

## **Pittsburgh-to-D.C. passage becomes even more attractive**

By Ashley Gold  
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Soon, a bike ride from the Steel City to the nation's capital will be easier to navigate.

In the past, bikers started their journey on the 400-mile Great Allegheny Passage either in Washington or at Pittsburgh's main access point in McKeesport. This fall, however, that will change.

Hannah Hardy, vice president of the Allegheny Trail Alliance, said crews are working hard to complete two more access points, at the Waterfront and in the city of Duquesne.

"Folks will be able to ride from the city of Duquesne at Grant Avenue -- half a mile toward Pittsburgh all the way to Washington, D.C.," Hardy said. "I think there's been a lot of activity, and there will be a lot more activity in completing the Great Allegheny Passage. ... Very exciting for us who have been involved."

Judy Melvin, a board member for Friends of the Riverfront, which is working on the project along with the alliance, Steel Valley Trail Council and Allegheny County, has ridden the trail about seven times, and called the experience one unlike any other. When those from out of town come to Pittsburgh via the trail, the city gets a chance to show off.

"You're gonna go see the museums, go to a ballgame, you're gonna want to really experience the city and stay here a night or two," Melvin said. "It becomes a tourism thing. It puts Pittsburgh more on the map for biking."

Two bridges are under construction to connect the trail to the Waterfront and Duquesne along the Norfolk Southern Railroad. At the end of August, ramps will be put up to connect the bridges to the ground.

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, federal money, the Allegheny Regional Asset District and a mix of private foundations are funding the work. The bridges and ramps will cost about \$4 million, and the 2-mile trail along the Coke Gas pipeline connecting the bridges will cost about \$1.2 million.

"To me, it's a travel adventure where you can get out and be totally self-powered, and go on a vacation," said Troy Bogdan, 42, of Bridgeville, who also enjoys biking the 46-mile Montour Trail from Moon to Clairton. "You see nature and history, and those are things that I enjoy."

Tom Baxter of Friends of the Riverfront said the Great Allegheny Passage -- which connects to the Chesapeake and Ohio Towpath in Maryland -- is raising Pittsburgh's profile.

"Just recently within the last year, we've seen a lot more people taking a week off, starting in D.C. and coming to Pittsburgh for their vacations," Baxter said. "Pittsburgh is becoming a destination for people from D.C."

To others from major metropolitan areas, Pittsburgh is one of the few cities with public riverfronts, with green spaces that make up the riverfronts, Baxter said. Other cities have green space, but Pittsburgh's 22-mile stretches are unique, he said.

"We take it for granted here, but it is truly amazing," Baxter said.

When people travel on the Great Allegheny Passage, they're focused on the journey, not the destination, Baxter said. Travelers usually choose to go 20-30 miles a day, many stopping at bed-and-breakfast inns along the way. The quality, cleanliness or safety of the trail -- which is mostly made of crushed limestone -- has never been an issue, he said.

What makes the trail such a unique destination for cyclists and travelers has to do with its variety, Baxter said.

"I think it's the fact that you're going through ... canals, railroads, communities with high historical significance and recreation," Baxter said. "It has a little bit of everything for everybody."

Melvin describes the experience of biking the trail as a relaxing one, a way to disconnect from technology and everyday hassles.

"It just really touches my soul."

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