

[South](#)  
[Washington](#)  
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## Bridges are boon for Montour Trail, but barriers to completion remain

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By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Montour Trail has scheduled ceremonies to celebrate progress in closing three gaps along its 46-mile route, but it may take years to fill one of its most conspicuous missing links.

The J.R. Taylor Memorial Bridge over Clifton Road in Bethel Park will be dedicated at noon Sunday, and groundbreakings are set in October for bridges over Morganza and Georgetown roads in Cecil.

But plans to build a bridge at the Routes 50-980 intersection farther west on the trail in Cecil must wait until the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation moves ahead with a project to realign the intersection.

Ned Williams, president of the Montour Trail Council, told the Pennsylvania State Transportation Commission at a hearing last week that the council is eager to move ahead with the bridge so bicyclists and other trail users don't have to cross traffic.

"It's an ugly intersection. There's a lot of near-misses there and a lot of crashes there," he told the commission, which is considering updates to the state's long-range transportation plan.

The problem has only gotten worse with truck traffic from Washington County's booming gas drilling industry, Mr. Williams said.

He said the trail council is prepared to pay for and erect the bridge in tandem with the PennDOT project, which would realign Route 980 so it forms a conventional intersection with Route 50.

Valerie Petersen, spokeswoman for PennDOT District 12, said the department is preparing to advertise for a design consultant. "It looks like three to four years until it comes into the construction phase," she said Monday.

The region's four-year Transportation Improvement Program shows construction scheduled to begin in 2014 but identifies only \$2.3 million toward the \$3.6 million estimated cost of the intersection project.

The trail council built a wooden stairway with a bike rail on the west side of the intersection in 2009 to make it easier for trail users to descend to the grade level and cross. The site is at trail mile 21.9.

The bridge in Bethel Park will be dedicated on what would have been Mr. Taylor's 51st birthday. The former superintendent of Century Steel Erectors died in May 2004 in an accident while doing yard work.

Since then, the company and Mr. Taylor's family have worked to raise money for the bridge, and volunteer ironworkers erected it this summer. The bridge completes the 2.7-mile Bethel Park branch of the trail, which stretches from the Arrowhead Trail in Peters to Irishtown and Logan roads in Bethel Park.

The trail council will break ground Oct. 15 for the bridges over Morganza Road at mile 27.1 and Georgetown Road at mile 27.3, Mr. Williams said. They are scheduled to open in midsummer next year.

The Montour Trail runs from Moon to Clairton. About 40 of the 46 miles are completed.

Remaining incomplete sections are along Valleybrook Road near Route 19 in Peters, east of Route 88 in Bethel Park and South Park, along Piney Fork Road in South Park and along Peters Creek Road in Jefferson Hills.

The trail also is adding two spurs: One in Findlay that will connect the main trail with Pittsburgh International Airport is expected to be completed this fall, Mr. Williams said.

A three- to four-mile branch in Washington County that is being developed in partnership with an energy company may be complete by late next year. It would run from near the Route 50-980 intersection to the MarkWest Energy processing plant near Houston, Pa.



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