

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



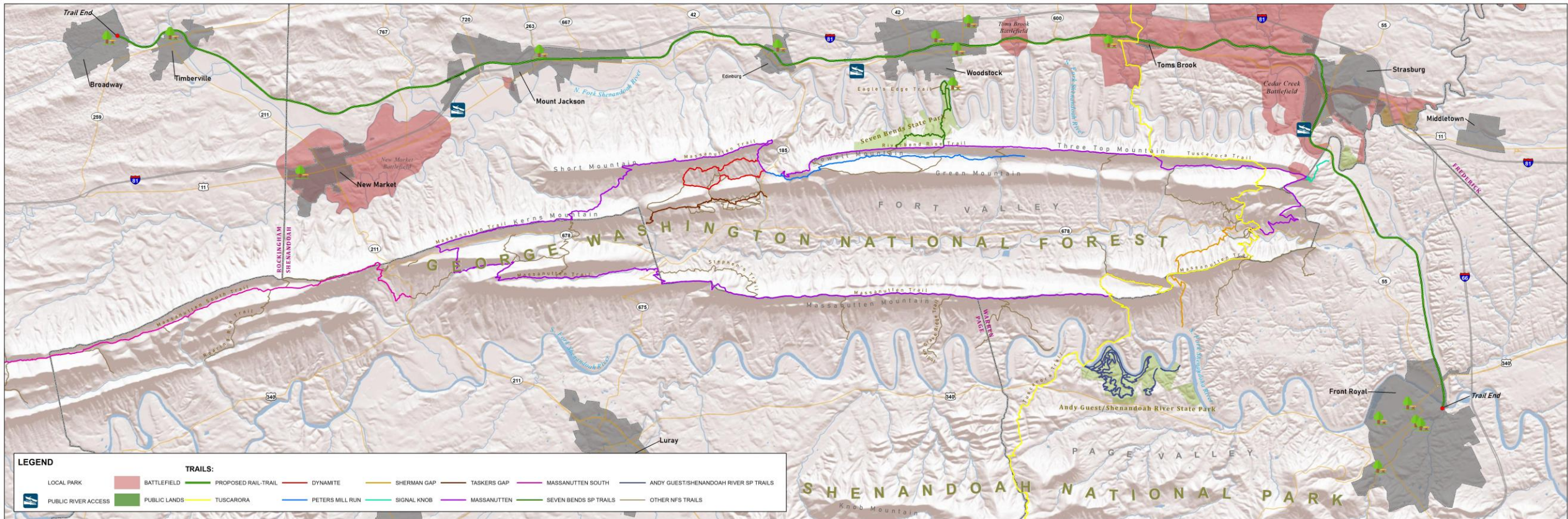
Budget Bill- HB1800

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

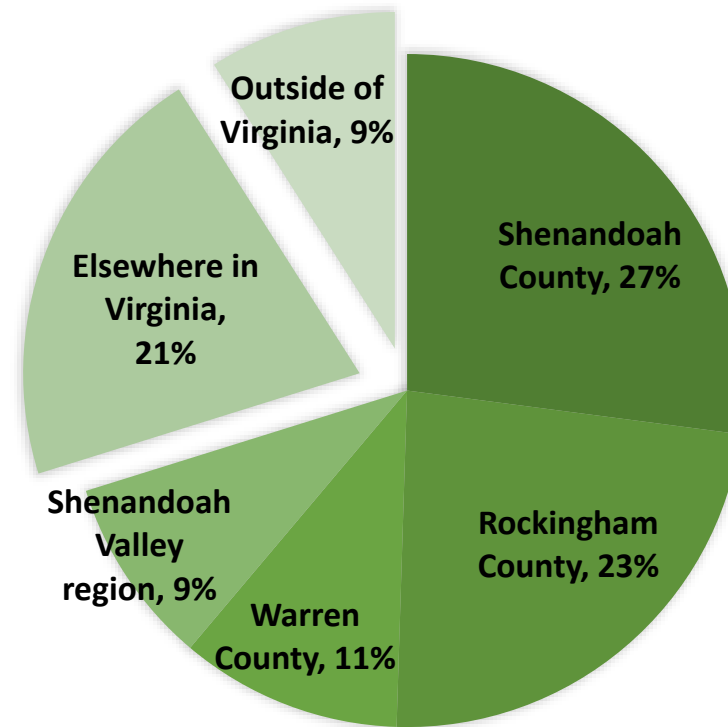
- Majority preferred a management entity that could provide a consistent, well-maintained trail experience
- Towns support varies but could include providing space for maintenance equipment, providing trailheads in town, financial support or performing some maintenance functions

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?



2

INTERESTS

3

BENEFITS

4

MAP

5

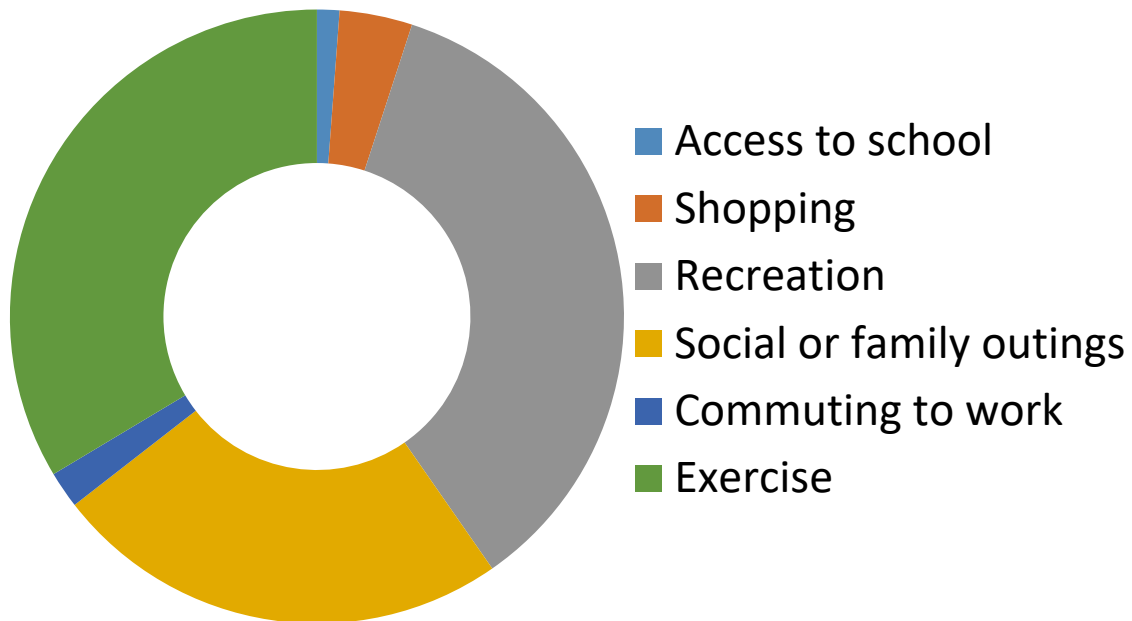
WRAP UP





- **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

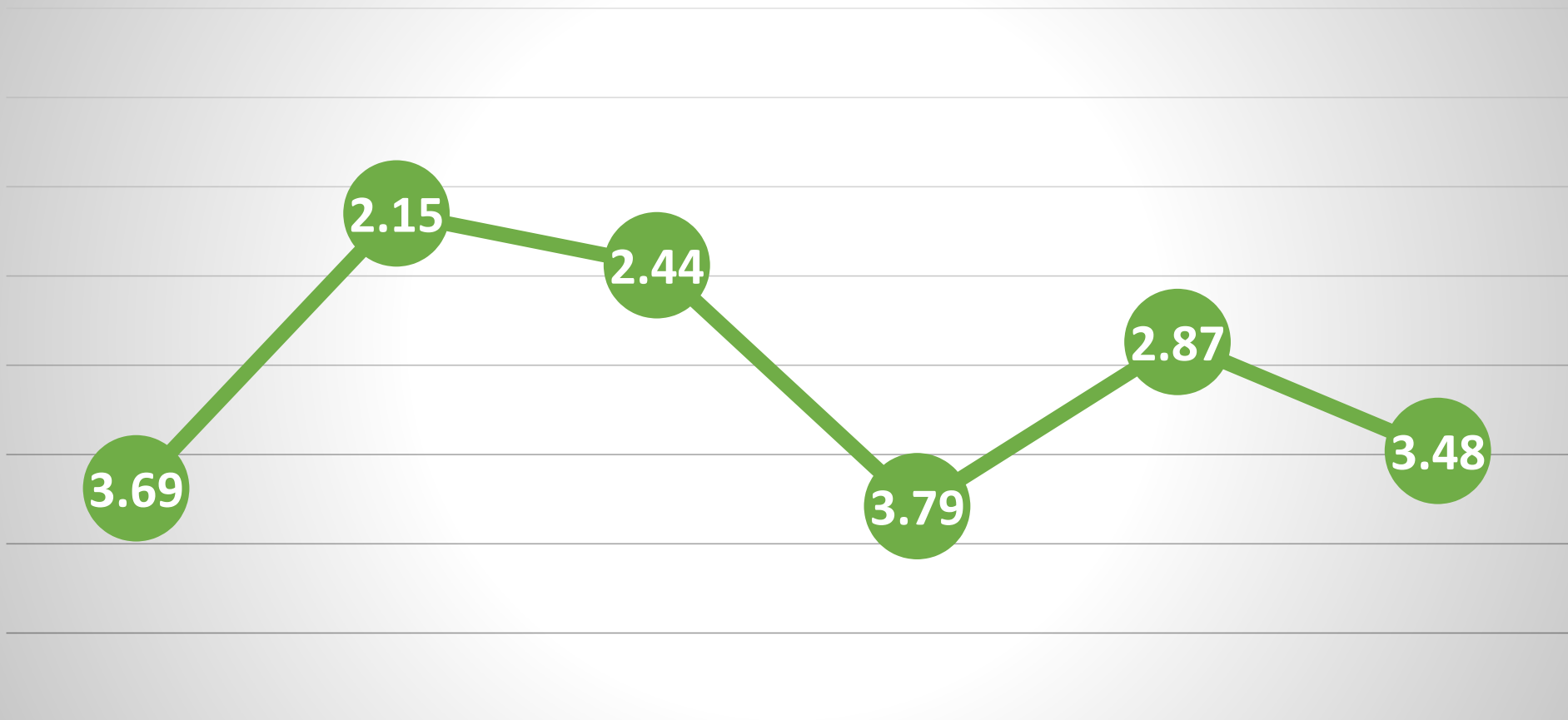
If built, how would you use this trail?



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

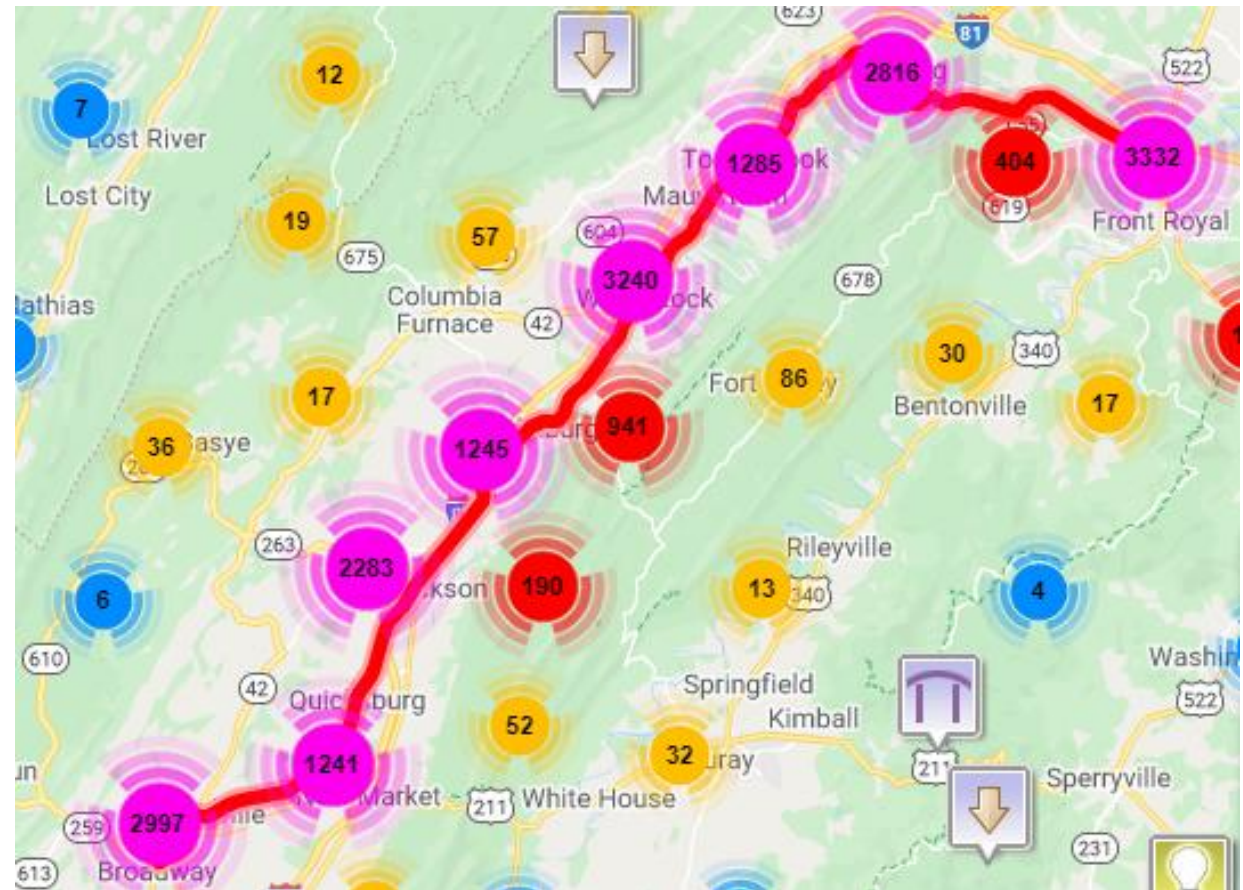
IMPROVE
QUALITY OF LIFE

INCREASE
TOURISM

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



WELCOME

INTERESTS

BENEFITS

MAP

WRAP UP

5

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

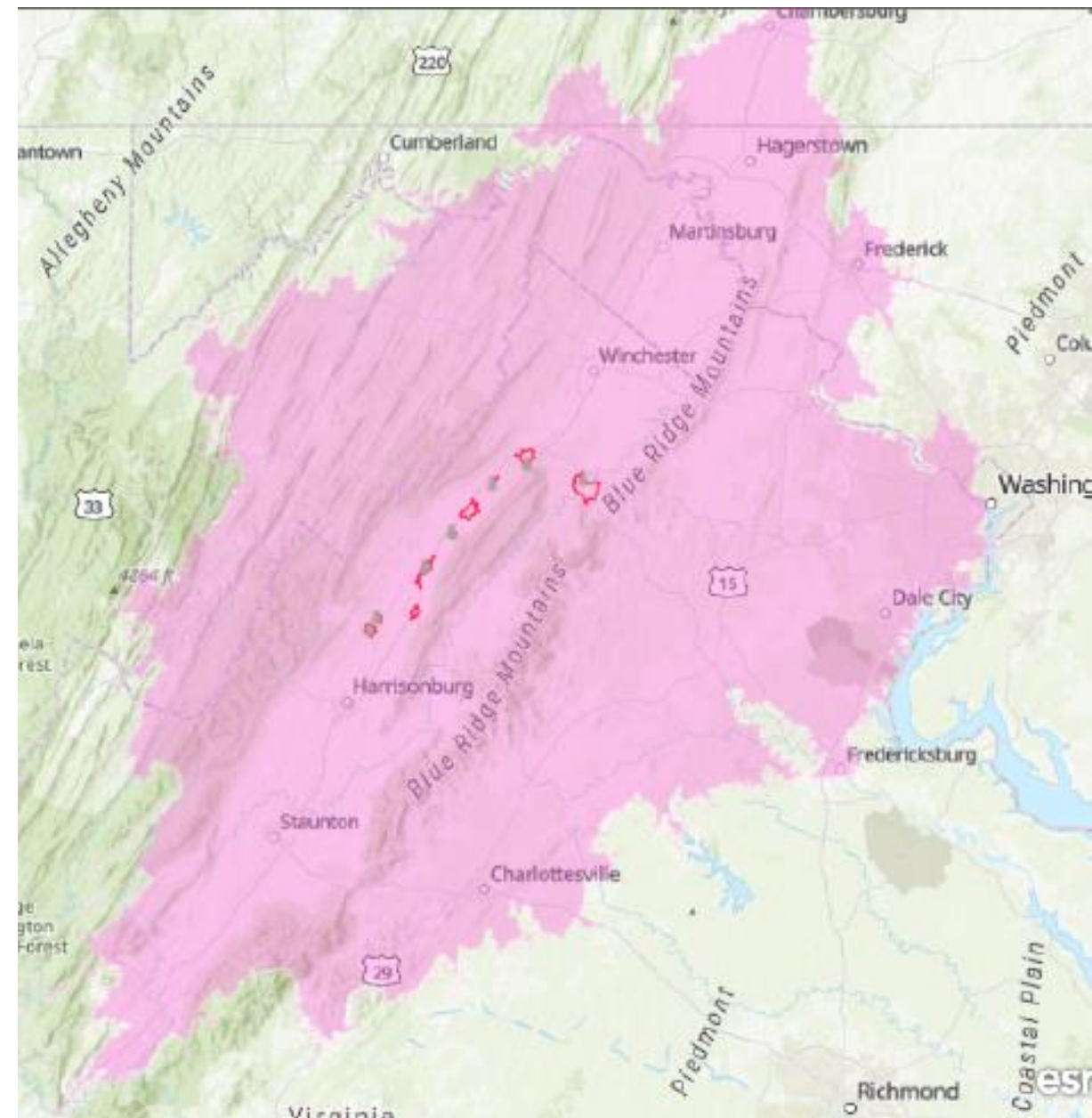
Vulnerable populations

- 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

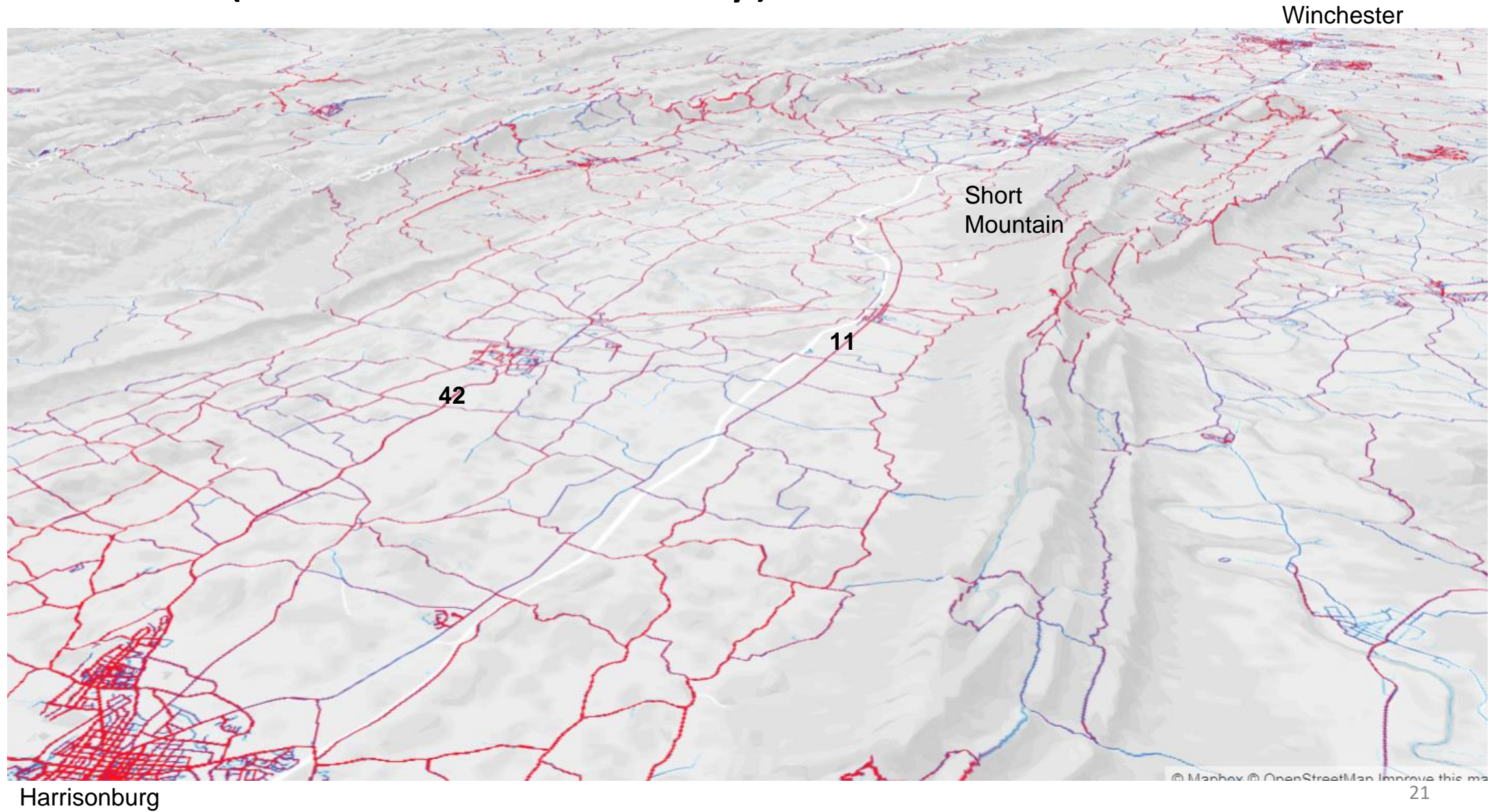
Market

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

A scenic view of a riverbank with a bridge in the background and people sitting on the shore. The image is slightly faded to serve as a background for the text.

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

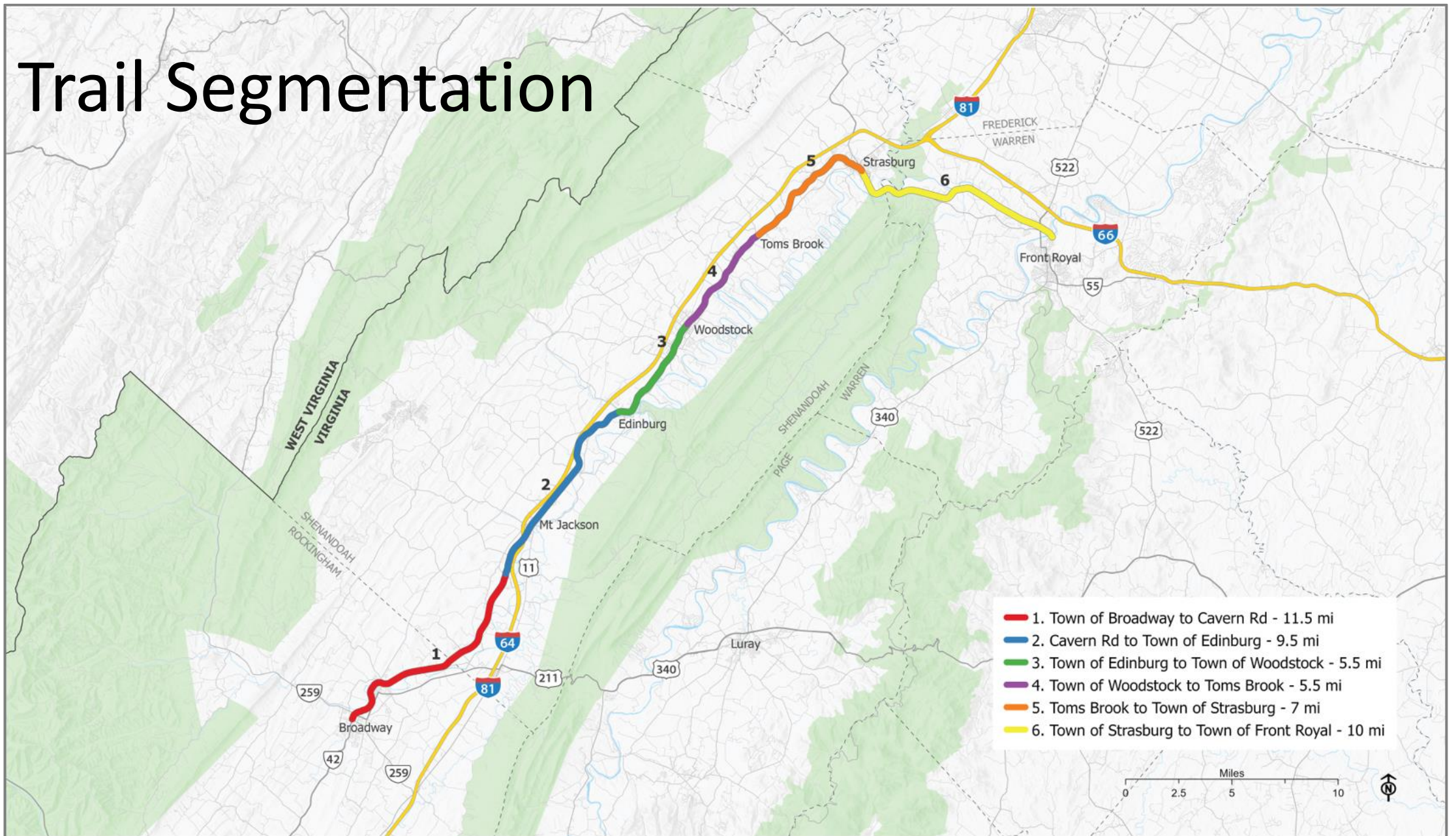
Corridor Overview: Work Performed To Date

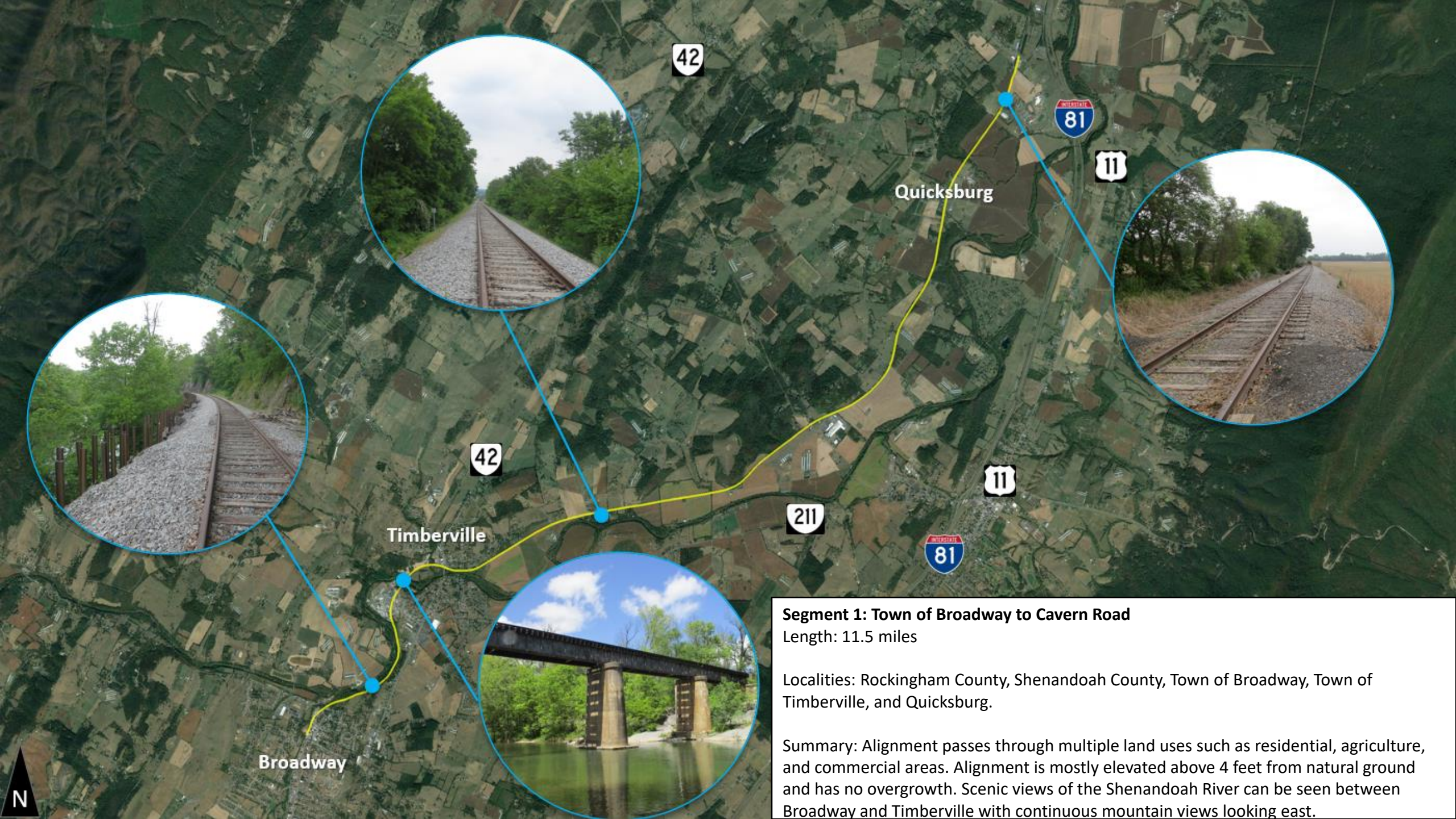


Field Review

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

Trail Segmentation





Segment 1: Town of Broadway to Cavern Road
Length: 11.5 miles

Localities: Rockingham County, Shenandoah County, Town of Broadway, Town of Timberville, and Quicksburg.

Summary: Alignment passes through multiple land uses such as residential, agriculture, and commercial areas. Alignment is mostly elevated above 4 feet from natural ground and has no overgrowth. Scenic views of the Shenandoah River can be seen between Broadway and Timberville with continuous mountain views looking east.





Mt. Jackson

Edinburg



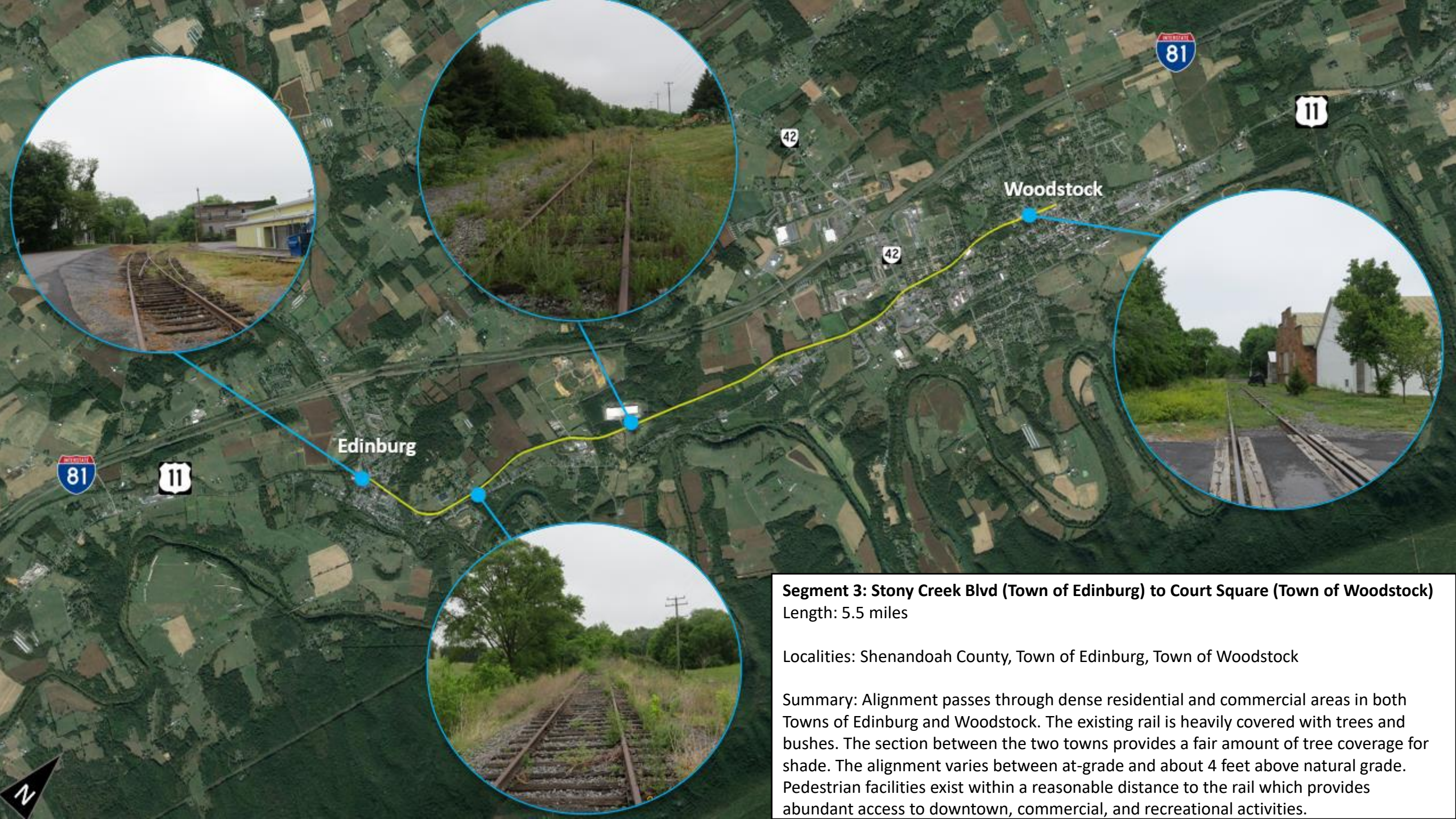
Segment 2: Cavern Road to Stony Creek Blvd (Town of Edinburg)

Length: 9.5 miles

Localities: Shenandoah County, Town of Mount Jackson, Town of Edinburg.

Summary: Alignment passes through dense residential in Town of Mount Jackson and through agriculture and low-density residential developments. The existing rail is mostly covered with trees and bushes outside of the Town of Mount Jackson. The dense vegetation will provide abundant shaded areas. The alignment varies between at-grade and about 4 feet above natural grade. There is access to commercial and recreational activities within the Town of Mount Jackson, as well as scenic views of the mountains in open areas.





Segment 3: Stony Creek Blvd (Town of Edinburg) to Court Square (Town of Woodstock)
Length: 5.5 miles

Localities: Shenandoah County, Town of Edinburg, Town of Woodstock

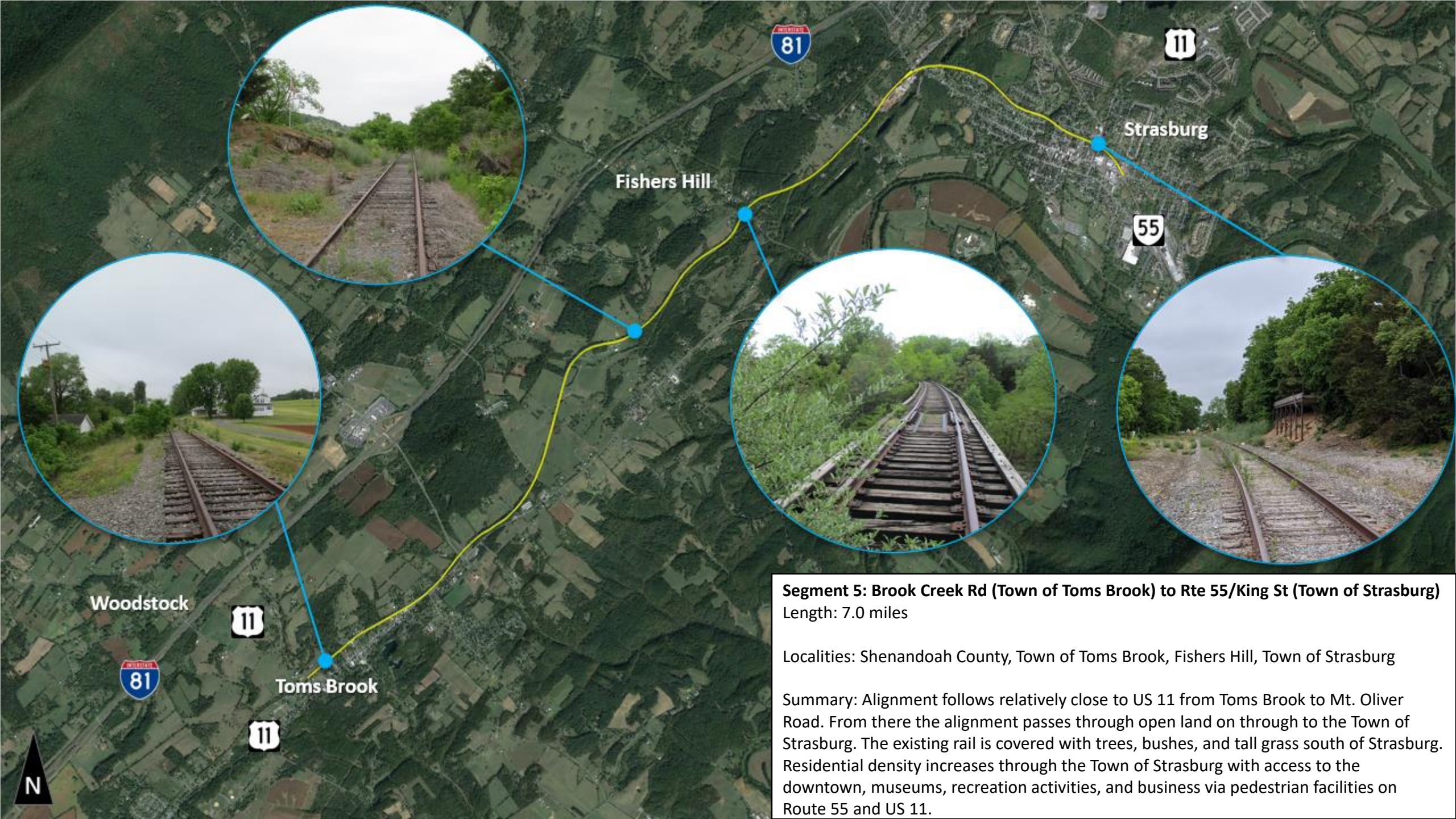
Summary: Alignment passes through dense residential and commercial areas in both Towns of Edinburg and Woodstock. The existing rail is heavily covered with trees and bushes. The section between the two towns provides a fair amount of tree coverage for shade. The alignment varies between at-grade and about 4 feet above natural grade. Pedestrian facilities exist within a reasonable distance to the rail which provides abundant access to downtown, commercial, and recreational activities.



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

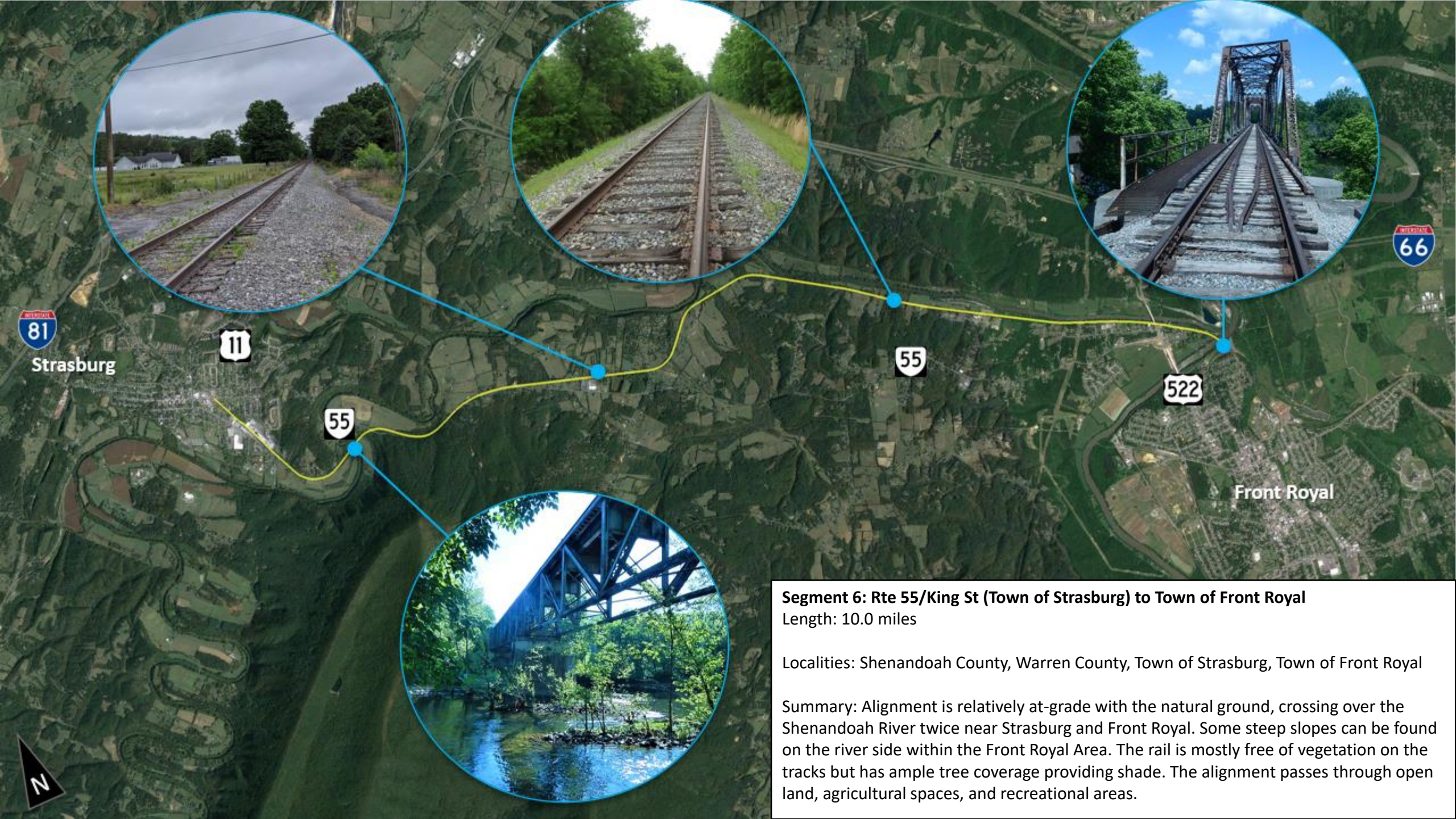
Summary: Alignment follows relatively close to US 11 at about 4 plus feet above natural ground. The existing rail is mostly covered with trees, bushes, and tall grass. The section between the two towns provides a fair amount of tree coverage for shade. The alignment has scenic views of the mountains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



Segment 5: Brook Creek Rd (Town of Toms Brook) to Rte 55/King St (Town of Strasburg)
Length: 7.0 miles

Localities: Shenandoah County, Town of Toms Brook, Fishers Hill, Town of Strasburg

Summary: Alignment follows relatively close to US 11 from Toms Brook to Mt. Oliver Road. From there the alignment passes through open land on through to the Town of Strasburg. The existing rail is covered with trees, bushes, and tall grass south of Strasburg. Residential density increases through the Town of Strasburg with access to the downtown, museums, recreation activities, and business via pedestrian facilities on Route 55 and US 11.



Strasburg



Front Royal



Segment 6: Rte 55/King St (Town of Strasburg) to Town of Front Royal

Length: 10.0 miles

Localities: Shenandoah County, Warren County, Town of Strasburg, Town of Front Royal

Summary: Alignment is relatively at-grade with the natural ground, crossing over the Shenandoah River twice near Strasburg and Front Royal. Some steep slopes can be found on the river side within the Front Royal Area. The rail is mostly free of vegetation on the tracks but has ample tree coverage providing shade. The alignment passes through open land, agricultural spaces, and recreational areas.



At-Grade Trail Crossings

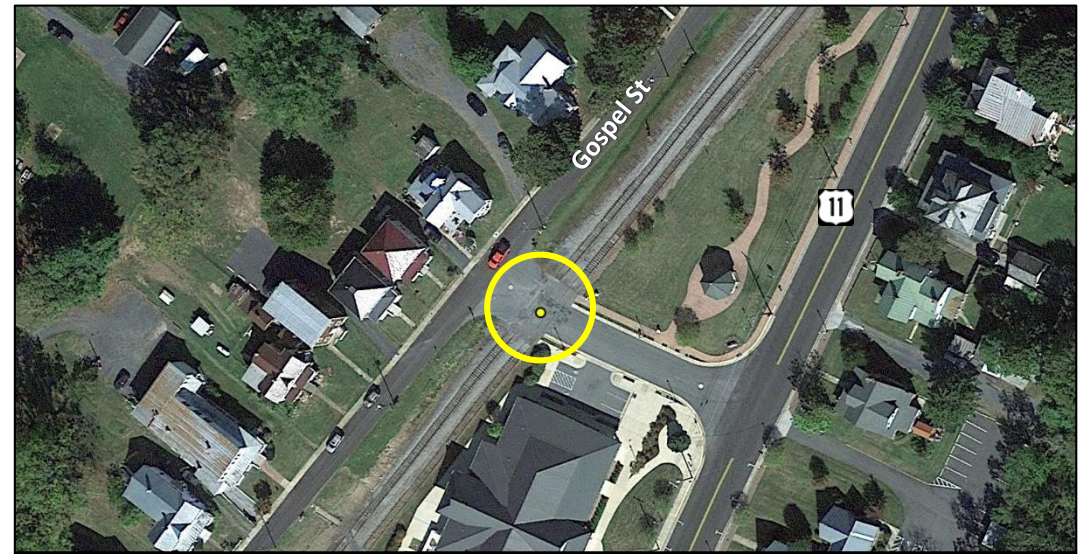
- 117 Trail Crossings
- Trail would typically cross low-volume, residential, or commercial roadways
- Typical treatments include signage and pavement markings for both trail and roadway users



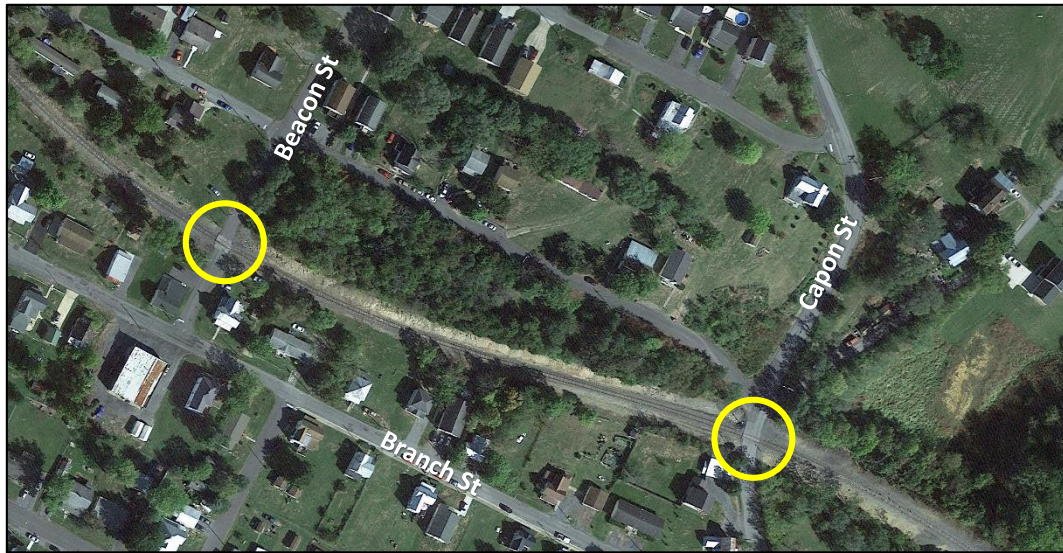
W&OD Crossing – Loudoun County, VA



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?

Please send to:

Jennifer Wampler, Virginia Department of
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