

RESOLUTION No. 9532

A Resolution of Support for the
“CORRIDOR OF DISCOVERY TRAIL”

A proposed 95-mile Non-motorized Trail between Helena and Great Falls,
Located within Cascade and Lewis & Clark Counties, Montana

Whereas, the rail line between Great Falls and Helena has been owned and operated by several companies during the past 120 years, with the current operator being the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railway; and,

Whereas, a portion of the rail line near Ulm has been out of service since 2000, due to an unstable and slumping rail bed and riverbank located along the Missouri River and which remains severed and unrepaired; and,

Whereas, the railroad line was identified as an “at risk rail line” in danger of abandonment in a 2004 study, titled, Montana Branch Line Study, Phase II, as prepared for the Montana Departments of Transportation, Agriculture and Commerce; and,

Whereas, community leaders, grain producers, rail shippers and other interested parties strongly advocate competitive railroad operations as a means to establish competitive shipping rates, and further envision the establishment of competitive railroad operations on the Great Falls to Helena line as a means to enhance the marketability of this region and of Montana produced products; and,

Whereas, the preferred interest of all involved parties is to reestablish the rail line as an active, useful and productive carrier of commerce; and,

Whereas, at present it is questionable whether any other entity is interested in acquiring, repairing and operating the rail line, and if there was, it is questionable whether BNSF is interested in relinquishing ownership of the rail line; and,

Whereas, if BNSF formally abandons the rail line and no other legitimate entity acquires the line, it is highly likely the rail corridor would be fragmented into many ownerships, making it difficult, if not impossible, to reassemble the corridor into a functioning railroad, if future economic conditions warranted; and,

Whereas, acquisition of the entire rail corridor, by a public entity or other organization, could protect its connectivity and continuity for other interim public and beneficial uses; and,

Whereas, the proposed trail, informally dubbed the “Corridor of Discovery Trail,” would create excellent opportunities to connect the urban bike and pedestrian systems in both Great Falls and Helena with outlying urban and suburban neighborhoods, as well as to provide a new public transportation and recreational facility for its use and enjoyment by the public; and,

Whereas, the “Corridor of Discovery Trail” could become one of the most scenic and commercially viable trails in the country and could provide the State of Montana with a world-class tourism destination, thus providing economic development opportunities for Great Falls, Helena and the communities in between. These opportunities could be similar to Idaho’s “Trail of the Coeur d’ Alenes” and other well-visited “rails to trails” around the country. An array of new and expanded businesses and support services could be created in both cities and in the communities along the trail.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF GREAT FALLS, MONTANA:

Section 1. The City Commission supports the reestablishment of the Great Falls to Helena rail line as an active, useful and productive carrier of commerce. However, until such time the line is reopened for rail traffic, the City Commission supports keeping the rail corridor intact for its future possible reuse as a rail line and interim use as a public non-motorized recreational trail.

Section 2. The City Commission supports converting the existing rail line into the proposed “Corridor of Discovery Trail,” as a means of creating new and exciting recreational, tourism and economic development opportunities.

Section 3. The City Commission recognizes that adjoining landowners may have concerns with the possible conversion of the rail line to a public trail. Particular concerns may include the spread of noxious weeds, law enforcement issues, safety of trail users and interference with the use of their property, etc. Further, the City Commission encourages and expects all groups, organizations and public agencies engaged in the acquisition and conversion of the line, to work with landowners, appropriate state and local governmental agencies and elected officials to avoid, address and mitigate identified impacts and concerns, consistent with applicable state and local regulations.

Section 4. The City Commission recognizes that the possible conversion of the rail corridor will require a dedicated partnership of public and private sector entities to acquire, hold, develop, manage and operate such a public trail. Further, the City Commission strongly supports such a partnership and the efforts of all individuals, groups, organizations, agencies and officials that have been working or will be working toward the development of this exciting new trail.

Section 5. The City Commission encourages other state and local governments and public officials to support the acquisition, protection and conversion of the rail corridor into the proposed "Corridor of Discovery Trail."

Passed by the City Commission of the City of Great Falls, Montana, this 15th day of November, 2005.

Randall H. Gray, Mayor

ATTEST:

Peggy J. Bourne, City Clerk

(SEAL OF CITY)

APPROVED FOR LEGAL CONTENT:

David V. Gliko, City Attorney