

HEX HIGHWAY TOURING ROUTE

HAMBURG TO STRAUSSTOWN

Overview

The on-road Hex Highway automobile and bicycle touring route begins on State Street in downtown Hamburg. The route continues west on State Street/Old Route 22 (Hex Highway) through Shartlesville into Strausstown. The route travels through the countryside, giving way to magnificent views of the surrounding agricultural fields and mountainous landscapes. Working farms with hundred year old barns dot the landscape along Old Route 22, reflecting the rich agrarian heritage. Many of these historic barns are decorated with a unique Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Art design, referred to as hex signs or "Barn Art". These hex signs are a major attraction in the Northern Berks County area and they are prevalent along the Route 22 corridor.

The charming small-town character of Hamburg, Shartlesville and Strausstown also help define the character of the touring route. These historic towns have intriguing architecture and flourishing businesses that serve the community. Businesses and residences lie side by side, adding to the unique cultural fabric of the streetscapes and bringing life to the streets. Some of the businesses in these towns, like Haag's Hotel in Shartlesville, have been serving the public since the 1800's, and continue the traditions of their Pennsylvania Dutch-German heritage.



Figure 2.1 A typical view from the Hex Highway of agricultural fields and the Blue Mountains in the distance

Analysis

The eastern terminus of the Hex Highway touring route begins on State Street in Hamburg. This street is home to Hamburg's business district, complete with specialty shops, dining, and assorted other small businesses. The architecture of the town reflects its historic rural and industrial roots. The old market building on the corner of Third and State Streets is a perfect example of this beautiful architecture. More detailed information about Hamburg can be found in Chapter 4 of this report, "Reconnections".

The Hex Highway touring route travels west,



Figure 2.2 The State Street Bridge looking east toward Hamburg.

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across the State Street Bridge over the Schuylkill River. The bridge serves as the primary western entrance into Hamburg. The State Street Bridge is currently in a general state of disrepair, with dilapidated sidewalks and rusted light fixtures. Despite this, the State Street Bridge is an attractive architectural structure with classic features. From the bridge there are impressive views of the river. PennDOT is planning for the repair of this wonderful bridge. This bridge is also a very important pedestrian and automotive link from Lowland Road.

Once repaired, this bridge serves as a valuable and attractive passage into and out of Hamburg. The repair of the bridge's sidewalks, and the widening of the shoulder along Lowland Road, would provide a pedestrian linkage between State Street to Lowland Road and the Hamburg/ Tilden Pedestrian Bridge.

West of Lowland Road, the wide shoulder along State Street provides the opportunity to create a route for the pedestrian/cyclist into West Hamburg. However, before traveling into West Hamburg, the trail passes under Route 61 and the Reading Blue Mountain and Northern Railroad. The Route 61 underpass is a wide and high concrete structure that is wide enough to accommodate the trail. However, the railroad underpass is a narrow stone structure but does have a separated sidewalk on the eastbound side. This does require westbound pedestrians and cyclists to cross Old Route 22 before and after the crossing. Once through the underpass, the trail continues along West State Street through West Hamburg. This segment of the road has wide shoulders and sidewalks. Homes interspersed with small businesses line the street.

The route continues west through Tilden Township on Old Route 22/Hex Highway. After passing the West Hamburg Elementary School, residential neighborhoods dissipate into rolling farmland and distant views of wooded mountains. The trail gracefully follows the topography of the land along



Figure 2.3 The Route 61 underpass in the foreground and the Reading and Blue Mountain railroad underpass in the distance.

the shoulder of Old Route 22 passing over trickling streams and through rural landscapes. There are grand views of the Blue Mountains to the north. The road widens at one point for about ¼ mile to three lanes over a steep hill and then returns back to two lanes. The road then enters Upper Bern Township and soon turns into Main Street, Shartlesville.

The route enters Shartlesville on Main Street after passing the Upper Bern School and municipal building. Wide shoulders and sidewalks make implementing a pedestrian/cycle trail through the town of Shartlesville relatively easy. Shartlesville



Figure 2.4 Haag's Hotel and Restaurant is one of the local businesses in Shartlesville that caters to tourists and locals alike.

site analysis

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is significantly smaller than Hamburg and is slightly more than a block deep on both sides of Main Street. Charming rural architecture is found throughout the town and businesses stand next door to residences. Restaurants, hotels, specialty shops, farm stands and other businesses can be found along Main Street. There are numerous opportunities for trail-users to stop and rest or shop at the local shops.

At the western edge of town, Mountain Road intersects Main Street. Billboards clutter the intersection, pointing the way to numerous local attractions (Fig.2.5). The I-78 interchange ramps onto Mountain Road, providing an easy on-off access. Near the I-78 interchange, gas stations, convenience store and Dairy Queen front onto Mountain Road. Further north on Mountain Road, are the Shartlesville Industrial Park, Mountain Springs Rodeo and Campground and the Appalachian Trail.

Continuing on Old Route 22, after passing Mountain Road, Main Street intersects Roadside Drive. Roadside Drive accesses to Roadside America, a tourist attraction showcasing the "worlds largest indoor miniature village". As the Hex Highway travels west it enters Upper Tulpehocken Township. The road is wide enough to accommodate the on-road trail until it is pinched by a narrow bridge that crosses a stream after Wagner Road. This narrow bridge needs to be widened for the safety of those using the trail. After crossing this bridge, the road widens again and passes the Hillcrest campground.

Traveling westward, the trail crosses streams, passes farms and reveals impressive views of the rural landscape. Near Power Drive, a narrow bridge eliminates existing shoulders. It is necessary to provide a continuous safe route for pedestrians/cyclists. Several stream crossings require widening to accommodate a separate bike lane.

After passing the Tilden Township maintenance building, the Zion Blue Mountain United Church



Figure 2.5 Unique billboards are found at the intersection of Mountain Road and Main Street.



Figure 2.6 One example of the barns along the Hex Highway. Note the Hex Art on the side of the barn.



Figure 2.7 The Zion Blue Mountain Church on the Hex Highway. Note the parking lot in the foreground. The Blue Mountains can be seen from this lot.

of Christ is located at the crest of a hill. This beautiful structure takes full advantage of the amazing view of Blue Mountain and the surrounding landscape. The Church's large parking lot is perched high above a valley and provides the opportunity for an interpretation of these wonderful views.

After passing the Zion Blue Mountain Church, the trail continues westward to a traffic light controlled intersection at Route 183. This intersection is moderately busy and precautions should be taken to ensure the safe crossing by trail-users. The trail then passes the Strausstown Elementary School and enters Strausstown. Strausstown is similar to Shartlesville in character, but is even smaller in scale. Old Route 22 is flanked on either side by a single block of mixed residential and commercial uses. Homes and a few small businesses lie adjacent to each other, comprising the total extent of the town.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The existing Old Route 22 corridor provides the perfect backbone for an interpretive trail. The trail passes century old farms, and affords breathtaking views of surrounding agrarian and mountainous landscapes. The trail passes through historic towns and the trail derives its unique character from its surroundings. Although the foundation for this trail has already been laid, there are numerous improvements necessary to make this a safe and functional pedestrian and cyclist route. The formation of this route for automobile touring requires signage and promotion.

1. Shoulder expansion.

The expansion of the shoulders along the Old Route 22 corridor and Lowland Road to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians is the most impor-

tant road improvement. It is recommended by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in the Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities that the shoulder width on roads with speed limits greater than 50 mph must be expanded to at least five (5) feet to accommodate a dedicated pedestrian/cyclist route.

A majority of the touring route's estimated construction cost is for paving of a bike lane. PennDOT might accommodate paving of the shoulder within budgeted maintenance improvements. Of the \$1.029 million estimated cost, \$935,000 relates to paving shoulders.

2. Widen two bridges.

Although the overwhelming majority of the Old Route 22 right-of-way is wide enough to accommodate an on-road bike route, the road is pinched in two locations by narrow bridges. Therefore it is necessary to widen these bridges and provide safe passage for the bike lanes.

3. State Street Bridge improvements.

The existing condition of the pedestrian sidewalks on State Street Bridge is poor condition. It is nec-



Figure 2.8 A view of downtown Strausstown from Old Route 22.

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essary to make major improvements to the sidewalks to improve the pedestrian link from State Street to Lowland Road and the western entrance into and out of Hamburg. Such improvements must include reconditioning of the sidewalks and light fixtures, resurfacing of the roadway and the addition of handicap access ramps to make them safe and usable by all pedestrians. PennDOT is currently planning improvements to this bridge. The borough should monitor the proposed improvements to ensure PennDOT is sensitive to the historic structure and makes accommodations for the pedestrian and cyclist.

4. Safety signage.

Along the Old Route 22 corridor, numerous roads will intersect the proposed route therefore requiring the need to alert vehicles of pedestrian and bicycle traffic. This necessitates the installation of signage along the trail warning vehicles of the presence of pedestrians and cyclists, and indicating dangerous intersections. The use of an ID sign will clearly delineate the trail route to both bicyclists and motorists.

5. Interpretive signage.

Throughout Hamburg, Strausstown and Shartlesville, as well as at key points between towns, it is suggested that interpretive and orientation signage be judiciously installed. These signs will disseminate information about historically significant points of interest and facility locations. Detailed recommendations for each town can be found in the "Reconnections" section of chapter 4 of this report.

6. Parking facilities.

In order to accommodate the needs of cyclists using the trail, it may be necessary to provide parking facilities for both bicycles and vehicles. In Hamburg, the existing parking lot at the park could handle this need. In Shartlesville, the municipal park could be used. In Strausstown, the parking lot for the Church is a possible location. The use of the church lot will need to be approved with the church.

COST ESTIMATE

Hamburg to Strausstown Route

Hamburg to Shartlesville Road

Subtotal \$591,527.50

Shartlesville Road Through Strausstown

Subtotal \$438,065.00

Total Cost \$1,029,592.50*

* \$965,167 for paving shoulders/bridge improvements and \$64,425 for signage, pavement markings, etc.

OLD ROUTE 22 HEX HIGHWAY

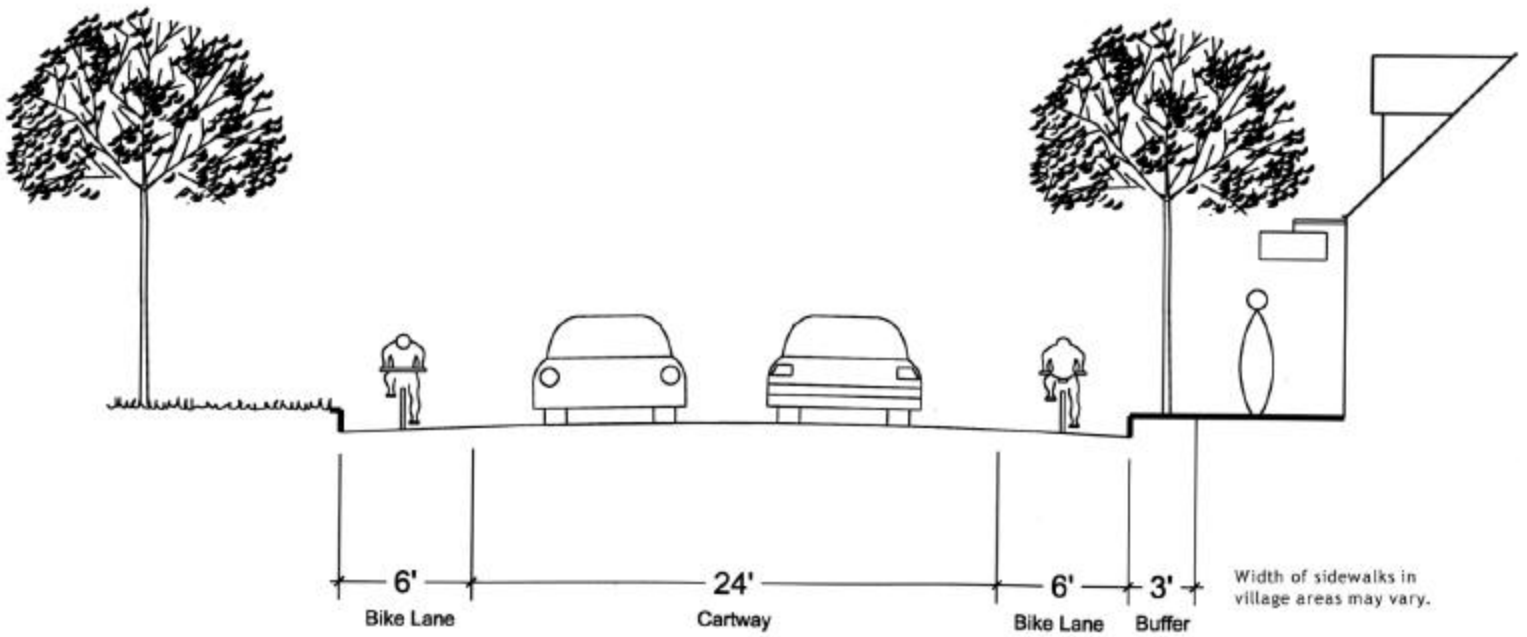


Figure 2.9 A typical section of Old Route 22/ Hex Highway with proposed bicycle lanes.

HEX HIGHWAY TOURING ROUTE

HEX HIGHWAY TOURING ROUTE

plan 1

plan 2

HEX HIGHWAY TOURING ROUTE

detailed matrix

detailed matrix

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