



## *Chapter Six* *A Strategy for Linkages*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the key opportunities in Heritage Areas is to foster more explicit connections physically via trails and tour loops, and experientially via interpretive threads, cooperative interpretive arrangements, or special event experiences, etc. The plan should provide an assessment of the potential of such linkages to add to the tourism appeal of ATHA.

–“Management Plan Requirements,” Maryland Heritage Areas Authority

This chapter explores ideas for creating linkages. After creating an interpretation program, creating linkages is perhaps the most important task in heritage development planning.

### FINDINGS ON LINKAGES

Existing and potential linkages in great variety are to be found in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA), including multiuse recreational paths, waterways, and transit and roadways. Findings here also address wayfinding and visitor reception.

- ✿ The Anacostia Tributary Trails System is one of Maryland’s premier greenways; a hiking/biking/equestrian trail, it follows the Anacostia River and its branches and tributaries to a similar system developed in Montgomery County. The 18-mile system connects with the Green Line Metrorail station in West Hyattsville and has the potential for similar direct links and on-road connections to the Greenbelt station.
- ✿ Another major trail is possible, linking the entire Anacostia Trails Heritage Area with the Anacostia Tributary Trails System. It would follow the vestiges of the Rhode Island Avenue trolley line that connected Laurel to Mount Rainier and then to the District of Columbia. This line stimulated development of the communities

along its length. The segment of the trail in College Park is in the design phase, with construction to begin in June 2001.

- ✿ Two designated national trails routes meet in this region, the East Coast Greenway and the American Discovery Trail (ADT). The East Coast Greenway will be an off-road, multiuser trail planned to connect cities from the Canadian border to Key West, Florida. The ADT will be a combined on-/off-road route from Point Reyes, California, to Lewes, Delaware. These high-profile projects designated by the White House and the Secretary of Transportation as National Millennium Trails will run on a concurrent route between Annapolis and Washington, D.C., using a portion of the Anacostia Trail network and a segment of the WB&A rail-trail. As well as being the gateway trail to Washington, D.C., it will be one of the legs of a regional Baltimore/Annapolis/Washington trail system. Both will utilize the Anacostia Tributary Trails System and are planned to connect to the planned Metropolitan Branch Trail, a primary walking route into the District of Columbia.
- ✿ Via the Anacostia River, which once included a deepwater port at Bladensburg, ATHA connects by water to Washington, D.C., and the area's other two historic seaports, Alexandria and Georgetown. It is possible to experience the river through occasional tours and outings provided by the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS) and M-NCPPC, along the Kingfisher Canoe Trail mapped out by AWS. However, other ideas to use the river to connect to special sites, such as the Navy Yard, the National Arboretum, and Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, await further planning and resources.
- ✿ The Anacostia River, by virtue of its tributary status in the Potomac River basin, shares in that river's honor as one of the nation's 14 American Heritage Rivers.
- ✿ The Potomac River is a congressionally designated National Scenic Trail corridor stretching from the Allegheny Highlands to the Chesapeake Bay. Few trails exist below Georgetown on the National Park Service's national map of scenic and recreational trails. Work has finally begun on creating a trail along the tidal Potomac on the Maryland side in Prince George's County, and interest is growing in the District of Columbia and Charles County. A spur to the trail is possible from Bladensburg and Colmar Manor.
- ✿ The Patuxent River, the only river of any size in the Chesapeake Bay system lying completely within Maryland, is less well known and accessible, especially within ATHA. Much of the river south of Laurel is an important flyway and research area, with high-quality forested floodplain wetlands.
- ✿ Besides the ordinary system of highway directional signs, including a modest number of "brown signs" (the standard for highway directional signs to historic and recreational sites), there is no existing or planned wayfinding system. The state Tourism Development Board has an ongoing project with the State Highway Administration

to improve signage on major highways that could contribute to a more extensive system throughout ATHA.

- ✿ There are no specific facilities or programs for visitor orientation to ATHA, but many existing facilities can be adapted. The rest stops at northbound and southbound I-95 cooperate with the City of Laurel, other sites in ATHA, and the Prince George’s County Conference and Visitors Bureau to provide information to interested visitors. Three visitor centers maintained at federal facilities (National Wildlife Visitor Center, NASA/Goddard, and the Beltsville Agricultural Center) are interpretive sites for visitors to those facilities only; similarly, The University of Maryland visitor center provides for visitors to the campus. These sites hold considerable potential to serve as part of a visitor orientation network with staffed or unstaffed kiosks, together with Montpelier Mansion or the Montpelier Cultural Arts Center, Laurel Museum, the I-95/I-495 Park-and-Ride lot, the Greenbelt Museum or Community Center, Riversdale, and the area’s four Metrorail stations. Together, these sites provide adequate coverage in a satisfactory pattern within ATHA. This pattern would be reinforced by visitor reception at three planned sites, the Bladensburg visitor center (interpreting the War of 1812), the Mount Rainier visitor center (interpreting US 1) and the Ammendale heritage center (interpreting Prince George’s County).



*Laurel Museum, which features an exhibit gallery as well as a library and gift shop, is housed in this brick-and-stone dwelling built for mill workers in the early 1840s.*

- ✿ There is a good system of transit services in the area: four Green line Metrorail stations (West Hyattsville, Prince George’s Plaza, College Park and Greenbelt) and four bus systems (Metrobus; Prince George’s County’s THE BUS; the Corridor Transportation Corporation, serving the greater Laurel area; and The University of

Maryland's bus system). The bus systems include routes that terminate at Metrorail stations. However, there are few opportunities to transfer between the various bus systems. ATHA is also bisected by a MARC commuter rail line that runs its entire length with stations at Laurel, Muirkirk Road, Greenbelt, College Park, and Riverdale Park.

- ✿ The area has excellent regional and national access via the Interstate Highway System (I-95, I-295, I-495), the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, and a large number of arterial highways. In addition there is general aviation (College Park Airport) and national/international air service (Baltimore-Washington International Airport and Reagan National Airport).
- ✿ Although the area has an extensive highway network, making it relatively simple to design multiple routes for visitors to follow links to historic sites, recreational access points, and natural areas, some arterial roads are congested at certain times of the day and could affect visitor mobility and circulation.
- ✿ MD 450 has a street-level train crossing in Bladensburg, with as many as 30 trains per day conflicting with the vehicle and pedestrian flow. An overpass is planned to eliminate this crossing and is currently on the county's priority list for construction and funding. There are several historic sites in the immediate area of the crossing. Moreover, the existing overpass of Kenilworth Avenue, access to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park, the Peace Cross intersection of MD 450 and Alternate US 1, and the crossing of the Anacostia River present additional challenges to creating pedestrian linkage. All of these challenges hinder efforts to link the significant historic sites of Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City and Fort Lincoln, and to interpret the Battle of Bladensburg in the War of 1812.



*An early photograph of the Peace Cross, erected to honor Prince George's County residents who died in World War I.*

## A STRATEGY TO CREATE LINKAGES

### Introduction

The linkage strategy described in this chapter encompasses a wide range of ideas, from improving the multimodal transportation opportunities in ATHA, to adding a “heritage trolley” during events and weekends in season, to completing the Anacostia Tributary Trails System to loop through the upper Patuxent watershed (and Laurel), to marketing the area as a premier bicycling destination. Among these many ideas, perhaps the key approach is to create a host of walking, biking and driving tours a collection of interpretive and recreational experiences to be called “Anacostia Trails.”

### Elements of the Strategy

Visitors first need to know about the attractions in ATHA. This need can be met by establishing a visitor reception and orientation system consisting of a number of visitor centers located in easily accessible places throughout ATHA. The visitor orientation centers will be the first opportunity to connect with the visitor and offer interpretation of

ATHA. These centers should be highly visible, welcoming and informative.

These centers can be existing or new facilities. Currently, no facilities focus on ATHA and its attractions. Any existing facility enlisted for service to ATHA will need to be enhanced to support orientation to ATHA and interpretation of the primary themes identified in Chapter Four.

In addition to gaining an understanding of what sites to visit, visitors and residents will need to be able to traverse ATHA easily and locate their destinations. This can be achieved through the development of a wayfinding system. The system will consist of media that points visitors in the right direction (directional and interpretive signs, maps, brochures, etc.) and employ a unified, easily recognized graphic identity consisting of logos, icons and color schemes. This system will allow visitors to know where they are, where they wish to go, and when they have arrived. How visitors move through the area will be determined through careful route planning. Once the best routes have been chosen, guidebooks and tours coupled with recognizable signs, brochures and visitor centers will provide visitors with guidance to navigate the area and gain an understanding and appreciation of ATHA.

One of ATHA's strongest assets is the existing, extensive system of trails that comprise the Anacostia Tributary Trails System. This system should be improved and extended further to accommodate the hiking, biking and equestrian needs of the heritage tourists and the area's residents. Currently the trail system follows the tributary network for the Anacostia River, and only those heritage attractions located near these water courses can be assessed. The system should be expanded to reach Laurel and include other heritage sites not currently accessible by nonroad, nonvehicular means. ATHA should link all of its attractions (visitor centers, historic sites and areas, museums, neighborhoods, and recreational and natural areas) by as many modes of transportation as possible.

ATHA will employ, as its primary interpretive wayfinding and linking strategy, a system of theme-based trails and tour routes for driving, walking, bicycling, boating and horseback riding. These trails and tour routes will physically and interpretively link sites in the area.

## **TRAILS**

### **Introduction**

With the name Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, the idea of reinforcing existing trails in the area and creating more is an obvious one. There are two basic approaches to the concept of trails here: multiuse recreational trails and interpretive trails. Either kind links historical sites, natural resources, and other places that have a story to tell or an experience to

provide. These trails may be either on-road (within a public road right-of-way) or off-road (in a dedicated park or trail easement).

### **The Bicycling Potential of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area**

The potential of ATHA for attracting bicycling enthusiasts in particular is considerable. The infrastructure is already substantial, and bicycling supporters in Prince George's County are an effective constituency, proud of their efforts so far and willing to work to showcase the region to fellow bicyclists. With the proposed completion of an off-road loop of the Anacostia Tributary Trails System, the gateway leg of the Washington/Annapolis/Baltimore regional loop, and an extension of the system into Washington, D.C., via a connection to the Metropolitan Branch Trail, ATHA could easily become a premier bicycling destination in the Washington, D.C., region. The advantage of emphasizing bicycling is that bicyclists can go where cars can go, within limits, and so interpretive driving tours should also accommodate the needs of bicyclists to the maximum extent feasible. In addition, combined recreational/interpretive tours designed exclusively for bicyclists can also be developed. The new trails supported here for the purposes of tourism can also improve opportunities to use bicycling as a transportation alternative for residents.

### **Multiuse Recreational Trails**

The concept of ATHA was inspired in part by the Anacostia Tributary Trails System. Built by M-NCPPC along the Anacostia's Northwest Branch and Paint Branch, the system encompasses 18 miles of off-road trails, generally via an 8-foot-wide paved path. The potential exists to extend the Paint Branch segment through Beltsville north to Laurel and back around through Greenbelt, approximately doubling the size of the current system. Recommendations here concern completing this loop and other planned extensions. To maximize the use of trails as linkages, this plan supports the following activities:

- ✿ Support the construction of a pedestrian bridge connecting the Bladensburg Waterfront Park to the Colmar Manor Community Park and trails that will be built as part of the Department of Environmental Resources' (DER) wetland restoration project located on the north side of MD 450. This system will form a loop connecting the waterfront park, Colmar Manor and the trails at the confluence.
- ✿ Support the construction of new trails that are environmentally sensitive. Alternate routes to trail alignments in stream valleys and other potentially sensitive areas should be explored wherever possible.
- ✿ Obtain national designation for a trail spur along the Anacostia River, starting from Bladensburg or Colmar Manor, to connect to the Potomac River National Heritage Trail.
- ✿ Produce an ATHA Trail Development Strategic Plan. This plan should be created through cooperation with a wide variety of

constituency groups and community representatives and should build on the trail planning already provided by M-NCPPC. The Trail Development Strategic Plan could be reviewed by the county's Bicycle and Trails Advisory Group and integrated into county plans, as appropriate. Its purpose is two-fold: to build greater community appreciation and support for existing trails and their potential for expansion, and to provide a step-by-step guide for involvement by the management of ATHA.

- ❁ Provide amenities to the Anacostia Tributary Trails System, either on the trail or in nearby communities, including trailhead parking areas, restrooms, bicycle racks, drinking fountains and public art. Interpretive panels explaining natural and historical features should be installed at appropriate points.



*A scenic bridge at Lake Artemisia attracts walkers in all seasons of the year along the trails of the Anacostia Tributary Trails System.*

- ❁ Extend the existing Anacostia Tributary Trails System into the northern end of ATHA, generally by connecting the Paint Branch Trail to the Indian Creek Trail via Laurel. One trail segment should extend the Paint Branch/Little Paint Branch Trail north toward Fairland Regional Park and continue another five miles to downtown Laurel. The return loop can proceed southward generally in the US 1/Baltimore Pike/Rhode Island Avenue corridor to connect to the Greenbelt Metrorail Station and the Indian Creek Trail.
- ❁ Support the planned extension of the Anacostia Tributary Trails System, known as the Anacostia Gateway (formerly the Prince George's Connector) which is slated to run from the West Hyattsville Metrorail Station to the Fort Totten Metrorail Station, where it will connect to the planned Metropolitan Branch Trail.
- ❁ Create a Trolley Trail from Laurel to Riverdale Park. (A route from Laurel to just south of Muirkirk Road at Ritz Way in Beltsville has yet to be determined.) A one-mile stretch from Ritz Way now exists in

the form of an eight-foot-wide, paved multiuse trail alongside US 1. From Ammendale Road to Sunnyside Avenue, a route has yet to be determined, but the old trolley right-of-way is proposed. In College Park, from Sunnyside Avenue to University Boulevard, another two miles can be followed alongside US 1. An eight-foot-wide, multiuse off-road path of nearly a mile is now under construction from Greenbelt Road (University Boulevard) to Paint Branch Parkway and will connect with the Paint Branch Trail segment of the Anacostia Tributary Trails System.

### **Interpretive Trails**

Interpretive trails in ATHA can be walking tours, driving/biking tours, or actual off-road paths, the latter being what the word often conjures in the reader's or listener's mind. Paths, however, are often designed more with recreation and ease of alignment in mind than interpretation. The primary purpose of an interpretive trail is to educate (and entertain) its users, with some healthy recreation along the way.

The route chosen to link various interpretive sites and features in a given theme is less important than the stops along the way but it is desirable that the route be attractive and easily traveled. When it is not possible to meet one or both of these tests, trail designers should incorporate explanations of the trail's surroundings as part of the interpretation, and cautions about likelihood of congestion if that is usual in a particular area. For example, if US 1 through Beltsville is to be followed for a small towns theme, users could be advised to watch carefully for the beautiful red brick church at the corner of Powder Mill Road or aided in imagining how the road once appeared when it was the 1812 Baltimore Pike. Helping users know what to expect, or to understand the underlying causes of what they experience today, reduces their anxiety or impatience and increases their interest.

To be successful, an interpretive trail must be easy to follow (requiring good directional signs, maps, and explanatory brochures, as discussed below in the section on wayfinding), offer a variety of experiences, and make sense thematically, so that a story emerges along the way. Although the idea of making sense is important, it is also useful to remember that unusual combinations, rather than more obvious ones, may make a trail more interesting. For example, a "science and environment" theme here has some of the most varied possibilities: from dinosaurs to space flight to recycled lands to stream restoration. Not every site on such a trail will capture everyone's interest, but it can be an intriguing experience nevertheless.

A final ingredient in the success of these trails is the interpretation itself the media chosen at each stop to convey the story, and the strength of the story and exhibits themselves. Research, writing and exhibit design will be required.



All trail design should consider visitor comfort guides and signs should direct visitors to places to eat, comfort facilities, connections to public transit, and other amenities.

The following are trail possibilities:

1. *Research Trail*—develop and create an on-road bicycle route on roads through federal research lands. Working in conjunction with the visitor centers at Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and Patuxent Research Refuge, the appropriate roadways (i.e., those with wide shoulders or low volume) will be designated for bicycle use, and interpretive signage installed along the entire length of the trail. This designated route could form a portion of at least three interpretive driving/biking trails: the Natural History Trail, Science and Environmental Trail, and the Agricultural History Trail.
2. *African-American Heritage Trail*—develop and create a trail that focuses on African-American history and presence in ATHA. Feature Abraham Hall, St. Mark’s United Methodist Church (in Laurel), the Town of North Brentwood, the community of Lakeland (in College Park), and other sites as appropriate (e.g., Montpelier Mansion, Bostwick, Riversdale). Later, any sites identified in studies of the Underground Railroad will be interpreted and included.
3. *New Nation Trail*—develop and create a trail that includes Montpelier Mansion and Riversdale, as well as Bostwick and other sites in Bladensburg. Early industrial and commercial sites may also be identified (e.g., the Snowden family forge near Montpelier Mansion/Snow Hill, the site of the powder mill on Powder Mill Road, the Adelphi Mill [a gristmill], Brown’s Tavern, or the Rossborough Inn).
4. *Agricultural History Trail*—develop and create a trail that includes the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, The University of Maryland, Riversdale, and the Port of Bladensburg. A combination driving/biking trail, it would include (at a minimum) existing portions of the Paint Branch and Indian Creek stream valley trails, the proposed Trolley Trail, and the Research Trail. The to-be-reconstructed octagonal barn at Riversdale would be featured at one end of this trail, with the research center at the other end.
5. *Natural History Trail*—develop and create a trail that connects the Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and the National Arboretum in the District of Columbia to the National Wildlife Visitor Center, the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and Greenbelt Park. While this trail would share some of the same interpretation as the proposed Science and Environment Trail described below, its interpretive focus would be on the appreciation and use of the educational resources of ATHA’s natural sites. As a component, develop a wetlands boardwalk for environmental education.
6. *Science and Environment Trail*—develop and create a trail that connects sites illustrating science, discovery, and the use of technology to

improve the environment. It would link the prehistoric (e.g., fossil-bearing site at the proposed Dinosaur Park) to the historic (e.g., all aviation sites, including NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, College Park Aviation Museum, Balloon Park) to the present (e.g., Mount Rainier Nature/Recreation Center, ERCO plant, Colmar Manor, and Brentwood Rain Gardens) to the future (e.g., The University of Maryland's proposed technology park). Where important to interpretation, the trail would include walks along the Anacostia Tributary Trails System. The trail would also closely relate to the Natural History Trail by sharing some of the interpretation

Other trails that could be developed include:

7. *Linking the Nation Trail*—a walking/driving trail connecting sites such as the Bladensburg Waterfront Park, Bladensburg Balloon Park, Riversdale, College Park Aviation Museum, NASA Goddard Visitor Center and the Spacecraft Magnetic Test Facility, Brown's Tavern, the Rossborough Inn, the B&O Railroad Station in Laurel, and Duvall Bridge.



*This picturesque Baltimore & Ohio Railroad station was built in 1884 in Laurel. Sole survivor of the county's Victorian railroad stations, it is a prominent symbol of transportation history.*

8. *Weary Traveler Trail*—a trail linking remains of the early post road and turnpike system along the US 1 corridor and the 18th- and 19th-century taverns that developed along the way, such as Brown's White House Tavern, the Rossborough Inn, and the George Washington House.
9. *Main Street Trail*—a trail celebrating the "Nation's Main Street," US 1 from Maine to Florida, linking the sites that tell the story of US 1 and the main street communities along it, including the downtowns of Laurel, Vansville, College Park, Riverdale Park, Hyattsville, Mount Rainier, Brentwood, North Brentwood and Bladensburg.

Individual sites that illustrate 20th-century development relating to the automobile can be included, from the 1930s filling station in Mount Rainier to the Tastee Diner in Laurel.

10. *Streetcar Suburbs Trail*—a trail celebrating the beginning of the Washington, D.C., suburbs as a result of the construction of the Washington to Mount Rainier trolley line in 1897. The streetcar suburbs include Mount Rainier, Brentwood and North Brentwood on one end and extend up US 1 to Laurel.
11. *Balloon to the Moon Trail (segment of the national History of Flight Trail)*—The entire span of American aviation history is represented within ATHA, including the Bladensburg Balloon Park, College Park Airport and Aviation Museum, the ERCO plant in Riverdale Park, and NASA Goddard Visitor Center.
12. *Mail-Order Houses Trail*—a trail featuring Victorian pattern book and mail-order houses built in the area, including the O’Dea House, the Chlopicki House, the Kleiner-Dillon House, the McEwen House, the Rizzo House and the Holbrook House, among others. As mail-order houses are found throughout the area, this trail would include sites in Mount Rainier, Brentwood, Hyattsville, Bladensburg, Cottage City, College Park, Laurel, North Brentwood, Riverdale Park, and University Park.
13. *Greenbelt Trail*—this trail would feature the City of Greenbelt and its existing walking/biking trail system. Key sites include the Greenbelt Museum, the Greenbelt Center School, and the Roosevelt Center, which includes the historic movie theater, but it is possible to enjoy a large part of this National Historic Landmark planned community on foot. Outdoor interpretive signs have been installed.



*Greenbelt Center School, built in 1937 as part of the planned community, is a striking example of streamlined Art Deco architecture. It now serves as a community center.*

14. *Stones and Bones Trail*—tours of early church buildings and cemeteries could be offered throughout ATHA, including St. Mary’s of the Mill, St. Phillip’s, the First United Methodist, Abraham Hall, Queen’s Chapel, St. Joseph’s, St. James, Mount Rainier Methodist, North Brentwood AME Zion, St. Paul’s/Free Hope Baptist, Evergreen Cemetery, St. John’s, the College Park Woman’s Club, Ivy Hill Cemetery in Laurel, the Calvert Family Cemetery in Riverdale Park, and the George Washington Memorial Cemetery.
15. *Champion Tree Trail*—a trail linking the 10 champion trees in ATHA: a Winged Elm, a Pig Nut Hickory, a Star Magnolia, a Bradford Pear, a Long-Leafed Pine, a Pitch Pine, a Red Pine, a London Plane Tree, a Caucasian Zelkova (a member of the elm family), and a Chestnut Oak. Some of these trees are on private land; others, however, are readily accessible.
16. *War of 1812 Trail (in support of the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail)*—a walking and driving trail interpreting the Battle of Bladensburg in Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, and Cottage City, and linking buildings that were present during the battle, including Bostwick, the George Washington House, the Market Master’s House, and the Magruder House.
17. *Industry and Labor Trail*—a trail to link sites related to the history of industry in the area, including Laurel Mills, Laurel Museum, Adelphi Mill, Bostwick, Muirkirk Iron Furnace, and the ERCO plant.



*Adelphi Mill, a stone grist mill of the 1790s, exemplifies the early industry of the area.*

18. *Education and Research Trail*—a trail expanding upon the Research Trail that would link such nationally recognized research sites as The University of Maryland at College Park, Archives II, the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center and Agricultural Library, the

Patuxent Research Refuge and National Wildlife Visitor Center, and the NASA Goddard Space Flight Visitor Center.

19. *Boat Trail*—a boat trail/tour along the Anacostia from the Bladensburg Waterfront Park to Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, the National Arboretum and the historic Navy Yard.
20. In addition, walking tours of the following places should be developed:
  - ✂ Berwyn Heights
  - ✂ College Park’s “Old Town”
  - ✂ Cottage City
  - ✂ Hyattsville
  - ✂ Laurel
  - ✂ Mount Rainier
  - ✂ North Brentwood
  - ✂ Riverdale Park
  - ✂ University Park
  - ✂ The University of Maryland



*This early (circa 1910) photograph shows one of Hyattsville’s streets, lined with Victorian houses.*

## **WATERWAYS**

### **Introduction**

During the early settlement of this area, water was the primary mode of transportation. At each end of ATHA, settlements and livelihoods depended upon navigable waterways. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the deep water of the Anacostia River gave merchants and traders access to

international markets and goods through the Port of Bladensburg. The Patuxent River powered Laurel Mills, the largest employer in the area for most of the mill's history. Some historic communities declined when they lost their navigable waterways; Bladensburg survived, although in altered form, because of its transportation alternatives.

In the 20th century, waterfronts, formerly a source of pride and income, became eyesores to be avoided as shipping industries closed down and ports silted up. Waterfront towns suffered and turned their backs on the water. Today, as in so many other small towns, the role water played in Bladensburg and Laurel is gone, the connections between towns and water only memories. New connections need to be created for residents and visitors who wish to enjoy the views of the water and the natural setting, or the opportunity to observe wildlife, to fish, or take a boat ride. Both towns have begun to look back upon their rivers with renewed pride and to create potential new economic opportunities.

### **Recommendations for the Anacostia River**

To maximize the role of the Anacostia River as a key component of the linkage strategy, the plan encourages the following:

- ✿ Continued dredging or other sediment-reduction programs to provide boat access to and from Bladensburg Waterfront Park.
- ✿ Development of a railroad bridge opening schedule to improve opportunities for larger boats on the Anacostia.
- ✿ Creation of further canoe access points at Bladensburg Waterfront Park and at other sites as pinpointed on the Anacostia Watershed Society's Kingfisher Canoe Trail.

### **Recommendations for the Patuxent River**

To enhance the role of the Patuxent River as a key component of the linkage strategy, the City of Laurel and the management of ATHA will focus on the following action:

- ✿ Develop the Laurel riverfront with a walking trail and pedestrian river crossing to the Laurel Park racecourse. The trail, which would also accommodate cycling and skating, would extend the existing trail along the Patuxent River at the Laurel Riverfront Park eastward across US 1 (both north and southbound divided lanes and private property) to the racecourse.

## **WAYFINDING AND VISITOR ORIENTATION**

### **Introduction**

ATHA is a diverse and densely developed place. Trying to find attractions may be difficult for visitors unfamiliar with the area. Wayfinding strategies are essential. Concerted efforts need to be made to make it

very easy for visitors and residents to find their way around. This is proposed to be achieved through a variety of methods.

### Wayfinding

A comprehensive signage system, consisting of entry or gateway signs, directional or “trailblazer” signs, and outdoor interpretive signs, should be designed and installed throughout the area. This system should have a consistent appearance, using logo, color, shape and other stylistic elements to add a distinctive note to the ordinary highway directional signage now in use. The system should have one group of directional signs for automobile drivers and a second group for trail users on the Anacostia Tributary Trails System and Trolley Trail.

### Visitor Reception and Orientation

In the case of visitor orientation, the region is modest in size (compared to other heritage areas in Maryland and beyond). Multiple locations, including police stations, interpretive sites, businesses (especially lodging) and restaurants, should be organized to receive and orient visitors. Two new town-sponsored visitor centers are proposed at the southern end of ATHA. One is to be developed by Mount Rainier as a 1930s gas station, ideal for interpreting US 1 as well as orienting visitors to the gateway municipalities, the proposed Arts District, and ATHA in general. A second is Bladensburg’s planned conversion of the former Roy Rogers restaurant building into a visitor center, an excellent location for providing interpretation of the Battle of Bladensburg as well as orienting visitors to ATHA and the Port Towns. The Bladensburg visitor center is proposed to support the proposed *Star Spangled Banner* National Historic Trail.



*This small 1930s gas station, itself a symbol of early automobile travel, is proposed as a visitor center.*

To create a cohesive, unique and integrated linkage wayfinding system, the plan supports the development of the above visitor centers. In addition, the following sites are under consideration for additional visitor reception and orientation activities.

- ✿ *(Existing)*: The southbound I-95 state-operated Welcome Center (north of Laurel), which can serve as a visitor center at an entry point for ATHA.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: The National Wildlife Visitor Center.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: The Montpelier Cultural Arts Center.
- ✿ *(Proposed)*: Dinosaur Park.
- ✿ *(Proposed)*: The Ammendale Heritage Center and Campus.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: The Beltsville Agricultural Research Center Visitor Center.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: Archives II Visitor Reception.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: The University of Maryland Visitor Center.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: The College Park Aviation Museum.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: Greenbelt Park.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: NASA/Goddard Space Flight Visitor Center.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: Riversdale.
- ✿ *(Proposed)*: The North Brentwood Museum.
- ✿ *(Existing)*: The Bladensburg Waterfront Park Visitor Center.

## **PUBLIC TRANSIT AND ROADWAYS**

With MARC, Metrobus, Metrorail, bike paths and sidewalks, visitors and residents have the opportunity to travel without driving. Public transit in ATHA is extensive, making it possible for visitors to Washington, D.C., to board a Metrorail train and find their way to one or more sites in ATHA for a day or even an afternoon. However, visitors are often reluctant to use unfamiliar transit systems, in particular Americans touring in their own country. The vision of “car-free” touring in this area should be pursued. To this end, this plan supports the following activities:

- ✿ Explore the possibility of simplifying public transit connections and transfers between Metrorail, Metrobus, THE BUS and the Corridor Transportation Corporation’s Connect-a-Ride system in the Laurel area.
- ✿ Encourage the placement of bus shelters at more stops within ATHA. (Where possible, display maps of ATHA.)
- ✿ Encourage the lodging industry to provide shuttle van service to transit stations, distribute transit maps and sell fare media.





- ☼ Encourage taxi companies to establish special discount rates and other programs for heritage tourists.
- ☼ Encourage a bicycle-friendly public transit system.

## SPECIAL TRANSPORT

Even with streamlining and enhancing the current transit system, it would be desirable to have more direct connections among all heritage sites in ATHA, especially during multiple events, on weekends, and at other times when it would be likely that a large number of users could be served. The idea of a “heritage trolley,” harkening back to the old street-car line that served this area, has been proposed. However, it would be a rubber-wheeled model able to move throughout the area. Visitors to the Washington, D.C., area are familiar with this form of touring transport, and it may be possible to work with existing concessionaires to establish a similar system here. An initial review of the feasibility of this idea indicates interest on the part of one company. This plan supports efforts to investigate the feasibility of this concept. If proven feasible, the plan supports the development and operation of the heritage trolley.

A precursor to the proposed trolley has been the wrapping of a county bus with ATHA’s logo, a stagecoach pictured on the 1812 Baltimore Pike. Brochures to answer riders’ questions and promote ATHA’s attractions are available on the bus. Plans are underway to wrap three more buses.



*Buses “wrapped” with the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area logo are now carrying passengers in parts of the Heritage Area.*

In addition, the idea of creating package day tours by railroad, involving leaving downtown Baltimore or Washington, D.C., on a morning commuter train, touring local sites through various means of public transport, dining at a local restaurant, and returning by train at the end of the day, has been proposed. This plan supports efforts to investigate the feasibility of this idea.

- ✿ Work with Laurel to develop a commercial carriage tour of its historic downtown and historic neighborhoods. The project would include planning, design, interpretation, development and marketing.

## PEDESTRIAN ISSUES

There are a number of areas in ATHA that make pedestrian tourism difficult. This situation demands creative solutions. Often, pedestrians are forced to traverse railroad tracks, thoroughfares, and other dangerous places because there are no pedestrian bridges or even sidewalks in some locations. For example, the new pedestrian bridges on Bladensburg Road in Colmar Manor and Cottage City are one attractive response to this problem. These decorative bridges provide pedestrians, who were forced to cross Dueling Creek by walking in the roadway of Bladensburg Road, protection from fast-moving traffic. In Bladensburg, efforts are underway to design an elevated CSX railroad crossing on Bladensburg Road. This project may present an opportunity to create a pedestrian pathway to the Bladensburg Waterfront Park. Similarly, creative thinking can result in solutions that are both helpful and attractive. This plan encourages improved pedestrian access to heritage sites.



*The foot bridge across Dueling Creek in Colmar Manor is an attractive solution to pedestrian movement in one part of the Heritage Area.*

