



WCIDC, Regional Trail Corporation and Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad Co. Approve New 25-Year Lease Agreement for Five Star Trail

Deal ensures that popular trail will be in use through 2045

GREENSBURG, PA, Dec. 17, 2020 — With the approval of a new lease agreement, the Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corporation, Regional Trail Corporation and Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad Co. have ensured that thousands of people will continue to enjoy the popular [Five Star Trail](#) for another 25 years.

The Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corporation (WCIDC) Board of Directors — Sean Kertes, Douglas Chew and Gina Cerilli — today approved the agreement, which voids the final year of a similar 25-year deal that established the trail in 1996. The new lease, which begins Jan. 1, 2021, locks in public recreational use along 6.11 miles of active rail that is owned by WCIDC through Dec. 21, 2045. Extending the term of the lease is key to receiving approval to use a \$324,500 federal smart transportation grant to improve neighborhood connections with the trail at multiple access points.

WCIDC Chairman Sean Kertes is happy to secure not only the trail's future but also money for upgrades.

“One of the seven core objectives of our ‘Reimagining Westmoreland’ comprehensive plan is to better connect our communities with parks and nature, and it specifically identifies enhancements to our trail systems as a way to do that,” Kertes said. “We’re thrilled that the RTC and the Five Star Trail communities are able to leverage this renewal to secure funding for trail improvements.”

The Regional Trail Corporation Board of Directors approved the agreement yesterday. RTC President Malcolm Sias said he’s delighted with the quarter-century deal.

“The board of the Regional Trail Corporation is both excited and thankful to extend the Five Star Trail lease for another 25 years,” Sias said. “The thousands of central Westmoreland County residents who regularly use the trail for walking, jogging and biking are assured of trail access for a long time into the future!”

The trail runs parallel to the railroad for 6.11 miles, from Lynch Field in Greensburg to Hillis Street in Youngwood. In Youngwood, it links up with the 1.1-mile Sewickley Creek Trail, which extends to the Armbrust neighborhood of Hempfield. The “five” in the trail name alludes to the communities through which it passes — Greensburg, South Greensburg, Southwest Greensburg, Youngwood and Hempfield.

Jeff Richards, county parks planning coordinator, noted that this trail is a rarity because it shares space with an active rail line. That means the “rails-to-trails” terminology doesn’t apply.

“The Five Star Trail is truly a special multi-purpose trail. According to the Rails to Trails Conservancy, of all the hiking and biking trails that currently exist in America, only 7 percent are in the rail-WITH-trail category,” Richards said. “Our trail improves the quality of life for people in its namesake communities

and beyond. It offers recreation close to home and an enjoyable way to get around town without a car, engage in civic life and support local businesses.”

WCIDC Vice-Chair Doug Chew said he was happy to renew a lease that maximizes the use of an asset such as the railway.

“We’re really happy to be able to continue our partnership with the RTC and to ensure that the Five Star Trail can be enjoyed by residents for another quarter century,” Chew said. “And since we’ve managed to safely enhance a vital transportation artery with a recreational use, that’s great value for taxpayers. Having been a very regular user in years past, it was important to me that this trail continues to be a community asset.”

The WCIDC contracts with Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad Co. — a subsidiary of Carload Express, Inc. — to operate the rail line. The railroad will sign off on the lease shortly, and Carload Express President Mark Rosner said “even though the railroad’s primary goal is to serve and help grow industry in Westmoreland County, we’re happy to continue as partner organization on such a worthwhile project.”

Although the lease renewal comes at a time of year when fewer people are using trails because of the cold weather, WCIDC Secretary Gina Cerilli said that the COVID-19 pandemic has helped remind people how essential public greenspace is.

“During this pandemic, outdoor recreational spaces have been so vital to our communities, not only recreationally but from a general wellness perspective, too. Amenities such as the Five Star Trail have enabled our residents to be around others while maintaining a safe social distance in an outdoor setting,” Cerilli said. “During these trying times, these spaces have helped people feel less isolated, and from a quality-of-life perspective, that’s invaluable.”

About Regional Trail Corporation

The Regional Trail Corporation is a nonprofit partnership whose mission is to acquire, develop and manage appropriate trail corridors in southwestern Pennsylvania and to create and promote opportunities for recreation, tourism, economic development and historic and environment conservation. [Website.](#)

About Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad Co.

Southwest Pennsylvania Railroad operates 66 miles of track, running from Greensburg through vibrant towns such as Youngwood, Scottdale, Connellsville, and Uniontown to its southern terminus at Smithfield. SWP is situated at the confluence of the region’s major highways, which enables shippers to utilize its transload network (including the Westmoreland and Fayette Rail Freight Terminals) to transfer goods from truck to rail for delivery as far away as the eastern seaboard. This combines the advantage of long-haul rail economics — via multiple line-haul connections — with the flexibility of truck delivery. [Website.](#)

About Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corporation

Founded in 1983 by the Westmoreland County Board of Commissioners, the Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corporation implements a comprehensive economic development strategy to promote growth in terms of job creation, economic output and a stable tax base for Westmoreland

County. Through the development of a county-wide industrial park system, a responsive Business Calling Program and involvement in public/private partnerships, WCIDC strives to foster business growth, resulting in job opportunities for the citizens of Westmoreland County. [Website](#).

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