

## Preserving History, Strengthening Communities on the Civil Rights Trail

The 54-mile Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, designated in 1996 by Congress, commemorates the 1965 Voting Rights March along U.S. Highway 80. In the same year, DOT named the route an All-American Road as part of the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) National Scenic Byways Program. To receive an All-American Road designation, a road must have one-of-a-kind features that do not exist elsewhere and be considered a "destination unto itself."

The trail begins in the small town of Selma, runs through forests and farms, and ends in the historic Peacock neighborhood in Montgomery, the state capital. FHWA provides funds through its [National Scenic Byways Program](#) and is a key player in interpreting and protecting the historic route. Communities near the trail share a deep connection to the march and want to preserve its history for future generations while reviving the struggling neighborhoods surrounding the trail. That effort is a story of collaboration among federal, state, and local agencies and these communities.

### The Power of Partnership

Revitalization began with 18 brownfield site assessments by EPA and the state of Alabama to



Jeff Downes, deputy mayor of Montgomery, and Stan Meiburg, EPA Region 4 deputy regional administrator, display West Montgomery community plans for Mt. Zion Church, a historic landmark along the trail. Photo courtesy of EPA.



"When faced with the challenges of redevelopment, the keys to success are a plan that has been composed together with many stakeholders, and developing a collaborative partnership including the public and private sectors. I have no doubt in the successful culmination of the efforts to preserve the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail thanks to the support of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and our other federal, state, and local partners."

—Mayor Todd Strange, Montgomery

determine the best sites for revitalization in the rural and underserved communities along the trail. Nine community visioning sessions supported by EPA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the [National Park Service](#) helped draft plans to connect historic points of interest in preparation for the 50th anniversary of the march. Community outreach sessions conducted by the city of Montgomery with Hud Community Development Block Grant funds led to a collection of plans with strong local support in the city of Montgomery and more rural communities.

EPA, FHWA, the National Park Service, and the city of Montgomery worked with the state on a green infrastructure design to absorb stormwater, which will help prevent sewage overflows into Genetta Stream in West Montgomery. Instead of maintaining underground pipes, the city will "daylight" the buried stream, bringing it back to the surface to improve drainage. The city also built a greenway around the stream to create an attractive community park with an entrance to the trail.

[HUD Community Development Block Grant](#) funds have been used for streetscape improvements, affordable homes for police and teachers, and repairs to the historic Mount Zion Church, where the march ended. [The U.S. Department of Labor's Job Corps Program](#) and the city of Montgomery trained 90 young people in green building techniques to

build community gardens and renovate homes in the Peacock neighborhood. [Department of Energy Weatherization Assistance Program](#) funds also supported this community revitalization effort. [EPA's Greening America's Capitals program](#) provided technical assistance to help the city explore options to rehabilitate a section of the trail under Interstates 65 and 85.

[Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange](#) says of the trail, “It’s fitting that this stretch of land—that demonstrated to the world the great things that can be accomplished when people unite to strive for a common purpose—is illustrating the dramatic results that can happen when federal agencies combine their talents and resources with state and local governments to transform areas of blight and neglect to places of natural beauty and sustainable viability. We are proud of what has been accomplished here by working together.”

This case study appears in *Three Years of Helping Communities Achieve Their Visions for Growth and Prosperity*, a report of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, June 2012. Learn more about the Partnership at [www.sustainablecommunities.gov](http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov).



*Genetta Park, once an industrial area, will serve as a gateway to the Selma-Montgomery Trail. Bringing Genetta Stream, now buried, to the surface will create a natural wetland to clean stormwater runoff before it is released downstream. Image courtesy of Judd Langham, 2D Studio, Birmingham, AL.*

