

Eric Lidji: ...so we can get it all on tape. Today is September 26, 2017. I'm Eric Lidji this is the Great Allegheny Passage Oral History Project. I'm speaking with Dave Mankamyer at his home in Friedens which is- is it its own municipality? Is it part of Somerset Township?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah. It's part of Somerset Township.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Dave Mankamyer: But, it's just a village as it's on a- it's not an independent village. It's part of the township.

Eric Lidji: Okay. So, I thought we could- one of the things I've been asking people when we get started is to give me a sense of their relationship with the area before the trail. Did you grow up in Somerset?

Dave Mankamyer: Yes, uh-huh.

Eric Lidji: What do you remember of the railroad and all that way back when?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, I can remember when they ran the last train.

Eric Lidji: In '75?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah, from Washington up. And I talked to some people who rode on the train, the last train. And they really had no plans to what was going to happen. And they are using the sidings on the train railroad till there was a little- kind of a lull in the coal business for awhile and they weren't using them and they were starting to take up some of the rails so then nobody could use it.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: And I don't if you talked to Hank. There was a college boy for his summer – he walked from Pittsburgh to Washington on that trail and he did a thing as a part of a project about turning that into a hiking and a biking trail to Washington. So...

Eric Lidji: Was that Kupek?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Dave Mankamyer: So, and then the- it's DC&R now, but I don't know what it was at that time owned a park in Ohiopyle and they went ahead and acquired the area through Ohiopyle and put a hiking and biking trail through there. So, that kind of sparked the idea along and there were some residents in Confluence which is in Somerset County come up and say, "Well, be nice if we could extend this out." And they took the idea to Bill Lloyd and Bill at the time was a State Legislator from Somerset County and asked him if he could do anything about it and, of course, the state wasn't too anxious about getting into this.

Eric Lidji: How come?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, when you have a park, you appoint a park ranger and he can maintain a crowd and set up rules and regulations what have you. But, they got to thinking, "Well, if this thing is stretched out for 400 miles, how are we going to regulate and operate it?" They've never done that. It was new to the state and they weren't set up to handle it. So, they were not encouraging it. They encouraged it through their park and because they had the apparatus and the people there to manage it. But, how do you manage your crowd on a biking trail? They've never had that before.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: So, it was something new and the powers that be weren't that all interested about jumping into it. But, at the time in 1970- the latter part of the 70s, not like it was now – they were just trying to come out of a recession and Congressman Murtha in Johnstown was an active person on the Interior Committee in Washington. And he started America's Industrial Heritage Project which was to bring some money into the area and try to beef up the tourism in the area at the time.

Eric Lidji: Can you describe the program a little bit more?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, as I go through I will.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Dave Mankamyer: But, then he talked to Bill Lloyd and these people had talked to him and he said- and when he talked to Congressman Murtha, Murtha said, "Well, there's some money here I have appropriated for tourism. If this will fit into what you want to do up there..." And we also had- Historical Society wanted to build that here in Somerset County. So, he kind of approached me, he said, "I can get some money now to do- possibly do that trail. Who wants to do it?" I said, "Well, we'll just try to approach the Conservation District which I was a Chairman of the Board at the time which is a volunteer organization and I said, "It don't exactly fit our mold, but it's going to open the outdoors and we're into land preservation and follows the Casselman River," which we wanted to clean up too at the time. And so, I said, "Maybe we can do it." I took it to the Board. The Board said, "Well, if you can make it fit, try it." So, we had- we went to the National Park Service and asked them for a grant. They gave us \$10,000 for a feasibility study in which case we hired a couple interns, they walked the trail and come back with the idea, yeah, they think this could be done. And we have a report and we should get you a copy of that report. I don't know if I can find mine. I have one somewhere, but I got a lot of things I don't know where they're at. Anyway, but we got a positive feed from the Board and a positive feed from the Congressman that this would fit into his thing. So, the Conservation District agreed to head it up as far as we could go. And we did the feasibility study and it came within the budget for- if we would do it in segments. We had 41 miles in it. And we picked the segment between Rockwood and Markleton because there were no bridges, there were no major obstructions and a lot of these sections, the reports just spells out – it was being used as a junkyard. People were going down in there and throwing their old tires and stuff that they didn't want, couldn't get rid of, you know, garbage what have you. And there was quite a bit of that. But, we overcame that. We went down, picked it up and what have you. And then we held public hearings in the county, in the small towns that this went through to inform the people. The majority of them were for it. There was a lot of hesitation by the landowners. They thought it was possibly bringing in riffraff and the wrong type of clientele and we tried to ensure them that people who ride and exercise on bicycles aren't usually the type of people

who cause a lot of trouble. And then some of the landowners said, "Well, the railroad took that land off our farm back in-around 1908 or 1911. And we'd like to kind of have it back." And so- but they did take it fortunately on fee simple. They paid them for their right-of-way. And that's, therefore, the railroad could sell it to us legally without having to revert back to the previous landowners. We had some deeds that we had to clear up and agreements that were signed by the wrong people. And we went through all that. And we just picked out that section between Rockwood and Markleton to develop and we did that. And it would come in about \$7-8,000 a mile which is very reasonable compared to now. And we got the money from the IHP Project – it's federal money. And the Park Service was very conducive to it. I don't know why they were so much more easier to work with than the state was at the time. Like I said, the state just didn't- never did it and just didn't- wasn't forward-thinking enough to want to do it.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: But, the Park Service had some people – a guy by the name of Paul Zincavage. He's still, I think, with the Park Service. He was a forester for them and he was working in that area down there and he helped us get the grant and also sit on our Advisory Board and brought in the Regional Director for the Park Service in the area. He was very that- and mainly because money is coming from the Interior Committee and the Congressman had asked for it was running the Interior Committee. So, it was kind of a "you help me out, I'll help you" kind of a deal, you know?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: And so, that's how we built that section.

Eric Lidji: From Rockwood to Markleton?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah. And when Congressman Murtha was one of the key factors and Bill Lloyd on that one.

Eric Lidji: When you got that money, did that go to the Conservation District?

Dave Mankamyer: It came through the Conservation District. And then we could do that- Conservation District is a partnership between a county and the state. But, we also work the Department of Agriculture and all- we have partnerships with a lot of agencies for environmental-type problems and our main objective originally for the Conservation District was just soil and water.

Eric Lidji: Right.

Dave Mankamyer: But, this was a little, like I said, was a little bit out of our area, but the Board was conducive to letting us do it. And then at our public hearings, we had some pretty stiff opposition from some areas.

Eric Lidji: Anything memorable?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah, yeah. I've been called things, but I never thought anybody would call me a "communist."

[laughter]

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah. Some of them were very vocal, but once we had that section up and I can, in fact, I can divert here a little bit. There was a group down there – a family that owned quite a bit of acreage between Markleton- or between Rockwood and Garrett and they had timber on both sides and they were worried they couldn't get their timber out and what have you. And they were very vocal against it. But, the day we got the thing opened from Rockwood down, this flatbed truck come down full of bicycles and kids – couldn't believe it. And I went, "Who are you people?" they said, "We're the Sanders."

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyer: They were the people that was supposed- their parents, their grandparents were opposing it and these kids couldn't wait to get on it.

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyer: They rode their bike and they liked it and that ended that. No more opposition in that family.

Eric Lidji: Was there a lot of that where children were convincing their parents and grandparents?

Dave Mankamyer: Right. Yeah. Once they started using it and found out what it was, it's a beautiful section of country there – the waterfalls and everything in that area. So, that took that opposition away. And then there was a guy with some horses down there in Garrett. He was using that to exercise his big horses and stuff and he didn't like it. He said, "You go here along Greer [? 0:12:02.0] and that," and I said, "We can't build a trail along the river." There was a trail already built. And I said, "We couldn't afford to put a new one in." And I said- he was 75 years old and I was in my 50s at the time and I said, "Don't worry about it, Bob," – his name was Bob. I said, "I don't think you and I will be around whenever this thing's finished." About a year later, he got kicked by a horse and he passed away. But, his kids didn't give us no trouble. And the most of the farmers that opposed it – once they seen it up and had it running and found out the class of people using it were not the type of people that would be a problem to anybody. We had very little of that. And once we got the thing up and going, the Game Commission came in and it gave hunters access to a lot of land and stuff in the winter when people were not riding the bicycles. Hunting season comes in and they were very eager to work with us and we worked them and they helped us in the control aspect instead of hire park rangers and somebody like that. They did that.

Eric Lidji: The hunters or the rangers?

Dave Mankamyer: No. The Game Commission.

Eric Lidji: Oh.

Dave Mankamyer: They had the Deputy Game Board and stuff and we signed on the Farm Game Program so they could shoot deer and drag them down the road and shoot from the trail what have you. So, we opened up a lot more land to the hunting without getting their cars and they could walk in and walk out so it worked out real well with the Game Commission.

Eric Lidji: Huh.

Dave Mankamyer: And they helped us patrol it then. We put in a rule that no boat-rise vehicles like 4-wheelers and what have you. And they really took it over had we not had that help

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: And once the couple tickets were wrote up for trespassing on land that they weren't allowed to be on, that kind of cleaned that up. If anybody dropped any trash, they would write a ticket. Only took one or two of them till that stopped that real quick, too. 'Cause there was a lot of people used to taking their garbage down along the abandoned railroad and dumping it. At least now, there was somebody looking, you know?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: So, that happened. And then the other thing that came along when building the trail, we didn't get a lot of money – we wanted to build this economical as possible and still build a good trail and have minimum maintenance. I went to- we as a Conservation District, we worked with the Soil Conservation Service. There, again, the connection to the federal money and what have you – we didn't have engineering services so we hired an intern out of college – a summer intern, a graduate student, an engineer. And the Soil Conservation Service allowed him to come in and work in their offices and take the guidance from their engineers as to how to build this trail and map it out and all that sort of thing. So, that was a big help, too. And the Director of the Soil Conservation Service – this was an area office for Western Pennsylvania, you're in Somerset. So, he also kind of carried that message to other counties that have joined us and helped them out to get the thing started in their areas. So, it kind of built from there. And the other thing that happened then later, we associated- I was going to the Board for the Chamber of Commerce and you'll see Hank on that and he'll tell you his version.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: Hank was very valuable to it, in working with the railroad. Railroads – it's a big corporation and a little cumbersome to deal with because you can't get to the guy that makes the decision.

You know, it's in Jacksonville, Florida – that's where the main office is. But then, Baltimore's property and supplies and somebody else down here is another department. So, they were using some of this railroad- the sidings all but- they store old cars of coal. They had that loading coal cars out what have you. So, it had to be coordinated all in there.

Eric Lidji: Did you go down to Jacksonville?

Dave Mankamyre: Well, we had to, yeah. And Hank will tell you about that I'm sure. But, as of by chance, I was naturally a good supporter of it but the County Commissioners when we bought- when we went to it, we wanted to buy it and we kind of determined between us that it would be nice if the county would own this. So...

Eric Lidji: Own the track?

Dave Mankamyre: Land, yeah. Buy the land, accept the deed from the railroad because the railroad, like I said, had it in fee simple so they had to deed it to somebody.

Eric Lidji: We're talking about CSX now?

Dave Mankamyre: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Dave Mankamyre: And they had to deed it to somebody. So, we kind of agreed that if we could get the commissioners to help it- and one of the commissioners had came from the Chamber of Commerce and ran for commissioner and became a commissioner. And he was a supporter of it. And by chance, he didn't care for his job as much as he should. He was an advertising man and what have you. A hospital offered him a much better paying job than what he had working for the county – he left. And that left an opening. So, some of my support people, there was one or two that run for this job and I had several other reasons for it, too. But, I had my laundry list of things I wanted to do. And so, I ran for it and got that position. Well, the day after I was sworn in, Hank said, "We got to buy some more railroad." We did that section though, the first section we had.

Eric Lidji: That's the route with the Markleton section?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: And he said, "Well, I can't get an answer because of the conflicts on the railroad to get the right decision." And I said, "Well, why don't you- I'll get an airplane, we'll go." Like I said, I was a pilot, but it wasn't my airplane. We wanted a big airplane to get to Jacksonville. It would take me all day in the little airplanes I fly. But anyway, I arranged for us to charter an airplane and I asked Hank to go along – Hank and I. And I asked the County Solicitor – he was a guy by the name of Kim Gibson. He was our County Solicitor. He's now a federal judge in Johnstown. But, he was very supportive and he- we got in the plane, we got to Jacksonville. And we went in and we sat down and I asked him to have everybody on- around the table that anything to do with this so we could get an answer and go forward. And they were there. But, we walked in there and everybody was, "Yeah, we can do this, this, and this. We want to get this rail off and we want to watch what we do with the rail." We have this one parking facility where they load coal cars out. They told us what they wanted done and what we could do. And when we left there, we agreed on the price, everything seemed to be coming into order. And we came back and we bought everything down.

Eric Lidji: Why did you feel that it was important for the county to own that line?

Dave Mankamyer: Because the liability and then ownership – the railroad had give us quick claim deeds and, like I said, some of those deeds that they had where they got off of landowners weren't as clear-cut. They didn't do very much in the way of investigations on the quality of their deeds they were accepting the land, you know, previous ownerships. And we had some problems with that. But, the county had eminent domain. So, if you couldn't buy it, you could take it which we never did, but having that tool in your toolbox helped to deal with the landowners.

Eric Lidji: And if you had been a 501C3, you wouldn't have been able to do that?

- Dave Mankamyer:** Right, right. You'd be stuck if they proved that there was a conflict with the deed, you know?
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.
- Dave Mankamyer:** And then the county could also give money to maintain it and what have you.
- Eric Lidji:** Were there any reservations in the county about liabilities or just...?
- Dave Mankamyer:** Yes. We went through all the obstacles and took them one at a time. And, again, it was Kim Gibson- was our County Solicitor and he was excellent in finding answers to the questions that were had.
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.
- Dave Mankamyer:** And even one of the commissioners told me when we got down, we bought that- we were- he said- one of the commissioners, "You buy the land up to the viaduct, don't buy that viaduct. Cost way too much money to clean it up and get it back and use it for a trail and the liability. It's 100 feet in the air..."
- Eric Lidji:** Right.
- Dave Mankamyer:** "...people would go off," and what have you. And we got down there and Kim said, "What do we do?" I said, "What can we do? We're going to buy it. Let's take an option on it." He didn't say to take no option. He just said don't buy it. So, we asked him if we could have an option to buy the viaduct and that gave us time then to study how much it was going to cost to rehabilitate it, to build safely, and acquire the money for that. And it worked out.
- Eric Lidji:** Why were you interested in having it in the first place? Why was it worth the risk to buy- to option it to you?
- Dave Mankamyer:** The viaduct?
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.
- Dave Mankamyer:** It'd been almost impossible – it goes over a river, Casselman River. It goes over 219, a major highway.
- Eric Lidji:** Right.

Dave Mankamyer: And, you know, it would have made a big obstacle to go over that. There were two tunnels on it over township roads...

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: ...that we would have had made it very cumbersome to build a trail.

Eric Lidji: And why not just stop the trail there? What did you...?

Dave Mankamyer: 'Cause the goal was from day one was to get to Washington, D.C.

Eric Lidji: You had that vision from the beginning?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah, yeah – connect Pittsburgh with Washington, D.C. That was the idea. And then we- at that time, soon as we had the thing narrowed down, we put together – and Hank will tell you about that too- I forget what we called it. We had a summit out at the ski resort up here and we got all the people interested from Pittsburgh to Washington. Invited them in and we could all sit down at one table and declare to work together and what we're going to build this trail for. And when we got together up there, everybody seemed in agreement. There was some argument about who's going to do what. Everybody had their own ideas. But, there was a lady come in there, a young- I call her a young girl or young lady, but she seemed very knowledgeable and she was very eager and I said, "Can you help us?" "Oh, yes," she said. She's Linda Boxx. And she was with the McKenna Foundation and she was also very tied into the endowments in Pittsburgh. And I said, "Well, this has to be a good spot." And we made her more or less the Chairman.

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyer: She got drafted. Then she really did a yeoman's job.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah, she- when it comes to raising money, she knew where the bodies were buried, you know, she knew where to go to find it.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: And whenever we had to have a matching grant, matching money for some grant out of Harrisburg or something like that, she was very tied-in politically.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: She used to say, "I'll do the 'R' thing, you do the..." I was a Democrat, she was a Republican. She said, "You do the 'D' thing, I'll do the 'R' thing."

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyer: And she did. From then on, Rachel Carson building is 16 stories high and in Harrisburg, everybody that makes the decisions are on the 16th floor. But, she could go right up and they'd be there opening a door for her.

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyer: She was well-connected. And she knew how to make it work.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. So, talking about this big vision of Pittsburgh to D.C. – if you guys had just built a trail in Somerset County, that would have been impressive. What was it about the bigger trail that seemed like- what were the benefits that you thought that Somerset County would...?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, you're tying in a million to two million people in Pittsburgh with four to six million in Baltimore and Washington. And with that kind of- when you're talking about tourism dollars and then people would ride a bike and want to spend money, stay overnight, what have you, we felt that was a way to help maintain the trail and make it more- and it worked out real well.

Eric Lidji: Was there a lot of tourism in Somerset County before the trail?

Dave Mankamyer: Mostly skiing and we have good natural country our fishing was not very good because we had so much acid mine drainage in the water and we cleaned a lot of that up after that with Congressman Murtha, too. And so, that mountain, that Laurel Mountain which the trail goes through has been a big- let me put it this way – on the weekend, the population of that mountain increased by 50,000 people. Monday morning they're gone. They've gone back to Pittsburgh to their homes, their cabins,

their ski resorts and stuff. There were three ski resorts at one time, still is. And so, that was a natural draw. We were thinking this would add to it. It was the mecca for, you know, the purpose of the money, the pot of money we got from the government was to try to increase tourism employment and move more money into the area. So, that kind of fit the pattern to keep that AIHP – America’s Industrial Heritage Project – moving. And they were going to use the steel industry in Johnstown and what have you to promote that. And we felt the trail would fit in that and it did. So, it helped our applications when they were giving out the money that he would allocate every year in the federal budget. For that thing, we could say, “Yeah, we have this trail. We expect “X” number of thousands of people to use it.” And it fit the application very well.

Eric Lidji: Huh. And then one more thing – going back to the Jacksonville trip, did you guys pick up the- was it the Meyersdale Station then?

Dave Mankamyer: Yes, uh-huh.

Eric Lidji: So, how did that come about?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, Mary Nimiller and can’t think of the other ones – two elderly ladies – both of them are passed away now. But, at that time, approached me and said, “We want- if you’re going to go down to buy this thing, you make sure you buy that station.” Because it was offered for sale over there, the borough fingered with it but never bought it ‘cause it- and I went over to look at it and I walked in it and the snow was coming down through the roof. It was a mess. They were using it as a storage lot for the grease and oil that they used on the B&O Railroad that [inaudible 0:29:00.2] which took the traffic off the trail railroad at the time. And so, there was- it wasn’t much. They wanted it for the heritage of it to keep it there. And then they asked us if we could try to buy it. So, actually we agreed on a price of the right-of-way that we needed to get us to the Maryland line and up to where we’re at now. I don’t know if it was me or Hank that said, “Now, about the station...” they said, “Well, there’s three acres there and stations there. We can’t just can’t give it away.” I said, “Well, how much do you have to have?” They said, “\$10,000.” And then he said, “Throw it in there.” And I had no idea where

the money was going to come from. But, they said- they agreed. So, that was an addendum to our agreement that they would sell us our option to buy – they'd sell us that station for \$10,000. And we couldn't use the Industrial Heritage Project for that. So, come back and we had some interns there at the Conservation District. I said, "Find us some money 'cause we need this." And they did a search and they come back and said, "Well, we have this one..." I forget what that foundation was that was set up. And it was set up to buy railroad and then connect it with the railroad. And we got the money there. I think we got \$60,000, I think, from them to buy and rehab that railroad. What they headed up, we spent a lot more money than that. But, their gain gave us an in at the state with the- I forget what the department is that handles that for old buildings and stuff – the upkeep on it. But anyway, the state finally kicked in and said, "We'll help you on that." I think it was about \$300,000 till they rehabbed it and got back into original- they wanted a slate roof on it. It was all chopped up and they wanted to keep it as natural as possible. And so, we had to hire an architect to go through the rehab and rebuild it.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamy: Local contractors over there. And then there was a guy – he was into these model trains over there and he had some nice fundraisers for us and so forth and picked up the extra odds and ends we had. And I went to one of their meetings and I said, "First thing you guys got to do over in Meyersdale is form a group just to put this thing together."

Eric Lidji: Like a historical society?

Dave Mankamy: Historical Society – said, "We need a Meyersdale Historical Society and the county will give you the- lease it to you for \$1 a year and you guys have to- because we don't want to have to be maintaining this railroad bridge."

Eric Lidji: Why was the Historical Society important to you?

Dave Mankamy: Because then they can raise money and maintain and operate that thing as kind of a little museum and keep it in condition. And I'm glad I did it 'cause we've had trouble over there

sometimes – young people, you know, how they do break-ins and stuff like that. But, they would jump right in there and clean it up and repaint the walls or whatever they got to do. If it leaks, they take care of it. The county would- we kind of guaranteed the commissioners when we built this thing that we would not be a burden to the county. And that put the burden into the town and they've done well with it. They put a miniature railroad in there and what have you. They have restrooms in and we have the vending machines and things – get some little money coming in.

Eric Lidji: Does the county still own it?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah. The county would own it but...

Eric Lidji: But, still today?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: And they still lease it for \$1 a year?

Dave Mankamyer: \$1 a year.

Eric Lidji: Huh.

Dave Mankamyer: I've never seen the dollar, I don't know.

[laughter]

Dave Mankamyer: Writing the check or not. I'm not involved with the county anymore. I had eight years and I quit. I didn't quit, they threw me out.

Eric Lidji: I heard that CSX sold you guys the wrong track?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, that's another story.

[chuckle]

Eric Lidji: You want to tell it?

Dave Mankamyer: I'll let Hank tell that side of it.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyer: Well, they sold us this siding that was in there that's still in use, you know? They sold us that siding. That gave us leverage in Jacksonville. "We'll give you your track back," 'cause we- the scrap man come in – they were asking \$400,000 for the right-of-way and we didn't have \$400,000. I said, "Well, but they had \$200,000 worth of track in there," and that's why we had the County Solicitor with us. And I said, "We'll give you back your track, you just cut \$200,000 off our price on the railroad."

Eric Lidji: And they did?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, yeah. The guy that was in charge of real estate, he said, "Track, track – that's property and supplies, that's Baltimore. I'm real estate. I want my money." I said, "Well, you got your money." I said, "If you give- you just got no track." So, he sold all Baltimore track. He said, "Track, track," he said, "That's property and supplies – that's Baltimore. We're real estate. We need our money."

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyer: So, we got- we had \$200,000 to buy the land off the AIHP, the real estate.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: So, it fit right in. So, I was kind of glad they sold us their track. We had something to bargain with.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: But, then I said that at the wrong time in the meeting one time and it come back to haunt me.

[chuckle]

Eric Lidji: You mean, you said you were glad?

Dave Mankamyer: It made them look kind of bad.

Eric Lidji: Oh.

Dave Mankamyer: They sold us something they didn't own.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

- Dave Mankamyre:** So, they were- I shouldn't get too heavy into that.
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah. So, the last thing before we got- before I diverted us was trail summit in '91.
- Dave Mankamyre:** Yeah, trail summit.
- Eric Lidji:** Is that- so, alright so, let's pick it up there.
- Dave Mankamyre:** That's where Linda Boxx came in.
- Eric Lidji:** Right. And is that where the ATA gets started? Out of that? Not right then, but is that what leads to the ATA getting started?
- Dave Mankamyre:** Well, yes, it is, uh-huh, yeah. 'Cause then we agreed then to meet on a quarterly or monthly basis and I kind of- and once that happened and we got that thing set up to go and we set up a pattern – more or less pulled the building of the trail out of the Conservation District and shifted it to the Planning Commission.
- Eric Lidji:** The County Planning Commission?
- Dave Mankamyre:** Yeah, right. And they had more personnel to work with it. And it would, like I said, it didn't fit into our agricultural mold of the Conservation District as well as it should. But, the County Commission- the Planning Commission is just to do anything commissioners ask them to do. You know, they're at the direction of the commissioners.
- Eric Lidji:** Right.
- Dave Mankamyre:** So, once the commissioner decided they'd own it, take ownership of it, I thought it would be better to put it in the Planning Commission. And we had a slow transition but, you know, I can't say enough about Hank Park. He was- ran the Chamber of Commerce but little details of stuff, he really took care of everything like that to keep the thing moving.
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.
- Dave Mankamyre:** And I think between the two of us we made a good silent partnership because I would keep- once you have the Commissioner's Office and had the availability of a secretary and a phone and just keep heading things up – when there were

snags, I would work on them, when there were money issues, I left him kind of to work on that.

Eric Lidji:

Huh.

Dave Mankamyer:

And keep the Congressman happy – make him look good. And I've always found that in the 30 years that I've been involved politically – I wasn't very active in politics until I got into my 50s – but, if you make them guys look good, they'll make you look good and money comes down. So, as often as I can, we kept a lot of shovels cleaned up and had a lot of groundbreaking and every time we had a little grant, we'd have the Congressman and the state reps and state senators come in and break ground and the public more or less bought into then, too. It came along.

Eric Lidji:

Was there a moment when you started to notice the public getting excited about it?

Dave Mankamyer:

Once they started opening and then they started using it, it did. I used to go- when I was a commissioner, all the County Commissioner's meetings and seminars we had – they'd meet quarterly in the state. And the first one that I went to when I became a commissioner, they had a seminar on the trail building. And I went down and went into it and I went in a room and there were two people in there, you know, like 300 people in this seminar. Nobody was interested. When I come out – I was there for eight years – the last one I went to, they had the same thing. They had a trail seminar. I went down, they were standing out in the hall trying to get in. So, we led the way. Once they seen what was happening to our trail then they all of a sudden, everybody wanted the trail. And that's what you have now. You have everybody wanting to build a trail wherever they can put one. And then we have- now they want to come from Garrett up to- Flight 93 is out here – they want to put that in and they want to make it go from Washington up to here and then up to New York where- for the 9/11-type deal. They want to put the trail. But, it's not going to be easy – I told them that when they suggested it 'cause we had the advantage – we had a railroad that was abandoned and it was bought fee simple by the railroad they can sell it to us. It wasn't taken on a lease or a right-of-way that reverted back and we had so many advantages going for us. Starting over new like they're trying to do and they

have to cross highways, get through towns, and acquire right of ways – it's going to be a nightmare. And I think most people have found that when the railroad decides to abandon a railroad – that's the time to jump on right then and hope that they bought their right-of-way fee simple if they took it on a pay it on a right-of-way fee with a reversion then you sit down next to the guy- the only way they could do that is if you have condemnation rights in your pocket. Like I said, I never used it – but had it.

Eric Lidji:

Did you ever come close to having to?

Dave Mankamyer:

Oh, yeah. When **doctor [? 0:41:10.9]** brought in a piece of ground down there to our conference right where it comes in – beautiful area going through there. His house is a half a mile away. “You were trying to go right through my backyard and bring all them people through there.” He was a half-mile away from it. And he fought us in court. And he almost won. He went back to when the right-of-way was bought, the guy- it was owned by somebody in England and the signature- they gave the money to the caretaker. I don't know if the money ever got to him. The caretaker signed the deed. And he took it all the way up there to the court. The only thing that they found out was the day before they had that, I put a resolution on the books, at the commissioner's meeting that the solicitor should acquire that right-of-way and use whatever means necessary. In other words, he could use condemnation. So, even though he proved the deed had a flaw in it, but the county owned it, all we had to do is file a paper. We take it through condemnation and that's always a crapshoot. You know, you might get a runaway jury who would say it's worth a million dollars and it ain't worth, you know, 200. But anyway, he couldn't stop us. And so, we had to negotiate a way to go through there. And finally, he didn't have to negotiate, but then we could have took it. That would have drug it all out in court. So, we had our obstacles. We took one by one. And then the other thing that really makes it difficult, we had the Casselman River Bridge, we had the high- low bridge – the first tunnel it goes through, we had a high bridge over there, we come down here, we had that viaduct, the Salisbury Viaduct. Then we had another viaduct – the one out from Salisbury – I forget the name of it right now.

Eric Lidji: Keystone?

Dave Mankamyer: Keystone Viaduct. And each one of them is an obstacle in itself. And the big, like I said, one time talking to a group and the mother of all obstacles was that Big Savage Tunnel. It was a half-mile long and it was decayed and falling in. Had three feet of water in it in some places. And we originally started out we thought maybe \$5 million dollars to go through it. And I came out to, I don't know, 20 or something like that. It delayed us by about 10 years.

Eric Lidji: Did it ever seem insurmountable?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah, many times, many times. But, there, again, we had this Kim Gibson. Like I said, he's a federal judge now, but he put in a lot of pro bono time. I mean, he's paid as a solicitor but not to spend his whole life taking care of our problems. But, he wanted to see it done and he got legal obstacles – he had to work through them.

Eric Lidji: What was his interest?

Dave Mankamyer: It's just- he just wanted make it happen, you know? Like a lot of us. We didn't have that much in it, but it was good for the county and something that we set as a goal and we just kept at it. And he was the same way. And it helped him because when they seen what he was doing and come up for times for appointment, the federal judgeship, that's usually not a very easy one to get into. But, he had a track record of a lot of friends because of the fact that he did help with us in a lot of these things.

Eric Lidji: It seems like there's a lot of people like that – Hank is one – who essentially were doing the trail as almost a second full-time job.

Dave Mankamyer: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yep, yep. And, you know, I didn't go in there for a job when I went and got involved in politics. But, we had two rivers in this county that looked like orange juice from acid mine drainage. And the only way you get that money is to go and fight for it. And there was money there. The coal operators – there's a fee they pay into the fund in Washington and right away, it was Washington, like they're doing now, tried to turn it into a one-way pipe. It went in, they wanted to bring it back and we had to fight for it. And I don't know how many times I testified in

appropriation hearings with Jack Murtha went down there and he'd call me and say, "If we want this money, we're going to have to fight for it." And I'd go down and make a spiel for it, go home and talk to TV stations and what have you. That's why it's necessary to do this. And it paid off. We spent I don't know how many millions on this Stonycreek River which is- starts right here – that hill over there, that goes that way, you go on the other side that road over there, that goes to the Mississippi. No, this goes to the Mississippi too, but it goes up Johnstown and then goes down to Conemaugh River. That over there goes to down goes into Pittsburgh to The Point and goes to the Ohio River. So, it's- we have trout now and the whole length of the Stonycreek River and we have fish in the length of the Casselman River. We still got some work to do over there, but if somebody didn't take an interest in it, it wouldn't happen – it just sits there. That's the way politics works.

Eric Lidji:

How did you guys find the money for all these big- the big infrastructure projects – the bridges and the tunnels and the viaducts?

Dave Mankamyer:

Linda Boxx.

[chuckle]

Eric Lidji:

Was it all foundation money? There wasn't any...?

Dave Mankamyer:

No. But, I don't know how I could say it – money is the mother's milk of politics. And if you're an endowment and election time comes around, you kind of help the people that help you. And she knew how to do the "R" thing. **And whenever mine [? 0:48:08.5]** came time come up, I knew how to do the "D" thing. I don't have the endowment money behind me, but I had enough influence in that party. And, like I said, I always- you make them happy, look good, they'll make you look good when you need money. And that's why it took 20 years. When we go into the- I guess you just got the last tunnel done here a year or two ago. And we had went around it. But, it's out there. The money in this country – there's no shortage of money, it's just where it's at.

Eric Lidji:

Now that it's all done, do you think that it took a long time or do you think it was short considering how much work there was?

Dave Mankamyers: That feasibility study said we were going to have a million dollars in this thing. We need to get it done. When it got done, I think we were around 27. So...

Eric Lidji: \$27 million?

Dave Mankamyers: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: And how- when you got started, how long did you think it would take to get done?

Dave Mankamyers: We didn't have no idea.

[chuckle]

Dave Mankamyers: The thing that worked in our favor – we picked seven miles to start out to prove the concept and when the parking lots got full, why that's when the opposition stopped and at that point they wouldn't have cared to spend a little local money onto it. But, mostly the only local money was put into it was the time we had to put in it.

Eric Lidji: You mean your work time?

Dave Mankamyers: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: What have the benefits of it been to Somerset County?

Dave Mankamyers: They did a study on that. Hank did on that end. There was a professor from State College come down and they took counts and how much dollars they spent and he has them figures, I don't. I never really into that end.

Eric Lidji: But, what about just what you see?

Dave Mankamyers: What I see?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyers: I see two, three towns that are trail towns that were dead now show activity on weekends.

Eric Lidji: That's what, Confluence and Meyersdale and what?

Dave Mankamyers: Rockwood.

Eric Lidji: And Rockwood.

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah and Garrett actually, too.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: But, Garrett – somehow, they haven't done much on bed and breakfast and restaurants. They never got into that there. But, it helps there somewhat. But, if you're doing it as an economic boom, it's not. Does it add to quality of life? It's a selling point. Like, I had a veterinary come here and he said, "I can get veterinarians to come," but he said, "When there are not wives to come, what's to do around here? There's not that much." This all adds on. They take their kids now, go to the trail and ride on Sunday and look at all when the leaves are changing, things like that. They have visitors in. They rode their bikes in and go take them to the trail. So, it's an addition to what we had. And it kind of adds on to the ski resorts. They get their- when the snow flies, they get the people. Whenever the snow is gone, the trails open, people come with their bicycles instead of ski racks on the top – yeah, but, bike rack behind the car. And so, Somerset County, like I said before, we had 50,000 people or more into these mountains than we have through the week. They work in Pittsburgh, but it's where they want to come and play. And the trail kind of fits into that. And now they use the trail a lot of times for fundraisers and competitions that Rockwood does and Confluence does, so does Meyersdale. It's nothing new at Meyersdale – see truckloads of bicycles come in and Boy Scout groups and stuff like that and ride on the weekends. It all adds to the quality of life. And is it a boom? No. Does it help? Yes. It gets people outdoors. It gets people to enjoy the outdoors. And now that we've cleaned up the Casselman instead of them looking down in orange river, it looks a little better. We still have one more discharge that we're working on now.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. When you think about all the things you've done professionally, where does this rank?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, I don't know. I never looked at it at that sense. But, it's definitely one of the better project I've ever worked on. I've always been pretty much a water man – cleaning up the rivers. I'm all for the coal industry. My family made their living in the

coal industry. But, it was a mistake from day one for letting people dump the sewage into the rivers and poison the rivers, kill the fish. And then they didn't have no choice. I asked one of the strip miners one time – I had some farmers over there. I was actively working in this. He said, "Dave, don't help them people," he said, "We got to get our coal out." I said, "Why didn't you put back?" he said, "I'll tell you why," he said, "We were selling coal for \$3 a ton. Can we dig off 20-foot of overburden and sell the coal for \$3 a ton and take a dozer then push it back?" He said, "We couldn't make no money." And he said, "That's why we were there." So, you know, they thought they were doing the right thing because they were employing people and making money and help the banks and what have you. But, what they did for their grandchildren, children, and great-grandchildren was not right. They should have- when they make it dirty they should clean it up. And when the coal got up to \$20-\$30 a ton, then they could afford to clean it up. And they did because we forced them to.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyre: But, the regulations now, like I said, we have a feed to go back and clean up the others. If you had \$2 billion dollars, you could just put a dent in it in Western Pennsylvania – the dirty water that we have as a result of the coal industry.

Eric Lidji: Mmm hmm.

Dave Mankamyre: But, then we have the steel mills, you have- the Suez Canal wouldn't have been built if it hadn't been for the coal that come out of Western Pennsylvania to make the steel.

Eric Lidji: Really?

Dave Mankamyre: Yeah. So, that's- got into World War II and World War I. You know, once they started fighting by tanks and steel and big ships, aircraft carriers, they needed a lot of steel. Pittsburgh supplied it. And a lot of coal come out of these hills. So, now there's a job to do to clean it up.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: And there's no- there's only one source of revenue and that's that little fee they feed in. Now, we're going over to natural gas to make our power and there's no money going into that fee. I think Pennsylvania at one time got \$24 or \$26 million out of that fee – the fee they paid in. Now, it's 10 and they want to keep that. And it's going to be a hard time. It won't be- the day will come, I think, and this is just from what I think – that water is going to be a valuable commodity – clean water. You can- we can grow food, but if we don't have clean water, you're in trouble. One of the other things I did when Bethlehem Steel went bankrupt in Johnstown, they had their own water company – had five big dams and 65 miles of pipeline. And when they're way out of time, we started a thing called "RC&D" it was through this whole Conservation Service – Rural Resource and Development. I approached them and I said, "What's it going to take to buy that water company?" And they said, "Well, we don't know. We want to sell it, but we don't know what." So, we started negotiations in they came down to \$6.2 million and we went up to \$6.2 million. We bought it for \$6.2 million. It was 5,000 acres of land, 65 miles of pipeline and over 14 billion gallons of water dammed up – fresh water. And we own it now. It's publicly-owned. And so, two weeks, we're going down to a groundbreaking ceremony. \$1 billion dollars to build a power plant and if we hadn't- he'll use seven million gallons a day in that power plant. They have to get away from coal 'cause of the carbon emissions. And, of course, we- Trump thinks it's a hoax, but anybody that spent the summer here would know that there is a climate change. Now, I can't say if it's manmade, I'm not a scientist or if it's natural. But, there is a climate change. And that carbon we're pumping out there isn't helping it. But, there's going to be a change over here of how we make our power and then I don't know how we're going to clean the rest of these rivers up.

Eric Lidji: Without the fee you mean?

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah. Yeah, the fee will be there, but there's nothing in it 'cause they won't be using coal.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: They say, they tell me the other day – I was at a meeting that 2026 there's- it's beyond 50 – coal-fired power plants – when they built them, they built a 50-year life into them. And then there's a big percentage of them out to be relicensed in '26 and that's not going to happen and they're- I know I was up at the Evansburg for solar power, you know, with this solar decided to put out here. But, the solar farms – they are building them all over in Texas and out West and Pennsylvania – down in Lancaster County, they're going for most of the farmers are putting them in. And we haven't done much here in Somerset County at all. They've all been trying to get that going. But, when that comes, the coal industry is just going to be done. It costs too much to get it out. And with the gas, they drill a hole, it pops right out that they have now. So, I think at that time, they're going to be looking at what's going to happen to this water. Without that fee, we'll have to find some other type of tax and it's not easy to pass a tax on anything nowadays.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: You know, and people won't value it. But, maybe- you know, I was in Kansas and George Bush the first – I was on a national committee, District Operations Committee for Conservation and the White House called our Washington office – every state has a Conservation District is a state association and then there's one national association. And they said, "We've got a big fight going on in Kansas, in Colorado, Kansas City wants to put another dam in up in the mountain for the snow melt to get more water 'cause they're running out of water." The same water goes down in the basin. The farmer uses to irrigate their wheat. So, there's a conflict there. He said, "Put a committee together, go out there and see if you can find a solution, a recommendation." And we did and out there when they drilled a well to do their irrigation, they have to call the office at the state. They go down and drop a rope down in – if they drilled more than 400 feet, they'd have to call a concrete truck and fill it back up at that point. That's 'cause the water table was going down, down, down. The guy with the deepest well – he got the water, you know? That's more land he could put under cultivation. So, they didn't want them to shut that water coming off the mountain, feed their water table. I mean, they don't want to

divert to go to the city. It wouldn't be no way of getting that out to the farms. But, we favored the farmers 'cause most of us are farmers. But, nevertheless, that's what will happen around here. I think we got so much population and Pittsburgh drinks the water that goes down that stream down here. And if we don't keep cleaning it up, there's going to be a shortage of fresh water. And, again, it's going to be expensive.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: 'Cause they're going to have to clean it up before they can use it.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: So, I don't know if that make an opportunity we can put a surcharge on the use of the water. They're trying some talk about it now – anybody that uses over 10,000 gallons a day would pay a fee to clean up the rivers. I don't know if that's- I'm 80 years old next summer. I don't think I'll be worrying about it. But, I wonder, you know, if there will be enough interest. It'll be there – the interest will be there when the water bill- when I got off a bus out there off the airplane and all the bus- the guy was our tour guide is a Forest Ranger and he said, "Welcome to the place where your water bill is higher than your electric bill." And it was, yeah. 'Cause they just didn't have no water. The price kept going up, and up, and up.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: That's what'll happen around here if they don't. They have to clean this water up in there in Pittsburgh where they want to use it and the population keeps coming. I guess Pittsburgh going to be a big deal right now. I seen on TV this morning, Amazon wants to build a big distribution center in Pittsburgh. It would create 5,000 jobs.

Eric Lidji: Yeah, a lot of cities are trying to get that.

Dave Mankamyer: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: Is there anything else about the trail before we wrap up?

Dave Mankamyer: Well, Chamber of Commerce, Soil Conservation Service, County Commissioners, I went through all that. The feasibility study when it first began and how it was started with Congressman Murtha and Bill Lloyd. And other than that, once that came it was a matter of partnerships...

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: ...who could do a lot. And that's what built it. There's no one man built it, you know, I certainly didn't do it. But, I helped keep it going. And that's the way that Hank- Hank thought it was a good thing for the county, he put a lot of his time into it. And that's what kept it moving. He'd call me and I'd call him and when we would run into a snag. And then one advantage of being a County Commissioner – when you're just an average farmer here you call somebody, call a politician. They might not call you back. But, the County Commissioner calls them, always got my calls returned. 'Cause, you know, we were out there we were talking to the press all the time. They want to keep on the good side.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Dave Mankamyer: And I think that's what kept it moving in times of weakness the fact that Hank was at the Chamber of Commerce and I was up at the Commissioner's Office and we kept these partnerships together.

Eric Lidji: You knew how the system worked?

Dave Mankamyer: Right.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Alright. Well, thank you so much for talking to me.

Dave Mankamyer: Alright.

Eric Lidji: I'm going to have you sign this. You just want to print there and sign, then fill out that top part.

Dave Mankamyer: Print here?

Eric Lidji: Print here?

Dave Mankamyer: Print there.

[end 1:05:32.9]

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