

IV. Inventory and Analysis

A. Physical Conditions

1. Natural Features- Opportunities and Constraints

The following physical conditions were investigated: Significant natural features including slope, existing vegetation, wildlife habitat, wetlands, agricultural lands, and PNDI sites. Appendix I contains the natural features analysis.

2. Cultural Features, Historic Sites and Land Use

The consulting team inventoried existing and proposed land use, cultural features, and destination and activity nodes within and adjacent to the study area.

One purpose of the trail is to connect important cultural features within the community such as schools and parks. Other important features to be connected include connections to rail stations, museums, historic sites, business districts and employment nodes.

Key features identified include:

- Blue Marsh Lake
- Lake Ontelaunee
- Reading Riverplace
- Hamburg Commercial District
- Shoemakersville Commercial District
- Leesport Commercial District
- Connection to the Berks County Nutrition and Wellness Corridor and the Berks Penn State Campus
- The Reading Company Historic and Technical Society Museum Site in Hamburg
- The Temple Rail Station
- The Berks County Fairgrounds
- Various Public Recreation and Historic Areas along the Schuylkill
- Various Historic Sites (See Appendix K)



Existing Path under Highway bridge

Appendix J provides a map showing these various features.

3. Ownership Patterns

Properties to be crossed by the proposed trail alignments were identified. Ownership was listed based on current County record data as of March, 2006. Appendix L provides a detailed mapping of ownership.

4. Transportation and Utility Corridors

The Schuylkill River Heritage Area owes its origin to its role as a transportation corridor. The early nineteenth century saw the construction of the canal. Later in the nineteenth century, first the Reading Company and then the Pennsylvania Railroad built railroads. In the study area both of these railway corridors are maintained and operated today by the Reading and Northern Railway. The abandoned canal's towpath provides the optimal alignment for the Schuylkill River Trail from Cross Key's Bridge to Hamburg.

The Study Team investigated several bridges that impact the trail alignment. Existing highway bridges provide opportunities to connect neighborhoods on both sides of the river to the trail. Several highway bridges were assessed to determine how they might best support this function.

At the northern end of the trail, a trail bridge on a former railroad bridge connects Hamburg to the Bartram Trail. Interest has been expressed by the Reading Company Technical and Historical Society in modifying this bridge to carry excursion trains as well.

Bridges with low traffic volumes such as the ones at Wall Street Bridge at Leesport and Cross Keys can be made suitable for the trail by signage and pavement striping, or the installation of traffic separators.

On its southern end the trail will also make use of the Schuylkill Avenue Bridge in Reading. Striping and signage are proposed for this bridge. This bridge provides a temporary connection to access River Place in central Reading until a bridge can be built at Confluence point.



Proposed alignment through Ontelaunee Orchards

Important highways follow and intersect this corridor. These highways in some cases would obstruct the trail alignment. Engineering solutions to these obstructions are proposed in this report.

Heavily trafficked Route 183 presents a barrier to the Freedom Trail. The study team evaluated options and proposed construction of a pedestrian overpass or underpass

5. Other Land Use

The study team investigated proposed land development activity as well as existing land uses. One area of particular concern was the proposed subdivision of the Walter Pohl property, Ontelaunee Orchards. A meeting was held with Mr. Pohl, and will require additional negotiations with Freedom Trail, Inc.

6. Environmental Quality.

Areas that could potentially be contaminated by hazardous materials from past industrial uses were visually investigated. See Appendix F.

B. Analysis Maps

Composite Analysis Maps were prepared to summarize the conditions inventoried. These maps are provided in Appendices I and J.

C. Usage Feasibility

The Schuylkill River Trail Reading to Hamburg is one of the last remaining links to be completed in the 130 mile Schuylkill River corridor, extending from the confluence with the Delaware River in Philadelphia to the headwaters in Schuylkill County. The trail is either completed, under construction, or under study by Schuylkill River Heritage Area, municipal planning agencies, and non-profit organizations. This trail will be a major regional recreational resource.

The proposed Freedom Trail will provide a reportedly 75-mile carriage loop from Blue Marsh Lake to Lake Ontelaunee and a spur to Reading. This would be a unique location for carriage rallies serving the entire East Coast. Horse drawn carriage rallies could contribute to the vitality of Reading Riverplace.

Recreational users of the trail system are anticipated to include:

- Joggers, Hikers and Walkers
- Bicyclists
- Anglers
- Equestrians (on the Freedom Trail, and the Schuylkill River Trail from Reading to Cross Keys)

As an integral part of Berks County, and with links to so many neighborhoods, towns, employment and commercial centers, the study anticipates use for local travel and commuting. Major benefits identified in interview and public workshops include:

- The ability to avoid traffic congestion.
- The ability to commute in a highly desirable, relaxing environment.
- The competitiveness afforded by “short-cuts” created by the proposed new bridges. Distances by trail may be much less than those on the highway for many trips.

D. Legal Feasibility

Legal issues to be addressed include the following:

- Zoning approvals from municipal governments may be required.
- In order to establish a trail head at the Fairgrounds, zoning restrictions on use of the Fairgrounds established by Bern Township must be modified.
- Approvals from the Public Utility Commission will be needed for an at-grade crossing of the Reading and Northern Railroad line.

- Any restrictions imposed by agricultural preservation easements should be explored.

V. Appendices

- A. Plan Showing Recommended Trail Types
- B. Plan Showing Existing Ownership Patterns
- C. Detailed Analysis of Probable Construction Costs by Reach and by Phase – Two charts are given – the first has costs grouped by the ultimate location of the SRT and FT, the second by Development Phases
- D. List of Possible Funding Sources
- E. Property Owner Meetings
- F. Environmental Analysis Report as prepared by STV
- G. Trail Alignment Maps (1 through 5)
- H. Trail Development Phase Maps (3 Phases)
- I. Natural Features Analysis Map. The following physical conditions were investigated: Significant natural features including slope, existing vegetation, wildlife habitat, wetlands, agricultural lands, and PNDI sites.
- J. Map of Cultural Features, Historic Sites and Land Use (existing and proposed land use, cultural features, and destination and activity nodes within and adjacent to the study area.)
- K. Historic Sites of Importance to the Trail Corridor
- L. Land Ownership Data by Township, Parcel Number, and Owner (will be listed in final report)
- M. Articles About the Schuylkill River Trail and Freedom Trail