



SOUTH PARK TO WHITE OAK PARK CONNECTOR TRAIL STUDY

MAY 2024



SOUTH PARK TO WHITE OAK PARK CONNECTOR TRAIL STUDY



FOREWORD

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The Allegheny County Parks Foundation (ACPF) envisions a future in which all nine county parks are connected by world-class trails. This vision has been built by many and can be traced back to the 2002 Allegheny County Park Comprehensive Plan. Regional trail systems and partial connections such as the Montour Trail, Panhandle Trail, Steel Valley Trail, and Great Allegheny Passage continue to expand near our southern parks which include Settlers Cabin, South, Round Hill and White Oak Parks.

Building off an assessment prepared by the Pennsylvania Environmental County (PEC) in 2021 to look at the connections of all four southern parks, the ACPF received funding from FedEx Ground and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation to conduct a feasibility study for the connection between South Park and White Oak Park.

In 2022, the ACPF began working with Environmental Planning & Design (EPD) to conduct the feasibility study and develop a detailed implementation plan. In partnership with Allegheny County, the communities of South Park, Jefferson Hills, Clairton, Glassport, McKeesport, and White Oak, along with the Montour Trail Council and Steel Valley Trail Council, a steering committee was established.

Working group sessions were held in 2022 and 2023 to review the trail connections that were outlined in the PEC study. Input from the local municipalities and trail groups and "ground truthing" were used to refine the proposed alignment. A series of public meetings and a public survey were conducted to introduce the project's purpose, present the trail alignments, and gather feedback from the public. Meetings were also held with stakeholders to provide an opportunity for early feedback and to further refine the trail's proposed alignment.

The efforts resulted in a study that lays out approximately 23 miles of on-road and off-road trail through 6 communities linking these two southern parks. The communities and trail groups can use the information in the study to support fundraising efforts for future construction. Each segment completed is a step towards providing better accessibility for all residents to parks and recreation.

We would like to thank Allegheny County, EPD, members of our steering committee and the local communities for their work and guidance on this study. We would also like to thank our funders, Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and FedEx Ground.

Joey-Linn Ulrich
Executive Director
May 2024



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FUNDING PROVIDED BY:

FedEx Ground
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation

MODULE A CONCEPTUAL PLANNING

PROJECT OVERVIEW

VISION

The County has envisioned for decades connecting the 9 county parks together with a greenways and trails system. As the County continues to urbanize and suburbanize, the time to act is now. The South Park to White Oak Park Connectivity Trail is the first link towards realizing this dream. The Connectivity Trail would link together South Park and White Oak Park with a nearly 24 mile multi-use trail. The trail would ideally be entirely off-road, but in areas where this is impossible, the trail should be and feel safe enough to attract diverse user groups and families.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

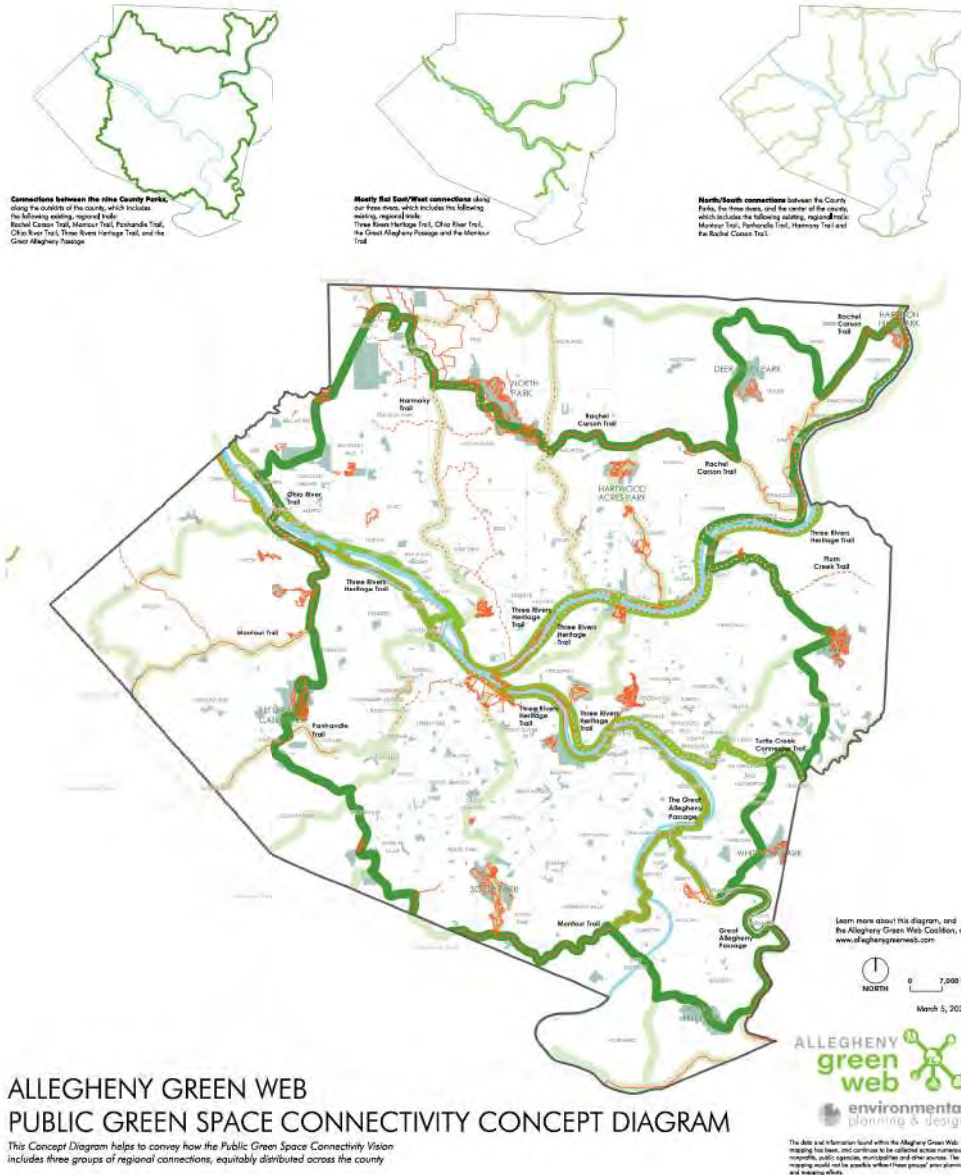
The purpose of this connectivity study is to conceptualize a route and determine costs needed for a multi-use trail to connect South Park and White Oak Park.

CHRONOLOGY

The County, through collaboration with the Allegheny Land Trust, looked into the possibility of connections between the county parks through ALT's Green Print project around 2008.

A decade later, The Allegheny Green Web took this idea one step further by trying to identify what these corridors would look like. This plan looked at not only connecting the county parks, but also connecting them to the other trail networks in Allegheny County such as the Three Rivers Trail and regional rail trails like the Great Allegheny Passage.

The County then worked with the Pennsylvania Environmental Council to groundtruth some of the most feasible connections from the Allegheny Green Web project. The South Park to White Oak corridor was identified as a good starting point, as there are many miles of existing trails that can be used, which makes the trail gaps between them smaller and more manageable.

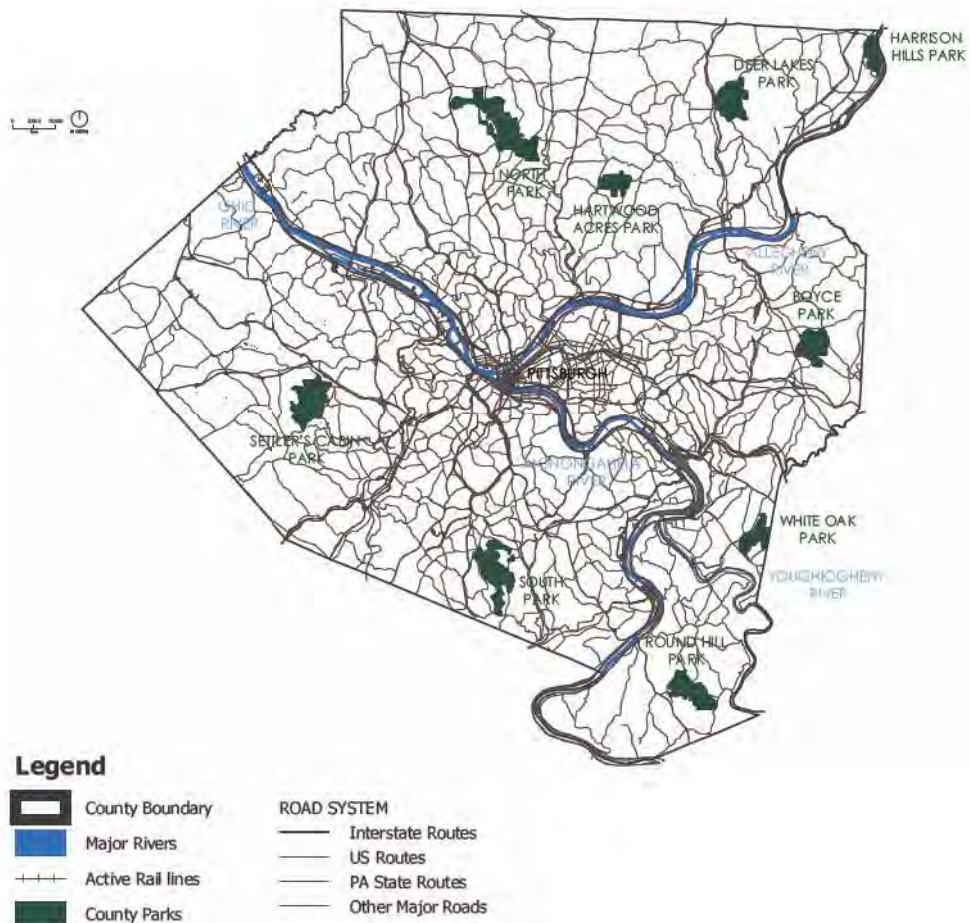


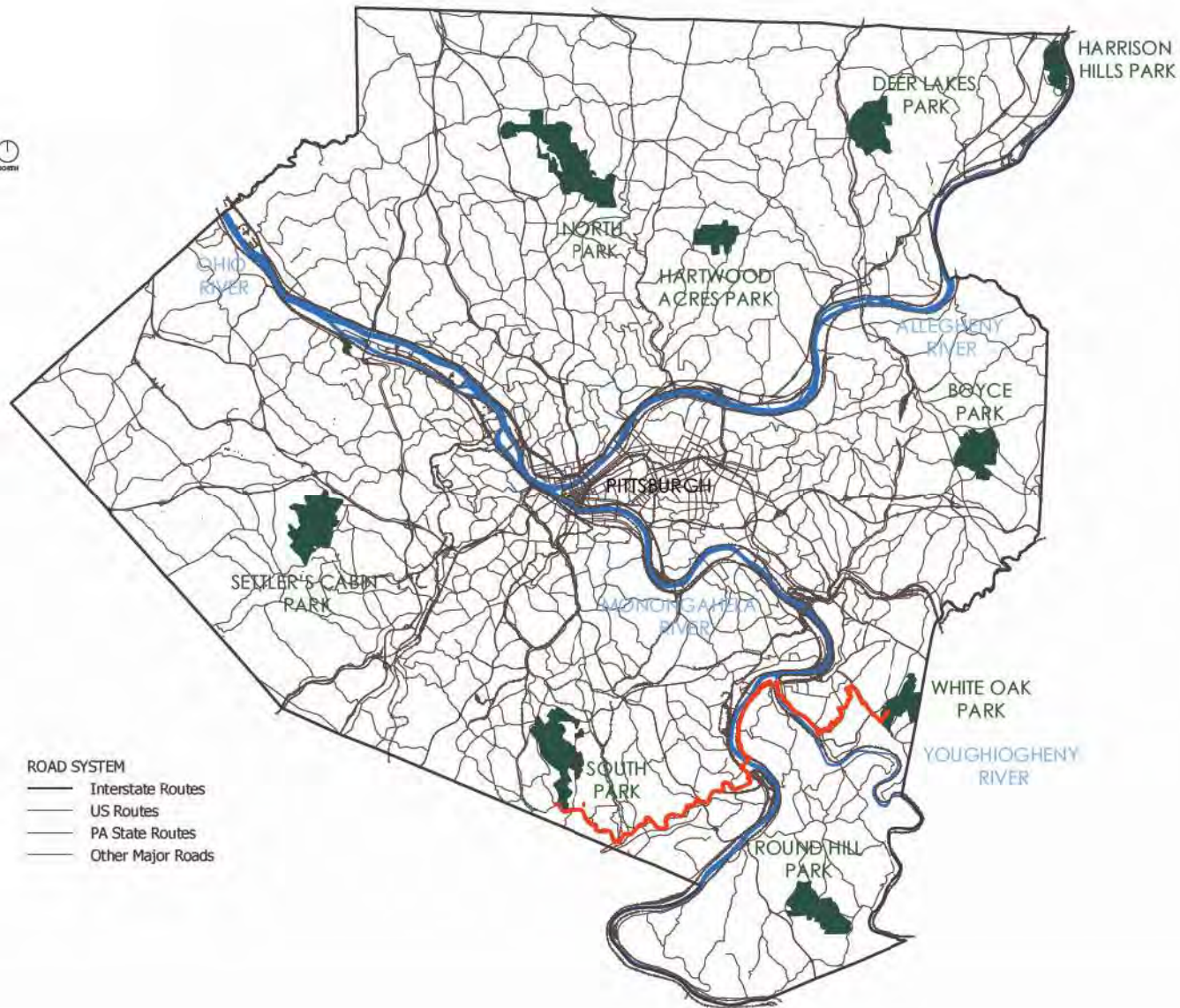
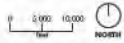
REGIONAL CONTEXT

Allegheny County has 9 parks spread relatively evenly throughout the County. They are: Boyce Park, Deer Lakes Park, Harrison Hills Park, Hartwood Acres Park, North Park, Round Hill Park, Settlers Cabin Park, South Park, and White Oak Park.

The County's topography is defined by the numerous rivers and streams which have cut steep-sided valleys and hollows into the landscape. The Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers meet in downtown Pittsburgh to form the Ohio River, which flows northwest into Beaver County. The Youghiogheny River also flows into the County from the south before meeting the Monongahela River in McKeesport. These rivers provide both opportunities and constraints for a county-wide trail system. On one hand, they provide scenic corridors and additional recreation and conservation opportunities, but they are also large barriers with only a few high-volume roads and bridges spanning them.

The County also has a growing network of existing local and regional trails such as the Three Rivers Heritage Trail, The Montour Trail, and The Great Allegheny Passage. The South Park to White Oak Park corridor was selected for this study because parts of these trails could be used for a significant percentage of the route.










Legend

-  County Boundary
-  Major Rivers
-  Active Rail lines
-  County Parks

ROAD SYSTEM

-  Interstate Routes
-  US Routes
-  PA State Routes
-  Other Major Roads

SOUTH PARK TO WHITE OAK PARK CONNECTION

-  Proposed Alignment

OVERALL CORRIDOR PROFILE

SOUTH PARK CONTEXT

South Park is located in Bethel Park and South Park Township in southern Allegheny County. It encompasses 2,013 acres and has many amenities such as a golf course, skate park, athletic fields, wave pool, and hiking trails. There is also a game preserve which is home to the beloved South Park bison.

WHITE OAK PARK CONTEXT

White Oak Park is a 810 acre park located on the boundary of Allegheny County abutting Westmoreland County. A hilltop park, it offers rugged hiking trails and scenic nature. It also provides county residents with an off-lease area, a playground, athletic and ball fields and other recreational amenities.

OVERALL CORRIDOR PROFILE

The South Park to White Oak Park Connectivity Trail will traverse six communities in southern Allegheny County between South Park and White Oak Park: South Park Township, the Borough of Jefferson Hills, the City of Clairton, Glassport Borough, the City of McKeesport, and the Borough of White Oak. The trail will cross the Monongahela River and the Youghiogheny River.

The trail's total length is 23.5 miles. 13.1 miles are off-road trail of various surfacing, either existing limestone or asphalt trail, new dedicated limestone or asphalt trail, or new or expanded concrete sidewalk. Where possible, sidewalks were designed or expanded to be wide enough for two bikes to comfortably pass. The remaining 10.4 miles are on residential or municipal roads with proper signage and bicycle pavement markings like sharrows.





CLAIRTON COKE WORKS



AERIAL VIEW OF WALNUT STREET IN MCKEESPORT

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

The 6 communities along the trail route have a total population of 61,137, which is 4.96% of Allegheny County's 1.233 million residents. All of them have lost population since 1990, except Jefferson Hills.

	Population	% of Allegheny County
South Park Township	13,416	1.09%
Borough of Jefferson Hills	12,420	1.01%
City of Clairton	6,181	0.50%
Glassport Borough	4,352	0.35%
City of McKeesport	17,334	1.41%
Borough of White Oak	7,434	0.60%
Total	61,137	4.96%
Allegheny County	1,233,001	



CLAIRTON-GLASSPORT BRIDGE



LINCOLN WAY & JACKS RUN ROAD

EXISTING CONDITIONS, ROADS & TRAIL INFRASTRUCTURE

Virtually all flat land in the river valleys along the trail corridor is developed. Land use varies from suburban and relatively dense residential blocks to commercial and significant industrial uses. Some former industrial areas are good candidates for redevelopment. The trail corridor will need to cross six large commercial arterial streets maintained by PennDOT such as Route 51, Route 837, and Route 48. In addition the trail will pass through or near the downtowns of the cities of Clairton and McKeesport and Glassport Borough. Pedestrian improvements such as signage and pavement markings are crucial in these areas to maintain safety. There are also several railroad corridors in the vicinity, some of which have been abandoned and converted to rail-to-trails and others which remain active.



PETERS CREEK ROAD



MONONGAHELA AVENUE

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

Property ownership along the trail corridor is varied as well. Following the trail east from South Park, it follows the rail-trail corridor owned and controlled by the Montour Trail Council. The trail will also follow municipal roads or cross municipal-owned land and there are instances where the trail will cross utility right-of-way or county-owned land. In Clairton and McKeesport, the trail will cross a few private properties. In most cases, these properties are tax-delinquent or owned by out-of-state residents. Properties adjacent to the trail corridor can be seen in more detail on a map for each community later in the report.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

As part of the planning process, we held various public workshops, open houses and meetings and attended several events within each community. We also developed a comprehensive community survey online, and provided paper copies at community events and upon request. The survey's purpose was to gauge the public's general perception and usage of existing trails and bike routes, specific challenges and opportunities along the proposed trail corridor, and level of enthusiasm for additional trail connections. The public engagement component provided input on residents' preferences for recreation and identified perceived challenges and opportunities within each community.

STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee made up of representatives from the County, the Allegheny County Parks Foundation, trail groups and the local communities met several times to discuss and improve the connectivity trail and to receive updates from the design team and debrief on the public meetings. The discussions focused on the general trail route with the goal of identifying the most feasible route while ensuring the safety of trail users.

WORK GROUP SESSIONS

In addition to the Steering Committee, Work Groups were set up to tackle more specific design challenges in each municipality. The trail corridor was broken into three parts with two municipalities in each group: the Western Section (South Park Township and Jefferson Hills), the Central Section (Clairton and Glassport), and the Eastern Section (McKeesport and White Oak). Seven work group sessions were held with the eastern and western sections meeting twice, and the central section meeting three times.

PUBLIC MEETINGS & OPEN HOUSES

A public meeting was held for each of the three sections midway through the design process in order to inform the public about the ongoing effort and to gather feedback on the trail route. Those who attended generally expressed interest and enthusiasm. Once the trail route was established, an additional round of public meetings were held in a less formal "open house" style where attendees could view maps of the trail corridor at their own pace and ask questions of the designers and municipal leaders.



GLASSPORT PUBLIC MEETING



WHITE OAK PUBLIC MEETING



CLAIRTON PUBLIC MEETING



WHITE OAK PUBLIC MEETING



CLAIRTON CONCERT IN THE PARK



MILL DR. BRIDGE



UNDERNEATH MILL DR. BRIDGE

COMMUNITY EVENTS

In an effort to reach additional members of the public who may not be inclined to attend a late night public meeting, EPD attended several staple community events in the late summer and early fall of 2023. We promoted the Connectivity Trail through casual conversation with residents and advertised for more public engagement with the survey. The events we attended were White Oak Community Day (8.05.2023), McKeesport International Village (8.15.2023), Glassport Community Day (8.26.2023), Clairton Concert in the Park (9.09.2023), and Jefferson Hills Rocktoberfest (9.30.2023). As the trail in South Park Township would share the same corridor as the existing Montour Trail, it was decided that there would not be sufficient public interest to justify attending an event there.

ADDITIONAL STAKEHOLDER INPUT

In early August 2023 EPD and ACPF met with US Steel's Clairton Plant Manager Mark Jeffrey to discuss crossing US steel property adjacent to State Street in Clairton. In particular, a small bridge called Mill Dr., which the trail would need to pass in front of or under. US Steel was receptive to a proposal to demo the front of the bridge to allow for a wide trail corridor, as they no longer used the bridge due to structural deterioration.

EPD also met with the Montour Trail Council on January 11, 2024 to inform the members on the connectivity trail's purpose and to give them an update on the public response to challenges along the part of trail shared with the Montour Trail. The design team integrated feedback from this meeting in order to align the future goals of the Montour Trail with the proposed South Park to White Oak Park Connectivity Trail.

Finally, EPD and ACPF met with PennDOT's District 11 Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator at the District 11 regional office to introduce them to the project and the specific trail crossing locations of state roads including Route 51, SR 837, and SR 48. PennDOT recognizes the need for improved pedestrian infrastructure along its roadways, but stressed the importance of collaborating as early as possible in the process. The best way to do this is for municipalities to approach PennDOT during their PennDOT Connects meetings, the purpose of which is to integrate local planning objectives into projects. This will give time for municipalities to make agreements with PennDOT for road crossings or other pedestrian improvements.

COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY

In addition to the meetings and events, we developed a comprehensive community survey to gauge the public's general perception and usage of existing trails and bike routes, specific challenges and opportunities along the proposed trail corridor, and level of enthusiasm for additional trail connections, as well as some general demographic information. The survey was mostly disseminated online, with a few paper copies being filled out at community events. We received over 160 responses.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Question 1: How often has someone from your household visited each of these trails in the past year? Please select either Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Annually, or Never.

Question 2: Think about the times you or someone in your household visited any of the trail that you noted as previously visiting in Question 1. What was your primary method of transportation to the trail itself?

Question 3: Would you expect to use the Allegheny County Parks Foundation's proposed trail connection between South Park and White Oak Park? Check all that apply.

Question 4: What would your primary use of the Allegheny County Parks Foundation's proposed trail connection between South Park and White Oak Park be?

Question 5: What types of activities would you use the proposed trail connection between South Park and White Oak Park for? Check all that apply.

Question 6: If you are a frequent bicyclist, what skill or comfort level do you have?

Question 7: If you would use the trail for biking, please check the boxes that best describe your group.

Question 8: What amenities or features would you like to see along the trail? Please select up to five.

Question 9: What connections, destinations, or features would you like to see at a trailhead?

Question 10: What activities would you like to do after finishing a visit to the proposed trail? Please select all that apply.

Question 11: What do you think is the biggest challenge to get people to use the trail? (Select up to 3)

Question 12: Where do you currently live?

Question 13: Please indicate the number of persons living in your household according to the following age groups. (Please fill in a number for the respective categories.)

Question 14: What is the approximate total income of your household?

Question 15: What is your race/ethnicity?

Question 16: (Optional) Tell us more! We want to hear any additional comments you may have on the proposed trail connection between South Park and White Oak Park.

SURVEY RESULTS

There were several key takeaways from the survey results that we were able to glean from the over 160 responses. While some people use long, regional trails on a daily or weekly basis, the majority of respondents indicated that they visit these trails only a few times a year, as opposed to a local municipal park trail which they visit more frequently. That being said, the vast majority of respondents (>60%) also drove to the trails which suggests the need for more trails within walking or biking distance of the average household. 80% of respondents wanted to enjoy the proposed trail with family or friends, supporting the desired goal of the planning team to develop a trail route that feels safe and that attracts families. Over 50% of respondents would use the proposed trail for health and wellness benefits, as opposed strictly for recreation. This response highlights the fact that individuals and families are increasingly seeking areas that can provide these health and wellness benefits, however, most people still expect those benefits to manifest through walking, running, biking or dog walking.

A surprisingly small amount of respondents would only prefer to ride on a dedicated trail with nearly 80% saying they were comfortable with some level of on-road riding situation like a protected bike lane or sharrow. Responses for amenities along the trail were varied but restrooms, trash receptacles, scenic views, water fountains and wayfinding/informational signage were the most desired. Additional or adequate parking and restrooms were the features that most people would like to see at trailheads. In response to question 10, respondents overwhelmingly wanted additional local activities to indulge in, supporting the earlier response that while people may not use the trail on a regular basis, when they do they want to make a day of it. In particular, people want to refresh with a beer or coffee and some food at a local restaurant.

Finally, the respondents identified three of the biggest challenges in each of the three "sections". For the western section (South Park Township and Jefferson Hills) getting across Route 51 was the biggest challenge for most, a sentiment shared by the Montour Trail Council. For the central section (Clairton and Glassport) riding on-road sections through those municipalities was perceived as most challenging. In the Eastern Section (McKeesport and White Oak) traffic speed, as well as general road conditions and pedestrian infrastructure worried respondents.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Most respondents:

- Use regional trails on a monthly or annual basis
- Drive to a trail instead of walking or biking to it
- Want to enjoy the proposed trail with family or friends
- Would use the proposed trail to support their health and wellness goals
- Would use the proposed trail to walk, run, bike, or walk their dog
- Would be comfortable with some on-road riding
- Want to see restrooms, trash receptacles, scenic views, water fountains and wayfinding/informational signage along the proposed trail
- Want to see parking and restrooms at proposed trailheads
- Want to explore local coffee shops, brew pubs, and restaurants
- Think crossing Route 51 is the most challenging aspect in the western section of the proposed trail
- Think that the on-road sections will be the biggest challenge in the central section of the proposed trail
- Think that traffic speed and road conditions will be challenging aspects of the eastern section of the proposed trail.

CONCEPT PLAN

DETAILED ALIGNMENT & TRAIL OVERVIEW

The South Park to White Oak Connector Trail will be a 23.8 mile multi-use trail connecting South Park and White Oak Park in southern Allegheny County. 13.1 miles will be off-road trail surfacing, either crushed limestone or paved concrete and asphalt. 10.7 miles of the trail will be on-road and clearly marked with pedestrian pavement markings like sharrows. The South Park to White Oak Park Connectivity Trail will traverse 6 communities in southern Allegheny County between South Park and White Oak Park: South Park Township, the Borough of Jefferson Hills, the City of Clairton, Glassport Borough, the City of McKeesport, and Borough of White Oak.

The South Park to White Oak Trail begins at the Montour Trail parking lot on Stewart Road in South Park Township. The South Park/Montour Trail Connector can be accessed 800 feet eastbound along the Montour Trail, which allows users to access South Park from the south. The trail then follows the Montour Trail through South Park Township and the Borough of Jefferson Hills to the Montour Trail's current eastern terminus on State Street in the City of Clairton.

From there the Connector Trail loosely follows the existing Steel Valley Trail route with some changes and improvements. Instead of following State Street to the Clairton-Glassport Bridge, the proposed route will parallel the state route along alleyways and ROWs beside the Norfolk Southern Railroad line. After crossing the Clairton-Glassport Bridge on the sidewalk, the route switches to on-road at the intersection of Ohio Avenue and Wall Street where the PennDOT-maintained section of Ohio Avenue ends. The trail then follows Monongahela Avenue through Glassport Borough before crossing into the 5th Ward neighborhood of McKeesport.

After crossing the 5th Avenue Bridge the trail connects to the GAP Trail and follows it southeast through the City of McKeesport before connecting to the McKeesport Loop Trail by the 15th Street Bridge. Near the southern terminus of the MLT, the Connector Trail will cross Walnut Street (148) at the Walnut Street and Eden Park Boulevard intersection and follow sidewalk before turning on 35th Street. At the end of 35th Street the trail will follow new off-road trail along the power line ROW and an existing old grade before leveling off around the 950' contour and winding its way along the edge of the slope to Renziehausen Park.

In Renziehausen Park, a brief on-road section takes trail users across Eden Park Boulevard. The trail then follows park trails to University Drive at Penn State Greater Allegheny before following a series of residential streets through Borough of White Oak to the intersection of Henderson Road and Lincoln Way. The Design Team then proposes that a half mile section of sidewalk on the east side of Lincoln Way be expanded to provide a safe trail corridor in this section to the Lincoln Way and Jacks Run Road (SR 48) intersection, a major PennDOT intersection which has been recently expanded. The trail will cross Jacks Run Road at the light with improved pedestrian infrastructure and follow new off-road trail between Lincoln Way and the Oak Park Mall. At the end of the Oak Park Mall by the Busy Beaver, the trail will enter White Oak Park on an old graded trail to be improved by the Allegheny County Parks Department.



P & LE BRIDGE NEAR THE EXISTING DOUGLAS STREET TRAILHEAD

PROPOSED CONNECTOR TRAIL ALIGNMENT

