



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

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## Introducing THE LINK

It is 125 miles of multimodal trails that snake into most every corner of the Lehigh Valley, serving as recreation for some and commuting corridors for other, and another 100 miles of trails waiting to be added soon.

To this point, it's been called the Lehigh Valley trail network, but now it is simply known as THE LINK.

A host of partners that included the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Discover Lehigh Valley, Lehigh County, Northampton County, the LVPC, Lehigh Valley Greenways, PennDOT, the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Wildlands Conservancy announced a major effort to raise awareness, community interest and money to enhance and grow the region's trail network.

It runs in partnership the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission's WalkBikeLV - a yearlong effort to draft a plan that will identify the obstacles in the trail, sidewalk, road and transit network. From there, WalkBikeLV will map out ways to clear the obstacles – while identifying ways to pay for it – to create a long-term plan to create a more usable network that gives people the option to get out of their cars.

While WalkBikeLV provides a roadmap and looks to raise funds, The LINK will focus on raising awareness, trail ambassadors and business sponsors.

“There are a lot of people who want to see the trail network grow into something much bigger,” said Elissa Garofalo, executive director of the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. “This is a plan to bring all those little efforts together to form one big effort that gets us where we want to go.”

Where they want to go is to create a seamless trail network that people can use for recreation and commuting from one end of the Lehigh Valley to the other, connecting not only the communities within the region, but connecting the Lehigh Valley to networks in neighboring regions.

THE LINK launch event, held Thursday at Northampton Canal Street Park, included release of the name and logo, and a plan to use corporate sponsorships, community involvement, volunteers, grants and public funding to connect the spine of the trail to these 10 existing trails in the Lehigh Valley:

- Bushkill Township Trail
- D&L Trail
- Forks Township Recreation Trail
- Ironton Rail-Trail
- Jordan Creek Greenway
- Karl Stirner Arts Trail
- Liberty-Water Gap Trail (Future)
- Little Lehigh Parkway
- Monocacy Way
- Nor-Bath Trail
- Palmer-Bethlehem Township Trail
- Plainfield Township Trail
- Saucon Rail Trail
- Slate Heritage Trail
- South Bethlehem Greenway
- Stockertown Rail Trail
- Tatamy Rail Trail

“It goes without saying that this promotes healthy living and cleaner air, but this is about so much more than that,” Tracy Oscavich, Director of Development at the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission said during the launch event. “A connected multimodal network not only raises the quality of life for the people who live here, but it makes the region more attractive for businesses looking to expand. It’s recreation, it’s commuting and it’s economic development. It’s that important to the overall health of the Lehigh Valley.”

The event included a reveal in which organizers unfurled a giant banner with the new name and logo – devised over the past year by a steering committee and D&L marketing consultants Klunk & Milan Advertising – and an inaugural ride on the newly named trail by children from the Community Bike Works in Allentown. With help from a \$750,000 Grant from the William Penn Foundation, it’s an effort similar to the Circuit Trails, the successful marketing and public engagement designed to grow the trail network in Philadelphia.

Others who spoke at the launch included Lehigh County Executive Phil Armstrong, Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure, Wildlands Conservancy President Christopher Kocher, Bike Works Executive Director Kim Schaffer, D&L Board Chairman Mike Drabenstott and Steve Johnson, L.L. Bean's Fields Operations Manager for its Outdoor Discovery Schools.

Johnson, and people like him, figure heavily in THE LINK's future growth, which counts on corporate buy-in and sponsorships to help raise money, awareness and new trail users.

"Coming to the outdoors is in our DNA as humans, but we've developed these lifestyles that are incongruent with that," Johnson said. "We need a balance. THE LINK is that balance."

The next step in is to bring the partners together to prioritize which trail gaps should be filled first, and then mapping out a plan to tackle them, Garofalo said.