DO YOU LIVE?



- **94%** of respondents would use this path if built (*strongly agree or agree*)
 - 75% 'strongly agree'
- **96%** reported being interested in the project (*strongly agree or agree*)
 - 85% 'very interested'
- **86%** of respondents have used other trails in Virginia

If built, how would you use this trail?

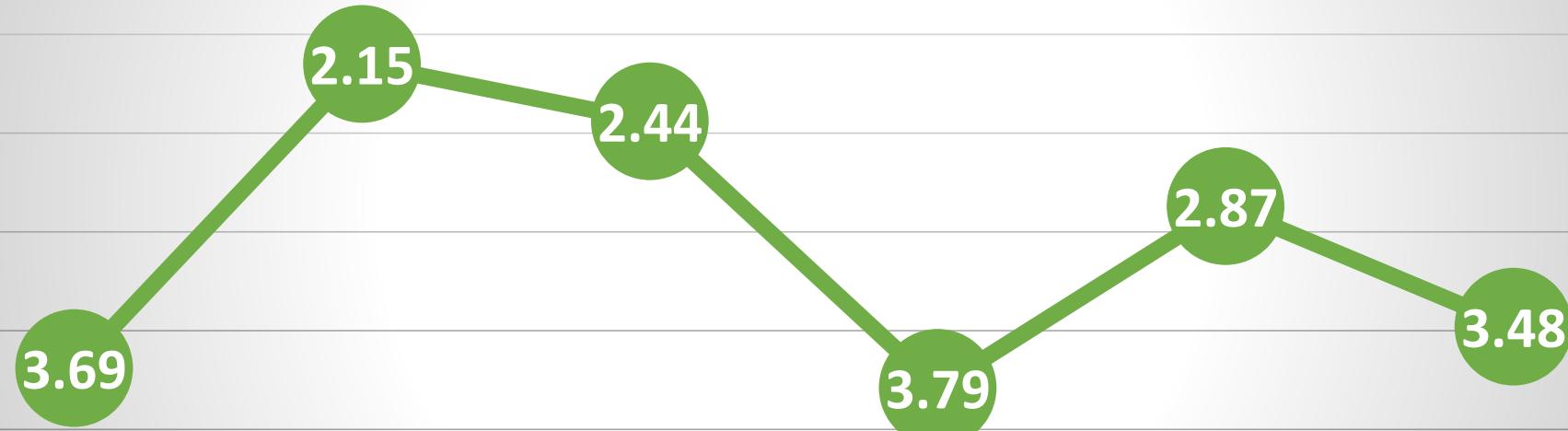


- Access to school
- Shopping
- Recreation
- Social or family outings
- Commuting to work
- Exercise

Desired Activity	% of Responses
Walking	38%
Biking	36%
Running	14%
Horseback Riding	3%
Scooter	2%
Rollerblading	3%
Other	2%
None	1%

Average Ranking of Perceived Benefits

(1 = highest rank, 5 = lowest rank)



ACCESS TO
DESTINATIONS

SAFER PLACES TO
WALK/BIKE

HEALTH AND
WELLNESS

ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

IMPROVE
QUALITY OF LIFE

INCREASE
TOURISM



What should we be aware of?

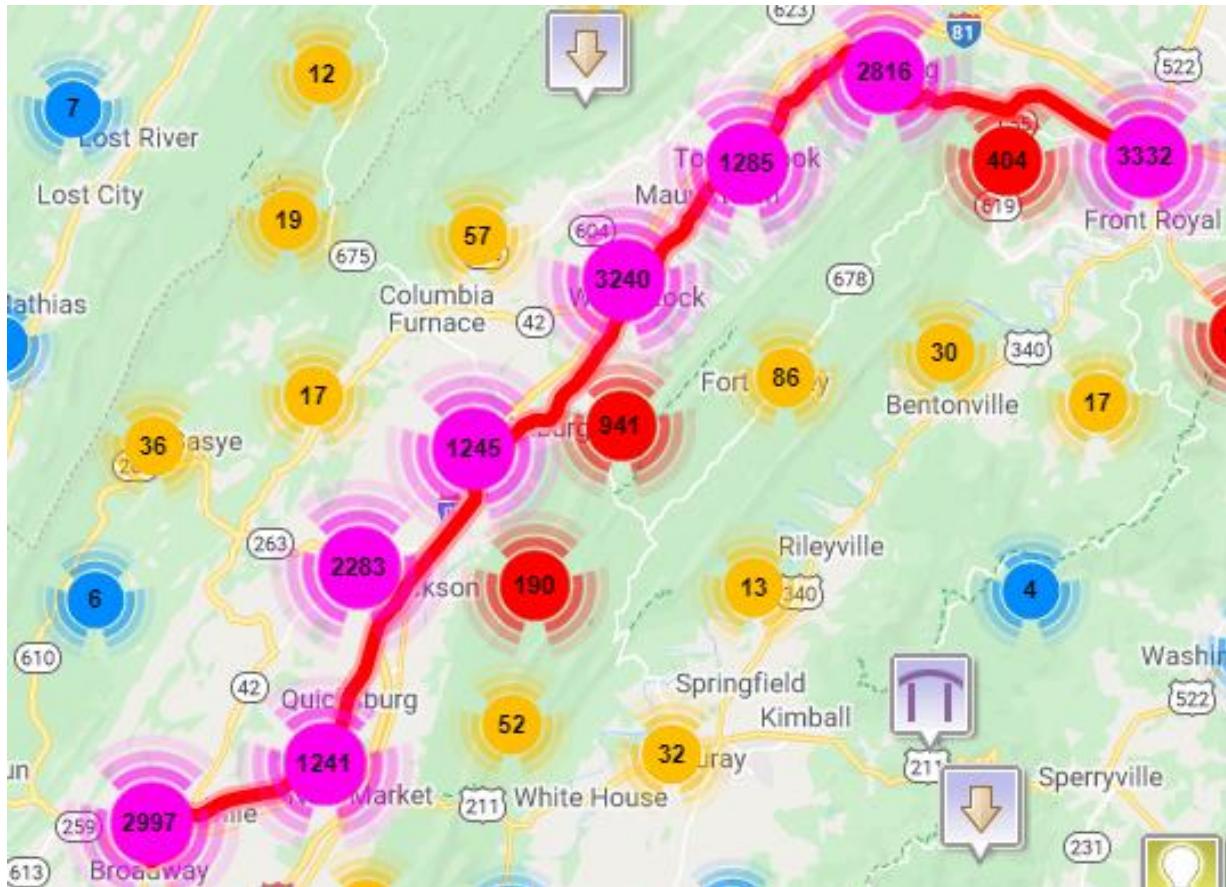
Please drop at least 3 map markers.



Marker Type	Count	% of Total
Parking	9,573	44%
Destinations	5,388	25%
Amenities	5,840	27%
Other	992	5%
TOTAL	21,793	

Map Marker Distribution

Numbers represent clusters of marker placement



Typed Comment Themes

Demographic and Market Research



Demographic Research

Latent demand for bike/ped infrastructure

- Walkability scores low between towns
- Existing biking infrastructure primarily serves higher-skilled users
- Bike/ped commute rates are low

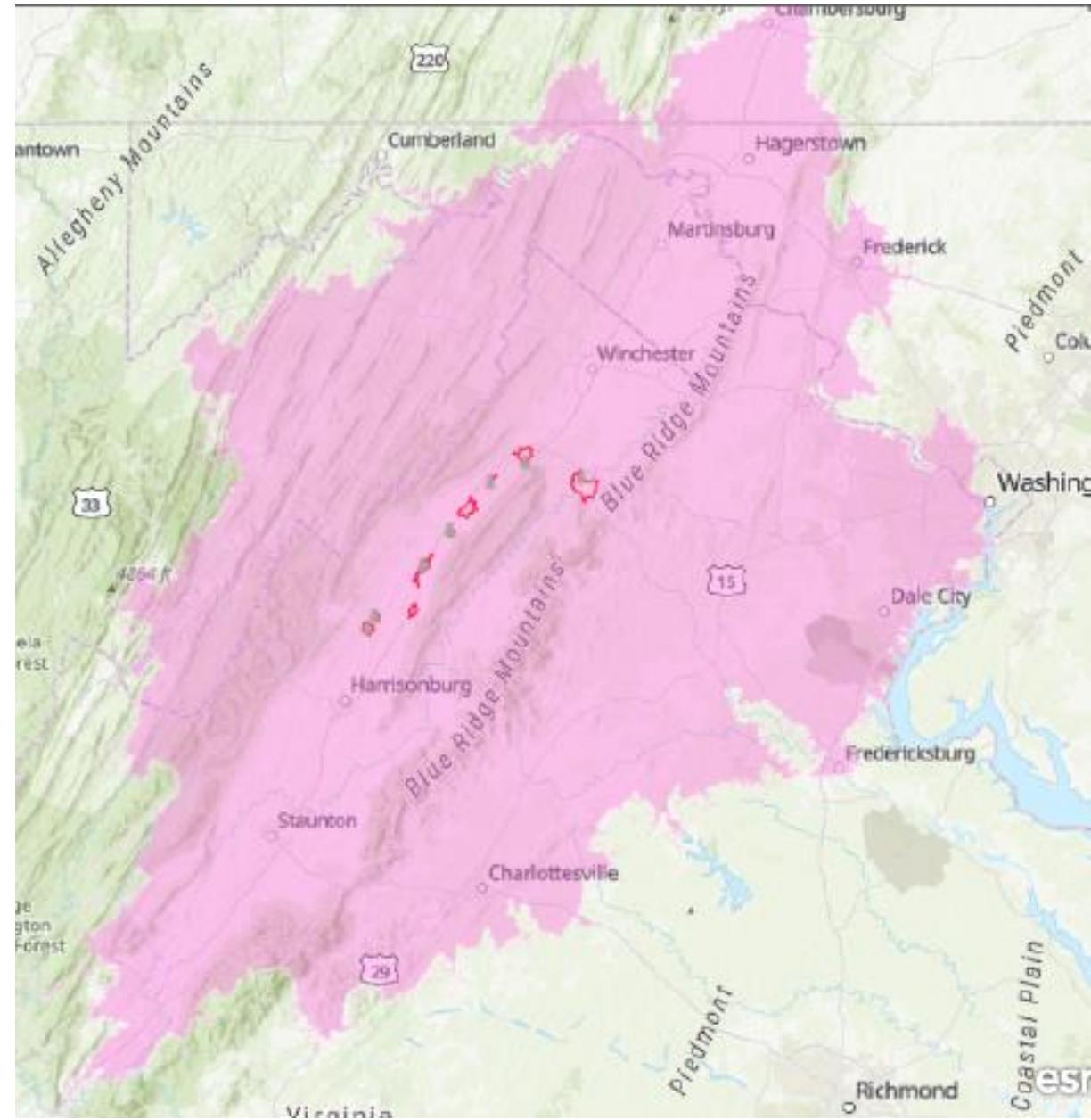
Vulnerable populations

- Higher levels of disability than state
- Higher levels of linguistically isolated, low income households in several areas along the tracks
- Higher levels of overweight, obesity, hypertension, and high cholesterol
- 3,686 households without car
- 32,709 people 65 and over

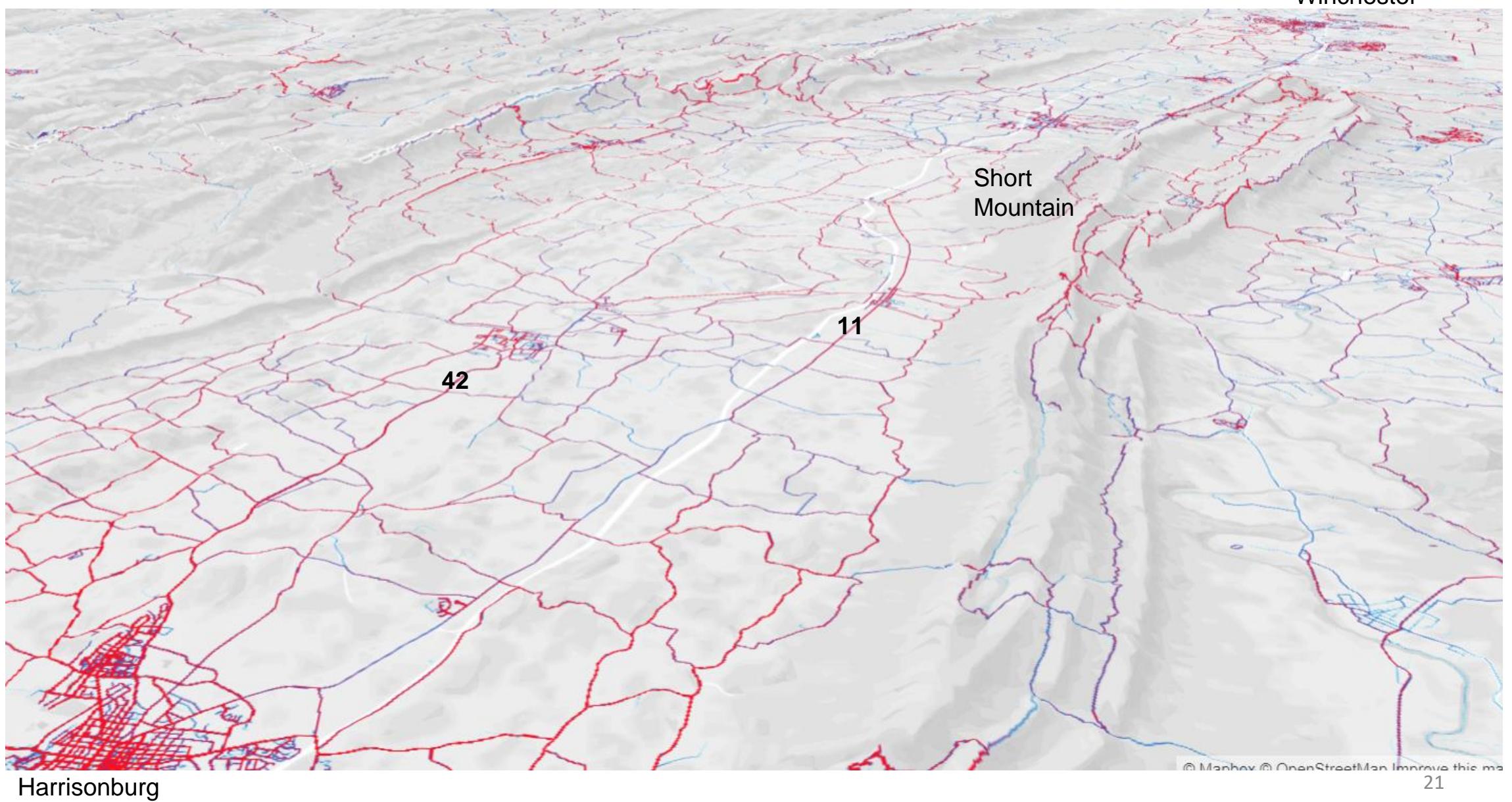
Market

4.5 million people within a 90-minute drive

- “Shenandoah Valley” has national appeal
- 23.5 million people within a four hour drive of Shenandoah National Park
- Shenandoah National Park had 1.7 million visitors in 2020



Market (Shenandoah County) Strava Data 2020



Demand for Outdoor Recreation

2017 Virginia Outdoors Survey

Most Needed Recreation Opportunity	Central Shenandoah Valley	Northern Shenandoah Valley	Average
Natural Areas	65%	61%	63%
Trails	38%	47%	43%
Parks	38%	43%	41%
Historic Areas	47%	31%	39%
Water Access	35%	34%	35%
Scenic drives	32%	29%	31%
Playing fields	11%	13%	12%

Potential Uses for the Trail



Potential Uses

Daily Uses

- Walking
- Wheelchairs/Strollers
- Hiking/Backpacking
- Jogging
- Bicycling (and e-bikes)
- Scooters (and e-scooters)
- Horse-back riding
- Outdoor classrooms

Special Event Uses

- Carriage/hayrides
- Races
- Fundraisers
- Historical reenactments
- History tours
- Scavenger hunts
- Group fitness on the trail

Partner Capacity and Support



Resolutions/letters of support

- Nine towns
- Three counties
- Two Planning Districts
- One city
- Shenandoah Rail Trail Exploratory Partnership
- Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley
- Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition
- Winchester Wheelmen
- Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River
- Shenandoah Valley Runners Club



Potential federal partners

- George Washington and Jefferson National Forest
- Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District (SVB Foundation and partners)
- Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park (and partners)
- Shenandoah National Park



Environmental Scoping



Environmental Scoping

Geography

- Karst topography
- Landslide susceptibility
- Floodplains, flood risk

Flora/fauna

- Endangered species
- Invasive species

History

- Historic districts in towns
- Battlefields
- Industrial uses

Corridor Description

Engineering Overview

Brad Shelton, Michael Baker International

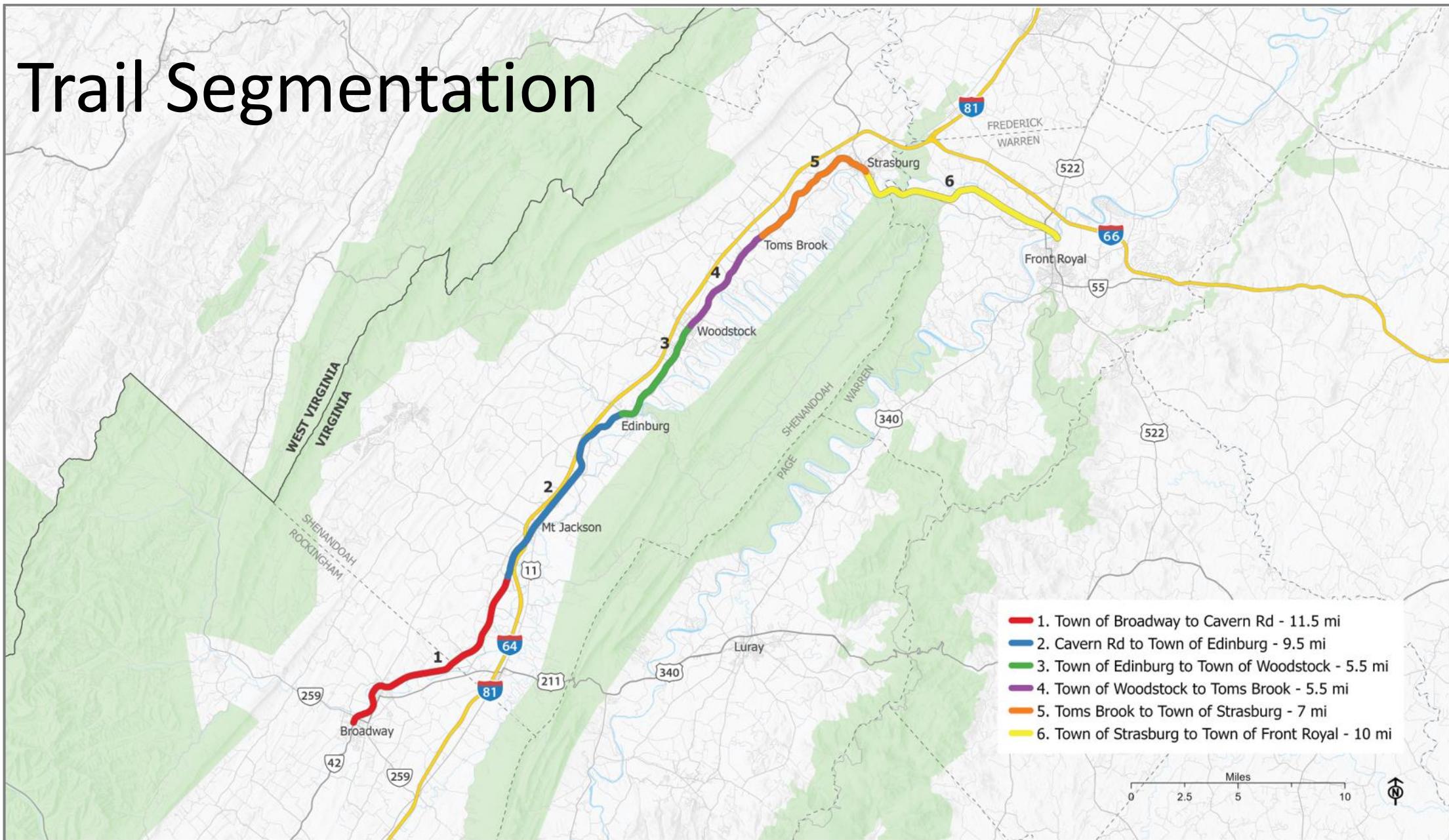


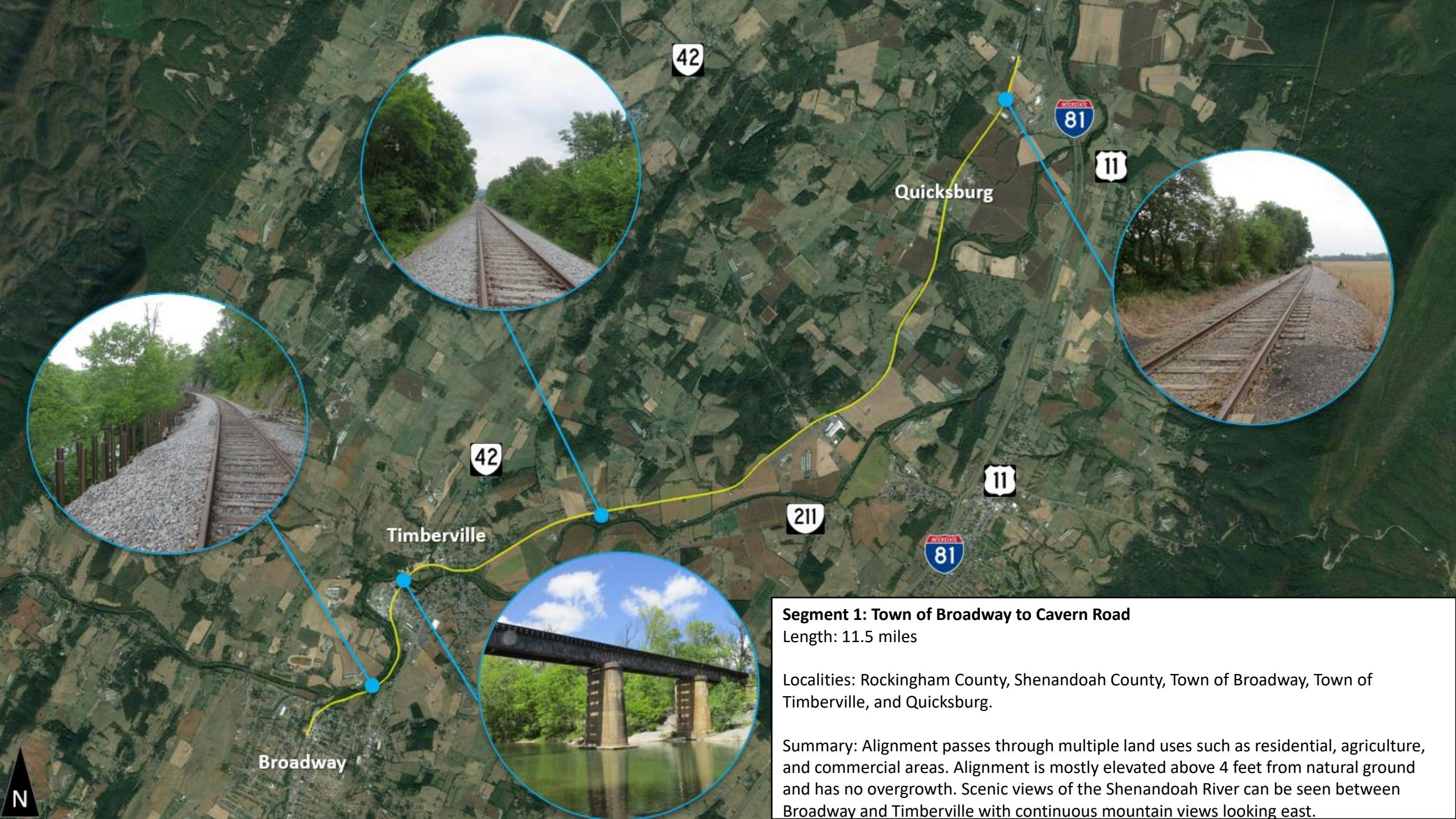
Corridor Overview: Work Performed To Date

Field Review

- Trail Segmentation
- Alignment Condition Review
- Trailhead Location Review
- Roadway Crossing Analysis
- Bridge Field and Condition Assessment

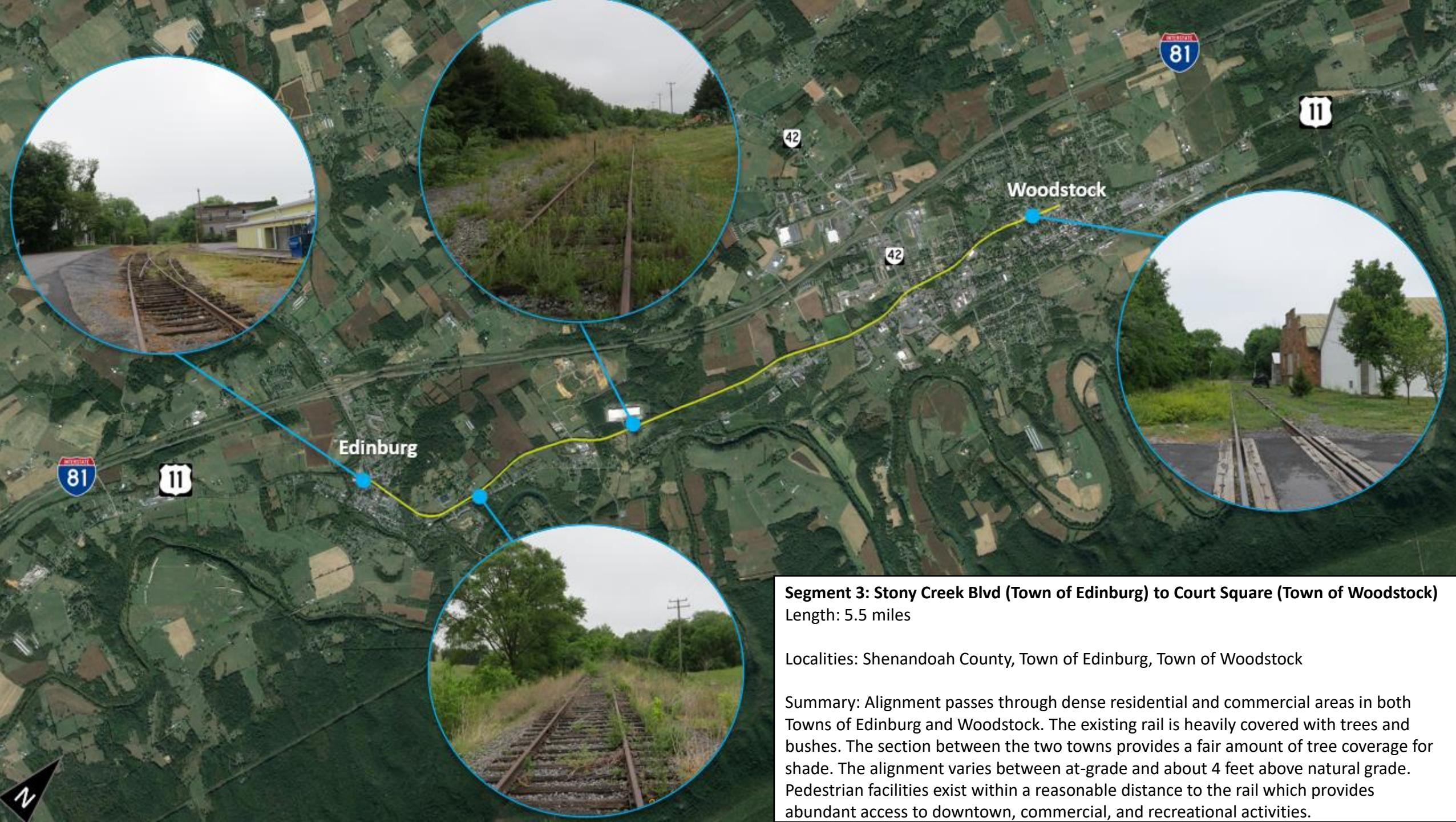
Trail Segmentation

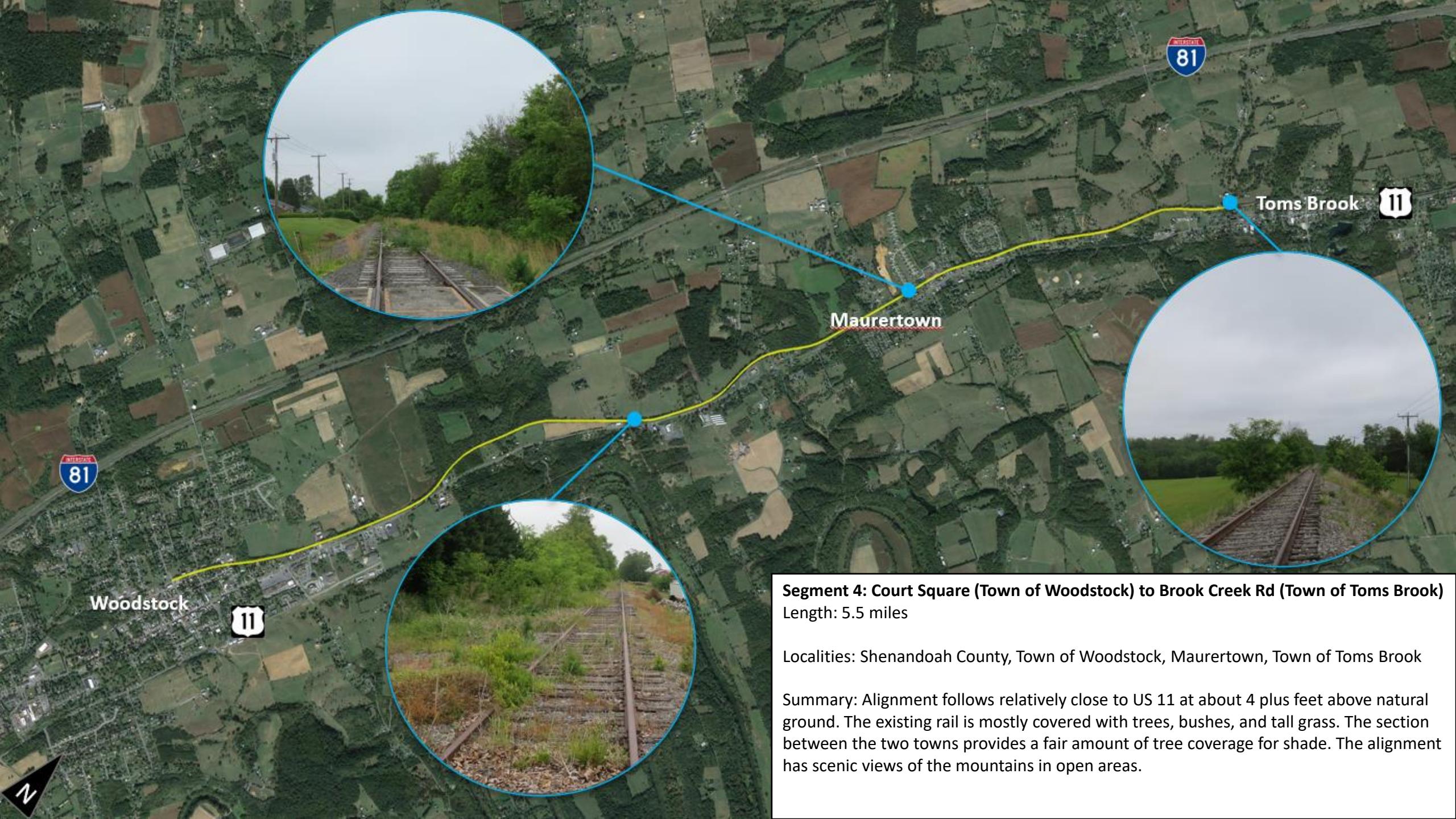




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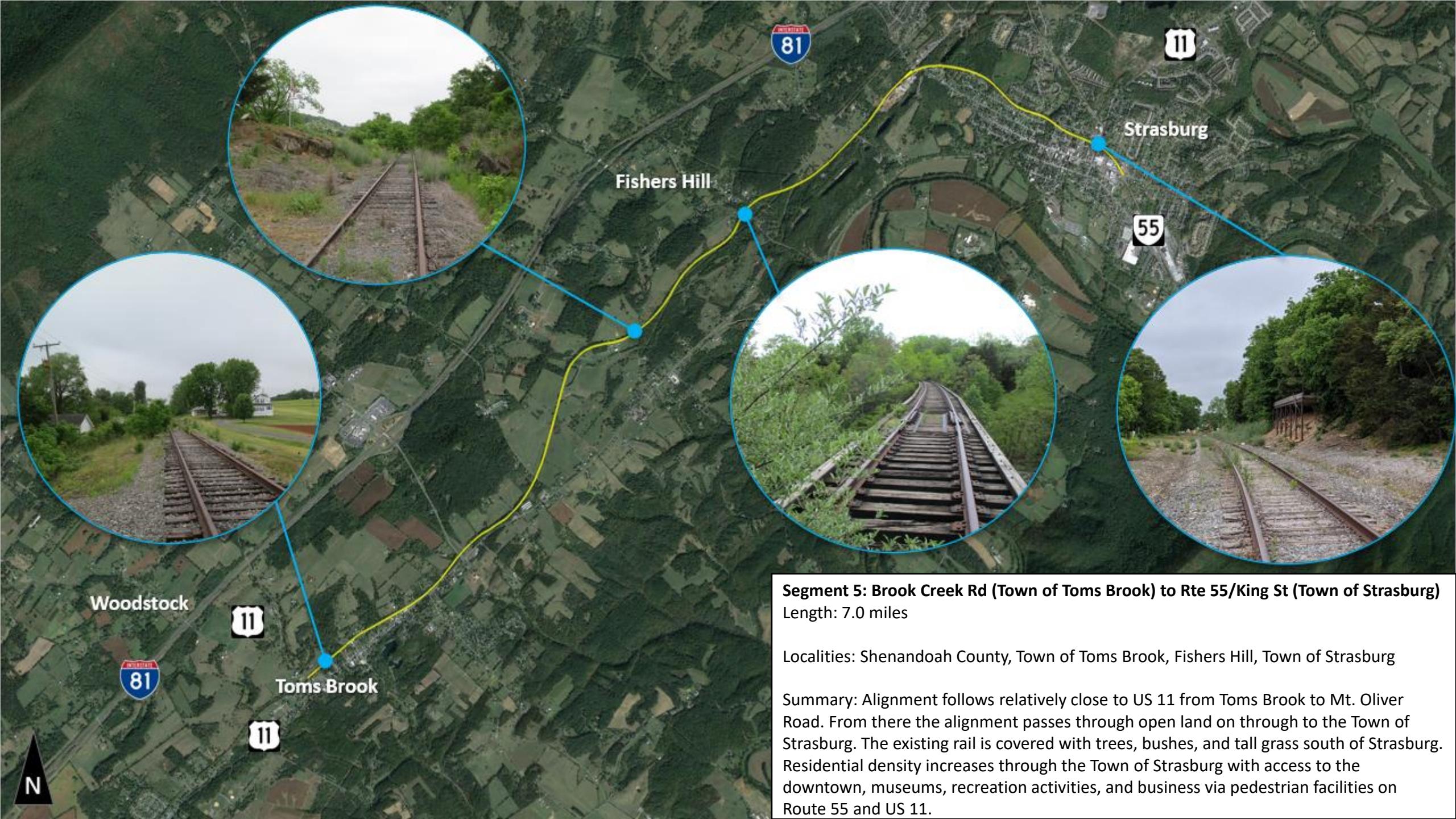


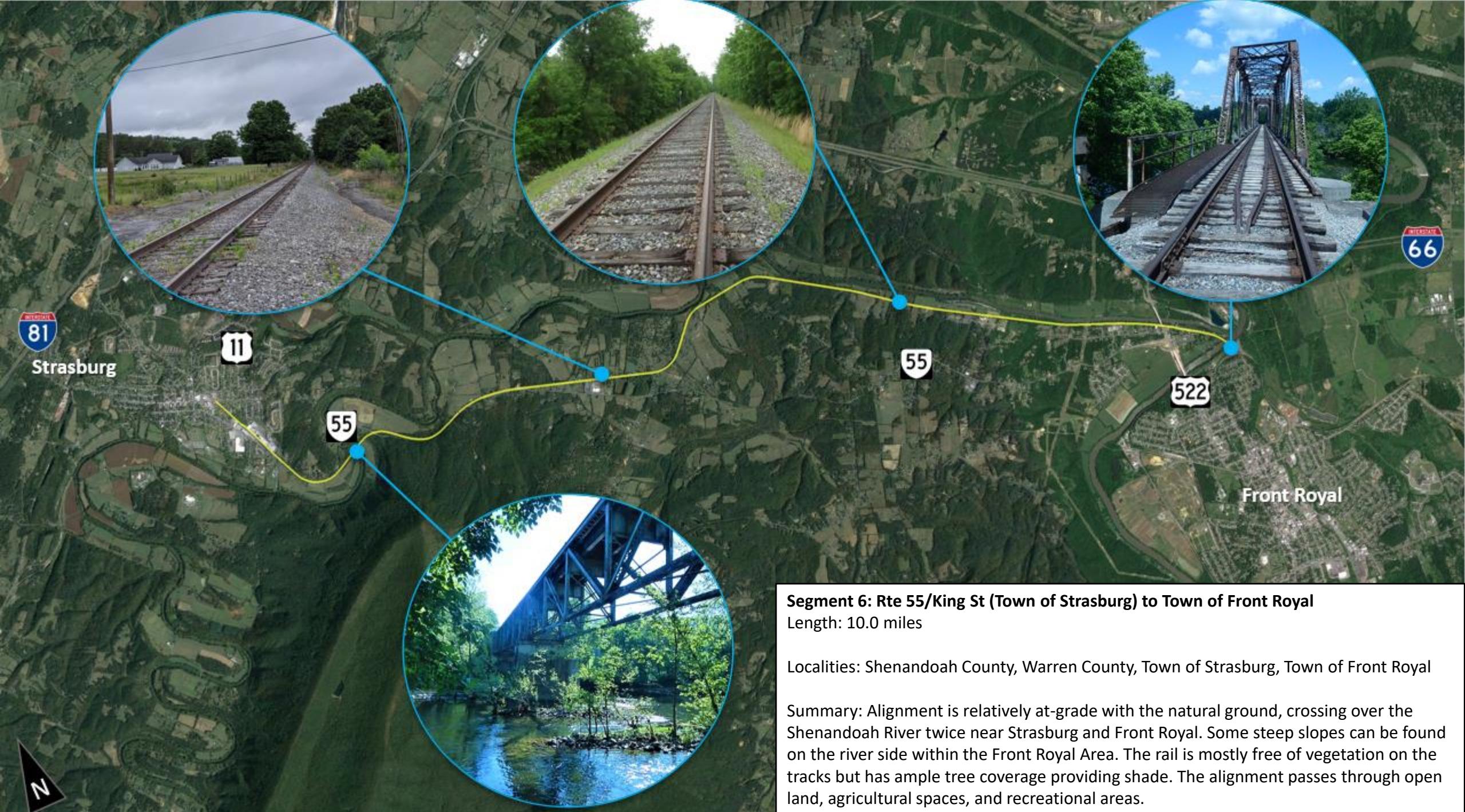


Segment 4: Court Square (Town of Woodstock) to Brook Creek Rd (Town of Toms Brook)
Length: 5.5 miles

Localities: Shenandoah County, Town of Woodstock, Maurertown, Town of Toms Brook

Summary: Alignment follows relatively close to US 11 at about 4 plus feet above natural ground. The existing rail is mostly covered with trees, bushes, and tall grass. The section between the two towns provides a fair amount of tree coverage for shade. The alignment has scenic views of the mountains in open areas.





At-Grade Trail Crossings

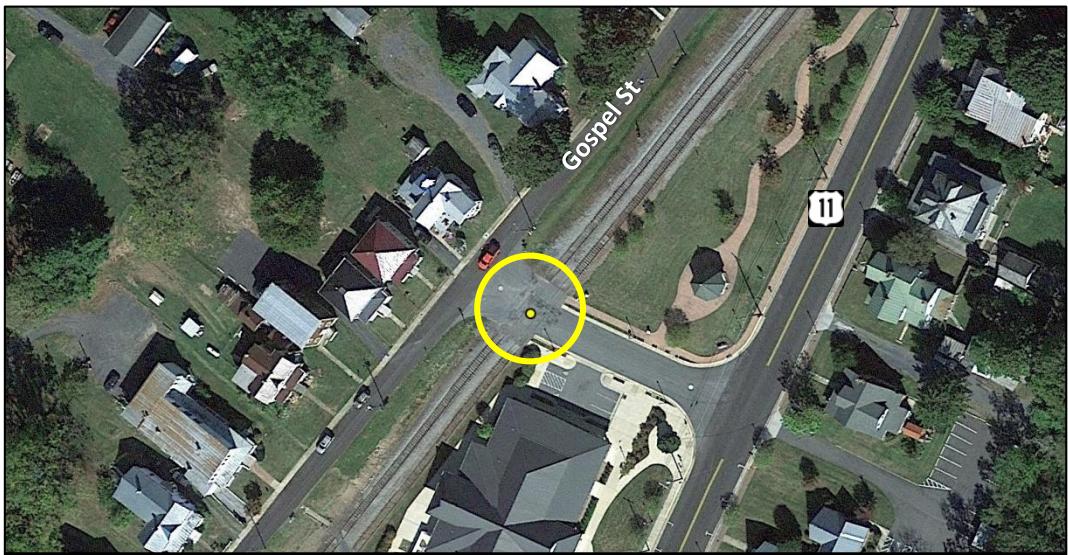
- 117 Trail Crossings
- Trail would typically cross low-volume, residential, or commercial roadways
- Typical treatments include signage and pavement markings for both trail and roadway users



W&OD Crossing – Loudoun County, VA



Commercial / Residential Crossing Type Example – Town of Broadway



Intersection Crossing Type Example – Town of Mount Jackson



Low Volume / Low Speed Crossing Type Example – Town of Strasburg



High Volume / High Speed Crossing Type Example – Town of Woodstock

Structures

- 49 Total Structures
 - 16 Long or Multi-Span Structures
 - 7 Single-Span Structures
 - 13 Culverts
 - 13 Drainage Inlets



Structures

- Evaluated for condition
 - Defects
 - Cracking
 - Erosion
- Improvements required for trail use to be noted
 - Re-decking
 - Safety railing



Corridor Overview: Work Performed To Date

Summary

- 9' – 10' wide alignment with moderate to steep slopes abutting either side
- Little to no overgrowth south of I-81 and North of Fishers Hill
- Moderate to heavy overgrowth between I-81 and Fishers Hill
- Multiple access points to Towns and local services
- Multiple trail crossings requiring crossing treatments
- Multiple structures requiring varying levels of repair

Corridor Overview: Next Steps

- Trail cross-section analysis
- Construction cost estimates
- Trailhead locations and requirements
- Roadway crossing treatments analysis
- Bridge recommendations and estimates

Management Alternatives

Jennifer Wampler, Trails Coordinator, DCR



Management Alternatives

Federally owned and managed

State-owned

- With federal management
- With state management (VDOT, DCR, Rail authority)
- Managed by a regional authority (Spearhead Trails)
- Managed in partnership with an NGO (Virginia Capital Trail)

Local or regional ownership

- Managed by a regional authority (W&OD)
- Managed by a regional commission (Roanoke Valley Greenways)
- Managed by a Board (Tobacco Heritage Trail)
- Managed by an NGO w/ support from the planning districts (Appomattox River Trail)

Guidelines for your feedback



Written comments in Spanish and English will be accepted up until 5:00 p.m. on August 21, 2021.

Please send to:

Jennifer Wampler, Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

600 East Main Street, 24th Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219

or email

Jennifer.wampler@dcr.virginia.gov
or by fax to 804-371-7899



Next Steps



- Draft document sent to Secretaries
- Final document sent to General Assembly by Nov. 1, 2021
- Norfolk Southern determines future of line and abandonment procedures
- General Assembly directs state agencies and assigns resources



Thank you!

Other comments and concerns?

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