

# OPRA connection

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# Study Examines Feasibility of a Multiuse Trail Connecting Communities in Southeast Ohio

by Paul Denny, PE, Project Manager, Woolpert

In early 2017, Muskingum Township, Ohio, selected Woolpert to conduct a feasibility study to determine the best route for a multiuse trail between the city of Marietta and the community of Devola.

The route would extend the Marietta River Trail, improving regional mobility, safety, connectivity and overall pedestrian facilities for the region.

The study area encompassed four jurisdictions: Muskingum Township, the city of Marietta, the community of Devola and Washington County. Marietta, the Washington County seat, is a historic urban community. Devola is a modern community of homes with large yards, located in the heart of Muskingum Township. The area between the two communities is mostly farmland, with some retail properties where local officials have recognized the need to improve regional pedestrian facilities in several long-range planning studies.

The study analyzed corridors ranging from on-road facilities to new multiuse trails, evaluated environmental and geotechnical issues, and incorporated the requirements of the project's purpose and need statement. To assist with this effort, the firm solicited feedback via four stakeholder meetings and two public involvement meetings over the eight-month study to develop and refine corridors to determine the most acceptable and cost-effective route for the project. Stakeholders included officials of Muskingum Township, the city of Marietta, Washington Township, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), the Wood-Washington-Wirt Interstate Planning Commission, major property owners and the Devola Multiuse Trail Committee.

Each conceptual corridor was analyzed for its ability to connect residents to major destinations, including parks, the hospital, businesses and schools, ensuring residents have a safer way to walk or bike to their destination. The study also considered aesthetics and utility and right-of-way impacts, as well as previous studies conducted by local government officials in conjunction with recreational groups and community activists. Available geographic information system (GIS) data supplied by the county and city, along with aerial mapping data from the Ohio Statewide Imagery Program (OSIP), was layered into the study to enable better analysis of the landscape and terrain.

Analysis of the area concluded that significant geotechnical issues would be encountered if the multiuse path were routed into hilly areas. In fact, while the feasibility study was underway, an extended period of rain oversaturated the soil and caused landslips that damaged roadways throughout the region. The additional costs of building retaining walls and trail maintenance in areas prone to landslides made those potential corridors impractical. Fewer geotechnical issues are associated with corridors in lowland areas, but it was determined that these corridors will require crossing creeks and will have potential problems with flooding.

Safety concerns that arose during the stakeholder and public meetings also were





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addressed, such as when residents voiced fears about corridors crossing a busy state highway. Traveling from Marietta to Devola will require trail users to cross SR-60 and SR-821, both two-lane roadways with posted speeds of up to 55 miles per hour. A high-speed slip ramp from SR-60 to SR-821 was also flagged as very difficult for pedestrians to cross.

The feasibility study suggested several options to improve the safety of these trail crossings. These suggestions included installing high-intensity activated crosswalk (HAWK) beacons to alert motorists on SR-60 when pedestrians or bikers are at the crossing. When a pedestrian or biker activates the beacon, oncoming motorists receive multiple cues of yellow-to-red flashing lights, while pedestrians see a countdown showing the amount of time remaining to cross safely. Additionally, the project team has discussed with ODOT the possibility of redesigning the intersection of SR-60 and SR-821 to eliminate the high-speed movement when funding becomes available.

Ken Schilling, president of the Muskingum Township Board of Trustees, said he felt the study “attempted to look at all of the input while dealing with geographic barriers and extremely difficult slopes along the Muskingum River Valley.”

The study concluded that the preferred corridor includes a 5-mile-long, 10-foot-wide, paved

multiuse trail that can be constructed in phases, as state and/or federal funding becomes available. The preferred corridor meets the study’s purpose and need requirements by connecting the two communities and providing access to local businesses, schools and parks.

*Paul Denny has 22 years of experience in project management and transportation engineering, working for the last four years as an engineering project manager at Woolpert. The Ohio State University graduate is registered as a professional engineer in Indiana, Ohio and Virginia, and is a member of the American Society of Highway Engineers.*

