# Wabash River Trail Plan

## Greater Wabash Regional Planning Commission

June 2003

## Introduction to the Wabash River Trail Plan

The goal of this plan is to create some ideas and concepts of pathways, and the feasibility of trails in the Southeastern Illinois counties of Edwards, Wabash and White, all near the communities of Grayville and Mt. Carmel, along the Wabash River. Two former rail corridors bisect this area in an X form, crossing in Grayville. The north-south segment in Illinois is about eleven miles long and is preserved via "railbanking." A federal law sustained by the Supreme Court, which preserves the federal authority and public transportation policy over the line, while allowing the railroad to remove its rail and economic interest in the corridor. The northeast to southwest segment from Bealle Woods State Park at Keensburg to Grayville is about eight miles long, and is abandoned-removing both federal authority and rails from the swath.

Together or separately these corridors can create singular trail routes, or the spine of a trail system, which can connect both geographically and economically hiking-bicycling-horseback riding ventures in the larger area of Mt. Carmel to Albion to Carmi and nearby communities and counties. For example, a geographic series of bike routes from Carmi to Mt. Carmel could be used for an annual fund-raiser bike ride by a not-for-profit in the area. In addition, such a route could be marketed for tourism trade and economic development from spring to fall. Noteworthy is that the east-west American Discovery (hiking) Trail runs from Evansville into Southern Illinois. It can be easily directed to Grayville once the Posey Trail is opened over the Wabash River into Grayville. The ADT itself uses a variety of on-road and off-road routes.

Usually no one trail is opened all at one time, let alone a whole trail system. Rather, a trail will open a couple of miles at a time. Thus, a trail may take several phases to open and span several years. Such would be the case for the Posey Corridor, from Poseyville, Indiana to the Wabash River to Grayville. A portion of the Wabash River Tail has been opened to walkers only at this point.

In general, routes may be off-road, a rail-trail, a river levee, an old road, etc. Or on-road, preferable lessor used country or township roads, but perhaps a state route for a short while. In either case, planning will take time. If routes are on-road, the designations and route markings will take time. For off-road routes land will have to be acquired or permitted. This alone will take quite some time, even before design and detail work begins.

To build a trail or two is good, but to build a trail system, not only overland for walking, bicycling, and horseback riding, but also a water trail system for canoeing, kayaking, and tubing, would be excellent. To couple this network with features and sites of local and natural history would be attractive to tourists.

## Creating the Trails Plan

The Wabash River Trails Committee has been the major driving force in the implementing of the trail plan. The committee is made up of interested citizens, government officials, and representatives of the tourism agency and Indiana Trials Fund, Inc. This group meets on a regular basis, along with representatives of the Department of Natural Resources, in helping identify possible plans. This group has enabled the planning process to have a community-wide interest. Public input played a major role in the corridor identification. Public meetings were held in which citizens were given the opportunity to express their concerns, discuss options, and come to the unity of potential trail plans.

The planning process identified greenways and trail priorities in the tri-county area.

## The Why of Trails and the Benefits

While many reasons exist for a community to develop trails, one overriding reason is that it is pleasurable and inviting to the user. Some users may be pedestrians, be they gentle walkers, rigorous hikers, fast joggers or runners. Other users may be bicyclists, horseback riders, bird watchers, and nature lovers.
Trails hold many benefits.

**Economically**

_ Increased spending in town or the area as a result of visitors purchasing gas, food, beverages, souvenirs, and lodging.
_ Trails provide opportunities for concessions and special events.
_ Trail maintenance organizations support local businesses by purchasing supplies and services.
_ Amenities that increase quality of life help retain and attract corporations and businesses.
_Real Estate sections of newspapers in areas with trails tout trail proximity as an amenity. Studies show quicker sales of homes near trails, and in some cases an increase in sales price.

**Education**

_ Signs, brochures, and guided hikes can be used to teach about nature, culture, and history.
_ Schoolteachers can use trails for outdoor classrooms.

**Environmental**

_Trails become greenways that protect the vegetation and geography of natural greenways.
_Greenways can serve as wildlife conduits between protected areas.
_Greenways vegetation provides habitat, creek bank stabilization, and water temperature regulation.

**Community**

_Trails provide focal points for special community events.
_Trails promote interaction between residents and businesses that improves community cohesion.

**Recreation**

_ Trails provide opportunity for a multitude of recreational activities, including walking, hiking, and bicycle riding, skating, bird watching, and wildlife viewing.
_ Many rail corridors have gentle grades that provide recreation opportunities for a diverse user group including children, seniors, people with disabilities, and whole families.

**Transportation**

_ Trails can connect several types of environments from urban to suburban to farmland to forest, often in a short amount of distance.
_ Trails provide non-polluting and less dangerous routes to schools, neighborhoods, parks, shops, and historical areas.

## Comprehensive Greenway Plan

## Regional Initiative

With increasing development pressures throughout the Edwards, Wabash and White counties, the need for a regional greenway plan has been established. This is important for preserving the environment and linear connections within the region. In 1983, the Illinois Governor's Council under Governor Edgar defined greenways and initiated a planning program to begin outlining ways to develop a statewide network of greenways and trails that add value to existing public holdings and provides the setting for a wide assortment of activities. This plan follows in the footsteps of the Southern Illinois greenways plans and suggests connections within the region to create a viable network of greenways, enhance the quality of life and improve the environment within the Edwards, Wabash and White counties.

## Wabash Regional Trails Committee

Under a grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Wabash Regional Trails Committee was formed to identify, prioritize and develop and or preserve greenways throughout the project area. Greater Wabash Regional Planning Commission facilitated the project for the city of Grayville and Wabash County with cooperation from local, state and federal representatives.

In order to complete the greenway plan, representatives from the commission and counties were contacted for their input into the conceptual plan. The following list represents the committee.

- City/Village Chief Elected Officials
- County Board Commissioner
- Edwards County Farm Bureau
- Wabash County Farm Bureau
- Southeastern Illinois Tourist Board
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- Beall Woods State Park
- Indiana Greenways
- Indiana Trails Fund

## Definition of Greenways

A greenway is a corridor of open space connecting natural areas, cultural and historic sites, parks, neighborhoods and communities. As our "Green Infrastructure", similar to roads, water and sewer systems and utilities, they are essential for the general health and welfare of the public. These linear corridors can be located along waterways, streets, railroads, utility easements, bluffs, ravines or any other linear feature connecting open space.

Establishing greenways in many cases means preserving existing resources. These ribbons of open land allow for natural filtration of streams and rivers. They promote erosion control along stream banks, ravines or bluff and create protective buffers for woodlands and prairies. Greenways protect wildlife migration routes and allow for recreation and multi-purpose trails. They are opportunities for rural community landscaping and design. Economic development is associated with greenways through increased property values along a corridor; recreation related sales and rental enterprises, tourism and historic attractions, and quality of life initiatives, which can attract businesses to the region.

Because of the linear nature of greenways, they offer greater accessibility to humans and wildlife. For example, a 160-acre greenway has a greater amount of edge area than a traditional park. If a traditional park were ½ mile on all sides, comparable the same number of acres for the greenway would equate to a park 16 miles in length and nearly 83 feet wide. As a result, a greater amount of open space is protected.

Greenways have been further defined as active, passive or a combination of these types. The definitions assist in the prioritization process and with strategies for implementation. Because distinct segments of a single greenway may have different functions, the following definitions have been developed for clarification:

**Active Greenways (A):** A greenway providing a wide range of opportunities for human use through recreation and multi-purpose trail development. Such linear parks or open space may provide for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, paddling, boating, snowmobile, cross country skiing, fishing, driving, etc. Access to active greenways can have multiple points of entry. Active greenways developed as multi-purpose trails may be implemented either on-road with shared access or off-road with non-shared access. Simple nature paths or non-hard surfaced greenways may be another option for active greenways. The proposed active greenways amount to 225 miles of linear open space.

**Passive Greenways (P):** A greenway providing a limited range of opportunities for human use by restricting public access. The function or value of this type of linear corridor is to emphasize conservation and protection of the natural environment. The purpose of a passive greenway may be for storm water and floodplain management, wetland preservation, erosion control, natural filtration for water quality improvements, living snow fences, migration of wildlife and preservation of vegetation. If public access is allowed at all, human access should be limited through designated points of access, such as guided nature paths, perimeter parking, designating paddling moorings/docks and selective scenic overlooks. The proposed passive greenways amount to 170 miles of linear open space.

## Opportunities and Characteristics of Greenways

### Greenways

Provide multiple benefits through preservation of sensitive land resources.

Represent a long-term and cost-efficient use of public and private resources.

Act as filter zones to stop sediments and pollutants that degrade water quality

Allow waterways, wetlands and flood plains to collect excess storm water caused from development.

Preserve or restore natural ecosystems so that plants and animals can expand their habitats

Provide buffer zones between incompatible development patterns, reducing noise, visual and environmental impacts.

Allow for access to important archeological and historic sites. For example, Native American and pioneer trails, abandoned rail lines, or historic trading and commercial routes.

Serve as outdoor classrooms for education in the field of natural and environmental sciences and management.

Offer non-discriminatory access to open space opportunities to walk, run, bicycle, cross country ski, horseback ride, canoe, fish as well as snowmobile and off-road ATV touring.

Establish an energy-efficient and safe means of connecting people and places with trails between homes, schools, shopping, work, parks, and other community facilities and points of interest.

Greatly enhance quality of life values and community image, and support commercial recreation opportunities and tourist activities.

Reduce costs of land maintenance by utilizing sustainable natural means coupled with heightened environmental awareness.

Impart an understanding of the regional landscape and build a sense of place, cultural identity, and respect for the environment.

# Proposed Trails

## Wabash River Trail

One configuration for a trail route would be an oval trail that would run from Grayville to Mt. Carmel and return around the Wabash River.
The western portion of the trail would use the New York Central Rail Road right-of-way along State Route #1 to Keensburg and Bealle Woods. The north route could take local roads into Mt. Carmel.
The east portion would use the levee on the Indiana side coming into Griffin or near there to get to the Posey Rail-Trail to connect back to Grayville.
The mileage of this trail is around fifty miles.
Much research is still needed on the land ownership of the former NYCRR line, and about public policy use of roads and levees.
Along the Wabash River Trail, aside from the land ownership/acquistition factor, other conditions and obstacles are still present. One bridge is out, and another, a concrete arch would have to be heavily rebuilt or replaced before this trail can become a reality.

## Grayville – Browns – Keensburg Trail

A trail extending from Grayville to Browns and then to Keensburg and back is another example of the choices of rail trails in this Wabash River Trail plan. To extend the Wabash River Trail from Grayville to Browns and then to Keensburg would be an easy extension from the original proposed trail. This would be a triangular trail.

A portion of this route from Grayville northeastwardly to the Keensburg area is part of a general agreement between Browns farmers and the Indiana Trails Fund to swap right of ways, if a trail is built on the NYC line. This trail would provide a re-use of a railroad line.

Extending the trail to Browns would mean that three bridges would have to be decked and handrailed. The bridges span Mud Creek, Wheeler Creek, and a creek with no name. In addition, some reworking of drainage ditches would be needed and a portion of the rail bank would need to be fenced to keep the livestock from roaming the trail.

The creation of this extension would increase the mileage to about 20 additional miles, thus creating a more suitable trail.

## Wabash River State Park to State Park Trail

A third trail opportunity avails itself in the idea of connecting two state parks into one trail. Bealle Woods in Keensburg, Illinois and the Harmony State Park in New Harmony, Indiana. This is roughly a thirty-mile route that lies in a linear zigzag formation that goes from one State Park to another, connecting two states.

From Bealle Woods, the route would run southwestwardly on the Wabash River Trail to Grayville, where it would jog into the Posey Trail across the Wabash River and southeastwardly to Griffin, Indiana. From Griffin the route would take the old road southward to New Harmony, Indiana and to Harmony State Park.

Perhaps support for this route is the strongest, as people in both states already perceive this as an obviously attractive route. Still, land would have to be acquired, or Illinois would have to rebuild Route One incorporating a trail with treadways for bicycling, hiking, and horseback riding.

In addition and most noteworthy is that this linear route, particularly from Grayville to Harmony State Park would basically duplicate the American Discovery Trail from Southern Illinois to Evansville, Indiana or vise versa. It can be easily directed to Grayville once the Posey Trail is opened over the Wabash River. The ADT itself used a variety of on-road and off-road routes as it connects the Atlantic to the Pacific with trails for hiking, bicycling and horseback riding.

## Additional Trails

In addition to the trails mentioned, the thought occurs to create two more trail routes.

One route is to connect various counties and county seats by bicycle and hiking routes, most likely along county, township and lesser roads. For example, connect Carmi to Albion via Golden Gate or via Grayville.

A second type of trail could be water routes for canoeing, kayaking, and tubing on the rivers and streams in the same counties about which we have projected walking, bicycling, and horseback riding. Indeed, if locals develop land trails to roughly parallel water trails, the symbiosis of these routes will yield stronger tourism appeal, than just each route separately.

A bicycle route from Golden Gate could parallel Elm Creek to Carmi, or follow the Little Wabash River to New Haven. That family and friends of somewhat different travel tastes could share vacations will provide a demanding draw by relating several types of activities for the family to enjoy.

## Implementation and Funding

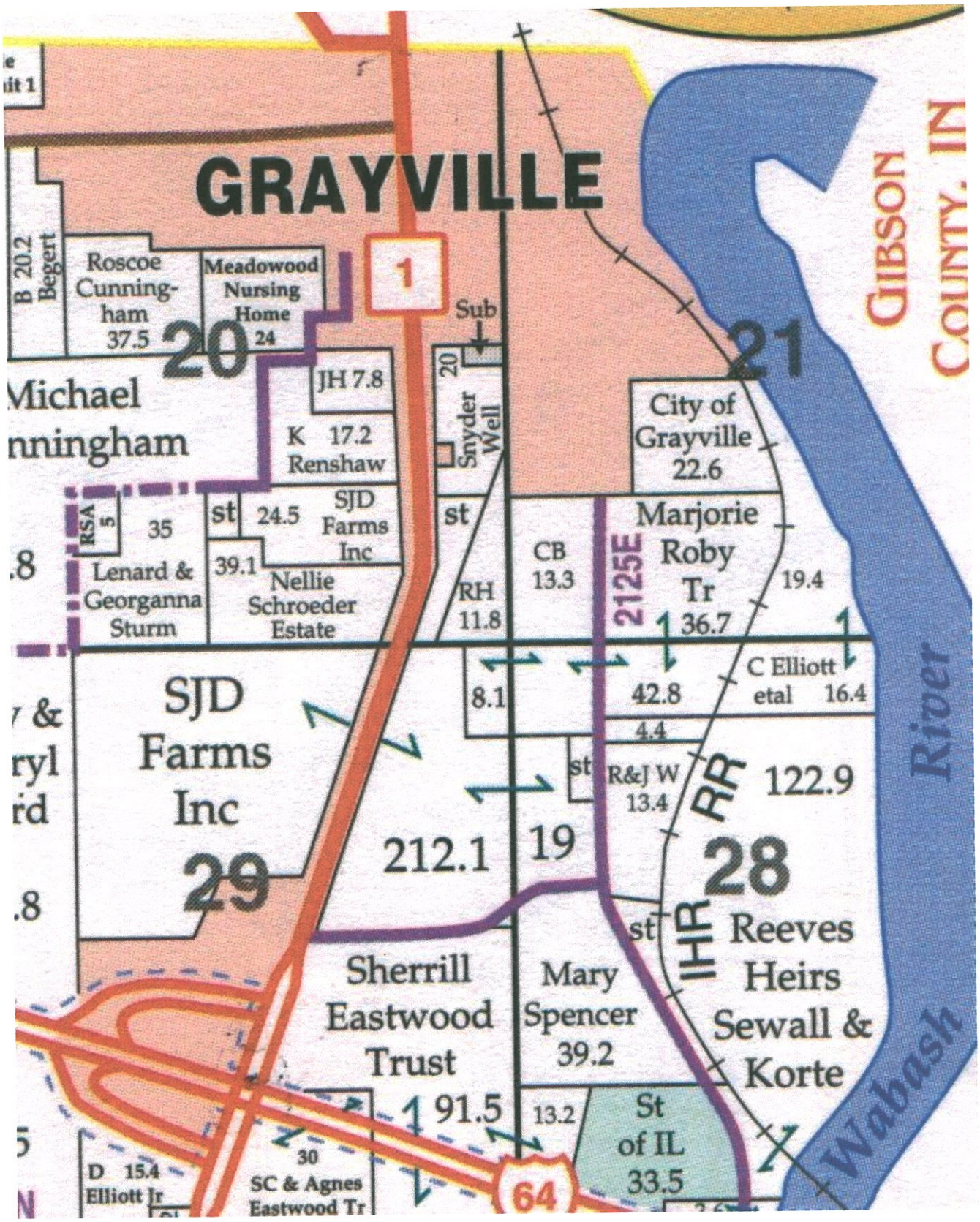
Funding for greenways and trails can come from several different sources. The key to obtaining the financing needed is to be aware of the different sources and the qualifications to obtain the sources. Funding can come from the federal government, state government, state government, local government or private sources. Obtaining grant money, fundraising, donations, earned income, and through taxes.

Donations can include gifts, whether from individuals or businesses or foundations.

State funding programs are annual and can be applied for each winter. Information can be obtained at:

IL Department of Natural Resources
Division of Grant Administration
Lincoln Tower Plaza
524 South Second Street
Springfield, IL 62701-1787
217-782-7481
email: grants@dnrmail.state.il.us
FAX 217-782-9599

Project Site Plat Map



# Site Development Map
# Phase I Construction
## Grayville, IL

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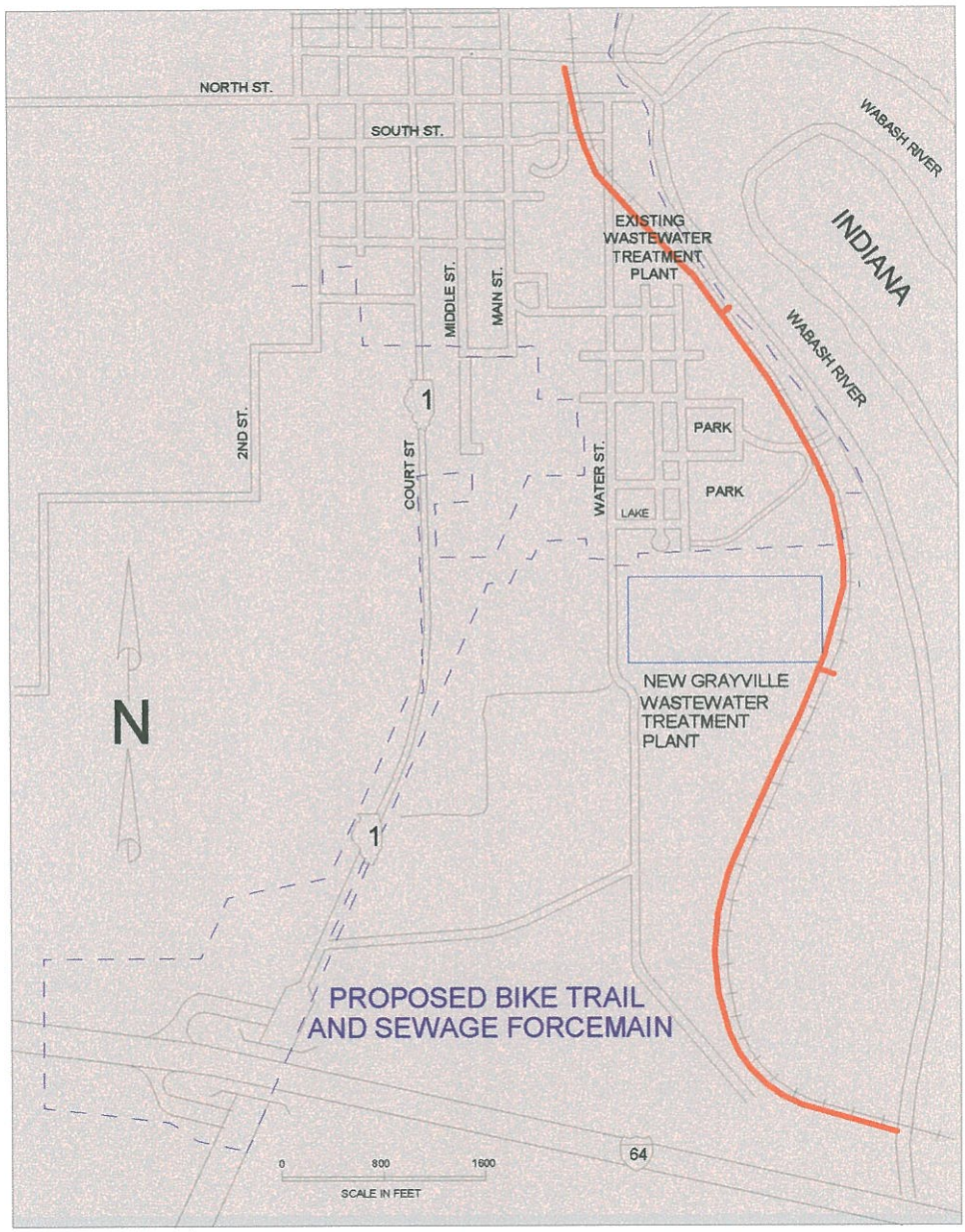
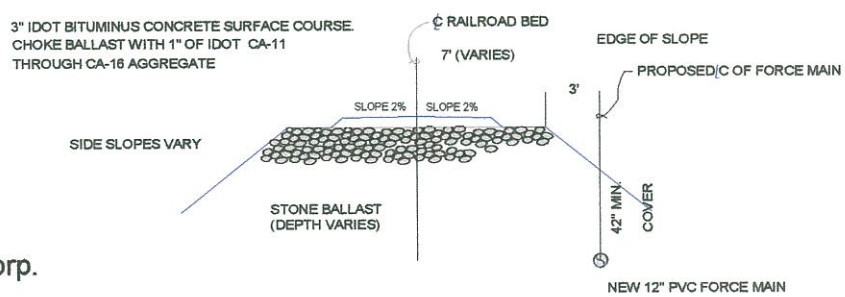
Proposed Trail

City Limits

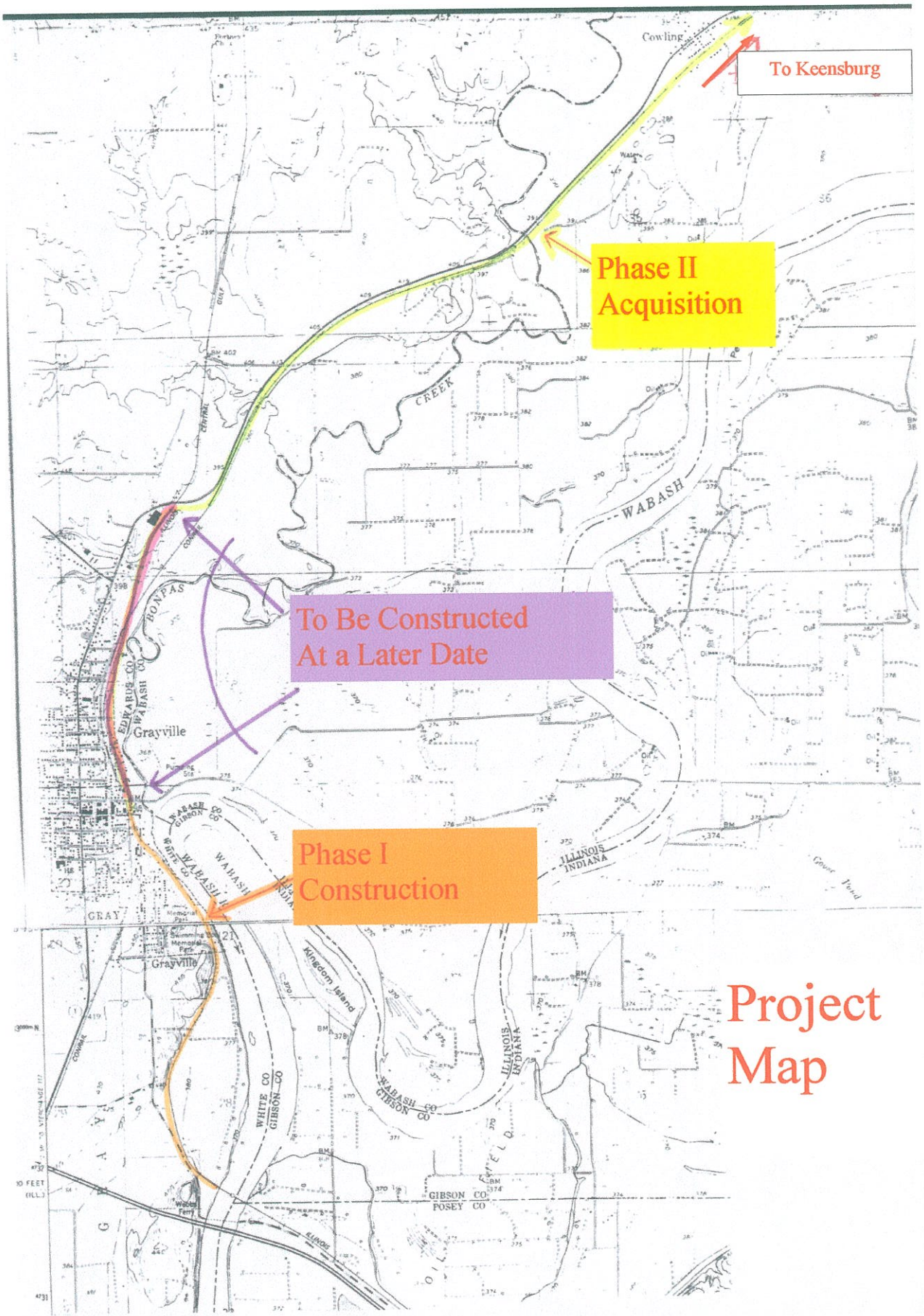



LOCATION MAP




PROPOSED TRAIL AND FORCEMAIN
ON ABANDONED RAILROAD BED

CAD drawing from WVP Corp.
Map by R. Shaw, 10/99
Produced by GWRPC

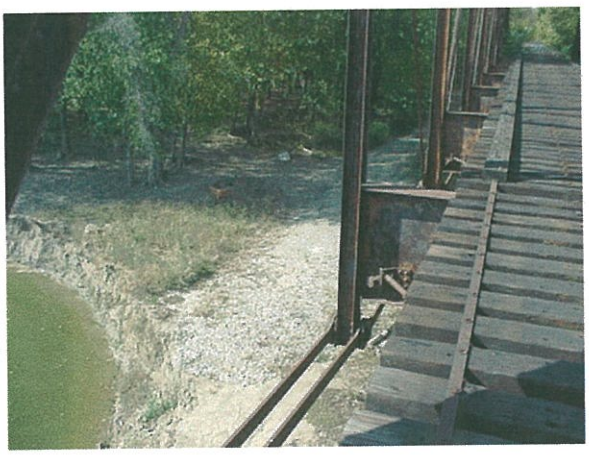

To Keensburg
Phase II
Acquisition
To Be Constructed
At a Later Date
Phase I
Construction
Grayville
WABASH
CREEK
ILLINOIS
INDIANA
WHITE CO
GIBSON CO
WABASH CO
GIBSON CO
POSEY CO
Kingdom Island

# Project Map

# Project Site

## South Starting Point at Wabash River

## Phase I - Construction



Beginning of Phase I. Located near future boat ramp site, end of Wabash River Bridge coming from Indiana. The bridge will be incorporated into project in cooperation with the Indiana Trail Fund, at a later date.

# North Endpoint – Phase I

End of Phase I at old depot. Ample parking available. Looking north from depot to downtown Grayville.

# Phase II – Acquisition of Abandoned Railroad Corridor

Phase II seeks to acquire this corridor of railroad bed. It runs parallel to Illinois Highway 1 from the north end of Grayville to Keensburg. The corridor is buffered with trees, and travels along scenic rural farmland. There are two major bridges along the route. The one pictured below looks intact, while the Bonpas Creek Bridge will need to be replaced.

TRAIL
IS
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OWN RISK