

New trail offers more than regular scenery

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By Jon Schmitz, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Chris Kasprak/Post-Gazette

Bikers spend Tuesday afternoon on the newest section of the Great Allegheny Passage bike trail. The recently constructed Whitaker Bridge, pictured here, crosses a large section of train tracks as part of the new trail.

Like the rest of the 150-mile Great Allegheny Passage trail, the newest three-mile segment in the Mon Valley has warbling birds and lush greenery.

But nowhere else does the trail brush so closely with so much heavy industry. The new segment, which officially opens Friday, is ripe with unique scenery and sounds.

There's the hissing and banging of the U.S. Steel Edgar Thomson Plant; the thunder and whistles of freight trains; the rumble of heavy truck traffic; even the joyous shrieks coming from riders of two Kennywood roller coasters just off the trail.

The birds are just no match for it.

Ahead of a 10 a.m. Friday dedication ceremony, several bicyclists and walkers

have checked out the new section, which runs from Grant Avenue in Duquesne to The Waterfront.

"It was a great experience. They did a really nice job. First class," said Martin Goldhaber, a retired attorney from Squirrel Hill who pedaled the asphalt trail on Saturday.

He noted the contrast between the new segment and the more tranquil mileage as the trail meets and follows the Youghiogheny River.

"You're in a heavy industrial area. It is what it is," he said.

Another feature that sets the new segment apart from the rest of the trail is undulation. Much of the Great Allegheny Passage is flat or on barely perceptible grades. The Mon Valley section will have riders clicking away at their gear shifters.

Riding northward on the trail from Duquesne, riders pass a vast pipe storage yard before arriving at the first of two bridges that carry the trail over active rail lines - a 110-foot-long span in the RIDC industrial park that crosses three sets of Norfolk Southern Railway tracks.

The next section of trail, once occupied by U.S. Steel's coke gas pipeline, has gentle curves and rises and is lined with trees.

"It's really a nice section of trail," said Linda McKenna Boxx, president of the Allegheny Trail Alliance. "It mimics a roller coaster ride."

That is apropos, as the trail bumps up against the lowest reaches of Kennywood with the tracks for the Phantom's Revenge and Thunderbolt coasters just yards away.

That section of trail is carved into the hillside that rises from the rail lines that follow the western bank of the Monongahela River. Through breaks in the trees, riders get a panoramic view of the river, Braddock Locks and Dam, the sprawling Edgar Thomson Plant, the Rankin Bridge and, far in the distance, the Westinghouse Bridge spanning the Turtle Creek Valley.

The second trail bridge, 170 feet long over six sets of tracks operated by Norfolk Southern and Union Railroad Co., is in Whitaker. It takes riders back down to the strip of land between the rails and river, a flatter stretch that passes under the Rankin Bridge and eventually enters The Waterfront complex.

Unfortunately, that is the end of the line for the time being. The last missing link

of the Pittsburgh-to-Cumberland, Md., trail, through Sandcastle Waterpark and an adjacent scrap yard, won't be finished by November as officials had hoped.

"We don't have the funds in hand," Ms. Boxx said last week. More than \$1 million has been raised toward the estimated \$3 million cost, and trail advocates are hoping Gov. Tom Corbett releases a \$750,000 grant that state Sen. Jay Costa, D-Forest Hills, had added to the capital budget.

The new Whitaker trail bridge will be the site of Friday's 10 a.m. dedication. Rather than cutting a ribbon, the celebrants will raise a ceremonial railroad crossing gate.

Organizers are urging bicyclists to ride to the event, a short distance from Guardian Storage Solutions on East Waterfront Drive.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11167/1153824-55-0.stm#ixzz1S5unldTI>