

PennDOT awards \$1 million to connect, extend trails in Luzerne County

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Richard Cochrane, treasurer of the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association, stands with a 'Rails to Trails' sign near a trailhead for the Luzerne County Levee Trail in Edwardsville. A state grant will pay to connect that trail to the Back Mountain Trail in Luzerne.

- JASON ARDAN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Richard Cochrane, treasurer of the Anthracite Scenic Trails Association, stands in a field near Main Street and Page Avenue in Edwardsville on Tuesday, gesturing to the path of a new trail that will connect a terminus of the Luzerne County Levee Trail in Edwardsville with a terminus of the Back Mountain Trail in Luzerne.

- JASON ARDAN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation has awarded grants totaling more than \$1 million to extend one trail and connect two others in Luzerne County.

The Anthracite Scenic Rail Association will receive \$834,176 for a new 1.6-mile trail that will connect the Creekside Trail portion of the Back Mountain Trail in Luzerne Borough to the end of the Luzerne County Levee Trail in Edwardsville.

And the City of Pittston will get \$200,000 to extend the 1.8-mile Riverfront Trail northward about 2 miles from the city into Duryea — another step toward connecting that trail with the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail in Lackawanna County.

The funding comes from PennDOT's Surface Transportation Block Grant program Set-Aside, also known as the Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TA Set-Aside).

It is part of \$49.5 million awarded to 55 projects statewide designed to improve the accessibility of biking and walking paths and amenities, pedestrian access to public transportation, community improvement activities, environmental mitigation projects and trails, according to a press release from PennDOT Secretary Mike Carroll.

The anthracite connection

The connector trail between Edwardsville and Luzerne will become part of the 6.2-mile Back Mountain Trail, which extends north from Parry Street in Luzerne to Dallas Twp. near the municipal building, Richard Cochrane, treasurer of the Anthracite Scenic Rail Association, said Monday.

The levee trail currently ends just off Main Street in Edwardsville near First Welsh Presbyterian Church. The connector will continue across Main Street, mostly on land owned by the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority, through Kingston and into Luzerne. PennDOT will award the construction job to a professional highway contractor, Cochrane said.

The project is still in the design phase, with construction still about a year away. The ASTA is awaiting approval of a Local Share Account grant from the Commonwealth Financing Authority to help with design, but the project will move ahead regardless of whether the LSA grant is awarded, he said.

A "goat path" trail currently exists where the connector trail will be built because people walk the path, "but it's not developed, it's not pleasant. When it's finished, we'll have a nice, modern, well-surfaced trail that people on tricycles and bikes and in wheelchairs, people with mobility issues will be able to use it," Cochrane said.

Riverfront Trail extension

Pittston Mayor Mike Lombardo said the extension of the Riverfront Trail into Duryea is part of a larger plan to eventually connect it to the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail in Lackawanna County.

Shannon Bonacci, Pittston deputy administrator for community development, housing and redevelopment, said Tuesday the Borough of Duryea has applied for a grant to add another two miles to the trail, which would leave only about two more miles that would have to be developed for a connection to the 70-mile heritage trail.

Lombardo said there will be some overlap between the trail project and the ongoing Water Street Bridge replacement project, so work on the section of trail near the bridge will be postponed until the bridge project is complete.

"The good news is, some of that trail work can be included with the bridge project," Lombardo said, noting that one part of the bridge project includes widening of sidewalks on the bridge.

"Our hope is that when the bridge is done, the Riverfront Trail can connect to the West Side Trail System, which includes the dike in Forty Fort," Lombardo said Tuesday. "We have a master plan that proposes 80 to 100 miles of connecting trails in this region. We believe in the next five years, we could see 80 to 90 miles of trail connectivity here."

That system will include an urban trail on which Pittston city employees and volunteers are working. That trail will be based on the sites of 88 dress factories that once operated in the city, as noted in the 2019 movie Martin Scorsese "The Irishman," based on a novel about an alleged mafia hitman who worked for the Bufalino crime family in Luzerne County, Lombardo said.