

Council formed to plan trail link along Ohio River

Thursday, May 06, 2010

By Brian David, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The vision for an Ohio River bike trail started with an eye exam.

Vincent Troia, a Monaca optometrist and former avid cyclist, was giving Monaca manager Mario Leone Jr. a checkup last year when the conversation turned to the Dr. Troia's favorite sport.

"I said, 'Wouldn't it be nice to have a trail from Monaca to Washington, D.C.?' " Dr. Troia said.

Mr. Leone agreed. But how?

It's not as hard as it sounds. Dr. Troia said the Montour Trail already connects to trails leading to the nation's capital, and its northern end is near the Ohio River outside Coraopolis - not far from Monaca.

Mr. Leone offered his political help, the idea mushroomed, and Dr. Troia is now president of the Ohio River Trail Council spearheading development of a bike trail that would run from the Montour Trail through Monaca to the Ohio state line, where it would eventually link up with trails leading south into West Virginia and north to Lake Erie.

"I rode the Montour Trail frequently, and I rode the trails in Ohio, and I had been thinking that we ought to connect the two," Dr. Troia said.

As planned, the trail would trace the riverfront from the Montour's trail head in Robinson through Coraopolis, Moon, Crescent, South Heights, Hopewell and Aliquippa to Monaca.

It would cross the Rochester-Monaca bridge, go north along the Beaver River through Rochester Township in New Brighton, cross the historic Fallston Bridge and go down the far bank of the Beaver through Fallston, Bridgewater and Beaver.

It would then follow the north bank of the Ohio through Vanport, Industry, Midland, Ohioville and Glasgow.

The council has gotten supportive resolutions from most of the municipalities involved and has the support of the Beaver County Planning Commission.

A grant from the state Department of Community and Natural Resources helped fund a feasibility study of the southern part of the trail - from the Montour Trail through Monaca.

That study is about two-thirds done, and the council is applying for a grant to study the rest. The involved communities also contributed toward the study, as did private individuals.

There are still miles to go - literally and figuratively. There is no abandoned rail line to follow, something that has eased the path for many bike trails. And in Moon, there are places where there's no room between the river and the hillside.

"In one spot we're going to have to build a boardwalk between the river and the rail line," Dr. Troia said.

The trail will also have to skirt industrial sites in Aliquippa and other areas, following Routes 51 and 68 when it can't be located on the riverfront.

But "overall I'm very pleased with the progress of the project," he said.

Engineering is the next step after the feasibility study. Dr. Troia hopes to see that start a year from now; he has no precise target date for construction.

The benefits to cyclists are obvious, though.

The Montour Trail is a significant artery, and the trail would also connect to a Beaver River trail leading north through Beaver Falls.

In Ohio, it could link with the Great Ohio Lake-to-River Greenway, which will eventually run about 100 miles from East Liverpool to Ashtabula.

There is also the potential to continue down the Ohio River to link up with the Panhandle Trail, which now ends in Weirton, WV. The Panhandle runs east from there to Collier, and links up with the Montour Trail near McDonald.

"That would create a loop of about 100 miles, and that would be very attractive to cyclists," Dr. Troia said. They could park, spend a day riding and return where they started without retracing their path.

But it's a ride Dr. Troia himself is not likely to make. "I don't ride anymore," he said. "My knees don't work."

Fortunately for cycling fans, though, his heart and brain still do.

Brian David: bdavid@post-gazette.com or 412-722-0086.