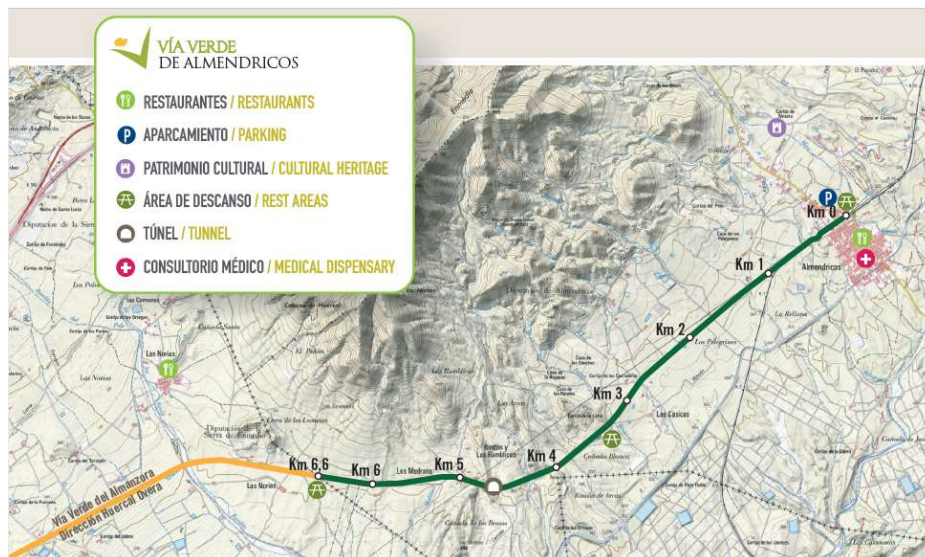


RECONDITIONING OF VÍA VERDE DE ALMENDRICOS

The so-called “**Vías Verdes**” or rail trails are former disused railway tracks reconditioned as ecotourism routes for walking or cycling. Thanks to their accessibility, ease and safety, with hardly any inclines and isolated from motor traffic, they are especially appealing to anyone who wants to discover the natural environment and cultural heritage of the towns and territories they cross.

Reconditioning works of the rail trail have consisted of: stabilising the road surface, repairing ditches, marking dangerous areas and installing safety elements, installing signs and signals, planting trees, and creating two small rest areas along the path as well as a big area next to the Almendricos station.



The eligible costs of the operation amounted to 273,920€, 219,136€ of which came from the ERDF’s aid.

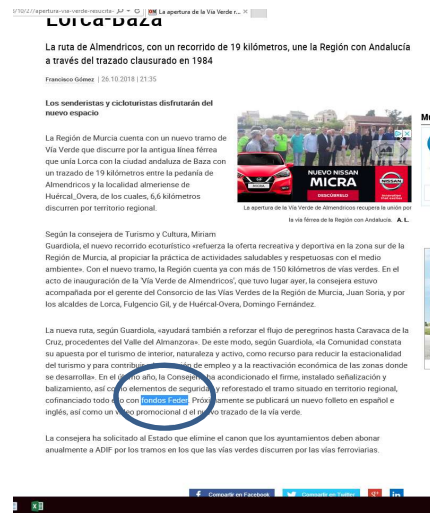
Thanks to the ERDF’s aid **6.6 kilometres** of Vía Verde de Almendricos have been reconditioned, connecting to the 12 km route of the “Vía Verde de Almanzora”, therefore contributing to the creation of a path for pedestrians and cyclists of nearly 19 km between the towns of Huércal-Overa and Almendricos.

This initiative has created tourism for Almendricos, which was until now a remote town off the beaten path, and is now contributing to interregional integration with the Andalusian region of Valle de Almanzora. This results in a higher capacity to attract visitors, and has a **positive impact** on business and employment opportunities (hotel industry, shops, organization of activities on the rail trail, etc.).

It is considered a Good Practice since it meets the following requirements:

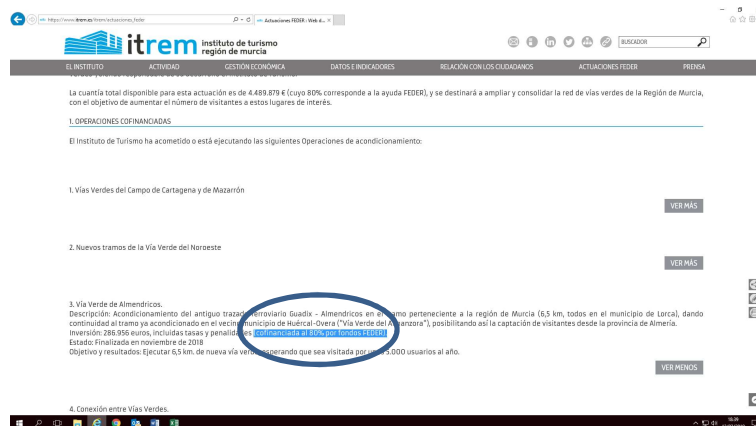
1. The initiative has been properly publicised among the beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries and the general public

The reconditioning of Vía Verde de Almendricos has been disseminated by the Tourism Institute with different communication actions:



Press release

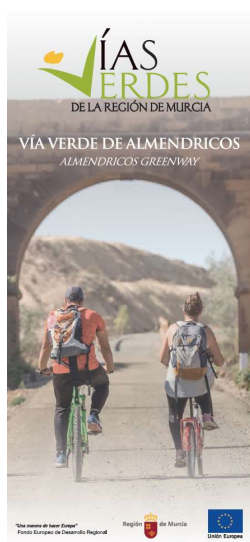
<https://www.laopiniondemurcia.es/municipios/2018/10/27/apertura-via-verde-resucita-antigua/966829.html>



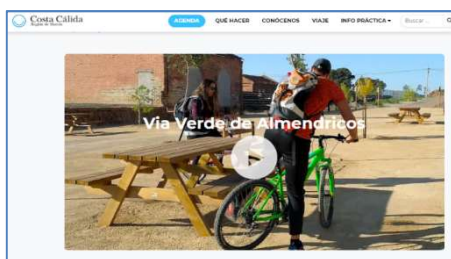
Webpages

https://www.itrem.es/itrem/actuaciones_feder

Opening ceremony attended by authorities, media (radio, press and television), neighbours and hikers from the region of Almanzora (Amigos del Camino de Santiago “Almería Jacobea” Association).



Leaflet publication



Informative video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_BKjx43Vwc

2. The initiative included innovative elements

An innovative **soil system** was used, which is completely innocuous to the environment and very long-lasting, reducing maintenance needs. Moreover, with this surface no dust is generated when going along the path, and it is perfectly chromatically integrated in the natural environment.



Another innovative element was the installation of a **technological meter** that detects and differentiates the number of pedestrians and cyclists, distinguishing those going in one direction or the other. It works without being connected to the mains (which makes it easy to place in natural environments), it can be concealed inside a wooden post (to prevent vandalism) and it has software which allows the data to be processed by a computer. With this kind of system you can register the number of users that have passed through that part of the rail trail, thus providing very useful information to assess the results obtained from the investment made with the aid of the ERDF.

3. The results obtained met the established objectives

The **objectives** of the Initiative were to recondition 6.6 kilometres of unused railway as a rail trail for pedestrians and cyclists and to have 5,000 new users a year.

The **result** has indeed been the reconditioning of those **6.6 kilometres** and regarding the **number of users**, from August to December 2018, 12,152 users were recorded, which largely exceeded the initial objective and showed the positive reception of this infrastructure.



4. Contribution to solving a problem or regional weakness

With this initiative, one of the actions laid out in the “*Strategy for sustainable development of the Vías Verdes in the Region of Murcia 2014-2020*” is executed. The incorporation of this new rail trail promotes rural and leisure tourism in the natural environment, which contributes to the **diversification of the regional touristic model** (still very dependent on the “sun and beach”), one of the big challenges in the “*Strategic Plan of the Region of Murcia 2014-2020*”.



With the reconditioning of rail trails, the **growing social demand for “soft” infrastructures** for outdoor activities (hiking, cycling...) has been addressed. They allow for going into different regions and enjoying landscapes and towns in a peaceful and respectful way (a trend that is beginning to be known as “slow tourism”).

5. High accessibility for the population at which it was aimed

The reconditioning of Vía Verde de Almendricos is aimed not only at **hikers and cyclists from the Region of Murcia**, but also at **users from other regions** attracted by the “*Vía Verde*” idea (people who like exploring different Spanish rail trails).

Due to its proximity to the coast, it is also expected that **national and foreign tourists staying in coastal areas** of Aguilas and Almería will use it as a leisure activity in addition to “sun and beach” (the reason why the leaflet is both in Spanish and English).

This rail trail is also used by **pilgrims** from the area of Almería to go to Caravaca de la Cruz or even to Santiago de Compostela (“Camino del Argar”).

Finally the **locals of Almendricos and Huércal-Overa** are also the direct beneficiaries of this infrastructure, frequently using it for leisurely walk.



6. Observance of cross-cutting criteria of equal opportunity and non-discrimination, as well as social responsibility and environmental sustainability

The rail trails are **non-discriminatory** by nature, and can be used equally by men and women. The wide and relatively flat path is very comfortable and safe for people with reduced mobility. Moreover, its public use is open to all and free of charge.

Furthermore, this rail trail meets the requirements of **environmental sustainability**, since it is not inside any protected spaces, or negatively affecting the environment. On the contrary, it reuses a disused infrastructure with the advantage of not causing any impact because it is already integrated into its natural surroundings.



7. Synergies with other politics or instruments of public intervention

This initiative is included in the regional policy for the development of rail trails, reinforced in 2003 with the creation of an “ad-hoc” Consortium made up of the regional Administration (led by the department of Tourism) and the municipalities involved. Therefore, the Tourism Institute assigned Vía Verde de Almedricos to this Consortium – **Consortio de las Vías Verdes de la Región de Murcia** – so that it can manage and maintain it.



On the other hand, Vía Verde de Almedricos is set to become part of a pilgrimage path to the holy city of Caravaca de la Cruz starting from the area of Almería, which is included in the ambitious project “**Camino de la Cruz de Caravaca**” promoted by the Tourism Institute to encourage touristic development in the interior of the region, by drawing together religious, cultural, rural, active and natural tourism.