

Both the Redbank Valley Trail and the Armstrong Trail have very active projects. These projects and interest in the north and south connections to other parts of the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail are increasing the focus that the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail can be completed before 2033.

Improvements continue with the Climax Tunnel as different funding sources are being blended for one project. Completion of the Tunnel is scheduled for late 2017. Nonpoint pollution projects with PennVEST and a DEP funding will make environmental improvements along with trail sustainability. RVTA also has an updates for the Redbank Valley Trail.

The Armstrong Trail has nine (9) active projects that include over 10 miles of trail that has funding secured and being upgraded this summer. Funding includes the Volunteer Fund of The Pittsburgh Foundation, DCNR Grants, PennVEST Grants, private donations, municipal workers, and lots of Volunteer work. Several small gaps are being eliminated, non-point source pollution problems are being solved, and on the road co-use sections are being reduced. Along with the volunteers, contractors, and engineers; the Conservation Districts of both Clarion and Armstrong County, Ford City Borough, Kittanning Borough, Manor Township, Manorville Borough, East Brady Borough, several municipal authorities, and public officials are involved in the projects.

The “pull behind mower” that Armstrong Rails to Trails purchased with a Trail Volunteer Grant through The Pittsburgh Foundation is becoming a huge success in mowing the entire trail in a few days. This has minimized the adjacent landowner’s encroachments onto the trail. Only a few people continue to plead ignorance when their personal property is moved to a safe distance away from the trail. We usually require a minimum 4 feet of clearance from the edge of the trail’s treadway to benches, fences, trees, bushes, or other obstacles and an agreement for the adjacent landowner to use a portion of the inactive railroad corridor. The result is that we have developed a parallel safety “green berm” that is 4 feet wide.

The Armstrong Conservation District is sponsoring an AmeriCorps Crew that is doing projects throughout the county. They have cooperated with ARTA and AVLTL to do several tasks along the Armstrong Trail such as installing Mile Markers, clearing invasive vegetation and unwanted vegetation, setting gates, and assisting in trail improvement projects.

CareerTRACK also has partnered with AVLTL and has a crew and supervisor that is assisting in laborious trail tasks, such as vegetation controls, repairing tools, and doing equipment maintenance (oil changes, greasing, and cleaning equipment.)

Although “champions” for the connection of the Armstrong Trail to Allegheny County are not identified, there continues to be more conversations on both temporary and permanent possibilities. This coupled with AVTA’s grant application for a feasibility study to consider trail possibilities extending south has revitalized the desire for additional improvements for the Armstrong Trail.

ARTA will have additional information for an ARTA update.

Industrial Heartland Trail Coalition

An IHTC Summit is planned for November 4 in Cranberry, Butler County. I encourage all to try to attend and find out more about the Industrial Heartland Trail Coalition. We will send out more info as we obtain it.

It has been suggested that EPTA have a Panel Discussion at the Summit to discuss forming and maintaining an organization such as EPTA. Kim Harris, Deb Frawley, and Deb Eckleberger are assisting me on a committee. This topic will also be discussed as an agenda item.

Eric Oberg gathered data and changed out the batteries on Rails to Trails Conservancy Trail Counters at the counter sites along the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail. The counters will continue to November and then they will be available to trail organizations for 8 week periods. This will allow more data to be gathered and also strengthen the model.

Ron's side comments

Three questions I hear over and over are:

When will the trail be finished?

What are the connections that I can do to overcome the gaps?

What is EPTA doing for the businesses?

As we do our strategic plan I think it is important to capture the thoughts of the stakeholders that are not at the quarterly EPTA Meetings. This includes are area of influence such as trail users, foundations and individuals that may be willing to fund the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail and/or EPTA, the private business that are both for-profit and nonprofit, public officials, educators, health care providers, and others. As we expand our trails we also expand the area of influence provided by the trails. My biggest regret with trails is that I did not dream big at an earlier age.

Ron