

VIDEO INTERVIEW – BRETT HOLLERN

Paul G. Wiegman: Brett Hollern.

Brett Hollern: Yes.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, you are the Project Manager? Is that what your term...

Brett Hollern: Official title is Trail Coordinator.

Paul G. Wiegman: Trail Coordinator.

Brett Hollern: It's a lot cheaper to pay a coordinator than it is a manager.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: Tell me first how you got to this position.

Brett Hollern: In 1996, I was a student at Penn State University majoring in Recreation Park Management. And, part of the curriculum was internship. So, I had actually ended up doing an internship with Somerset County assisting with the Rails-To-Trails project. So, I put in a semester working with the trail. I graduated college after that, went away for about a year, and then an opening came with the Somerset County Planning Commission for a planner position. And, I applied for the position. I was actually recycling and saw waste were the primary duties. But, one of the other caveats I got was to work with their rehabilitation of the Meyersdale Station which is on the trail. So, that was my first actual work with the trail and through that, I started to take on some more trail responsibilities. Then in 1999, the Allegheny Trail Alliance applied for and received a DCNR Circuit Rider Grant. And, the purpose of the grant was for somebody to primarily oversee the development of the trail in Somerset County because there was so much going on here that they needed somebody to make sure the projects were getting done to oversee the projects. It was too much for existing staff to take. And also, part of the work was to oversee quarter-wide projects from Pittsburgh to Cumberland. So, I was working in Somerset County, but I was also working on quarter-wide initiatives.

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Paul G. Wiegman: I didn't realize that.

Brett Hollern: And, I did that for four years. The grant- they kept me on for a fifth year. And then, in July of '04, the county actually created a position for Trail Coordinator. It was the first time they had dedicated staff where I wasn't grant-funded anymore. I was funded solely through Somerset County. So, I've been in that role – sort of been with Somerset County the entire time, but in different capacities.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, you have a unique position – the first full-time Great Allegheny Passage employee?

Brett Hollern: More or less, yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, okay. Well, that certainly is historic right there. Now, you took over from- Linc Van Sickel was doing some of the overseeing of the project.

Brett Hollern: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, the trail began here in Rockwood. This was the first piece. And, it was the easy piece because there were no bridges. And then, it was built from Rockwood to Garrett. Then, I understand from Linc- I talked to him recently and that was the easy part. But then, they started to get into the bridges, and the tunnel, and I guess it was the Salisbury Viaduct that was the really big one. Now, he did part of the work on that and then you took over with the Salisbury Viaduct? Is that right?

Brett Hollern: Yeah, I came in at the end of the Salisbury Viaduct project, which I would've loved to have been a little more involved in because it was a terrific project. But, it was right towards the end that actually the construction was done. And, I – more or less – pushed the remainder of paperwork that was left for the Salisbury Viaduct.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

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Brett Hollern: So, I've been doing all construction oversights since the end of that project.

Paul G. Wiegman: What portions of trails then have you worked on?

Brett Hollern: I've overseen the trail – the Pinkerton section, I guess, is what they call it. But, that was actually from the Pinkerton High Bridge down through a mile past Fort Hill. Also, the construction of the trail from Fort Hill to Confluence.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Brett Hollern: And then, from the Salisbury Viaduct the whole way to the state line have been my projects.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, let's go back to the Pinkerton area. The way- I understand, that these first trails were built- it's kind of hard to find the word. I don't want to say...

Brett Hollern: On the cheap.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: ...on the cheap. You said it. I didn't say it. In talking with Hank Parke, suddenly they had a corridor, and they had to build trails, and they started building trails. But, once Linc got involved and passing on to you- you're building the more some sort of specifications now.

Brett Hollern: Well, it's really- the funding is dictated how the trail sections have been built. Once they created the ISTEA– the Intermodal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act- and the federal funding started to be available for these trails – all of a sudden, they started to have to be built to standards and the standards happen to be of the Department of Transportation who administers the monies, so.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, so it wasn't a decision on the part of servicing the county to build it at a different standard. It was the grants that were coming in.

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- Brett Hollern:** It was the grants. Early from what I know about the past, a lot of the trail that was built was built through a variety of funding sources. A trail section may have had six or seven different types of funding involved in it; whereas, when we started to get the larger grant monies from the federal government – we were basically using two types of funding. We'd get money from the federal government through the transportation enhancements program and then usually match it with funding from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. So, how the trail sections were built were largely dictated by how they were funded.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** How did they differ? Say, this section here, Rockwood, which was built on the cheap differ from the section from Fort Hill to Confluence?
- Brett Hollern:** Well, the standards at the PennDOT looks at things and they know roads. So really, you're building trails like roads, the types of drainage necessary, the types and amounts of materials used are dictated by that. But basically, they're built more like a roadway than what you would say a trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, we're doing a subsurface and then choking it with finer materials and then laying a very fine layer on top of limestone.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that's pretty much what The Great Allegheny Passage is from the whole length within Pennsylvania.
- Brett Hollern:** Yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, okay. So, you were involved in Pinkerton to Fort Hill.
- Brett Hollern:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That was fairly easy. Did you do the two Pinkerton Tunnels or the two Pinkerton Bridges?
- Brett Hollern:** No, they were done...

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** They were done.
- Brett Hollern:** ...they were done beforehand. They were also done on the cheap as we say. And, those are two particular projects – if they would've been enhancement funded – would've been astronomically different in how they were done and the amount of money it would've taken to get them done.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Sure, yeah. Then, you were involved in Fort Hill. Actually, a little bit beyond Fort Hill.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You took the trail- what, about a mile beyond Fort Hill?
- Brett Hollern:** The Pinkerton project went from the end of the Pinkerton High Bridge a mile past Fort Hill.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It kind of ended up in nowhere there for a while.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, and there was a reason for it ending up in nowhere for a while.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, there were some right-of-way issues with the neighboring property owner who had actually been able to get part of the right-of-way. And, there were ongoing for years, and years, and years negotiations with this gentleman to actually get permission to bring the trail through that section of his property.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, by building it right next to him we kind of said- and I say "we" as being on the board right now. But, the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association sort of said, "We're coming along here, and we're going to build this trail, and we're building it right up to your boundary," and it was there.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** What year was the section completed from Fort Hill to Confluence?
- Brett Hollern:** You're going to test my memory on this stuff. I think – from the top of my head – I think it's 2002 we completed that.
- Brett Hollern:** 2002?
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, the great celebration and...
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, that was the first time Somerset County section had joined with other trail groups. Nothing was done on the other side towards Maryland. And so, we were sort of this little island out here.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay, okay. So, that was the first link?
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, that was the linking-up ceremony. We had a big to do in Confluence and it was significant because it created essentially 100 miles of trail, too – continuous miles of trail from the Salisbury Viaduct to McKeesport.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, so that really was- can we say that that was the point that which it sort of became The Great Allegheny Passage?
- Brett Hollern:** That was the point where it went from being a segmented thing. Although, there were large continuous sections done – I think, in my opinion, that was the point it went from being sort of segmented and more to the reality of, "Oh, my goodness, this thing's going to get done. They're making, you know, these independent sections are connecting to each other."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, right.
- Brett Hollern:** And, it was big in that aspect. But, was also big in the fact that there was 100 continuous miles now, which, you know, a century is a pretty significant thing in a long-distance trail system. What we were providing at that point with 100

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continuous miles – really to completely non-motorized trail corridor or- sort of unique at the time. I think that made us the longest continuous rail trail east of the Mississippi with that completion – if I'm correct.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Oh, okay, okay. I didn't realize that. I knew there were some significance to that. Let's go to the other end. Now, we've got the- we're done almost to Meyersdale. Salisbury Viaduct's done, and the Meyersdale Station is in. Then, you're really facing some pretty daunting projects at that point.

Brett Hollern:

There were seven particular crossings of the Western Maryland right-of-way that we're in contention with the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission there. All those crossings had to come to resolution before we could expend any of the federal money that we had sitting there waiting to be spent. And, these were crossings that were mostly overhead crossings. The Keystone Viaduct was one of the crossings that was in order. And basically, what had to happen was all the parties that were at the table at this PUC case had to come to an agreement about how these crossings were going to be abolished whether it be the removal of bridges, the rehabilitation of bridges, and everybody sort of had their own separate stake in this.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Okay.

Brett Hollern:

There was a bridge in Meyersdale Borough that was an old timber bridge that was in bad shape that went over top of the right-of-way. Well, they weren't going to agree to sign off on things until they got something that they felt was going to be suitable for them. There were timber bridges that needed to be removed because they were no longer in use. So, it was a really long process. I think there were probably five or six parties that all had to come to some type of agreement on what was exactly going to happen and who was going to be responsible for each of these seven crossings. And, off the top of my head, I can't say how many years this went on, but I think it actually probably started about the time that the right-of-way was acquired right up and through the time until the

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time that the PUC issued the order of what exactly was going to happen at these crossings.

Paul G. Wiegman: And now, we're in the 2000s at this particular point. The problem was that these cross, but they were still owned by Somerset County because Somerset County owned the right-of-way? Is that where the...

Brett Hollern: As I understand it, the utilities commission has oversight on what goes over...

Paul G. Wiegman: This is Pennsylvania Utilities Commission?

Brett Hollern: Yeah, the PUC has oversight on what goes over any type of railroad corridor as a utility.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay, okay.

Brett Hollern: So, the county didn't necessarily want to take responsibility for the borough's bridges and things. But, since they crossed over...

Paul G. Wiegman: I see.

Brett Hollern: ...there was a tie-in.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, this was Somerset County, the PUC- PennDOT was involved here?

Brett Hollern: PennDOT was a player, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, CSX because we crossed over the active CSX railroad.

Paul G. Wiegman: At the viaduct?

Brett Hollern: At Keystone.

Paul G. Wiegman: At the Keystone Viaduct?

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- Brett Hollern:** And also, I believe Summit Township was another player because we crossed over a township road at Scratch Hill.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** At Scratch Hill.
- Brett Hollern:** And, I think that probably would be the Historical Museum Commission Pennsylvania, too, was also a party to that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, all of these people had to come to a resolution. There had to be a resolution of exactly what was replaced or what was taken out.
- Brett Hollern:** How it was going to be done.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, how it was going to be done. Wow.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, I mean, that's why with the Keystone Viaduct – that's why we had to remove one of the piers to straighten PennDOT's roadway underneath. That's why we have a new structure at High Street and Meyersdale. Basically, we were behind the eight ball because to do what we needed to do – we sort of had to abide by what everybody else wanted or we were never going to be able to do it. We would've rather not taken out a pier on the Keystone Viaduct. It cost a lot more. It required us to pay more for engineering to design a span of what was going to go across between the two piers that remained there on each side of the roadway. Although, it's a little confusing and convoluted now – we were originally supposed to cross a road at-grade at Scratch Hill. So, we were taking out an overhead crossing, and mingling bicyclists, and vehicular traffic all being on a very rural low amount of traffic road. But, you know, it wasn't necessarily the decisions that Somerset County would've made without all these other parties being involved.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, all of those things happened east of the Meyersdale?
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, everything west of Meyersdale like the Garrett Crossing, and the Rockwood Crossing, and the Markleton Crossing had already been taken care of?
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, they weren't an issue. I'd have to go back and look to remember exactly why these particular crossings became issues when the other crossings that we've had were not an issue mostly because I think these involved a lot of bridges. And, in a lot of cases, the bridges that were on these other existing sections were taken out...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes, right. They were gone.
- Brett Hollern:** ...before we ever had ownership of the right-of-way, there were bridges here in Rockwood, Garrett, and Markleton, and they're all gone.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** They're all gone. Right.
- Brett Hollern:** So, that's probably why there was never issues during the original construction.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** They were taken out very quickly after the railroad abandoned in the mid-'70s, '75, '76, '77. They were gone very quickly.
- Brett Hollern:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, your role in all of that was negotiating for the county – for Somerset County?
- Brett Hollern:** Basically...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, for the trail itself.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, my role was less than our county solicitor's role that really played a part. And, I think when I came in – we knew what we wanted to do at each of these crossings like what the wishes of the county were, and we kind of knew what we were going to have to do based on the wishes of the other parties.

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So, my role was more making sure that those things got done once we went into design and construction.

Paul G. Wiegman: And then, once that was done did you have to come with or work with the contracts? Who writes the contracts? Where do the contracts coming from?

Brett Hollern: We've done them several different ways. The Keystone Viaduct, in particular, PennDOT, administers the contract. They put together all just like a roadway project. For all the other projects that we did from Meyersdale down, we did them as local lets where the county acts as the letting agent versus the department of transportation. We did that in the effort to expedite things because we know that highway projects take priority and trail projects are down here at PennDOT. It's not a knock on PennDOT, it's just that's just the nature of things.

Paul G. Wiegman: That's just the nature, sure.

Brett Hollern: So, you know, we knew if we were going to rely on them to get these projects out to bid – may take a lot longer than if we became the letting agent. So, we took on those projects actually put out the bids ourselves. Did everything to the department standards. They have a procedure for local lets, and we follow those and put these projects out to bid in the hopes that they went out quicker than they would have through PennDOT.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, your responsibility is putting together the project, putting together the bids, getting them out there, accepting the bids.

Brett Hollern: Sure, reviewing the bids and the county would award the bids. Then I go, from that point on, it's project management. We are required by the Department because of the funding to have a full-time inspection. So, we have somebody out there every day seeing what's going on. But then, my role is to make decisions when issues arise, to administer the funding...

Paul G. Wiegman: And, to get things done.

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Brett Hollern: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: If something needs done to get that done. I would imagine the biggest project then was the Big Savage Tunnel.

Brett Hollern: The Big Savage Tunnel is by far, and probably - I can't imagine any other project on the entire grid Allegheny Passage will be as a big-ticket item as the tunnel was.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, tell me a little bit about it how that whole thing got started and...

Brett Hollern: The first time that I had ever had any dealings with the tunnels and I was an intern. And, I actually Linc Van Sickel and I went down to the tunnel. And, at that point – other than the private drive, which we sort of were afraid to use – there was no- we couldn't even figure out how to get to the tunnel. I can remember coming down with Linc one day and we were meeting with people from a, I believe, from the Bureau of Mines were coming in to take a preliminary look at the tunnels. It may be one of the first things done. I sort of got off on the township road and ran up through the woods to even find out where the tunnel was at.

Paul G. Wiegman: Where it was, yeah.

Brett Hollern: It was the first time I had ever seen it. And, the first sight of the tunnel was that the north portal was craved in. And, there was a pile of dirt taller than me blocking your way into the tunnel and a hole right through the liner up where you could see straight up to the sky. And, I think preliminary estimates on that tunnel were somewhere in the neighborhood of \$3 to \$4 million – realistically preliminary estimates.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Brett Hollern: We were lucky enough through the powers that be to get money in the state capital budget to do the rehabilitation project. The project was put out to bid. They awarded a contract through the Pennsylvania Department of General

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Services. Got a contractor out there and started working. A couple months into the project, the contractor said, “You’ve got bigger problems here than you think and the design that you’ve got here on paper isn’t going to address these problems.” “So, okay, what’s going to address these problems?” Well, it turned out to be about \$5 or \$6 million more than the original \$7 million they were awarded.

Paul G. Wiegman: Wow.

Brett Hollern: So, then there was – I don’t want to condense things too much – but there was a scramble to find more cash. There was a private fundraising campaign. They raised money to meet the funding need of the \$5 million deficit. The state stepped up to the table and brought in some more money. And, we were able to continue on with the project which ended up taking a little over, I think, two years from start to finish to get the thing done.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, when did it start?

Brett Hollern: I believe it was – well, you’ll have to ask me again – it probably started in 2003.

Paul G. Wiegman: Two thousand...

Brett Hollern: I think early 2003.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, it’s just now completed in 2005?

Brett Hollern: Yeah, until we got everything to have the doors put on for winter protection and things – it was basically this last February they put the doors on.

Paul G. Wiegman: What was the problem that created the extra need for money?

Brett Hollern: Well, basically there was a continuous void throughout the tunnel between the liner and the rock above that made the tunnel liner extremely unstable. The original problem with the tunnel is the hydrology and geology of the Big Savage

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Mountain, and the freeze-thaw conditions that were present during winter months. There's a tremendous amount of groundwater in the tunnel. And, if you go down and find out where the tunnel drains underneath and where it comes out – water runs throughout there year-round. Even at periods of extreme drought, there's a good amount of water flowing out of both ends of the tunnel. So, the Big Savage Mountain is a huge aquifer and it collects a lot of water. So, what was happening and it plagued the railroad throughout – they made spot repairs. And, they always had problems with this freeze/thaw was in the winter time – the water that was flowing, the drainage wasn't adequate to handle it all. It would get trapped behind the liner. And, the cold- the prevailing winds would come in through the north and somewhat through the south. But, the north took the brunt of the problem. The water would freeze behind the liner, and crack the concrete, and over time just deteriorated the concrete liner to the point where the whole north portal basically had caved in.

Paul G. Wiegman: It just collapsed from that liner?

Brett Hollern: Yeah, so the contractor along with their engineers suggested installing about, I think, 6,000 rock bolts to secure that liner into the rock up above. And, that void was then filled with a Cellufoam grout. So, what used to be a void throughout the 3,295 feet of the tunnel is now filled with cement grout, and then 6,000 rock bolts go through the liner up into the rock above to secure it all. And then, there was a new drainage layer installed, and some insulation at the north end of the tunnel, and the south end of the tunnel where the freeze/thaw was happening. And, adequate drainage is there now. And, it's a basically- it's a simplified thing and then they shot came in with a shock crate which is basically cementitious type of spray and sprayed on a new liner on the inside of the tunnel. And then, \$12 million later, they were out of there.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, that's the total cost was the \$12 million?

Brett Hollern: Yeah.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. That's an interesting number because when you look all the way back to 1975 when the first proposal for The Great Allegheny Passage was then the Pittsburgh to the Cumberland-Connellsville Trail. They estimated to build the trail, to handle the tunnels and the bridges was going to be about \$2.5 million. So, we've exceeded that by a ...

Brett Hollern: Yeah, a little bit.

Paul G. Wiegman: ... by a little bit.

Brett Hollern: A little bit. Linda Boxx tells me – she says, “Do you think if they would've told someone at the time that it was going to cost \$12 million to restore a tunnel that this project ever would've gotten off the ground?” I said, “I guess that's a good point.” But, I don't think anybody – as inflation drives the cost of anything up – I don't think anybody ever anticipated that on a cost scale from that time to this time that there was going to be that much money necessary to take care of the tunnel.

Paul G. Wiegman: Just for understanding, the tunnel is carved through the mountain?

Brett Hollern: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: They just go in and drill out the rock, and it's a rough hole, and then this liner that you talk about is a poured concrete arch that is inside that hole. So, there's a hole through – but then there's this liner as rocks fall or something like that – they aren't hitting onto the tracks or under the trail now.

Brett Hollern: Yeah, exactly.

Paul G. Wiegman: And now, there's the old rocks. There's the liner, but then there's this grout in between. So, you have a continuous surface in there. A continuous...

Brett Hollern: It's like a giant Twinkie the stuffing in the middle between the liner and the rock.

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[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, that's good.

Brett Hollern: Yeah, but that was one of the other problems when there was that void space. Anytime the rock would let loose, it would hit that top of that liner. Well, the contractor explained it was that if something compromised that liner in the state it was in before construction – the whole thing could've just come down.

Paul G. Wiegman: Just come down. Yeah, wouldn't want a group of bikers in there when that happened.

Brett Hollern: No.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, we get the Salisbury, and these last little steps that you've been working on more recently are the McKenzie Hollow and Scratch Hill.

Brett Hollern: Yeah, the Sand Patch Project is about six miles of trail construction. We also tacked on the other mile – 1.2 miles on the other side of the tunnel onto that project.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Brett Hollern: One of the things we did there is – when we talked a little bit earlier about the bridges being removed, there was a bridge at McKenzie Hollow Road which is actually a PennDOT's State Route 2011. It was removed and filled when the railroad was gone, and we're actually putting in a concrete arch culvert there so we can go underneath the road and keep bicycles and pedestrians separated. Again, we're at the pretty much 95th percentile on completion of that project. It'll be a new trailhead parking area deal that they're finishing up work on, which will actually be the closest parking area that has access to the Big Savage Tunnel. We probably did something a little more special there because of the volume we fill are going to want to come to see the tunnel and...

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, the tunnel in it of itself will be an attraction.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, for sure.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I mean, there will be people that just ride in the tunnel and ride through the view on the other side and ride back.
- Brett Hollern:** Right, I feel there's a whole market of people that are strictly coming to see structures – Salisbury, Keystone, Big Savage. And, the easiest way to get to them – because they're not your typical, quote-unquote, "trail users" because they're less interested in riding their bike on the trail and more interested in seeing these old railroad structures and seeing what's been done to restore them.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's, yeah, sure. At Deal, there will be the memorial – I guess it's not a memorial but the...
- Brett Hollern:** The donor monument.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The donor monument and all the donors were considered to be roof bolts – what term did you use?
- Brett Hollern:** I think the terminology they came up with were rock anchors.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Rock anchors.
- Brett Hollern:** And, portal patrons and they have based on the amount of money you gave. Yeah, that was a great campaign. It really brought people back into the projects sort of like grassroots thing. For a long time, it's been, "Oh, we've got all this government money and grant money to spend" and then all of a sudden, we couldn't get there on that money alone. We tapped the well dry. So, it was nice to get people back involved.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** How many donors were there?
- Brett Hollern:** Off the top of my hand I'm not sure. That was handled more or less through the Allegheny Trail Alliance Office. But, they were

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at least – I think they were over 200 and probably more than that, but ...

Paul G. Wiegman: Good number. I will add to this so that it goes down in the history of The Great Allegheny Passage that I believe that my grandson is the youngest rock anchor on that memorial.

Brett Hollern: Yeah, we had that...

Paul G. Wiegman: Because I bought him one, I think, five days after he was born. So...

Brett Hollern: Oh, yeah, it's not going to beat that.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, he's only two now. So, I don't think there's anybody younger than that on that list.

Brett Hollern: I donated some of my hair and a few layers of my stomach lining stressing out during that project because there were times when it was almost like what's going to happen here? "Are we going to have to abandon this project because when you're faced with a \$5 million deficit – it's not easy to come by."

Paul G. Wiegman: And, abandonment wouldn't have been- there was precedence because of the Pinkerton Tunnel had been started.

Brett Hollern: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, they found larger problems than they expected and it stopped.

Brett Hollern: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: It just ended and it wasn't finished. We all hoped that it will be finished someday, but...

Brett Hollern: Yeah, and there was no Pinkerton Horn Bypass of the Big Savage Tunnel. And, there was no easy way around that. It

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was going to be roads to Frostburg or up over the mountain. They looked at switchbacks over the Big Savage Mountain at one time.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, really?

Brett Hollern: There was some ridiculous amount of mileage to get the 3,300 feet through the tunnel to go over it with a couple miles. The great and elevation changes were unrealistic to even consider based on the way the rest of the trail system was.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, let's see. Where else do I want to go with this? Well, your high point in these years that you've been working with The Great Allegheny Passage – what's kind of the most unusual thing that's taken place?

Brett Hollern: I think probably the Big Savage Tunnel Project has been the most frustrating/rewarding project. Although, all these projects have been frustrating and rewarding. I think it's an overall thing for me is that what I'm doing- actually I think sort of like one of the underlying things is I'm a bicyclist first and I work on bicycle trails second. So, it's sort of like I'm getting to work on projects that I would be using in my free time. So...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Brett Hollern: ...it's a very unique thing that I'm sort of one of those people that gets to do what they love. Although, it comes with its own share of headaches. It's still really unique to be working on something I have an interest in my free time. But, the most rewarding thing I get out of everything is building these trails because they're so- they have so few restrictions for the people that can use them. And, there are so many different types of people who use them. They're free. You don't need to be in tremendous physical condition. You see people from 3 years of age to 92 years of age on them. And, it really gets people and introduces people back into being active, and also getting outdoors, and riding bicycles, which I think is something that's gaining popularity. But, it's been lost on the general public. We're so vehicle-dependent. Nobody is really

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probably commuting to work from Rockwood to Garrett on their bicycle that's making a huge difference. But, as we move towards the urban areas – people are using this project for that sort of thing.

Paul G. Wiegman: Are you using them? You grew up in Somerset County?

Brett Hollern: Yeah, I'm originally from Somerset County. And, I'm originally from Windber, which is where I still live, which is on the northern end of the county.

Paul G. Wiegman: Were you aware of the trail when you were...

Brett Hollern: Yeah, I was aware of the trail when I was going to school. I went to school for Recreation and Park Management. So, I was always recreationally-minded, but I was aware it was going on. But, at the time, that's when smaller sections were done, and ...

Paul G. Wiegman: Did you ride it at all?

Brett Hollern: I had never been on it before I started my internship.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, really? Oh, okay, even being from Somerset County?

Brett Hollern: No.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Brett Hollern: It's one of those things that I think this trail wasn't well-known enough locally yet and what's available. And, I don't want to deviate too far from it – but I'm more of a mountain biker than I am a rail trail user.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Brett Hollern: I've ridden all around these areas, but I prefer to be on a single track versus...

Paul G. Wiegman: On a single track, yeah.

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- Brett Hollern:** ...yeah, a ten-foot-wide crushed limestone trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, yeah. I could say that's why all the bollards are so close together. And, I have trouble with my tricycle to get through. But, we are expanding those bollards and making it. It's really open for use for everybody.
- Brett Hollern:** Yeah, like I said, it's handicapped accessible. It's flat. I mean, if you can come up with a reason why you're not able to use this – then you're probably a unique circumstance versus the norm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Let's talk about the Bollman Bridge at this point. Explain what the Bollman Bridge is.
- Brett Hollern:** The Bollman Bridge is a 130-some-odd year – probably almost 140-year-old bridge that sits near the trail. It can be viewed from the Salisbury Viaduct in Meyersdale off of State Route 219. This bridge was in its own PUC case sort of- had no relationship to the trail other than you can see it from the trail. A few years ago, I got a call out of the blue from PennDOT saying, "Hey, here's this Bollman Bridge. Would you guys ever be interested in having this bridge on the trail?" I thought, "Well, I'm sure somewhere along the trail system there's always a need for bridge." I knew a little bit about it because the county had been involved in a PUC case with it. I said, "Yeah, maybe we would be, why?" They said, "Well, we're looking to do some remediation efforts for the 219 Highway Project." And, one of the things that we pitched is possibly moving this bridge to the trail as a way to offset some of the impact that 219 is having on the local area with its construction.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Brett Hollern:** I said, "Oh, that's interesting." And, they said, "You know, we would probably be able to fund this work." So, me being, "Hey, somebody is giving you something for free and wants to pay for it." Mentioned it to a few people and a few people said, "Oh, wow!" And then, it sort of got out that, "Wow, this is a

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really a unique bridge.” This Wendel Bollman was a self-taught bridge engineer. His Bollman truss-style bridge is this famed bridge. And, I started to learn more about him. And, local people found out that there was an effort to save it because at this time – it was probably on the verge that it was going to be they were going to do a historical recordation on it, and dismantle it, and scrape it.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, just take it apart and scrap it.

Brett Hollern: So, then local people found out we were going to try to save this. And, in the meantime, we kind of thought we had a place for it on the trail because there was an area over near Meyersdale called Scratch Hill Road that we were actually having to take an above-grade crossing out. And, we were going to be creating an at-grade crossing. So, there was this...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Brett Hollern: ...if we can get permission to move this bridge there – we’ll be able to separate traffic again. And, the township will get what it needs because they have a little one-lane crossing. It was what I call a “honk your horn” type tunnel because you honk your horn to let the car on the other side know you were coming through.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, yes.

Brett Hollern: So, they wanted to be rid of this existing structure. So, that’s why we were creating this at-grade. It was tied to the other PUC case that I had mentioned before. So, at this point, everything was looking great. And then, PennDOT- in talking with them – found out – “Well, that’s not going to meet the conditions of some of their remediation work they were going to do.” They’d love to still be involved, but they’re not going to be able to fund this work.

[Chuckle]

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Well, at that time, there was all this ground swell of support. “Let’s save the bridge. We’re going to move it to the trail!” So, we decided that we were going to pursue these efforts. Went back- got the county solicitor to go back to the PUC – say, “Look, instead of destroying the bridge, let us take the bridge and move it to the bike trail.” They divvied up the cost. There was an effective property owner that had some say in it. Everybody came to an agreement, “Okay, here is what we’re going to do.” The plan was there. We had about three times we were ready to move the bridge and they – “Whoa, whoa, slow down here. There’s lots of different stuff that has to happen before you can do this.” So, we were going through that process right now. It’s taking much longer than we anticipated. So, we’re going to be unique. They’re going to bring in a rather large crane, brace this bridge up, and lift it all off in one piece.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, this goes over the CSX main line, right?

Brett Hollern: Yeah, it’s over an active railroad. So, it’s the ton of issues that brings to the table. And, the sort of unique thing is this bridge- its design is that it supports itself. So, when it’s lifted off – you can’t change the way it’s weighted or it’ll just crumble apart.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay, okay.

Brett Hollern: So, it’s got to require a lifting plan that addresses those issues. Once it’s lifted off and set down, it’s going to have to be dismantled to be moved to its new location at Scratch Hill because it’s too big to be moved.

Paul G. Wiegman: It’s too big to roll on the...

Brett Hollern: I mean, you could probably move it if there was a smooth path to get there. It’s not too big to be moved, but you can’t get there from here aspect about it.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, Scratch Hill is a little bit out of the way and the roads are narrow to get there.

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Brett Hollern: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And, I think there's a bridge crossing that it wouldn't get under and things like that. So, we're in that process right now. We're hitting permitting delays, and it sounds like as of actually today that the permit is going to be issued very soon, and the contractor can get out there, and start the removal work. Once it's removed, it's got to be dismantled, moved, abutments are going to have to be put on Scratch Hill Road, and then it'll be put into place at Scratch Hill Road. Unfortunately, the trail on both sides of it's done – but we've got this open cut. So, we haven't been able to open that section to trail up. Essentially, we're done with trail construction once the Sand Patch Project is done, but we're going to have this open cut here at Scratch Hill Road.

Paul G. Wiegman: Which is the last gap?

Brett Hollern: Yeah, it's going to be- the last gap's going to be a couple hundred feet instead of what it used to be in miles and miles to connect down from McKeesport the whole way down to the other side of Frostburg now, so.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, and with the Bollman Bridge going in place at Scratch Hill – that will be it. That will finish Somerset County and we'll have a continuous trail from the Pennsylvania line to McKeesport. Actually, beyond the Pennsylvania line into Maryland. We'll talk to some of the people there. Are you out of work?

[Chuckle]

Brett Hollern: Well, no. There's a couple areas on the trail that we've bypassed because, at the time, there wasn't the funding. Wasn't there to do them. The Pinkerton Tunnel is one of them. We'll be pushing efforts to get the Pinkerton Tunnel restoration completed. And also, in Garrett we leave the original right-of-way and follow along a Burrow Road for – I think it's about, I don't know maybe, 1,500 feet or something along that. And then, cross a state road at-grade. And, actually you have to ride along the state road and cross over, so...

Paul G. Wiegman: It's a difficult crossing there.

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Brett Hollern: Yeah, we've actually just been lucky enough to get funding for the construction in that in the latest federal transportation bill. So, we've got two pretty large-scale projects. Pinkerton will probably be \$3, \$4, \$5 million project and this Garrett – I'm calling it the Garrett Underpass Project which will restore the trail back to the right-of-way there. It's probably going to be in the neighborhood of a million dollars. So, I'll have that going for me. And, I've slowly been acclimating myself to this as Trail Coordinator is the operation's maintenance management end of things and getting something into place where this thing is cared for adequately and operated adequately.

Paul G. Wiegman: Because we're at a point now that this section that we see right here in Rockwood is 10 years old. Even a little bit older than that and as you say, "It was built on the cheap." So, there's some rebuilding that needs to be done.

Brett Hollern: Yeah, 10 years is probably a pretty great life expectancy for a trail section like this considering it was built- it wasn't built necessarily how we build trail these days. If this is a test to how long a trail section will last – some of these new sections hopefully will last longer.

Paul G. Wiegman: Even longer.

Brett Hollern: That's what you'd think.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Brett Hollern: So, there's going to be that aspect, too, that we're going to have to go back and resurface sections. And now, I think there's a commitment now from the county that wasn't necessarily always there because this wasn't the most popular project in its inception. So, the county has eased themselves into this over time. And, the more that's gotten done the more they've taken ownership of it. I mean, they actually own it. I want to say – taken ownership of it in a symbolic sense that they really understand how important this trail is. And now, the realization that's connecting to Pittsburgh, and it's going to be connecting to Cumberland soon- the amount of people that

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are coming here – I think there’s really a push to make this section one of the nicest sections in The Great Allegheny Passage saying, “Look, all these people are coming into Western PA and Maryland. Let’s make their visit here special.” So, we’ve recently done enhancements here to the Rockwood Trailhead landscaping and some things to dress up these areas. So, there’s always going to be these smaller projects.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, the signage, getting signs, coordinated sign system, the mileage markers – there’s a lot to do. And then, as you say – trail management needs to be done at some point. I’m always looking at the mowing that goes on and whether it hits the rare plants or not. So, we need a management plan.

Brett Hollern: Part of what’s happened was – in the grand scheme of things, the construction end of things – it’s come along really quickly in the last five or six years. It was like all of a sudden going from managing 20 miles of trails to having to deal with 42 has happened in a very short amount of time. And, the focus has always been so heavily focused on construction that the management end of things has not been neglected – but it’s been a lower priority.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Brett Hollern: And, all of a sudden, it’s starting to shift. Hey, we’ve got this thing built – now, let’s look at how we’re going to maintain this thing properly, and the best ways of doing things, and we’re going to take what we’ve done successfully, and look at those things, and build on those, and what hasn’t worked, and get rid of that stuff. The county is at the process right now of building a maintenance building, which is going to be sort of the first step to having equipment. If we’re going to have mowers and things like, we’re going to have a place to store them. So, we’re building that here at the Rockwood Trailhead because one of the reasons is it’s centrally located. It’s pretty much a central point on the trails we can get from having to maintain...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. Yeah, I hadn’t thought about that but yeah.

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Brett Hollern: ...maintain things when essentially what we're looking at is managing a 42-mile linear park. It's a daunting task and it's not super complicated. It's just labor intensive, so...

Paul G. Wiegman: You're looking forward to doing that?

Brett Hollern: I'm looking forward to overseeing it and coordinating what I hope to someday be some seasonal staff, working with volunteers, and finding creative ways to do it because there's the opportunities with kids in the summer, the probation department that the county has started to get involved in working with projects. So, I think there's really sort of a creative management model for how this thing can be done. It doesn't necessarily have to be all volunteers. It doesn't necessarily have to be all service clubs. It doesn't have to be all stuff – but a melding of the three.

Paul G. Wiegman: A combination of those things. Good, you're very positive about the future of this whole thing.

Brett Hollern: Well, I think it's something unique in itself and it happens to be right here. I don't think some people that may live in the town that it passes through realizes what its potential is when you've got the amount of people coming through. These towns aren't necessarily going to be booming like they were with industry, but it's really helping to revitalize the communities, and bringing something into Somerset County that without it – very rarely we'd see. And, it also compliments what's here already with the resorts, and the rivers, and the mountains, and everything very well. So, it's exciting to be part of.

Paul G. Wiegman: Good. Thank you.

Brett Hollern: Thank you.

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