

This trail alignment follows River Road / PA Route 23 along its west edge. County GIS records indicate a wide highway right-of-way along the 1600 feet of GlaxoSmithKline’s frontage, so a trail easement may not need to be acquired in this area. Existing drainage swales will need to be reconfigured to fit the 12-foot wide multi-use trail into this area. The next approximately 800 feet of frontage is owned by Coopers Creek Chemical. Here, some earthwork will be required to grade a flat bench suitable for trail construction, and a trail or construction easement may need to be negotiated.

A low-volume freight siding crosses River Road at grade in this area, and the trail would modify this existing crossing by widening it. Existing lights and crossing gates warn of approaching trains.

Reach 18D

Crossing into West Conshohocken, Alternate D continues along the west side of River Road / PA Route 23. The adjacent land is again owned by GlaxoSmithKline. As with the previous reach, some grading will be required to create a bench suitable for trail construction, and a chain link fence will need to be moved back from River Road. County GIS data indicates a narrower highway right-of-way in this area, so a trail easement will need to be negotiated.



River Road north of Blue Route viaduct

Before River Road passes beneath the twin Blue Route viaducts, the trail begins to curve to the right, moving away from the road, and away from its intersection with GlaxoSmithKline’s driveway. It may be advantageous to move an existing gate that controls access to the driveway to a position farther from River Road. The existing chain link fence in this area should be adjusted as well.

Reach 19D

Here the trail alignment follows a PECO right-of-way along the edge of Route I-476, the “Blue Route.” At the top of the hill, the PECO right-of-way skirts the edge of the Portland Road industrial park. After a half mile, the trail curves to the left, leaving the PECO right-of-way.



Portland Road looking towards Balligomingo Road

Reach 20D

A 300-foot long easement will need to be negotiated, in order to bring the Trail from the PECO right-of-way to the public right-of-way of Portland Road. One possible alignment has been drawn on Sheet 42, but other alignments are possible, depending upon the amenability of individual

property owners.

Reach 21D

Portland Road is a cul-de-sac serving a light industrial park. Traffic is limited to mostly weekdays (especially during morning and afternoon peak hours). Depending on where the previous reach of Trail is located, at least 500 feet of Portland Road will be utilized as Trail alignment. Reach 21D provides safer pedestrian passage by proposing a 6 foot wide concrete sidewalk. Due to topography in this area, the sidewalk begins on the right side and then switches over to the left. A painted crosswalk and signage are envisioned at the point where the sidewalk crosses over. Reach 21D brings trail users to Balligomingo Road.

Reach 22D

Running parallel to the Reach 21D sidewalk, this reach has bicyclists sharing the road. Signage and pavement markings are proposed. Like Reach 21D, this reach brings trail users to Balligomingo Road.



Intersection of Portland Road and Balligomingo Road

Reach 23D

Trail users cross Balligomingo Road with the benefit of a crosswalk and push-button actuated traffic signal.

Once across, a new multi-use trail begins to climb the hillside as it travels north. This 3500 foot long section of trail would cling to the hillside, offering trail users broad views of the valley. Care should be taken to avoid steep grades, and to avoid the felling of native-species trees. Portions of the properties to be traversed have pre-existing trail easements; in other cases easements will need to be negotiated.

Alternates

At this point, the Trail might utilize Reach 26E (described below, after Reach 28). This viaduct over River Road and Norfolk Southern Railroad would bring the trail back to the riverside, on ground owned by Five Tower Bridge, and follow Reach 27C. If an easement cannot be agreed upon with the owners of Five Tower Bridge, then the Trail could continue on Alternate D, as described below.

Reach 24D

This short stretch of First Avenue, a paper street, would bring the Trail from the wooded hillside into the traditional residential part of West Conshohocken Borough.



Barr Harbor Drive

Reach 25D

This 1700 foot long reach includes one block of Bullock Avenue, and Barr Harbor Drive from Front Street to the Fayette Street bridge. Bicyclists

would share the road with motor vehicle traffic, while pedestrians are accommodated on existing concrete sidewalks. Crossing Front Street will be facilitated by the installation of traffic signals (new signals are already proposed for this location). Motor vehicle traffic on Barr Harbor Drive tends to be light. Workers commuting to the firms located in the Tower Bridge complex do add traffic during weekday morning and afternoon peak hours.

Alternate D and Alternate C converge on Barr Harbor Drive at the point where the street passes beneath the Fayette Street bridge.

Reach 28

South of the Fayette Street bridge, the existing paved path runs on the riverbank past the Four Tower Bridge and ASTM (American Society of Testing and Materials) office buildings. The existing path terminates at Arrowmink Creek. Just beyond Arrowmink Creek, Norfolk Southern's railroad curves left until it runs along the top of the riverbank, leaving no space for a trail. Because of the "cul-de-sac" nature of the trail in this area, once under the Fayette Street bridge it is recommended that Barr Harbor Drive serve as the Trail, rather than the riverfront path. The cartway width of Barr Harbor Drive is approximately 36 feet, and there is a concrete sidewalk on the river side of the street to accommodate pedestrians.

South from Barr Harbor Drive, it is recommended that the Schuylkill River West Trail follow the alignment of Bliss Street. Bliss Street's thirty foot wide cartway and concrete sidewalk serve as a back entrance to the parking garage beneath the 300 Four Falls office building. Motor vehicle traffic volume is low, albeit somewhat higher during weekday morning and evening rush hours.



Study committee walks along Bliss Street in West Conshohocken

This brings the trail alignment to the boundary with Lower Merion Township, and beyond that an alignment on an unused section of River Road.

***Reach 26E**

The selection of Alternate C or D is contingent upon two factors: Norfolk Southern's selling, granting an easement or lease of a small parcel near PECO's Fire Academy, and the owners of Five Tower Bridge granting public access to their privately-owned riverfront. If both parties agree to allow the Trail on their respective properties, Alternate C is the preferred route.

If neither owner agrees to allow the Trail, then Alternate D provides a continuous trail, albeit to the west of River Road, a long distance away from the Schuylkill River. This option is both far from the riverfront and more expensive to construct.

A third possibility is that Norfolk Southern refuses to allow the Trail near the PECO Fire Academy, but the owners of Five Tower Bridge do allow the Trail along their riverfront. Reach 26E allows for this situation. A long trail viaduct and spiral ramp would connect Reach 23D (the

Balligomingo hillside rail) with Reach 27C (the riverside at Five Tower Bridge). Please refer to Drawings 14 and 15 to see the relationships between these options. It should be noted that the Reach 26E viaduct and ramp would be expensive to build.

Reach 29

As Bliss Street crosses from West Conshohocken Borough into Lower Merion Township, the name changes to River Road. At a point just within Lower Merion, motor vehicle traffic is blocked. Before the Schuylkill Expressway was constructed in the 1950s, River Road connected the communities on the west bank of the Schuylkill River. Nearly a half mile of abandoned River Road still exists, bounded by a cut-stone parapet and retaining wall, above Norfolk Southern railroad and below the Schuylkill Expressway. Much of this retaining wall, though not maintained in some time, appears to be in good condition. (A thorough structural evaluation would be part of any further design analysis.) This study includes a preliminary opinion of probable cost for re-pointing the wall's mortar joints.



Stone parapet along abandoned River Road

This study recommends the construction of an 8-foot wide soft-surface trail on this section of abandoned River Road. The soft surface is envisioned as a matrix of small stones bound together with stone dust (limestone or equivalent).

Because this reach of trail runs parallel to and down-slope from the Schuylkill Expressway, a fence along the edge of the highway shoulder is recommended. This four foot high fence would be attached to the top of the existing three foot high concrete barrier, giving an effective height of seven feet. This fence is also recommended for portions of Reaches 30, 32, 37, 38, 39 and 40.

A preliminary trail alignment has been sketched. Final trail alignment will depend upon the determination of precise property line locations, high-resolution topographic survey, locations of significant trees, and other factors. In Reach 29, this preliminary trail alignment comes no closer than 40 feet from the edge of the nearest travel lane of the Schuylkill Expressway, and no closer than 30 feet from Norfolk Southern's railroad. At the point where the trail is 40 feet from the expressway, it is approximately 23 feet below the expressway barrier. At the point where the trail is 30 feet from Norfolk Southern's railroad, it is approximately 30 feet above the railroad. Because the alignment follows the existing roadbed of abandoned River Road, much of Reach 29 has an effective cross-slope of 0% (level). In some areas, talus (fill) from the Schuylkill Expressway slope has spilled onto the abandoned roadbed. The placement of precast concrete barriers acting as a short retaining wall should gain adequate width for the trail. In that area, the (partial) cross slope is approximately 55%.

Transition in Trail Types

From Valley Forge National Historical Park until this point, the Schuylkill River West Trail is recommended to be a 12 foot wide hard surface trail, the generous width offering ample space for both walking and bicycling. The reduction in width and the change in trail surface as the trail