

# “TENNESSEE NEW RIVER TRAIL”



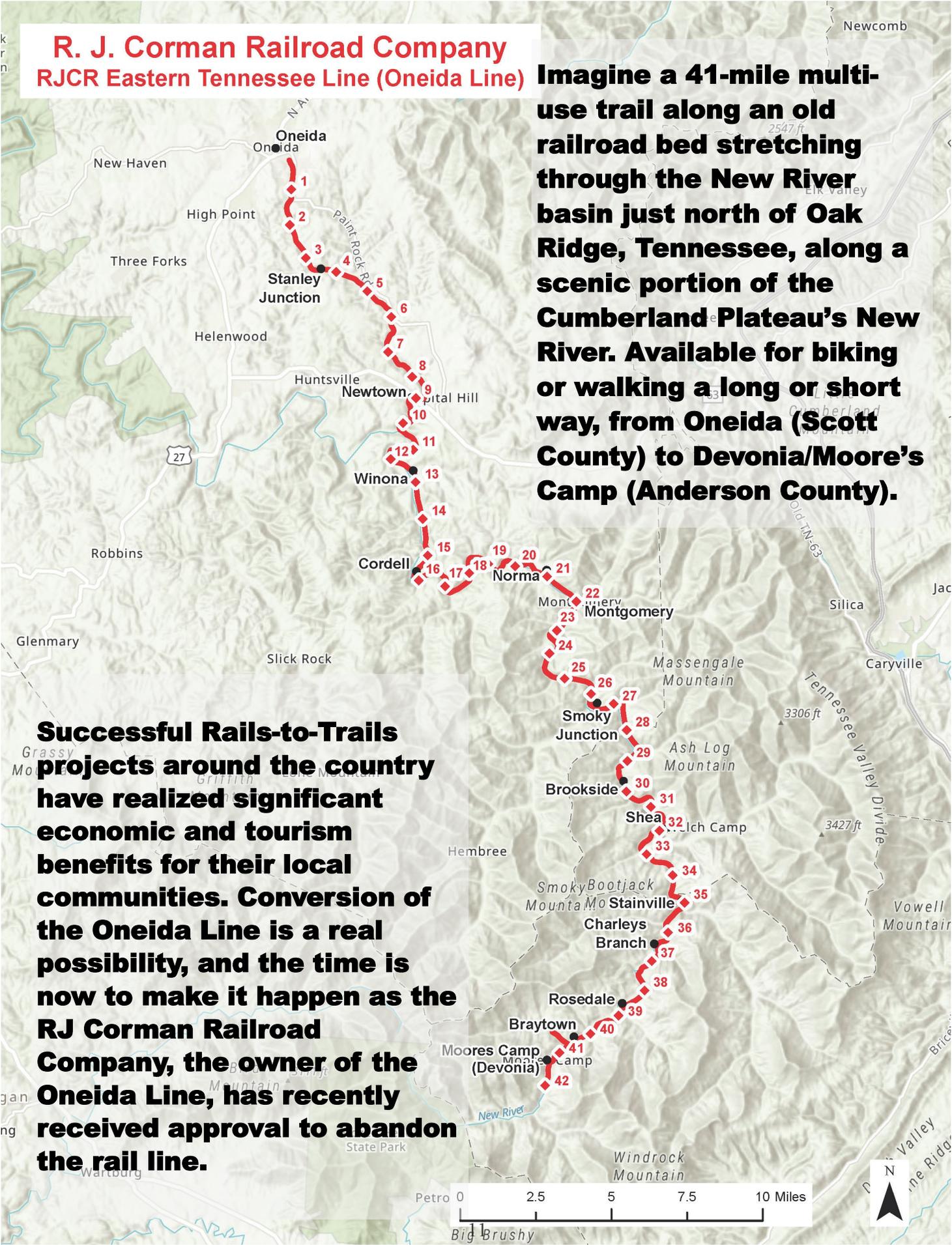
photo by Ken Mayes

*A Rails to Trails Proposal for the Oneida Line*

# R. J. Corman Railroad Company RJCR Eastern Tennessee Line (Oneida Line)

**Imagine a 41-mile multi-use trail along an old railroad bed stretching through the New River basin just north of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, along a scenic portion of the Cumberland Plateau's New River. Available for biking or walking a long or short way, from Oneida (Scott County) to Devonia/Moore's Camp (Anderson County).**

**Successful Rails-to-Trails projects around the country have realized significant economic and tourism benefits for their local communities. Conversion of the Oneida Line is a real possibility, and the time is now to make it happen as the RJ Corman Railroad Company, the owner of the Oneida Line, has recently received approval to abandon the rail line.**



In April 2020, R.J. Corman filed a request to the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) to abandon the 41-mile “Oneida Line.” Following Corman’s request for abandonment, Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) filed a request to the STB for a Notice of Interim Trail Use (NITU), which the STB granted.

This NITU, or Railbanking Agreement, not only provides a potential recreational destination for Scott, Campbell, and Anderson counties, it also requires Corman to leave the bridges, railbed, and subgrade intact, ensuring the railroad right-of-way is preserved for possible reactivation for rail service. Interim trail use of railbanked corridors has preserved thousands of miles of rail corridors that would otherwise have been abandoned.

Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) would like to work with local and state governments, residents, and businesses to turn this abandoned rail line between Oneida and Moore’s Camp (Devonia) into a Rails-to-Trails project that would be a boon to the local economies.

This 41-mile rail corridor follows the scenic Paint Rock Creek Gorge and the New River Valley for much of its length, through parts of three TN counties: Scott (27 miles), Campbell (6.5 miles), and Anderson (7.5 miles).

The trail will connect nearby Frozen Head State Park, The Cumberland Trail State Park, The North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area, and several small towns with rich histories including: Oneida (Gateway to the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area), Norma, Winona, Brookside, Shea, Devonia, and Moore’s Camp.

The proposed trail has a perfect grade for leisure riding and walking and follows a very scenic river valley and rocky gorge through quite a bit of undeveloped wildlife management preserve and small farms and towns. The trails would be very attractive tourist and local bike riders, hikers, and local walkers. The trail would also provide access for other trail users, provide river fishing access, canoeing and kayaking access and greenspace. Hikers from the Cumberland Trail could also hike to Oneida or Frozen Head State Park along the proposed trail. B&B or other



**Scenic view along the  
Virginia Creeper.  
Photo by Ken Mayes**



**Future trail for families to enjoy.  
Photo by Tim Bigelow**



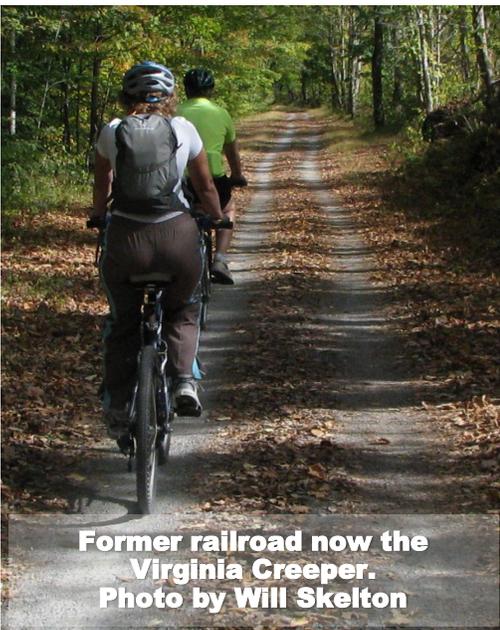
**Family enjoying the Eureka Trail  
in Athens, TN.  
Photo by Will Skelton**

types of overnight accommodations could also be established by locals in the small trail towns for tourism, riders, and distance hikers. Making the project a reality will require cooperation and leadership from a variety of stakeholders including the three counties governments, the State of Tennessee, the national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, regional conservation and recreation organizations (such as TCWP), and local landowners.

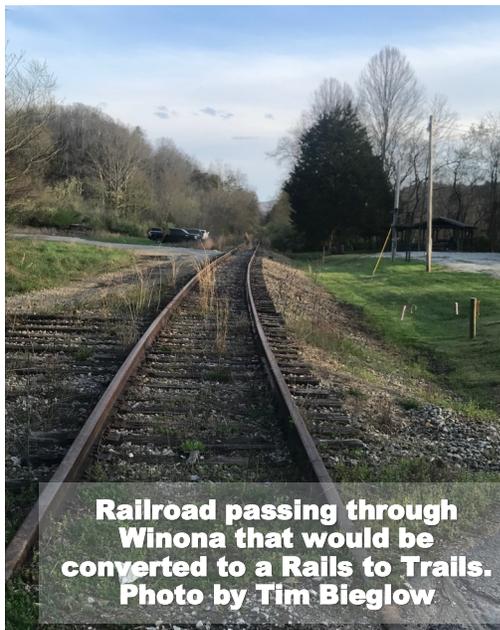
the Great Allegheny Passage-C&O Canal Trail in Pennsylvania and Maryland. A 2004 economic impact analysis\* of the 34-mile Virginia Creeper Trail estimated that the trail contributed over \$2 million per year to the local economy and trail use has almost doubled since that analysis.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with local officials and communities to explore this timely economic opportunity.

There's a window to get this project off the ground with the hope that it could be like the Virginia Creeper Trail in southwest Virginia or



**Former railroad now the  
Virginia Creeper.  
Photo by Will Skelton**



**Railroad passing through  
Winona that would be  
converted to a Rails to Trails.  
Photo by Tim Bieglow**

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# ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VIRGINIA CREEPER

**\$1.6M**

IN TOTAL ANNUAL ECONOMIC  
ACTIVITY SUPPORTED

**\$610,000**

IN LABOR EARNINGS

**& 27  
JOBS**

**106,000**  
PEOPLE USED THE  
VIRGINIA CREEPER A YEAR

OF 39,367 NON-LOCAL TRIPS SURVEYED,

**5,725**

WERE OVERNIGHT TRIPS

OVERNIGHT USERS SPEND

**ROUGHLY 4X**

MORE THAN DAY USERS.

**61%**

OF THE INCOME  
OF LOCAL BUSINESSES  
GENERATED BY TRAIL USE.

MANY LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS  
NAMED VIRGINIA CREEPER  
AS MOTIVATION FOR OPENING A  
BUSINESS IN THE AREA.

## Economic Impact Resources:

\*Gill, Joshua. 2004. The Virginia Creeper Trail: An Analysis of Net Economic Benefits and Economic Impacts of Trips. Thesis – Master of Science Degree. Athens: University of Georgia. [https://www.vacrepertrail.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Economic-Impact-Study\\_2004.pdf](https://www.vacrepertrail.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Economic-Impact-Study_2004.pdf)

Bowker, J.M., Bergstrom, J., Gill, J. 2007. Estimating the economic value and impacts of recreational trails: a case study of the Virginia Creeper Rail Trail. *Tourism Economics*. 13(2): 241-260. [https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/ja/ja\\_bowker008.pdf](https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/ja/ja_bowker008.pdf)

Economic Development Studio [Stephen Cox, Jonathan Hedrick, Chelsea Jeffries, Swetha Kumar, Sarah Lyon-Hill, William Powell, Katherine Shackelford, Sheila Westfall, Melissa Zilke]. 2011. Building Connectivity Through Recreation Trails: A Closer Look at New River Trail State Park and the Virginia Creeper Trail. Blacksburg: Economic Development Studio – Virginia Tech. [http://www.visitdamascus.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-Report\\_Impact-of-Trails\\_Fall2011Studio\\_VT.pdf](http://www.visitdamascus.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-Report_Impact-of-Trails_Fall2011Studio_VT.pdf)

Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways <https://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?id=4618>

Trail Investment: A Good Deal for the American Economy - Trails and Trail Networks Revitalize American Infrastructure [https://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?name=trail-investment-a-good-deal-for-the-american-economy&id=14675&fileName=RTC\\_Trail\\_Benefits\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_All\\_Use.pdf](https://www.railstotrails.org/resourcehandler.ashx?name=trail-investment-a-good-deal-for-the-american-economy&id=14675&fileName=RTC_Trail_Benefits_Fact_Sheet_All_Use.pdf)