



Urban part of bike trail set to open

By [Ed Runyan](#)

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By ED RUNYAN

runyan@vindy.com

WARREN

After years of planning, Warren will open the most urban part of the 100-mile Great Ohio Lake-To-River Greenway through the city this year.

Niles will complete the 4.5-mile section from the Mahoning-Trumbull County line in Austintown to Robbins Avenue in Niles.

Trail advocates say completing the two sections is important mainly because it brings the trail — a potential recreational and tourist attraction — two steps closer to completion.

But it might also create in Warren an opportunity for riders to experience something they won't see in most other parts of the trail: industrial, residential and commercial parts of a city.

Charlie Kohli of Harpersfield, Ohio, a longtime trail advocate, said the 3.9-mile Warren trail will give riders a chance to see "a city at work — an urban area where the population is concentrated. It could be an eye-opening experience."

Kohli is a member of the Ashtabula County MetroParks Board, which built 27 miles of trail on an abandoned rail bed starting on the south side of the city of Ashtabula, 41½ miles south of Lake Erie, and passing through miles of woods, a bridge and a tunnel to the Trumbull County line.

Trumbull County extended the trail 14 more miles through the rural northern part of the county to Champion Avenue in Champion.

"It's a unique experience," Kohli said of riding the Warren trail expected to be ready this year. "It's urban instead of the birds and the bees."

Warren's trail will utilize some virgin land on the north end of town, then pass through North End Park just west of North Park Avenue and follow Paige Street south alongside the former Packard Electric plant on Dana Street, reaching a trail parking lot near Elm Road and Harding High School.

The center part of the trail — considered temporary — will use several city streets before meeting up with an abandoned railroad bed. It will continue south a few blocks west of Forum Health Trumbull Memorial Hospital — where it will require riders to cross East Market Street — and complete its trek through the city in an industrial area along Thomas Road.

Kohli said some of those parts of Warren have the potential to be dangerous. But something interesting has happened in every town where a bike trail has gone through, he said.

"A trail always improves a community," he said, adding that urban trails in other parts of the country have been hugely successful, especially in places such as Portland, Ore., and as nearby as Akron.

The partially complete 100-mile Ohio and Erie Towpath Trail passes south from Cuyahoga County into downtown Akron, passing by the Canal Park baseball stadium and other attractions.

Kohli notes that most bike trails are limited to dawn-to-dusk hours, and trail riders would need to be mindful of their safety just as anyone traveling through a city would be.

Kohli and a regional planner from Youngstown agree that the GOLTR Greenway will eventually put Ashtabula, Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana counties on the map as a "regional and national destination" for tourists and bicyclists.

Ken Sympton, program manager for the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments, which has helped Mahoning and Trumbull counties secure most of the federal money used to build the greenway, says he expects the trail to some day attract bike riders "from across the nation."

On a more local level, the bike trail continues to give local residents a way to travel that doesn't create air pollution or traffic congestion, Sympton said.

The Warren trail will cost about \$3 million — \$1.5 million this year and another \$1.5 million in 2011. Construction is likely to begin by early summer.

Niles, meanwhile, is also set to begin constructing its 4.5-mile portion of the greenway this spring. It will connect with the Mahoning Bikeway at the Mahoning-Trumbull County line just west of state Route 46 and travel north along an unpopulated rail bed, cross the Mahoning River on the east side of downtown Niles and end at Robbins Avenue and state Route 46 near the Macali's Giant Eagle.

The project will cost \$5 million and will include a pavilion, restrooms and picnic area in downtown Niles. About half the cost is for reconstructing a bridge over the Mahoning River near downtown.

Sometime later, the county will fill in the gap between there and Warren by heading northwest along state Route 169.

The section connecting the Western Reserve Greenway at Champion Avenue East in Champion with the north end of Warren has been designed and is mostly funded but is probably a year or more away from construction, said Julie Green, grants coordinator for the county planning commission.

Officials in Ashtabula County are just beginning to acquire funding to extend the trail north from 52nd Street in Ashtabula to the Lake Erie shore, Kohli said.