

Funding secured for last bike trail missing link

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By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

State Sen. Jay Costa Jr. today announced a \$750,000 grant that will be used to complete the last missing segment of the Great Allegheny Passage biking/hiking trail.

When that segment is finished, a continuous trail will stretch from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C.

Officials in October announced that they had finally completed lengthy negotiations with Sandcastle Waterpark and CSX Railroad for easements that would allow the trail to cross their property.

Their hope was to complete the last segment by 11-11-11: Nov. 11, 2011.

In a statement announcing the grant, Mr. Costa said: "We've worked hard to revitalize the area that was hit so hard by the departure of the Homestead Works. These efforts are paying off, and completion of this trail is a huge win for the folks who work and play here. Not only is this a valuable resource for those who will be able to spend quality time outdoors, but the economic impact this trail has on the area can't be overstated. It attracts over 700,000 visitors every year, who spend millions of dollars and help to fuel the area's turnaround."

"The completion of the Great Allegheny Passage is a transformational moment for our region, both economically and recreationally," said Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato. "This trail has been improving the economy and quality of life in towns throughout the Laurel Highlands and Southwestern Pennsylvania, and now its benefits will spread north through the Mon Valley and into the City of Pittsburgh."

Linda McKenna Boxx, president of the Allegheny Trail Alliance, said "there will be a significant jump in traffic once the last link to Pittsburgh is completed. The trail is truly having an economic impact in the communities through which it passes, and we look forward to revitalization in the Mon Valley communities. Pittsburgh will truly become a biking Mecca."

The 150-mile Great Allegheny Passage connects in Cumberland, Md., with the C&O Towpath to Washington.

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