



Communications Office

1 Historic Courthouse Square • Hendersonville, NC 28792
Phone (828) 697-4809 • www.hendersoncountync.gov

Mike Morgan

Chief Communications Officer
tmorgan@hendersoncountync.gov

Kathryn Finotti

Public Information Officer
pio@hendersoncountync.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Senator Tillis Announces \$24.5 Million Grant Awarded to Complete the Ecusta Trail

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According to a recent notification from Senator Thom Tillis’s office, the City of Brevard is slated to receive a \$24.5 million grant for the Ecusta Trail from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Program. The RAISE Program provides funding for the completion of passenger transportation infrastructure projects with significant regional impact.

Once complete, the 18.9-mile rail-trail will connect the Henderson County towns of Etowah, Horse Shoe, Town of Laurel Park, the City of Hendersonville and the City of Brevard. Nearly two decades after the closure of the Ecusta Paper Mill in Brevard, EcustaRails2Trails, LLC, purchased the railbanked corridor in 2021 with the goal of rehabilitating the abandoned line to create a linear park for people of all ages and abilities. With the help of the RAISE grant, the disused rail corridor will one day connect communities in Henderson and Transylvania Counties and enhance access options to Pisgah National Forest.

In addition to the trail’s recreational benefits and tourism-related economic opportunities, the project also seeks to serve the needs of rural communities that have experienced historic disinvestment. It will link communities to job centers, medical facilities, and stores in both counties. The rehabilitated railroad corridor will incorporate safety enhancements (like crossing beacons and emergency access points) and will help reduce the risk of collisions by providing a separate path for pedestrians and bicyclists away from high-speed rural roadways. It will also provide a safe, multimodal connection to Pisgah Forest Elementary School and Davidson River School in Brevard and Etowah Elementary School in Etowah. The Ecusta Trail will further increase transit options by linking directly to two stops on the Transylvania Fixed Route bus service in Brevard and to the Apple Country Public Transit in Hendersonville, facilitating safe access to these bus stops.

“The City of Brevard is ecstatic about being awarded the RAISE grant for the Ecusta Trail,” remarked Mayor Maureen Copelof. “I am extremely proud of the dedication, perseverance, and shared vision of all our collaborative partners. This is truly the result of an amazing team effort.

The Costa Trail will be transformative for this region in terms of economic, social and health impacts across our communities. I will be concentrating now on moving forward as soon as possible and making this trail a reality.”

The enthusiasm for this monumental achievement is shared by local officials in Henderson County. “I was excited to learn of this federal grant that will be awarded to help complete the entirety of the Ecusta Trail,” said Rebecca McCall, Henderson County Board Chairman. “Many thanks to the Henderson County staff who assisted in the work to complete the grant application and to all of those who have been part of this dream for the past 15+ years. I look forward to seeing the first bit of asphalt being poured and bridges being replaced very soon.”

Tillis’ announcement comes roughly one year after Henderson County secured additional STBG funds towards constructing the remainder of the trail in Henderson County.

“The RAISE grant supports the construction and development of the entire trail,’ said John Mitchell, Henderson County Manager. “We are looking forward to the continued partnership with NCDOT and the City of Brevard.”

This grant, of course, does not signal the end of fundraising efforts for the Ecusta Trail’s capital campaign. While this grant funds the construction of the trail itself, it does not contribute to amenities like parking areas at designated access points, benches, bike repair stations, or bathrooms. Please visit www.ecustatrail.org to learn more about the future of the trail and ways to give.

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