

# Saluda Grade Rail Trail

A Strategic Framework for Trail-Driven Economic Growth

**Pillar 1**

Market Analysis

**Pillar 2**

Community Assets

**Pillar 3**

Economic & Experiential Drivers

**Pillar 4**

Trail Activation Zones

## The Saluda Grade Trail will reshape the communities it connects across the Blue Ridge foothills.

Over 1,000 residents, business owners, and elected leaders said the same thing: grow, but grow with intention. With one million residents in the core trade area and up to \$22 million in projected visitor spending, this plan provides the framework to turn trail investment into community wealth, local jobs, and long-term resilience.

### 1 Market Analysis

**1.08M**

**Residents as Trail Users**

1.08 million residents in the immediate region; 8 million within a two-hour drive. The corridor's resident population forms the year-round backbone of trail demand.

**\$12–22M**

**Visitor Spending**

18–33% resident participation, one visit per year, at \$25–\$155/day. Every trail visit is a potential transaction: food, gear, lodging, and services.

**Economic Multipliers**

Visitor spending generates sales tax for communities to recirculate. Outdoor recreation attracts boutique manufacturers and the knowledge economy. Each dollar amplifies through local supply chains.

**What's at Stake**

Planning for popularity should be a priority. Without coordinated investment, corridor communities risk ceding a generational economic opportunity to competing regions.

### 2 Community Assets

**CONCEPT 2.1**

**Parking as Economic Infrastructure**

Well-managed parking is the first touchpoint of the visitor experience, distributing access and converting arrivals into economic activity.

- Spatial distribution across downtown, edge-of-town, and remote tiers
- Management strategies for ADA, turnover, pricing, and zoning
- Visitor communications through online platforms and on-site wayfinding

**CONCEPT 2.2**

**Community Hub Assets**

A layered system of interception sites, municipal trailheads, and commercial storefronts channels trail users into the heart of local economies.

- Interception sites using civic amenities as visitor funnels
- Community hubs with bike rentals, shuttles, and food trucks
- Commercial hubs near trail access as spending destinations

**CONCEPT 2.3**

**Downtowns as Destinations**

Thoughtful trail connections, distinctive placemaking, and design oversight transform downtowns from pass-through stops into reasons to linger and spend.

- Trail-making with seamless access, bike racks, and lighting
- Placemaking through murals, pocket parks, and alley activation
- Design oversight via standards, facade grants, and historic registry

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## 3 Economic & Experiential Drivers

**CONCEPT 3.1**

### Capture Local Spending

Aligning business operations with trail-user patterns keeps visitor dollars circulating locally rather than leaking to competing areas.

- Reduce economic leakage
- Align hours and amenities to trail-user behavior
- Passport and badge recognition programs
- Events and itineraries that extend visits

**CONCEPT 3.2**

### Workforce Readiness

A skilled workforce fluent in hospitality, outdoor recreation, and local knowledge is the foundation of a credible trail economy.

- Trail hospitality training
- Cross-community peer learning networks
- Future workforce planning for trail job types

**CONCEPT 3.3**

### Trail Business Development

A pipeline from mobile vendors to established outfitters gives entrepreneurs at every scale a pathway into the trail economy.

- Define trail business types and service gaps
- Mobile operations at trailheads
- Small-scale outfitting and event vendors
- Entrepreneurship funding and mentorship

## 4 Trail Activation Zones

**Concept 4.1** Activation Zones by Context

Each stretch of the corridor presents a different economic environment. Four typologies organize what belongs where.

THE "ARRIVAL"

### Visitor Funnels

Decision-making and orientation before reaching town.

THE "HUB"

### Edge-of-Town Nodes

Trailheads, staging, and interception areas that channel visitors toward downtowns.

THE "DESTINATION"

### Downtown Core

High-density commerce, gathering places, and walkable streetscapes.

THE "EXPERIENCE"

### Between-Town Corridors

Scenic stretches, dispersed recreation, and residential privacy management.



### Corridor Zone Maps & Tables

Spatial mapping across the full corridor provides a shared visual framework for planning, investment, and coordination. Communities mapped: Inman, Campobello, Landrum, Tryon, Saluda, and the North Terminus.

*The full plan includes an implementation framework with priority actions organized by community.*

**The trail will be built.** The question is whether corridor communities capture the value it generates or watch it pass through. This plan is the mechanism for making sure they do.