

**Eric Lidji:** Today is July 21, 2017. I'm Eric Lidji. This is the Great Allegheny Passage Oral History Project and I'm speaking to former Mayor Tom Murphy at his home in- are we in Perry Hilltop...is the technical neighborhood?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah.

**Eric Lidji:** Perry Hilltop. So, let's start with just your recollections of the area that's now trail when you were a kid. What did people think about the Riverfronts when you were growing up, and what time period are we talking about?

**Tom Murphy:** So, I was born in 1944 and grew up, really, the first four years in Greenfield, a neighborhood, and then we moved to Baldwin right above the rivers. And, nobody thought about the rivers other than to go across them. I mean, they were places of commerce and they were really our septic system, is what they were. They were very badly polluted. And, when I was growing up we would go out to play and we were always going on hikes. My mother would always two things, "Be home before the street lights come on," and "Never go near the rivers," because every summer there were people that drowned in the rivers, but they were also so polluted. So, we didn't think much about them. And, of course, one of the reasons they were lined with industry and railroads, and so you really had- it was hard – there was only here and there could you get access to them.

**Eric Lidji:** So, when you first started getting involved in trails was when?

**Tom Murphy:** Probably in the early '80s, maybe even the late '70s.

**Eric Lidji:** This is just policy? Is it the policy as a lawmaker?

**Tom Murphy:** No, first it was really as a community organizer on the North Side. My history is that I grew up here and then went away to school and worked for Alcoa for a couple years and had moved with them, and then my wife and I went to the Peace Corps, came back and got a Master's degree at New York, at Hunter College in New York City and then came back. Looked

for jobs in Pittsburgh and came back as a community organizer in this neighborhood, in Perry Hilltop, about 40-some years ago, so this was in '74.

**Eric Lidji:** What was Perry Hilltop like in the '70s?

**Tom Murphy:** It was a racially changing neighborhood. It was the microcosm of urban American since it was undergoing redlining, if you know what I mean, by banks. So, we were redlined. We were told that we wouldn't be able to get a mortgage on this house. We bought this house for \$8,000.

**Eric Lidji:** Wow.

**Tom Murphy:** And, it's in a bad neighborhood and the banks didn't want to give \$8,000 mortgages.

**Eric Lidji:** I didn't realize that redlining worked in two directions.

**Tom Murphy:** In what way?

**Eric Lidji:** Well, I knew that it prevented black families from moving into places, but it prevented white families from moving in?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, yeah, right. It was racially neutral in that way in the sense that banks redlined the neighborhood, basically. They said this is not a neighborhood we want to give mortgages in.

**Eric Lidji:** I see, okay.

**Tom Murphy:** And so, we went to 12 different financial institutions. They never even – any of them, not one, looked at our credit. It was just simply, "It's not a place where we would want to give mortgages." So, it becomes self-perpetuating. It becomes a place you don't want to move. So, I'm becoming a community organizer for this neighborhood when I came to realize that.

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** And so, one of the things I did as a community organizer here was organize a greenlighting campaign, which was to get the churches and individuals, and businesses to agree to sign a pledge to withdraw their deposits in financial institutions.

**Eric Lidji:** Huh.

**Tom Murphy:** And, this was going on all over America, unbeknownst to me. And so, that led to, eventually, people from all over the country began to come together and find out – and this is before the Internet or anything – we find out that other people- this was a common practice. It led to the Community Reinvestment Act, which became a powerful tool to monitor banks and what they were doing. And so, anyhow, that's a whole other story maybe you'll write sometime. And so, as an organizer on the North Side, in Perry Hilltop and in the North Side Civic Development Council, I became interested in the rivers then. And, the North Side Riverfront was, you know there was a trail of sorts down by Three Rivers Stadium. You could sort of see it, it was an old asphalt – real uneven. It was an afterthought because the road was primarily on the river where Three Rivers Stadium was. And then, from the 6<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge to the 9<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge it was- the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, it was largely old factory buildings. And then, from the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge up to Washington's Landing, then known as Herra Island was, it was the Zubick's Navy. It was a scrap yard. This was a marine salvage operation. And, he would go out and if old barges and things caught up and drop them along the shore there, and so, literally, it was a junkyard from the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge all the way up to what was then Herra Island.

And, Herra Island was the front third of the island if you know where that is. It was a scrap yard Buncher Company owned it and they had a big scrap yard there. And, the back two-thirds of the island was a slaughterhouse and rendering plant for cows for Pittsburgh got its meat, Armour Company had that. And, that was in the midst of going bankrupt. And so, you had, essentially, the whole Riverfront. And, going down the river on the other side of Three Rivers Stadium by the West End Bridge, there was still an active railroad track – not so active.

There was actually a railroad track that came down to about the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge also on the North Side.

And then, going up the South Side Riverfronts on the South Side, it was largely a steel- I mean, my father worked in that steel mill for 51 years.

**Eric Lidji:** In the J&L?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, J&L. So, he worked literally where the Hot Metal Bridge is on the South Side, and he would have his lunch on the Hot Metal Bridge every day. I'm sort of becoming aware of stuff in the early '50s. He would describe how the bridge was guarded heavily by the military during World War II...

**Eric Lidji:** Huh.

**Tom Murphy:** ... because it was seen as one of the most strategic bridges in America because it carried out a high percentage of the steelmaking capacity for the United States. The iron was made on the Hazelwood side. You could see pictures. I think I might have pictures of the old Eliza furnace where they put the ingredients to make the iron. And then, the Hot Metal Bridge was, literally, where- it carried the hot metal across the river to be made into steel – whatever kind of grade. And so, that was a whole integrated mill there and that bridge played a critical role in that whole process.

And so, on both sides – I worked there in the summers – sat on the river and had lunch when I was in college, on the Hazelwood side. So, from where the concrete and gravel company is, all the way up to the Hazelwood Bridge was largely Jones and Laughlin as well as everything on the South Side.

**Eric Lidji:** We're talking about 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue?

**Tom Murphy:** Well, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue all the way up. And so, all that was a very busy place where probably 10,000 to 15,000 people worked at

one time. So, that's my memory of the Riverfronts and not much memory of the Strip District. I didn't ever go up that way.

**Eric Lidji:** Okay. So, you said that you started as an organizer. The trail started when you were an organizer, so...

**Tom Murphy:** So, I got interested in trying to do something on the Riverfront. Our backs were turned to the river. I mean, the buildings that were warehouses and the fronts were- nobody looked at the rivers. I'm a runner. I like to run and would run along the North Side Riverfront, think about trying to do something.

**Eric Lidji:** What was the condition that you were running over?

**Tom Murphy:** Even the trail, I mean, the trail was by Three River Stadium, it was a broken-up piece of asphalt. There were no trees. There was nothing there.

**Eric Lidji:** But, it was technically a trail?

**Tom Murphy:** And then, there was a railroad right-of-way, in fact, that I was running on.

**Eric Lidji:** Just ballast?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah. It was essentially abandoned railroad. The tracks were still there, the ballast was still there – from the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge up. And then, when the mills went down – this is fast forward – when the mills shut down – I would run over just through the South Side through the steel mills. They were all abandoned – and run down through there, and never thinking that I would be mayor and that I could actually do something with it. Right? But, I would be imagining that we could do something.

**Eric Lidji:** So, you could have a vision that early of what was...

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah. I always thought that there was a huge opportunity. And it's funny, from the 10<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge up to about 18<sup>th</sup> Street, right, that was largely a place where homeless people hung

out. But, there was a trail of sorts...if you've been on that part of the trail, it's sort of wooded, it wasn't developed. Fast forward when I became, actually not even mayor, I was a legislator, we had started a "Friends of the Riverfront" fund and I had friends on the South Side. And I said, "Have you ever been there? There's a real beauty." There was an old dam there at one time, so you can see the old pillars.

**Eric Lidji:** Is it still there?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, but just the pillar on it, I mean just the bulkhead on the shoreline.

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, it's still there. There's a huge history along the rivers that you, sort of, the remnants of it that you can see it.

**Eric Lidji:** Right.

**Tom Murphy:** And so, I went to some of my friends on the South Side and I'd say, "Come on, take a walk with me." This was really sort of magical place. In their whole lives, they'd grown up on the South Side and they had never been down there. It was just a place that they'd never went. But, you had to go across the railroad tracks.

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** So, somewhere in the- probably early '80s- late '80s- so, I start getting involved in trails in the legislature. It was serendipitous. I would happen to be on the Conservation Committee. So, I'm in the legislature now. About '79 I go into the legislature, and I went here on the North Side. And, somewhere in the early '80s- I still have the picture on my wall, in fact. Somewhere in the early '80s, as a Conservation Committee member, we'd get invited to go up to look at Pine Creek, which is the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania. I don't know if you've ever been...

**Eric Lidji:** I haven't been up there, but I've seen it.

**Tom Murphy:**

It's really a beautiful place. I was really taken by it. There was a 62-mile railroad right-of-way that went from Wellsboro down to, I think, Williamsport, and Conrail, at the time, owned it, and they were going to abandon it. And, the states, whatever it was, Conservation proposed to acquire the whole right-of-way and turn it into a bike trail, which I had never heard of before. It's the first time I've heard of the idea of turning railroads into bike trails. This would be in the early '80s. And so, the legislation was introduced, and here, the legislators from there were opposed to it. They supported only 14 miles that went through the Pine Creek Gorge. The state would take the remainder of it – would revert back to the property owners. And, they were getting pushed by the property owners who thought city people and bikes would come and break into their house and steal stuff if they had a bike trail behind their house. So, it became this big fight in the legislature.

And, I loved it. I thought it made all the sense in the world. And so, I started pushing it, and I'm on the committee, and I finally get it out of committee, the bill out of Committee. The Democrats, at the time, were empowering the past. And then, it's delayed and delayed, and finally, it comes up for vote late one night in the legislature. And, the legislators from the area – at least one of them was very actively opposed to it – and I spoke for it and other colleagues of mine were for it. And finally, the vote went up and my Republican colleague introduced an amendment to strip out all but the 14 miles – that the state would not purchase that. And, we debated it and it went up for a vote, and it was a tie vote, which meant the amendment failed. So, he files for a reconsideration. By now, it's probably one o'clock in the morning, and he files for a reconsideration, and I'm furiously running around- because you can see who voted, you get a tally of it. And, I'm running around, trying to change votes, and it goes up for another vote again and it's a tie vote, but 24 votes had changed.

**Eric Lidji:**

But, still tied?

**Tom Murphy:**

It's tied.

[Laughter]

So, I had gotten 12 people to change their vote, and he had gotten 12 people to change their vote because people didn't really care about it if it wasn't in their district. So, it was still a tied vote, so it was amendment failed again. So, you can only do it twice. And so, Pine Creek became 62-mile [inaudible 0:15:13.7]. I was up there not too long ago, it's just lovely. The people who were for it in Wellsboro gave me a picture of it. I have it up – it's on the wall right there. And so, I got interested in the idea of it. I met a young guy, who just died, sadly, David Burwell...

**Eric Lidji:** Another name.

**Tom Murphy:** ...and Peter Harkin. And, they were starting a group called The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. So, I ended up on the board for about ten years.

**Eric Lidji:** What was the- could you describe the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy?

**Tom Murphy:** The Rails-To-Trails Conservancy?

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah, just for the record. Could you describe what it was, what their idea...?

**Tom Murphy:** Well, David and Peter saw- I describe the Rails-to-Trails movement as, probably, one of the purest citizen movements I've seen in the country- because sort of spontaneously all over America. I don't know if it was in the air or water, all over America people started saying, "Well, there's all these abandoned trails, we ought to do..." "I love walking my dog out there. Why don't we keep it? Why don't we turn it into a trail?" It was sort of this empowerment thing. It wasn't any government. It was individual citizens began to get involved with it. And, again, it was like the redlining campaign, we all discovered each other. I think David and Peter with the Wildlife Federation, or one of those, and I think they saw this beginning to happen around the country. They had a bigger



view. I was just focused on Pittsburgh. And so, they started an organization. It was an important organization, but really critical for two things – one is they were able to get what is called railbanking legislation, which in effect says there's a railroad that's going to be abandoned, the right-of-way can be kept intact for future...

**Eric Lidji:** Is that Federal?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, it's a Federal law, and it's been tested in the Supreme Court – and that was really critical. And, the second was to include Rails-to-Trails under the highway enhancement money, which really opened the gates. In the highway, it's a relatively modest amount of money, but for trails, when you can access millions and millions of dollars, it really moved it forward. In some states, Pennsylvania being one, and others, took advantage of it and used other state's- well, their money for highways, and so they never really used the enhancement. So, that became a very important... And, it really began to connect people around the country – that you weren't by yourself. Lots of lawsuits, very similar...

**Eric Lidji:** Property owners?

**Tom Murphy:** By property owners in Pine Creek. You know, people didn't want trails behind their house. They thought they would- no, there's lots of evidence that it enhances the value rather than creates a liability. The other one that I got really involved in – I fell in love with the Montour Run. My wife, often, would drop me off out by the airport and I would run- I don't know if you've been on the Montour Run Trail. Do you know where Montour...?

**Eric Lidji:** I know where it is.

**Tom Murphy:** If you get off and run down there, it's incredibly beautiful. You go down to the Ohio River...and sometimes she'd pick me up. I was running marathons at the time, and then, sometimes I'd run back, I'd just do a loop. And, it was an abandoned railroad right-of-way. There was nothing there. I went to my colleagues

in the legislature, “Why don’t you guys think about doing a trail there?” The communities and the municipalities – the police didn’t want it. They thought it would create more crime and they’d have to worry about getting down there. And, there was a gun club along it and they saw the idea of this trail near their gun club as a problem.

And here, there was a group of people...Stan Stassinger, and others, that were involved – who you ought to interview – were involved in trying to do something with that. They saw the value of it, also, trying to do something. And somehow, I connected with them and got involved with them. I can remember going with them to meet with the railroad. The railroad still owned it. I can’t remember the president of the railroad’s name. To his credit, I think he recognized- he had Lou Gehrig’s disease.

**Eric Lidji:** Was it Gordon Neuenschwander?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah. And, I always remember, I mean, it was a really lasting gift he gave to Western Pennsylvania...

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** ...because he could have sold... There were people along the right-of-way that wanted pieces of it and he could have sold them. And instead, he gave us time to hold onto it.

**Eric Lidji:** Did you get a sense of why he was interested in the project?

**Tom Murphy:** I think he saw the value of it. I mean, people get it or don’t get it, and back then a lot of people didn’t get it. I think he saw the value of it, that it would be a really great asset for them. In this valley, particularly, it’s where the trail follows the Montour Run. It was very pretty. And so, he gave us time. And, I remember, I was able to get \$150,000 through the state. Nobody was interested in this in the legislature. Ron Gamble, and others, Mike Fisher, they were fine with it, and some of them were a little nervous about it.

And, the- I always remember, I went and said this would be a lot easier if this was under government auspices for liability and insurance purposes and everything, and then they could contract it. And, I went to Tom Foerster, who was, then, the county commissioner, and he agreed to take the Montour Trail under the county. But, in Washington County, the guy, Massaro, who became a congressman, was the county commissioner, he did not want it because he wanted to build the Mon Fayette Valley Expressway on the right-of-way, so he didn't want the trail. So, he would never have Washington County take ownership of the trail.

**Eric Lidji:**

Ownership of it.

**Tom Murphy:**

So, in private, he owns the Washington County, I think still today. And then, in Allegheny County, technically, it's part of the county park system. Anyhow, it's a great story. There's a wonderful volunteer group that could be a whole- the whole Montour Trail is a great story of citizen... At the same time, I'm mixing this up – at the same time I get involved with some other people in Pittsburgh. Back, probably in the mid-'80s, about trying to do Riverfront trails. And, Larry Ridenour's involved with that. I meet him back then, and there's a guy named Martin O'Malley, who's now died, who is an activist. And, Todd Erkel – I don't know if you met- Todd is a writer in Pittsburgh, John Stevens. So, the four of us come together, along with some other people and create what we call "The Friends of the Riverfront." It was a nonprofit that was going to try to get the city to...

**Eric Lidji:**

So, you were one of the founders of "Friends of the River?"

**Tom Murphy:**

Yeah. It was going to try to get the city to build the- start paying attention to the rivers, and to take an opportunity to do trails. Our concern was if the city started to build the Riverfront, we would continue to turn our backs on the Riverfront, redevelop it because now the mills are shut down and there's a lot of- there's railroads being abandoned.

So, other than sort of the afterthought of a trail in front of Three Rivers Stadium, really, the only public access was a park at the Caliguri at 18<sup>th</sup> Street, on the South Side, it was really a boat launch. The city had gotten some money from the state to put a boat launch in. And that was, really, the only public access on the Waterfront in Pittsburgh when we start this.

**Eric Lidji:** Was there a sense of urgency in the...?

[Crosstalk]

**Tom Murphy:** I felt it, but I don't know that many other people did.

**Eric Lidji:** Did the other three people that you were working with?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, I think that's why we started it.

**Eric Lidji:** Where did that sense of urgency come from?

**Tom Murphy:** They said that there was going to be a new generation of development on the Waterfront at some point. Understand Pittsburgh is... You came in '95?

**Eric Lidji:** '95.

**Tom Murphy:** So, you're catching the tip. Pittsburgh is in a steep decline in terms of population loss...

**Eric Lidji:** Right.

**Tom Murphy:** ...in terms of, "What are we going to be when we grow up?" The idea of thinking about a Riverfront park when thousands of people leaving every year, you know, you're becoming an "old" city, the young people- you were unusual, you came back- I mean, between '70 and '90 we lost almost 500,000 people, from the region about 300,000 people.

**Eric Lidji:** When something like J&L closes, was there a sense in Pittsburgh that, at some point, that land would become something, even if it was just in the park...?

[Crosstalk]

**Tom Murphy:** Well, we went through years of iterations of how to restart the steel mill.

**Eric Lidji:** Okay.

**Tom Murphy:** So, that was the conversation. It wasn't that it was going to be something else, it was about – how do we bring back the steel mill? When I first announced as mayor, when I first ran in '99 and I lost, 200 union people picketed my announcement – didn't support me, picketed it because – two things – one is I had done a lot of legislation around high technology within Franklin Partnership, and so I was seen as this high-tech guy, which is not what unions want to hear, right? And, the other was I had said publicly, "We need to move on. The steel mills aren't coming back and we need to..." And so, they saw me as not truly a Pittsburgher, right, because I wasn't for steel and I wanted to bring this high-tech stuff to Pittsburgh.

**Eric Lidji:** This was '89, you said?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, '88, '89, yeah. So, you could go back and look. There were all iterations and the state put millions of dollars in trying to figure out how to bring the steel mills back, not only in South Side but in the Mon Valley. There was a big thing about Dorothy 6, which was a huge glass furnace in the Mon Valley. You might remember some of that. And, that was all efforts to bring the steel mills back. Not to think about what are we going to do with this property? What are the opportunities it presents?

The mills go down and there's not a lot of thought about it. And so, in '94 when I'm becoming mayor and I have this remarkable group of people. I don't take credit – Tom Cox, who was my chief of staff and Steve Leeper. We decide, in a

very conscious way, that we needed to become a different city, which is not an easy conversation to have with your constituents, right? And, we needed to do something with all this vacant land, which has now been sitting there for years. And so, we do something very controversial, we, in a flat-broke city, we take \$6 million out of our operating budget. We have junk bond status, we had a 12% pension fund, funded pension, and there's a lot of things to do with money. We take reducing the workforce of the city and eliminating about 150 positions. We divert \$6 million out of the city's operating budget and use it to finance a \$16 million bond issue, put it in the Urban Redevelopment Authority, which is going to become our economic driver. In the first year I'm mayor, we buy over 1,000 acres of land, so we go and buy the steel mills. We buy South Side, and we buy the slag dump in Somerset, and we buy the old Sears building in East Liberty where Home Depot is, that's what started the whole [inaudible 0:28:27.5]. So, we started buying property with the idea that we're going to build a new Pittsburgh.

I mean, think about how audacious that is because a private market could have bought all this property, but they didn't see any value in it. And so, our view was we needed to create value, and so we bought all this stuff. The results are the results. I mean, we created this value, but part of the deal was, I mean, now, I'm mayor, and I've run on these trails and I've played on those Riverfronts for almost 60 years. So now, I have the opportunity to do something different with them. And so, we do – really good partnerships of people who made it happen. Literally, every square foot of the Riverfront has a story to it – getting rid of Zubick's Navy on the North Side.

**Eric Lidji:**

How'd you get rid of it?

**Tom Murphy:**

We gave them notice. So, when we did a survey- one of the first things when I became mayor is I had us do a survey of who owned all the Riverfront, and it turned out we owned – we, being the city – owned the property where Zubick's Navy was, and so we gave them an eviction notice and said, "You've got to leave." We went to court and won, and that was

the first trail piece that we did, from the 9<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge up towards Washington's Landing. Washington's Landing wasn't developed as we know it.

**Eric Lidji:**

Was that one of the properties that the city bought?

**Tom Murphy:**

There's a whole story there. I mean, every piece has a story. I'm a legislator and Washington's Landing still is industrial – Herra Island. The front part of it is owned by the Buncher Company. The city intends that I'm their legislator- Tom Cox, who becomes my chief of staff, who's a dear friend now becomes head of the North Side City Development Council. And, they and I, again, guy – God bless him, Mark Schneider, who's died – he was a staff person working with the neighbor. They developed a concept of Washington's Landing sort of as an interesting place for the North Side and Herra Island. And, the city, as it turned out, had other plans. The city was going to sell- the city had taken over, I think, for taxes, the back two-thirds of the island and was going to sell the whole island to the Buncher Company and the Buncher was going to put an industrial park out there, and essentially, expand their scrap yard. And, the neighborhood groups had a different idea. And, there was a bridge that went out to the island that was an old rickety wooden bridge, so it would be hard to hold big trucks.

**Eric Lidji:**

From the Troy hillside, or from the...?

**Tom Murphy:**

The Troy hillside, where the bridge is now, but it was an old rickety wooden bridge. And, the city had applied to the state for money and the state was going to fund the railroad bridge. So, I'm a young legislator and I got in the middle of that and stopped it – the state from giving the money to the city for the bridge that would have a bunch of... So, we had this big showdown over the whole thing, and at some point, the city blinked and they said okay, we'll keep the property and we'll work with you to redevelop it. And so, it is what it is today now because of Tom Cox and Mark Schneider, other two. I saw a different vision of what Herra Island could be than what others saw.

**Eric Lidji:** Was there a trail, you know, the little sculpture park on the North Side?

**Tom Murphy:** Right.

**Eric Lidji:** Was there always a trail there?

**Tom Murphy:** There was never a trail there until that development happened.

**Eric Lidji:** So, this is what I don't understand – why is Mayor Caliguiri doing all this renaissance stuff, and some of it is Waterfront, and this is not part of it? Why was it hard to convince him to do trails...?

[Crosstalk]

**Tom Murphy:** People did not see the linear value. They saw individual pieces. So, he does that little linear park, it's just that block.

**Eric Lidji:** Right.

**Tom Murphy:** Because that development's going to happen there. Those buildings over there, right?

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** And, it's just that park, he doesn't see... And, on either side of it are warehouses, right?

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** So, it's between, what is it, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge and so on either side it was not easy to do. As I said, every square foot of the Riverfront has a story to it. There were buildings there or there were railroad tracks. It was just an impediment and nobody saw the value of extending it. I don't remember when we "Friends of the Riverfront." You could ask them when it started. I think that's the first time people began to see a linear opportunity, okay?



I can remember- so, I run for mayor in '89 and lose, and Sophie wins, and I have a decent relationship. I can always remember getting- her chief of staff and the chairman of the planning commission to go on a bike ride with me one morning. And, we're out at Squirrel Hill – I meet them in Squirrel Hill. And, we ride down what is now the Jail Trail, the Eliza Furnace Trail. But, it was an old railroad right-of-way. And, I'm trying to tell them that you can come from riding to Schenley Park right through Schenley Park, come all the way down into the city on this abandoned railroad right-of-way.

Her chief of staff, Joe Mistick, got a flat tire. It was a disaster of a trip. I'm trying to convince them that they ought to do something with that. This is after '89 when I lost. And, of course, they didn't, they couldn't see the- you, know, there's the hassle of trying to get it from the railroad. And so, when I became mayor, one of the things we do, Steve Leeper and I fly onto Jacksonville, Florida to talk to- who was it Norfolk Southern or CSX? CSX, I guess, to buy that whole right-of-way. And, we buy it and we buy – what is that – parking lot there where the parking garage is, and then we buy it all. Steve, my staff person, thought we were nuts, buying it. It was going to be a waste of money. We made our money back in a year in that surface parking lot and then we built a garage on it.

**Eric Lidji:** The parking lot paid for the acquisition of the trail?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, yeah. And then, the parking garage we built, and then PNC Bank puts their operations center there. So, think about the value we created on an old railroad right-of-way. And, as an aside, we have that trail that runs all the way into Oakland.

**Eric Lidji:** Did that trail require accommodations from the development? Like, the jail is just beyond there.

**Tom Murphy:** So, that is before I became mayor. Now, I'm into this trail stuff. So, this is when I'm a legislator and the county and the city make an agreement to build a jail. And, I'm beating up Tom Foerster about leaving enough room back there for a trail

because I'm thinking about this is going to be a trail one day, and nobody else can see that. And, the warden says, "I don't want a trail back there. People are going to use it to escape." Right?

[Laughter]

I mean, everybody had their excuses, but they moved it back. They left the right-of-way there for the trail. Tom Foerster, to his credit, had them leave the right-of-way for the thing. And then, PNC bank- when PNC Bank- that trail wasn't completed yet, but when PNC bank proposed to build their operations center there, they had designed right up against the parkway, there. I can remember calling Tom O'Brien, who was chairman of PNC Bank, and saying, "You need to move your building back 50 feet."

**Eric Lidji:** And, he was okay with that?

**Tom Murphy:** "Oh," he said, "It's going to cost us money to redesign this building. What are you saying to me?" And I said, "We're going to put a trail – it's going to go from the Point all the way out to Oakland and we want you to leave space for it." And, he said okay. When they designed the building, then they put locker rooms for their employees to use the trail, they put an eating area in the cafeteria. So, they took advantage of the trail. So, there were all those stories because, like I said, every square foot has a story.

**Eric Lidji:** Was it just enthusiasm that persuaded these people? Was it just your enthusiasm?

**Tom Murphy:** Maybe the fact that they knew the zoning, too?

[Laughter]

I mean, there's different levers that the city has.

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** And, I would think it was probably my enthusiasm. I mean, I had relationships with these people so I think they were willing to accommodate us as long as it wasn't- the biggest one is with the Steelers...

**Eric Lidji:** Can you tell that story?

**Tom Murphy:** Huh?

**Eric Lidji:** Can you...?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah. So, we bought Jones and Laughlin Steel Mill site on the South Side, so it's about 120 acres. And, we make a decision to do the kind of development that you see, they do a mixed-use, urban. The first developers that come in the door after we buy it are people that want to build a Walmart. And, we make a conscious decision we don't want to do the "Big Box" and all this stuff. Let me just say, half the people in South Side wanted the Walmart – the old Southside. And so, everything is controversial. So, we start doing a plan about how we want to do this. And, I can remember taking Rebecca Flora and her chairman of her board at the time – Rebecca was head of the South Side Development Corporation. And, we started a run up by the Frick Art Museum and we ran down through Frick Park, and down through what is now Somerset, but was then a slag dump – but there was still a trail that ran down through that valley, and down along the Riverfront from – I don't know if you've ever done this – down along the Riverfront from Duck Hollow, down to the Glenwood Bridge, and across the Glenwood Bridge, and down along the South Side. And, I'm telling him, "We need to do this trail." And, that's why the trail for the South Side was going to be so important, that we could come down there. And so, for me, anytime we were going to do anything on the Waterfront, it was going to have public access, that we were going to own the Waterfront. And so, as we buy South Side, the one piece- if you're coming across the Hot Metal Bridge, the one parcel on the left-hand side, it's a long narrow parcel. It's on the Riverfront on one side, on the North Side, and the South Side is an active railroad track that's actually partly in the tunnel going through the South

Side, and then this long narrow one. And then, the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center and Steelers come to us and say they want to build a world-class sports medicine facility and practice fields, and headquarters for the Steelers. Dr. Freddie Fu was a friend of mine who was running that. In fact, he'd operated on my knee at some point. And so, of course, I said, "We would love for you to do that." And so, they designed, and they come back and their buildings are on the Waterfront. And, that road that goes down through there is up against the railroad track and there's no public access on the Waterfront, everybody wants the Waterfront. They want the Waterfront view. And so, they had designed so they could look up and down the river out of their offices. And we said, "That's not going to happen. You've got to move it back. We've got the Riverfront."

So, Dan Rooney and Jeff Romoff – true story – my chief of staff, my planning director, and I go to lunch with them at the Duquesne Club and the waiter had to come over and tell us to keep it because they were moving it out to Passavant if they couldn't build what they wanted to build. And, Dan's big objection was if I build- if we put the trail there, he would only be able to build four 80-yard practice fields. So, that's why the Steelers can't score...

[Chuckle]

...in the 20-yard line. So we went back and forth. They, eventually, agreed to move back, move the building back off the river and build the 80-yard football fields. You see the trail there. And then, a year or so later, after the buildings are done and Dan's in his office, he had a corner office, he called me one evening and said, "You know, I'm looking out, it's a nice summer evening. See these families are all on the Riverfront riding bikes, and old people walking and riding bikes," he said, "We did the right thing, didn't we?" And so, that's the story. For me, that sums up the story, is that people couldn't see the connection of the whole thing of how it all could be woven together. Everybody saw this individual piece and I think the sculpture park on Washington on the North Side was an

example that people saw just that piece, not the whole thing. So, there were lots of good allies in this. And, at some point, then, Linda McKenna Boxx, who I think is really the mother of the whole trail, really, she saw the whole connection, that could it all go all the way down. And, at some point, I understood that. I got it, too, how important that whole connection was.

**Eric Lidji:**

You were saying that part of it is that people didn't have the vision, but it seems like a big part, too, is, from what you're saying, that if the city owns the property, it changes the dynamic of the conversation.

**Tom Murphy:**

Big time. The city wasn't willing to spend a lot of money on it. If it was available, maybe they would create something. Even the 18th Street Park, I mean, Dick Caliguiri saw that, primarily, I think, as a boat launch, not as a big trail. Further up the river, which is now done, the people that owned Sandcastle at the time is a local family. And, their part of Sandcastle, when they bought that, where they put it – part of the property was in the City of Pittsburgh and most of it was where they put Sandcastle, but the part closest to city was in the city, and they didn't want to have to deal with two taxing bodies, and so they offered to donate it to the city. And Sophie said, "We don't want it."

**Eric Lidji:**

Why?

**Tom Murphy:**

Because they didn't see any value in it, and it might have liability because stuff was dumped there. And so, that became- if you've ever been up that way, you would know for years you couldn't get through there. Then, the next owners really didn't want to give it up. That was a big stumbling block, getting around Sandcastle. So, it was that people didn't see the value in it. And, we all grew up not seeing the value in it. Now, if you took the trails away, there would be a revolution. So, for me, it's really heartening to see the kind of energy being put in the trails that people generally get.

I can remember – this was not that long ago – where I mentioned about coming down Duck Hollow and then you come down- that’s actually that little piece from Duck Hollow down to the Glenwood Bridge – is probably my favorite piece. I don’t know if you’ve ever been on it.

**Eric Lidji:**

Just walking.

**Tom Murphy:**

It’s a beautiful area, and you have no sense that you’re in the middle of a city. It’s incredibly wooded and beautiful. And, my vision was to get a bridge at the end by the Hot Metal Bridge to come up and to connect into the Glenwood Bridge, so you could get across that railroad track, and then, eventually, they’d be able to connect it onto the South Side trail, which, at the time, didn’t go up to the Glenwood Bridge.

And, I can remember going to the county – Jim Roddy was the chief executive – they were rebuilding, refurbishing the Glenwood Bridge and I said, “Why don’t you move the sidewalk to one side,” take it off- it’s on both sides, take it off the one upriver side, “and let’s try to raise a little bit more money and put this...” And he said, “That’s all you want to talk about, are trails. It’s going to slow us down, it’s going to cost us more money. We don’t want to do it.” Now, you can’t get through there. They put up a big fence, the railroad, I think, has, to block that. And, that was what you faced. I mean, you faced this inertia about trails. Of course, and sometimes active officers should, but... From the very beginning, it was that kind of inertia that was really hard to get people to overcome. And, that was the value of being mayor, is that I could get people’s attention.

**Eric Lidji:**

Huh.

**Tom Murphy:**

Well, sometimes. In that case, with Jim Roddy, I couldn’t get his attention. And so, today, you still can’t get across the Glenwood Bridge.

**Eric Lidji:**

Was there any other moments along the way that felt like they distilled the accomplishment into a single moment?

- Tom Murphy:** Yeah, for me- I was standing down by the water steps with, probably, my grandson at the time. It was probably eight, ten years ago, and this couple comes riding down on a bike and they say, "Hey, thanks for the trail." We started talking. They were 82 and 80 years old and they had ridden down from Millvale and had not been on bikes for almost 70 years. But, they decided to buy bikes because it was safe, and it was flat, and they could ride the trail, and it would just change their lives. That, for me, said that's the kind of city I want to have.
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah. Have you done the full Great Allegheny Passage?
- Tom Murphy:** Yeah, four times.
- Eric Lidji:** Four times?
- Tom Murphy:** Yeah. I'm going to actually do it over Labor Day.
- Eric Lidji:** Really?
- Tom Murphy:** If you want to come, you're welcome to come.
- Eric Lidji:** Okay. When you do it four times, you're saying Pittsburgh-D.C., D.C.-Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh...
- Tom Murphy:** No, four times from Pittsburgh to D.C.
- Eric Lidji:** Really?
- Tom Murphy:** Mona drives and we put a...
- Eric Lidji:** Where do you stay along the way?
- Tom Murphy:** Bed and breakfasts. The first one was funny. We started before the trail was done... So, part of it down by Confluence, from Confluence, that part of it wasn't done yet. We rode on the right-of-way, but it [\[audio skips 0:49:47.2\]](#).
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** And, it started my- our daughter was graduating from Carnegie Mellon and we decided we'd do a father-daughter trip ride because we had talked about riding on the trail. And, we had done pieces of it. She had talked to her friends at school and some of them said, "Oh, we'd love to come." And, I'd mentioned it to some people I knew, and they'd said, "Well, I'd love to do that, too. Let's do it." So, it evolved into 14 people and most of them said, "Camp?"

[Chuckle]

We were going to camp. But he said, "The idea, if you're going to ride bikes for 60 miles a day, you stay in a nice place, you have a nice bed, you go to the best restaurant around, and you drink lots of wine. We want to do the trip like that." And so, I mentioned my friend, Mark Schneider, who's now dead, he took control of it and we put this trip together. Actually, Art Rooney went on it.

**Eric Lidji:** Really?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah. It's just a group of people. It was just a pick-up group. So, we did this trip and, yeah, it was a good trip – five days. And then, subsequently, we've done this several other times.

**Eric Lidji:** Do you have favorite parts of the trail?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah. My favorite part is the tunnel. Have you been on it?

**Eric Lidji:** The Big Savage Tunnel?

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah. Have you done this?

**Eric Lidji:** I haven't done it.

**Tom Murphy:** It's worth just going out to that. And, when you come through and the...so you can go under the Mason Dixon Line and then when you come out the other side. On a clear day, it feels like you can look all the way to Alabama. You're looking straight down the ridgelines of the Appalachians – this incredible view.



**Eric Lidji:** Mm-hmm.

**Tom Murphy:** And then, all along, you know, Pennsylvania is beautiful. It's the part coming down by Confluence between Ohio and Pennsylvania, the Confluence, the Salisbury Aqueduct. I love part of the C&O Canal, too. I love the history of that, of the canal and how it was built. It's a great ride. Five days gives you enough time to sightsee, you're not in a rush.

**Eric Lidji:** And then, you do five days back?

**Tom Murphy:** No, and then I drive back. I couldn't do five days back.

[Chuckle]

So, I've done it several other times in pick-up groups of people. We're planning a trip over the Labor Day weekend.

**Eric Lidji:** Okay. Are there still things in Pittsburgh that you'd like to see, little pieces that you feel like would make the whole system even...

**Tom Murphy:** Yeah, so, my vision, which we didn't- was to try to figure out a way to connect every neighborhood in Pittsburgh to a trail. So, I saw the Riverfront trails as the big highways, and then we were trying to think about how to create fingers off of it into the neighbors. So, one of the things we looked at was there's a railroad right-of-way that is not heavily used that runs all the way through the South Hills out Route 51.

**Eric Lidji:** Huh.

**Tom Murphy:** You see the bridges as you go out the Fort Pitt Tunnel to the airport. And so, we talked about trying to acquire that. It's probably used twice a week. You could create a great park along there – it's about 1,500 acres of land along the 51 slope, that you could create a whole park around that right-of-way that would have connected it, I don't know, all those neighborhoods going out through the South Hills. And then, my other really grand goal – I was just thinking about it

yesterday – was to recreate Bigelow’s loop of the city. He was doing it with roads, okay?

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** And so, my view was that you go out- if you start at the Fort you can go out the Allegheny River up to Highland Park. You could talk to Pat Hassett if you’ve not. Pat Hassett was our planner for the city at the time doing this. The Highland Park Bridge had to be – not the big one coming across the river, but it’s the smaller one – and we were looking to bring the trail up right by Washington Boulevard and come up Washington Boulevard, go up through Negley, all off-road. And then, there’s actually a tunnel up there where there’s new development is now that goes under. You can go up through there – a little tunnel. You’d have to go on a road a little bit around, just for a couple blocks around where Bakery Square is now. Now you’re into Mellon Park, you could ride Mellon Park for a couple blocks. Then you’d have to go on Beechwood Boulevard which is a [inaudible 0:55:14.4] in the [inaudible], and now you’re in Frick Park. And then you go down through Frick Park – what I described before – all the way down and go across the Glenwood Bridge or go along eventually down along the Hazelwood side all the way back, and you’d have a complete off-road loop. I measure trails by- we had a son late in life. He was born in 1990, and so when I’m mayor, he’s young. And, I measure trails by where would I take my 6 or 7-year-old son or daughter to ride a bike? I don’t like bike lanes for that reason.

**Eric Lidji:** Because kids can’t go on them?

**Tom Murphy:** It’s dangerous. At the best of times, it’s still dangerous. I don’t like to ride on the streets. And so, my view was to try to figure out as much as possible how do you create a separation? And, I understand the need for bike lanes, but it’s not ideal in my mind if you understand what I mean.

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** So, my view was how do you weave the city together, into sort of an overlay it with a network of, in effect, a bike infrastructure that's not on roads?

**Eric Lidji:** So, you can go anywhere without being on a road on a bike?

**Tom Murphy:** Right. Right. That was sort of the result. And, Pittsburgh is unique in the sense because of its hills and valleys, but there's a lot of open space in that sense that you could sneak bike lanes in, right?

**Eric Lidji:** Yeah.

**Tom Murphy:** I just had the conversation yesterday about – or a couple days ago – with the Parks Conservancy woman. We extended the trail out to the prison on the North Side. And so, let's say you start somewhere on the North Side and you can go all the way out to the prison, and then you can go up Woods Run and the parallel in Woods Run is a narrow alley where houses are being abandoned over the years, called "Lucky Alley." My thought is that we would acquire that property as it became abandoned and extend that up. And, you can almost get up to Brighton Road, and then into Riverview Park, and now you're in Riverview Park, and you go through Riverview Park, and you can drop down. I've walked it several times. You come down Venture and you can put a trail, then, all the way along the eastern valley. If you'll drive down, you'll notice that there's a natural bench in the hillside right there. So, you can create this whole loop on the North Side, in a sense that gets you down to the Riverfront with going on, you know, a couple of blocks of roads, not much at all. If you think about it, right, and that was- I never got to it, it was just, you know, it's hard to... But, I would love to see that kind of vision where you could create a biking system in Pittsburgh that would minimize the car-bike interaction.

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

**Tom Murphy:** No, that's good, I think.

**Eric Lidji:** All right. Thank you very much.

**Tom Murphy:** Okay.

[End 0:58:22.9]

jvh-t/cr-p

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