



A lot of good news for bicyclists to cheer about

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By Larry Walsh

Bike news is breaking out all over ...

- The long-awaited agreement to extend the Great Allegheny Passage through the Sandcastle Waterpark is expected to be announced within days.
- In a feat that required precision timing, two prefabricated bridges were lifted into place July 7 in Duquesne and Whitaker to give bicyclists and pedestrians safe access across active railroad tracks.
- A long-sought "roll-on/roll-off" service for bicyclists on the Capitol Limited that will open the passage and the C& O Canal Towpath to more riders between Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C., is expected to be available next June.
- A feasibility study for a bike trail leading from the Montour Trail to Monaca is expected to be completed within a few weeks by the Ohio River Trail Commission.
- And "On The Passage," John Urman's informative and delightfully entertaining video on riding the Great Allegheny Passage from Cumberland, Md., to Pittsburgh, has become a must-see for new and veteran trail-users.

Let's start with the expected agreement between Allegheny County and Palace Entertainment, the owner of the Sandcastle Waterpark. It will allow bicyclists to traverse the latter's property on their way to and from the Mon Valley and beyond.

James Judy, vice president of operations for Palace Entertainment, told Jon Schmitz, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette's transportation reporter, that a formal announcement of the agreement is only days away.

"We're thrilled to be on the trail," Judy said earlier this week. "It's been a very high priority for me to get this done."

That's a welcome change from the position of the former owner, Kennywood Entertainment. It maintained there was not enough room for the trail.

Trail enthusiasts are raving about the teamwork involved in the placement of the trail bridges in Duquesne and Whitaker. The one in the RIDC industrial park in Duquesne, a 110-foot-long, 37-ton span, crosses three sets of Norfolk Southern tracks.

The 170-foot-long, 62-ton bridge in Whitaker elevates the passage over six sets of tracks heavily used by the Norfolk Southern Railway and the Union Railroad Company. The tracks were temporarily closed while construction cranes lifted the bridges into position.

Jack Paulik, project manager for the Regional Trail Corp., said work will start this fall on a 2 1/2-mile segment of the passage that will link the bridges to the existing trail. Meanwhile, the new bridges and the property immediately before, between and after them are closed to the public.

Linda McKenna Boxx, president of the Allegheny Trail Alliance, said the roll-on/roll-off service announced by Amtrak officials July 9 "will add a great

convenience and extra excitement to tourists who want to bike our great trail system." She said bicyclists will be able to roll their bikes on/off the Capitol Limited in Pittsburgh, Connellsville, Cumberland, Harper's Ferry and Martinsburg, W.Va., Rockville, Md., and Washington. Reservations will be required.

Boxx said Amtrak will install bike racks in several baggage cars "and needs to work out operational issues before the service can begin." She said the SCA Trail Town Outreach Corps deserves "special thanks" for developing a survey to assess interest in roll-on/roll-off service, conducting other research and helping to organize a letter-writing campaign.

Somerset County officials and the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association discussed roll-on/roll-off with Amtrak officials in conjunction with their efforts to create a stop in Rockwood. And the alliance prepared a report "showing the need, the trail traffic, survey results and sample itineraries."

Vincent Troia, chief executive officer of the Ohio River Trail Council, told the Post-Gazette's Brian David that he is seeking public and private grants to link the Montour Trail to Monaca.

For more information on the council, Sandcastle and the Duquesne and Whitaker bridges, go to www.post-gazette.com.

Larry Walsh writes about recreational bicycling for the Post-Gazette.