

Allegheny Passage trail link under way

Friday, October 07, 2011

By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Four bicyclists who were about to embark on a five-day Pittsburgh-to-Washington, D.C., ride got a surprise sendoff Thursday from one of the main architects of the Great Allegheny Passage trail.

Jack Paulik, project manager for Regional Trail Corp., was at The Waterfront to monitor the start of work on the newest trail improvement -- a 3,000-foot dedicated bike lane on East Waterfront Drive in Munhall.

The lane will begin near the giant blue Marcegaglia industrial building, hooking directly with the recently opened 3-mile section that goes to Grant Avenue in Duquesne. It will follow East Waterfront Drive past the historic Pump House to near the first apartment building, linking with another trail section that dives behind the apartments and several office buildings and restaurants.

The bike lane will be 9 feet wide to accommodate two-way traffic, Mr. Paulik said. It will be separated from vehicle traffic by a 5-foot-wide buffer strip, marked with delineator poles (sometimes called "candles") every 32 feet. Two 12-foot-wide lanes will be maintained for cars and trucks.

"I don't think anybody's done a bike lane like this in the region," said Linda McKenna Boxx, president of the Allegheny Trail Alliance. "Munhall Borough was phenomenally cooperative."

Restriping the road and installing the delineators and signs should take about two weeks, Mr. Paulik said.

Original plans called for building the trail through the Marcegaglia property, but after prolonged discussions, company executives decided not to allow it, Mr. Paulik said.

Aside from the wasted time, that might have been a blessing -- the cost of the bike lane is about \$42,000 (paid for by the Colcom Foundation) while building the trail on the Marcegaglia site would've cost an estimated \$400,000. The savings will be invested in other trail

improvements.

Completion of the bike lane leaves the one-mile gap across the Sandcastle Waterpark and Keystone Metals sites as the only incomplete piece of the Great Allegheny Passage. Progress has been made on design and financing for that section and construction on the Sandcastle property may begin this fall, Mr. Paulik said.

The last piece will be finished sometime next year, but with federal Transportation Enhancement funding in the mix, the project is subject to a complicated review process that makes it difficult to give a specific completion date, he said.

The bicyclists, all from Frederick, Md., were making their first ride on the passage, which goes from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Md., where it meets the C&O Towpath to connect to Washington.

They delayed the start of their trip by a few minutes to get a preview from Mr. Paulik of the scenic new trail section connecting The Waterfront to Duquesne, and to have their picture taken with him.

"Your money's done good work," said Gaye Eckenrode, who was joined by friends Megan Miller, Randy Austin and Jeff Austin for the ride.

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