

# PISGAH NATIONAL FOREST

## THE ECUSTA TRAIL

fy2022 | NSFLTP GRANT APPLICATION

A Multimodal Gateway to  
Pisgah National Forest +  
The Blue Ridge Parkway

PROJECT NAME	THE ECUSTA TRAIL
Total Project Cost	\$53,530,111
NSFLTP Program Grant Request Amount	\$21,412,044
Federal (DOT) Funding including Program Funds	\$36,954,498
Total Non-Federal Funding	\$16,575,613
Project is within, adjacent to, or accessing Federal and/or Tribal land?	Yes

Submitted by:



Sponsored by:



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*(Background image): Looking Glass Falls in Pisgah National Forest, off of the Blue Ridge Parkway, near Brevard, NC. Pisgah is the most popular forest in America (Travel and Leisure).*

Sources: <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3466431>;

<https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/landmarks-monuments/pisgah-national-forest-north-carolina-waterslide-most-popular-forest>





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PROJECT SNAPSHOT



### Project Location

City of Hendersonville to City of Brevard  
and the Pisgah National Forest  
Transylvania County + Henderson County, NC



### Total Mileage

**18.8 miles**  
Shared-use path along an acquired, railbanked  
rail line connecting to Pisgah National Forest and Blue  
Ridge Parkway



### Estimated Completion Date

Q1 2028

### Background materials:

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/NSFLTP2022-ECUSTA/Pages/default.aspx>

## Project Readiness + Low Risk

<b>Project Administration</b>	NCDOT
<b>NCDOT STIP #</b>	EB-6037B + BL-0007
<b>Match Funding</b>	60% of the total project cost
<b>Match Contributions</b>	Variety of sources (federal, state, local, private)
<b>NEPA Categorical Exclusion (CE)</b>	Complete
<b>Design</b>	Funded + In Progress

<b>PROJECT COST</b>	\$53,530,111
<b>NSFLTP FUNDING REQUEST</b>	<b>\$21,412,044</b>
<b>PROJECT MATCH</b>	\$32,118,067

**45%**

of the project corridor is within an **Area of Persistent Poverty**

**48%**

of the project corridor is within a community that is identified as **Transportation Disadvantaged**



**Pisgah is the most popular national forest in the USA!<sup>1</sup>**

1 <https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/landmarks-monuments/pisgah-national-forest-north-carolina-waterslide-most-popular-forest>

### Safety

*Reduces risk of collisions by providing a separated facility, away from high-speed rural roadways; Connects to local schools; Provides safety features such as enhanced crossings with signals and personal safety devices*

### State of Good Repair

*Provides alternative to driving into Pisgah National Forest which experiences traffic, parking, and roadway/shoulder maintenance issues along main entrance; Rehabilitates and reuses a historic linear railroad transportation corridor*

### Economic Benefits

*Facilitates tourism-related economic development; Reduces household transportation costs*

### Quality of Life

*Enriches physical and mental health by connecting to the Pisgah National Forest, local and regional services, employment, recreation, and fostering opportunities for social belonging*

### Climate Change + Environmental Justice

*Reduces emissions by providing multimodal travel options and preserves a linear green corridor*

### Racial Equity + Barriers to Opportunity

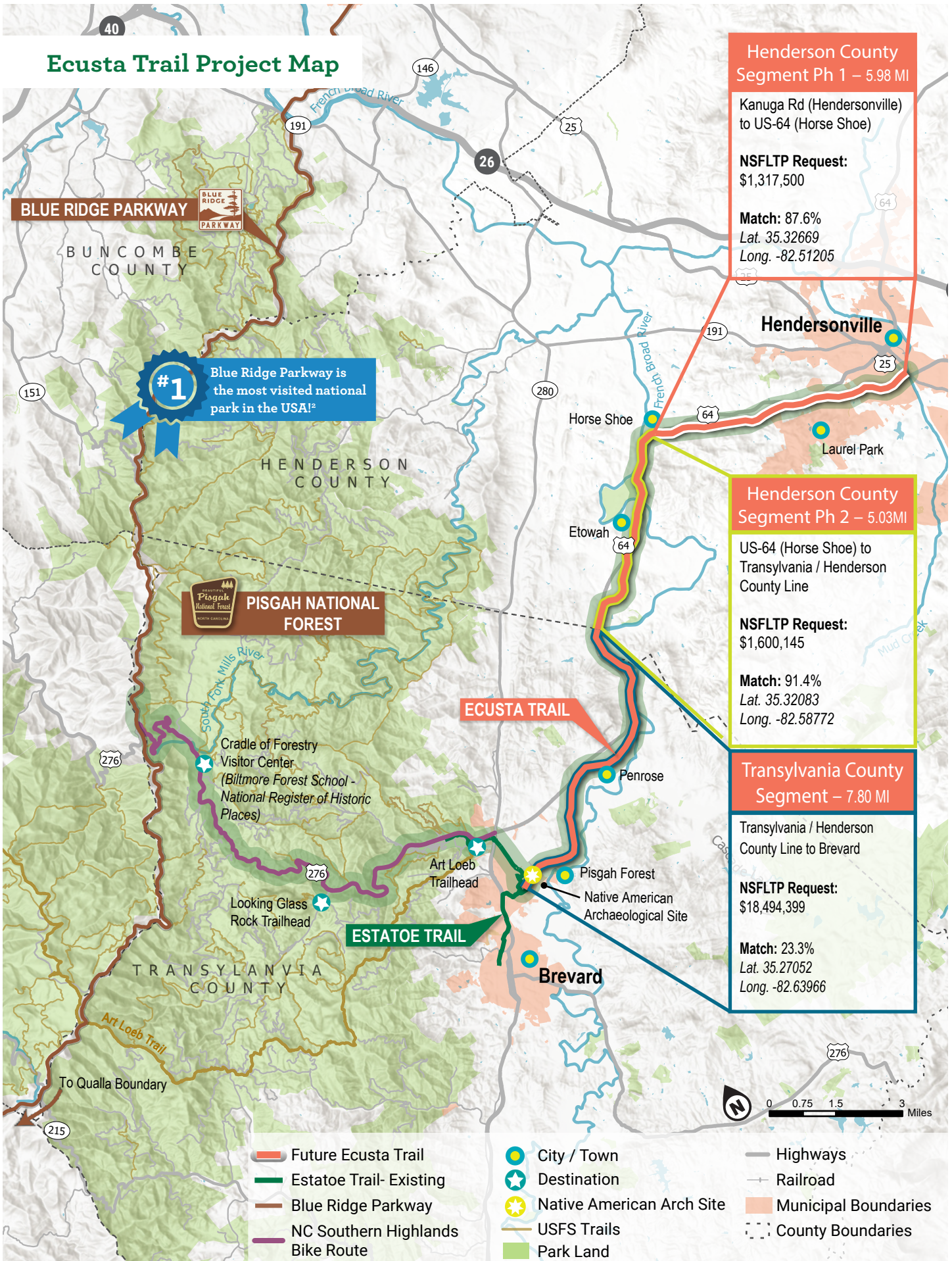
*NCDOT and project partners have active equity and inclusion programs; Provides new multimodal access for rural communities that have experienced industry loss*

### Job Quality, Workforce Development + Workforce Equity

*Project partners have multiple programs, standards, initiatives, and committees that focus on upholding labor standards, supporting apprenticeships, supporting workforce development, soliciting Disadvantaged Business Enterprise and Small Professional Services Firms, and addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*



# Ecusta Trail Project Map



**#1** Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited national park in the USA!<sup>2</sup>

**Henderson County Segment Ph 1 – 5.98 MI**

Kanuga Rd (Hendersonville) to US-64 (Horse Shoe)

**NSFLTP Request:** \$1,317,500

**Match:** 87.6%  
 Lat. 35.32669  
 Long. -82.51205

**Henderson County Segment Ph 2 – 5.03 MI**

US-64 (Horse Shoe) to Transylvania / Henderson County Line

**NSFLTP Request:** \$1,600,145

**Match:** 91.4%  
 Lat. 35.32083  
 Long. -82.58772

**Transylvania County Segment – 7.80 MI**

Transylvania / Henderson County Line to Brevard

**NSFLTP Request:** \$18,494,399

**Match:** 23.3%  
 Lat. 35.27052  
 Long. -82.63966

- Future Ecusta Trail
- Estatee Trail- Existing
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- City / Town
- Destination
- Highways
- NC Southern Highlands Bike Route
- Native American Arch Site
- Railroad
- USFS Trails
- Municipal Boundaries
- Park Land
- County Boundaries

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/visitation-numbers.htm>



## I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The requested NSFLTP program funds and local match will support the construction and completion of the entire Ecusta Rail Trail, an 18.8-mile shared-use path on a railbanked rail line that will connect the county seats of Henderson and Transylvania Counties in Western North Carolina to Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway, while also strengthening these communities' connection to the Qualla tribal lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. **The project is nationally significant in that it will provide an essential multimodal connection to the most popular forest in the country, Pisgah National Forest,<sup>1</sup> and the most visited National Park and historic scenic byway, the Blue Ridge Parkway<sup>2</sup>.**

The Pisgah National Forest features beautiful scenery and waterfalls with multiple recreational activities such as mountain biking, hiking, fishing, camping and rafting. Funding this multimodal active transportation project would advance the Administration's key goals of equity, safety, and climate resiliency, and it would be the first project of its kind to receive NSFLTP funding for active transportation connectivity to federal lands.

When complete, the 18.8-mile Ecusta Trail will dramatically improve regional mobility choices in Henderson and Transylvania Counties, making it possible to access Pisgah National Forest, as well as schools, parks, social services, employment, and shopping destinations, by walking and biking. While the trail will be a significant investment into the continued growth of the tourism industry in Transylvania and Henderson Counties, the day-to-day benefits will be realized by people in the region who cannot (or choose not to) drive to work or school, who are affected by rising fuel costs, and who are aging in place (as Western North Carolina becomes more of a popular destination for retirees) in a rural area where driving can be dangerous.



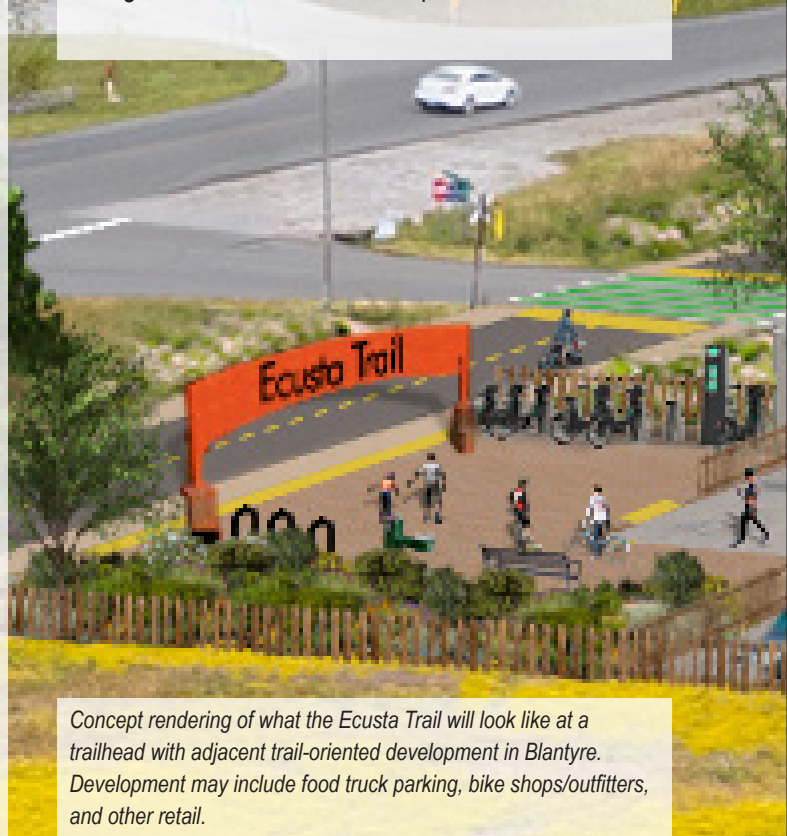
**"This project supports Forest Service goals to contribute to the communities of western North Carolina, by increasing access to public lands and creating opportunities for economic development through tourism and sustainable recreation."**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/landmarks-monuments/pisgah-national-forest-north-carolina-waterslide-most-popular-forest>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/visitation-numbers.htm>

## II. PROJECT LOCATION

The Ecusta Trail will link the municipalities of Brevard, Laurel Park, and Hendersonville, also connecting the communities of Pisgah Forest, Penrose, Etowah, and Horse Shoe. The trail's western terminus in Brevard will connect directly to the existing Estatoe Trail, which leads north to the Art Loeb trailhead and hundreds of miles of recreational trails, including the Mountains to Sea Trail, at the most-visited entrance of Pisgah National Forest. The project will also connect trail users to the local roadway networks in Brevard and Hendersonville, US-64, and the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP). The Ecusta Trail is a priority segment of the proposed Great Trails State network, an NCDOT-led initiative with the goal of providing an "arterial" system of shared-use paths connecting all 100 counties of North Carolina (<https://www.ncdot.gov/divisions/bike-ped/great-trails-state/Pages/default.aspx>). The trail will also connect to the NC-8/Southern Highlands section of the North Carolina statewide bike route system (US 276) which is heavily used by bicyclists, with access to the Blue Ridge Parkway, America's longest and most visited linear park.



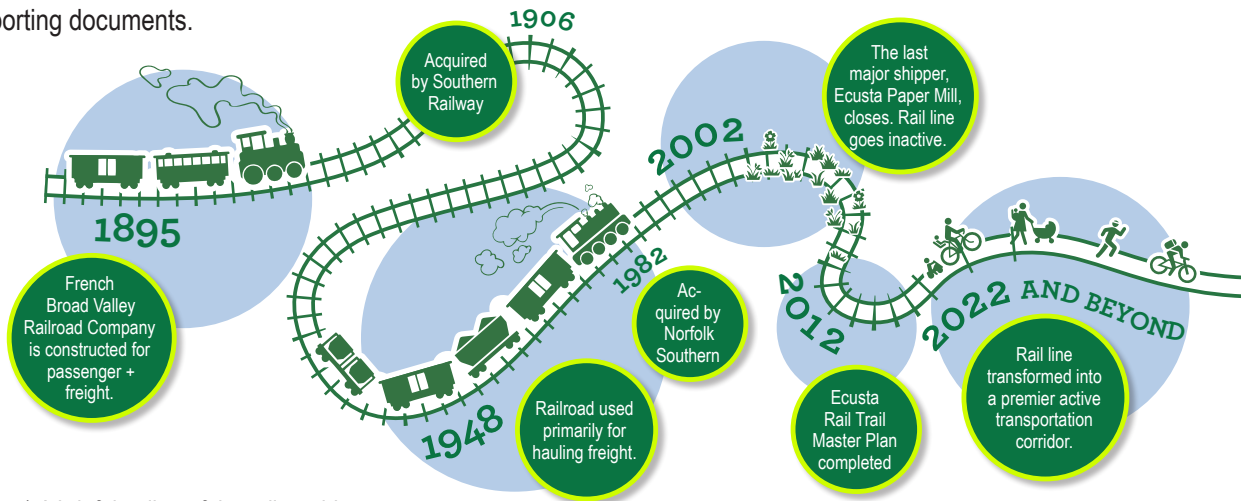
*Concept rendering of what the Ecusta Trail will look like at a trailhead with adjacent trail-oriented development in Blantyre. Development may include food truck parking, bike shops/outfitters, and other retail.*



### III. PROJECT PARTIES

This grant application is the result of collaboration between the cities of Brevard and Hendersonville, Transylvania and Henderson counties, the Land of Sky Rural Planning Organization, the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Friends of Ecusta Trail, Conserving Carolina, and the State of North Carolina, under the supervision and guidance of the North Carolina DOT and with the support of the National Parks Service and the U.S. Forest Service. NCDOT will administer the construction and the City of Brevard and Henderson County will assist as necessary and lead the long-term maintenance. The depth of community support for the Ecusta Trail is demonstrated through the letters of support provided by diverse local organizations and multiple government entities. The full text of each letter is included in the supporting documents.

"The increased connectivity and improved recreation access promised by the Ecusta Rail Trail are consistent with the Parkway's purpose and will contribute greatly to the region's interconnected recreational network."



(Above) A brief timeline of the rail corridor.

### IV. GRANT FUNDS, PROJECT FUNDING SUMMARY, + BUDGET

#### Funding

Funding for the Ecusta Trail will come from a variety of sources, including federal, local, and private dollars that comprise 60% of the total construction cost. The NSFLTP grant request will enable the completion of the full 18.8-mile Ecusta Trail. Design for the project sections are funded through federal funding (Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP)) and local funding and is in progress for each segment in this application. Demonstration of construction cost, match, and funding request is provided in the budget below.

#### Budget

SECTION	COST/% OF TOTAL	EXISTING FEDERAL STBG / TAP FUNDING	MATCH FOR STBG / TAP GRANTS BY HENDERSON COUNTY	HENDERSON COUNTY TDA*	TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY TDA*	CONSERVING CAROLINA PRIVATE DONATIONS	FRIENDS OF THE ECUSTA TRAIL (STATE OF NC)	REQUESTED NSFLTP FUNDS
Transylvania Co.	\$24,126,899 (45.1%)				\$1,000,000	\$1,500,000	\$3,132,500	<b>\$18,494,399</b>
Henderson Co. Ph 1	\$10,661,523 (19.9%)	\$5,075,219	\$1,268,804				\$3,000,000	<b>\$1,317,500</b>
Henderson Co. Ph 2	\$18,741,689 (35.0%)	\$10,467,235	\$2,616,809	\$2,740,000			\$1,317,500	<b>\$1,600,145</b>
<b>TOTAL COST</b>								<b>\$53,530,111</b>
<b>TOTAL NSFLTP FUNDING REQUEST</b>								<b>\$21,412,044</b>
<b>TOTAL MATCH</b>								<b>\$32,118,067</b>
<b>MATCH %</b>								<b>60%</b>

= denotes match funding source

\*TDA - Tourism Development Authority



# STATUTORY CRITERIA

## Safety

Successful construction of the Ecusta Trail will enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety by completing the connection into the Pisgah National Forest. Broadly, it will improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety in Transylvania and Henderson Counties by providing an entirely separate facility for people walking or biking between Brevard and Hendersonville, allowing them to avoid US-64, a high-speed roadway without dedicated pedestrian and bicycling facilities.

Between 2007 and 2020, there were over twenty pedestrian- or cyclist-involved collisions resulting in minor or serious injuries that occurred within 0.25 miles of the proposed Trail alignment. There were three crashes resulting in pedestrian fatalities. Collisions occurred most frequently on US-64 and Old Hendersonville Highway, which run parallel to the proposed Ecusta Trail. Providing an alternate route for active transportation users will be a key step towards reducing the possibility of further fatal and severe injuries.

The Ecusta Trail will also provide a safe, multimodal connection to the Pisgah Forest Elementary School and Davidson River School in Brevard and the Etowah Elementary School in Etowah (see photo below).



The Ecusta Trail will also link directly to two stops on the Transylvania Fixed Route bus service in Brevard and to the Apple Country Public Transit in Hendersonville. This will provide safe, separated access to these bus stops.

The Ecusta Trail project will also include a number of safety features such as crossing enhancements (hybrid beacons and RRFBs), 1/10 mile markers for emergency response, emergency access, periodic call boxes, and lighting in key areas.

FUTURE ECUSTA TRAIL

**Complete SIDEWALKS** can result in a

**65-89%** reduction in crashes involving pedestrians walking along roadways.<sup>1</sup>

1 <https://www.fhwa.gov/ohps/ohps/summarydocs/2010/030302.pdf>

**SHARED-USE PATHS** can result in a

**25%** reduction in crashes involving bicyclists along roadways.<sup>2</sup>

2 <https://www.fhwa.gov/ohps/ohps/summarydocs/2010/030302.pdf>

A common concern voiced by residents during the Transylvania County Bicycle Plan was safety involving sharing narrow and winding mountain roads with bicyclists. The Ecusta Trail will act as a sidewalk or shared-use path option for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel and access the Pisgah National Forest, separate from the roadway. It will also be safer for motorists when trying to avoid bicyclists as shown in the picture above.



## State of Good Repair

This project fulfills the state of good repair requirement by providing an alternative to driving into Pisgah National Forest, lowering demand for parking and wear and tear to US-276. Both NCDOT and the U.S. Forest Service have expressed concerns over visitors parking on the roadway shoulder for miles into Pisgah due to heavy traffic during the summer tourist season.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the edges of the roadway often erode into the river and require frequent patching. This creates a water quality issue. The Ecusta Trail will mitigate this parking and safety concern by providing an alternate way to access the Forest without driving. The project will not only create new options for access to Pisgah and BRP, but also will help better balance the visitor loads, giving tourists new options to visit in the perimeter of Pisgah. These additional options will also result in longer-lasting visits, which tend to be more sustainable from both the environmental and economic development standpoints.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.transylvanialimes.com/news/forest-visitors-face-heavy-summer-traffic/article\\_f7ee01cf-785d-5f12-8aeb-d67b98cb5945.html](https://www.transylvanialimes.com/news/forest-visitors-face-heavy-summer-traffic/article_f7ee01cf-785d-5f12-8aeb-d67b98cb5945.html)

## Economic Benefits

Shared-use paths have demonstrable economic benefits for the communities in which they are built. For comparison, a study of the economic impacts of shared-use paths in North Carolina from 2015-2017 included the Brevard Greenway (now called the Estatoe Trail that connects directly to the Ecusta Trail) and found that the estimated annual benefits of the trail included **\$365,000** in annual traffic reduction costs, **\$670,000** in annual vehicle collision costs, **\$456,000** in annual roadway maintenance costs, **\$1,735,000** in annual household vehicle operation costs, and reduction of emissions totaling **4,952,000** lbs. of Co2 emissions and **99,000** lbs. of other vehicle emissions.<sup>2</sup>

The Ecusta Rail Trail Master Plan and Economic Impact Analysis estimated nearly \$10 million of annual benefits.<sup>3</sup> A Spring 2022 benefit-cost analysis (BCA) completed for the Transylvania County portion of the trail (see project website) showed the following benefits compared to the baseline:

<sup>2</sup> [https://ire.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/NCDOT-2015-44\\_SUP-Project\\_Final-Report\\_optimized.pdf](https://ire.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/NCDOT-2015-44_SUP-Project_Final-Report_optimized.pdf), pg.75

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hendersonvillenc.gov/sites/default/files/uploads/departments/planning/ecusta/chapter-5.pdf>

### Transylvania County Ecusta Trail BCA Results

BENEFIT CATEGORY	TOTAL BENEFIT THROUGH 2048
ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS BENEFITS	\$803,000 (2020 dollars, undiscounted)
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY BENEFITS	\$83,600 (2020 dollars, undiscounted)
SAFETY BENEFITS	\$41,400,000 (2020 dollars, undiscounted)
STATE OF GOOD REPAIR BENEFITS	\$105,200 (2020 dollars, undiscounted)

## Quality of Life

One of the project's goals is to foster a more livable and accessible built environment in Henderson and Transylvania Counties, improving the quality of life for both residents and visitors by connecting them to jobs, recreation, important services, and each other. **The Ecusta Trail's connection to the existing Estatoe Trail will allow for connectivity to the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway as well as into downtown Brevard and downtown Hendersonville.** In addition, the Ecusta Trail has the potential to improve the health of area residents and was identified as a marquee project for Blue Zones Brevard, an initiative to address local health issues<sup>4</sup>. The Spring 2022 BCA estimated the following annual benefits in increased biking and walking trips, VMT reduction, and general quality of life benefits that could be achieved with the construction of the Ecusta Trail (Transylvania portion only):

<sup>4</sup> <https://brevard.bluezonesproject.com/>

### Transylvania County Ecusta Trail BCA Results

BENEFIT CATEGORY	TOTAL BENEFIT THROUGH 2048
BICYCLE + WALK TRIPS	7,810,000 additional bicycle and walk trips
REDUCTION IN VMT	1,631,000 vehicle miles reduced
QUALITY OF LIFE BENEFITS	\$32,350,000 (undiscounted 2020 dollars)

## Improves the Condition of Critical Transportation Facilities

Construction of the Ecusta Trail will improve the condition of a critical access point to Pisgah National Forest, creating a multimodal connection to one of the most popular recreation destinations in the Southeastern United States. The Trail will also provide an even stronger link from local communities to the Estatoe Trail and the National Forest, help alleviate heavy vehicle traffic and demand for parking at key forest access points, and lessen the impact on roadway surfaces and shoulders by replacing vehicle trips with non-vehicle trips.

## Needs Construction, Reconstruction, or Rehabilitation

The Ecusta Trail follows an acquired, abandoned railroad corridor that has experienced some physical deficiencies, particularly on bridges. In bridge analyses, 16 of the 17 bridges were found to need replacement with the other bridge requiring rehabilitation as part of the project.

While the corridor is not advertised for trail use currently, pedestrians are still using the corridor.



## Has Costs Matched by Other Funds

The project is matched by federal, state, local, and private sources, making up 60% of the total project cost (see budget breakdown on page 4).

## National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)

While the railroad itself has history back to the late 1800s, NRHP designation has not been pursued. There are multiple locations and a district along the corridor that are part of the NRHP or listed as eligible or on a study list including Lenox Park Historic District, WJ Davis House, Pisgah Forest Post Office, the Elizur Patton House, and the Cradle of Forestry (Biltmore Forest School). A 2019 Archaeological Adverse Effect Determination Form was completed for NCDOT, recommending that a prehistoric campsite along the Trail is eligible for listing in the NRHP (see map on page 2).

## New Technologies + Innovations that Enhance Project Efficiency

The Ecusta Trail construction will utilize Every Day Count (EDC) innovations that include the following:

- **Safe Transportation for Every Pedestrian (STEP):** Use of pedestrian hybrid signals and rectangular rapid flashing beacons as proven pedestrian safety countermeasures, as needed
- **Accelerated Bridge Construction:** Use of prefabricated bridges, as needed

## Supported by Other Funds to Construct, Maintain, + Operate

As part of the railroad lease agreement with Conserving Carolina, Henderson County and the City of Brevard (for the Transylvania portion) are responsible for the maintenance of their segments. Henderson County considers it a linear park so the corridor is treated as a park to be maintained (the County is already mowing and maintaining the right-of-way). In addition, the Friends of the Ecusta Trail are a partner to both the County and the City for volunteer clean-ups that are already occurring.

## Spans Two or More States

This project will be located entirely within North Carolina, but provides access to the Blue Ridge Parkway which spans across multiple states. It will also strengthen multimodal connections to regional transportation networks, extending into neighboring Tennessee and adjacent South Carolina counties. The ongoing Saluda Grade Rail Trail Study would eventually connect the trail to South Carolina.

## Serves Land Owned by Multiple Federal Agencies or Tribes

This project will serve the Pisgah National Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway, land owned by the United States Forest Service and National Park Service, respectively. The project also connects to key Native American archaeological sites that are recorded as prehistoric campsites of undetermined Archaic and Early to Middle (Pisgah) Mississippian components (one recommended for NRHP as described in previous section).



# DISCRETIONARY CRITERIA

## Project Readiness

- **Environmental Risk:** A signed Categorical Exclusion (CE) document was completed for the entirety of the project.
- **Technical Capacity:** The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) will administer this project, given its long history of successfully delivering federally funded projects and addressing federal requirements.
- **Design Status:** Design is funded and already in progress.
- **Financial Capacity:** As described previously, the match package is 60% of the total cost and shows commitment from a variety of state, local, and private partners.

## Underserved Community

45% of the Ecusta Trail alignment lies within an Area of Persistent Poverty, and 48% lies within a community that has been identified as Transportation Disadvantaged, meaning that people living there “spend more, and longer, to get where they need to go.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/d6f90dfcc8b44525b04c7ce748a3674a>

## Climate Change + Environmental Justice

The Ecusta Trail, like any project designed to increase usage of active transportation modes, has the potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, which are a key factor in improving air quality. An estimated reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) of 1,631,000 total through 2048, with just the construction of the Transylvania County portion of the trail, would result in significant pollution reduction, particularly from carbon dioxide as estimated below):

### Transylvania County Ecusta Trail BCA Results

POLLUTANT	METRIC TONS RELEASED PER VMT	POTENTIAL REDUCTION IN POLLUTANT
PARTICULATE MATTER 2.5 (PM <sub>2.5</sub> )	0.0000000044	0.0071764 metric tons
NITROUS OXIDES (NO <sub>x</sub> )	0.00000008	1.3048 metric tons
SULFUR OXIDES (SO <sub>2</sub> )	0.00000001	0.01631 metric tons
CARBON DIOXIDE (CO <sub>2</sub> )	0.00044	717.64 metric tons

The Ecusta Trail also addresses the administration’s environmental justice goals. Historically, the State’s paper mill industry was responsible for significant emissions of greenhouse gases and other harmful pollutants. **After the closure of the Ecusta Mill in 2002, its site along the Davidson River next to the proposed trail alignment was a priority cleanup area for the Environmental Protection Agency’s Superfund program.** Construction of the trail in this former industrial area is a key step towards reversing the history of environmental damage in the region and creating a sustainable future in Western North Carolina.

## Racial Equity + Barriers to Opportunity

**Planning and Policies Component:** An equity analysis was completed, showing that 45% of the trail alignment is in an Area of Persistent Poverty, and 48% is within census tracts that have been designated Transportation Disadvantaged. NCDOT recently created SEA-Change: A Strategic Equity Agenda which is a blueprint for integrated, comprehensive, and measurable action items by NCDOT Units and Divisions to advance equity.<sup>2</sup> It provides a set of strategies for coordinating diversity, equity, and inclusion activities to increase equity within the transportation field. In addition, the City of Hendersonville has also formed a Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Committee to provide guidance to the City Council on matters of equity and inclusion, including addressing past inequities.

**Project Investment Component:** Investment in new infrastructure for walking and biking will reconnect rural Western North Carolina communities. Tourism has driven regional economic growth since the decline of the paper and textile industries, but centers of employment are spread out and not easily accessible except by motor vehicle. This presents a significant barrier to opportunity, but the Ecusta Trail will provide equitable access to jobs and services and serve as a catalyst for equitable economic development in the region.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.volpe.dot.gov/news/us-dot-volpe-center-supports-ncdot-equity-and-innovation-initiatives>

## Job Quality, Workforce Development, + Workforce Equity

NCDOT and Henderson and Transylvania Counties are committed to advancing the project in a way that meets this objective.

### NCDOT

- Is committed to upholding strong labor standards via contract adherence to all NLRA requirements, including requiring the posting of workers' rights, prevailing and minimum wage rate and whistleblower protection information.
- Supports apprenticeships through its On the Job Training Program, targeted towards women, minorities, and other groups.
- Supports workforce development via State and other Federal funding.
- Solicits Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) firms for project construction contracts and conducts quarterly DBE outreach to highlight upcoming opportunities
- Utilizes a Small Professional Services Firm (SPSF) program that is race, ethnicity and gender neutral for small business firms.
- Has formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee and adopted an Equal Employment Opportunity Plan.

### TRANSYLVANIA / HENDERSON COUNTIES

- The NCWorks Career Center at Blue Ridge Community College provides workforce development services to the Henderson and Transylvania County communities. Pisgah National Forest is home to the Job Corps' Schenck Civilian Conservation Center.
- Local/regional initiatives include the Henderson and Transylvania Counties workforce development boards, the 4-County Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, and the Growing Outdoors Partnership which supports the growth of outdoor recreation jobs.

## V. URBAN / RURAL PROJECT INDICATION

While Brevard and Hendersonville are both within urbanized areas as defined in the 2010 census urbanized area definition (Brevard classified as an urban cluster and Hendersonville within the Asheville urban area), the Ecusta Trail's alignment is located in a rural region. **33% of the trail corridor falls within a defined rural area.**

## VI. PROJECT MERITS

A benefit-cost analysis for the Transylvania County portion of the Ecusta Trail is included on the supplemental materials website and confirms significant economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits (highlighted in tables on previous pages).

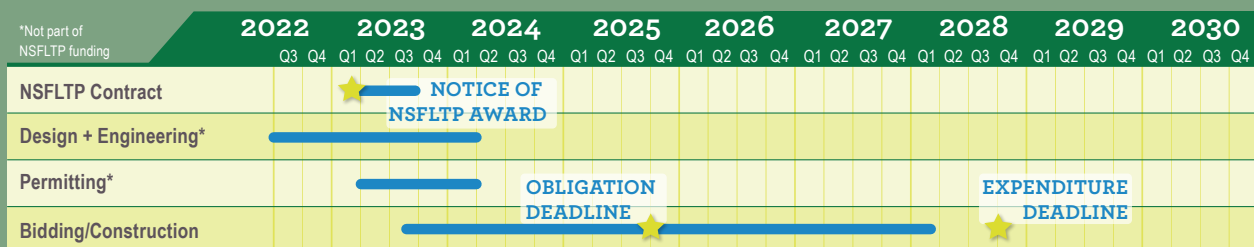
## VII. PROJECT READINESS

### Technical Feasibility

For the 18.8 mile rail-to-trail conversion project, a 10% design was completed on the entire corridor as part of a 2019 \$6.4 million TAP funded project that allowed Conserving Carolina to purchase and acquire the corridor in October 2020, with support from Friends of the Ecusta Trail, City of Brevard, Henderson County, and NCDOT. Since then, Henderson County has been working to complete engineering/design drawings to begin construction in mid-2023 for its first section of the Ecusta Trail. The City of Brevard received a Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant for design of the Transylvania County section that will be underway by late 2022, with permitting complete in 2023, allowing for construction to begin in 2024. Cost estimates for the projects were developed by two transportation engineering firms and reviewed by NCDOT, using the most current quantity costs and bid prices with contingencies to address the current economic challenges of labor, supply, and inflation. Cost escalations were calculated for construction year 2025. No major utility conflicts or relocations have been identified.

## Project Schedule

The project schedule is presented below. Acquisition and NEPA documentation are complete. Design and permitting are already in progress and will continue through late 2023 with construction beginning in 2023 on Henderson County Segment 1 and in 2024 on Henderson County Segment 2 and the Transylvania County segment.





## Required Approvals

- **Information on NEPA documentation:** The 2019 Categorical Exclusion (CE) document is complete and provided in supporting materials and at this link: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/NSFLTP2022-ECUSTA/Pages/default.aspx>
- **Information on reviews, approvals, + permits by other agencies:** The project will require standard NCDOT plan review process approvals, Federal contract management, materials testing and CEI. Basic permits anticipated are: USACE Section 404 Permit, NCDEQ Section 401 Water Quality Certification Permit, NCDEQ NPDES General Permit, Floodplain Development Permit, and NCDOT Right of Way Encroachment Permit. No delays are expected for the required permits.
- **Environmental studies or other documents:** There are no additional documents.
- **Description of discussions:** The project team worked directly with NCDOT Division 14 and George Hoops of the FHWA NC Division to develop the CE document.
- **State + local approvals:** The State of North Carolina and the counties and municipalities along the Ecusta Trail support and approve the project through partnership and funding. The NCDOT STIP numbers for the entirety of the Ecusta Rail Trail are EB-6037B and BL-0007.

## Public Engagement

There is broad public support for this project as evidenced by numerous stakeholder and public engagement activities. This grant application builds on years of consensus-building and planning by local governments and nonprofits. A complete timeline of the Friends of the Ecusta Trail organization's consensus-building in support of the trail can be found on their website: <https://www.ecustatrail.org/about/ecusta-trail-timeline.html>

The Ecusta Trail is a key priority listed in plans completed by Brevard, Hendersonville, Transylvania and Henderson Counties, and the state of North Carolina (Great Trails State Plan and Walk Bike NC) over the past decade, including the original Ecusta Rail Trail Master Plan and Economic Impact Analysis. In addition, the City of Brevard held a public event for adjacent property owners on August 9, 2022 which garnered further support. A full list of the relevant local and state plans is featured on the supplemental materials website: <https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/NSFLTP2022-ECUSTA/Pages/default.aspx>

## VIII. PROJECT RISKS + MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Minimal risks are anticipated with the project. The table below assesses the potential issues that may arise and the preemptive and/or proposed mitigation measures. In addition, NCDOT will serve as administrator for this grant and will handle bidding, selection, and construction administration. NCDOT will appoint a project manager for all construction-related issues and assign a grant coordinator for grant-related tracking and compliance on technical requirements and project delivery.

RISK	MITIGATION STRATEGY
UTILITY CONFLICTS + BRIDGE STRUCTURES	As the repurposing of a former rail corridor, utility conflicts are anticipated to be minimal and relocations for the most part not required. Budgetary allowances are included in the cost estimate for the anticipated drainage and erosion control improvements required for the project. Sixteen railroad bridges will be replaced and one rehabilitated. Full demolition and construction costs for these bridges are included in the cost estimate.
RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITION	No issues are anticipated. Conserving Carolina / Ecusta Rails 2 Trail LLC have completed acquisition of the rail corridor. The project will remain fully in the corridor ROW.
PUBLIC + STAKEHOLDER INPUT	Multiple planning and public outreach efforts have been completed over the past few years and decades, and public and stakeholder support is overwhelmingly positive. Any community impact issues that may arise before, during, or after construction will be mitigated through clear and continuous communication with the public.
SCHEDULE RISK	The project schedule allows for flexibility that includes sufficient time to address potential issues. Even with the extra time built in, the project is anticipated to complete construction by Q1 2028, ahead of the Federal deadline for expenditures.

