

# PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

## Trail-bridge funding next for Riverlife nonprofit

By Tom Fontaine

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A Pittsburgh nonprofit applied this week for the first building permits related to a \$3 million project that would plug a large hole in the city's riverfront trail system.

Downtown-based Riverlife Pittsburgh now needs to plug a large hole in funding for the project.

To date, Riverlife has raised about \$2 million to build the Mon Wharf Switchback, said spokesman Stephan Bontrager. The project will connect the Smithfield Street Bridge to the Mon Wharf Landing and Eliza Furnace Trail below for pedestrians and bicyclists.

"I can't speculate how the (funding) gap will be made up," Bontrager said. "We're hoping the community will come forward to support this project, as it has so far."

About two-thirds of the money raised has come from foundations and individuals; the rest is from public agencies. This month, the Allegheny Regional Asset District announced plans to put \$100,000 in public money toward the project over the next two years.

Currently, bicyclists and pedestrians must use a steep set of stairs off the bridge or a steep vehicle ramp to the Mon Wharf Landing. The switchback will provide a gently sloped, U-shaped path from the bridge to the trails below, and a new set of stairs will be constructed.

Also in the works, as a separate project, is a plan to create a better connection from the western end of the Mon Wharf riverfront park and trail to Point State Park. The only path now is four feet wide and separated from highway traffic by a concrete barrier and from the Monongahela River by a chain-link fence.

Bontrager said the Point State Park Connector project is expected to cost another \$3 million.

Once completed, pedestrians and bicyclists on the Great Allegheny Passage will be able to get to the Point without having to get off their bikes in Pittsburgh or navigate what can be treacherous city streets.

"This is the missing link," said Scott Bricker, executive director of the Lawrenceville-based advocacy group Bike Pittsburgh. "These are important projects."

A Riverlife study released this fall predicted that the switchback, connector and planned Allegheny Riverfront Trail in the Strip District and Lawrenceville would

result in more than 16,000 people switching from the roads to the trails for the bulk of their transportation needs. That would mean less traffic congestion and pollution and reduced transportation costs for those who use the trails, the study said.

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