



Ohio River Trail proposal picks up pace

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Supporters of the proposed Ohio River Trail say it has potential to be a model of redevelopment, helping to connect four communities in two counties and to revive industrial brownfields along the river.

In initial steps toward realizing the 41-mile bike and water trail project, the project's governing council wants public input and has been conducting meetings in four municipalities to discuss reuses of defunct river properties.

The council has completed a study for the South Shore communities to be part of the project and is working on a feasibility study of the North Shore portion, expected to be completed this summer.

The group received a \$175,000 grant late last year to conduct an Environmental Project Agency's Brownfields study. Consultants Stromber/Garrigan & Associates Inc. of Somerset is examining how to reuse industrial properties in Coraopolis, Aliquippa, Monaca and Midland.

"We're interested in using the trail as an impetus for economic growth," said Vincent Troia of Moon, CEO of the Ohio River Trail Council.

The council's 18-member board of directors includes Troia, Monaca Manager Mario Leone and business representatives and officials from communities such as Ohioville and Midland.

The Ohio Trail project began when Troia, an optometrist and Monaca native, examined Leone's eyes in 2008 and asked Leone what it would take to construct a trail from Monaca to Washington, D.C. A state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources planning grant of \$20,000, along with the financial support of local communities and Beaver County government, got the project off the ground.

"Our project is very unique. It is the only one that crosses four communities and two counties," Leone said of the brownfields portion of the plan.

At a recent meeting in Coraopolis, people proposed such reuses for industrial sites as student housing along the Ohio River, a transportation depot for Robert Morris University facilities in the former Coraopolis train station, and establishing a boathouse on the back channel. The trail would connect the properties.

"We'd love to see the trail go through Coraopolis," borough Manager Raymond McCutcheon said.

He said that although the design needs to be tweaked to eliminate such things as crossing a busy two-lane road and going down an alley, "the borough's definitely behind" the project.

If constructed, the trail would replace Route 51 as a PennDOT bicycle route, Troia said.

Monaca applied for the EPA grant and chose Coraopolis and Midland for the brownfields study

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because they are beginning and end points for the South Shore portion of the project, which would run through eight communities in Allegheny and Beaver counties and connect to Neville and the Robert Morris University Island Sports Center. Participants hope the South Shore Trail will connect to the existing Montour Trail.

The next step would be a study of what cleanup or remediation on the brownfields is needed.

Troia said the council hopes to complete the trail segment between the Montour Trail and the Sewickley Bridge in Moon in three to five years, at an estimated cost of \$1.7 million.

The engineering phase of the project would cost about \$250,000. Troia said two grant applications for a total of \$210,000 are pending for the South Shore project and First Energy Foundation has contributed \$15,000 for the North Shore project.

Troia said a feasibility study pegged the cost of the entire South Shore Trail segment at \$6 million.

It would dovetail with a waterfront park Moon hopes to construct near the south pier of the Sewickley Bridge.

A North Shore rail, which would run through 13 Beaver County communities would include a water component.

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