



the Crescent

June/July 1987

COALITION LAUNCHES EFFORT TO SAVE TRAIL

Twenty area politicians, agency officials, and other dignitaries joined an enthusiastic crowd of over 300 people at a rally sponsored by the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail (CCCT) in Bethesda on May 2 in support of a trail along the B&O Railroad line being abandoned between Georgetown and Silver Spring.

Speaking for U.S. Representative Constance Morella (R, MD), her staff member Rob Sobhani said that the congresswoman "is committed to seeing the railroad spur converted into a trail." Maryland State Senator Howard Denis, State Delegate Brian Frosh, and Montgomery County Recreation Director David Robbins also expressed strong support for the trail. D.C. City Councilman James Nathanson said that he will do all that he can to promote this type of "green space" in his ward.

Bill Spitzer of the National Park Service, representing the agency's Director William Penn Mott, encouraged participants to write letters to the Park Service supporting the trail. Joe Keyser, Chairman of CCCT, suggested that participants also write to the Montgomery County Council.

Appearing on behalf of Montgomery County Executive Sidney Kramer, the county's Transportation Director Robert S. McGarry said "We will do our best" to put a trail in the railroad right-of-way. The county is considering using the right-of-way for a

"transitway" between Bethesda and Silver Spring, but may be able to fit a trail alongside such a road.

Said Peter Harnik, CCCT Vice Chairman, "The hike and rally have been a fantastic success story for us. People are already drawing comparisons to Justice Douglas' historic walk to save the C&O Canal. It has really put the coalition on the map."

Over half of those participating in the rally hiked to it along the proposed trail. Many hiked six to eight miles, arriving shortly after noon to applause from the audience. Those seeing the route for the first time were deeply moved. As event organizer Henri Bartholomot observed, "This right-of-way offers a rare opportunity to travel through the heart of Bethesda on a wooded path free of traffic. It would make a wonderful trail."

The rally closed with a ceremony along the railroad tracks. Removing a "golden spike" from the tracks, Senator Denis and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy President David Burwell symbolically began the process of converting the right of way into a recreational trail. "Just as a golden spike signalled completion of the inter-continental railroad," commented Burwell, "let this one signal the dawn of a new era in which abandoned rail lines are converted to trails for the public and future generations to enjoy."

WHAT IS THE COALITION FOR THE CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL?

The CCCT is the umbrella group leading the effort to create a park and trail out of the right-of-way of the soon-to-be-abandoned "Georgetown Branch" railroad track from Silver Spring to Georgetown.

In just over a year, CCCT members have:
-- Produced a report describing the benefits of the Capital Crescent Trail.
-- Put on a slide show about a successful
(continued on Page Two)

WHAT IS THE COALITION? (from Page One)

local rails-to-trails conversion, the W&OD Trail in northern Virginia.

-- Distributed 10,000 copies of a promotional brochure that has alerted residents of the metropolitan area to the wonderful potential of the Capital Crescent Trail.

-- Organized a hike along the tracks that resulted in a full-page article in the Washington Post.

-- Testified on several occasions before the Montgomery County Council.

-- Sent representatives to appear on local television and radio interview programs.

-- Organized a litter clean-up that was

blocked by the railroad because of liability fears. (Because of the incident, Montgomery County has leased the track so that anyone may now walk on it.)

-- Obtained seats for two of its members on official Montgomery County Advisory Boards which are making recommendations on the rail corridor.

-- Spearheaded the effort to require an environmental impact statement on the rail abandonment, and then provided detailed comments on the statement.

-- Organized a major hike and rally in favor of the trail which received TV and newspaper coverage.

-- Peter Harnik

THE PEOPLE BEHIND CCCT

The Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail is an association of dedicated community leaders, conservationists, runners, hikers, bicyclists, and concerned citizens. CCCT was founded by over 20 groups and organizations with membership exceeding 100,000 and with active membership (volunteers, financial supporters, and organizers) now numbering over 600.

Those founding groups (though others are now joining every month), include the American Hiking Society, Appalachian Mountain Club (D.C.), Audubon Naturalist Society, Capital Hiking Club, Conservation

Federation of Maryland, Greater Bethesda-Chevy Chase Coalition (over 21 civic associations!), Maryland Association of Bicycling Organizations, Montgomery County Road Runners, Montgomery County Citizens Bicycle Committee, Montgomery County Outdoor Education Association, National Parks and Conservation Association, N.I.H. Bicycle Commuting Club, Pentagon Pacesetters, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, Potomac Pedalers Touring Club, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Sierra Club (Rock Creek), Virginia Volkssport Association, Walkways Center, Wanderbirds Hiking Club, and Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

**THE CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL:
A RECREATIONAL MECCA**

The development of the Capital Crescent Trail between Silver Spring and Georgetown would provide the Washington metropolitan area with an unparalleled 20-mile loop that would be a mecca for bicyclists, runners, walkers, skiers and other recreationists.

Starting under Key Bridge in Georgetown, one could walk or ride westward along the beautiful Potomac River, cross over the C&O Canal and head up the impressive Palisades,

passing lovely Dalecarlia Reservoir and entering Little Falls Park. The route then passes under Wisconsin Avenue and East-West Highway in Bethesda, traverses the Columbia Country Club and crosses over Rock Creek on a spectacular high trestle. A "cloverleaf" descent to the creek valley brings the walker into Rock Creek Park, which leads all the way to the C&O Canal Towpath and, a few blocks later, back to the starting point at Key Bridge.

(continued on Page Three)

RECREATIONAL MECCA (from Page Two)

"The Capital Crescent Trail is the connecting link between the two great parks in our area -- Rock Creek and the C&O Canal," said Peter Harnik, vice chair of the Coalition for the Capital Crescent Trail. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to create the kind of new recreational facility that our children will thank us for."

Moreover, the new trail would represent an outstanding commuting and shopping route for those who prefer to travel by bicycle or foot.

For instance, the Capital Crescent Trail would make it possible to cycle safely on a

virtually flat route from Silver Spring to Bethesda, avoiding the traffic dangers and steep hills of East-West Highway. It would provide tens of thousands of Montgomery County residents with a pleasant cycling route directly to the Bethesda Metro station.

In addition, the trail would provide an unparalleled "bicycle beltway" for those heading for shops in Georgetown or jobs and tourist sites downtown. From River Road to Key Bridge there would not be a single traffic light or road crossing.

"We can't let this opportunity slip through our hands," concluded Harnik. "Join in the effort to create the Capital Crescent Trail!"

NATURAL VALUES OF THE CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL

Where can you expect to see a hermit thrush or a purple finch or a scarlet tanager? How about a four-toed salamander, a five-lined skink, or a pickerel frog? Or pigweed, pilewort, and periwinkle?

Well, these species and some four hundred others make their homes in the woodlands, watershed ravines, and other green spaces of metropolitan Washington. And we can give them a little more habitat -- and give ourselves that much more chance of seeing them -- by protecting a new linear park, the Capital Crescent Trail. The 11 miles of trail would add an estimated 150 acres of open space (even if in a string bean shape) to a part of our region that has precious little green and wild.

But there is more. Research has increasingly demonstrated the importance of corridors in urban areas, as pathways for the movement of not only mammals and birds, but also plant life. Ecologists find that as development engulfs an urban area, only isolated pockets of natural habitat remain, and in these, the diversity of plant and animal life is decreased dramatically (one

rule of thumb states that as you reduce habitat by 90%, you will ultimately wind up with only 50% of the species originally there). In the extreme, inbreeding and then decline in genetic viability of a species will occur. But a series of corridors moderates this "island" effect. A linear greenway strings together the "pearls," the parks and green spaces already there, into a more biologically healthy system.

Such would be the effect of the Capital Crescent Trail. Existing natural areas -- Rock Creek Park, Little Falls Park, and the C&O Canal (corridors in their own right), Columbia Country Club and Dalecarlia Reservoir -- would be tied together, allowing for the more natural movement and dispersion of plant and animal species.

Wouldn't our lives be a little less stark and inevitably urban, be a little more refreshed and enriched by the diversity which this lacework of green would provide?

-- Chris Brown

