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Airport section of Montour Trail set for opening

6.3-mile segment will be ready March 20

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By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Bob Donaldson/Post-Gazette

The Montour Trail's Airport Connector crosses Airport Boulevard. Warning lights protect the crossing.

The Montour Trail has scheduled the grand opening of a 6.3-mile segment connecting to Pittsburgh International Airport for the first day of spring, March 20.

Trail and airport officials quietly implemented a "soft" opening of the new segment in December. The Airport Connector runs from the Five Points intersection of Cliff Mine and Enlow roads and Main Street, on the North Fayette -Findlay line near mile 8 of the trail, to the extended-term parking lot at the airport.

The connector has been in the works for more than a decade. Montour Trail board member Tim Killmeyer said his first inquiry to airport officials was in February 2001. Months later, security concerns in the wake of 9/11 put the idea on hold. "We thought it wouldn't take this long. [The attacks] really put a wrench into things," he said.

Aside from some signage and mile markers, work on the new segment is complete and it is open to the public.

Much of the connector uses existing paved roads, and two sections will have public vehicular traffic on them. It also uses stretches of road that are open only to airport personnel. A $57,000 grant from the Allegheny Regional Asset District paid for construction of a section of new trail in the airport parking lot and a pedestrian signal where it crosses Airport Boulevard.

In messages to trail enthusiasts, Mr. Killmeyer has emphasized that because much of the connector is on airport property, it is essential that users stay on the trail and not wander or loiter, lest they draw the eye of Allegheny County police and federal Homeland Security forces.

"Unless you have a thing for cavity searches, you might want to pay special attention to this one," he said in one message. "Most of the side roads have signs that say 'No Montour Trail Traffic' and you will want to mind those as well."

From the existing Montour Trail, the connector starts on Enlow Road going northwest. It veers left at Clinton Enlow Road, which is closed to traffic except airport vehicles. Trail users can bypass the gate there. Paralleling the Airport Expressway (Interstate 376), and passing under five towering concrete bridges that connect the expressway to the Southern Beltway, it continues to McCaslin Road, eventually reaching another gate and a short residential section.

After that, riders will travel a brief distance in traffic on Clinton and Moon Clinton roads, crossing the bridge over the expressway. Mr. Killmeyer said that section has a fairly wide shoulder and "if you're used to riding on the roads, it's not a bad ride."

That leads to another gate and another stretch of road closed to public vehicular traffic, which loops near Runway 10L and into the airport parking lot, finishing at the far end of the concourse with the moving sidewalks that connects to the landside building. Bike racks have been installed there.

Mr. Killmeyer said the trail council gets lots of calls during the riding season from visiting bicyclists wanting to know how to get to the trail from the airport. The link also will be useful to people planning long cycling adventures. They can park in the secure extended-term lot at the airport or, if visiting from elsewhere, transport their bikes in a rental vehicle and drop it off at the airport, he said.

The opening ceremony will be at 11 a.m. March 20 at the airport. The Pittsburgh Major Taylor Bicycle Club is planning to lead riders to the event, starting from the Five Points end at about 10 a.m.

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