

ECGA SWOT ANALYSIS

(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
Compilation of Past Analyses

STRENGTHS

- ◇ **Power of the vision**
 - **Appeal of the Greenway vision: everyone brightens up at the idea**
 - **Benefits many populations. Serves**
 - **all ages**
 - **all abilities**
 - **all economic levels**
 - **urban, suburban, rural**
 - **Uniqueness of the mission**
 - **First long distance *urban* trail system**
 - **Only Maine to Florida trail along the Eastern Seaboard**
 - **Clear and concrete end product: a spine route clearly signed, easy to find and follow**
 - **Addresses many agendas: more transportation options, tourism (adventure, heritage, eco, and sustainable) health and fitness, clean air, energy conservation, community building, smart growth, social connectedness, economic development, conservation, recreation, cultural (art on the trail)**
 - **Links many important points of interest, transportation nodes, and destinations, and connects to scores of side trails to form a network and loop travel options**
 - **Physical location of our route – in the nation’s densest region, close to home for over 30 million people and central to an enormous media market**
- ◇ **Has broad support**
 - **Virtually non-controversial concept**
 - **The size and depth of our partnership structure, at national, state and local levels**
 - **A “feel –good” issue with strong local support for politicians at all levels**
 - **Have secured written support of 75% of the Senators and 50% of the Congressmen along the route**
 - **Appeals to small towns hit economically by interstate highway (I-95) as way to bring travelers back**
 - **The ECG is one of only 16 designated National Millennium Trails**
- ◇ **Organizational Strengths**

- Committed board of trustees
- Talented and hard-working professional staff of five
- State committee structure grounds the project
- Scores of volunteers
- Partnerships with agencies and organizations at national, state and local levels
- Have established strong organizational credibility
- Have created a unique set of trail standards and designation procedure for the ECG
- ◇ The Project has strong funding potential, some of it realized
 - A relatively cheap project given its size (2600 miles @ \$300,000/mile = \$780 million. 20% is done.)
 - Massive project that can be implemented incrementally
 - Funding available via federal transportation dollars allocated by state
 - Enormous potential membership and donor base (we ought to exceed Appalachian Trail's 35,000 members)
 - Strong potential for corporate sponsorship due to location in urban corridor
 - Potential for Chamber of Commerce along route with businesses paying annual fee for listing
 - Route potential for charity events feeding into ECG
 - Licensing ECG name for booking and other user services
 - Have begun to shift from grant dependency for Alliance support to contributions and memberships

Weaknesses

- ◇ Trail Development
 - Too little trail in place
 - Too few trail markers posted
 - Poor track record in states moving completed trail to designation
 - Difficulty in getting trail managing agencies to sign letters of endorsement
 - Many state Committees lack capacity to do the job
 - Insufficient staff support for state efforts
 - Local trails (managers and friends groups) not sufficiently engaged with ECGA
 - Lack of clarity for advocates on funding available to complete trail
 - Public awareness of ECG is limited
 - Inability of volunteers to handle trail designation role tasked to them. Need to shift some tasks to staff.
 - Water and highway crossings are a problem
- ◇ Organization
 - State Level Weaknesses

- Failure to engage many of the volunteers who would like to become involved
- No funding for staff and hard costs
- All volunteer efforts are hard to motivate and manage
- States unable to carry out benchmark assessment annually
- States not setting annual work goals
- State committees not inclusive
- State Committees do not follow basic procedures when making recommendations to the BOT (meetings, minutes)
- **Board Level Weaknesses**
 - Board meets too infrequently to remain engaged
 - Board lacks people with strong money connections to fund the effort
 - Board does not embrace its fund raising role
 - Board is heavy on people whose chief focus is at the state and trail level. Not enough people concerned with strategic thinking and funding the effort
 - By laws mandate one board member per state
 - Need to remove inactive board members
 - Need for more worker bees on the board
 - Board burnout
 - Term limits not observed
 - No board leadership transition planning
 - No consensus on the need for the Board to assume fundamental charge of the project. Policy making on the trail deferred to states when it should be the board that makes final decisions.
 - Failure to engage many talented people who are sidelined without a role to play in the organization
 - Failure to use our board members strategically
 - Failure to use our Advisory Board strategically
 - Need expertise: financial (treasurer), legal, marketing
 - Board committee structure needs to be assessed
 - Difficulty of operating with a board so spread out geographically, especially with committees
 - Lack current strategic plan.
 - Lack of a personnel policy manual
 - Lack of a financial policy and procedures manual
 - Lack of a comprehensive trail designation criteria and procedures policy document
 - Lack of a comprehensive signage policy and plan
- **Staffing Weaknesses**
 - Insufficient funding to retain needed staff

- Office located away from power and financial centers and off the route
- Size of job managing 16 state-level volunteer operations and scores of volunteers
- Current office space is too small

◇ Project Support

- Have not linked with some key partners like Amtrak, APA, ASLA, I-95 Corridor Coalition and others
- Membership is still very small relative to the potential
- Do not have adequate advocacy materials
- Have not secured corporate sponsorships
- Still do not have broad public awareness. Many people do not know what the ECG is.
- Web site needs major overhaul. Need to build the trail user information.

Opportunities

- ◇ Potential for many alliances: boy scouts, Rotary Clubs, AARP etc
- ◇ Health agenda is hot and might hold funding potential for us
- ◇ Tourism linkage has not been tapped
- ◇ Trends to adventure, heritage, sustainable and eco tourism
- ◇ Untapped pool of volunteers with commitment and talents to offer
- ◇ Large group of retirees with time and resources can join force of advocates, strengthen board and state committees and fuel user base
- ◇ Linkages with spur routes can widen our base of support
- ◇ Adding alternate routes can widen our base of support
- ◇ Funding from transportation program continues
- ◇ Federal designation of route
- ◇ Expanded Congressional support
- ◇ Local trail managers and friends groups as integral part of Alliance
- ◇ Improved web site
- ◇ Enlarged membership potential
- ◇ Major donor potential
- ◇ Mile sponsor potential
- ◇ Corporate sponsor potential
- ◇ Tour potential for funding national and state efforts
- ◇ Using "trail runners" as funding and publicity for ECG (e.g Marathon Man)
- ◇ User materials as funding source: maps, user guides
- ◇ State of Trail Report or User guide as advertising vehicle
- ◇ ECG Chamber of Commerce as funding source
- ◇ Celebrity spokes person

Threats

- ◇ Burn out by board, staff and state committees
- ◇ Changes to federal transportation funding sources
- ◇ Lack of clear policies and procedures to govern ECGA
- ◇ Lack of transition plan for board and staff
- ◇ Failure to cultivate and serve our members and contributors
- ◇ Disengagement of board and states due to limited face to face meetings

- ◇ **Danger of disconnecting trail focused people from our board under Trails Council arrangement which could be addressed by having some level of representation on the board**
- ◇ **Danger of board becoming disconnected with our mission as it grows to a “monied” board**
- ◇ **Insufficient funding to allow needed staff and program expansion or should funding for the current operation fall and contraction of staff and operations occur**
- ◇ **Recession**
- ◇ **Federal budget deficits and impact on our funding sources**
- ◇ **Inability to adapt our policies and goals over time**
- ◇ **Failure to keep true to our mission and vision**
- ◇ **State and local efforts not properly coordinated and in gear with our vision, mission and policies**
- ◇ **Becoming too bureaucratic and rigid; conversely being too loose and lacking standards and procedures**
- ◇ **Growing too fast. Overextension of our work program and overextension of our spending**
- ◇ **Lack of consensus on our trail vision**
- ◇ **Liability issues stemming from trail users**
- ◇ **Overuse of trail once it is up and running.**
- ◇ **Loss of trail segments (completed or potential) to development or return to rail use.**