Ohio River South Shore Trail Feasibility Study

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# Ohio River South Shore Trail Feasibility Study

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The communities of: The City of Aliquippa, Monaca Borough, Center Township, Hopewell Township, South Heights Borough, Crescent Township, Moon Township and Coraopolis Borough. The ORSST corridor roughly parallels today’s CSX Railroad’s mainline corridor from Pittsburgh to Ohio and follows the former Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad’s mainline.

Project Goals:

Goal #1: Establish the Spine - Establish a dedicated linear trail, paralleling and located as close to the Ohio River as possible, from the existing Montour Trail to the Monaca Rochester Bridge crossing in Monaca Borough.

Goal #2: Maximize the Overall Potential Community, Transportation and Economic Impact - Design a trail in a manner that best serves the needs of regional users, businesses, employers, and property owners.
Executive Summary

While this project focuses on the eight ORSST communities, it is important to consider the ultimate trail, as a whole, when considering management, operations and partnerships strategies. By establishing an effective and creative approach to management rooted in collaboration, additional partners and resources can be folded in as the trail is extended. The eight communities within the South Shore Feasibility study area span two counties, Beaver and Allegheny, and have a combined population of over 75,000 and range in population size from 542 to 22,290 residents. The level of municipal staffing, budget and capacity for maintenance and operations vary widely by jurisdiction. By working together in developing, operating and maintaining the Ohio River Trail, the municipalities will be able to develop and operate the trail as a premiere recreation facility that will be an important asset of the region.

As one of the leaders of the ORSST study effort, the ORTC is a non-profit corporation well suited to serve as the umbrella organization for the management of the ORSST. Already in place with a positive public image, the ORTC could help to carry out the intergovernmental agreement for the trail development and operation. The ORTC already provides a management foundation to the municipalities in the trail corridor in terms of getting it up and running. The ORTC could serve in a leadership role in all facets of trail planning, development and operation in the corridor, thereby providing expertise and support that the municipalities may not have on their own.

A sample intergovernmental agreement for the ORSST communities is provided in Appendix A of this document and is intended to be used as a model to further partnership discussions.
Project Background, Public Planning Process and Vision

Project Background

The Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC) proposes a multi-use trail, the Ohio River Trail (ORT), along the “La Belle Riviere” or the Ohio River and its tributaries from West Virginia and Ohio to Beaver and Allegheny County, Pa.

The Ohio River Trail Corridor is located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and includes up to twenty-six (26) Western Pennsylvania Communities. There are eleven North Shore communities and nine South Shore communities. There are also four communities included in the North Shore extension and two in the Brady’s Run Extension.

The communities within the Ohio River Trail South Shore Trail (ORSST) Feasibility Study includes eight of the nine overall South Shore communities: Monaca Borough, Center Township, the City of Aliquippa, Hopewell Township, South Heights Borough, Crescent Township, Moon Township and Corapolis Borough. The ORSST corridor roughly parallels today’s CSX Railroad’s mainline corridor from Pittsburgh to Ohio and follows the former Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Railroad’s mainline.


The ORTC is in support of a growing national movement to develop greenways, especially since 1987 when President Reagan’s Commission on American Outdoors recommended establishing a national greenways network. Greenways are often accomplished and managed through partnerships between municipalities, counties, and non-profit organizations. Pennsylvania’s statewide Greenways Program was established by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge in 2001 to promote and support the many local and regional greenway efforts in all 67 counties. The vision is to create a network of greenways throughout the Commonwealth, with a greenway in every community by 2020.

The City of Aliquippa, on behalf of the eight South Shore municipalities, and in partnership with Beaver County and the ORTC, took the lead in obtaining a Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2) grant to fund the undertaking of the ORSST Feasibility Study. Matching funds were obtained through contributions, both monetarily and through in-kind services, by each of the participating municipalities.

The ORSST Feasibility Study builds upon the tradition of community based planning that has been led and promoted by Beaver and Allegheny Counties, as well as all of the eight communities within the study area. Beaver and Allegheny Counties have recently completed major regional planning efforts that address trail planning elements as well as parks, recreation, open space preservation and the protection and improvement of the Ohio River.

Beaver County’s 2010 Comprehensive Plan and its 2007 Greenways and Trails Plan establish strong goals and recommendations that support the planning, design and implementation of new trails throughout the County. These recommendations set the framework for the ORSST Feasibility Study effort.
Project Background, Public Planning Process and Vision

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Allegheny County, Places is the County’s 2008 Comprehensive Plan and is the County’s first comprehensive plan. The plan established an overall vision for the County’s future and series of policies and actions to achieve the vision. The plan’s unifying theme is supporting and enhancing “places” throughout the County through quality-of-life improvements. The plan specifically promotes the development of extensive greenways to connect communities with parks, trails, riverfronts and other natural amenities. In addition, Allegheny’s Riverfronts, A Progress Report on Municipal Riverfront Development in Allegheny County, 2009, is a report prepared as a joint effort between Allegheny County, Friends of the Riverfront and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. The document examines the diverse riverfront community development opportunities that exist, including ways to balance the industrial needs of the region’s rivers with the potential to provide continual access along the four rivers in Allegheny County. It also explores the goal of providing positive non-motorized recreational experiences on and along the rivers, especially the Ohio River.

Public Planning Process

Community Participation

The trail planning process included a series of public involvement activities as part of the overall ORSST Feasibility Study preparation. The community input and education for the ORSST Feasibility Study was conducted primarily through steering committee meetings, key person interviews and two public meetings, as well as through a municipal leaders/stakeholders targeted survey and a project website managed by the Ohio River Trail Council.

Project Steering Committee

The project steering committee includes representative members from each of the eight municipalities as well as from other key public agencies and major stakeholder groups. Many of the members of the steering committee are also active in other local or regional planning efforts and provided valuable insight and direction throughout the planning, alternative review and recommendation development process.

Public Meetings

The first public meeting was a public open house and presentation held on March 10th, 2010 at the Community College of Beaver County Learning Resource Center in Center Township. The goal of this meeting was to introduce the project to the community and interested stakeholders, obtain feedback on the proposed project vision and goals and determine potential route alternatives to study.

The second public meeting was a public open house held on April 14th, 2010 at the Moon Township Municipal Building. The open house format of this meeting consisted of a series of information stations grouped by the six trail planning sections established to aid in the organization of data, analysis, alternative evaluations and proposed trail recommendations. Meeting attendees were provided the opportunity to comment and physically mark-up drawings and maps at each work station as a way to record all community comments, concerns, ideas and areas where more information was needed. The outcome of this meeting, along with feedback from the project steering committee, resulted in the proposed Ohio River South Shore Trail route presented in Chapter 2 of this document.

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Municipal Leaders Survey

A four page survey was distributed to elected officials, key staff and other identified stakeholders. The survey questionnaire included questions which gauged the current status and need for trails and other parks, recreational, open space and multi-modal transportation facilities and resources within each respective municipality. The survey also asked each respondent to assess their community’s desire for the creation of new trails within their community and the region, as well as their willingness to support, including economically, the construction of a trail along the Ohio River as well the expansion of public access to the river. The results of this survey were partly used to develop trail route recommendation as well as the ownership, management and maintenance recommendations presented in Chapter 4 of this document.

Ohio River Trail Project Website

The Ohio River Trail Council maintains a project website which allows all interested parties access to information on the Ohio River South Shore Trail Feasibility Study as well as providing project updates and meeting notices. It can be viewed at: www.ohiorivertrail.org.

Vision Statement and Project Goals

Ohio River Trail Vision Statement: The communities of: The City of Aliquippa, Monaca Borough, Center Township, Hopewell Township, South Heights Borough, Crescent Township, Moon Township and Coraopolis Borough will all be interconnected by a contiguous linear trail spine that links these communities with local and regional trail networks in an effort to support each community’s initiatives to promote economic development, expand transportation options, provide additional recreation opportunities and enhance the overall quality-of-life for all residents.

Project Goals:

Goal #1: Establish the Spine—Establish a dedicated linear trail, paralleling and located as close to the Ohio River as possible, from the existing Montour Trail to the Monaca Rochester Bridge crossing in Monaca Borough.

Goal #2: Maximize the Overall Potential Community, Transportation and Economic Impact—Design a trail in a manner that best serves the needs of regional users, businesses, employers, and property owners.

Goal #3: Make Physical Progress in Both the Short and Long Terms—Determine the most viable route for a linear trail or network of trail segments that can be implemented within the shortest period of time and identify the preferred ultimate alignment, that can be created over time.

Goal #4: Develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Friendly Culture throughout Each of the Communities —Identify a trail feeder system of on-street bicycle and pedestrian connectivity in order to maximize the ability of local residents to access the trail and the riverfront and also provide a means for regional users to reach local businesses, destinations and attractions.

Goal #5: Reconnect the Community to the River’s Edge—Utilize the trail as an impetus for a regional greenway network of diverse publicly accessible lands, parks, recreation facilities and historic and cultural activity settings/sites along the Ohio River -i.e. make the Ohio River edge as publicly accessible as possible within each community and as a linear greenway network, while balancing the needs for preserving existing and future redevelopment.