

FEASIBILITY STUDY

SALIDA TO LEADVILLE TRAIL CORRIDOR

June 2012



LEADVILLE STAGE ROAD / MIDLAND RAILROAD

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- Lake County Board of County Commissioners
- Chaffee County Board of County Commissioners*
- Chaffee County Heritage Area Advisory Board
- Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway
- Towns/Mayors of Salida, Buena Vista* and Leadville
- Buena Vista Trails Advisory Board
- Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area*
- Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service Leadville District
- Lake County Open Space Initiative
- Land Trust of the Upper Arkansas
- Salida Parks Open Space and Trails
- Salida Mountain Trails
- Trout Unlimited Collegiate Peaks Anglers Chapter
- Ark Valley Velo Bicycle Club

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- Casey Swanson
- Bob Gray
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- Kathy McCoy

Project Lead:
Greater Arkansas River Nature Association (GARNA)
Executive Director
Alison Ramsey
PO Box 1522
Salida CO 81201
(719) 539-5106
E: info@garna.org
W: www.garna.org

Planning Consultant:
Thomas & Thomas Planning, Urban Design and
Landscape Architecture, Inc.
614 North Tejon Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
W: www.ttplan.net

Funding Partner:
Colorado State Parks and Wildlife Colorado Trails
Program
Nancy Matchett
State Trails Coordinator
13787 S. Hwy. 85137
Littleton, CO 80125
nancy.matchett@state.co
303.791.1957 x4128



Executive Summary

The stories of the Leadville Stage Road (LSR) and Midland Railroad (MRR) have been part of the development history of Lake and Chaffee Counties for more than 100 years. For a decade or more, the idea of the LSR and MRR as a long-distance trail has been contemplated by many. Local biking and hiking enthusiasts as well as local historians have talked about preserving, interpreting and exploring the old routes. In 2005, the Chaffee County Heritage Advisory Board began to document stories and the alignments of the two routes and other historic transportation routes from Salida to Leadville as part of planning for the Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway. With successful establishment of Colorado's 25th byway, the Heritage Board and GARNA began to look at the possibility of building momentum for use and preservation of the LSR and MRR routes by offering them as an alternative heritage experience for bikers and hikers and horse back riders. This same approach would highlight the values of these routes to the new Collegiate Peaks Scenic and Historic Byway and the existing Top of the Rockies Scenic and Historic National Byway in Lake County. In a broad sense this plan would recognize the significance of the modern Scenic Byways, the river, and these historic routes as three major avenues to experience the scenic, recreational and historic values of the Upper Arkansas River Corridor.

In 2010, GARNA's efforts were rewarded when they received a \$40,000 planning grant from the Colorado State Parks Trails Program to conduct a Feasibility Study. The purpose of the study was to determine the level of community support for preserving, interpreting and exploring the LSR and MRR in Lake and Chaffee Counties and assess opportunities to provide public access to some sections of the routes. The study began in the fall of 2010 with support from the Colorado State Parks Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area (AHRA) managers, the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, Lake County, Chaffee County, the towns of Buena Vista and Salida, City of Leadville and individual trail and open space organizations from the surrounding communities. In addition to gathering details on historic route location

and land ownership status, the study's public outreach focused on determining the level of support that existed in the various communities and among the public and private landowners along the corridor. Although many of these "stakeholders" had already been contacted during the preparation of the grant application, the public outreach was an opportunity for them to make more formal statements of concern or support. The outreach included three open-houses to engage citizens in both counties regarding the concept of Preservation, Interpretation and Exploration (P.I.E.) of the LSR and MRR routes.

These three meetings documented considerable local support from the general public and public land managers for the idea of a long-distance trail that offered users an opportunity to learn about and experience the 125-year old story. However, in these, as well as private meetings, there was little support for public access from most private landowners, especially within the 20-mile north-central section of the proposed 64-mile corridor from the Otero Bridge to and through Granite. Although several private landowners in that section expressed appreciation for preserving the history of the two transportation routes, they were not interested in allowing public access on or near their private properties. And, in contrast to the high degree of support for a physical trail that was expressed by the three larger communities along the corridor (Leadville, Buena Vista and Salida) the small historic community of Granite currently strongly opposes a trail that would pass through their community.

The study outlines a few alternative by-pass options for these private sections and the segment through Granite. However, future planning efforts will need to continue to study and evaluate access options, river and railroad crossings, and implementation expenses in relationship to private property ownership interests. Other options may include the purchase of easements or property acquisitions. These issues were not discussed in any detail with property owners as part of this study.

Following the effort to measure support for the



project, the planning team explored cultural, social and environmental factors that influence local and regional trail-related decision-making. They also conducted field inventories that documented the general physical limitations and opportunities that would impact access, circulation and user experience.

After analyzing results of public outreach, many private contacts and examining historical and physical data, the planning team (Thomas & Thomas and the Working Group) has concluded that the development of a long-distance trail along or near the historic alignments of the Leadville Stage Road and Midland Railroad in Lake and Chaffee Counties would be a desirable and important regional asset for future consideration. More importantly the study has generated a great deal of local support and momentum for the preservation of the historic alignments and archeological resources found along the two routes. It was also agreed that the preservation of such a historical resource would provide stimulus for interpretive and heritage programs, and support local economic objectives. The preservation effort would also complement the existing Scenic Byways programs and provide new valuable options for experiencing the river corridor, bringing significant educational, recreational, and economic opportunities to the communities.

Legitimate concerns of private landowners and public land managers, especially those charged with wildlife protection, have been noted and the Team concludes that these can be resolved without compromising the wider vision of the historic routes and their long-term community value with a future management plan in place.

Overall, the Team concluded that the feasibility study provided enough evidence to support the (P.I.E.) original preservation, interpretation and exploration objectives. It is recommended that relevant planning partners endorse these conclusions and provide support to fund the next steps. To this end, the Planning Team has prepared a list of short, mid and long-term recommended “next steps” to guide more detailed planning and implementation efforts.



Early color rendition of Barlow and Sanderson stage in the Rocky Mountains



Still from 1906 B&W film “Holdup of the Leadville Stage” with original stage coach equipment

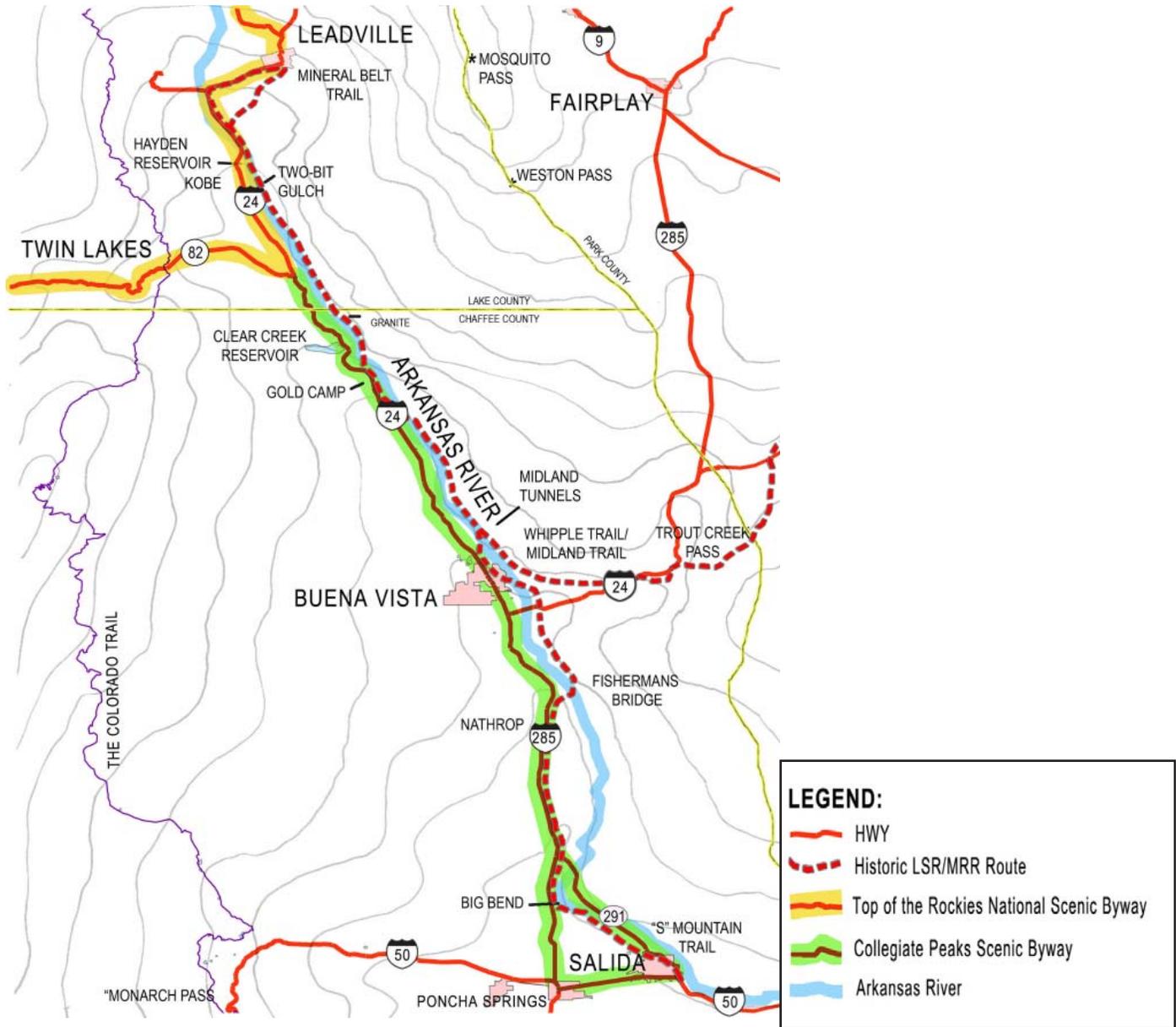


Existing Leadville Stage Road stone retaining walls north of Granite



In summary, short-term steps include the development of a non-profit management/coordinating organization to help in the preparation of a Master Plan, development of off-site interpretive and educational materials, and pursuit of grant funding for the next phases. Mid-term objectives include further development of the preservation and interpretive programs, the development of on-the-ground segments and local exploration opportunities. Finally, the long-term objective is to develop long-range segments of the route for public use with local community planners in support of enhanced corridor experiences. Additional work may include purchase of easements or properties to facilitate long-range access plans to the historic routes. For a complete description of recommendations, see Section 7.8.

The regional map below provides a broad overview and project context for the study area.



LSR/MRR Regional Map



Final Round of Public Comments:

The final draft of the Salida to Leadville Trail Corridor feasibility study was completed March 15th, 2012 and the following comments were received as part of the final public review and comment period conducted from March 17th to May 15th, 2012. This information has been documented and included in the appendix of the report in support of the “Next Steps”. It is recommended that these comments be referenced in the next phases of work and in development of the recommended Master Plan.

Recommendations/Concerns:

1. It is important to know that GARNA will need to submit a use application to the State Land Trust for access and trail crossings if the proposal moves forward as illustrated with alternatives that cross Sections 4 and 16 in Township 50 North Range 8 East in Chaffee County.
 - It is recognized that that future planning will need to involve the State Land Board and that permissions, easements or other arrangements would require application to and approval from the State Land Board for portions that cross State land along the potential route.
2. A concern over possible use of eminent domain has been raised by a small number of private land owners.
 - Eminent domain is not a strategy that has been suggested for acquisition of easements or other rights across private property in this trail concept. Any and all future land or easement acquisitions would be negotiated with land owners based on willing sellers and fair market price. Ideally the outcomes of these negotiations would be mutually beneficial to the seller and the buyer.
3. How and what historical funds would be used to preserve the LSR, and will historic preservation consider the importance of the structures and features along the route, such as the resources found in Granite?
 - The historic value and significance of the LSR/MRR alignments and related historical resources are consistently highlighted in the study and their future preservation and interpretation are primary objectives. Although specific sources of funding for preservation have not been secured, there are obvious avenues to pursue (e.g. Colorado State Historical Fund, which is already heavily involved in heritage survey and preservation along the Scenic Byways). Further study may uncover additional structures and features, but the obvious ones are remnants of retaining walls, stage stations, river crossing abutments and gully bridges; addressing their stabilization or reconstruction would be included in physical trail development plans. Treatment of privately-owned features associated with the stage or railroad such as in Granite would be at the discretion of the owners, but identifying the relevance of these structures to the stage or railroad is likely to draw favorable attention from preservation grantors or non-binding programs for listing properties on state and federal historic registers. As the proposed Master Plan is developed, private owners of related historic resources would be encouraged to make their views known so that they could be included in future planning.
4. It would be better to have the Trail follow the US HWY 24 right-of-way so that trail users could view the historic stage road rather than tread on and degrade the fragile historic alignment, particularly those portions south of Granite and north of Buena Vista.



- While it is evident that there are several ways to experience the story of the LSR and MRR other than physically using the historic alignment (e.g. observing from the Scenic and Historic Byways and via river access), the section south of Granite is most commonly cited by hikers, horse riders and cyclists as having the greatest interest as a physical trail. It is understood that care must be taken in developing a future management plan that will protect the trail’s historic integrity and physical character. There are other issues of concern south of Granite (private property and wildlife protection) but in the event those can be resolved, development of the trail in this section would include restoration of retaining walls, stabilization of eroding side slopes, and installment of appropriate-style gully crossings. In recognition of the diversity and quality of historic remnants along this section, management guidelines for maintenance and routine repairs would be at a higher standard than in sections where little physical evidence still exists. With this approach, the ultimate result of using the trail would be to strengthen and preserve rather than degrade the route.

5. I oppose more any more [public] spending on this kind of project in bad economic times [and when there are more pressing needs such as education or healthcare].

- It is agreed that any public spending today or tomorrow needs to maximize public benefit. It is also understood that future trail planning and implementation will need to address costs and justify benefits, while seeking funding sources which do not compete with social programs and existing community operational expenses. The majority of input documented in this study suggests that a trail project which would over time serve thousands of users both educationally and recreationally, bring about physical preservation of historic resources, and also generate economic opportunities for the region (see Section 4.3) is in the public interest. While opposing “any more public spending” is a legitimate expression of ideology, as a practical matter, funding for development, preservation and management of such a trail would not compete with social services. The report summarizes alternative grant and funding sources from existing programs such as GOCO and the Colorado State Parks and Wildlife Trails Program. Funds from these programs come largely from outside Lake or Chaffee Counties and are already set aside for open space and recreation and thus do not have major impacts on local spending in other categories.

6. The historic location for the Everett Slaughterhouses is located on the other side of the river from where they are shown on the map. Of historical note, the location for what was incorrectly given to the slaughterhouses is the location for the old Cameron home that was a stage stop, and was first settled by the Camerons in 1868. The bridge on the Arkansas River on CR 166 is just above what was known as “Cameron Crossing” due to how shallow and flat it was. “Under the Angel of Shavano” book by George Everett and Doc Hutchinson is a great resource for additional information.

- This information will be shared with the Master Planning Team and future maps will be updated. We’ll be checking available sources more closely before publishing additional maps and doing exhibits or signs for public viewing.

7. The old stage road was and is a 2-track road. Is the plan to make that road a multi-use trail? Are there any plans to allow motorized access to the old road?

- To date the public process has not supported or requested allowing motorized use (including unlicensed ATVs or dirt bikes) along segments of the historic routes that are not currently open to such use. On the contrary, there is strong sentiment within public agencies, private landowners and residents of Granite that such use would not



be appropriate. The concept promoted by the Working Group has been that “multiple use” would consist of hiking, biking and horse use along those currently unopened sections. On public roads already open to motorized use (e.g. county, federal or state) such use would continue to be permitted subject to regulations of the relevant jurisdiction. Hiking and horse use may not be practical or safe along all such roads, but bicycle use would be feasible though in some cases require shoulder modifications, as noted in the study. More than 70% of the 64-mile trail as envisioned would be open to licensed motorized use and it is anticipated that many visitors would confine their experience to those sections, along which historic remnants would be identified and their stories communicated through interpretive exhibits.

8. If the proposal is for a multi-use long-range route, it is very important to have safe, adequate parking for all intended users i.e. for horse trailers, hikers, and bicyclists.

- Yes. As currently envisioned, long-range plans would provide access for a broad range of users including hikers, cyclists and horseback riders. The recommendations recognize that different users have different needs for parking (and other trail design features). Many of the suggested trailheads and staging areas would be developed in cooperation with AHRA or other land managers and the proposed Master Plan will address appropriate design standards for anticipated users.

9. The study does not adequately recognize or appreciate the rights of private landowners. It doesn't address the potential for conflict between trail users and owners such as when users might be tempted to depart from a trail to access the river where no public access has been negotiated. It makes an unrealistic suggestion that landowners may eventually see mutual benefits in having a trail pass through or close to their lands.

- These sentiments are frequently voiced in projects in Colorado and even nationally in complex, long-distance trails that might pass through a mixture of public and private lands. The current project clearly has this complexity. The Working Group feels that the feasibility study has made a good-faith effort to assess and address the views of private land owners, and will continue to do so in more detailed planning. Many alternative routes and discussions of management actions are presented which could be implemented to avoid private land and /or minimize conflict. And in examining the evolution of similar trail projects, there is ample evidence that some landowners eventually do change from opposition to support when their fears of conflict or loss of privacy are dispelled. There is also evidence that property values may increase with association to a public trail, and that landowners develop at least tolerance and at best pride in having helped facilitate a trail. The most successful mixed ownership trail proposals have been open and straightforward in trying to balance private land issues with equally valid rights and desires of the public to have access to and enjoy public lands. Striking this balance and reaching a “best possible outcome” for public and private interests can take considerable time and involves development of mutual trust and compromise that is often hard to foresee in early stages.

Comments of Support:

1. We support the concept and encourage you to go forward with your planning efforts (Chaffee County Commissioners, worksession May 14, 2012)
2. We encourage you to keep up the good work and we think this is a win for both counties (Lake County Commissioners session May 15, 2012)
3. The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area remains supportive of this concept and looks forward to a detailed



Master Plan that AHRA can consider for its implementation (AHRA Park Manager, May 14, 2012)

4. Some 39 “likes” have been recorded on the study’s Facebook page including an expression of interest and support from the Rails To Trails Conservancy. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Leadville-Stage-RoadMidland-RR-Study/206624022693584>
5. The Conservation Corps could provide installation help and on-going maintenance support in the future.
6. I have reviewed the Salida to Leadville Trail Corridor Feasibility Study, dated March 10, 2012. Let me compliment you on producing a most interesting and well illustrated report.
7. Thank you so much for working on this trail. I have had visitors to the area ask me about this as a possibility for the future. I think it could be a huge attraction and a great asset to our quality of life.
8. An example of a successful trail system in New Zealand....good luck with this project, it would be a great asset to both counties. <http://www.otagocentralrailtrail.co.nz/index.htm>
9. We just wanted to congratulate you on your ongoing effort to establish this trail.
10. In conversation with Senator Udall’s staffer, it was noted that this trail and planning effort was just another reason that a national monument and wilderness area in Browns Canyon is gaining momentum.
11. We support the hard work that your team has put forth to secure this part of our region’s history.
12. I pass Granite and see that stagecoach trail opposite the highway, I always wonder about what it would be like to travel that little road.
13. With respect to Zebulon Pike, we would also like to point out that on December 26th, 1806, he camped out in the snow so that his aide and others could have his tent at the same spot that the [stage road] depot used to be, at the confluence of the Arkansas and South Arkansas Rivers:
14. Let me compliment you on producing a most interesting and well illustrated report.

