

Purpose:

The purpose of this feasibility study is to determine the viability to extend a trail connector route between the Three Rivers Heritage Trail in the City of Pittsburgh, west along the Ohio River, toward Coraopolis Borough. The route traverses through several neighboring communities and connects to the Montour Trail at Allegheny County's Sports & Athletic Complex at Montour Junction.

The project is a collaboration between Stowe Township, Friends of the Riverfront, the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and Allegheny County to bring together seven local communities, municipal leaders, residents, trail and cycle enthusiasts, community groups, developers and business owners. This multi-municipal effort encompasses the City of Pittsburgh, McKees Rocks, Stowe, Kennedy, Neville, Robinson, and Coraopolis and includes many local community groups.

This project serves all members of the community by providing safe and accessible facilities for people who walk and people who ride bikes to work, to school, to shops and to services. This project is a key link between interstate trail networks, and it also connects Pittsburgh's west end neighborhoods to the City. ***The west end includes many people who do not own a car and, with the reduction of transit routes, these neighborhoods are in need of other transportation choices.***

Constructing roadways for all modes of travel (including walking and bicycling) increases access opportunities to employment centers and community resources. A walk-able and bike-able community offers multiple transportation choices to all citizens regardless of age, ability or socio-economic status, and provides for healthier travel choices. This is low cost infrastructure to 'move' your community.

The feasibility study proposes improvements to the existing sidewalk system, upgrades at intersections and crossings, and an on-road system for cyclists using shared lane markings, separated bike lanes, and regulatory signing. The recommended improvements comply with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations.





Existing Corridor Conditions:

The Ohio River valley corridor is confined by steep cliffs, railroads, river banks, narrow roadway corridors, and heavy traffic conditions including trucks and buses. Traffic speeds along State Route 51 are greater than posted limits and volumes are high during peak use hours. The property along the river is owned by multiple owners and by CSX Railroad. The riverbank geography is steeply sloped, wooded and narrow; several river locations are used by barge traffic for docking and access; and the banks are separated from the adjacent community by an active railroad. Given these conditions, an 'on-road' bike route connector was investigated.

The proposed trail connector route is an on-road system that accommodates walkers and bicyclists. The bike route alignment proposes two types of routes:

- Preferred Route
- Local Loop Route

Each route offers pedestrians and bicyclists a choice to travel- 'straight through' or to 'connect to community services/facilities'. ***This project is an opportunity to reconnect communities through improvements for both walkers and bikers to safely link our homes to places of employment, services, shops and points of interest.***

Municipalities should consider all new road projects, including resurfacing projects, as an opportunity to provide for all modes of transportation- pedestrian, bicycles and automobiles. This will ensure a complete system for transportation and offer our citizens choices to move through the community and between communities. Many of the improvement can be accomplished through a 'road-diet' and the addition of a bike lane, or a shared lane marking.



By reconstructing bike-able and walk-able communities each town is providing for all citizens regardless of age, ability or income level; and they are positioning their town to attract new residents, travelers, and businesses.

Recommendations:

The 11.79 mile alignment is proposed as an on-road bicycle route extending through neighboring communities. The route travels through each community as opposed to bypassing the community along the river bank or along a hillside terrace. This provides each town with needed infrastructure improvements, safety upgrades, and the opportunity to capitalize on being a 'trail town' and benefiting from commuters, and a growing outdoor recreation and heritage tourism market.

Recommendations include attainable route solutions for implementing the project:

1. Preferred Route – directs walkers & bicyclists between Pittsburgh and Coraopolis. This route includes a combination of on-road bike lanes and bike shared lane markings; along with sidewalk and accessible crossing improvements.
2. Local Loop Route – connects walkers and bicyclists to homes, restaurants, shops and businesses in the community.

Specific Improvements Include:

1. ADA Improvements for Pedestrians
2. Repaired Sidewalks
3. Intersection Upgrades at Crossings
4. Shared Lane Markings (SLM)- a share the road condition
5. Bike Lanes
6. Bicycle Tracks (a protected & separated track)
7. Regulatory & Wayfinding Signs
8. Trailheads
9. Bicycle Parking

The study includes estimates for construction, potential funding sources, and links to organizations offering technical data, education, enforcement, and fund raising assistance. The report also provides contact information for communities to adopt a complete streets policy, to become a bicycle friendly and walk-able community, and to market themselves as such.

The majority of the route, 9 miles, from the McKees Rocks to Coraopolis is estimated at \$1 million. Most of the improvements include a ramp connection to the Montour Trail, and roadway signs, pavement markings, sidewalks, intersection crossings, shoulder paving, and traffic signal improvements. The study also includes a detailed cost estimate for a protected pedestrian-bicycle track along a portion of West Carson Street- from the Pacific Pride Gas station to the beginning of the new West Carson Street design.

A vital link in the project, and most costly, is the 2.5 mile section from Pittsburgh’s Station Square driveway to the McKees Rocks. This section includes the newly designed West Carson Street by PennDOT. The preferred bicycle route improvements are estimated at an additional \$2.5 and \$5 million for the construction of a protected pedestrian-bicycle track or a combination track and shared lane marking system. Completion of a protected and separated track would significantly increase the bicycle level of service and the number of users, both local commuters and visitors, traveling to and spending money in the City of Pittsburgh and in it’s neighborhoods.

Benefits of the Project:

Why provide for bicycling and walking in your community? Many of our western Pennsylvania town’s have been bisected by railroads and highways projects. Providing safe places to walk and ride bicycles helps to re-connect communities and offers alternatives for people get to work, to school, to shops, and to commute locally. And, encouraging walking and bicycling is a simple way towards improving public health. With more people walking and biking, a community experiences reduced traffic demands, improved air quality and greater physical fitness.

We recommend that the town council review and adopt a Complete Streets Policy directing all newly constructed and reconstructed roadways to be designed for safe and accessible travel for pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles.

More information about a Complete Streets policy can be found in the Smart Growth America’s Complete Streets, Local Policy Workbook at:

<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/cs/resources/cs-policyworkbook.pdf>





Once complete, **this project will become THE LINK in a multi-state trail system**, placing Pittsburgh Pennsylvania in the middle- the keystone- between the states of Maryland, Ohio, West Virginia and New York. Completion of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail Connector will strengthen the link between our nation’s capital and our great Midwest.



Creating a safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle route between Pittsburgh’s west end neighborhoods and the downtown is a low cost infrastructure improvement that will serve all citizens in our community. This is truly a project that can help people commute to places of employment, education, services and shops.

In addition, communities with walk-able and bike-able streets become places with a higher quality of life, where people want to visit, live and work. Rebuilding such a place can translate into a more connected, physically active, and an environmentally sustainable community that enjoys increased property values, business growth, increased tourism, and more transportation choices for all citizens.



Implementation:

We recommend municipalities consider all new infrastructure projects, roadway maintenance, resurfacing, repair projects, and site development projects as an opportunity to improve community connections for all modes of transportation.

Roadway projects should consider provisions for ‘road diets’ (to 11’ lanes), wider shoulders, bike lanes, bicycle shared lane markings, intersection crossing (ADA) improvements, and sidewalk extensions to re-connect the street grid. Some projects can be completed by local volunteer groups, others by local departments of public works and larger projects by the State Highway Administration- depending on the roadway jurisdiction and total project impact and cost. The report lists specific projects, costs, priorities, and funding sources for implementation.

The Next Steps:

- Promote and host bicycling events in your town
 - Dove-tail cycling tours with existing events (festivals, carnivals & fundraisers)
 - Coordinate with Bike Pittsburgh, SPC, the ORT and MTC Councils, and local cycling enthusiasts to help promote, lead and educate during the event
- Begin fund raising and implementation of the walking and cycling projects
- Appoint responsible members to implement and maintain designated routes
- Plan, permit and construct bike and walking routes



Mackin Engineering Company, 412.788.0472
www.mackinengineering.com