

## VIDEO INTERVIEW – BILL ATKINSON

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Bill, thanks for joining us, joining me, on a...
- Bill Atkinson:** You're welcome. Thanks for having me.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, we were going to do this at the Trailhead, I should mention this.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That we were going to do this at the Frostburg Trailhead but it turns out it's snowing.
- [Chuckle]
- Bill Atkinson:** Snowing.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, it's snowing further up on the mountain so we are in the...
- Bill Atkinson:** Old Western Maryland train station.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** This is the Western Maryland train station?
- Bill Atkinson:** This is the Western Maryland train station, yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** At Frostburg?
- Bill Atkinson:** At Frostburg.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, let me ask you that because that's just kind of- I thought the Western Maryland was where the trail is?
- Bill Atkinson:** It is. It had a spur line. This spur went underneath the main street in Frostburg, the old National Road, and on down to the Georges Creek area to bring coal out and then the other spur at switch nine, is what it was called, switched and went on up then into Pennsylvania.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Into Pennsylvania.
- Bill Atkinson:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. We're talking today about the Allegheny Highlands Trail of...
- Together:** Maryland.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Let's begin- let's begin where you come in at the beginning and this whole movement starts to happen, in the state of Maryland.
- Bill Atkinson:** I guess it started to happen- the National Park Service actually was the first one in Maryland that got involved with it. In 1989, they did a feasibility study.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** To see if it was even feasible to convert the old Western Maryland line to a trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, that was done in 1989 by the National Park Service. Sat around for a while, you know, people talking about it, going about it. In '92, '93...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Did they come to, and this is Allegheny County?
- Bill Atkinson:** Allegheny County, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Did they come to the county or was this just something the National Park Service started on their own?
- Bill Atkinson:** They came to the county and there was some interest in it at that time of, you know, what that conversion was.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, that was why they were, you know, not asked but they came to do it. The county gave them their blessing to do it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, it was found that it was feasible.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** It was very feasible to do that, that there was many, you know, success stories with it and it would be that link to Pennsylvania which would then make that whole link from D.C. to Pittsburgh. So...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh. Okay.

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- Bill Atkinson:** That original study looked at all of that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That was 1989?
- Bill Atkinson:** '89.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** Then, in '92, '93, the Maryland Department of Planning and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources did a trail plan on, you know, how are we going to do this now? It is feasible, now what are we going to do? How are we going to lay this out? How are we going to put it together?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** At around that same time in '92, the county put together a committee called the Allegheny Highlands Trail Maryland Board or Committee.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, that- they were to work with all the agencies to try to put together this plan and lay it out-
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** -for building this trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** For building- actually building the trail?
- Bill Atkinson:** For actually building the trail. That was what they were to do – was try to get them, you know, everything together to build it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, that was the real beginnings and that was the real, you know, startup of it all.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Was there anybody that, in particular, that was asking the National Park Service? Was there- were there voices here in Allegheny County and Frostburg and Cumberland saying, "This thing's here, it's abandoned. There was talk back in the '70s."

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- Bill Atkinson:** Right, right. There was. You know, Larry Brock was one of our first, you know, activists in the local community. From the National Park Service, though, the person that was real passionate about it and really got it going was Ursula Lemanski...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** ...who worked for the National Park Service and she was the one that looked at it as a greenway corridor. You know, she did work with the National Park Service on greenways and that and saw that opportunity.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** You know, so I think those two really were the ones that got the momentum going.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, that triggered that stuff?
- Bill Atkinson:** And then, that triggered all that study and I remember one of the first meetings of the trail group was Hank Parke up in Somerset County coming down to talk to our county commissioners and talk to our trail group to say, "Look, this is what we've done in Somerset County, you know, these are the positive things that have happened because of this trail."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** "And, we think it'll only be better, you know, if it links the entire way." You know, that if we can make that link, it makes sense. So, you know, he was very instrumental in the very beginnings of this trail starting in Allegheny County.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, that was in the '90s.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, at that point, there was a trail in Ohio State Park.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yes, there was.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It's already being used and in Somerset County, there was some pieces of trail.

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- Bill Atkinson:** Pieces of trail, right. That's all.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That were being put together.
- Bill Atkinson:** Right.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** Like you said that's- the little pieces or what they saw was, "Boy, people are using these little pieces of trail. If we really start connecting these, you know, it should be more and more people use it."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that was- did anybody from the county come up and ride those sections of trail or were they familiar with them at all?
- Bill Atkinson:** I don't think anybody went up and rode them other than, you know, the trail group organization because it was basically made up of people who are passionate about bike riding.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** You know, the people that were appointed to the trail board were basically people who were bike riders or bike enthusiasts.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, that's who the county put on there. So, I think the commissioners kind of deferred to them as the experts and said, you know, "Well, you let us know what can be worked out, what's going to happen with this and that." So...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, were you on that committee?
- Bill Atkinson:** I wasn't on the original committee, but I joined it shortly after that because my real job is working for the Department of Planning so I was involved in that study in '92, '93 – in the planning of it. And also, I'm an active bike rider.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, the two kind of just merged and it was an easy fit for everybody.

[Chuckle]

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, so now you have a study and you have some plans to do something, what happens from there?
- Bill Atkinson:** I think after that, we had just a lot of, you know, we did a marketing study, you know, later on in the '90s. and the main thing that just was trying to get the momentum and get people pushed and finding the money.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Ah.
- Bill Atkinson:** You know, getting money for construction and that was, you know, very difficult. We had not convinced our state, you know, officials at that time that the trail wasn't just recreational. That it was economic development.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** You know, and that was one of our hardest things was convincing everyone that this is a money deal also. This is economic development, this is a small business startup. This is, you know, not just a trail for people to go out and have fun on.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What kind of arguments did you use?
- Bill Atkinson:** Luckily, we got some early studies from other places that had done some – North Carolina and some other areas – had done some economic impact studies of trails they had in their areas.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, it showed, you know, that there was money in this business. It was a business, it wasn't just recreation. That people come from all around to use your trail and while they're here they spend money.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Ah.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, that helped and then in '98 we received some funding, actually from the state of Pennsylvania, again.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Foreign Aid.
- Bill Atkinson:** Foreign aid, again, from Pennsylvania - \$1 million.

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**Paul G. Wiegman:** Wow.

**Bill Atkinson:** That was from a transportation enhancement bill...

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Bill, okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** ...through Congressman Shuster.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** Who put a line item in there, I think it was \$6 million for the entire trail.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** At that time, the Allegheny trail lines was getting up and running.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.

**Bill Atkinson:** I got involved with that organization.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** And, we convinced them that if we could get, you know, some startup money in Maryland that that would go a long way in convincing everyone that, you know, this really was a good project and, again, we would have to match that money. So, if we could get some startup money, we thought we could really get everybody to get on board and really work towards this.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Were you able to match it?

**Bill Atkinson:** We were able to match it. We went to the Governor's office and to the legislation and said, you know, "We have this million dollars from the state of Pennsylvania to do these studies and engineer a design and build this trail as far as the money will take us, but we have to match it."

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** That is the key – we have to match it. And, the state did come through with a million dollars to match it.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** So, now you have \$2 million.

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**Bill Atkinson:** So, now we have \$2 million. The county hired Mackin Engineering in 1998 to do the engineer and design work for the trail.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** That took until now to finalize that.

[Laughter]

It was a one-year contract that took many, many more years. We ran into a lot more obstacles and roadblocks than we anticipated.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** For instance?

**Bill Atkinson:** Working with the railroad because we are going to be, you know, running parallel for about 12 or 15 miles with the Scenic Railroad which is a steam engine.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.

**Bill Atkinson:** So, we ran into a lot of obstacles with that. Our last five-mile section from Frostburg to the Mason-Dixon Line was owned by one property owner. At the time in '98, we thought was a willing seller who wanted to sell this to the trail group.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.

**Bill Atkinson:** Didn't work out that way.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Uh-huh.

**Bill Atkinson:** We spent many, many years negotiating with him and I think it was until 2002 that we actually acquired that property...

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** ...from the Moran Coal Company.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** I see.

**Bill Atkinson:** For a considerable sum of money. So, that was one of our holdups. We couldn't get on his property to do engineer and design work until we purchased it.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, till you actually had the right-of-way.



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- Bill Atkinson:** Until we acquired it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, that portion of the right-of-way had been separated off?
- Bill Atkinson:** That had been separated off and purchased, actually at auction.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that would have been sold by CSX at that point? Sure.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Because by the '90s it was CSX.
- Bill Atkinson:** Because the other right-of-way was bought by the state of Maryland to run the Scenic Railroad on.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The Western Maryland.
- Bill Atkinson:** The Western Maryland line was bought by the state of Maryland to run the excursion train that runs the steam engine once a day, three or four days a week from Cumberland to Frostburg and back.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right. Oh. Just to go back a little bit, when did the Scenic Railroad start?
- Bill Atkinson:** Let's see, I think 16 years it's been in operation. So, it was...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, back into the '90s.
- Bill Atkinson:** ...'80s.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** 80's, okay, '80s and '90s.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yeah. Early '90s.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** But, it had not used the right-of-way up until that time?
- Bill Atkinson:** No.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. So, the Western Maryland right-of-way was still there at the time.
- Bill Atkinson:** The tracks were still there, right. At least one set of them and in some places, there was two.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, there was?

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**Bill Atkinson:** And, part of what we found when we got into our engineer and design that slowed us down also was that when the state had purchased it and the Scenic Railroad went in, you know, they tore up the second track, but they just kind of aligned the first track wherever it was easier to line it up. So, it wasn't on one side or the other of the right-of-way, in some places it was right down the middle of the right-of-way.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh. So...

**Bill Atkinson:** So, it wasn't that we could just lay a trail beside it because it wasn't necessarily where it originally had been.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** So, again, that created a lot of issues and problems that we had to deal with at that time. So, that really slowed down our engineering and design.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, let's go back then to 2002. You now- I guess that's the right date.

**Bill Atkinson:** Mm-hmm.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** You now have this piece of property.

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Do we start to see a trail at that point?

[Chuckle]

**Bill Atkinson:** Unfortunately, not because that \$2 million didn't go very far that we had originally got for trail, you know, construction and that. We had some of it left. The purchase of the Moran property was \$800-some thousand dollars.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, there's half of it gone right there.

**Bill Atkinson:** So, there's half of it there. Yeah, a good bit of the state money went towards that.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.

**Bill Atkinson:** You know, and then our engineering costs, of course, went considerably higher...

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**Paul G. Wiegman:** Sure.

**Bill Atkinson:** ...because of the delay and because there was a whole lot of changes that were done.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.

**Bill Atkinson:** But, it didn't take us too much longer after that. We were able to build that section first. In actuality, we built the Trailhead first. Again, just to get something on the ground to start spending some money.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, the Trailhead is...

**Bill Atkinson:** Is at Frostburg.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** The one here at Frostburg?

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** And, it was built in 2003.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** The Trailhead was built in 2003.

**Bill Atkinson:** Right.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Did that include the switchback that takes you...

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes. That included the switchback that gets you from the train station we are here down to the Trailhead.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** To the trail. Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** Yeah. And, that was actually the Frostburg trail. That actually was built by the city of Frostburg.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay. Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** With some state funding and that.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** So, now the Trailhead with a parking lot and so forth is built.

**Bill Atkinson:** Is built, yeah. And, that was in '03 and then...

**Paul G. Wiegman:** That was in 2003? Okay.

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- Bill Atkinson:** And in 2004, we built the trail from Frostburg to the Mason-Dixon Line.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, that was our first piece that we built. Then this year we built from Frostburg to Woodcock Hollow, which takes us not quite halfway to Cumberland, but just about there.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right. And, this is 2005, so it's been- this is really the newest part of the trail except what'll open up in Somerset very soon. Were you able to share a lot of experiences from Ohiopyle State Park and from Somerset County and from the Youghiogheny North Trail people?
- Bill Atkinson:** Yes, absolutely. A lot with drainage. A lot of with crowning the trail instead of flattening the trail so the drainage runs off. A lot with, you know, the stormwater system as much as anything.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, right.
- Bill Atkinson:** You know, to really protect it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** Because when we opened our first section – the Mason-Dixon line to Frostburg in- was it '03? I think it's '03.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** '04.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** '04.
- Bill Atkinson:** We opened it in October and closed it the same day we opened it because Hurricane Ivan had come through the week before or a couple days before.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes. I remember that. Yes.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, we found out that our drainage underneath the trail wasn't quite as good as it needed to be and we washed out a good section of the trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Wow.

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**Bill Atkinson:** So, it opened in October, closed, but then reopened in April of the next year.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** In April of this year...

**Bill Atkinson:** Yeah, in April of...

**Paul G. Wiegman:** ...of 2005.

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes, in April of 2005. And, you know, was it really open for...

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Let's go back. You're an officer in the Allegheny Highlands Trail of Maryland?

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes, vice president of that organization.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Of that organization?

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** When did that form?

**Bill Atkinson:** That was formed in '92.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** That was formed in '92.

**Bill Atkinson:** That was formed in '92, right.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Did the committee that was put together by the county become that organization?

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes. Yeah, that committee became that nonprofit organization.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** And, you are now a separate organization from the county?

**Bill Atkinson:** Correct. Yeah, we're separate nonprofit that we are charged with, you know, working to oversee the construction of the trail and to raise private funds for the trail.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. Now, you have a first on the trail in the fact that we have a rail and a trail.

**Bill Atkinson:** And a trail, right.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Which just opened in August of 2005.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yes. Shared use.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Shared use.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yes. Not uncommon in the United States because there's quite a bit of that and in fact in, I think it was 2002, the federal government did a study on rails with trails.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Bill Atkinson:** It was called the Alt Study, A-L-T, because the consultants that did it was the ALT Consulting firms.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I see.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, they basically found that they coexist with no problems. There were no difficulties. Now, ours is somewhat unique in that for the majority of the time our train excursion is a steam engine.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** Which is unique in itself in that it has steam coming out of the sides of it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yep.
- Bill Atkinson:** It has smoke coming out of the top of it. It has cinders that come out with the smoke.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And soot.
- [Chuckle]
- Bill Atkinson:** And soot. And, we also have to go through a 945-foot tunnel with that same steam engine entering.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, we spent a lot of time doing a risk management study plan on, you know, what are the risks involved and, you know, what are the things that we can do in our design that will help to alleviate those risks. And, what we did, there's several things

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that when you are on the same right-of-way is that the train tracks are a grade above the trail.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** So, there's a grade separation. In between the two, there is a gravel surface that is sloped so, again, you'd have to go up that slope and then up a grade to get onto the railroad tracks.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** So, on a bike.

**Bill Atkinson:** The trail is back down below it and it's of the fine crusher run. So, you go from fine crusher run to a larger gravel to ballast and you also have to go up a grade to get to it. So, that kind of keeps us separated. Anywhere we couldn't-

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Is that the same way in the tunnel also?

**Bill Atkinson:** That'll be the same way inside the tunnel, also, yes. And, anywhere that we're closer than 10 ½ feet, which is federal law, you can't be any closer than that so we are at least 10 ½ feet if not further away from the train. We have a fence.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.

**Bill Atkinson:** Just post and cable, basically.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.

**Bill Atkinson:** More because of the railroad needing to be able to get in and work on the railroad tracks so we couldn't put up a chain link fence to keep people away because then they wouldn't have any access to work on the train tracks.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** It's sort of like the carvings in the side of the road that if you're riding a bike and you're suddenly on gravel...

**Bill Atkinson:** Right, you'll know the difference.

[Chuckle]

**Paul G. Wiegman:** You'll know the difference. You'll notice that you're heading to the train tracks.

**Bill Atkinson:** You'll know you're heading for the train tracks, yeah. And, like I said, you'd have to go up a hill way in over the gravel. And,

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we don't see it as a big issue, like I said, we've done a lot of studying with it. The train doesn't sneak up on you, you know, it makes a lot of noise.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Yep.

**Bill Atkinson:** We have worked cooperatively with the Scenic Railroad and they're going to have signals, you know, and they're going to blow the whistle extra times, you know, before they're coming towards the tunnel. You know, so we have all that in place. We're going to have a lot of signage up. We're going to have a rest area at the tunnel so that if you want to stay there and watch the train go through, you know, and not deal with it then you can rest there. There'll be picnic tables and everything else.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Let's take the step into the future since we're kind of talking about that, I don't want to miss it, but you opened a trail around August 11<sup>th</sup>, I think it was...

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** ...of 2005. There's still a gap.

**Bill Atkinson:** There still is a gap. From Woodcock Hollow into Cumberland which is about nine miles. We have all the funding in place for that section.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Good.

**Bill Atkinson:** We just purchased property from the CSX corporation that we needed in the city limits of Cumberland. That was our last piece of real estate- large piece of real estate we needed.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** The engineer and design plans are done and hopefully within the next couple weeks, we will go to bid on that section and start construction in January of '06 and finish sometime in the fall of '06. So, we will be ready to connect.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** We'll be ready to connect. And, The Great Allegheny Passage as it was originally conceived, actually greater than it was originally conceived.



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- Bill Atkinson:** Greater.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Because it was Connellsville to Cumberland, The Great Allegheny Passage will go from McKeesport to Cumberland which will be the longest rail trail in the eastern United States. I like to think about it as we've built- you've built, you people and all the- you and Hank and Linda and all these other people that we're interviewing have built the first interstate bike trail system. This is the beginning of the interstate bike trail system and I think more and more states will be looking to do.
- Bill Atkinson:** Oh, yes, I think so, too. I think when they see the numbers. Because the good part is once you hit Cumberland, the C&O Canal ends there.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That was my next question.
- Bill Atkinson:** Yeah, 184 ½ miles is the terminus there and in fact, the county along with the state is working on a project to re-water the C&O Canal Basin in Cumberland.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Bill Atkinson:** And in fact, there will be water in the turning basin probably in November of this year.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Of this year?
- Bill Atkinson:** Of this year. They put the lining in, they have to put the water in or the lining won't hold up.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** How will The Great Allegheny Passage connect?
- [Chuckle]
- Bill Atkinson:** Interesting. It actually connects at the Western Maryland Rail Station in Cumberland.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** In Cumberland?
- Bill Atkinson:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, will the bike trail come into the station at the same level as the trains?

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- Bill Atkinson:** No, it comes in below the- it comes in on the lower side of the station and the train comes in on the upper side of the station.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, there will be some point that it'll just come off that elevation...
- Bill Atkinson:** Right, right at that elevation it drops a little bit down. Basically, what there is, there's an alleyway that leads into some parking.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes, right.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, we will come through that alleyway into the parking and then up onto the promenade and around and onto the C&O Canal.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that's mile 0 of The Great Allegheny Passage.
- Bill Atkinson:** Great Allegheny Passage at 184 ½.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** At 184 ½ of the C&O Canal?
- Bill Atkinson:** Yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And that's- I guess you were supposed to do some of that signage today but...
- Bill Atkinson:** Yeah, yeah. This morning we were going to do some GPS work on the mile markers and that but weren't able to do that at this time.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What have been the high points for you?
- Bill Atkinson:** Opening the first section, I think, was probably the biggest high point. There were times I was, you know, didn't think this was ever going to get moving. You know, there was just a lot more to doing it than I think I originally envisioned. I think I was like everyone else, you know, the right-of-way is there, just go put some gravel down and...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, just put some- sure, just throw some gravel down and you can ride it.

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- Bill Atkinson:** And, I remember one of our meetings early on with our State Highway Administration because they have to approve everything because they were providing some funding.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, one of the obstacles we had to overcome was that all the engineers that work for our State Highway Administration are road engineers.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** They're not trail engineers. So, you know, they think the trail needs to be built to withhold- if there's going to any vehicles on it ever, emergency or not, then it needs to meet certain standards.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, I think that was very difficult and I think that extremely increased the cost. I think will, however, allow the trail to maintain itself a whole lot longer.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Bill Atkinson:** But, the gentleman said to me at one of our meetings, he said, "You know, you think this is so easy."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Bill Atkinson:** But he said, "You're building," as you said, "an interstate trail." You know, "You're building an interstate." You know, "You're building a roadway. I mean, you're linking Pittsburgh to Cumberland and this isn't just a trail. This isn't just a path through the woods. You know, this is a major undertaking and, you know, there's a lot of culverts, there's a lot of bridges. You know, there's a lot of tunnels. There is a lot of obstacles that you don't realize, you know, that are there.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Uh-huh.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, again, drainage was one of the big ones we had to address and also with the railroad we addressed several areas where they had had problems with slides. So, we built retaining walls.

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**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, I see.

**Bill Atkinson:** To keep the sliding from happening which had always been a problem and even when the Western Maryland Rail Line was there.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm, sure.

**Bill Atkinson:** So, we did a lot of additional work, you know, to help to do that. We had to move some of the Scenic Railroad track to get it off of center lines so that we could move it over.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** That was a question that I had. For this section from Frostburg to Woodcock Hollow...

**Bill Atkinson:** We moved...

**Paul G. Wiegman:** You put the track back into there?

**Bill Atkinson:** We sit back over on the one side of the right-of-way, yes.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. And, it's that way- that's what will happen?

**Bill Atkinson:** That's what will happen all the way down.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** All the way into Cumberland.

**Bill Atkinson:** Now, we do have to cross it in six different locations.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** And, you have a tunnel?

**Bill Atkinson:** And, we have a tunnel.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, you have two tunnels.

**Bill Atkinson:** Two tunnels.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** You have the Brush Tunnel and the board one.

**Bill Atkinson:** And, we also have a bridge over top of U.S. Route 40.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh. Okay. In the Narrows?

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Right before Cumberland?

**Bill Atkinson:** Yes.

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**Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.

**Bill Atkinson:** Yeah, we have to cross that bridge with the railroad also, with the Scenic Railroad.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, with it?

**Bill Atkinson:** Yeah, with the train.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** And, you'll do ties or wood?

**Bill Atkinson:** Decking, wood decking with a fence in between.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Decking. With a fence in between.

**Bill Atkinson:** Could be interesting to be on the bridge when the train's coming across.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.

**Bill Atkinson:** Because I would imagine the bridge rattles a little bit when the train is going across it.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** I'm sure. We did hear the train get ready.

**Bill Atkinson:** Yeah, train's leaving now.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** The train is getting ready to leave the bell there.

**Bill Atkinson:** So, I think the high points were, you know, that first dedication.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.

**Bill Atkinson:** That, you know, really took hold and...

**Paul G. Wiegman:** You felt like you finished something.

**Bill Atkinson:** I felt like I finished something and, you know, I think it was at that point that the politicians for the state and the county, even, really hit home. They were all supportive and we've had a lot of great backing from Senator Sarbanes, you know, at the federal level. He's been a wonderful supporter and we've had several great supporters in the state. But, I think when that first dedication came and they saw three hundred people here, you know, to open a trail, I think it hit home to them that, you know, this is economic development. This isn't just a fun thing to somebody to have.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** That this is going to spur, you know, money. And, again, that's part of why I really think I stayed involved with it is, you know, Allegheny County has always been a little behind the curve in economic development.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, I think this can really make a big difference in, you know, businesses in the area.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, that takes me to my, really, last question. As a planner, you look at this a little bit differently than me as a writer. The future for Cumberland, for Frostburg- what? Ten years? Twenty years?
- Bill Atkinson:** I think it's going to be odd. I mean, I think we're just at the tip of the iceberg. I think it's going to be phenomenal. I mean, Cumberland was basically this area that was founded on transportation. We had the C&O Canal. We had the railroad. We had the National Road.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Bill Atkinson:** Now, we have an excursion railroad that's hauling people again.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** We have the National Road that is gaining in popularity all across the country.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Bill Atkinson:** Because it was the first federally funded highway in the country and it started in Cumberland.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh.
- Bill Atkinson:** And now, we have a trail which is an interstate trail that's going to link everybody from Washington D.C. to Pittsburgh.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yep.

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- Bill Atkinson:** So, I think you're going to see a whole bunch of small businesses popping up in both Frostburg and Cumberland – bike shops, bed and breakfasts, restaurants. And, I think they're going to cater to the locals and they're going to make all their money off of the bike people.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh. Okay.
- Bill Atkinson:** I think you're going to have shuttle service. I think we're, hopefully, going to work with the Scenic Railroad. That they're going to become our train taxi. So, that if you want to ride- your family wants to come and do a 10- or 15-mile ride, they can ride the Scenic Railroad up the upgrade from Cumberland to Frostburg, bike back downhill.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, almost coast back downhill.
- Bill Atkinson:** Almost coast back, just about.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Uh-huh.
- Bill Atkinson:** So, you know, I think all of that is just going to add fuel to that whole economy and everything else. I mean, there's a lot of other things going on in Allegheny County and I think this just adds to that and I think it's going to do a whole lot more than most people think it is.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** How are you going to feel when you see that?
- Bill Atkinson:** That's the good feeling, yeah. It's a great feeling now to see the people using the trail, you know, to get people to stop you on the street and say, "Man, I was on that trail, it is so nice. It's so great." You know, "Thanks for putting in the time to get this done." That's when it's all worth it, you know, that's when this last 10 years or more of work, you know, at times have been very struggled.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, right.
- Bill Atkinson:** And, I remember we first met with Linda Boxx and she said, "You know, building this trail is like taking three steps forward and two back." It's a slow process but we will get there and we're almost there now.

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**Paul G. Wiegman:** Almost there now.

**Bill Atkinson:** Almost there now.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Very good.

**Bill Atkinson:** Thank you, sir.

**Paul G. Wiegman:** Thank you.

[End 28:16.4]

slt-t/cr-p

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