

2017-07-10 DAVE WRIGHT

Eric Lidji:

Today is July 10, 2017. I'm Eric Lidji. This is the Great Allegheny Passage Oral History Project. I'm speaking with Dave Wright, and we are in a conference room on the fifth floor of the county office building in downtown Pittsburgh. So, why don't you start by telling me how you got involved in the RTC, or how the RTC came about since you got started at the beginning of it?

Dave Wright:

Well, I was involved with the Montour Trail formation in 1989. So, working at the county and working on trails is kind of a passion because I can combine the interest in engineering and the interest in trails together. And, we'd already been involved in not only acquiring the Panhandle Trail for Allegheny County, but also the county acquired the Panhandle Trail within Allegheny County for 7-1/2 miles in cooperation with Washington County. And, that's when Andy Beckley worked at Washington County. He was parks director there. And, then along came Linda Boxx and she wanted to try to get the trail continuous from Pittsburgh to Cumberland and so being involved with the county, they needed the county support, so here we are.

Eric Lidji:

Was Allegheny County involved in trails before?

Dave Wright:

Yeah, the county owns a portion of the Montour Trail in Allegheny County. The reason for that is because the predecessor organization for DCNR was only allowed, by their funding requirements, to fund the municipalities and they couldn't get funds to non-profit organizations like the Montour Trail Council. And, Allegheny County was willing to accept the ownership. And, in the case of the Panhandle Trail, it was the same kind of thing. In that case, the railroad wanted to donate the property and the county was willing to accept the donation. The railroad only wanted to deal with the Washington County, Allegheny County, and West Virginia Rail Authority, and they wanted to sell the property all in one lump sum to all three organizations so they wouldn't get stuck with a piece that they couldn't do anything with. So, Allegheny County just accepted that donation. There weren't any bridges that had to be dealt

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with in Allegheny County. So, there wasn't any responsibility that the county had to deal with for bridges over roads.

Eric Lidji: Larry said that in the early days, when the P&LE deal was about to happen, that there was this working group of 12 or so people who convened in the county and made sort of a feasibility study. Do you remember anything about that?

Dave Wright: Well, the Rails to Trails Conservancy came around and they wanted to do a feasibility study for trails in the Pittsburgh region, and we contributed information of what we knew about the status of different railroad corridors at that time to them. Maybe that's what he's talking about.

Eric Lidji: He made it sound like the Montour Trail and the Yough River Trail North were running parallel, not physically, but in their...

Dave Wright: A time...yeah.

Eric Lidji: ...that ideas were going back and forth between the two.

Dave Wright: Yeah, you mean to convince the administration that it was a good idea to accept the responsibility of ownership?

Eric Lidji: Or, even just ideas on how to...

Dave Wright: How to develop?

Eric Lidji: ...how to do things. Do you remember anything?

Dave Wright: I wasn't directly involved with that, with a team like- if that's what happened.

Eric Lidji: So, you come on to what becomes, then, The Allegheny Passage only for that last stretch through Allegheny County? Is that where you really got involved with it?

Dave Wright: Yeah, pretty much. When they started acquiring property, the county had to accept ownership of property, so that was my direct involvement.

Eric Lidji: What's involved in accepting ownership?

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- Dave Wright:** Well, the county has to accept the liability that goes along with it. You could get sued for somebody who breaks their back on your property if they injure themselves, so that's part of it. If you're accepting a bridge, you have to maintain the bridge, too. So, the county was convinced that that was the right thing to do.
- Eric Lidji:** But, you're an engineer, right?
- Dave Wright:** Sure.
- Eric Lidji:** So, what are you doing...engineering? Liability is legal...
- Dave Wright:** No, I wasn't involved in design. That was strictly done by consultants. They had Senate Engineering as a consultant doing design work out there in the Steel Valley. That's a local firm there. I think Senate did most of the work for them. They also hired a surveyor to define to the boundary of the area that was acquired from U.S. Steel and Norfolk Southern for the Coke Oven Gas line portion. That was Atonissi. But, that was just something we oversaw, we didn't do direct design. I wasn't involved directly with design.
- Eric Lidji:** So, you were just involved administratively and taking ownership of pieces of property?
- Dave Wright:** Yeah, pretty much. Yeah.
- Eric Lidji:** And, when did that start?
- Dave Wright:** Well, I can get you the dates for the parcels – when we were acquiring them.
- Eric Lidji:** Were you having to do a lot of things simultaneously, or was it happening one after the other?
- Dave Wright:** Well, Jack Pollock was the project manager and he did what he could at the time he could do it, so things came as they came. It wasn't a big one lump sum. We recorded deeds as they became available.

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Eric Lidji: And, that was your responsibility?

Dave Wright: Yeah, I just recorded the deeds.

Eric Lidji: Jack wanted me to ask you how you found money for various things in the budget.

Dave Wright: I have to remember what we spend money on. I can't remember what we spent money on. We had to get administrative authorization to record deeds to accept properties and we did that through the county manager. I've got executive actions for each of the parcels or the accumulated parcels for authorizing the acceptance of ownership. I'd have to look and see if we got money to spend for anything, but I can't remember anything right now.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

[Chuckle]

Dave Wright: I don't think we've paid for anything.

Eric Lidji: Really?

Dave Wright: I don't think so. I can't remember anything. Maybe I'll find something and then remind myself, but right now I can't think of it.

Eric Lidji: Were there any moments in the time that you were involved where things weren't pro forma like that, that there was a certain amount of serendipity involved or anything like that?

Dave Wright: You mean when the planets align correctly to do something?

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Dave Wright: Well, the change of ownership for the Festival Fun Parks was a change in policy. The original owners didn't want any part of the trail, but the new owners were willing to accept the trail running alongside their southern boundary on their property at Sandcastle.

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Eric Lidji: So, that only got resolved because they were the owners?

Dave Wright: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: Do you know what the original owner's hesitation was?

Dave Wright: I don't think that they found the trail being in their interest. They didn't benefit from it. When we took a walk with those guys along the route, they explained that their customers don't come from the local neighborhood, they come from the region. People drive there. And, they didn't expect people to take a bicycle or walk into their property to use their facility. In fact, the fellow who was there and expressed a very low opinion of the neighborhood that they were in. But, the new owners, I guess they saw the value in the project, and they were willing to go along.

Eric Lidji: The trail is not just for people in the neighborhood.

Dave Wright: Of course not, but they just didn't see a benefit for their facility there.

Eric Lidji: What would have happened if there hadn't been a resolution? How would the trail have gotten through that area?

Dave Wright: Along the road, which wasn't very safe. There's a section of sidewalk along part of it, there's a section that sidewalk could be installed along with another part. But, people parked on the sidewalk and there was a lot of busy traffic there. So, it was discouraged at the onset to not use 837 to try to get through Sandcastle. That's why the persistence occurred there, to keep it a high project to try to get through there.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: What was the deal with the Keystone Metals?

Dave Wright: Well, they were willing to let the trail through. In fact, when they acquired the property, what I heard is that the city had a first option to acquire property that was being sold by railroads, and the city relinquished its first right of refusal to the

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Keystone Metal people on the condition that they allow room for a trail to go through. So, Dennis Thompson, who ran that company, honored that promise, that obligation. But, he didn't want to give up his right before Sandcastle because he didn't want trail users coming down past his property and stopping at Glen Hazel Street and congregating there because his equipment goes through there – his trucks and his cranes regularly use that road for access between the two sides of the railroad that their company maintains. And so, he didn't want to create a safety problem there. So, that's a reasonable request and then when Sandcastle finally did concede, then Dennis said, "Have at it."

Eric Lidji: Were there other holdouts in that nine-mile stretch?

Dave Wright: Of course, yeah, there were difficult parcels. Not to the extent of Sandcastle and Keystone Metals. There was one just going down the line, just starting. In McKeesport, you've got the first site, the mill site that used to be McKeesport Tube Mill. I think it's RIDC that controls that site and they had environmental issues. They had to clean up the site. They still had to fill in areas that hadn't been completely filled in and level them.

Eric Lidji: Were the municipal leaders in McKeesport accommodating for the project?

Dave Wright: As far as I know they were. People like Larry dealt with them more than I did. I wasn't involved with the municipalities.

Eric Lidji: So, then after McKeesport, what was next?

Dave Wright: When you passed RIDC, then you had demolition of the ramp going up to the Riverton Bridge, the railroad's ramp. And, Jack was able to work out a deal with a scrap metal company to tear it down and not have to pay much money. I think he didn't have to pay because a contractor could salvage the scrap metal, they didn't have to pay a big buck for taking down the approach.

Eric Lidji: To the Riverton Bridge?

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Dave Wright: To the Riverton Bridge.

Eric Lidji: Were you involved in the transfer of the Riverton Bridge at all?

Dave Wright: Well, we accepted the deed, yeah. There was a hesitation when we were looking at the bridge. Our deputy director wanted to know if it had been inspected lately. And, I assured him that the railroad had been regularly inspecting their bridge. And, the fact that there was a crane that had hit the thing and pushed the deck up, and they just hired Flame Incorporated to re-straighten out that deck in order to make it usable. And, they did that just before the county acquired it, so they didn't leave us with a broken bridge.

Eric Lidji: So, right before the transfer happened a crane hit it?

Dave Wright: Yeah, there was a barge crane that went under the bridge and banged against it, pushed it up, and the trains were going over this humpy bridge.

[Chuckle]

Dave Wright: I guess it was several weeks before the engineers finally reported it to the railroad company and before they closed the bridge for train traffic, and then they fixed it. You can interview the engineers for the railroad. The two guys retired, were involved in that – Union Railroad. Anyway, I was showing them pictures of the bridge and apparently when you look at the photo of the pier that holds the bridge up, there's a course of stone that isn't completely level with the water. It looks like it's tilted, and so he thought maybe the bridge pier was leaning. So, he hired an engineering firm from the county to go out and take a look at it and they said, "No, it's not leaning. It's a fine pier," so he accepted it.

Eric Lidji: That was the deputy director?

Dave Wright: That was our deputy director. It delayed it, maybe a couple weeks.

Eric Lidji: What was his name?

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- Dave Wright:** That's Don Kilmer.
- Eric Lidji:** So, after the Riverton Bridge, what's next?
- Dave Wright:** Gone up into Duquesne and it's another RIDC site – Duquesne, we had to acquire that property. We had to cross their entrance road. That's a traffic hazard and so that was a concern. Then, there's the next site up- is American Textiles. They had purchased the property, so they owned that section all the way up to the railroad, and a part had to be acquired from them, a little sliver. They make pillows for Walmart, that's what I understand they do. Then, coming up again- you're taxing my brain. I should be looking at the file to remind me of what these parcels are.
- Eric Lidji:** I wrote some of them down.
- Dave Wright:** There's another Union Railroad property that came up on the Norfolk Southern property that made it too narrow, so we got through there. And, then you have the bridge over the Norfolk Southern and Union Railroad, and it's called the Port Perry Crossing. Port Perry was this little village on the other side of the river that was destroyed. It was demolished in order to extend the Pennsylvania Railroad yard to serve the mill on the other side of the river.
- Eric Lidji:** Was there anything involved in that bridge?
- Dave Wright:** Well, yeah, we had to get aerial easement from Union Railroad and from Norfolk Southern who owned the tracks under it.
- Eric Lidji:** What 's aerial easement?
- Dave Wright:** That's when you have the right to build a structure over the track, but you don't have the use of the ground surface.
- Eric Lidji:** Like air rights?
- Dave Wright:** Air rights. Aerial easement, generally, also, by PennDOT's definition, includes the right of support at specific locations.

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- Eric Lidji:** So, this was to build the trail going over the railroad?
- Dave Wright:** That's correct.
- Eric Lidji:** Okay.
- Dave Wright:** We were only limited to be able to have the span lifted over the railroad on, I think, it was two weeks in the year, or maybe one week. And, this was a week around the Independence Day weekend that the miners had off so that you wouldn't have coal trains running through there. The stack trains would still be running. That's a- container trains would still be running through, but the coal trains would not be running, so it could open up a larger window of opportunity to place the span over the track. And, that's what they did. In fact, they ran both the Whitaker Bridge and the Port Perry Bridge simultaneously; they had cranes at each site. And, the contractor placed both spans about 20 minutes apart, something like that. I could see one, but I couldn't see the other one.
- Eric Lidji:** So, you have two trains, the Whitaker and the Port Perry...?
- Dave Wright:** The two bridges...
- Eric Lidji:** Two bridges.
- Dave Wright:** ...yeah, in different places along the track.
- Eric Lidji:** And, you're trying to build a span over it, and you have to do it at...
- Dave Wright:** There's two spans.
- Eric Lidji:** Two spans. And, you have to do it when there's not trains.
- Dave Wright:** No traffic. You can't have train traffic. So, they gave them a certain period, maybe a half hour or something, to be able to place it.
- Eric Lidji:** Is that unusual?

[Chuckle]

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- Dave Wright:** No, that's the way the railroads operate. They don't want anybody to hold up any trains, see. They'll hold up their own trains, but they won't let you hold them up, and so they put restrictions on how you can operate within 25 feet of the track. When the county builds bridges over railroads, we have to have a separate contract with them for protecting railroad property. We pay for them to have a flagman up on the site to tell when the trains are coming by so the contractor doesn't have any activity during the time that the train's going to pass. And, we pay a big fee for them to hire that guy, to sit on the track, and to blow his horn when the train is going to come. That's what happened. That's usual practice.
- Eric Lidji:** Were you there the day when they had that 30-minute window or...?
- Dave Wright:** Yeah, I witnessed the erection of the one up at Port Perry. I didn't see the one at Whitaker.
- Eric Lidji:** Whitaker. Were you out there because you had to be or because it was interesting, and you wanted...?
- Dave Wright:** Oh, yeah, just to be interesting, yeah. It's...
- Eric Lidji:** What were you saying?
- Dave Wright:** Yeah, it wasn't something that was mandatory. It's just something to see – history in the making.
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah. So, after those two bridges, what's the next thing?
- Dave Wright:** Well, between the bridges, you've got, continuing up toward Whittaker Bridge from Port Perry, you've got the section that runs along the maintenance track for Norfolk Southern. They have maintenance away, trains parked. They call them camp cars when they have the crew cars, or dormitory cars, for maintenance away crews. They park them there. And, they park other maintenance away equipment there other times. And, they wanted a separation between the trail and the railroad. They wanted a wall to separate so that the trail was

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above, and so they required our contractor to put in a wall, which happened to be a pre-cast concrete block wall.

Eric Lidji: Is that cinder block?

Dave Wright: It was pre-cast concrete blocks; it wasn't cinders. It was another kind of aggregate; it was stone aggregate. And then, you had to make sure that the drainage coming off the trail into the railroad was compatible with the way the railroad could accept it. And then, once you reach the end of that thing, you have to go up a steep hill up toward Kennywood Park. So, the steep hill had some curves in it and when you reached the top – and that's where Union Railroad used to have their car shop facility. It had been abandoned at that time. They were making car repairs out in the field and they didn't want to have the expense of a shop and bringing cars in and out of the shop when they needed to be repaired. So, that was another acquisition through that area. Then, from that point, you meet the Coke Oven Gas line section, and that was owned by U.S. Steel. They had a Coke Oven Gas line that went from the Clairton Works to the Homestead Works. And, since the Homestead Works had been taken out of service and demolished, there was no need for this Coke Oven Gas line anymore, but then what do you do with it? It was shown to have arsenic in the chemical analysis of the solid material left inside this pipe. And so, that was another question is how do you get past that? Linda Boxx was able to bend the ear for the U.S Steel guys, and they took it out on their own money.

Eric Lidji: Huh.

Dave Wright: They paid to take it out

Eric Lidji: Why do you need a gas line connecting Clairton to Homestead?

Dave Wright: Well, it provided fuel for the Homestead plant.

Eric Lidji: Was the fuel produced...

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Dave Wright: Fuel was produced in Clairton as a process of coke making, is a byproduct of the coke making process.

Eric Lidji: Oh, sort of like a synthesis gas?

Dave Wright: Well, when you make coke you bake the coal by heating it up with the absence of air, with controlled, very small amount of air, so it doesn't just all burn up. It heats up and the heat drives the gas out of it. And, this gas is flammable, and that you can use somewhere else as a fuel so that they shipped it to Homestead.

Eric Lidji: Do you know when that line was built?

Dave Wright: The Coke Oven Gas line? Probably when Clairton was built as a factory at the turn of the century. They still have a Coke Oven Gas line that goes to the Edgar Thompson Works and it crosses the river right there at that point where you start that section of the trail for the Coke Oven Gas line where the car shops were for the Union Railroad.

Eric Lidji: It goes from Clairton to Braddock?

Dave Wright: Yeah, they just rebuild it. At the time we were putting the trail in they were constructing the replacement for the Coke Oven Gas line to Braddock.

Eric Lidji: So, you still took the Clairton down, that line out, free of charge?

Dave Wright: Yeah, free of charge. Yeah.

Eric Lidji: And, they donated the Riverton Bridge, too, right?

Dave Wright: Yeah. U.S. Steel controlled Union Railroad that was using the Riverton Bridge that had been previously acquired from Pennsylvania Railroad- Norfolk Southern. So, Norfolk Southern released its rights and U.S. Steel gave them the bridge.

Eric Lidji: Do you know why U.S. Steel was so in favor of the project?

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- Dave Wright:** I think that was a personal interest of the CEO. He understood the value of the project. I think he used trails himself and just recognized the value. The trains didn't have to use that bridge, they could go on another bridge, but they'd have to spend more money going through a CSX yard to get to the Camp Hill Works. So, they lost responsibility for maintaining that bridge, like the Flame bending that I just described when the crane hit it, but then they had to pay more for operation for running through the CSX yard to get the cars to the Camp Hill site.
- Eric Lidji:** So, basic operations get more expensive, but it becomes less risky?
- Dave Wright:** Well, they gave up the bridge; they didn't have to maintain it anymore.
- Eric Lidji:** You mentioned Kennywood earlier. Were there any stories that went along? Did you have to negotiate – not you, but did the project have to negotiate with Kennywood at all?
- Dave Wright:** Yeah, I wasn't directly involved with that. It was between Jack and Linda and the people who owned Festival Fun Parks. I just got the deed.
- Eric Lidji:** So, after the Coke Oven Gas line, was Guardian Self-Storage next?
- Dave Wright:** No. There's a three-acre parcel run by Norfolk Southern. You see, that Coke Oven Gas line had previously been the Kenny branch of the Union Railroad. And, the old maps show that this Kenny branch had turned right and went over the track of Norfolk Southern and into what was called the central dock. And, the central dock is still there, but Union Railroad serves it from the lower level and not from the upper level. So, they could get rid of this track and make the Coke Oven Gas line there. But, just after it turned right to go over this bridge to get to the central dock, there was a property owned by Norfolk Southern, it's a three-acre parcel, so we had to acquire that, too. And then, you finally get to the Whitaker site where the Whitaker Bridge was placed.

Whitaker Metals went out of business and then they sold their property to a company that had an interest in Georgia Power. The story is that they were going to put a coal-to-gas conversion plant on that site to create electric power because it would provide an alternative to Duquesne Light, which was charging a high fee for using the power in the mill. However, they wanted to use not only the site that they acquired, but also they wanted to acquire property on the other side of the track between the track and the river where this central dock is located from the County Redevelopment Authority, who controlled it. But, the County Redevelopment Authority said, "We'll let you use the property only if you let a trail through," and they stormed out of the room.

Eric Lidji:

Why were they opposed to it?

Dave Wright:

Because they didn't want a trail going through their site. They wanted to use all the land that was available for converting coal to gas and then converting that in electricity, or something, I don't know, something like that. I think they wanted to use it for coal storage on that site, possibly. I'm not sure. So, they got real mad and they wouldn't let us use their property for running a bridge over the railroad track. The original plan was to use just part of their property for that Whitaker Bridge, but since they wouldn't let us use it, we had to move it out of their property, which moved it into a much more narrow section of where the tracks were. And so, Union Railroad gave up one of their tracks to make room for this bridge ramp to come down into the County Redevelopment property.

Eric Lidji:

The bridge ramp for the trail?

Dave Wright:

The bridge ramp for the trail.

Eric Lidji:

So, there was this coal-to-gas plant idea...?

Dave Wright:

Yeah, coal, or maybe it was a gas- I don't know. I can't remember. There's a gas line that's located on that property,

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too, that could have gotten the gas out of this gas line to make the electricity for the...

Eric Lidji: Yeah. It has something to do with gas, or power, or something?

Dave Wright: Yeah, it was producing electricity.

Eric Lidji: And, the trail needed to go through it?

Dave Wright: It needed space to go through that area.

Eric Lidji: And, they were opposed to it, so the trail, instead, used Union Railroad property?

Dave Wright: Yeah, that had been occupied by a track that went to the central dock.

Eric Lidji: What's the central dock?

Dave Wright: That's that area that I was talking about.

Eric Lidji: I just can't picture it. That's all.

[Chuckle]

Dave Wright: I'll show you the drawing if you want to see it.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Dave Wright: But, Union Railroad cooperated because people who owned what used to be Whitaker Metals site weren't cooperating.

Eric Lidji: So, there were two uncooperative parties in that area? Because there was Whitaker Metals and there was this power project?

Dave Wright: Well, Whitaker Metal sold to the power company, see...

Eric Lidji: Oh, I see. The two owners in a row weren't interested in working...

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Dave Wright: Well, Whitaker Metals was out of business by the time we got there, so it was really just the one that we sold it to.

Eric Lidji: Okay. So then, at that point, you're at the Whitaker Bridge.

Dave Wright: Yeah, crossing over into Whitaker Bridge. And, then you come down into where that track used to be for Union Railroad and then you parallel the Union Railroad track. That's their interchange with Norfolk Southern. They bring cars in from—they're switching for the steel plants and they'd interchange with Norfolk Southern there. And then, you continue on the property that's owned by the County Redevelopment Authority. Come underneath the Rankin Bridge and then into the site for the Guardian Self-Storage. Now, Guardian Self-Storage owned on both sides of Munhall flyover ramp, which comes down and splits their property. And, the part on the south side is what they were using. The part on the north side's just a thin strip. And, that's where we could put the trail is just on that thin strip. And, they were willing to sell us the thin strip because they weren't using it, but we had to pay full value because that's a business that's in the business to make money and so that's what they charged full value for.

Then, at that point, then you meet with Marcegaglia, that's the tube works. They make tubes and pipes. We took a tour of the plant. When we asked them if we could go behind the plant between the plant and the river and stay off the road that runs in front of their plant, but they showed us that they're using all the space available back there and they couldn't let us do that. So, they said, "You can run it in front of the plant." And, Jack said, "Well, why don't they move their hedge and fence back so we can have some room on their strip on their property to widen the existing sidewalk there to ten feet, because it's just on a five-foot sidewalk there so that's an acceptable trail width?" And so, he tried to negotiate moving that.

They did remove the hedge, but after a while they decided not to relocate the fence. So, instead, the trail went out into the road. There was a four-lane road there approaching the Munhall Flyover Bridge and all you really needed was, I think,

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three lanes there. So, they eliminated the lane and put the trail there in front of Marcegaglia. And then, at that point, then they connected with the existing trail that had been placed by Continental Real Estate Company for the development along the Waterfront. They have a limestone trail that runs along the edge of the river there.

Eric Lidji: So, at that point, you're in Munhall?

Dave Wright: Yeah, near Munhall, yeah. That's still not controlled by RTC, it's controlled by the developer – the successor for Continental. It's a homeowner's association that controls that.

Eric Lidji: Because there's all those built condos or whatever on...

Dave Wright: It runs behind the condos, it's for the use for the condo people. So, trail users have the choice of using that limestone along the river or just staying in the street, using a sidewalk that runs in front of the condos. Then, you get to where the condos end and restaurants start. And, there's a bridge that crosses over the road at that point for access from the main part of the business district to where the restaurants are. And, the idea was to try to continue along the river, but West Homestead people- and so, the idea was to ask the municipalities to zone a 50-foot strip between the river edge and any building development to provide room for a trail. Well, that didn't happen. They didn't enforce it, or whatever. I think it was West Homestead who said, "Well, you'll never get past Kennywood, so we might as well just let them build there."

[Laughter]

And so, they figured people would come across that bridge and into the water...

Eric Lidji: The Waterfront, yeah.

Dave Wright: ...the Waterfront development and end the trail there. But, little did they realize Linda's persistence.

[Laughter]

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Dave Wright: And so, she asked the people who did develop there, up to the river, to widen the sidewalks in front, allow them to be widened. So, you got the ten-foot sidewalk going in front of those. The hotel was going to be a Red Rooster...

Eric Lidji: Red Robin.

Dave Wright: Red Robin?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Wright: There's a gas station there, all the way to Kennywood. So, you've got the wide sidewalk going all the way to Kennywood. Then Kennywood said, "Well, we want you to cross the road and run between our road and the railroad." So, there was enough room for the section, up until their fence, through their parking lot, to build a trail between the railroad and the road coming in, but then it started getting narrow. And, they couldn't relocate their fence because there are rides right up against the fence behind it. There was a drive-it-yourself car ride track that went right up, that they'd have to relocate, as well, so the fence didn't get moved. I think they had to relocate some utility poles and that was expensive, it was really high. I think there were four of them that got relocated, maybe three or four to make room for moving the road to where the utility poles were.

And then, it just got narrow up to the point where there's an overhead railroad bridge crossing. There's a pier right there, which jogged the trail over toward their entrance. They have a parking lot where the entrance is, where that pier goes over the top, where the railroad bridge goes over the top. And so, they had to relocate their entrance road just past that pier. And then, after that point, it was free because you just had parking lot from there to their fence and there was lots of room. Oh, and then there's this problem with the stream enclosure.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: At Kennywood?

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- Dave Wright:** At Kennywood, yeah. There was a storm – Ivan, I think it was – that collapsed a brick stream enclosure for Streets Run coming through their parking lot. But, luckily, there was a section of it that still remained that had been built as a hefty heavyweight bridge right next to the railroad, I guess anticipating for it being used for railroad sidings, there, that the trail could use. And so, Kennywood has this big open ditch in their parking lot there, that they'd probably want to cover over to make parking spaces, but the DEP says, "Oh, no, we like open ditches, we don't like enclosed streams."
- Eric Lidji:** Why doesn't the DEP like enclosed streams?
- Dave Wright:** Well, that's the natural- it's more natural having an open stream. So, I think it's still open, right?
- Eric Lidji:** I haven't been to Kennywood...
- Dave Wright:** I think it's still open. It's a big hole in the ground there. There's a big fence around it. But, the trail still could fit through because they were on this solid portion of railroad bridge over that stream that could go through. And then, from that point, you're up to Glen Hazel, which is where we started.
- Eric Lidji:** Were you involved in the Hot Metal Bridge at all?
- Dave Wright:** You're talking the one down here in...
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah, on the South Side.
- Dave Wright:** Well, that's a URA project, the Urban Redevelopment Authority was the developer for the Hot Metal Bridge. They wanted it to provide access for the Southside Works development that they were developing.
- Eric Lidji:** But, there's that section that's technically part of the Great Allegheny Passage, right?
- Dave Wright:** Yeah, there's two bridges. The Hot Metal Bridge they use for the trail and the Mon Con Bridge is used for the automobiles.

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- Eric Lidji:** Right.
- Dave Wright:** And, the URA was involved with both of them, I think. Then they turned it over to the city.
- Eric Lidji:** And, once you get past that, it's just a straight shot to the Point?
- Dave Wright:** Well, on the North Side you've got the Jail Trail, which...
- Eric Lidji:** Right.
- Dave Wright:** ...which runs down to Grant Street. Mayor Murphy had to insist that the jail be built so that it would allow a strip for the trail to run in front of it. So, that occurred because I think he required it. So, it gets all the way up to Grant Street. And then, when PennDOT reconstructed the parkway, the central portion of the parkway, they widened the sidewalk from Grant Street to Smithfield Street along the road that runs from Smithfield to Grant – made it one-way. I don't know if it was two-ways, but it's not a two-lane road now, it's a one-lane road, and it's a wider sidewalk. And then, at Smithfield Street, then you have to get back down to the wharf to continue to the Point. There used to be a set of stairways there that were built by the county when the county built Water Street, but they were taken out. We've got photographs of them in there.
- Eric Lidji:** Of the original street?
- Dave Wright:** Of the original stairway. But, they were gone by the time the trail came through. And, all the Riverlife is supposed to be constructing- I haven't been down there to see what progress they're making – the ramp system and stairway going from Smithfield down to the wharf.
- Eric Lidji:** The switchback?
- Dave Wright:** Yes, a switchback.
- Eric Lidji:** If there had not been this larger trail that was coming from Cumberland and, in some sense, from D.C, do you think it

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would have been possible to build a trail through this section that you just described to me through all of these industrial facilities and theme parks? It's not very accommodating for a trail. The fact that there was this giant trail...

Dave Wright: Well, I see. It provided incentive to get it continuous all the way in.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Wright: Well, that was the selling point, sure. The way Linda sold the project to funders is to see what you can have here by just closing the gap. In fact, when our county executive was elected, Linda came to him and she said, "Well, you've got the last gap here in Allegheny County. Aren't you lucky?"

[Chuckle]

So, he accepted the challenge to support the project. That was – what was his name – the one before the guy we have now. Rich Fitzgerald's our current county...

Eric Lidji: Onorato?

Dave Wright: Onorato, Dan Onorato, yeah. He was given this task to help to close the gap, and it happened.

Eric Lidji: Didn't they make it a big priority in 2008, or 2006, or something like that?

Dave Wright: The county did?

Eric Lidji: Yeah. To close the gaps by...

Dave Wright: Right. Yeah. He talked to various people, like the U.S. Steel CEOs. He used his influence as being county executive, it was a political influence, I think, more than funding. I don't think we gave him any money. I can't remember it. Maybe they did, but I can't remember it.

Eric Lidji: Was the process of doing the Montour Trail completely different than this?

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Dave Wright: Oh, yeah. Much different, because there you had an abandoned railroad to work with all the way through. There were parcels that were acquired subsequent to the railroad's acquisition on the Montour. There were revisionary parcels that were acquired by the railroad as a railroad right-of-way, and not as fee title. And so, by coincidence Duquesne Light was building a high-voltage transmission line along a portion of it that had a whole lot of revisionary parcels. And so, as a cooperative thing through an agreement with Duquesne Light that we paid the percentage of what they paid for those parcels, for the right to have the trail. They retained the power line easement, and we retained the trail easement or they retained fee title and we took a trail easement through their parcels.

Eric Lidji: Oh, I remember. You said acquired it as right-of-way, was that through railbanking?

Dave Wright: No. Montour was acquired before railbanking.

Eric Lidji: Existed?

Dave Wright: Existed.

Eric Lidji: Were you interested in trails before Montour?

Dave Wright: Sure. Yeah, I have been bicycling since I was this big on the road.

Eric Lidji: Here in Pittsburgh?

Dave Wright: Cleveland, I grew up near Cleveland, and rode on the roads around Cleveland. And, when I moved to Pittsburgh I bought a mountain bike so I could ride on the Montour Railroad before it got fenced off. And, lo and behold...

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Just on the ballast?

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- Dave Wright:** Yeah, just on the ballast to bounce it around. You'd just go down there once, just for the experience of going all the way through.
- Eric Lidji:** Right.
- Dave Wright:** And then, just, lo and behold, we got the call from Dino Angelici, who, with Dan Sattinger, was forming the Montour Trail Council. They had a committee and they were both with the AYH, the American Youth Hostel group, local branch in Pittsburgh, and they were performing a committee to form a new group for the Montour Trail.
- Eric Lidji:** Were there a lot of bike enthusiasts that you discovered along the way?
- Dave Wright:** Oh, yeah. They come up, yeah, when they see a project that they have an interest in and join the trail group. And then, if they're interest goes beyond just membership, they become part of the committee.
- Eric Lidji:** But, I mean, when it came to opening doors or getting people to be accommodating, did it turn out that a lot of the reason that people were accommodating was because they were interested in bikes?
- Dave Wright:** That had a lot to do with it, I think. In the case of U.S. Steel, it had something to do with it. When we hear speeches from the guy who was at U.S. Steel – what's his name again?
- Eric Lidji:** Surma?
- Dave Wright:** Surma, John Surma. He said he lived in Washington, D.C., or he was visiting, or something, and he took a walk along the Canal Towpath Trail going up to Great Falls and he wasn't familiar with it. And, he asked somebody on the trail, "How far does this go?" And, the guy said, "Well, right now it only goes to Great Falls, but someday it'll go all the way to Pittsburgh." So, he said that inspired him to cooperate with this project.
- Eric Lidji:** Huh. Mayor Murphy was a big bike person?

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Dave Wright: Oh, yeah. He's a runner, too. I remember Ned Williams, who's currently president of the Montour Trail was walking along the C&O Canal Trail and he was pumping the pump to get some water out of it and along comes, [panting] Mayor Murphy. And, Ned looked at him and he said, "Yes, I am the mayor."

[Laughter]

Dave Wright: Mayor Murphy was involved with the Pine Creek Trail. He was in the state legislature at the time when the state was deciding whether or not to accept ownership of a Conrail donation of the railroad that goes up along Pine Creek, from Jersey Shore up to- up the hill.

[Chuckle]

And, the local politicians were against it because they represented people who own cabins along there, who wanted to keep the peace and quiet of the cabins. They didn't want outsiders coming in. But, it was Mayor Murphy's impassioned speech that swung the vote toward accepting the ownership and D.C. ended up put gates across the railroad to keep outsiders in. They put them up right away and then they developed the trail. And so, D.C. and art facility, it's not a local like the ones around here. It's not owned locally, it's owned by the state. A lot of states have state-owned trails, but Pennsylvania's not one of them.

Eric Lidji: Except for that piece?

Dave Wright: Except for that, yeah.

Eric Lidji: Huh. But, there are a lot of trails in Pennsylvania.

Dave Wright: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there's a high number of trails, high mileage, compared to the other states.

Eric Lidji: Have you ridden the Gap?

Dave Wright: Yeah, I was in four group tours. Rode three times with the group that was sponsored by the Allegheny Trail Alliance and

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once with the group that was sponsored by the Rails to Trails Conservancy.

Eric Lidji: And, you went all the way to Cumberland?

Dave Wright: We started in Washington, D.C., and came to Pittsburgh.

Eric Lidji: Oh, the other way?

Dave Wright: Usually, they come this way.

Eric Lidji: Do you have any thoughts about the trail, having ridden it?

Dave Wright: I'm not going to do it again.

[Laughter]

But, it's a great trip if somebody wants to take it. A lot of people say that's a challenge that they want to take and I think they feel pretty good after they accomplish that. They feel accomplishment after having done it. My personal problem with group rides is that you have to ride in the rain to keep up with the schedule.

[Chuckle]

And, I'm not going to do that anymore.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Were those rides after that stretch through Allegheny County that we were describing was completed?

Dave Wright: No, it was completed up to McKeesport. It was still unfinished between McKeesport and downtown.

Eric Lidji: I asked because I was just curious if you had that sense of accomplishment being on this trail that you were part of finishing.

Dave Wright: Of course. Of course.

[Laughter]

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Engineers generally don't work on trail projects, and I'm kind of a lone wolf doing that. When this first started as a concept, the engineers shied away. The legislature shied away from providing any funding for non-highway projects because they wanted it all for highways because people had shown a need for acceptance of spending their tax dollars on highway improvements. And, engineers stayed where the money was until people started realizing the value of the project and then the legislatures took the advice of Mayor Murphy and the other people who thought along his lines and started supporting the projects. And, the engineers saw the money in it that was coming out of these development projects and they started getting interested, too. My boss, my director told me, "You shouldn't be involved with this. You should stay in the mainstream," and I said, "Well, I like being where I am."

[Laughter]

"I think there's good opportunity there and I get to be more independent that way." So, I've been able to be creative and independent by sticking with this non-mainstream project, and that's a personal satisfaction.

Eric Lidji: I didn't realize that...it would make sense that you have a certain amount of leeway on what kinds of way of- even though you're in a public position.

Dave Wright: You can only design what the money's going to pay for.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. And, you have some discretion on what you're going to get involved in and what you're not going to get involved in.

Dave Wright: Working at the county I had more discretion than I would have in working as a consultant because they only get projects with defined scopes.

Eric Lidji: Right.

Dave Wright: In fact, I've been reminded by my bosses, and I got that reminder a couple weeks ago, that their projects come first,

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and trails come second. And, I've told them, "Well, that's been the case all along."

[Laughter]

I have to keep you happy before I can spend time on these trail projects.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Wright: Sometimes Linda didn't like it. When I delayed doing something for Linda she got mad at me. But, we got over that.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Are there any parts of the trail that, looking back, you're still kind of surprised that they managed to pull it off?

Dave Wright: The whole thing.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: What about on the parts that you were involved in?

Dave Wright: I think it was quite an accomplishment for getting through the Steel Valley like they did because there were so many obstacles – I just described them – that could continue to hold up that kind of a thing. And, it's just amazing to me that it was all accomplished the way the way it was.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Wright: And, it was timely, too. Things fell into place after a while. You just have to be persistent and respectful. And, if you're persistent and respectful, things will happen. Politics change, businesses get sold, but if you're still consistent and you outlast those changes, then there's still a way for finishing your project.

Eric Lidji: That's an interesting perspective.

Dave Wright: Well, that's...

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[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Wright: That's been my perspective. You have to be respectful and persistent. I'm involved with property acquisition here at the county and we have to do that, too, just to acquire property for our road and bridge projects. You meet all kinds of people who own property out there – rich people and poor people. And, they all have different perspectives. They all have different priorities. They might have a sick relative in the hospital, and then you come along and you want their property, and they don't have time to deal with you. But, you still have to go through with it. And, if you're persistent and respectful, then you get it done.

Eric Lidji: Is there anything else we should talk about?

Dave Wright: No, let's go home.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: Okay. All right. Well, thank you very much.

[end 0:58:30.8]

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