

## **CONCLUSIONS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

During this year-long Feasibility Study, the Study Committee convened a series of meetings, reviewed data and documentation prepared by the consultant team and others, solicited public input through surveys/questionnaires and Public Meetings, and considered the range of information included in this Feasibility Study. All of these efforts have been focused on answering the question: "Is it feasible to develop a rail-trail between Warwick Township and Ephrata Borough?"

### **Conclusions**

The Study Committee concludes that it could be feasible to convert this 4.3-mile section of the former Reading & Columbia rail corridor into a rail-trail, facilitating a possible 7-mile rail-trail between Lititz and Ephrata. If, after further study, each municipality determines that the implementation of the rail-trail is appropriate for its community, the trail:

- would provide new regional recreation opportunities, that are supported by the larger community;
- could serve as an alternative means of transportation;
- would link a number of communities (in terms of residents, employees/employers, and community facilities);
- presents opportunities for historic and cultural interpretation;
- could be supportive of the local and regional economy, including the agricultural economy; and,
- would enhance the quality of life in the region.

This conclusion is not lightly made. It recognizes that prudent use of public funds and a modicum of patience will be required. It also recognizes that several key issues (outside of the scope of this Study) remain unresolved and must be resolved prior to implementing the rail-trail. Specifically, these issues/matters include:

- Property ownership and the appropriate means of acquiring interests in the corridor.
- Compatibility between the rail-trail and the agricultural preservation easements on several adjoining farms.
- Safeguarding the adjoining landowners, through further design and implementation.

It is important to note that, if each municipality pursues implementation of the rail-trail, many members of the Study Committee are willing to volunteer to continue serving in the

capacity of a regional advisory group. In this way, the current Study Committee seeks to assure that the rail-trail is completed cooperatively and with consistency between the communities it serves.

### **Executive Summary**

This Executive Summary can only highlight portions of the Feasibility Study. The reader of this Summary is encouraged to read and understand the entire content of the Study, to fully comprehend and appreciate the conclusions that it draws.

Simply stated, the **Purpose of the Feasibility Study** is to determine the feasibility of developing this rail-trail, which while only consisting of 4.3 miles, has the potential to facilitate a 7.1-mile rail-trail that could connect Lititz and Ephrata.

Throughout the course of the Study, seven **Goals** were derived, along with supporting **Objectives**. The Goals include the following:

1. **Provide for a wide range of user types and skill levels.**
2. **Address security, safety, environmental and liability concerns.**
3. **Demonstrate the benefits of such a trail system.**
4. **Create meaningful linkages to intra-community and Countywide facilities, alike.**
5. **Educate the community to the benefits of the trail and enhance trail users' stewardship of the trail corridor.**
6. **Be flexible, adapt to changing conditions.**
7. **Leverage funding, through grants and partnerships, to yield improvements that are financially achievable, affordable, and sustainable in terms of first and long-term costs.**

A variety of factors were considered as part of the processes of **Inventory and Analysis**. The feasibility of a rail-trail must consider its compatibility with the vision and aspirations of each of the participating communities. Further, the feasibility of a rail-trail must consider physical conditions, environmental constraints, cultural and historic attributes, existing and proposed land uses, various attractors, and legal/landowner conditions along the potential corridor. Additionally, the evaluation must account for compatibility with agricultural preservation concerns, the ability to assuage neighbor, landowner, and community concerns; and, the ability of the four municipalities to cooperatively take on such an undertaking.

What emerged from these investigations were **Critical Issues/Concerns** in which the Study Committee and consultant expended considerable effort to address in a manner that is instructive to the communities and affected stakeholders. In other words, the Study Committee directed the consultants to seek answers that were proven to work both on the local and national levels, concentrating on the former. These issues/concerns include:

**1. Ownership of the rail corridor and acquisition of interest for trail usage.**

At best, the records of property ownership and title to the rail corridor are not complete or clear and will require further research and consideration. Claims of title to much of the corridor are made by both Pagnotti, Inc. (trading as the Reading Company) and many individual adjoining owners. It is recommended that the preferred means of resolving these property claims and acquiring an interest in the rail corridor for purposes of developing a rail-trail is through negotiating with each individual landowner, including Pagnotti. While not the preferred means of resolving these matters, eminent domain may need to be invoked if the rail-trail is to proceed to implementation.

**2. Impact upon agricultural preservation easements.**

Similar to the difficulties experienced with regard to ownership of the rail corridor, the impact of agricultural preservation easements must be further investigated. At present, eight farms along the corridor are preserved by either the Lancaster Farmland Trust or the Lancaster County Agricultural Preservation Board. Pending further study, the potential alignment of the rail-trail may be unaffected or may need to be adjusted to avoid conflicts with agricultural preservation easements.

**3. Adjoiners' concerns.**

The principal concerns expressed by adjoining landowners include loitering, mischief, theft, and vandalism; privacy and trespass; number and types of users; maintenance, upkeep, and cleanliness; hours of operation and lighting; rules/regulations and, impact on property values. These concerns are typical of rail-trail projects throughout the country, state, and county. Accordingly, data that addresses these concerns has been documented and a list of reference sources has been included that provides additional insight into these concerns.

**4. Cost/Use of taxpayer and public funds.**

In considering the feasibility of expending public funds to implement such a rail-trail, it is important for each municipality to balance its community's needs with the amount of expense required to implement and maintain the facility. To that end, it is important to note that the municipalities' comprehensive planning documents refer to strong support for trail-type recreation facilities that appeal to a wide cross-section of the community. Further, trails and rail-trails represent

some of the most frugal uses of public funds for recreational purposes, representing a modest initial cost and relatively low on-going expense (especially when compared to the cost of constructing and maintaining active recreational fields/venues).

**5. Liability/Users’ safety.**

Similar to the Adjoiners’ Concerns described above, liability and users’ safety are concerns of this rail-trail, as they are of national, state, and county rail-trails. These concerns are addressed in terms of transferring liability to the trail entity (municipality or carrying agent), physical design to eliminate or to protect against unsafe conditions, and recognizing that two local police departments (Ephrata Borough and Warwick Township) are located directly on the rail corridor itself.

As noted in the Conclusions, the Study Committee concludes that this Feasibility Study, to their satisfaction, has addressed these issues to the extent that they can at this time. Additional study and further planning will be needed to resolve matters that cannot currently be finalized under the purview of this Study.

The Feasibility Study provides **Trail Design Standards**, culminating in a **Trail Plan** that identifies exciting possibilities for the rail-trail and its possible connections within the communities. Working together, the Standards and Plan identify the context-sensitive design of a rail-trail for non-motorized usage (with the exception of emergency, maintenance, and possible agricultural equipment) that could pass through very urban and very rural settings. The Standards and Plan also outline the means necessary to provide for the rail-trail’s safe implementation and usage. Finally, the Standards also provide a framework for consistent maintenance and upkeep along the rail-trail’s entire length.

Without question, the rail-trail will cost money to plan, implement, and maintain. The detailed **Opinion of Probable Cost** within this Feasibility Study estimates the costs that can be quantified at this time relating to acquisition, implementation, and maintenance/upkeep. Further study will identify additional costs that could be incurred. Currently, using present dollar value, the range of acquisition and development costs (including “hard” and “soft” costs) on a municipality-by-municipality basis are estimated to include the following (the reader is encouraged to examine the detailed cost estimates in Chapter 8 and Appendix G for further clarity):

	<u>Acquisition</u>	<u>Development</u>	<u>Total</u>
• Akron Borough	\$ 82,604	+ \$163,736 to \$ 412,543	= \$246,339 to \$ 495,147
• Ephrata Borough	\$ 0	+ \$ 51,875 to \$ 83,770	= \$ 51,875 to \$ 83,770
• Ephrata Township	\$ 92,482	+ \$186,123 to \$ 431,261	= \$278,605 to \$ 523,743
• Warwick Township	\$311,077	+ \$278,241 to \$1,049,406	= \$589,318 to \$1,360,483

If implemented, each municipality would realize an on-going, yearly expense related to maintenance and upkeep. In present dollar value, the cost to each municipality is estimated to include the following (again, the reader is encouraged to examine the detailed cost estimates in Chapter 8 and Appendix G for further clarity):

Yearly Maintenance/Upkeep

- Akron Borough                    \$3,143
- Ephrata Borough                \$1,540
- Ephrata Township               \$2,217
- Warwick Township               \$6,958

It is not enough to simply identify potential costs. This Study also identifies potential **Funding Sources** to help offset the costs incurred in establishing and maintaining the rail-trail. These sources range from public agencies to private foundations and include federal, state, and local sources.

The Feasibility Study concludes by briefly outlining considerations for **Implementation, Structure, and Next Steps**. Here, the Study provides insight into the possible strategies that should be considered in terms of acquisition, phased/prioritized implementation, and maintenance/upkeep, both in terms of physical implementation and organizational structure. In terms of next steps, the municipalities are encouraged to consider:

**1. More thoroughly gauging public and adjoining landowners' support.**

While a number of meetings/public meetings were convened and several surveys/questionnaires were circulated, interest in this project was relatively low. Perhaps each municipality should hold separate meetings to review the Feasibility Study with its residents and business owners.

**2. Enlisting the input of municipal advisory committees.**

Before deciding whether to adopt this Feasibility Study, each municipality should request the input of its Recreation/Park Advisory Committee and/or Planning Commission.

**3. Determining the feasibility of the rail-trail, on a municipality-by-municipality basis.**

After obtaining further public and/or advisory committee input, each municipality should determine whether the rail-trail is feasible for its citizenry. In doing so, however, consideration must be given to the impact that a positive or negative decision will have on the other municipalities that have participated in this Study.

4. **If determined to be feasible, clearing title and agricultural preservation issues and acquiring interests in the rail corridor for purposes of implementing the rail-trail.**

Finally, if each municipality should deem that the rail-trail is feasible, the logical next step toward implementation will be the task of clearing the documented title and agricultural preservation issues and begin acquiring interests in the corridor for purposes of developing the trail. It may be determined at this time that additional grant funding may be required in order to complete title searches and acquire the rail corridor.

All in all, this Feasibility Study provides considerable detail and bases upon which to conclude that the Warwick-to-Ephrata Rail-Trail could indeed be feasible, provided that the several key issues that remain unresolved at this time can be resolved prior to implementing the rail-trail.