

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION



Rails on the ground in Lynch, Harlan County



Depot in Eminence, Henry County



Weedy right of way near Island, Muhlenburg County

The purpose of the Abandoned Railroad Corridor Inventory Project was to map and inventory Kentucky's abandoned railroad network and analyze the suitability of each corridor in regard to future trail reuse. This analysis was to ascertain the land ownership status and the dates of abandonment of the abandoned segments. The physical integrity of corridors was to be noted as well. This relates to the presence or absence of railroad structures such as bridges, tunnels, and culverts that may be useful in future trail development.

These objectives were to be accomplished through gathering information to create a thorough GIS database of alignments of all abandoned railroad of all types including common carriers and private lines. The future trail potential of abandoned railroad rights of way was to be assessed with information on ownership, connectivity to other railbeds, nearness to population centers, proximity to parks and forests, and access to natural and historic features, as well as connection to civic and cultural amenities and commercial services.

The results of this study will help existing rails to trails organizations, such as Kentucky Rails to Trails Council, expand their effort into new areas, identify new lines with trail potential, and assist local community trail initiatives with projects. Local groups, elected officials or interested individuals will also find the report useful in identifying abandoned rail resources in their area.

The GIS database created through this study is intended to be compatible with the State Rail Plan that focuses on active rail lines. These two studies can be used together to show a complete picture of Kentucky's rail network, past and present. The database is designed to be added to and maintained as future abandonments occur and as more

knowledge about individual lines is gained. It serves as a central, updateable archive for Kentucky's historic railroad information.

The project website is a convenient and user-friendly access point for members of Kentucky communities interested in rails to trails projects or in railroad history. The site is designed so that users do not have to be familiar with GIS software to be able to access the information contained within the GIS database. The historic railroad information and trail suitability assessments will be of interest to railroad history enthusiasts, railfans, and local historians, as well as those directly interested in trail development.

There is great interest at the local level in the history of rail lines that passed through communities. In many places in Kentucky and around the country, rails to trails projects provide a way for history to be actively experienced. It is an objective of this project to assist these types of community initiatives in preserving and interpreting local history through rails to trails projects.

This report is organized into four sections: history and context, methodology, inventory, and high value lines. The first section places Kentucky's railroad network into a national context to better understand why rail line abandonment occurs when and where it does. The methodology section explains how we gathered our data and assessed the lines for trail suitability. A large table, divided by regions of Kentucky, shows the inventory of abandoned lines. This table and its accompanying maps show the location, length, dates of construction and abandonment, railroad company names, current condition and use, and highlights of the line such as railroad structures or unique natural features for each abandoned rail corridor. Finally, the high value chapter describes in greater detail several lines that have high trail potential. We highlighted lines that are not

currently proposed as trails or have only a small segment identified as a possible trail project. A few of these lines have short sections that have been developed into trails, but these completed projects were small percentages of the potential trail mileage.