

BARTRAM TRAIL EXTENSION

HAMBURG TO SHOEMAKERSVILLE

OVERVIEW

SRGA is working to provide a continuous recreation trail parallel to the river from its headwaters in Schuylkill County to its confluence with the Delaware River. The John B. Bartram Trail is the northernmost section of a 128-mile Schuylkill River Trail. This non-motorized recreational trail begins in Hamburg and travels north to Frackville and Morea. In July 1999, Schuylkill County in cooperation with Schuylkill River Greenway Association (SRGA) and Berks County, completed the John B. Bartram Trail Feasibility Study. Much of the route follows the old Penn Central Railroad Company right-of-way and is off-road. Some trail segments follow alternate routes, which are often on-road, as segments of the old railroad right-of-way were sold to others. The study identified many alternative routes along some challenging trail segments and provided maximum flexibility in trail implementation.

In advancing trail planning and implementation, this chapter explores optional routes to extend the Bartram Trail south from Hamburg to Shoemakersville.

BICENTENNIAL TRAIL

In Hamburg, the Bicentennial Trail parallels the old Schuylkill Canal alignment along the eastern banks

of the Schuylkill River. The trail runs north from Hamburg Park to the trail's terminus just north of the Blue Mountain Road and Port Clinton Avenue intersection. At this point, the trail could link to the Appalachian Trail via Blue Mountain Road. Just east of this intersection on Blue Mountain Road, an off-road trail connects the Olivet Blue Mountain Camp Grounds to the Appalachian trail atop the Blue Mountain. This is an important connection to Hamburg, providing hikers the opportunity to use the services offered in Hamburg.

At the southern end of Hamburg Park, the Bicentennial Trail connects to the Bartram Trail at the Hamburg/Tilden pedestrian bridge. From this point, the Bicentennial Trail was planned to proceed south, following the shoreline of the Schuylkill River. Frequent flooding, easement acquisition and physical obstacles have prevented this section from being completed.

TRAIL TYPES

This study presents three trail options of off-road, on-road separated, and on-road shared.

OFF ROAD

Off-Road trails are constructed to accommodate pedestrian, equestrian, and bicycle traffic only,



Figure 1.1 The Hamburg/Tilden pedestrian bridge.

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away from roads. These trails provide the safest routes and are most desirable. Off-road trails can be as simple as a compacted earth trail, wide enough to handle foot traffic to an optimal 10' to 12' wide paved trail of stone dust or asphalt.

ON ROAD ROUTE - SEPARATED

When land easements or topography restrict the development of off-road trails, existing road right-of-ways provide an alternative. These trails utilize expanded paved shoulders. Pavement markings delineate and separate the trail from vehicular traffic. When the trail crosses a street, it is important that both trail users and motorists be alerted of such crossings, through signage and pavement markings.

ON ROAD ROUTE - SHARED

The most inexpensive trail shares an existing roadway. These trails can often be implemented as “immediate” routes, and are used to complete connections, and get the trail up and running quickly. This trail type is sometimes seen as a temporary route, ultimately being replaced by a separated bike lane or off-road route.

ANALYSIS

The proposed Hamburg to Shoemakersville section of trail connects the southern terminus of the Bartram Trail at Hamburg Park through Hamburg to Main Street in Shoemakersville (see Hamburg to through truss bridge section in Chapter 3 for more detail).

From Lowland Road to Hamburg Park, the trail has followed the former Pennsylvania Rail Road line.



Figure 1.2 The Blue Mountain Rail Road underpass in southern Hamburg.



Figure 1.3 Remnants of the Schuylkill Canal are visible along segments of Five Locks Road.



Figure 1.4 The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission boat launch facility.

However, once over the bridge, a building now obstructs the former R.R. grade. At this point the trail requires a new alignment. (See Chapter 3 - Kernsville Dam for more detailed information on the proposed trail from Hamburg North)

From the Hamburg/Tilden pedestrian bridge, the extension could follow a number of on-road or off-road alignments. Three different trail options are outlined:

ROUTE OPTIONS

OPTION 1 . OFF-ROAD ROUTE

Overview

The off-road route primarily follows the towpath of the Schuylkill Canal. The State and property owners own much of the old canal alignment which has the potential to be developed into an off-road trail. There are many interpretive opportunities along this route to describe the history of the canal, the river, and the surrounding area. Also, because the majority of this route is off-road, it is the safest and preferred trail option.

Route

The Hamburg/Shoemakersville trail segment begins at the Hamburg/Tilden pedestrian bridge. From this point it will head south and cross State Street traveling along Front Street, a lightly traveled, wide street.

Many industries continue to operate in this section of Hamburg. For 800 feet, adjacent open lands owned by the Municipal Sewer Authority and Mid-Atlantic Cannery Association could be used to accommodate the trail improvements up to the canal alignment. At this point the trail crosses Front Street at the intersection of Pine Street onto the old Schuylkill Canal alignment. The canal has

been filled and is now a dense vegetative hedgerow. The trail will continue to follow the Canal alignment, owned by the Borough of Hamburg.

At this point the trail intercepts an inactive portion of the Reading Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad (RBM&N) . The Route 61 by-pass blocks the old canal alignment, so the trail turns to follow the railroad alignment. This upper segment of the railline is not currently used. As the rail approaches Route 61, the RBM&N line accesses a railcar storage and repair facility. Coordination with the RBM&N will be necessary to route the trail around this facility to the west.



Figure 1.5 The intersection of State and Fourth Street.



Figure 1.6 The intersection of Route 61 and Fourth Street looking north on Route 61.

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The proposed off-road trail shares this RBM&N railroad underpass, avoiding an on-grade crossing of Route 61.

The railroad passes under Route 61, a busy four-lane highway. This is a key feature of this route because it allows the trail to remain off-road and avoids crossing a busy Route 61. The trail can share the service road on the west side through the underpass.

The trail reemerges on the southern side of the 4-lane highway and returns to the Schuylkill Canal alignment. At this point, the canal is watered. The South Hamburg Railroad Station is located between the railroad and the canal. This period piece of architecture has heritage, preservation, and interpretation opportunities.

South of Hamburg Borough, the trail could follow one of three alternative off-road alignments. One parallels the inactive railroad bed. The second retraces the canal towpath and the third follows the

Schuylkill River shoreline.

The trail briefly passes through Windsor Township and then enters Perry Township, intersecting Five Locks Road.



Figure 1.7 The intersection of State and Fourth Street.

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An interim route could follow the currently unused RBM&N Railroad alignment. The RBM&N Railroad does plan to bring this line back into service, so this would only be a short term route. It may be possible to build a permanent trail parallel the rail line. This would require several miles of fencing and some grading. If the land owned by the RBM&N rail road is wide enough or if adjacent landowners agree, the trail could even be built parallel the rail line away from the active line.

The railroad and canal follow a more direct route for about a mile and a half to village of Five Locks, intersecting with Five Locks Road. The trail can continue along the former canal towpath. This route requires the permission from the property owner as well as clearing of overgrown vegetation.

A third route would closely follow the Schuylkill River. This route requires permission of land owners and clearing for the trail. This section would be located in the flood plain and be subject to temporary closures and occasional washouts.

After crossing Five Locks Road at the Five Locks Business Center, the canal, railroad and road closely parallel each other.

This segment of Five Locks road is quite beautiful, characterized by dense woods and lush vegetation flanking both sides of the road. This segment of road can be widened on the river side to accommodate a pedestrian/bicycle trail. Remnants of the Schuylkill Canal are visible on the eastern side of the road and provide the opportunity for interpretation. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission in conjunction with the Wildlife Conservancy owns and manages a boat launch between Five Locks Road and the Schuylkill River. Located a short distance down river from the boat launch, is the Peter Yarnell Canoe Launch.

At this point, all three options converge back to an off-road trail alignment. The trail continues south



Figure 1.8 The narrow railroad underpass on Five Locks Road

past Fisher Dam Bridge along Five Locks Road. To avoid a narrow railroad underpass at the intersection of Five Locks Road and Water Street, the trail will remain west of the railroad right-of-way, along the canal towpath.

The trail continues off-road along a vegetated corridor following the path of the Schuylkill Canal, parallel the railroad right-of-way. The trail follows the vegetated corridor, passing farm fields and providing occasional glimpses of the Schuylkill River. As the trail approaches the Shoemakersville Borough, the canal alignment disappears as residents have “reclaimed” this land.

At this point the trail turns onto a private gravel farm road that passes through agricultural fields. It



Figure 1.9 A typical view of agricultural land along Water Street.

should be noted that this access road is privately owned and would require an easement and an agreement with the owner to allow public use of this right-of-way. The trail continues along the access road and terminates in the parking lot of the Globe underwear factory in Shoemakersville. A closer study of the parking area with the property owner will be required to define a safe trail route to Main Street. This connection could occur within the street right-of-way, if necessary.

OPTION 2. ON ROAD-ROUTE

Overview

This on-road route begins at the Hamburg/Tilden pedestrian bridge and proceeds through the town of Hamburg then heads South on Route 61 to Main Street, Shoemakersville. This route utilizes existing roads as the backbone of the trail. Road improvements and the installation of signage are necessary to make this a feasible trail route.

Route

This route begins at the Hamburg/Tilden pedestrian bridge, connecting to State Street. Proceeding east on State Street for approximately one half mile, the route passes through the commercial downtown district of Hamburg to the Fourth Street intersection (F.1.5). Local stores, restaurants, specialty shops and other small businesses on State Street provide various retail and service businesses for the local community. This well-preserved commercial district also features distinctive "Main Street" architecture from the 19th century including an historic market building on the corner of State and Third Street. This route reflects the rich architectural history of Hamburg.

At the intersection of Fourth and State Streets, the trail turns south on Fourth Street for approximately

5,500' to Route 61. Fourth Street is mixed with residential and commercial uses and has sidewalks for the majority of its length. This section of road is heavily traveled by motorists, as it also provides a direct connection between I-78 and Route 61.

For the next half mile, as the trail approaches Route 61, both sidewalks and curbs disappear to undefined masses of asphalt paving. (F.1.6). This area is not pedestrian oriented. It would take substantial improvements to provide a safe corridor up to and across four lanes of traffic on Route 61.

A traffic signal controls the intersection of Route 61 and Fourth Street. The wide lanes and awkward road angles make this intersection a hazard to pedestrians and bicyclists. The intersection meets at an atypical 20-degree angle. Numerous driveways to adjacent businesses only add to the confusion. This is by far the most dangerous point on the route. It is absolutely necessary to provide a safe crossing for pedestrians across Route 61 at this point.

Once across Route 61, the trail follows the western shoulder of the highway south, towards Shoemakersville. As one approaches the top of the hill, the trail turns right onto Zion Church Road. This street quickly terminates at the intersection of Main Street and Hughes Hill Road. From here the trail proceeds south on Main Street.

Even though this on-road route loses the amenity of the river and the noise from Route 61 is audible, the street is lined with graceful mature trees and views open to fields that border the road. This road was the historical connecting road between Shoemakersville and Hamburg. The trail follows Main Street into Shoemakersville Borough. On street parking in town, will require cyclists to share the road in town, however reduced traffic speeds make this shared trail segment less of a concern.

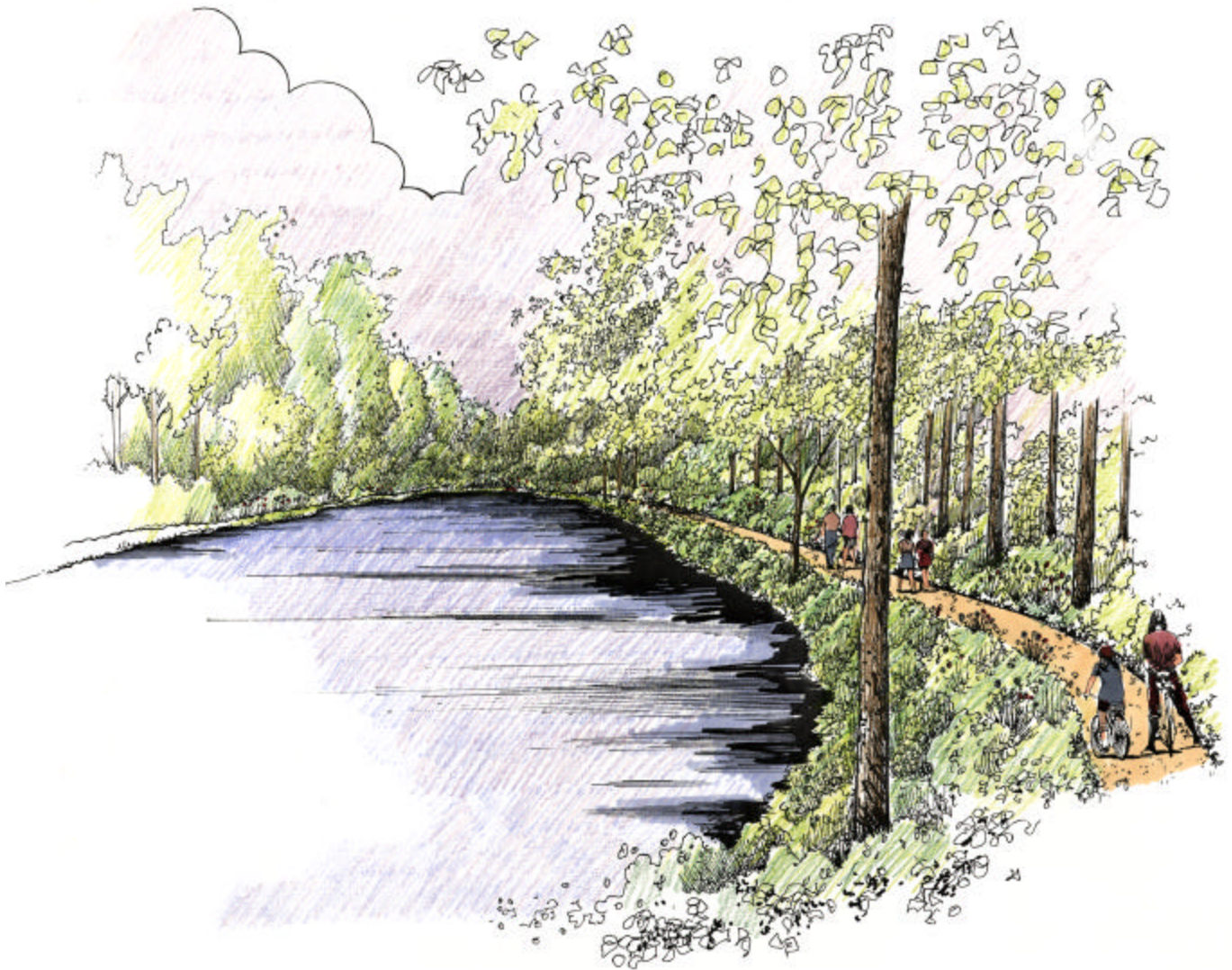
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OPTION 3. ON-ROAD ROUTE

Overview

The third trail option follows the same alignment as trail Option 2 up to the intersection of Route 61 and Hughes Hill Road. The route then turns west-southwest onto Hughes Hill Road to Five Locks Road traveling through Five Locks to

Shoemakersville. Some segments of the roadway are not able to be widened making this route primarily 'share the road'. The route requires crossing railroad tracks (now inactive, but potentially active in the future) at three different points. This route is indirect, traveling west-southwest through Five Locks, but it affords great views of the Schuylkill River and the surrounding agrarian countryside.



The proposed off-road trail follows sections of the Schuylkill River Navigation Canal.

Route

The first section of this trail follows the on-road (option 2) route from the Hamburg/Tilden pedestrian bridge through Hamburg and across Route 61. The trail would proceed south on 61, on the west side to the intersection of Hughes Hill Road. The trail turns right onto Hughes Hill Road, a narrow road which will be difficult to widened because of a steep embankment to the east and private property to the west. This is a safety concern for pedestrians and cyclists.

The route turns west onto Five Locks Road, heading toward the Schuylkill River. This narrow segment of road borders open farm fields to the north and south. The road crosses the inactive Reading Blue Mountain & Northern Railroad (RBM&N) at an on-grade crossing just before making a sharp turn to the south. Here the road widens and the character of the landscape changes, entering a tunnel of tall trees. The road, canal and railroad parallel each other with the Schuylkill River a short distance to the west. This route passes the Pennsylvania State Fish and Boat Commission boat launch and the Fisher Dam Bridge.

Proceeding on Five Locks Road, the route turns sharply east this time passing under the railroad (Figure 1.8). This narrow underpass is a dangerous point along the route. Safety and warning signage are required to make this underpass useable. Five Locks Road then changes to Water Street where it continues to parallel the alignment of the Old Schuylkill Canal and the inactive railroad. This wide segment of road is expandable to accommodate a trail. Views of the open rolling agrarian landscape unfold. Some remnants of the Schuylkill Canal are visible, although most of the old alignment has been filled and is now a vegetated corridor. The on-road trail continues along Water Street. The road remains wide and portions of the Old Canal are again visible.

Two trail options into Shoemakersville are possible. The first option continues along Water Street, winding through residential neighborhoods which have sidewalks for pedestrians. This option crosses the inactive rail line for the third time and terminates at Main Street. The second option is to turn right onto Walnut Street and left onto a gravel access road, which is also utilized in trail Option 1. This access road continues through farm fields and provides beautiful agrarian scenery. The trail travels past the Globe underwear factory and intersects Main Street in Shoemakersville.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Option 1, the off-road route, is the recommended trail. Although coordination with several property owners is required, most of the trail follows former roads or paths. The construction of the trail will be the greatest expense.

IMPROVEMENTS

The following is a list of trail improvements to be completed for each trail option.

1. *Shoulder expansion.*

For on-road route options, the expansion of the shoulders to accommodate bicyclist and pedestrians are the most important improvements. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in the Development of Bicycle Facilities Guide recommends shoulder width on roads with speed limits greater than 50 mph should be expanded to at least five (5) feet to accommodate a dedicated pedestrian/cyclist route. The expansion of shoulders is most cost effective when built in conjunction with other road improvements.

2. *Traffic safety signage.*

Along the on-road routes and at off-road trail intersections with roads, there is a need to alert vehicles of pedestrians and bicycles that may be on the road. Additionally, warning signs posted along the touring route make the trail user aware of the upcoming intersection or railroad crossing. These signs should be posted on both on and off road trails. Also line painting the trail on-road will assist in delineating the trail and also alert motorists of the trail. Where the trail crosses an adjoining street, it is important this crosswalk be clearly marked.

3. *Interpretive signage.*

Interpretive and orientation signage should be installed at key locations between Hamburg and

Shoemakersville. Interpretive signs provide an opportunity to tell the story about the region, its history and points of interest on or near the trail.

4. *Obtaining trail easements.*

Several off-road trail sections require easements through private lands. Land acquisition is not often feasible or necessary. An easement or permission for long term use is satisfactory. Developing an open and cooperation relationship with landowners is critical in making trail connections complete. When a trail follows an existing trail or other easement, such as a rail line, the addition of a paralleling trail has minimal impact. Screen planting or fencing may satisfy any privacy concerns.

5. *Off-road trail.*

The off-road sections of trail will require improvements to make them accessible. Those improvements include clearing existing vegetation, grading the surface for proper drainage and installing a trail surface. Construction of the trail should be sensitive to the surrounding landscape and adjacent land owners. It is recommended the trail be a minimum of ten feet wide.

6. *Control measures.*

The proposed off-road alignment parallels an un-used rail corridor in some locations. The future use of this line may change. Where the trail passes under Route 61 with the railroad, a 6' high chainlink fence will separate the uses. The use of "pass through gates" at road crossings on the trail will eliminate unwanted vehicular traffic on the trail. These bollards must be removable to allow for emergency and service vehicles.

COST ESTIMATE

1. OPTION ONE - Off-Road Route

Off-Road Section From Hamburg to Shoemakersville

Total Cost **\$434,250.00**

2. OPTION TWO - On-road Route

Hamburg to Hughes Hill Road/Main Street.

Subtotal \$80,930.00

Downtown Shoemakersville - Main Street

Subtotal \$11,500.00

On-Road Section - Main Street Shoemakersville to Hamburg

Subtotal \$154,380.0

Total Cost **\$246,810.00**

3. OPTION THREE - Scenic Touring Route

On-Road Trail: Route 61 to Five Locks to Shoemakersville

Total Cost **\$296,433.00**

Please refer to route matrix for a complete description of costs.

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