

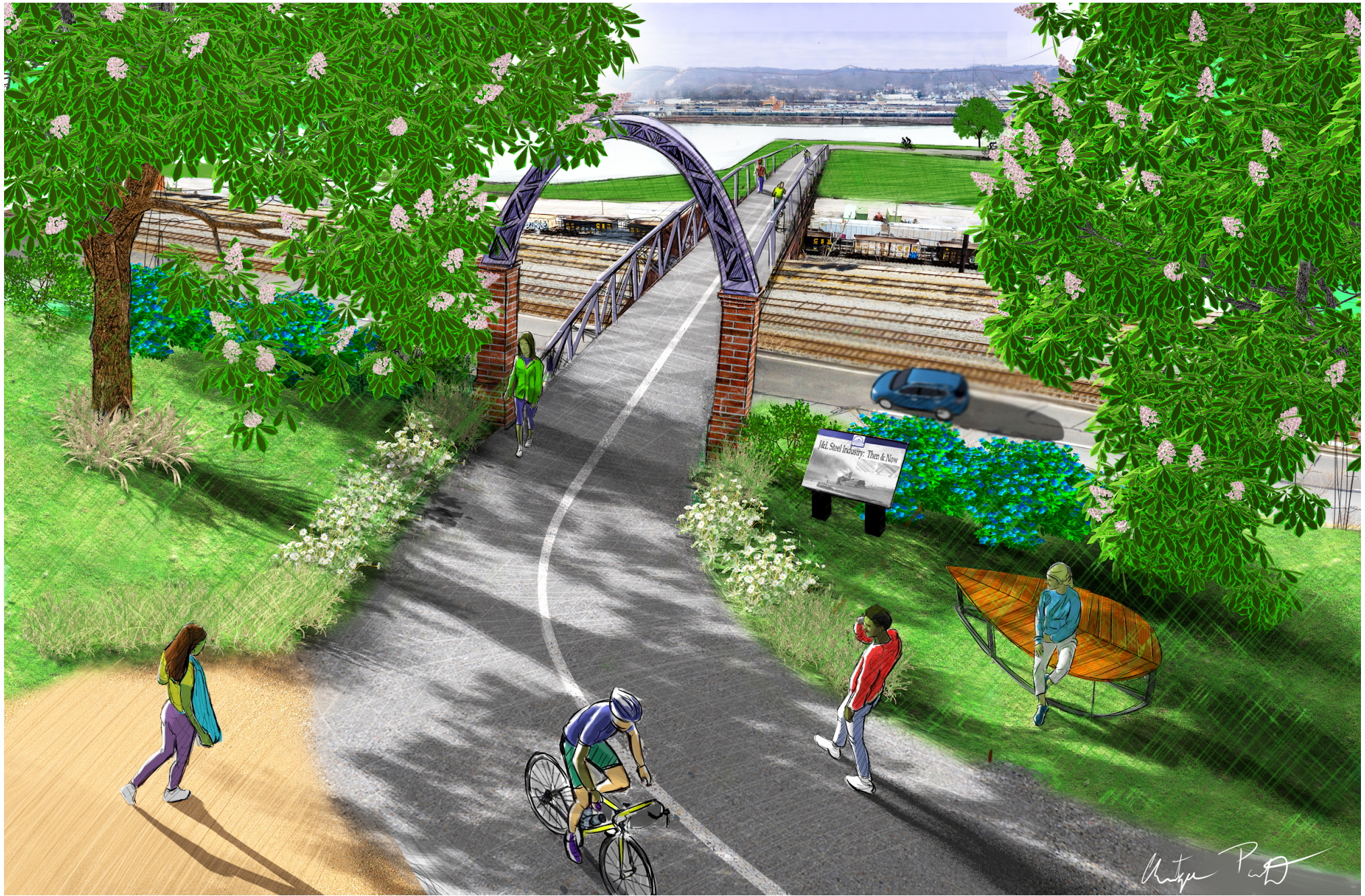


PROPOSAL Black's Run Bridge Acquisition

March 25, 2021



Overhead rendering of the future Black's Run Bridge and Ohio River Greenway Trail along Old State Route 51



Rendering of the entrance to the future Black's Run Bridge and Ohio River Greenway Trail



Close up of signage that educates trail users about the former site of J&L Steel, through which the future Ohio River Greenway Trail will travel

Project Summary

Requesting Organization	Ohio River Trail Council
Project Background	<p>Since 2009, the Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC) has been working to create a network of trails throughout Beaver County. This network, known as the Ohio River Greenway Trail, comprises nearly 30 miles of multimodal trails that are utilized each year by tens of thousands of residents of Beaver County and beyond.</p> <p>Numerous and extensive feasibility studies conducted over the last decade demonstrate only one viable route for trail development through the heart of Beaver County. This route requires the acquisition of the Black's Run Bridge, which will provide the ORTC with access to a two-mile stretch of roadbed adjacent to old State Route 51. Acquisition of this bridge addresses numerous challenges along this trail corridor, provides public access to the trail network from current State Route 51, preserves one of only a handful of remaining historic bridges in the region, and generates numerous opportunities for tourism related to Beaver County's industrial heritage.</p> <p>Over the last 18 months, the Ohio River Trail Council has conducted over \$60,000 worth of due diligence related to the acquisition of the structure in question. The bridge itself has been inspected by Larson Design Group. The roadbed along Old State Route 51 has been examined both by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and by Steffey Trail Connections. In addition, the crossing at the Mancini Bridge has been studied at some length by Environmental Planning and Design. Research to date demonstrates the following: (1) the bridge is more than suitable for pedestrian traffic, (2) the roadbed where Old State Route 51 once existed has been generally well preserved and meets all of our needs, and (3) there are viable options for connectivity on the south end of the proposed hilltop trail. In short, extensive due diligence has confirmed the wisdom of our planning and has emboldened our resolve to continue development of this segment of the Ohio River Trail.</p> <p>Given the numerous benefits to a wide array of Beaver County residents, and based upon our extensive research concerning this project, The Ohio River Trail Council is asking the Board of Commissioners to approve taking ownership of the Black's Run Bridge. All existing evidence suggests that doing so will solidify Beaver County's future as a leader in trail connectivity, outdoor recreation, and historical and industrial tourism, generating both enhanced quality of life and numerous economic benefits to residents of the region for generations to come.</p>

Why this Project is Important

Throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, a growing network of political leaders, community organizers, and trail advocates are working to construct a 1,500 mile-plus mega corridor of trails known as the [Industrial Heartlands Trail](#). Currently 50% complete, this network will eventually comprise “the largest shared-use trail system in North America for tourism, physical activity and recreation.”¹ A significant portion of this trail, The Ashtabula to Pittsburgh Corridor, passes directly through Beaver County, on precisely the stretch of land addressed in this proposal. Even more expansive than the Industrial Heartlands Trail network is the [Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail](#). This nearly 5,000 mile long [trail network](#), which stretches from Pittsburgh to Oregon “follows the historic outbound and inbound routes of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.”² This trail will also hinge on the completion of the Beaver County trail segment in question.

In order to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from this growing network of interstate trails, Beaver County must prioritize trail building through the heart of the Ohio River Valley. To do this, we must preserve the Black’s Run Bridge. Failure to do so will forestall the broader vision of cross county trail development in Beaver County for at least the next several generations, slowing the work of both regional stakeholders and trail advocates from the tristate area and beyond.

Recreation Benefits to Beaver County

Outdoor recreation contributes over \$800 billion a year to the US economy. This amounts for nearly 7 million jobs, roughly 5 times the total number of jobs generated by WalMart, America’s single largest employer. Prior to COVID-19, over 115 million Americans per year utilized trail networks like those being proposed here in Beaver County.³ In Pennsylvania, the number of trail users during COVID-19 is reported to have nearly doubled when compared to 2018 figures. Not only are more people using trails in PA, but studies also demonstrate a significant change in demographics related to trail use. Simply put, a substantially greater number of younger and more diverse residents are using trails than ever before. This trend is only expected to continue beyond COVID-19.⁴ As more and more Pennsylvanians become accustomed to using trails of all kinds, it will become increasingly important that communities seeking economic and population growth provide such amenities to prospective residents. This likely trajectory, coupled with the unique appeal of the Ohio River along the historic J&L Steel site, offers unparalleled opportunities for on road and offroad recreational trails, scenic river overlooks, riverfront parks, and much more.

¹ <https://www.railstotrails.org/our-work/trailnation/industrial-heartland-trails-coalition/mega-corridors-and-major-trails/>

² <https://lewisandclark.travel/>

³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19H3LuH9CLxUQWBLv0o7c1v77xSLV9ebz/view?usp=sharing>

⁴ <https://pecpa.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID-Trail-Report-Final-6-9-20.pdf>

Tourism Benefits to Beaver County

Trail connectivity provides innumerable benefits from the vantage point of regional tourism. In 2019, visitors to Pennsylvania spent over \$46 billion across a wide range of sectors. Such spending is estimated to have supported nearly 350,000 jobs in Pennsylvania. Less than 20% of statewide spending on tourism occurred in the Greater Pittsburgh region, demonstrating significant opportunity for increased market share. In 2019, for example, Beaver County reported just over \$300 million in tourism revenue, less than half of the \$715 million reported by Washington County,⁵ home to the award-winning Montour Trail.⁶

Although the Black's Run Bridge was initially explored as a trail related asset, it also provides opportunities for further promoting tourism related to Beaver County's industrial heritage. Unlike any other location along the old J&L Steel site, the bridge offers immediate access to this industrial corridor from directly off of State Route 51. If properly utilized and marketed, this bridge could serve as a central and iconic reminder of Beaver County's industrial history. One could imagine an interactive, GPS enabled app for a phone⁷ that accompanies trail users throughout the former site of J&L Steel, historic Logstown, the site of George Washington's visit to Beaver County and more. As users traverse the trail, the app could automatically push them historical information, displaying the many sights and sounds of Beaver County's past on their phone. A network of stopping points along the trail could be created to augment the impact of such an experience and could even be used to direct trail users into local communities along the Ohio River Trail. More than a perk to trail enthusiasts alone, such an app could be used to attract train enthusiasts, river advocates, local history buffs and more.

Economic Benefits to Beaver County

Acquisition of The Black's Run Bridge will enable an estimated \$10 million in trail-related projects through the heart of Beaver County. Renovation of the bridge and construction of the trail will comprise the bulk of such economic activity. Over time and depending on the buy-in that can be secured from surrounding municipalities, county agencies, and business owners along the trail, this number could be substantially higher. Opportunities exist along the trail to explore the creation of riverfront parks and overlooks, scenic vistas off of Old State Route 51, solar powered light gardens⁸ along the trail, electric bike routes and charging stations, and much more.

One additional and substantial benefit of this project concerns how it aligns with the [proposed](#)

⁵ https://www.visitpa.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/Economic%20Impact%20of%20Tourism%20in%20PA%202019_FINAL-min.pdf

⁶ <https://montourtrail.org/about/>

⁷ To see a similar app that has already been created, click [here](#) then scroll down to "Explore this Tour Remotely." Once there, click the "Play" button to access the full tour.

⁸ For an example of what is possible, click [here](#).

	<p>interconnect between the Municipal Water Authority of Aliquippa (MWAA) and the Borough of Monaca Water Department (BMWD). All told, these two water systems service nearly 22,000 residents representing approximately 14% of the total population of Beaver County. In total, estimates suggest that the interconnect and closely associated projects will cost over \$11 million to complete. Although this initiative might at first appear to be unrelated to the proposed bridge acquisition, this could not be further from the truth. Once the bridge is acquired, the trail will be constructed over top of the very same easement provided to the MWAA and BMWD, thus generating economies of scale and increased incentive to undertake both projects simultaneously.</p>
<p>Evidence in Support of this Proposal</p>	<p>Along with this proposal, we have submitted the following letters of support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allegheny County Office of the Executive (Rich Fitzgerald) • PA State Representative Rob Matzie • Rails to Trails Conservancy (Eric Oberg) • National Park Service (Andrea Irland) • Friends of the Riverfront (Courtney Mahronich Vita) • Beaver County Regional Council of Governments (Rebecca Matsco) <p>Additionally, each of the studies listed below support claims made throughout this proposal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black's Run Bridge Inspection Report (Larson Design Group) • The Ohio River Greenway Trail North Shore Connector (Mackin Engineering Company) • Ohio River North Shore Trail Feasibility Study (Stromberg/Garrigan & Associates) • Ohio River Area-Wide Brownfields Planning Project (Stromberg/Garrigan & Associates) • The COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Pennsylvania's Non-Motorized Trails: Increased Use, Added Strain, and a Newfound Appreciation (Pennsylvania Environmental Council) • Economic Impact of Travel & Tourism in Pennsylvania 2019 (Pennsylvania Tourism Office) • The Business of Trails: A Compilation of Economic Benefits (American Trails)
<p>Costs Associated with</p>	<p>There will be no cost associated with the acquisition of the Black's Run Bridge. Any emerging expense</p>

Acquisition of the Bridge	<p>associated with transferring ownership will be covered by the current owner of the structure.</p> <p>Once the bridge is owned by Beaver County, all normal expenses associated with owning such a structure will become the responsibility of the county.</p> <p>As indicated by the Black's Run Bridge Inspection Report, there are a handful of improvements that Larson Design Group recommends undertaking prior to opening the bridge to pedestrian traffic. These upgrades are estimated to cost roughly \$500,000. After the bridge is in use, and at some point within the next decade or so, approximately \$2.5 million in additional improvements are recommended in order to preserve and beautify the structure for many decades to come.</p> <p>Extensive research, past history, and recent experience all suggest that the funds required for bridge improvements can be raised from multiple private, local, state, and federal sources.</p>
Resources Available to Offset Future Costs	<p>The Ohio River Trail Council has either raised or contributed over \$60,000 to this project to date. The current owner of The Black's Run Bridge, Mr. Chuck Betters, has agreed to donate the bridge, as well as adjacent land, for future trail use. Along with the bridge, Mr. Betters will pay for the legal work required to subdivide property and generate easements necessary to construct roughly 5 miles of additional trail between the Moor Industrial Park (in Monaca) and the Ambridge/Aliquippa Bridge. Mr. Betters is also willing to make a \$50,000 cash donation to be used to address any immediate or future needs related to acquisition and maintenance of The Black's Run Bridge.</p> <p>Although further due diligence must be conducted to arrive at a more precise number, we anticipate that such contributions by Mr. Betters will produce up to \$2 million or more in matching resources that can be used to secure future funding for trail development and related projects.</p> <p>Research regarding future funding has already begun, conversations have been initiated, and all indications suggest that funding will be available to preserve this important structure. If and as stakeholders are willing to think creatively about the bridge and adjacent property, funds should be available from a wide range of sources including private, local, state, and federal sources.</p> <p>Should it be desirable, The Ohio River Trail Council would happily agree to work diligently alongside the county to help secure funds to rehabilitate the bridge and construct the trail and associated amenities.</p>
Proposed Timeline	<p>The window of possibility for securing The Black's Run Bridge is very quickly closing. Plans to demolish the bridge were well underway prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, and now that the weather has turned</p>

those plans are being actively executed. For numerous practical and financial reasons, the current owner is committed either to transfer or demolish the structure in the coming months.

Given the urgency of this situation, we are asking for the quickest possible resolution of this matter. Should it be desirable, representatives of the Ohio River Trail Council would be happy to attend the April 8, 2021 meeting of the Beaver County Board of Commissioners to discuss this proposal in greater detail. Of course, The ORTC would also be amenable to meeting at another time and place of the Board of Commissioner's choosing.

In order to communicate expectations, move planning forward, and set the stage for securing possible future funding, we are requesting a written response to this proposal by Monday, April 12, 2021.

Should you have any questions in the interim, please direct them to Mario Leone, co-founder of the Ohio River Trail Council, at manager@ambridgeboro.org or 724-480-8099 (cell).