

Consider Reuse Of Old Bridge - News, Sports, Jobs - The Intelligencer / Wheeling News-Register

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On both sides of the Ohio River trails dedicated to walkers, joggers and bicyclists have expanded greatly during the past few years. The trails have become very popular and, to some extent, are boons to the local economy. They will become even more important in the future, as they expand and link to networks in other areas.

But linking trails in this area involves overcoming a rather substantial obstacle - the Ohio River. Members of the Ohio Valley Trail Partners this week suggested what sounds like a good way to accomplish that.

The old Aetnaville Bridge, linking Wheeling Island with southern Martins Ferry, should be preserved for "hiking/biking" use, the Trail Partners suggested during a Wheeling City Council meeting.

Closed for many years, the bridge is unsafe for vehicular traffic. It may well be usable for pedestrians and bicyclists, however.

As City Manager Robert Herron noted during the council meeting, the span is the property of the West Virginia Division of Highways. The agency's plans for the bridge are not known - though it might reasonably be expected the DOH's long-term strategy calls for demolishing the structure.

As members of the Trail Partners group noted, there are no other good routes for a hiking/biking trail across the back channel of the river at Wheeling Island. The relatively new vehicle bridge, a few hundred feet downstream from the Aetnaville span, is used extensively and probably is not a good alternative.

Whether the Aetnaville Bridge can be preserved - and at what cost - is a question DOH engineers will have to address. We encourage them to do so. The Trail Partners' idea sounds like a good one and should be pursued.