

Erie-Pitt trail, a work in progress

A 270-mile trail is in the making for western Pa.

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A 270-mile bike and walking trail from Erie to Pittsburgh is in the making, with the help of the Erie-Pittsburgh Trail Alliance (EPTA).

The EPTA, an active coalition of 11 trail organizations, along with six other agencies are working on connecting a series of community trails to create one unified, non-motorized trail route which will be known as the Erie-to-Pittsburgh Trail (EPT) and will connect the Erie Bayfront to Point State Park in Pittsburgh.

"The alliance has helped the different trail groups realize the importance of completing their sections in order to make one large trail," said Julia Eagles, vice president of the EPTA. "Two-thirds of the route is complete."

The trails are being created along former railroad corridors.

According to James Holden, president of the EPTA and the Allegheny Valley Trails Association, most of the route was the Allegheny Valley Railroad built from Pittsburgh to Kittanning in the 1850s, which extended to Oil City in 1867 to haul oil during the oil boom, then extended to Buffalo in about 1913 by the Pennsylvania Railroad, who bought the line in bankruptcy.

"Much of the former rail corridor became available for sale once the Railroad companies formally filed the legal abandonment paperwork," said Debra Frawley, Greenways and Open Space coordinator. "Local trail groups have been able to purchase this land."

She noted, however, that some segments were reverted to the original or current landowner.

"In these cases, right-of-way agreements have been signed with these landowners to allow passage of the trail. Most landowners are willing to do this because of the benefit to the community and access to such an amenity have been known to increase property values in the community," said Frawley.

The EPT still has many gaps throughout its route, which, according to Frawley, are due to the system currently being in the planning or construction phase.

"Several groups have already made the entire trip by bicycle, finding easy road routes around areas not finished yet," said Frawley.

According to Eagles, as you get closer to Pittsburgh there tends to be less trail development due to land



Media Credit: Photo courtesy of Eriepittsburghtrail.org
An overview map of the Erie-Pittsburgh Trail (EPT) is shown above. The map identifies current trail status, such as which trails are open and which trails are currently closed. For now, there is no estimated date when the EPT will be completed.

ownership issues.

The Corry Junction Trail and Spartansburg trails are about to complete some more of their trails, she said.

The EPTA will be working on 14 different trails throughout western Pennsylvania, which will eventually create a path from Allegheny to Erie counties.

With millions of dollars in the making, the EPTA does not have an estimated time when the project will be completed.

Frawley said that the cost of each trail segment varies depending on what elements, such as bridges, stream crossings, road crossings, wetlands, etc., are present in the area.

Main trailheads with parking and access to supplies and services are more costly, she said.

According to Eagles, a paved trail costs around \$100,000 per mile to construct.

Each community decides whether to use pavement or crushed limestone, which is preferred surface for trails that share access with snowmobiles and cross-country skiers in the wintertime.

"The revenue to the communities along the way that the trail brings in is also significant," said Frawley.

Towns and communities nearby will also be working to connect their central downtown area with the trail so that visitors can come in to eat, shop, rest and even stay overnight.

The EPT will connect with the Great Allegheny Passage, which, according to Holden is nearly complete from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland, and connects with the C&CO Canal Towpath for a total of 330 miles to Washington, D.C.

Since the EPTA's last meeting, two more trail segments have gone to bid for construction in the spring of 2010.

The EPTA meet quarterly to assist each other in the ETA process. The meeting locations vary along the route.

Those interested in using the trail or helping their community benefit from it can contact the individual trail groups listed on the Web site at www.eriepittsburghtrail.org, or by contacting Debra Frawley at greenways@ficda.org or (814) 432-4476 extension 121.

<http://media.www.eupspectator.com/media/storage/paper1345/news/2009/12/10/CommunityNews/EriePittTrail.A.Work.In.Progress-3849349.shtml>