VANDALIA CORRIDOR
Northside and South Cumminsville
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Goals
The Vandalia Corridor projects propose a variety of uses which offer a comprehensive approach to the greenway and provide not only a distinct identity for the two neighborhoods but the opportunity for future development in the area.

The four framework goals are addressed within the project areas, as are the three components of sustainability. Economic development and neighborhood development (as well as economic sustainability) opportunities exist hand in hand not only in the increased property values for homes along the corridor, but land in the adjacent communities that could be repurposed for new business and technology opportunities. South Cumminsville would have the ability to define their community’s identity and create a business district that better serves the needs of the area if traffic to the neighborhood was increased.

Through the implementation of community garden programs in the area, as well as through the use of permeable pavement and recycled elements, the project addresses the idea of environmental sustainability. By including softscape elements such as bioswales, the corridor has the potential to offset the problem of stormwater on the combined sewer system in Cincinnati.

By providing separate pedestrian and biking paths, as well as creating destinations for these pathways to lead, the project pushes residents to think about the future of their transportation. While many residents of Northside and South Cumminsville do use public transit, the creation of this corridor will promote easy movement between neighborhoods at a more pedestrian scale.

Opportunities for social interaction abound with the project elements the corridor proposes. Not only will this act as a mode of travel, but community gardens, art installation pieces, as well as amphitheater settings provide a setting for residents and visitors to interact not only with one another, but with their environments.

Project Description
The Vandalia Corridor as it currently exists is an abandoned rail line. It is in some places used as parking for bordering homeowners, and in others unused and entirely overgrown with vegetation. This natural path is almost two miles long, crossing I-74, connecting the two neighborhoods of Northside and South Cumminsville in Cincinnati,
Ohio. The corridor has no structures within it, save for one storage facility which would need to be relocated in the event of the construction of the project.

Being proposed is a one and half to one and eight tenths mile pathway including both a pedestrian walking and jogging trail, and a bike path separated by softscaping elements and a bioswale. Both of these structures are to be made of pervious pavement and efforts should be made to include recycled materials such as fly ash in concrete structures.

The path will be lit at night with pedestrian scale fixtures, which will be powered by solar energy stored in battery systems. The path will feature resting and sitting areas, as well as locations for picnics or group meetings.

The neighborhood of Northside gives the impression of being an artistically oriented community, and the path would feature installation works using recycled materials created by local artisans. Kiosks would be placed in strategic locations along the pathway to provide background information on the area, the project, and directional signage as well as the opportunity to interact with the environment as you would in a hands-on museum display.

In addition to these projects, also being proposed are community gardens and urban farms (the difference being in size, and for-profit status). The opportunity to grow food locally has already been identified in the area, as the owner of a local restaurant grows his own lettuce and herbs. There is also a small-scale community garden already in place close to the proposed pathway, which is looking for expansion opportunities.

When considered in relation to one another these strategies offer a comprehensive solution to the problems of economic and neighborhood revitalization, transportation, social interaction, and sustainability.

**Rationale**

The corridor currently serves almost no functional purpose within the neighborhoods accept as the occasional place to park a vehicle. The pathway already exists and can be seen quite clearly in aerial photography.

This proposal suggests the reuse of this property as a method of reinvesting in the neighborhoods. Through site visits, data collection, research, and meeting with community leaders, the final proposal addresses a variety of solutions in one comprehensive approach. While the City of Cincinnati staff were not available to be interviewed during the study period, community members offered insight and direction in guiding the functions of particular areas of the project. The proposal not only addresses community concerns, but goes further to offer a solution to the question of identity. By implementing this greenway, the area would be recognized as a leader in sustainable development, urban agriculture, and the incorporation of the arts.

Urban Design Associates, as well as the Ohio Department of Transportation have planned major changes in this area to the exit path of I-74, almost immediately following its connection to I-75. This project takes advantage of these changes by utilizing the newly abandoned exit area and proposing a way for pedestrians and cyclists to travel between the neighborhoods of Northside and South Cumminsvisle without the barrier of the highways.
The pathway runs parallel to the projects being implemented by the Mill Creek Restoration Project and offers the opportunity to connect the two and create a circular transportation path in the future.

**Implementation/Funding Strategies**

Through the inclusion of community gardens and farm space, the Vandalia Corridor can provide a space for residents to grow their own produce, as well as the option for a collective group to grow products to sell at a farmer’s market, through a CSA, or a private ordering service. Students from both the University of Cincinnati, as well as Cincinnati State could study agriculture at these locations and participate in the process. These spaces may even provide the opportunity for local school-age children to learn about and participate in nutrition-focused activities. Through these agriculture oriented social interaction opportunities the corridor project could receive federal grants from the Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program. If crops in the farming area were deemed to be specialty, and organic, the opportunity to be awarded up to 3 million dollars in funding is presented through both the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, as well as the Specialty Crop Block Grant program.
The involvement of the University of Cincinnati in the planning and design process, as well as the potential for future students to study the effects of the corridor once implemented would provide the opportunity for educational involvement, as well as community involvement. Both the Higher Education Challenge Grant Program, and the Garrett Morgan Technology and Transportation Education Program offer funding to programs that address state or regional educational needs by facilitating relationships between education and the private sector. These grants offer up to six hundred thousand dollars towards the implementation of the Vandalia Corridor plan.

The corridor has the potential to reduce the overall environmental impact of the area. While areas will involve the installation of asphalt, the overall impervious surface ratio (ISR) for the site will be greatly reduced from what it currently is. By removing old rail tracks, large parking surfaces, and remediating brownfield sites—while replacing these with vegetation and open space—the environmental impact of the area can be reduced. The Source Reduction Assistance Grant Program is a creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and works to reduce pollution by methods other than recycling. While the recycling of materials is being proposed, the corridor seeks to do more by reducing stormwater runoff, and replacing impervious structures with softscape elements.

The Vandalia Corridor promotes “alternative” modes of transportation through an unused rail corridor. Where the path is proposed to cross I-74, a bridge over the interstate or a tunnel under, will have to be constructed. While no federal program exists specifically to assist with the cost of building a pedestrian accessway, over three hundred thousand dollars of federal monies was recently awarded to the state of Arkansas to relocate and repair several rail bridges. While not a complete comparative precedent, this does shine light on “untraditional” methods of funding.

Should buildings (such as the American Can Building) be renovated or repurposed to meet LEED standards, the Property Tax Abatement for Green Buildings could be applied both for residential and commercial structures. In these instances, abatements last from twelve to fifteen years. A similar program exists at the Cincinnati level, through the department of Community Development which encourages residential development (both new and renovation) though does not specify that these structures must meet green standards.

End Notes (if applicable)

Further information on the following federal grants; including application deadlines and contact information can be found at grants.gov

Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative
Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program
Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Higher Education Challenge Grant Program
Garrett Morgan Technology and Transportation Education Program
Source Reduction Assistance Grant Program