

WARWICK-TO-EPHRATA RAIL-TRAIL
FEASIBILITY STUDY

**Boroughs of Akron and Ephrata
and
Ephrata and Warwick Townships
Lancaster County, PA**

December 2006



Prepared by
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was funded in part by a grant from the Keystone Park and Conservation Fund administered by the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Funding was also provided by the Boroughs of Akron and Ephrata and Ephrata and Warwick Townships.

The Consulting Team of ELA Group, Inc. and Gannett Fleming, Inc. Vortex Environmental, and Von Neida Environmental was assisted throughout the project by Dan Guers, Akron Borough Manager and Project Coordinator, and by the efforts of the Warwick-to-Ephrata Rail-Trail Feasibility Steering and Study Committees. The following persons represented the Steering and Study Committees:

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Special thanks also go to representatives of the public who attended the Study Committee Meetings and Public Meetings held in regard to the Feasibility Study.

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INTRODUCTION

Warwick and Ephrata Townships and Akron and Ephrata Boroughs have determined that it is appropriate to study the feasibility of converting a 4.3-mile section of the former Reading & Columbia railroad corridor into a rail-trail facility. Should this potential project be deemed feasible and each municipality determine that the construction of the rail-trail is appropriate, it would serve as a linchpin in an approximately 7-mile rail-trail that could, in essence, connect downtown Lititz with downtown Ephrata.

As the potential for such a rail-trail was coming into focus, the four municipalities applied for a matching Community Conservation Partnership Program grant, as administered by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). When principal funding for this Feasibility Study was awarded to the municipalities, they impaneled a Feasibility Study Committee, retained the consulting firm of ELA Group, Inc., and initiated this study, which has been completed in full compliance with the requirements of DCNR.

The following report outlines the planning process and conclusions that have been reached by the Study Committee with input from the community at-large.

PURPOSE OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The purpose of the Warwick-to-Ephrata Rail-Trail Feasibility Study is to determine the feasibility of converting approximately 4.3 miles of the former Reading & Columbia Railroad Corridor into a linear trail. If deemed feasible, such a trail could, in essence, serve as part of a connecting link of some 7.1 miles between Lititz and Ephrata Boroughs, as follows:

- Potential Rail-Trail in Lititz Borough (from Route 501 to Oak Street): 0.7 miles
(as studied in the Lititz Borough Greenway & Trail Feasibility Study/2004)
 - Existing Rail-Trail from Oak Street to Warwick Township Campus: 0.6 miles
(implemented in 2000)
 - Potential Rail-Trail from Warwick Township Campus to Newport Road: 0.5 miles
(as studied in the Lititz-to-Warwick Rail-Trail Feasibility Study/1998)
 - Potential Rail-Trail from Newport Road to planned Ephrata Rail-Trail: **4.3 miles**
 - Planned Ephrata Rail-Trail (generally from Sycamore to Main Streets): 1.0 miles
(to be implemented in 2007)
-
- Total Potential Rail-Trail (Lititz to Ephrata): **7.1 miles**

Such a trail could serve a variety of purposes ranging from recreational to alternative transportation (such as for bicycle commuting or usage by the agricultural community). The rail corridor included in this Feasibility Study passes through four municipalities (Ephrata and Warwick Townships and Akron and Ephrata Boroughs), each of which is a participant in the conduct of this Study.

This project is financed in part by a grant from the Community Conservation Partnerships Program, under the administration of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. Funding is also provided by the four participating municipalities. Due, in part, to the funding provided by the DCNR, this Study extensively considers the feasibility of this rails-to-trails conversion including, but not limited to, the following factors: legal/ownership, physical conditions, demand and potential usage, financial implications, and phasing/prioritization. As such, the Feasibility Study addresses the following:

- Analyzing community demographics and preferences as to trail demand and usage (based on existing data provided by the municipalities).
- Inventorying and analyzing the existing conditions within the corridor [including Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA), wetland identification, structures, and crossings].

- Garnering input from the communities and from adjoining/adjacent property owners that might serve as a model for other Lancaster County communities.
- Through successful case studies, educating the public to the benefits (from health to economic) and responsibilities of trail development and stewardship, including resolution of conflicts (between various types of trail users) should they arise.
- Identifying landowner concerns and potential conflicts (especially regarding legal/ownership status of the rail corridor, the rural setting of much of the corridor, and the preserved farm designation of several tracts adjoining the corridor) and the identification of possible solutions to these concerns/conflicts.
- Identifying operational, maintenance, and security issues along with the identification of possible solutions to these issues.
- Recommending a conceptual trail alignment, including amenity areas, with desirable connections and applicable acquisitions and evaluating same against other recreational uses or alternate trail configurations (alongside rural roads, for example).
- Providing construction guidelines and illustrative designs that address critical design issues and areas.
- Providing an estimate of costs related to acquisition, development, and operation of the trail.
- Identifying potential sources of funding (including, but not limited to, Federal, State and County funding initiatives).
- Identifying potential development sequences for the potential trail and its associated amenities.
- Formulating short and long term strategies for implementation.