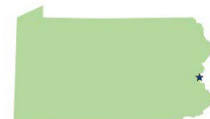


Planning for Sustainable Brownfield Redevelopment

CONVERTING A RAIL TRESTLE TO A VIBRANT BIKE TRAIL

EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA AND PHILLIPSBURG, NEW JERSEY, EPA REGION 3



The cities of Easton, Pennsylvania, and Phillipsburg, New Jersey, are on opposing banks of the Delaware River. With miles of river and historic canal frontages, both communities are undertaking major initiatives to embrace their waterfronts. Although both cities lie along major regional and historic trails, no major trail connection spanning the Delaware River currently exists.

Two abandoned railroad trestle bridges—both designated brownfields—provide an opportunity to create an extraordinary trail connection that could provide a unique recreation experience for both communities. This “Highline” type trail could be a game-changer for the region.

Local support for the project began with the efforts of the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC). The LVEDC facilitated dialogue among the two city governments, other local development agencies, and EPA’s Land Revitalization Team. The main project objective was to gauge the feasibility of repurposing the two trestle bridges as part of a future trail installation. The new trail corridor would provide dynamic public amenities along with easy access for citizens to the regional trail network.

The Land Revitalization Team provided design services in creating a master plan for the future trail and other public open spaces. A general-level field structural assessment was performed to determine if there were any issues with existing trestle structures or the rail alignment that would preclude the proposed facilities. The Team also was tasked with developing an innovative and cost-effective solution to accommodate a future trail crossing of an active rail line. Representatives from the two communities contributed insights and ideas throughout the design development process to ensure that the project master plan would meet local needs.

The Land Revitalization Team developed a series of base maps indicating existing physical conditions of the project site and adjacent areas. During a site visit in June 2016, the Team gathered valuable in-field data concerning project opportunities and constraints. Based on this information, the trail master plan includes: active open spaces / trailheads on both the Easton and Phillipsburg ends of the proposed corridor; overlooks at key viewing points; a plaza space on one of the existing trestles; a ramp leading to the active rail line crossing in addition to an elevator and stairs to address the grade change on the opposite side; and suggested locations for public art installations.

EPA’s Land Revitalization Team provided the communities with a Summary Document that details the master plan and an implementation roadmap. This will be used by the two communities and the LVEDC to facilitate discussions with local and regional stakeholders as well as the public. A project leadership group will be established to help create a plan for project funding as well as a plan for long-term operation and maintenance of future facilities. This group also will lead negotiating efforts with the associated railroad companies to ensure effective implementation.

For more information, please contact Christopher Thomas, EPA Region 3, at thomas.christopher@epa.gov.



Figure 1: Master Plan of the West Section of the Proposed Trail Corridor.



Figure 2: Rendering of Proposed Trail, Overlook and Trestle Plaza

LESSONS LEARNED

- Abandoned infrastructure and brownfields can provide unique opportunities to enhance a community’s quality of life.
- Collaboration between two city governments can be more efficient when working to develop a shared community amenity and when using a coordinated approach to programming and design.

PLANNED POST-TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES

- Create a group of city and development agency representatives to develop funding, operational, and maintenance plans for the proposed project.
- Present the concept plan to local and regional stakeholders as well as the public to build support.
- Engage and negotiate with the associated railroads to ensure effective plan implementation.