



Southeastern Railway Museum

The mission of the Southeastern Railway Museum is to provide an educational atmosphere that will vividly bring to life the cultural, technological and historical importance of railroads and land transportation to our region. This is accomplished through preservation, conservation, display, and operation of historic equipment, publications, memorabilia and the portrayal of the lives of those people who created and provided that transportation.

History

The Southeastern Railway Museum (SRM) grew from a “seed” planted over sixty years ago. In 1955, a group of railroad veterans formed the “Save 290 Club” in an effort to preserve the Atlanta & West Point Railroad (A&WP) locomotive #290. The “290” boasted a rich heritage dating to the early 1920’s and was featured in the movie, “Fried Green Tomatoes.”

The “Save 290 Club” evolved into the Atlanta Chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society (NRHS) in 1959. Significant portions of the SRM collection date from the earliest years of the Atlanta Chapter NHRS. Back then, many of the Museum’s artifacts were housed at a variety of railyards throughout the metro Atlanta area.

The first consolidated Museum site was established in 1966 through a donation by the Southern Railway. Finally, the Atlanta Chapter began collecting rolling stock, memorabilia and artifacts from around metro Atlanta and storing them all on one campus. The Southeastern Railway Museum, operated by the Atlanta Chapter NRHS, was opened to the public in 1970.

In 1998, the Southeastern Railway Museum was moved to its present location in Duluth through a generous donation of thirty acres of land by Mr. Frank Ewing of Washington, DC. Soon thereafter, in 2000, the Georgia legislature approved a resolution designating SRM, “Georgia’s Official Transportation History Museum.”

In 2010, the Atlanta Chapter NRHS established a separate community-based Board of Trustees to operate the Southeastern Railway Museum and transferred the facility and artifacts to the board through a long-term lease. Currently, the Museum includes Buildings #1 and #2 which house most of the museum exhibits. The Duluth Depot, dating to 1871, stands at the entrance of the Museum grounds. The Park Train, a miniature locomotive and cars was originally used at the Birmingham Zoo beginning in 1957. In 2017, the Museum added the Rail Transit Exhibit (RTE) building, a 21,000 square foot shelter for rail cars and busses.

The Southeastern Railway Museum is staffed and operated primarily by volunteers. The Museum annually welcomes more than 25,000 visitors including 5,000 students on field trips.

To move this important venue forward and to expand and enhance its service to the Gwinnett County and Metro-Atlanta region, SRM has established a Strategic Planning Task Force composed of corporate and community leaders from throughout the area. Over the last seven months, they have carefully crafted their collective vision into a ***Southeastern Railway Museum Strategic Plan 2020-2024***.

Now, we invite you to read the proposed five-year Southeastern Railway Museum Strategic Plan and join us in this important project:

Southeastern Railway Museum

Strategic Plan

2020 – 2024

I. ENHANCE THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Education is a key component of the quality of life in every community. How its visitors are engaged, informed and educated defines the sense of place and vitality of a museum. When a museum provides a hands-on experience, it increases the learning opportunities ten-fold. Children, youth and adults will have the opportunity to see and feel and hear what it was like to live and work in an age decades ago. They will learn to appreciate how this country was developed by understanding how its transportation network has evolved through the years. To enhance its education experience, the Southeastern Railway Museum will:

- A. Develop the Museum's new Education facility
 - *The Museum will renovate the modular buildings on site to provide classroom space for visiting school groups as well as offices for the Museum education staff*
- B. Establish the Museum's Library / Archives building
 - *Over the next five years, the Museum will establish an archives facility on site to house and display the collection's archives*
 - *Enhance the Museum's partnership with the Gwinnett County Public Library*
- C. Expand the Museum's education curriculum for area schools
 - *Provide new learning experiences for students in Gwinnett County and the Atlanta metropolitan area*
- D. Enhance Museum learning opportunities for youth and adults
 - *Beginning in 2021, the Museum will offer a minimum of three adult seminars annually*
- E. Host special events to showcase Atlanta's transportation history
 - *Over the next five years, the Museum will host a minimum of three annual events to increase public awareness and showcase Atlanta's transportation history*
- F. Partner with local and state education institutions to engage students in hands on education experiences at the Museum
 - *Beginning in 2022, the Museum will work with its local education partners to provide area students with hands-on instruction and practice in transportation repair, maintenance and renovation as well as museum operations and management*
 - *The Museum will partner with local and regional fire and police departments to provide hands-on instruction and practice for first responders in transportation emergencies*

Annual Cost: \$200,000

Five-Year Cost: \$1,000,000

II. IMPROVE & EXPAND MUSEUM EXHIBITS

In today's "education sphere", visitors want to learn through engaging and immersing themselves completely in the subject matter. A superlative museum offers the visitor / learner the opportunity to hear, understand and absorb their stories. The Southeastern Railway Museum has an abundance of stories to tell about how various modes of transportation molded our country and its economy into a world leader. SRM's visitors will see, hear and experience first-hand what their ancestors experienced before. Refurbishing the trains, passenger and baggage cars is critical to their preservation. It also provides visitors with a more realistic view and understanding of their importance as the country's economy grew. Through this extraordinary initiative, the Southeastern Railway Museum will:

- A. Redevelop the Museum's collection to better tell the story of transportation
 - *Expand the history of transportation in the Atlanta area to include all of the region and how the railroad has helped develop our area*
 - *Expand SRM's scope to include all forms of transportation in addition to trains*
- B. Revitalize and expand the Museum's current exhibits
 - *Over the next five years, the Museum will stabilize the "Superb" (President Warren G. Harding's personal railway passenger car)*
 - *Restore the Southern Railway 6901 locomotive*
 - *Re-assemble and cosmetically restore the Atlanta & West Point 290 steam passenger locomotive*
 - *Restore the Southern Railway 2442 "Thomas Ruffin" passenger sleeping car*
 - *Restore the interior of the Southern Railway 2019 "Tugalo River" passenger sleeping car*
- C. Expand the Museum's train ride experience
 - *The Museum will renovate / upgrade all of the operating trains on site*
- D. Enhance the overall visitor's experience at the Museum
 - *Develop innovative ways to better "tell the story" at each Museum exhibit*
 - *Partner with the City of Duluth to promote the Museum at the city's new train watching platform*
 - *Enhance the Museum's website*

Annual Cost: \$250,000

Five-Year Cost: \$1,250,000

III. MODERNIZE THE MUSEUM FOR GROWTH

The Southeastern Railway Museum, as it showcases the past, must prepare for the future. The Museum's staff and leadership will continue their role as good stewards of this priceless collection of transportation artifacts and memorabilia. At the same time, the Southeastern Railway Museum will carefully redevelop and enhance its campus to deliver a journey through time that is more meaningful, easier to understand and more compelling. The Museum will also update and modernize its grounds and facilities to make SRM more efficient, effective and "visitor friendly." Over the next five years, the Southeastern Railway Museum will:

- A. Develop a new, visionary SRM Master Site Plan
 - *The new Master Site Plan will create a new SRM Visitors' Center for ticket sales and the gift shop*
 - *Expand and enhance the Museum Theatre*
 - *Improve ground level parking*
 - *Develop and implement a landscape / drainage plan*
 - *Create a picnic area and outdoor entertainment venue on the Museum campus*
 - *Install general improvements to Building #1*
 - *Renovate and upgrade the Depot building*
- B. Make the Museum and grounds more "visitor friendly"
 - *Develop a network of handicap accessible walkways throughout the campus*
 - *Install a public address system and Wi-Fi throughout the Museum grounds*
 - *Expand and enhance all public restroom facilities*
 - *Install new wayfinding signage throughout the Museum venue*
- C. Improve Museum safety and security
 - *Install the electrical network and lighting in the RTE building*
 - *Improve the electrical network and lighting in Building #2*
 - *Construct a handicap accessible covered platform for boarding the train*
 - *Add an emergency vehicle exit*

Annual Cost: \$500,000

Five-Year Cost: \$2,500,000

Total Five-Year Cost: \$4,750,000

Conclusion

Our region's corporate and community leaders will drive this new Southeastern Railway Museum initiative and help our community realize this new collaborative vision. Business and industry leaders, public sector officials, private individuals and community partners will help raise the \$4.75 Million necessary to underwrite this important program.

The Southeastern Railway Museum will add significantly to the quality of life in the Gwinnett County / North Metro Atlanta area. The overarching vision for this multi-purpose Museum is to create a venue where the community can come together to meet, to learn, to experience, and to grow. Over the next five years, The Southeastern Railway Museum will truly become a "centerpiece" for education and tourism in the region.

As the Museum expands and enhances its program, it will strengthen its relationship with its education partners to develop unique and compelling opportunities for learning. The Southeastern Railway Museum will also seek new ways to deliver its story of the history of transportation to other museums, schools and other venues in the region. SRM will continue to work closely with its transportation partners...Gwinnett DOT, Georgia DOT, MARTA, Norfolk Southern Railway and CSX Transportation...to tell the story of transportation and its positive impact on economic and community development in the region.

Our long-term success and prosperity requires that every generation must "invest" its own leadership and legacy for successive generations. The Southeastern Railway Museum represents an opportunity for Gwinnett County and Metro Atlanta's corporate and community leaders to do exactly that. If we approach this project from a passive, reactive or complacent mindset, we risk losing out to other communities that either have or are developing aggressive, well-funded community initiatives such as this. We risk both a decline in our economic vitality and in our "quality of place" if we allow our community's destiny to be determined by forces beyond our control or by people for whom this region has no meaning. This extraordinary Strategic Plan represents the most logical, effective way to influence the future we want...and our children and grandchildren deserve. In these times of economic uncertainty, it also represents a tremendous opportunity. Because we have not been as severely impacted by the "ups and downs" of a volatile economy, we can – and should – push forward, while other communities retreat and retrench. Now is the time for the leadership in our region to come together, expand this public / private partnership, and invest in a shared future of growth and prosperity for our cities, county and region.

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