Bellefonte Central Rail Trail Feasibility Study

Public Meeting
November 29, 2006
Project Introduction

• Local Municipalities have a Vision
  – Bellefonte Borough
  – Benner Township
  – Ferguson Township
  – Patton Township
  – Spring Township
  – State College Borough

Can a shared use trail be developed along the former Bellefonte Central Railroad corridor to connect State College with Bellefonte?
• Project Steering Committee

- Mr. Kent Addis
- Mr. Chip Aikens
- Mr. Mike Bloom
- Mr. Ed Bowman
- Ms. Ann Donovan
- Mr. Jim Dunn
- Mr. Jim Eckert
- Mr. Douglas Erickson
- Mr. Rick Gilmore
- Ms. Sue Hannegan
- Mr. Joe Hartle
- Mr. Frank Hartranft
- Ms. Betsey Howell
- Mr. Bob Jacobs

- Mr. Dennis McDowell
- Mr. Bill MacMath
- Mr. Tom Masullo
- Ms. Trish Meek
- Mr. Doug Wasson
- Mr. Warren Miller
- Ms. Kate Reeder
- Ms. Beth Rider
- Mr. Mike Rose
- Dr. Paul Simpson
- Mr. John Steimer
- Mr. Mike Shamalla
- Mr. Tom Songer
- Ms. Jennifer Shuey
- Mr. Jeff Terrell
Introduction

• Municipalities requested the assistance of the Centre County Planning Office to determine the feasibility of the proposed project

• County applied for and received a grant from the State to complete this feasibility study
Introduction

- Feasibility Study Process
  - Inventory and analysis of the corridor's physical and environmental features
  - Analysis of the status of the former railroad right-of-way
  - Analysis of demand for the trail and determination of level of support for the proposed trail
  - Recommendations
• Recommendations
  – Not Feasible
  – Feasible
    • Trail Concept Plan
    • Operations, Management, & Security Plan
    • Financial Feasibility
Trail Development has Begun

- 1.3 mile trail built through the Penn State Arboretum Property - from Sunset Park to vicinity of State Route 322

- Toftrees Master Plan provides for the continuity of the trail through their developed and undeveloped land - 2.6 miles

- Spring Benner Walker Joint Authority has verbally committed to allow the trail through their property - this will connect Buffalo Run Community Park to Coleville Park - 4.5 miles
Why Rail Trails?

• Health Benefits
  – Promotes healthy lifestyles by providing opportunities for walking, hiking, and bicycling.
Why Rail Trails?

- Environmental Benefits
  - Reduces the negative environmental impacts associated with automobiles by providing an alternate mode of transportation.
Why Rail Trails?

• Environmental Benefits

- Protects Natural Resources and Habitat
- Provides Opportunities for Environmental Education

Waddle Swamp BDA

Buffalo Run – High Quality Stream

Wetlands

Floodplain
Why Rail Trails?

- Cultural Benefits
  - Conserves Historic and Cultural Resources
  - Fosters Community Interaction
Why Rail Trails?

- Economic Benefits
  - Increases tourism
  - Enhances land and property values
Why Rail Trails?

- 80,000 residents in 6 Municipalities
- 162,000 residents within 15 miles
Who owns the rail bed and its structures?

- The title search conducted by Stone Consulting and Design, Inc. reveals the Bellefonte Central Railroad sold portions of its interest and the ownership of the remaining portions has reverted to adjacent owners.

- 4.5 miles of right-of-way sold by railroad to the Spring Benner Walker Joint Authority.
• What does this mean for the proposed trail?
  
  – Proposed trail route will need to be re-assembled

  – Must acquire easements or property for trail to become a reality
Who Will Own the Rail Bed?

- Municipalities or their designee must negotiate an easement or purchase the property from land owners

- Easement agreement – simple two page document to more complex document depending on requirements of parties involved
Concerns

• Where Will the Trail be Located?
  
  – Existing rail bed is preferred

  – Other options will be considered provided the continuity of the trail can be maintained
Concerns

• Liability

– Landowner or easement holder is responsible for the structures in the abandoned corridor

– Potential protection through the PA Recreational Use of Land Statute - has not been tested

– Liability can be transferred to easement holder
Concerns

• How Can Property Be Protected from Trespassers?

• Plantings
• Signage
• Control Points
• Gates
• Fences
How does the Trail Affect the Value of Land?

– Property values increase for those adjacent to or near the trail

– 2002 National Association of Realtors and the National Association of Home Builders Survey

  • trails are the second most important community amenity out of a list of 18 choices

  • Lots adjacent to trails sell faster and for an average of 6-9% more than similar properties not located next to trails
How Does the Trail Impact Local Businesses?

- The trail will bring tourism
- The trail will make the area more attractive to businesses

Allegheny Trail Alliance Survey 2002

- Average $8.93 spent per person / trip
- 13.2% visitors overnight
  average 2.4 nights in area
• What Type of Trail Will it Be? 
  – Shared-Use Non-Motorized Trail 
    • walking 
    • jogging 
    • biking

Cross Section of Two-Way Shared Use Path on Separated Right-of-Way
Vision
Vision
Vision
Vision
Vision
Vision
Vision
Vision
Vision
What are we asking you for tonight?

- To share your thoughts and concerns regarding the proposed project
- To be open minded and give us a chance to come back and address your issues and concerns
Your Issues and Concerns

What other issues and concerns do you have regarding the proposed trail?
Ground Rules

- Every idea is valid. Please respect the opinions of others.
- You do not have to agree with every idea that is suggested. Even if you don’t agree, this is not the time to debate a specific item.
- Please remain quiet while someone else is talking; Everyone will have a chance to speak.
- There is no need to repeat an idea if it has already been mentioned.
- Please try to keep your statements as clear and concise as possible.
- Convey one issue per turn.

Your Issues and Concerns
Next Steps

- Complete Inventory and Analysis
- Determine Feasibility
- Prepare Recommendations
- Spring '07 - second public meeting to present draft recommendations

Date and Time - To Be Determined

Follow the planning process by visiting www.co.centre.pa.us/planning/cultural.asp
Next Steps

• Before you leave tonight
  – Sign the attendance sheet so we can notify you of future meetings

Thank you for attending tonight's meeting!
A State College-bound freight rounds the Penn State golf course, 1963, L. Gette photo