



# NEWS

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## **Montco Opens New, Scenic Section of the Pennypack Trail**

**Huntingdon Valley, PA (September 18, 2015)** – With the help of local municipal officials, representatives from SEPTA, open space advocates, and regional bicycle groups, the Montgomery County Commissioners today cut a ribbon officially opening a 2.7-mile section of the Pennypack Trail that runs from Welsh Road to Byberry Road.

The new section is the most scenic section of the Pennypack Trail and winds through Bryn Athyn, Lower Moreland, and the Pennypack Wilderness area along the Pennypack Creek. The area has been an inspiration for generations of painters, including Russell Smith whose painting will be featured on some of the interpretive signage that will be along the trail.

The Montgomery County section of the Pennypack Trail now extends 5.4 miles from Rockledge Park to Byberry Road. The first phase connecting Rockledge Borough and extending it to Welsh Road was completed and opened in the fall of 2014. The section opened today by the commissioners also included two road crossings at Terwood Road and Route 63 and trailhead parking at Byberry Road. The total cost of the project was \$1.8 million. The section from Route 63 to Byberry Road cost \$500,000.

This project marks another milestone in the completion of the Circuit, the region's multi-use trail network. Currently with 300 miles of completed trails, the Circuit is a planned 750-mile network of bicycle and pedestrian trails connecting people to jobs, communities, parks, and rivers in the Greater Philadelphia Region.

Riding, walking, or running the trail can also be an educational experience thanks to a series of interpretive signs that will be placed at various locations along the trail.

When the railroad, which the trail now follows, and stations were built back near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, people came from Bethayres Village to catch the train. This station also had mills, quarries, and farms nearby that used the railroad to transport freight to and from Philadelphia. The content of the interpretive signs was produced by an interpretive trail signage committee that was comprised of knowledgeable and creative volunteers from the community that continue to be inspired by the history and environment along the Pennypack.

The signs show the old Huntingdon Valley train station area and the points of interest along the railroad/trail. The map panel shows images of the old train stations along the route. The signs also show the rail corridor between the Huntingdon Valley Station and the Valley Falls area, a well-known spot along the creek and the site of a train station that was located about where Huntingdon Pike passes over the trail. This stretch of railroad is infamous for the 1921 train wreck in which two trains collided and the wooden passenger cars caught fire. Twenty-seven people lost their lives and as a result wood frame passenger cars were replaced and gas lamps were banned on trains.

The opening of the new section of the Pennypack is just one of several trail extensions and openings that the county has done in the recent past and will do in the future. Montgomery County has over 60 miles of its proposed 165 mile county trail system completed. The county trails connect county parks, greenways, local trails, and towns providing a variety of recreation, health and fitness opportunities, and mobility options for people getting to work or other destinations.

The county trail system currently attracts a growing numbers of users:

- The Schuylkill River Trail attracts an estimated 800,000 users per year
- A 2008 Rails to Trails Survey estimated that 400,000 people use the 19-mile Perkiomen Trail system each year
- Rails to Trails studies on the Schuylkill and Perkiomen Trail found that the average amount of spending per person using the trail was about \$10 a day on soft goods

### **Montgomery County Trail Expansion Program**

Here are some of the trail projects that are now being studied, in design, or under construction:

- **Schuylkill River Trail – two sections**
  - Pottstown Riverfront – a one-mile section along the Schuylkill River from Hanover Street to Yost Road to be funded in part with a recently obtained a

\$199,000 grant from the PA DCNR. This section will be constructed in the spring of 2015.

- Pottstown/Lower Pottsgrove Trail connection to the new US Route 422 Bridge over the Schuylkill to be built by PennDot. The county made a grant application to PA DCNR for funding to purchase property for this connection. Some preliminary design work has been performed.

- **Chester Valley Trail Extension**

- A four-mile section of the Chester Valley Trail through Bridgeport and Upper Merion Township.
- This project is 100 % funded under federal CMAQ grant funds.
- This trail link will complete a safe 16-mile trail between the Schuylkill River Trail in Norristown, Montgomery County and Exton in Chester County.

- **Wissahickon Trail Connector**

- The completion of the one-mile gap in the Wissahickon Trail through Erdenheim Farm is being planned in partnership with the Whitemarsh Township and the owner of Erdenheim Farm.
- When completed this will provide an 18+ mile continuous pathway system from the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia to North Wales

- **Cross County Trail**

- The county is working on a feasibility study with Plymouth Township to develop a 2.5 mile section of the Cross County Trail from Germantown Pike to Erdenheim Farm.
- When this gap is completed the Cross County Trail will extend from the Schuylkill River Trail in Conshohocken to Fort Washington State Park.

- **Norristown Trail Center**

- The county is seeking PA Local Share Grant funding to refurbish an historic freight station at the Junction of the Schuylkill River Trail and Chester Valley Trail in Norristown.
- The Trail Center improvements would be made in conjunction with Phase II of the Lafayette Street Project.

- The trail center could serve all types of trail users as well as commuters using the Norristown Transportation Center and the events sponsored by the Arts Hill Area of Norristown.
- **SunRise Trail**
  - The county has submitted a grant to the PA DCNR to develop a feasibility study for a new trail along the Swamp Creek connecting the county's 236-acre SunRise Mill natural area with the Perkiomen Trail in Schwenksville.
  - Work on the feasibility study could begin in the fall of 2015.

### **Get Out and Go Montco**

- The new Montco initiative "**Get Out and Go Montco**" urges Montgomery County residents to get healthy and have fun utilizing the county's parks, trails, and open spaces.
- It is important for our residents to be fit and healthy, and given our trails and parks there is no reason not to be.
- Businesses seeking to expand in or relocate to Montgomery County are interested in quality of life and our trails, parks, and open space provide that.
- We already have over 60 miles of trails, and we are investing over \$9 million in additional miles of trails in the next two years.
- Montgomery County was named the fifth healthiest county in Pennsylvania by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, but still 21 percent of our population over 21 does not get daily exercise.
- The "Get Out and Go Montco" tent is here today and will be on display throughout the county this fall for a series of events.