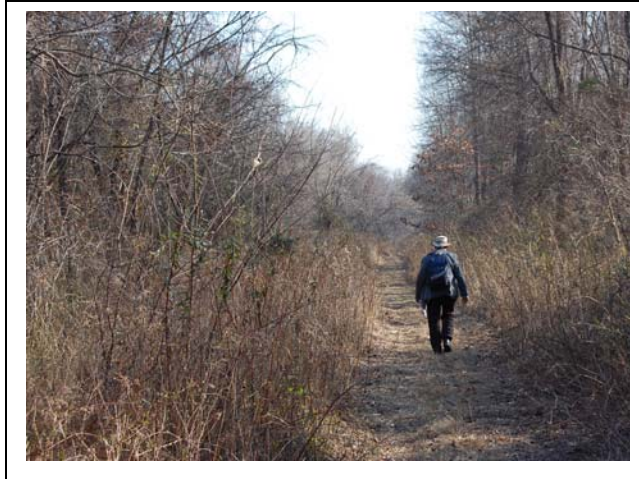


A FEASIBILITY STUDY for the  
**Schuylkill River West Trail**

**Lower Merion Township  
West Conshohocken Borough  
Upper Merion Township  
Bridgeport Borough**

**Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**



**Prepared for:**

Lower Merion Township  
West Conshohocken Borough  
Upper Merion Township  
Bridgeport Borough

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Feasibility Study for the

# Schuylkill River West Trail

in the Townships of Lower and Upper Merion  
and the Boroughs of Bridgeport and West Conshohocken

Montgomery County, PA



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The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources, nor any of their sub-agencies.

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# I. Executive Summary

## A. Background

This study investigates the feasibility of constructing a multi-use trail in Montgomery County and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on the west side of the Schuylkill River between Valley Forge National Historical Park and Fairmount Park at the Falls Bridge. Throughout its proposed length, the Schuylkill River West Trail would connect existing networks of local sidewalks and regional trails. At its northern terminus in Valley Forge Park, the trail would connect to the existing the Schuylkill River Trail, the Horse-Shoe Trail, and to a loop system of multi-use park trails. At its southern terminus near Falls Bridge, the Schuylkill River West Trail would connect to the existing southern reaches of the Schuylkill River Trail on both Kelly and Martin Luther King Drives.

Public participation has been a key component to the success of this project. Input from community groups, local governments, and the public in general has been solicited through public meetings, maps, graphic presentation and displays, publicly distributed project brochures, and interviews.

This study's recommendations are the result of public participation garnered through a structured stakeholder interview process. The proposed trail alignments and configurations were developed through a series of meetings with the project study committees and in public forums.



**Map of the Study Corridor.**  
For higher resolution, please refer to the appendix

## B. Goals and Objectives of this Study

This study assesses the feasibility of a recreational trail along the west side of the Schuylkill River in Upper Merion Township, Bridgeport Borough, West Conshohocken Borough, Lower Merion Township, and Philadelphia. The objectives of this study are to evaluate the feasibility of proposed trail alignments, and where appropriate, make recommendations and formulate preliminary designs to guide the creation of the Trail.

## C. Trail Recommendations

A brief summary of this study's recommendations includes the following:

- ◆ A continuous multi-use trail through the study corridor is constructible, and there is demand for it.
- ◆ Feasibility hinges on approval by two significant property owners/agencies: Norfolk Southern, and PennDOT. If either withholds permission to construct the trail, either a

continuous trail will not be possible, or alternate alignments away from the river will need to be investigated.

- ◆ A generally hard-surfaced, 12 foot wide trail is recommended in Upper Merion Township, Bridgeport Borough, and West Conshohocken Borough.
- ◆ A generally soft-surfaced, 8 foot wide trail is recommended in Lower Merion Township, with some sections to be 6 feet wide.
- ◆ Trail implementation should be phased. A detailed discussion of recommendations for three key stages of construction is given in Section IV.D, and illustrated on Maps G and H in Appendix 4.



**Existing riverside path at Five Tower Bridge  
in West Conshohocken**

## **D. Implementation Recommendations**

The proposed alignment of the Schuylkill River West Trail passes through five municipalities. This study recommends that each of the five municipalities take the initiative to design and build their portion of the Trail.

The Implementation Recommendations Plan envisions Phase I projects beginning in each of the four Montgomery County municipalities. Phase I segments were carefully chosen to be of value separately as they are completed. Later phases (II through IV) will link the earlier segments together, eventually forming the continuous trail from Valley Forge to Falls Bridge.

Upper Merion Township has started construction of the first piece of the Schuylkill River West Trail. In 2008, Township supervisors voted unanimously to fund the trail between Heuser Park and Bob Case Park (designated Reach 4 in this study).

This study's designs can be used as a template to ensure the Trail's continuity. Montgomery County may assist the four municipalities within the County by making Open Space funds available.

## **E. Opinion of Probable Cost**

### **1. Acquisition**

Trail development will require the acquisition of easements or the purchase of rights-of-way from a number of existing property owners. Based on recent purchases of trail corridors in Montgomery County, it is estimated that the total purchase price for all parcels may be approximately \$275,000.00. The estimated cost of each parcel is listed in the Preliminary Opinion of Probable Cost. If easements or right-of-way are to be purchased, the use of an appraiser is recommended for help in determining a fair and reasonable price.

Some owners of other trail corridors have donated easements, often taking a tax deduction for such an easement.

## **2. Construction**

In the opinion of Campbell Thomas & Company, the probable cost for the Trail will be approximately \$13 to \$21 million, depending on the alternate alignments chosen. This figure includes estimated design fees, which can be anticipated to be 15 percent of construction costs. The analysis supporting this estimate of probable construction costs is provided in Section IV.B, and the cost table included in Appendix 6.

## **3. Maintenance Costs**

Maintenance costs generally range from \$5,000 to \$7,000/per mile/per year for similar trails. We recommend that the responsible agencies use a figure of \$7,000 per mile to estimate maintenance costs during the first year after development. This figure can be evaluated at the end of the first year. This cost can be used for fundraising purposes as well as to solicit volunteer help for maintenance.

Many trail operators have been able to supplement their maintenance program by creating partnership agreements with local businesses, clubs and organizations. Formal cooperative agreements can be made with these partners that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each party. Developing an effective maintenance management system is an on-going process.