

Trail council developing bicycle suitability study with public input

By SAM BOJARSKI, [Tribe LIVE](#)

June 29, 2019 SEWICKLEY, PA — While living in Monaca, Dr. Vincent Troia frequently rode his bike to the Montour Trail in Coraopolis. He followed the Ohio River down Bicycle PA Route A, along Route 51, despite the high-speed traffic. Troia also said he would bike on the Little Beaver Creek Greenway trail, just across the state border in Ohio.

“I was thinking, ‘boy, it would be nice to just connect the two trails, and then we’d have a beautiful network, a bike network,’” said Troia, who now serves as president of the Ohio River Trail Council (ORTC). The nonprofit organization works to protect trails and to provide active transportation networks in the Ohio River Valley and surrounding areas.

Since its founding in 2009, the nonprofit ORTC has completed multiple bicycle feasibility studies to improve safety for cyclists. The studies encompassed an area along the Ohio River from Coraopolis to the Pennsylvania-Ohio border and examined possibilities for safer, off-road trails, according to Troia. Now, ORTC is developing a more comprehensive bicycle suitability study.

It will give roads a rating from below-average to above-average and could also include data points like traffic volume, speed, road width and elevation. “But it gets much more detailed,” Troia added. “Each road will be rated and color-coded as far as traffic stress.”

The Level of Traffic Stress (LTS) methodology, originally developed by the Mineta Transportation Institute at San Jose State University, assigns a number between one and four to a road, based on traffic characteristics and the availability of services like protected bike lanes or roadside paths. LTS 4 is assigned to roads suitable for the most experienced cyclists.

To gather data for LTS ratings, ORTC is receiving assistance from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), a regional planning agency that serves a 10-county area.

SPC has already used its expertise in geographic information systems (GIS) to develop bicycle suitability maps for several counties in the region. Information on state-owned roads was gathered using Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) video logs.

The logs “identified whether a road was suitable for biking or not, and that was the first step. But then the key follow-up was getting input from local bicycle riders in that county,” SPC transportation planner Leann Chaney said.

SPC is currently working on a general suitability map for Allegheny and Beaver counties to serve more experienced cyclists. The Ohio River corridor, in particular, will contain the more detailed LTS information, serving riders of all skill levels. For roads not maintained by the state, SPC plans to gather the necessary data from county authorities and local users in conjunction with ORTC,

according to Chaney.

“We want to classify essentially from the Point in Pittsburgh where the Great Allegheny Passage starts, all the way to the Pennsylvania-Ohio border, and part of our mandate, our mission, is the Ohio River and its tributaries, so we would go up the Beaver River, through Lawrence (County),” Troia said.

ORTC and SPC had an initial working-group meeting in March and will meet again July 18 at Laughlin Memorial Library in Ambridge. By attending the meeting and working with ORTC, cyclists can become a key part of the input process.

“We invite the community to come and participate, and certainly we invite cycling groups, because those people who ride on the roads have lots of information on safety and maybe certain areas that need improvement,” Troia said.

The study is still in its early stages, but once complete, it could result in lasting changes for cyclists in the region.

ORTC plans to complete it by the end of the year and make it available in print form and online. The final version would contain the safety information needed to approach local governments about adding bicycle infrastructure.

Troia said certain roads, like Beaver Street from Leetsdale to Haysville, have been identified by the Active Allegheny program as targets for implementing designated bicycle routes.

The analysis in the study would provide suggestions for how to lower the stress level on certain roads, making them more suitable for biking. Depending on traffic activity, these suggestions can range from bicycle signage to off-road paths.

“We can look at that data and say ‘hey, here’s a really difficult place, we need to make improvements,’ and we can use that information in a grant application,” Troia added.

For more information about the July 18 workshop, visit www.meetup.com/Ohio-River-Trail-Council-ORTC-Outdoor-Adventure-Club/events/262444590/.

Learn more about ORTC and its other upcoming events, including a “River Run” road race series here: [https:// membership.ohiorivertrail.org/](https://membership.ohiorivertrail.org/).

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