

Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail Plan

Adapted from NWA Regional Planning Commission documents and news reports.

The 2025 Regional Transportation Plan for Northwest Arkansas includes a *Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail Plan*, adopted on October 28, 2002. The plan calls for:

A regional network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that connects Northwest Arkansas citizens and visitors to our rich heritage, our recreational and cultural assets, a healthier lifestyle, and to each other.

Plan Overview

Washington and Benton Counties offer a unique opportunity for recreational and non-automotive travel throughout the area. Our region includes national forests, state parks, recreational areas, cultural assets, and significant historic sites.

The routes of three prominent historic movements make up the primary network of the Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail Plan. These are the Trail of Tears, the paths traversed by Civil War troops, and the Butterfield Stage Coach route.

As designed, the Butterfield Stagecoach Route is a major "backbone" component of the Heritage Trail Plan. (See box at right for historical sketch.) This route will be marked with unique signage and promoted with an informational brochure. It can also be promoted as an auto tour as soon as the signs are in place.

As the Trail of Tears routes and Civil War routes are developed, similar efforts can be made for these unique components. As such, the Heritage Trail system can double as an auto tour guiding citizens and visitors to our region's attractions and points of interest.

Scope of Network Design

The plan describes a regional network for proposed bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the two counties of Northwest Arkansas. The entire network can be seen, at a minimum, as a bicycle route with

improvements along the route providing safety for bicyclists. Within the more populated areas, where pedestrian traffic is anticipated, the improvements will also accommodate safe pedestrian travel.

Butterfield: Three-year Odyssey of the Longest Stage Coach Route in the History of the World

In 1858 John Butterfield began operating the longest stagecoach run in the history of the world. Butterfield's mail coaches ran from Tipton, Missouri to San Francisco, right through Northwest Arkansas. The mileage of the route was approximately 2,800 miles. Coaches were to run each way twice a week. Having 25 days to make each run, the coaches traveled day and night to meet this deadline.

There were stage stops every 20 miles or so to change teams. The first westbound Butterfield Stage stopped at Callaghan's Station in present day Rogers on September 18, 1858, a Saturday morning. It was then down through Cross Hollows on the way to Fitzgerald's Station in modern day Springdale (then Shiloh). The stage arrived in Fayetteville at 11:00 a.m. that Saturday morning. It left at 10 minutes till noon, headed south on the way to Van Buren and Fort Smith via the rugged Boston Mountains.

Of the route from Fayetteville to Fort Smith it was said by one of the first riders, "I might say the road was steep, rugged, jagged, rough, and mountainous and then wish for more impressive words". This first westbound stage arrived in San Francisco on October 10, 1858, one day ahead of schedule.

The Butterfield Stagecoach ran from 1858 till 1861. It is said that Texas and Arkansas Rebels confiscated many of the coaches and horses for the war effort.

Linking Cities' Master Trail Plans

This regional system is designed to link the emerging master trail plans of the region's cities. By incorporating local trail plans into the regional network, a functional regional system will begin to emerge. By linking with the cities' own plans and including strategic spurs, the NWA Heritage Trail Plan provides links to recreational sites, parks, historic sites, museums, schools, work centers and retail shopping.

Almost the entire regional trail network coincides with the existing road network. Some exceptions are a railroad corridor from Bentonville to Rogers, and a connection that would go through Lake Fayetteville Park. The Heritage Trail Plan depends primarily on existing right of ways in order to achieve immediate continuity. Off road facilities will be developed by the involved cities as part of their individual master trail plans.

The partial trail map on page 6 indicates some key plan elements associated with northeastern Benton County.

As cities adopt their own Master Trail Plans that link to the Regional Plan, those plans will be recognized as part of the Regional Plan.

Goals:

- **Develop a regional network** of bicycle and pedestrian facilities utilizing existing right of ways and public lands thus linking the master trail plans of the region's cities.
- **Create travel and recreational opportunities** by providing access to the region's attractions.
- **Enhance economic development** opportunities through the promotion of heritage-based tourism.
- **Promote awareness** among local residents of the region's abundant resources for recreational, historic, and cultural interests.
- **Promote the health benefits** associated with outdoor activities.

- **Work with** local jurisdictions and AHTD to promote discussion of new **public funding sources** to support the development and continuing maintenance of the regional trail network.

Background and Update

The NWA Heritage Trail initiative has been enthusiastically led by John McLarty, transportation planner with the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission. On January 14, he convened a meeting of volunteer groups to present the plan as adopted, and to suggest formation of a non-profit "Friends of the Heritage Trail" or similar organization.

This action will be considered further at a future meeting.

Governance for programs and projects of the Commission, and for the Regional Transportation Plan, is provided by mayors and county judges of member entities, and their representatives. Significantly, on January 17, the Commission approved an expansion of the transportation planning area to include the whole of Benton and Washington Counties, rather than just the metropolitan portions, as had been the case. □

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(E-mail to Win Logue)

Hi, Win:

This is Karen Miller in California, with the Shook, Polk, Casey, Walker, Garrett, Wardlaw, etc. families in Benton County. I just wanted you to know how excited I was to find out about the new CD of the Benton County Plat Book.... I'm sending for it right away!

....

The Pioneer is always a welcome addition to my mailbox, thanks to you and all the group there for all your hard work on the articles and the activities.

Sincerely,
Karen Miller in California
