

Executive Summary

Purpose

The Shawnee Greenway Feasibility Study was undertaken by the Shawnee Institute to determine the viability of creating a 3-mile hiking and biking trail between the site of the new PennDOT Welcome Center, located at the “Delaware Water Gap” Exit 310 of Interstate 80, and the southern terminus of the McDade Trail within the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DWGNRA).

The study was funded by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Shawnee Institute, and was developed with the involvement of multiple partners, including; Smithfield Township, Borough of Delaware Water Gap, Monroe County, the National Park Service (NPS), the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau, and several local and state trail development organizations.

The Feasibility Study will serve as the basis for future decision-making by all potential partners in the development of a regional trail infrastructure in Monroe County.

Project Area

The Shawnee Greenway Study area is a 3-mile long preferred alignment that parallels the western side of the Delaware River in Pennsylvania, and navigates a complex of waterways, steep terrain, and narrow, historic transportation corridors.

The majority of the preferred alignment traverses private property. The northern terminus and small “in holding” parcels that are potentially affected in the central portion of the alignment are owned by the federal government and managed as part of the DWGNRA by the NPS.

At the southern end of the alignment the trail will traverse municipal park properties. It is important to note that the southern trail segments of the Shawnee Greenway trail are being planned, designed and built independently by Smithfield Township and its partner, the Borough of Delaware Water Gap. These southern trail segments will unite the physically divided parcels of the Smithfield Minisink Park with the multi-municipal Regional Park – as well as with the New PennDOT Welcome Center, the Borough of Delaware Water Gap, and the Appalachian Trail.

Executive Summary

History

The *Comprehensive Plan for the PennDOT Delaware Water Gap Welcome Center 2001*, included a chapter that analyzed the alternatives to create trails from the site of the Welcome Center to several existing and proposed trails that all converge on the Delaware Water Gap. This plan was funded by PennDOT and the USDA Forest Service and prepared by the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau with a consultant team.

The trail linkage alternatives to the McDade Trail were studied in detail and mapped using the GIS data from Monroe County and NPS. Three alternative alignments were considered. The “Island Bridge” alternative was recommended as the option that would create the least cumulative impacts, be the most universally accessible, and bring trail users closest to the river environment – in a way that is compatible in character to the NPS McDade Trail.

The 2001 recommendation for the McDade Trail extension to the Delaware Water Gap served as the next step in planning for an idea that was identified by the NPS in its early studies for the McDade Trail, but needed to be performed by other partners for adjacent properties located outside the DWGNRA boundary.

The Shawnee Resorts were approached by the 2001 “Comp Plan” study team to determine the potential for planning a trail across portions of the resort properties. Shawnee Resort agreed that the idea had merit and was worth studying.

The Shawnee Institute, a non-profit (501c3) educational organization took on the task of a feasibility study after it applied for, and was awarded funding from PA DCNR in 2003.

Trail Feasibility

Municipal Segments – The southern segments of the Shawnee Trail under development by Smithfield Township are feasible and are being advanced as separate, independent segments of what ultimately could be a 3-mile Shawnee Greenway Trail. Each segment of trail in this section can immediately function as part of the municipal and regional park system.

Federal Properties / Jurisdiction – Portions of the preferred Shawnee Greenway Trail alignment may impact small “in-holding” parcels of the DWGNRA. Much of the trail alignment is on privately-owned properties that are located “within” the boundary of the DWGNRA. These realities and the likelihood that state and federal funds will be used to design and construct the trail will subject the project to all relevant environmental compliance and permitting requirements.

Shawnee-on-Delaware, Smithfield Township, Monroe County, Pennsylvania

Preferred Alignment – Physically, the preferred “Island Bridge” trail alignment is the most universally accessible; least impact to the community; and perhaps the most structurally intensive. The proposed overland trail segments will be connected by four trail bridges from the mainland over the back channels of the Delaware River – one at each of the north and south ends of Shawnee and Depue Islands, respectively.

The preferred “Island Bridge” alternative creates a trail route through municipal park properties and multiple private properties that are controlled almost exclusively by one owner. This strategy minimizes the total number of private owners that would be directly affected by the trail. This alternative also avoids the significant issues of private-property, community, aesthetic and environmental impacts that would result from either trying to widen River Road along the mountainside and through the Village of Shawnee on Delaware – or from routing the trail through multiple privately-owned properties along the Pennsylvania edge of the Delaware River. Both of these options were considered “fatally flawed” in the 2001 Comprehensive Plan and that opinion remains true in 2006.

There may be a possibility to create a different type of facility that mixes on-road, and hiking trails to make footpath connection along this greenway area, but this could not be considered a “multi-use” trail equivalent to the McDade Trail and was not the subject of the Feasibility Study.

McDade Trail Extension – Part of the project will include an extension of the McDade Trail approximately one (1) mile from the Hialeah access area in the DWGNRA to the southern tip of the DWGNRA located directly across the northern tip of Depue Island. This section of trail will be the responsibility of NPS.

Operation, Maintenance, and Security – These issues are identified in this feasibility study, but will need to be addressed by project partners as the project is developed in subsequent phases. Smithfield Township, The Multi-municipal Recreation Consortium, Monroe County, the National Park Service and the Shawnee Institute are all potential trail management entities. The best solution may be a delineated division of responsibilities among several or all partners. At the feasibility stage, the county or multi-municipal level of government appears best suited to take on the general management of a “regional recreation trail facility” such as the Shawnee Greenway. Such action would require a new commitment by Monroe County to consider the Shawnee Greenway as a “county-level park” facility. Monroe County would need to reconsider its personnel, budget and technical capabilities. Somerset is an example of a Pennsylvania County that acquired and manages the 42-mile segment of the Allegheny Highlands Trail as its “first county park”. Monroe currently has a recreation department, a roads department, and a county

Executive Summary

engineer that could all be tasked to take on trail management responsibilities – not without additional costs. Again, Somerset should be considered an example of a county that has enlisted multiple partners to help fund the design, construction and maintenance of its county park trail.

Public Concerns – The Feasibility Study process discovered a general public concern about the development of the Shawnee Greenway. People questioned many aspects of the trail – including construction, operation, maintenance and safety issues. These are all real issues that can and are being solved across the nation by communities that desire trails. The heart of the issue is “change” and this is common with trails projects. There was a general public expression that development and taxes were increasing too rapidly in Smithfield Township, and that a trail would only be another cost and impact to the community. The “preferred” alignment was presented as the best physical alignment – if a multi-use trail was to be developed in this section of the valley. It was determined that even Shawnee Resort has not accepted a “preferred” alignment route for a trail that would need to be created across the heart of its campus and along parts of the golf course.

Future Considerations – One community resident expressed support that this trail linkage is important for the future. Another asked how long the trail would take to be constructed if it started today. The answer is probably ten years, considering the funding requirements and the environmental issues that need to be addressed – and this can happen only if the community is united in favor of the project. Otherwise, the Greenway completion is unlikely.

The Shawnee Greenway Trail has all the attributes to be a nationally significant project, but there are too many other projects that enjoy widespread community support for any conflicted project to compete against successfully for funding.

The key to understanding the importance of the Shawnee Greenway Trail is to envision what River Road should be like – not today, but in ten years. Regardless of whether the trail is built, the volume of vehicular traffic through the Village will increase. The Shawnee Greenway Trail was conceived as an alternative transportation route through the valley that did not require motor vehicles. The concept remains valid – not only to allow visitors to enter and travel through the valley without a car, but to allow residents to travel outside the community without a car.

Issues were raised about the current level of users of the McDade Trail which, according to NPS, is not quite what was originally projected. It is important to understand that the trail is not yet completed to the total 30-mile length that will attract long distance riders. McDade Trail useage can be expected to increase exponentially once the trail is completed through to Milford and

people become aware of this attraction. Completion of McDade Trail is still several years away, but the residents of Shawnee on Delaware need to think about whether they want every new trail user forced to drive through the Village twice just to use the trail.

Future Linkages – The PennDOT Welcome Center on I-80 was designed and built as primarily a facility for motor vehicles, even though the site does contain a minor footpath through it. There is no parking for trail users at the welcome center site, but there is an adjacent Park & Ride lot that has the potential to serve trail users on the “off peak” hours during weekends – when trail use would be the highest. Ultimately, PennDOT will need to acknowledge the Welcome Center and Park & Ride as more than a single use facility – based upon sheer demand of multiple uses. The Park & Ride lot is currently overflowing during weekdays.

Milford is in a similar situation to Delaware Water Gap as the northern access area to the McDade Trail, but due to the traffic volume on I-80 and the proximity of the new welcome center to the national park, the southern entry to the McDade Trail will likely bear the majority of the visitor traffic through Shawnee on Delaware.

The success of the Park & Ride and the interstate bus service in Delaware Water Gap are factors that favor the future of rail service to New York City – a study that is currently in progress. The rapid rise in gas prices is also an incentive to re-establish rail in this corridor. If and when rail service happens, it will serve to as an alternative transportation route for commuters to provide relief to I-80 traffic, as well as an off-peak service for visitors to the Pocono Region. Planners suggest that the new rail station will take the place of the existing PennDOT Welcome Center and consolidate all transportation modes and services into a multi-modal facility with structured parking – not unlike the original vision set forth in PennDOT’s 2001 Welcome Center Comprehensive Plan.

Next Steps – The Shawnee Greenway needs a champion to move to the next step. The project should be considered as a major recreation project at the county level – as the missing link between municipal, state and federal recreation facilities in this 3-mile corridor. Monroe County can revisit its open space bond program to examine whether it can be used in the future to support the operation, maintenance, and security costs that partners would assume to manage such pivotal project of regional, state and national importance.

Project Costs – In 2004, the Shawnee Greenway was estimated to cost approximately \$3.5M. The final feasibility level cost estimates for year 2006 are over \$4.0M.

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