

At a national conference last weekend in Jacksonville, Fla., the East Coast Greenway Alliance officially designated the 10.5-mile West Ashley Greenway as part of the 2,600-mile urban and rural trail from Maine to Florida. However, the organization underscored the need to surface West Ashley Greenway to make it accessible to wheelchairs, road bikes, skates and strollers.

# CLOSING GAPS

West Ashley Greenway named local link in East Coast path

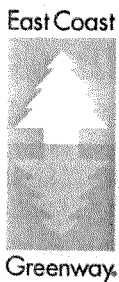
BY DAVID QUICK  
*The Post and Courier*

For much of the past 26 years, the effort to create a 2,600-mile bike and pedestrian route from Calais, Maine, to Key West, Fla., has been a pipe dream.

How could a trail, similar in concept to the Appalachian Trail, wind its way through the diverse, challenging terrain of concrete jungles, such as New York and Philadelphia, and especially along hundreds of miles of farmland, woods and wetlands?

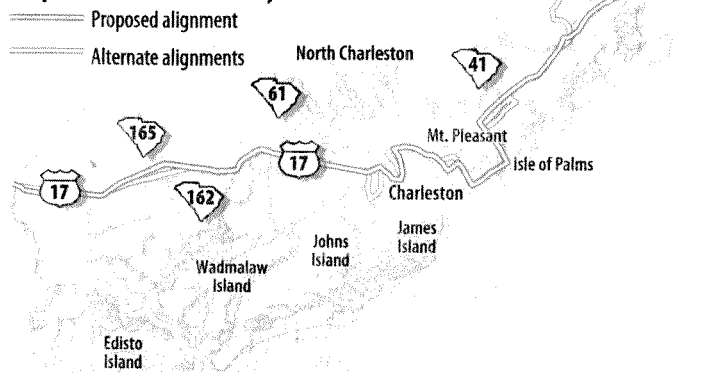
Most of its work, in fact, has centered on the urban areas of the North and Florida.

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## East Coast Greenway

Proposed Charleston County routes



# Greenway named local link in East Coast path

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But through the continued commitment and hard work of a growing number of mostly volunteer groups, bicycle and pedestrian advocates and hired staff, the East Coast Greenway is closing gaps in connections, especially in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

This past weekend, the East Coast Greenway Alliance approved its newest sets of official links, including the 10.5-mile West Ashley Greenway, at the alliance's biennial meeting in Jacksonville, Fla.

The designation is just the latest of the good news related to the East Coast Greenway's establishment along the Palmetto State's coastline.

"It's clearly an idea whose time has come," says Peter Wilborn, a local attorney and the first South Carolina resident to serve on the alliance's national board.

Wilborn says a national path is part of a solution for some of today's biggest ills: obesity, oil dependency, safe transportation alternatives and isolation among individuals and communities.

"This is not like the paths built in the 1970s that go nowhere. This is truly a road that connects communities and cities. ... It's not about getting on an outdoor treadmill. It's about going somewhere."

Wilborn, who attended the meeting in Jacksonville, said the biggest shot in the arm for the greenway making its way through Charleston was the opening of the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge and its bike and pedestrian path, named Garrett Wonders Way for a cyclist killed three years ago (see related story).

Wonders Way and the section of Coleman Boulevard from the bridge to Shem Creek was designated part of the East Coast Greenway last year. Signs depicting that designation with the East Coast Greenway logo have not been posted.

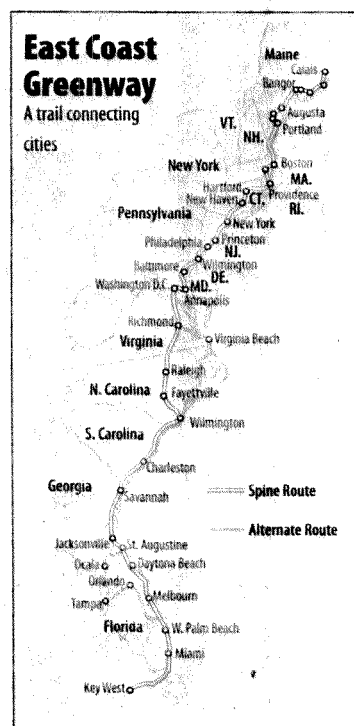
Meanwhile, both the alliance and local governments are starting to recognize the importance of the greenway going through the area.

In 2005, the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments and its consultants completed the East Coast Greenway Master Plan, which calls for the 95-mile route through the region. The Charleston Area Transportation Study Policy



MIC SMITH/STAFF

**Nonie McInnis, who lives near the West Ashley Greenway, takes a walk on the newly surfaced section between Albemarle and Folly roads. "I feel like I have to take advantage of it," she said.**



Committee, or CHATS, team also approved the route as part of its long-range transportation plan.

Vonie Gilreath, a senior planner for the Council of Governments who also serves on the

alliance's National Trail Council, says that while the plans are there, much work is left to do.

"Alliance staff noted that one of the biggest gaps on the East Coast is the lack of a separated path providing safe passage from Charleston to Savannah," says Gilreath.

And that includes the need to surface the West Ashley Greenway.

A recently surfaced half-mile section between Albemarle and Folly roads is a symbolic gesture by the city of Charleston toward that step, says Donald Sparks, a longtime local bike and pedestrian advocate who is part of the Charleston Moves advocacy group and vice president of the League of American Bicyclists.

Most of the West Ashley Greenway consists of an uneven dirt path.

"Unless you're on a mountain bike with huge tires on it, (the greenway) is unsatisfactory. It can be muddy and rough and it doesn't encourage use," says Sparks, adding that part of the need for surfacing is to provide access for wheelchairs, road

bikes, skates and strollers.

Sparks applauds the city's recent efforts, which include the approval of \$400,000 worth of bike and pedestrian trails in West Ashley and the creation of a new advisory committee to provide guidance on new projects.

The primary work for Charleston Moves, as it pertains to the East Coast Greenway, is to press the need for surfacing the link from Charleston to Beaufort.

In that sense, Charleston advocates are reaching out to like-minded groups to the north and south, such as the Greater Bluffton Pathways. Among that group's success stories in the past five years is working to get 35 miles of 8-foot-wide surfaced path built in Beaufort County.

Dave Kimball, a Greater Bluffton board member, says two of its new initiatives are defining routes, one from the south of Charleston to Savannah and the possible conversion of a 25-mile rail line to greenway from Yemassee to Port Royal through Beaufort County.

"Both routes are challenging. The interim routes have safety issues, and the permanent route will be changing because this part of the state will be growing at a rapid rate over the next 15 years," says Kimball.

"Our success will depend upon the willingness of local government officials, developers and landowners to cooperate and give easements for the pathways."

## Greenway ride

The city of Charleston will hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the official extension of the West Ashley Greenway at 12:30 p.m. Monday at Albemarle and Ripley Point roads. After the ceremony, the Coastal Cyclists will hold a ride on the greenway (the trail is most suited for mountain bikes and hybrids). Following the ride, the group will have refreshments provided by nearby Earth Fare.