

I. Executive Summary

A. Background

This study investigates the feasibility of constructing a multi-use trail in Montgomery County and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on the west side of the Schuylkill River between Valley Forge National Historical Park and Fairmount Park at the Falls Bridge. Throughout its proposed length, the Schuylkill River West Trail would connect existing networks of local sidewalks and regional trails. At its northern terminus in Valley Forge Park, the trail would connect to the existing the Schuylkill River Trail, the Horse-Shoe Trail, and to a loop system of multi-use park trails. At its southern terminus near Falls Bridge, the Schuylkill River West Trail would connect to the existing southern reaches of the Schuylkill River Trail on both Kelly and Martin Luther King Drives.

Public participation has been a key component to the success of this project. Input from community groups, local governments, and the public in general has been solicited through public meetings, maps, graphic presentation and displays, publicly distributed project brochures, and interviews.

This study's recommendations are the result of public participation garnered through a structured stakeholder interview process. The proposed trail alignments and configurations were developed through a series of meetings with the project study committees and in public forums.



Map of the Study Corridor.
For higher resolution, please refer to the appendix

A glossary of terms used in this report has been provided, and can be found in Appendix 0.

B. Goals and Objectives of this Study

This study assesses the feasibility of a recreational trail along the west side of the Schuylkill River in Upper Merion Township, Bridgeport Borough, West Conshohocken Borough, Lower Merion Township, and Philadelphia. The objectives of this study are to evaluate the feasibility of proposed trail alignments, and where appropriate, make recommendations and formulate preliminary designs to guide the creation of the Trail.

C. Trail Recommendations

A brief summary of this study's recommendations includes the following:

- ◆ A continuous multi-use trail through the study corridor is constructible, but approximately one-third of the proposed alignment is on private property. Some of the property owners are amenable, some less so. Feasibility of three trail reaches hinges on approval by two significant property owners/agencies: Norfolk Southern railroad, and PennDOT. If either

withholds permission to construct the trail, either a continuous trail will not be possible, or alternate alignments away from the river will need to be further investigated.

- ◆ A generally hard-surfaced, 12 foot wide trail is recommended in Upper Merion Township, Bridgeport Borough, and West Conshohocken Borough.



Existing riverside path at Five Tower Bridge in West Conshohocken is private property

- ◆ Owing to the physical challenges, a generally soft-surfaced, 8 foot wide trail is recommended in Lower Merion Township, with some sections to be 6 feet wide.
- ◆ The southernmost mile of the trail cannot be constructed on the Lower Merion side of the Schuylkill River, because right-of-way is not available. Therefore this study recommends the utilization of the existing Schuylkill River Trail on the east (Philadelphia) side in that area, with the trail crossing on existing bridges.
- ◆ Trail implementation should be phased. A detailed discussion of recommendations for three key stages of construction is given in Section IV.D, and illustrated on Maps G and H in Appendix 4.

D. Implementation Recommendations

The proposed alignment of the Schuylkill River West Trail passes through five municipalities. This study recommends that each of the five municipalities take the initiative to design and build their portion of the Trail.

The Implementation Recommendations Plan envisions Phase I projects beginning in each of the four Montgomery County municipalities. Phase I segments were carefully chosen to be of value separately as they are completed. Later phases (II through IV) will link the earlier segments together, eventually forming the continuous trail from Valley Forge to Falls Bridge.

Upper Merion Township has started construction of the first piece of the Schuylkill River West Trail. In 2008, Township supervisors voted unanimously to fund the trail between Heuser Park and Bob Case Park (designated Reach 4 in this study).

This study's designs can be used as a template to ensure the Trail's continuity. If the Trail gains the full support of all four municipalities – thus making this a truly *regional* effort – Montgomery County may assume some maintenance and safety patrolling responsibilities once the trail is open. If less than full support is forthcoming, and implementation of some portions of the trail are not moved forward, the County has indicated that its efforts may be directed elsewhere. In addition, funding sources at the State and Federal level often place multi-municipal efforts at the top of the list, when determining which projects will be awarded grants. Thus, trails that do not cross municipal boundaries, or trails with gaps or “dead ends,” will be viewed less favorably by funding sources, and will therefore be more difficult to implement.

E. Opinion of Probable Cost

1. Acquisition

Trail development will require the acquisition of easements or the purchase of rights-of-way from a number of existing property owners. Based on recent purchases of trail corridors in Montgomery County, it is estimated that the total purchase price for all parcels may be approximately \$275,000.00. The estimated cost of each parcel is listed in the Preliminary Opinion of Probable Cost. If easements or right-of-way are to be purchased, the use of a Pennsylvania Certified General Real Estate Appraiser is recommended for help in determining the fair market value.

Some owners of other trail corridors have donated easements, often taking a tax deduction for such an easement.

2. Survey / Preliminary Design Costs

Two reaches of the Trail in Lower Merion Township traverse parcels whose ownership cannot be definitively determined by this feasibility study. It appears likely that these parcels are owned by PennDOT or Norfolk Southern, although it is possible that some of them may be owned by third parties.

- An in-depth field survey and title search will be required to determine the precise location of property lines.
- If the Trail is to be placed on PennDOT right-of-way, preliminary design will need to be completed before PennDOT will decide whether or not to allow the trail. This design work, as is typical, represents a significant expense with no guarantee of approval.

3. Construction

In the opinion of Campbell Thomas & Company, the probable cost for the Trail will be approximately \$15 to \$21 million, depending on the alternate alignments chosen. This figure includes estimated design fees, which can be anticipated to be 15 percent of construction costs. The analysis supporting this estimate of probable construction costs is provided in Section IV.B, and the cost table included in Appendix 6.

3. Maintenance Costs

Maintenance costs generally range from \$5,000 to \$7,000/per mile/per year for similar trails. We recommend that the responsible agencies use a figure of \$7,000 per mile to estimate maintenance costs during the first year after development. This figure can be evaluated at the end of the first year. This cost can be used for fundraising purposes as well as to solicit volunteer help for maintenance.

Many trail operators have been able to supplement their maintenance program by creating partnership agreements with local businesses, clubs and organizations. Formal cooperative agreements can be made with these partners that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each party. Developing an effective maintenance management system is an on-going process.